SINNERS IN THE HANDS OF AN ANGRY MOB:
VIOLENCE AGAINST RELIGIOUS OUTSIDERS IN THE U.S. SOUTH, 1865-1910

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Studies of violence in the late nineteenth-century South focus almost exclusively on racial and political violence against African Americans. While this emphasis is both understandable and appropriate, what has been largely neglected is the violence committed against religious outsiders, and more generally their overall treatment in what was essentially a hegemonic culture of evangelical Protestantism. In addition to the many instances of violence against African American churches and ministers, the South also witnessed dozens of episodes of anti-Jewish violence and literally hundreds of cases of anti-Mormon violence from 1865 to 1910. Acknowledging and understanding this relatively hidden chapter in American history provides us with unique insights into postbellum southern culture and the sometimes violent side of the American experiment in religious pluralism.

This dissertation adds to the growing body of scholarship exploring the relationships between religion and violence in southern history and American history more broadly by making three primary contributions. First, it uncovers numerous untold narratives of violence against southern religious outsiders. Second, it examines the interrelationships between minority religious groups and the dominant evangelical Protestant culture in the South. Third, it explores the various ways in which religious identity and religious
motivations, whether explicit or implicit, informed the attitudes, actions, and reactions of the perpetrators as well as the victims of the violence. The four groups treated herein—black Christians, Mormons, Jews, and Catholics—were the groups that contemporaries most commonly perceived as providing substantial challenges to the cultural, racial, and religious orthodoxies of southern Anglo-Saxon Protestantism.

In short, this dissertation is a study of the multiple religious dimensions of violence in the postbellum South. Although some episodes treated herein qualify as overt religious violence, in most of the cases religion was one among a number of factors that shaped and triggered violence, and interacted with other variables including race, gender, family structure, politics, class, economics, and ethnicity. As a set of sacred doctrines and practices, a cultural category, or an analytical lens, religion played different roles in the ways that black Christians, Mormons, Jews, and Catholics precipitated, experienced, and responded to southern violence as religious outsiders.
To Melissa,

an incomparable companion
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CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

1.1 Prologue

Robert and Mary Quinn were by all accounts fairly typical southerners. They came from good Confederate stock—Robert’s father William had been a company flag bearer at numerous battles including Shiloh and Vicksburg—and they, along with most of their extended family, were active members of Bethlehem Baptist Church in Ackerman, Mississippi. All that changed in 1895, however, when Mormon missionaries started preaching in the area. Persuaded by the missionaries’ message, Robert and his parents were baptized in a nearby creek before dawn one December morning; family legend has it that the ceremony was performed before sunrise “because they were afraid of mobs.” Mary was slower in making the decision, but she and several other members of the family were similarly baptized in the ensuing months. Shortly thereafter, the Mormon converts were excommunicated from Bethlehem Baptist, where many of their relatives still worshipped. Despite antagonism from their former church and threats of mobbing, the Quinns remained in Choctaw County long enough for Robert, who gained a reputation as a “brilliant speaker and a useful man,” to be ordained an elder and eventually president of the local branch of the church’s Mississippi Conference. In 1901 part of the family decided to emigrate to Idaho, piling themselves and all their worldly possessions in a boxcar and riding it to the West. They did so with an eye toward “gathering with the Saints,” as was common for many Mormon converts in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Leaving Mississippi was
difficult for the Quinns—the Baptist contingent of Mary’s family had disowned her when she became Mormon, and refused to even come out of the house when she came to say her goodbyes. Robert, who always retained his Mississippi accent and southern manner, was forever hurt to have left the South, considering himself a southern man to the day he died and regretting that his children grew up talking like Yankees. 1

Robert and Mary Quinn happen to be my great-grandparents, and it was through this family narrative that I became clued in to some of the general themes and questions that drive this study. To the best of my knowledge, none of the Quinns ever became victims of actual violence after they became Mormon; indeed, among the worst treatment they received was the cold shoulder that Mary’s family gave her. However, what intrigues me as a historian about this story is that they were so conscious of the possibility—or in their minds, the probability—of violence directed against them for apparently no other reason than their religious affiliation, or in this case, their change in religious affiliation. Indeed, the Quinns’ experience raises a number of questions, each laden with implications that go much further than my own family history or even the history of Latter-day Saints in the South: Could religious minorities in the postbellum South reasonably expect to be victimized by violence? What were the sources of those fears? Was the threat of violence (real or perceived) uniform for all minorities, or was it different among various outsider groups? What effect did violence and the potential for it have on minority religious communities and individuals? Were religious outsiders marginalized and persecuted because of their beliefs, their practices,

1 This narrative is gleaned from multiple sources. It relies on my own remembrance of stories told by my grandmother, Lena Lillian Quinn Later, as well as two formal interviews with her: one conducted by myself on 5 June 2000, in Sandy, Utah; and another conducted by my brother Matthew Mason on 1 May 2004, also in Sandy. Other sources include a Quinn (Quin) family history (no author or date, photocopied typescript in my possession); H. P. Dotson, “Notes from Mississippi,” *Salt Lake City, UT*) Deseret News, 8 Aug. 1896; Mississippi Conference Record, 6782, pp. 48, 188-189, in the Church History Library, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah; and Elizabeth Buckner Rester, “A History of Bethlehem Baptist Church” (July 1994), online at http://www.rootsweb.com/~mschoeta/BethlehemChurch.html.
or something else? More broadly, what were the religious dimensions of violence in the late nineteenth-century South?

A survey of the historical literature on the Reconstruction and New South, or even on postbellum southern violence, reveals only a smattering of such conflict targeting religious outsiders. Most studies of the postbellum South have focused exclusively on racial and political violence against African Americans, an emphasis that is both understandable and appropriate given the pervasiveness and historical significance of the phenomena of lynching and other forms of racial oppression. But what has been largely omitted from the narrative of the late nineteenth-century South is the violence committed against religious outsiders such as Latter-day Saints and Jews, and more generally their overall treatment in what was essentially a hegemonic culture of evangelical Protestantism. While racial and political violence was more prevalent, southern violence against religious outsiders was much more common than its absence from virtually all historical treatments suggests. Indeed, in addition to the many instances of violence against African American churches and ministers in the South, there were also dozens of episodes of anti-Jewish violence and literally hundreds of cases of anti-Mormon violence in the last quarter of the century.

Acknowledging and understanding this relatively hidden chapter in the underside of the American experience provides us with unique insights into postbellum southern culture and the sometimes violent side of the American experiment in religious pluralism.

1.2 Religion and Violence in the Late Nineteenth-Century South

There are two basic truisms about the late nineteenth-century South: first, that it was religious; and second, that it was violent. In both cases, the statistics are telling. Between 1850 and 1890, the Southern Baptist Convention alone experienced a 374% increase in total membership, a five- or six-fold explosion in adherents, and a building boom of somewhere between two-and-a-half to four times as many churches.\(^3\) If the early nineteenth century represented “the beginnings of the Bible Belt,” then surely the last quarter of the century was when the belt was tightly fastened.\(^4\) Religion was pervasive, even inescapable, throughout the region, and “Even those filled with doubt or disdain could not escape the images, the assumptions, the power of faith.”\(^5\)

At the same time that religion, and especially evangelical Protestantism, was solidifying its hold on the South, the whole region also seemed to be awash in violence. The colonial and antebellum South was renowned for its penchant for violence related to its culture of honor.\(^6\) In the decades following the Civil War the violence swelled, both in

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\(^6\) See Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *The Shaping of Southern Culture: Honor, Grace, and War, 1760s-1890s* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001); Kenneth Greenberg, *Honor & Slavery: Lies, Duels, Noses, Masks, Dressing as a Woman, Gifts, Strangers, Humanitarianism, Death, Slave Rebellions, the Proslavery Argument, Baseball,*
quantity and intensity. Violence was a strategic political tool frequently employed during the years of Reconstruction and Redemption. Although used by both races while posturing for power in the transitional postwar society, it was most effectively utilized by white Democrats to drive both Republicans and blacks out of power, to end any aspirations by poor white and black farmers of significant changes to the structures of society, and to reinforce white elites’ power by creating the laws and structures that led to Jim Crow and the Solid South.7 C. Vann Woodward suggested that violence was in fact more characteristic of the New South than the Old, and that the region was “one of the most violent communities of comparable size in all Christendom.”8

By the last two decades of the nineteenth century, lynching became a kind of trademark for the region, being transformed from its origins as a means of frontier justice common in many parts of the country until by the 1890s “lynching had become primarily a


8 C. Vann Woodward, Origins of the New South, 1877-1913 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1951/1971), 158-59. In his neo-Woodwardian treatment, Edward Ayers concurs, saying that the New South was “a notoriously violent place,” with homicide rates easily the highest in the country and among the highest in the world” (Promise of the New South, 155). Also see Ayers, Vengeance and Justice.
southern and racial affair.”

Although they can never capture the real toll in human terms, the numbers, even for their inadequacy as chronically low estimates, tell at least part of the story. Between the end of Reconstruction and the beginning of the Great Depression, one recent count is that there were at least 2462 African Americans lynched by southern mobs; another reliable estimate puts the figure at 3220. Those estimates do not count “legal lynchings” (state-sponsored executions after summary judgments by judges or juries) and Reconstruction-era violence, which together would exponentially increase the totals. From 1889 to 1899, the decade in which the racial terror peaked, an average of at least 187.5 African Americans per year were lynched, more than one every other day.

Despite their parallel rise, the relationship of religion and violence in the postbellum South has received surprisingly little scholarly attention. This oversight has begun to be addressed in recent years as scholars such as Donald Mathews and Orlando Patterson have


11 See George C. Wright, *Racial Violence in Kentucky, 1865-1940: Lynching, Mob Rule, and “Legal Lynchings”* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Press, 1990), 3. Wright demonstrates the undercounting that typically attends lynching estimates: “Most sources have indicated that at least 205 people were lynched in Kentucky, placing it ninth among states with the largest number of mob murders. By contrast, my findings reveal that at least 353 people were lynched in the Bluegrass State” (5).

adopted theories and methodologies from other fields, focusing their analyses on the theological and anthropological implications of southern lynching. Historians Paul Harvey and Steven Hahn have each given a prominent place to the themes of both religion and violence in their excellent recent treatments of the postbellum period, but neither attempts an extended analysis of the linkages between the two.

A need remains for a thoroughly historical treatment of the religious dimensions of southern violence that would cast the phenomena of Reconstruction-era political violence and lynching, among other violent acts, in a fresh light. In addressing this need, my dissertation makes three primary contributions. First, it uncovers numerous untold narratives of violence against southern religious outsiders. Second, the dissertation examines the interrelationships between minority religious groups and the dominant evangelical Protestant culture in the South that provided the context for such violence. Third, it

13 In his book Rituals of Blood: Consequences of Slavery in Two American Centuries (Washington, DC: Civitas/Counterpoint, 1998), Orlando Patterson indicts southern Protestantism for combining what he sees as the Pauline corruption of Christianity with a racist creed shaped by negrophobia and white supremacism, all of which resulted in a “cult of human sacrifice, focused on the literal and symbolic castration of Afro-American males” (xiii).

Scholar of southern religion Donald G. Mathews acknowledges the fact that the “overlay of religion and lynching in the New South” seems to be “a paradox if not a contradiction” that has received too little historical attention. Similar to Patterson he focuses on the element of human sacrifice and substitutionary atonement for communal sin common to both Christianity—at least the “orthodox (white)” interpretation of it—and lynching. Mathews does not come down so hard on southern Christians or Christianity as does Patterson, but he does argue that there was an unavoidable “connection between the South’s most dramatic act of brutality and the pervasive drama of salvation preached from pulpits throughout the region.” See Mathews, “The Southern Rite of Human Sacrifice,” Journal of Southern Religion (22 Aug. 2000), online at http://jsr.as/wvu.edu/mathews.htm. Also see Mathews, “Lynching Is Part of the Religion of Our People,” in Religion in the American South: Protestants and Others in History and Culture, ed. Beth Barton Schweiger and Mathews (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 153-194.

In her examination of lynching as communal ritual and visual display, Amy Wood is skeptical about the more Girardian aspects of Patterson’s and Mathews’ analyses, but agrees that communal lynching and southern Protestantism had significant cultural, rhetorical, and emotive overlap, as “defenders of lynching consistently configured mob violence as punitive justice, a revenge against the black man’s sin (certainly never their own) that was ordained and consecrated by God.” In Wood’s analysis, lynching was less about vicarious scapegoating and more about an evangelical crusade to rid their communities of sin and corruption, perfectly symbolized in the image of the black rapist. See Amy Louise Wood, “Spectacles of Suffering: Witnessing Lynching in the New South, 1880-1930” (Ph.D. diss., Emory University, 2002), 73, see all of chap. 2.

14 See Paul Harvey, Freedom’s Coming: Religious Culture and the Shaping of the South from the Civil War through the Civil Rights Era (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005); Hahn, Nation under Our Feet.
explores the various ways in which religious identity and religious motivations, whether explicit or implicit, informed the attitudes, actions, and reactions of the perpetrators as well as the victims of the violence. In short, I seek to better understand the religious dimensions of southern violence in all their variety.

1.3 Definition of Terms

“Religion” is defined here as “the human response to a reality perceived as sacred.” Although frequently thought of simply as an individualized spiritual expression or personal relationship with the divine, in its strictest sense religion (derived from the Latin religare, meaning “to bind together”) is originally communal. In this formulation religion, in all its globally diverse forms, is comprised of a creed (a foundational set of beliefs, values, myths, and doctrines), a cult (devotional and ritual behavior), a code of conduct (governing moral norms), and a community (the body of believers and devotees), all of which is focused on the transcendent, ultimate, or divine. Because religion at its heart deals with ultimate concerns, it is often used to sacralize other important categories and organizing principles of human society, including ethnicity, gender, hierarchy, economy, politics, nationalism, and so forth. Although we usually think in terms of the variety of world religious traditions—Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Buddhism, Confucianism, Hinduism, and Taoism, to name a few—it is essential to recognize that each of these traditions is characterized by a high degree of internal pluralism, allowing for different constructions of each religious tradition by individuals and groups who claim to be its true heirs. In this study we will see pluralism as it is expressed both across religious traditions (Christianity and Judaism) and as multiple expressions of one tradition (evangelical Protestant, African American, Mormon, and

Catholic appropriations of Christianity). By exploring the multiple dimensions that religion assumed in shaping societal norms and reinforcing sanctions against their violation, we are better equipped to understand the complex nature of violence in the postbellum South.

It should be clear, then, that religion, whether operating as a spiritual feeling, a social force, or an analytical lens, is not a static concept that operates identically in all situations. Indeed, perpetrators and victims of violence often comprehended and used religion in very different terms, both in their self-understanding and in their construction of the world around them. Not only did these various groups typically have competing worldviews, but their relationship to the violence altered the way they used religion to understand and interpret their place in a particular historical situation. Religion, qua religion, helped establish and reinforce societal norms in many of the cases presented in these pages. But religious symbols, practices, beliefs, and worldviews also subtly informed and transformed politics, culture, and economy, in different ways for different groups. Rather than imposing a monolithic application of religion on all cases, then, this study will highlight some of the multitude of ways in which religion operated in a range of violent settings, thus opening up further possibilities for extending our understanding of the relationships between violence and culture.

In addition to defining religion, it is important to clarify what I mean by “religious outsiders,” “violence,” and “the South,” respectively. In terms of “religious outsiders,” this study focuses primarily on three major religious groups that fell outside the boundaries of

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16 In the last two decades some scholars have argued that Mormonism comprises a new world religious tradition, emerging from Christianity as Christianity did from Judaism. In this study I am less concerned with establishing a precise taxonomy for world religions than I am with examining the historical interactions of Mormons with evangelical Protestants in the South, an approach that does not require a declaration one way or the other whether Mormonism does in fact constitute a new world religion. See Rodney Stark, “The Rise of a New World Faith,” Review of Religious Research 26 (1984): 18-27; Jan Shipps, Mormonism: The Story of a New Religious Tradition (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1985).
southern white mainline and evangelical Protestantism: black Christians, Mormons, and Jews. While these groups were not the only religious minorities or outsiders in the South (others include sectarian Christians and Indian and Chinese laborers), they were most commonly seen (and treated) by contemporaries as providing substantial challenges to the cultural, racial, and religious orthodoxies of southern Anglo-Saxon Protestantism. Catholics of course also fit this definition, but, for reasons I will explain in Chapter Six, with some qualifications they remained largely unscathed by the violence visited upon these other minority groups in the South. While recognizing that the concepts of “mainstream” and “outsiders” are constructed to a large degree, I maintain that they were historical realities that were reflected in the everyday lived experiences of the people involved, especially the marginalized.\(^{17}\) Although “minority” and “outsider” are not necessarily synonymous terms (i.e. throughout the nineteenth century Catholics were marginalized as cultural outsiders in the northeastern United States even in cities where they came to outnumber other religious groups), in the South all of the religious outsiders I discuss were in fact also minorities, so I will sometimes use the terms interchangeably.

For the most part, I will concentrate on instances of physical, or direct, violence. Direct violence in the late nineteenth-century South comprised a wide range of activities, including lynching, murder, attempted murder, rape, beating, tar-and-feathering, and whipping. In addition, it took the form of property destruction, such as when vigilantes burned or ransacked homes, businesses, and churches. In the course of my analysis, I will also consider the influence of the structural and cultural aspects of violence, particularly as

\(^{17}\) My conception of the nature and importance of “religious outsiders” parallels that of R. Laurence Moore in his formative work on American religious and cultural history, \textit{Religious Outsiders and the Making of Americans} (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986). Mormons, Jews, black Christians, and Catholics comprise four of the five groups Moore focuses on (the other is Christian Science), and I agree that they constitute the most historically significant religious groups that stand outside the bounds of white Protestantism in America.
they shaped the ways in which direct violence was carried out. Structural violence is defined here as harm imposed indirectly on some people by a dominant group (or groups) who, through the social system, pursue their own preferences at others’ expense. Examples of this would include economic exploitation, political repression, and social-cultural marginalization, as seen in Jim Crow or apartheid laws, colonialism, and certain features of global corporate capitalism, to name just a few. The notion of cultural violence is even broader, as it highlights the fact that culture can become a source of violence by allowing or encouraging the dehumanization of certain persons or groups, usually through the construction and marginalization of difference. Cultural violence is often, though not necessarily, used to legitimate direct and structural violence; common examples include misogyny (and machismo), racism, bigotry, religious hatred, caste-based ideologies, and so forth.\textsuperscript{18}

The value of using structural and cultural violence as distinct categories is that by analyzing only direct violence one might miss a number of cases in which direct violence, as a form of social control, never actually occurred and was in fact unnecessary in a given community, because the structures and culture of violence in that locale were effective in keeping the target population “in their place.” This approach draws on arguments common not only in the field of peace and conflict studies but also in African American history, where scholars have long asserted that the maintenance of white supremacy relied on a number of tactics ranging from lynching (direct violence) to segregation (structural violence)

to dehumanization (cultural violence). In short, paying attention to structural and cultural violence against religious outsiders can illuminate aspects of these conflictive social relationships that otherwise might be obscured if we looked exclusively at the more obvious instances of direct violence.

My study is not only located in the South, but also makes particular arguments about southern institutions, society, and culture. In doing so, I support claims that the South is a distinctive region, in part because of its culture of violence and its unique religious ethos. I employ a fairly standard set of geographical parameters for the South, including the states of the former Confederacy, and occasionally Kentucky and Maryland. Most of my cases, however, took place in the unquestionably southern states of North and South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, and Tennessee. The experiences of African Americans, Mormons, Jews, and Catholics were qualitatively different in the South than in other regions of the country, and even varied within the South from state to state and often between cities and the countryside. Although I often turn to the national scene for broad historical context, the story I tell is a uniquely southern one. Indeed, attitudes and practices that were widely shared by most Americans, including racism, anti-Mormonism, anti-Catholicism, antisemitism, defense of womanhood and family, and the use of extralegal violence for community preservation, all took on distinct forms as they interacted with one another in the specific historical situation of the South in the fifty years following the end of the Civil War.

In studying the period from 1865 to 1910, I depart somewhat from standard chronologies of postwar southern history that make a clear division between Reconstruction

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19 Two general accounts that highlight the various of levels of violence used to oppress southern blacks are Ayers, *Promise of the New South*, chap. 6; and Leon F. Litwack, *Trouble in Mind: Black Southerners in the Age of Jim Crow* (New York: Knopf, 1998).
and the beginnings of the New South. In doing so, I make the point that the traditions and tactics of vigilante violence that were fine-tuned by the Ku Klux Klan and other paramilitary groups in the years immediately following emancipation were carried over into subsequent decades as southerners grappled with questions of how to deal with a range of outsiders, including religious and ethnic minorities. Although the Klan was officially disbanded by federal action in the early 1870s and not formally resurrected until circa 1915, about the time of the Leo Frank lynching, the tradition of southern vigilantism thrived during the Klan’s hiatus and was applied to situations ranging far beyond race relations. In this sense I contend for a greater degree of continuity between Reconstruction-era violence and the violence of the lynching era than is typically portrayed in accounts of the period.20

1.4 The Multiple Dimensions of Violence

What does it mean to claim that this dissertation is a study of the multiple religious dimensions of violence in the postbellum South? It means, first and foremost, that incidents of obvious “religious violence” do not begin to exhaust the range of cases in which religion, as defined above, was a central dimension of violence against minorities. By overt religious

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20 Most studies of racial violence make a clear distinction between Reconstruction violence (in the late 1860s and 1870s) and post-Reconstruction lynching (for which semi-reliable data begins to be available circa 1882). This division is not entirely arbitrary of course, as the South underwent significant social, cultural, and political transitions at the close of Reconstruction. However, either stopping or starting the clock at 1877 obscures many of the broader continuities in postbellum southern culture, including the similarities of Reconstruction-era violence to the less systematic but no less threatening vigilantism of the ensuing decades. Examples of this divided periodization are Rable, But There Was No Peace (1865-1877), and Brundage, Lynching in the New South (1880-1930). An example of including both Reconstruction- and lynching-era violence, such as I am doing, is Wright, Racial Violence in Kentucky (1865-1940).

violence, I mean violence conducted by and/or against religious actors or institutions, in which the religious identity of the perpetrator or victim, as expressed in belief and practice, is the principal motivating or triggering factor. This type of explicitly religious violence is usually conducted by religious actors from a competing faction, denomination, or faith tradition, although secularists and the secular nation-state have also been involved on both ends of this kind of activity, particularly in the modern era.

In examining cases of religious violence, we must consider the role of doctrine, both in terms of unorthodox doctrines that potentially spur violent antagonism, and also certain theological orientations that allow for and even call for violence against individuals or groups who are seen as ungodly or otherwise dangerous. I contend that Americans have rarely mobilized violent resistance simply on the grounds of doctrinal heterodoxy, but it is clear that theological commitments and doctrinal interpretations have frequently led to, or at least justified, the use of violence against those whose religious practices positioned them out of the mainstream.  

Doctrines and theology often have discrete practical manifestations, and thus social and cultural practices that are inspired by religious commitments often become targeted for violence when they are perceived to transgress accepted community norms. In such cases the religious identity of the victims may not be directly assailed, but the perpetrators are insistent that certain practices be abandoned. The national campaign against Mormonism in the late nineteenth century was a vivid example of this, as most anti-Mormons were not really intent on extirpating the Latter-day Saint religion per se (although many would have

21 Here I am in agreement with William Hutchison, who argues that Americans have traditionally tolerated (if begrudgingly or bemusedly) radical beliefs but not radical behavior, that “manner” has meant more than “matter.” Speaking of the early republic but generally applicable otherwise, Hutchison asserts that “a dissenter could hold wildly heretical positions and yet be tolerated so long as he or she was ‘our sort of person.’” William R. Hutchison, Religious Pluralism in America: The Contentious History of a Founding Ideal (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), quote from p. 32.
happy if Mormonism simply disappeared). Instead, they focused their efforts on eliminating the obnoxious practices—rooted in distinctive LDS theological claims—of theocracy and especially polygamy. The numerous episodes of anti-Mormon violence, detailed and interpreted in Chapters Three and Four, are the clearest examples in the dissertation of overt religious violence.

If our analysis is limited to religious violence in this classic sense, however, we miss many nuances of the other ways that religion also operates in violent settings. Beyond specific practices, religion also dictates or at least informs broad social, economic, political, and cultural orientations. It may not even be a specific religiously prescribed rite that draws opposition, but rather a worldview that is shaped by the religious vision of certain religious outsiders. One illustration of this was the explicit involvement of black preachers in politics following emancipation, which was inspired by the notion of an undifferentiated “sacred cosmos,” a cultural retention from West Africa in which there was no clear distinction between sacred and secular. In this case, as I argue in Chapter Two, religion undergirded and sacralized competing approaches to political culture. In other words, the pluralism within Christianity was the source of two diametrically opposed religio-political approaches. On the one hand was the “liberationist” Christianity of African American freedpeople, drawn largely from the Old Testament narrative of the exodus. This was pitted against the no less politically charged establishment Christianity of the white evangelical Protestants, who because of their dominance over a religion-suffused mainstream culture enjoyed the luxury of insisting on their own idiosyncratic version of a “church-state separation,” and reacting violently when African Americans transgressed the boundaries they had constructed. While it would obscure as much as it clarifies to categorize white terrorist attacks on black churches and preacher-politicians as religious violence per se, it is
nonetheless essential to seriously consider the religious dimensions of violent episodes such as these that are commonly typed solely as political or racial.

Whereas African Americans, who sought political and economic independence, and Mormons, who sought a peoplehood distinctive from Protestant America, consciously made religion a marker of their outsider status, Jews (Chapter Five) and Catholics (Chapter Six) chose an accommodationist route and privatized their religion as long as they remained a minority, which status constituted a perpetual condition for both groups in the South (with the exception of the Catholic areas of Louisiana). Violence against these religious outsiders in the South was triggered more by their economic and ethnic profiles than by competing religious doctrines, practices, or worldviews. Although antisemitism and anti-Catholicism operated as pervasive cultural forces throughout this period, and arguably strengthened with the rise of populist fears of foreign conspiracies in the late nineteenth century, they did not translate into widespread or systematic violence against Jews or Catholics in the South. These groups’ conscious decisions to acculturate as much as possible to the southern mainstream made them non-threatening on a local level even while many southerners raged against the broader international perils of the “Jewish conspiracy” or the “papist threat.”

Finally, it should be emphasized that precise taxonomies are difficult to achieve, as the lines between various types of violence are often blurry—for instance, scholars may quibble about whether a certain instance is an example of ethnic or religious violence. The process of categorizing violent episodes is further obscured because of lack of clarity about historical actors’ true motivations, diverse opinions among the attackers or victims, and the difficulty of separating categories to begin with (i.e. are Jews a racial, ethnic, or religious group?). Furthermore, violent actors have frequently cloaked their true intentions in a guise of religion as a means of rallying the masses on their own side and giving a deeper and more
transcendent meaning to their actions.\textsuperscript{22} By focusing the inquiry on examining the religious dimensions of violence (which may simultaneously demonstrate economic, racial, ethnic, political, or other dimensions), we are better able to assess the richness and complexity of violent episodes rather than shoving them into categorical boxes that are not necessarily perfect fits. It would be inaccurate to describe southern violence against Jews, for instance, as being exclusively religious violence or even ethnic violence, as it usually had a distinct economic component to it as well. However, by considering the situation of Jews as religious outsiders in the South we are better able to contextualize and explain the violence against them, so long as we keep in mind that the violence also had ethnic, economic, and even racial dimensions. Their marginal status made Jews, African American Christians, and Mormons all more susceptible to stereotypes, discrimination, and violence. Religion played different roles—or had multiple dimensions—in the ways that these various groups precipitated, experienced, and responded to southern violence as religious outsiders. What connected all their experiences was that the victims had been accused of sinning against the social order in some way, and violence became the means of punishing the transgressors and impelling them to conform to southern cultural and religious orthodoxies.

CHAPTER TWO

“IF THIS BE THE SPIRIT OF JESUS”:
POSTBELLUM VIOLENCE AGAINST BLACK MINISTERS AND CHURCHES

The meanest negroes in the country are those who are members of the churches and, as a general thing, the more devout and officious they are, the more closely they need watching.

-- North Georgia Citizen, 1879¹

Within our own borders a Negro may be beaten with more brutality than one would dare treat a horse or even a dog. . . . He may be tortured and put to death with all the shocking horrors of savage ferocity. . . . If this be the Spirit of Jesus, then give us Mohammed or any other redeemer.

-- Reverdy C. Ransom²

Hell is an improvement upon the United States where the negro is concerned.

-- Henry McNeal Turner³

2.1 Overview

One night in June 1870 a band of masked horsemen attacked a small rural church near Tuskegee, Alabama. In the brief, one-sided skirmish that followed, two African Americans were killed and three wounded. The freedmen had gathered at the church that night to discuss candidates for upcoming elections, a topic that had been hotly debated


recently in other sites throughout the county. In testimony provided over a year later before a congressional sub-committee, Robert H. Abercrombie, a prominent local white citizen, discussed the incident in the context of race relations in Macon County. When pressed for details, Abercrombie seemed confused about precisely what kind of assemblage it was that had sparked such bloodshed. When first asked about “the character of the meeting of the blacks that night at this colored church,” he answered that “its objects were political.” Two questions later, he hedged and stated that it was “a leaders’ meeting . . . a church meeting, I presume.”

Abercrombie’s confusion over whether the nighttime gathering was “a League meeting” or “a meeting of the leaders of the church” is understandable, given the relationship of politics and religion among African Americans in the postbellum South. In the years following emancipation, African Americans’ political meetings were often led by ministers, opened and closed with prayer, and featured frequent references to God’s omniscient and omnipotent guidance of His suffering servants, the newly liberated freedpeople. It was also common for the freedpeople’s worship services to be liberally sprinkled if not saturated with talk of improving their lot in this life through both prayer and politics. Although this represented a pragmatic approach of progress by any means available, it also revealed a worldview in which the division between sacred and secular was neither clear nor entirely desirable. Just as God leading the ancient Israelites to the Promised

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4 U.S. Congress, Joint Select Committee on the Condition of Affairs in the Late Insurrectionary States, Report of the Joint Select Committee Appointed to Inquire into the Condition of Affairs in the Late Insurrectionary States, So Far as Regards the Execution of Laws, and the Safety of the Lives and Property of the Citizens of the United States and Testimony Taken (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1872), IX, 1110; Abercrombie’s full testimony is on pp. 1103-1113. These extensive congressional hearings were (and are) better known as the Ku Klux Conspiracy hearings; as such, I will hereafter refer to them as Ku Klux Conspiracy, with accompanying volume and page numbers.
Land marked both their spiritual salvation and temporal deliverance, the freedpeople believed that the altar and the ballot box were both tools for their liberation from bondage.

This conflation of politics and the pulpit by African Americans represented a departure from common practice and cherished beliefs held by southern whites. In the antebellum era, southern evangelical Protestants had resisted any explicit fusion of religion and politics, particularly as they reacted against what they saw as the moral crusading of the emergent Republican Party.5 Even the providence-soaked language that sacralized the Confederate cause only went so far as to bless the state with divine favor, while preachers and politicians each retained their own separate spheres.6 Although individual southerners were hardly loath to inform their politics with their religion, they were suspicious of explicit ties between the two. During Reconstruction, northern evangelicals remained more overtly partisan, using federal and state governments to pass a wide range of societal reforms (many of which targeted the vanquished South). Southern evangelicals, on the other hand, were more adamant about the formal separation of church and state, even if such a separation did not prevent them consistently criticizing radical Republican rule. Southern Baptists in particular were champions of disestablishment, although their commitment to the principle was compromised somewhat as they supported Redeemer governments and increasingly

5 Richard J. Carwardine, Evangelicals and Politics in Antebellum America (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 321-322. Specifically in relation to the issue of slavery, antebellum southern evangelicals “increasingly articulated a doctrine [that] came to be known as the spirituality of the church which relegated to the state all power in the political sphere and to the church all authority in the moral sphere. As a corollary, the church could, in fact, meddle in politics, but only when a clear-cut moral issue was at stake.” Slavery was thus cast as a purely political, not moral, question, and abolitionists were condemned for their “sinful mingling of church/state issues.” Joseph W. Creech, Jr., “Righteous Indignation: Religion and Populism in North Carolina, 1886-1906” (Ph.D. diss., University of Notre Dame, 2000), 196-197.

depended on the power of the state to legislate on “moral” issues that were mediated in the political sphere, such as marriage and divorce law, Sabbath observance, gambling, and especially temperance. There were internal debates about what did or did not entail political involvement, but a general consensus emerged that “Preachers should vote but not seek political office; they should refrain from partisan politics; and they should preach on political questions only as those questions concerned public or private morals.”

Thus, when the leaders of the Macon County congregation held a Union League meeting in their church, they were seen as overstepping the bounds of the church’s acceptable function. Similarly, in Edgefield County, South Carolina, black prayer meetings were attacked by white vigilantes who thought the assemblies were prone “to terminate politically and not spiritually.” Across the South, politically active African American preachers were frequently threatened, intimidated, blackballed, beaten, whipped, or killed by whites who sought to subdue the former slaves; black churches with real or perceived political connections were attacked, demolished, or burned down. Few things were more


Joseph Creech succinctly frames the tension among evangelicals on the church-state issues, and their inconsistency in supporting Redeemer governments: “Evangelicals’ thoughts on political action vacillated between two rather nebulous foci. On the one hand, evangelicals viewed the relationship between church and state from a conservative perspective summarized in their conceptions of ‘separation of church and state’ and their doctrine of the ‘spirituality of the church.’ Evangelicals drawn towards this view of church/state relations tended to frown at any attempts by Christians, churches, and especially ministers to ‘meddle’ in politics. On the other hand, ideals of patriotic millennialism and the close association made by evangelicals between religious and political freedom produced strong calls for Christians to be involved in the political sphere to reform civil corruption, legislate moral norms, or to ensure the continuance of civil and religious freedom. . . . In their support of redeemer governments, however, evangelicals were by no means consistent in their advocacy of separation of church and state. Even though many ministers condemned the close association of church and state in evangelical support for the Confederate cause, their actions often ended up intentionally or unintentionally supporting the Democratic ‘powers that be.’” Creech, “Righteous Indignation,” 196, 200.

threatening to whites in the postbellum South than blacks exercising political power, and when religion was added to the mix, the combination became even more explosive. The black church and its more politicized clergy therefore became, along with the other pillars of black independence and progress during Reconstruction, the Freedmen’s Bureau and the black school, special recipients of white violence.  

While scholars have been correct in noting that violence against black ministers and churches was generally political in nature, I argue that seeing the violence as purely political or even racial obscures some of the processes at work in the conflict. Viewing the violence through the religious—and not just racial or political—identities of both the perpetrators and the victims illuminates what was at least in part a clash of alternative worldviews informed significantly by the way the actors saw God ordering the world. Southern white evangelicals perceived a world of distinct hierarchies that ordered relationships among the various races, genders, and classes (placing elite Protestant white men on top), whereas black Christians since the days of slavery had developed a competing claim that God was in the business of liberation and sided primarily with the oppressed. The exodus of the freedpeople from white churches in the years following emancipation was the institutional culmination of this alternative religious vision, and was a move that made them not only racial but also religious outsiders in the postbellum South. Of course, freedom had its costs: just as emancipation freed the slaves from economic and political bondage, it opened them

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9 As William Montgomery notes, the term “black church” is problematic. African Americans were never all members of a single homogenous or monolithic institution—not only were there numerous denominations and sects among African Americans, but they often were in fierce competition with one another. Recognizing this, however, scholars have generally agreed upon usage of “black church” as an umbrella term encompassing a wide variety of denominational and other religious expressions, focusing on the shared identity and interests of African Americans, especially in relation to white churches and the broader white culture. It is this in this respect that I will refer to “the black church” in this chapter. See William E. Montgomery, Under Their Own Vine and Fig Tree: The African-American Church in the South, 1865-1900 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1993), xii.
up to terrorist violence aimed at suppressing that very economic and political liberty. So too the black exodus from the white churches brought black Christians out from under the suppression but also the protection of the white denominations. Using the freedom of their own churches to institutionalize a religious vision that included political rights as well as spiritual salvation was the freedpeople’s prerogative, but it also put them at risk with those for whom the gospel of white supremacy held black subservience as a central dogma. Violence against black churches and ministers, while explicitly political in motivation, thus also attacked assumptions that lay at the core of the freedpeople’s religious identity.

This chapter is concerned with how in the postbellum African American community political resistance and power were sacralized by subversive religion. This process in turn precipitated violence by whites against the clearest personal and institutional manifestations of this political religion (or religious politics), the black preacher-politician and the black church. As would also be the case in later movements such as Garveyism and the civil rights movement, blacks’ political activism in the postbellum era was transformed and deepened by their religious convictions, as for them the religious element was never far from the political arena. Religion brought a power and dynamic to the political process that was empowering for blacks but frightening for their white opponents, and it galvanized people to take action on both sides. When black ministers began to retreat from the sphere of party politics after the Reconstruction political and social order collapsed, they correspondingly became more exempt from white violence. Although these more moderate black preachers became no less prominent within their own communities after their withdrawal from politics, their temporary capitulation to white demands for a depoliticized black church provided them

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with relative immunity from the worst horrors of the lynching era in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. While religion was admittedly not a key variable in many cases of violence against freedpeople in the postbellum South, this chapter seeks to better understand those instances when religion was in fact a significant factor, considering the role of religion in shaping post-emancipation political culture and focusing in particular on episodes in which black preachers and churches were victimized by white violence.

2.2 The Development of a Distinctive African American Religious Vision

Colonial-era debates about whether or not slaves should be Christianized had eventually given way to a general antebellum consensus that religion, or at least the biblical teachings about otherworldly salvation and this-worldly submission, should be imparted to the slaves as part of the Christian duty of both individual slaveholders and the larger southern society.\(^{11}\) While slaveholders always remained at least slightly nervous about the revolutionary possibilities inherent in slave worship—Martin Prosser and Nat Turner had taught them the explosive potential of black prophets—by the antebellum period the African American population in the South had for the most part become Christianized, either through the “invisible institution” of slave religion or through the visible but small independent churches that existed among the South’s free black community.\(^{12}\)


\(^{12}\) Numerous works deal with the importance of religion in the antebellum slave community. A concise summary of much recent scholarship is Steven Hahn, *A Nation under Our Feet: Black Political Struggles in
slavery, southern blacks typically gathered in one of three different kinds of worship service: free black churches; biracial religious services alongside whites; or slave meetings, sometimes watched over by white ministers or overseers and sometimes free of supervision. Although the peculiar institution passed away, its basic religious counterparts did not, as former slaves retained multiple options about how and where they would go to church. One of the key questions that therefore gripped African Americans immediately upon emancipation was not whether but rather whither they would worship.

With freedom came blacks’ entrance into not only the economic but also the spiritual marketplace, and the South was deluged with missionaries from northern denominations, both white and black, competing to bring adherents to their respective folds. White denominations in the South had conflicted feelings about whether or not they wanted freedpeople in their churches. Most whites supported separate black churches, not wanting to share the same space with freedpeople on Sundays any more than they did during the week. One white southerner expressed concern over integrated religious services, writing to his father in 1870 that such biracialism “would move toward amalgamation and the degradation, physically, mentally, & morally, of the whites, [more] than all that has yet been


13 Methodists were particularly active in proselytizing the former slaves; they were represented by both white (Methodist Episcopal) and black (African Methodist Episcopal [A.M.E.] and A.M.E. Zion) missionaries. See Reginald F. Hildebrand, The Times Were Strange and Stirring: Methodist Preachers and the Crisis of Emancipation (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995).
At the same time, whites were wary of any form of black independence, and feared losing access to yet another institution of social control. This sentiment was reflected in statements that blacks were not capable of independently governing themselves, spiritually or in any other way. A writer for the Episcopalian publication *Spirit of Missions* argued, “The negro is not prepared for a separate organization. He is not yet mentally capable of the burdens of self-government. . . . He is not ready for separation, because of his lack at this time of proper administrative capacities.”

In general, white southern churches went through a series of policy adjustments and readjustments as they considered their relationships with black Christians, but they eventually encouraged or at least allowed blacks to secede and form their own congregations. As in political and economic affairs, whites sought to retain significant influence over the religious life of the freedpeople, but most of the increasingly autonomous black congregations soon broke their dependence on white patronage and support.

Regardless of what whites said or did, the freedpeople were determined to establish their own religious institutions, and it was through their own initiative, rather than via whites’ permission or patronage, that they did. Indeed, one of the most remarkable developments in the months and years immediately following emancipation was the

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14 Letter from R. H. Wills to his father, 10 May 1870, in William H. Wills Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.


16 Daniel Stowell argues that southern white evangelicals’ continually evolving policies toward blacks went through five stages: “Initially, leaders believed that the antebellum patterns of paternalistic biracial churches could continue. Next, they attempted the organization of the freedpeople into separate congregations with white ministers. Later, they accepted the idea that freedpeople might have black ministers under white supervision. Eventually they assisted in the organization of black associations, conferences, and presbyteries. Ultimately, they reluctantly admitted that the freedpeople would have an entirely separate and independent denominational structure.” Stowell, *Rebuilding Zion*, 46-48, 85-89; quote from pp. 47-48. For a view of how one diocese dealt with ecclesiastical issues related to black membership and representation, see Lyon G. Tyler, “Drawing the Color Line in the Episcopal Diocese of South Carolina, 1876 to 1890: The Role of Edward McCrady, Father and Son,” *South Carolina Historical Magazine* 91 (April 1990): 107-124.
explosive growth of the autonomous black church, both in terms of new churches and increased membership in existing denominations. As one white missionary told a southern audience, some years after the majority of blacks had separated into their own congregations, “The Negro does not wish to intrude into your churches; he prefers his own.” Black southerners did not reject Christianity outright as the “white man’s religion,” as some of their descendents, such as the Nation of Islam, did in the twentieth century. However, they did reject the southern white church as a racist and fundamentally flawed institution, which one contemporary characterized as an “intensely racial and sectional” church in which “even their most liberal and progressive leaders have not fully accepted the full import of the meaning of the doctrine of liberty, equality, and fraternity when applied to the colored man.”

There are multiple factors that help explain the black exodus from the white churches, including white pressure, blacks’ lack of opportunity and status within white denominations, and blacks’ desire to establish their own institutions. As Katharine Dvorak astutely points out, beneath all these factors was the fact that through their experience with

17 Although virtually all accounts of post-emancipation African American history deal with the emergence of the autonomous black church, the best sources are Paul Harvey, Freedom’s Coming: Religious Culture and the Shaping of the South from the Civil War through the Civil Rights Era (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), chap. 1; Katharine L. Dvorak, An African-American Exodus: The Segregation of the Southern Churches (Brooklyn, NY: Carlson Publishers, 1991); Stowell, Rebuilding Zion, esp. chap. 5; Montgomery, Under Their Own Vine and Fig Tree; and Spain, At Ease in Zion.


slavery and emancipation, black Christians had developed their “own distinctive appropriation of Christianity,” which left them with a unique theology and religious worldview that could not mesh with that of the racist white denominations.\footnote{Dvorak, *African-American Exodus*, 2. Dvorak’s view, which I strongly endorse as part of my own argument, represents a significant departure from earlier interpretations such as Joel Williamson, who asserted that “Church affairs among Negroes during Reconstruction differed in no essential respect from that of their white contemporaries. Indeed, the organization, ritual, and theology of the Negro churches were direct and conscious imitations of corresponding denominations in the white community. The most distinctive trait of the black man’s religion was probably its emulation of the white ideal.” Williamson, *After Slavery: The Negro in South Carolina During Reconstruction, 1861-1877* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1965), 201.}

A century before the phrase would come into vogue, blacks during Reconstruction, through their actions as much or more than through their words, articulated a “theology of liberation” that stood in marked contrast to the “theological racism” that pervaded southern white evangelicalism.\footnote{Paul Harvey refers to the “theological racism” that “was pervasive among white southerners.” He defines it as “the conscious use of religious doctrine and practice to create and enforce social hierarchies that privileged southerners of European descent, who were legally classified and socially privileged as white, while degrading southerners of African descent, who were legally categorized and socially stigmatized as black. . . . In everyday speech, folklore, self-published tracts and pamphlets, Sunday school lessons, sermons, and high-toned theological exegeses, white southern theologians preached that God sanctioned the inequality between white and black and between men and women.” Harvey, *Freedom’s Coming*, 2. In *The Times Were Strange and Stirring*, Reginald Hildebrand uses the term “Gospel of Freedom” for what I call a “theology of liberation.” The classic twentieth-century statements of black theology are James H. Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power* (New York: Seabury Press, 1969), and Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1970). Liberation theology thrived particularly in Latin America following Vatican II. One of the key early formulations is Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics, and Salvation*, trans. and ed. by Sister Caridad Inda and John Eagleson (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1973).}

Once established, black churches became the social and political as well as spiritual centers of the African American community. In part this speaks to the centrality of religion in the freedpeople’s worldview, but it also represents a more pragmatic approach, in that the church was the only major organization entirely owned and controlled by blacks with no supervision or competition from whites. Naturally, the principal function of the black church was to provide spiritual instruction, guidance, and solace, accomplished primarily through Sunday sermons, Christian service, and pastoral ministrations. In most black
communities, churches were the largest buildings that African Americans owned and therefore became meeting centers for events throughout the week. Black churches thus reached beyond a strictly spiritual mission and served as social environments where African Americans could gather for community events or for cooperative efforts that would collectively improve their lives. The church was a major provider of economic and social opportunity, as African Americans either worked directly through churches or built on networks fostered in the churches to establish key institutions such as schools, banks, insurance companies, and welfare organizations. Particularly during Reconstruction many churches doubled as schools, and ministers had weekly jobs as teachers. In addition, the church was often the center of community mobilization, as in the case of the 1899 “Darien Insurrection,” when the bell in the local black Baptist church was rung as a signal for blacks to gather to protect accused members of their community from being taken by whites and lynched. In short, “the black church became the central and unifying institution in the postwar black community.”

One of the most important roles played by the postwar black church was that it became “the focal point of black political life during Reconstruction.” As the only black institution truly capable of providing the necessary leadership and organization in the aftermath of emancipation, many churches took on both spiritual and political missions. This often made it difficult to tell a sermon from a stump speech, which flabbergasted

whites. Black churches were involved in every step of the political process, from providing political candidates with financial support to registering voters to holding Republican Party and Union League meetings and political rallies. For instance, in July 1884, blacks in Washington County, Texas, held a “religious, Sunday School, and political gathering” at a black preacher’s home. Preaching occupied the morning’s activities, and the afternoon was dedicated to “political affairs” that “absorbed the attention of voters present.” Because the churches were the unrivaled centers of the black community, they possessed an unparalleled ability to mobilize public sentiment and gather people together for a common cause. As such, as Steven Hahn notes, “they were by definition political institutions.” The black church was a space in which many freedpeople had their first lessons in acting as consciously political beings, whether through the actual political meetings that were held there or through their participation in the democratic workings of church governance that were especially prominent in Baptist congregations but suffused all of African American Protestantism. In addition, the very existence of independent, autonomous black churches stood as a statement of black freedom, initiative, and self-expression.

At the head of the African American spiritual and political world stood a relatively small but extremely influential cadre of preacher-politicians. It was only natural for the freedpeople to turn to their ministers for political leadership, as they were generally the most influential and respected men in the community and already enjoyed recognition and prestige among their congregants that would be difficult to compete with. Although the proportion


26 Hahn, *Nation under Our Feet*, 233.
varied state by state, throughout the South preachers constituted a significant percentage of the black legislators and constitutional delegates who served during Reconstruction; the best count available is that approximately one-sixth of black officeholders during Reconstruction were ministers, more than any other occupation except for farmer. Only a relative handful of these ministers were full-time clergy. Most worked as farmers, blacksmiths, carpenters, laborers, or a host of other daily occupations, fulfilling their ecclesiastical duties on Sundays and during their spare time, a combined workload that helped diminish the distinction between sacred and secular in the African American religious worldview.\textsuperscript{27}

Not all black ministers agreed that the church and its ordained clergy should be overtly engaged—or entangled—in the secular realm of politics. Bishop Lucius H. Holsey, who participated in the formation of the Colored Methodist Episcopal (C.M.E.) Church in 1870 and then personally led a church in Savannah, was a prominent advocate of keeping separate the affairs of church and state. He was a tireless worker for his church in the effort to strengthen its base among southern blacks in the twenty-five years following emancipation. However, unlike many of his fellow clergy members, particularly other Methodists, he strictly avoided politics, not necessarily out of personal disinclination but rather out of principle. “While our ministry and members represent all political parties and creeds,” he wrote, “as ministers of the gospel, we make no stump-speeches and fight no

\textsuperscript{27} See Drago, \textit{Black Politicians}, 20-24, 161; Montgomery, \textit{Under Their Own Vine}, 156; Peter Kolchin, \textit{First Freedom: The Responses of Alabama’s Blacks to Emancipation and Reconstruction} (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1972), 117-121; Hahn, \textit{Nation under Our Feet}, 234; and Edward L. Wheeler, \textit{Uplifting the Race: The Black Minister in the New South} (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1986). Over a quarter of black legislators in South Carolina whose postwar occupations can be determined were preachers (42 of 194); in Georgia the number may have approached a remarkable sixty percent. See Thomas Holt, \textit{Black over White: Negro Political Leadership in South Carolina during Reconstruction} (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1977), 81; and Drago, \textit{Black Politicians}, 39. The national average is lower than the count in either of these two state studies—according to the most detailed collective biography of black officeholders during Reconstruction, 237 of 1465 (16%) were ministers, more than any other occupation except for farmer. Eric Foner, \textit{Freedom’s Lawmakers: A Directory of Black Officeholders during Reconstruction} (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), xxi, 258-259. Note that many of the men listed as ministers also held other occupations.
battles of the politicians.” For Holsey, the exclusive domain of the church was to “propagate the gospel,” and in order to do that with integrity and maximum effectiveness, he argued, it was requisite that the church’s leaders “always stood aloof from politics, not as individuals, but as officials representing an organization for a certain and specific purpose.”

Holsey’s anti-political stance drew sharp criticism from leading preacher-politicians such as African Methodist Episcopal (A.M.E.) Bishop Henry McNeal Turner, who fervently believed that religion and politics would work together for the uplift of the race.

Southern whites were concerned, at the very least, with black religio-political activity, and preferred apolitical ministers like Bishop Holsey over “troublemakers” such as Bishop Turner and his ilk. What whites witnessed but failed to understand completely was that for the majority of African Americans in the immediate aftermath of emancipation, religion and politics could not be separated, as they were both fundamentally concerned with the same basic thing: freedom from bondage. This was partly rooted in an appropriation of the Old Testament exodus narrative, focusing on Moses leading the Israelites out of Egyptian bondage, a story that held out promises of liberation from the chains of both sin and servitude. It was also related to the notion of a “sacred cosmos,” a cultural retention from

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29 The best biography of Turner is Stephen Ward Angell, Bishop Henry McNeal Turner and African-American Religion in the South (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1992); see pp. 103-107 for a discussion of Turner’s criticism of the apolitical stance of the C.M.E. church. For a collection of Turner’s speeches and writings, see Redkey, Respect Black. A.M.E. ministers were typically the most politically active—perhaps because of their membership in a national organization provided both impetus and some degree of protection, or because A.M.E. churches thrived particularly among the more educated and literate segment of the black population that naturally provided a greater share of community leadership. The likelihood of Baptist ministers holding political office was much lower, despite Baptists’ numerical superiority. Of the 237 ministers listed by Eric Foner as black officeholders, only 55 were Baptist. See Foner, Freedom’s Lawmakers, 258-259.

a West African worldview in which there was no clear separation between sacred and secular, between this world and the next. Even the most mundane rhythms of daily life were deeply infused with the divine, and so politics and worship could naturally go hand in hand in the search for soul freedom.\textsuperscript{31} As African Americans made their religion political and their politics religious, it was not so much that the postbellum black church made an alliance with politics, but rather that with rare exceptions (such as Lucius Holsey) the freedpeople considered there to be no distinction between the two.

But particularly as the newly autonomous African American churches and especially their pastors became increasingly political in the early years of Reconstruction, the black church became both a symbol and a reality of the newfound assertiveness among the freedpeople that so many southern whites found not only obnoxious but truly threatening. The political organizing that went on in black churches posed a very real threat to southern white hegemony after the war, and also reflected a rejection of the strict separation of church and state that white Protestants stood by. This clear distinction between the church and politics was in fact largely a myth that evangelical Protestants were able to rhetorically maintain only because of their hegemonic social location. Indeed, the imposition of their particular religious worldview on the structures of the state and nearly all aspects of nineteenth-century American culture was all but invisible to them precisely because of their differing view of Christ’s atonement as opposed to white evangelicals. Whereas southern white evangelical Protestants developed a theology of the punitive aspects of Christ’s substitutionary atonement, African American Christians viewed Christ’s death less as punitive and more as sympathetic; in other words, blacks believed that Jesus not only suffered for them, but that in a very real sense He suffered with them. See Donald G. Mathews, “The Southern Rite of Human Sacrifice,” Journal of Southern Religion (22 August 2000), available online at http://jsr.as.wvu.edu/mathews.htm, II:7-8; and Mathews, “‘We Have Left Undone Those Things Which We Ought to Have Done’: Southern Religious History in Retrospect and Prospect,” Church History 67 (June 1998): 305-325.

\textsuperscript{31} On the idea of the “sacred cosmos” being retained from African traditions and then melded with Christianity, see Sobel, Trabelin’ On, chap. 6; also see Samuel S. Hill, One Name but Several Faces: Variety in Popular Christian Denominations in Southern History (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1996), 36-38. On the religious-political worldview of the freedpeople centering on the theme of freedom, see Harvey, Redeeming the South, 53-54; and Hahn, Nation under Our Feet, 233-234 and passim.
virtually uncontested ascendancy. It was only when challenges to the dominant evangelical political culture came in the form of groups such as African Americans, Mormons, and Catholics, that evangelical Protestants were forced to defend their particular blend of religion and politics while denouncing all others as perversions. Thus, Southern Methodist preacher Simon Peter Richardson was able to defend white violence against black soldiers based on the “constant tendency” in Methodism “to throw off the governmental restraints of the Church,” but black clergymen, as one former slave in Arkansas put it, had to be “might particular what they said in the preachin” for fear of retribution.

Much of the violence targeting black churches and ministers was clearly motivated by their close ties with the freedpeople’s political aspirations and their refusal to remain subject to white domination. In May and September 1874, respectively, two black churches in Iberia Parish, Louisiana, were destroyed by fire. The members of the two congregations had been approached by representatives of the local White League, but had refused to “adopt a series of resolutions indorsing the White League party, and pledging their support.” The White Leaguers responded by burning down the churches, then in a gesture smacking of hypocrisy, they offered to help rebuild the churches they had just torched if the congregations would support the white supremacist platform. This proposition was also turned down, the church

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32 In a chapter in which he outlines the various aspects of the “Protestant ethos” that dominated nineteenth-century American society and culture, William R. Hutchison then observes, “We might suspect that most ‘outsiders’ lacked any awareness of the Protestant establishment and its values; and that might be true, just as it would be true that most Protestants were unaware of a dominance they simply took for granted. Aware or not, however, the people in nonmainstream communities could scarcely avoid being affected by the continuing white Protestant domination of the newspapers, the educational system, and most city governments.” Hutchison, Religious Pluralism in America: The Contentious History of a Founding Ideal (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 76, see all of chap. 3. Also see Foster, Moral Reconstruction.

33 Both quotes in Harvey, Freedom’s Coming, 7, 37.
members “preferring to be perfectly free in the exercise of their political rights.” Even churches that remained apolitical could be mistakenly targeted in a kind of guilt by association. In March 1871 an African American church in Meridian, Mississippi, was burned down by Klansmen who mistook it for another church where blacks had held political meetings.

As several historians have convincingly demonstrated in recent years, the strategic use of violence was a key tactic in southern whites’ struggle to overturn Reconstruction and restore white supremacy to their region. Rather than being epiphenomenal, white intimidation, rioting, and lynching were central to conservative efforts to overthrow Reconstruction and place southern white Democrats back in seats of power. When black

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36 No one ever denied that Reconstruction was a profoundly violent period in southern history. However, recent interpretations placing violence at the center of Reconstruction race and politics in fact represent a kind of rediscovery of similar arguments made by W. E. B. Du Bois in Black Reconstruction: An Essay Toward a History of the Part which Black Folk Played in the Attempt to Reconstruct Democracy in America, 1860-1880 (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1935). The insights made by Du Bois were largely ignored or forgotten in the coming decades. In their place came assertions such as those made by Joel Williamson that the violence performed by the Klan and other white terrorist groups was generally spontaneous and reactive, whereas the violence committed by black militias was more threateningly aggressive and disruptive to social order. See Williamson, After Slavery, 256-273. White Terror, Allen Trelease’s detailed study of the “Ku Klux Klan Conspiracy” chronicled in impressive detail the extent and depth of Klan depredations, but argued that all that violence had relatively little effect on the overall political climate, as it did not actually work in directly overthrowing Republican rule in any southern state. George C. Rable provided an important corrective to this line of reasoning, arguing persuasively for the effectiveness of southern terrorism in undermining black political power and Republican rule. See Rable, But There Was No Peace: The Role of Violence in the Politics of Reconstruction (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1984). Eric Foner then brought the historiography full circle, essentially resurrecting the interpretations of Du Bois and others that placed African Americans at the center of the narrative of Reconstruction. As such, Foner demonstrated that while white violence might not have overthrown any Reconstruction government in the manner of a direct coup d’état, violence did undermine Republicans’ credibility even with their own supporters, and therefore simultaneously hastened the crumbling of their control and the phoenix-like rise of the Democrats back into local and state government. See Foner, Reconstruction, 1863-1877: America’s Unfinished Revolution (New York: Harper & Row, 1988). For more recent interpretations placing violence at the center of Reconstruction politics, see William D. Carrigan, The Making of a Lynching Culture: Violence and Vigilantism in Central Texas, 1836-1916 (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004); Laura F. Edwards, Gendered Strife and Confusion: The Political Culture of Reconstruction (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997); Kenneth C. Barnes, Who Killed John Clayton? Political Violence and the Emergence of the New
religious leaders used their position and influence to challenge racial inequality and support Republican rule, they became subject to white violence. The experience of one black preacher, Thomas Allen, is emblematic of this use of violence by white conservatives to push blacks and Republicans out of the democratic process and discourage black clergymen from inserting themselves into the political sphere.

Thomas Allen was born in 1833 in Charleston, South Carolina, to a white father and black mother, inheriting his mother’s condition of slavery. His father set the children free at his death, leaving them ten thousand dollars to educate them in trades, but both the children and the money were “stolen away” from Charleston to Georgia (the details are unknown), where Thomas was kept and hired out as a slave until emancipation. In the aftermath of slavery, Allen served as pastor of a Baptist church, and leveraged his religious influence into political power. He was appointed as a delegate to Georgia’s Reconstruction constitutional convention, and then was elected to the state legislature from Jasper County, all the while continuing his duties as a pastor.

One day in October 1868, two white men came to the field where Allen was working and suggested that he ought to abandon the “radicals” and join the Democrats. Allen refused, and the men commented vaguely that he “could do more good by preaching the gospel and leaving political affairs alone.” Shortly thereafter, around 2:00 A.M. on the night of October 16, a party of men came to Allen’s house, hiding themselves in the dark. When they knocked on the door, he asked who they were and what they wanted. They pretended to be friends of his, and when Allen’s brother-in-law Emanuel opened the door and held up a light, guns fired from the darkness, immediately killing him. When morning came and the

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surviving Allens were able to fully survey the situation, they counted one hundred eighty
shot in the house, including two in the bedstead where Emanuel’s wife and children had
huddled for safety.

A crowd gathered around the scene of the crime the next morning. A former
Confederate colonel pulled Allen aside and said, “By God, Allen, I told you six months ago
that we would not submit to negroism in this State; did I not tell you they would kill you?”
Allen replied, “Yes, but I did not believe it; I did not think anybody had anything against me;
I preached for you all during the war, when you could not get a white preacher, for all had
gone into the army; I did not think anybody would kill me for my political sentiments.” The
colonel then warned, “I told you they would do it; you leave the country now or they will
murder you, and your wife and children.” Allen heeded the advice to leave town, but not
before he organized a protective association along the lines of the Union League that he
called the Grant Rangers. He then traveled to nearby Forsyth, where he organized another
club of Grant Rangers and published an account of his brother-in-law’s murder in a Macon
newspaper.

At the advice of friends, Thomas Allen and his family settled in Atlanta, away from
the mob violence that awaited him back home, but he kept his congregation in Marietta and
was nominated for the state legislature again in 1870. Unsure of their victory beforehand,
the Democrats attempted to bribe him to drop out of the race; when he refused their money,
several men came to the house of another brother-in-law where he was staying and riddled it
with bullets. On election day, Allen went to the polls with a hundred men for protection but
was barred from voting on the pretext that he had not lived in the county for the past six
months. It was a lose-lose situation—on the one hand Allen watched himself being
disenfranchised in the very election for which he was a candidate, but on the other hand he
knew that the Democrats’ strategy was for him to vote so they could then jail him for fraud (since he had in fact been living out of the county for his protection). As he later told the congressional investigators, “when they get a man in jail here that is as good a place as they want him. . . . They would just go there and demand the keys from the jailer, and take him out and kill him.” Allen lost the election by sixty votes in a county that had 960 black and 600 white voters. What he kept, despite multiple attempts by his enemies to the contrary, was his life. 37

Allen’s experience demonstrates the challenge that black preacher-politicians represented to southern whites’ views of the social and political order. When he was first approached to abandon his career in politics, the men told him to keep to preaching and leave politics alone, revealing an antagonism to the conflation of religious and political roles that featured so prominently in the postbellum African American community. In his conversation with the white colonel after his brother-in-law had been killed, Allen expressed surprise and even hurt that his identity as a member of the clergy, and apparently one that was well-known and accepted among whites in the area, did not immunize him from political violence. Regardless of the threat to not only his own life but also the safety of his family, Allen continued his dual role as preacher and political activist, running for office and organizing black self-protection societies. In the end he was outmaneuvered by his enemies, and although he was able to escape with his life, his ability to serve his people simultaneously as a political and religious leader was stripped from him. While it was not necessarily his doctrinal views that were under attack, Allen’s vision of black political activism led by community religious leaders was squelched by white intimidation and violence.

37 Ku Klux Conspiracy, VII, 607-609.
2.3 The Price of Prominence

The two most obvious reflections of a distinctive African American religious vision in the years following the Civil War were the establishment of independent black churches and the rise of black preachers in politics. Among a recently emancipated population that had limited organizational resources, preachers immediately emerged as natural leaders not just in the spiritual realm but in the social and political as well. Driven by a desire to uplift their people and supported by a theology that largely conflated the sacred and profane, many African American ministers eagerly embraced the opportunities and duties of community leadership. Their prominence within the church made them influential voices among the freedpeople, but that same prominence came with a price, as it marked them as potential victims of reactionary white reprisal violence. A major way in which religion played in terrorist violence against blacks in the postbellum South was simply by placing many black preachers and churches at the forefront of community politics.

In the darkness of a late August night in 1870, Baptist preacher and political activist Richard Burke was shot dead. Details about Burke’s murder are sketchy, as no direct eyewitnesses to the tragedy are known, although several people saw the band of unmasked by anonymous riders who disappeared in the direction of the state line after accomplishing their goal. Burke was a relatively prominent figure in the local community, both among blacks and whites, and the fact that he was singled out that night was anything but random.

As a prelude to the 1870 election season—always a highly charged time of year in the Reconstruction South—the Republicans in Sumter County, Alabama, announced that they would hold a meeting in the county seat of Livingston on August 13 to nominate candidates for county elections. The evening before the meeting was to take place, rumors began to circulate among whites in the area that up to a hundred armed blacks had stopped in nearby
Gainesville to procure ammunition before proceeding to Livingston. Word quickly spread throughout the community that the freedmen might be causing trouble; at least some whites described it as a potential “insurrection.” On the morning of the appointed day, both whites and blacks converged on the town. It is unclear how many blacks arrived and whether or not they were armed, but at least two hundred armed white men patrolled the area. Richard Burke and other leaders of the black Republicans met with representatives of the white community, who assured them that the freedpeople would be allowed to hold their meeting in peace if they would leave their arms outside the town. Burke responded loudly that blacks had just as much right to their guns as did the whites, and they would not disarm unless the whites did as well. Rather than risking open conflict, the Republicans eventually decided to postpone their convention, which they ended up never holding.

Unlike many Reconstruction-era political confrontations between blacks and whites, this particular episode did not immediately erupt in outright violence, although several blacks had their guns confiscated and were scattered by the white riders. Richard Burke, however, had marked himself by standing up so publicly and boldly for African American political rights. Word spread (whether true or not) that he was the one who had originally encouraged the freedmen to bring their guns to town for the convention. To southerners still chafed by the memory of armed black troops fighting in the Civil War and later occupying parts of the conquered South, the vision of black men carrying loaded guns was among the most maddening in their collective imagination. Burke did not escape retribution for his strong defense of the freedpeople’s liberties. He was gunned down less than a week later outside his home in Gainesville, after his former master had turned him away saying he could offer no protection. His offenses, according to the congressional report compiled later, were twofold: first was his advocacy of the freedmen’s right to be armed at Livingston;
second, as a spiritual and political leader among Alabama blacks, “he had made himself obnoxious” to certain whites in the area by being a leader in the Loyal League “and by having acquired a great influence over people of his color.”

Though described by his former master as a “moderate” on the race issue, Burke’s leadership was seen as sufficiently threatening by at least some whites that it they deemed it necessary to remove him from having any further influence, other than making his death stand as a sobering caution to would-be black political activists. Their tactic worked, as the former slaves in Gainesville and environs felt “scared,” “insecure,” and “profoundly dejected” in the ensuing weeks, and some even wondered whether they should quit the black belt of Alabama and emigrate to Texas. They were advised by the white town fathers that “if they conducted themselves with propriety they would not be troubled.” Most blacks in Sumter County did not campaign or vote in the election that followed, admitting “they were afraid some of the democrats would get hold of them, or the Ku-Klux.”

Apparently Burke had not conducted himself with sufficient “propriety.” An “old man” in his sixties, Burke seems not to have wasted a moment after his emancipation. In the five-plus years between Appomattox and his assassination, he tirelessly worked as a Baptist preacher, a teacher in the freedpeople’s school, an Alabama state legislator representing Sumter County, and an active member and leader of the Loyal League. He was one of the preacher-politicians that provided organization, guidance, and encouragement to the masses of freed slaves in the postwar South. Because of their status as indigenous leaders within the black community, preachers were thrust to the fore of postbellum black

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38 Ku Klux Conspiracy, VIII, 334-337; X, 1773-1775. These two testimonies, the first by Burke’s former master Judge Reavis and the second by local resident and attorney Reuben Meredith, provide very different versions of the circumstances surrounding Burke’s murder. My portrayal of the sequence of events reflects my own judgment as to the validity of their various claims.
mobilization, and thus became special targets of the rage of white southerners for whom the nightmare of black freedom—and worse, black initiative and power—had finally come true. Although Burke was not killed for his religious beliefs or even his role as minister per se, the community leadership that came with his role as minister placed him in a position where he became a noticeable voice for black freedom and thereby a target for white violence. As Peter Kolchin simply noted about Burke and others like him, “Black ministers, in short, paid a price for their prominence.”

Black preachers did not even need to be officeholders to be victims of vigilantism. Lewis Thompson, an A.M.E. Zion minister in South Carolina, was horribly murdered by the Klan in 1871. After preaching to “quite an assemblage of colored people,” he was taken from his home and never seen again until his body washed up on a nearby riverbank. He had received multiple stab wounds, and there were indications his body had been dragged along the road and horses had run over him. There were also “other mutilations” that the newspaper account did not mention, but said it reminded them of “some of the worst Indian practices,” perhaps scalping or genital mutilation. Thompson had never held or ran for any office, but he was known as “quite an influential Republican” in the area, sometimes using his pulpit as a platform for political activism.

African American ministers and churches typically became targets of white violence when they entered the fray of Reconstruction politics. Tensions ran particularly high around election season, when political mobilization was at its height. For instance, throughout the week leading up to the November 1868 election, white riders roamed the countryside around Natchitoches, Louisiana, intimidating, beating, and killing black Republicans. They ended a

39 Kolchin, First Freedom, 121. For brief biographical information on Burke, see Kolchin, 87, 121; and Ku Klux Conspiracy, VIII, 334-337.

Saturday night of terror by assembling at the home of Alfred Hazen, an exhorter in the Methodist Church and president of the local Grant and Colfax club. When Hazen rebuffed their demands that he come out of his house, they prepared to set it on fire. Knowing he was a dead man one way or the other and preferring to spare his family a fiery death, Hazen went outside where “they killed and immediately butchered him.” In Madisonville, Louisiana, two years earlier, shots were fired into a colored church during the first week of November; fortunately no one was injured. Black churches were burned during or just before election week in West Baton Rouge and St. Helena Parish, Louisiana, and Coosa County, Alabama.\(^{41}\) The violent attack on the church near Tuskegee, Alabama, mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, proved to be only the beginning of the terror that election season, as nearly every African American church and school in the county was burned down prior to the election.\(^ {42}\) In October 1874, just before the elections in Bossier Parish, Louisiana, a black preacher named Julius Steward was tied up and killed. The white perpetrator then went to Steward’s wife and told her if she wanted to get her husband he was “lying there in the road.”\(^ {43}\)

Not all Reconstruction violence, even when it was related to politics, occurred at election time. Although summer and early fall was the peak season for Klan activity, at no time were black churches and ministers associated with politics truly safe from white terror. For instance, four black churches were burned in Virginia in spring 1866, three in Petersburg.

\(^{41}\) Letter from James Cromie, 5 Nov. 1868, Natchitoches, LA. This letter, along with reports on the other episodes, is in “Miscellaneous Reports and Lists Relating to Murders and Outrages,” Mar. 1867-Nov. 1868, Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen and Abandoned Lands Records, National Archives Microfilm Publication M1027, Roll 34; hereafter referred to as Freedmen’s Bureau Records. Also see Trelease, \textit{White Terror}, 131, 306-307.

\(^{42}\) Trelease, \textit{White Terror}, 270-71.

\(^{43}\) \textit{44th} Congress, 2\textsuperscript{nd} session, House Exec. Doc. no. 30, p. 459.
and another in Nansemond County. A church in Perote, Alabama, was burned in December 1867, although whites accused “black leaguers” of burning it themselves in order “to inflame the negroes” against local whites. In February 1868, Jonathan T. Gibson, a preacher and active black radical, was shot and killed by two white men in Early County, Georgia. Although violence did often follow election cycles, thus making certain times of the year riper for conflict than others, terrorist violence against blacks was never out of season in the postbellum South.

Unlike lynching, for which semi-reliable statistics were kept beginning in 1882, there is no count of the number of victims of white violence during Reconstruction, although any reasonable estimate must put the number well into the thousands. No single pattern or theory that can explain all this violence, but a common theme is that any significant effort by freedpeople to assert their independence or equality, especially but not limited to the political sphere, would likely spur hostile reactions. As Steven Hahn notes, “Any black assembly, any sign of economic independence, any attempt to ignore or reject the conventions of racial subordination became an invitation to harassment or summary punishment.”

Many black churches became targets because they were associated with education, which was one of the key avenues used by freedpeople to throw off racial subordination. Until separate facilities could be built, schools for the freedpeople were often housed within churches, making them particularly obnoxious to those whites who considered a primer in a freedperson’s hands only slightly less threatening than a ballot or a gun. The black church


46 “Report of Assaults committed upon Freedmen with intent to murder them in the Division of Cuthbert, Georgia from the first of January 1868 to the 31st day of October 1868,” Freedmen’s Bureau Records M798, Roll 32.

47 Hahn, Nation under Our Feet, 151; see also Vandal, Rethinking Southern Violence, 29.
and the schoolhouse came to represent, in real and symbolic terms, the independence and progress of African Americans, and thus these two institutions were frequently coupled in incidents of white vigilantism. This connection was noticed by contemporaries, including one white Democratic senator who observed that Klan outrages frequently targeted “poor negro preachers and school-teachers,” or in other words, “those who are lifting the negro race from its ignorance.”

For example, a church in Chattooga County, Georgia, was burned after a school was established in it. In the midst of “race troubles” in Jasper County, Mississippi, a crowd of masked men burned a small black church then went down the road and torched the black schoolhouse as well. As two of the most prominent arenas of racial progress, religious and educational assertiveness by African Americans precipitated much of the conflict between the races in the postbellum South. In the postbellum South, religion and schooling were politics by other means, and with many black churches and preachers at the heart of these alternative political activities, they naturally became prime targets for vigilantism.

The violence was not limited to relatively obscure churches and preachers. Indeed, white vigilantes often targeted black ministers who held prominent political office, precisely because of their influence. In July 1868, members of the Klan visited Romulus Moore, the pastor of a church in Columbia County, Georgia. Both a preacher and a blacksmith by trade, Moore had been a pivotal figure in early Reconstruction politics in Georgia, serving as


49 See Trelease, White Terror, 329; “Negro-Haters at Work,” Indianapolis Journal, 15 Sep. 1889. White missionaries were also punished for adding an educational element to religious teaching, as in the case of William Champion, who was “whipped and subjected to a revolting outrage” for teaching freedpeople the alphabet as part of a Sunday school class. “Kuklux in South Carolina,” New York Times, 17 July 1871.

50 On the “politically symbolic and practical elements of Klan vigilantism” against churches and schools, see Hahn, Nation under Our Feet, 276-280.
a voting registrar and a delegate to the state constitutional convention, then being elected to the state legislature in 1868. Enjoying a weekend free from his duties in the statehouse, Moore decided to take the train home to see his family and congregation. When he arrived on Saturday morning, he discovered that Klansmen had visited his town and had seriously beaten one of his close friends. That night, undisguised Klan members, “well armed” with pistols, shotguns, and miscellaneous other weapons, appeared at Moore’s door as he was inside reading his Bible by the fireside. Rather than cowering, as they expected him to do, Moore stood his ground and initiated a “kindly” conversation with his would-be attackers. As he later testified before Congress, “They abused me considerably for my political principles and my misleading the colored people, as they said.” When Moore politely pointed out that he had canvassed the entire neighborhood during his election campaign and had received no trouble then, and that his reputation was well-regarded throughout the county, they admitted, “Yes, we have nothing against you in the world, only that you mislead your people.” By that they meant, according to Moore, “that I should not control my people politically,” but should separate his religious role from the political sphere. The prolonged discussion apparently took the fire out of the nightriders’ bellies, and they slinked away saying, “We didn’t come to hurt you to-night; we haven’t got on our grave clothes.” The next week the Klan—in disguises this time and apparently meaning business—did come back, but Moore was back in Atlanta conducting state business, so they went down the road and took out their anger by severely beating another freedman. Moore also barely escaped violence the next spring, when white terrorists near Augusta killed a white Republican state legislator named Joseph Adkins and then came looking for him, breaking down the doors to his home and threatening his wife, a schoolteacher, before discovering he was not there.  

51 Ku Klux Conspiracy, VII, 735-742. Edmund Drago characterizes Moore as essentially conservative,
White violence and intimidation even extended to the most prominent of African American preacher-politicians in the South, including Tunis G. Campbell Sr. and Henry McNeal Turner. Campbell was a northern-born A.M.E. Zion minister who in 1863 came down to Beaufort, South Carolina, “to instruct and elevate the colored race.” He was employed by the Freedmen’s Bureau after the war to help organize self-government among the freedpeople on Saint Catherine’s and Sapelo islands off the coast of Georgia. Dismissed by the Bureau in 1866, Campbell settled in Darien and established McIntosh County as one of the strongholds of black political power in Reconstruction Georgia. Campbell served in numerous political capacities in the decade after emancipation, including as a voting registrar, justice of the peace, state constitutional convention delegate, and state senator, emerging as one of the most respected and influential African American men in the South.

As the price for his political activism, however, throughout the late 1860s and 1870s Campbell was subject to “continual threats” that his life was in jeopardy. Most of the threats were not acted on, but he was poisoned at one speaking engagement, and on many more occasions he received explicit notice that whites meant to kill him. After whites “redeemed” the state from Republican rule, he was sentenced by a state court to a year’s hard labor on the pretext that while serving as justice of the peace he had illegally sent a white man to jail for contempt of court. Campbell’s imprisonment sent shock waves through the black community and began rumors that there was a conspiracy that “every leading colored man in the State” was also to be sent to the penitentiary. After spending eleven months in prison, Campbell returned to the North, where he lived out his life performing church work.52

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52 "more concerned about the spiritual than the earthly well-being” of his constituents (Black Politicians, 88-89). On Adkins’ death, see Angell, Bishop Henry McNeal Turner, 90.

Perhaps the most prominent—certainly among the most vocal—of all the South’s postbellum preacher-politicians was A.M.E. Bishop Henry McNeal Turner. Self-described as “a minister of the gospel and a kind of politician,” Turner was born free in South Carolina. He was first licensed to preach by the Methodist Episcopal Church in 1853, and spent the next decade as a minister in Baltimore and Washington, D.C. He became a chaplain to the Union army’s first colored regiment, and worked briefly for the Freedmen’s Bureau before devoting the next few years to religious work and serving in Georgia politics as a state constitutional delegate and member of the state House of Representatives.

Turner’s life was threatened on numerous occasions, both by written notices and by the appearance of armed mobs. He escaped the latter by hiding “in houses at times, in the woods at other times, in a hollow log at another time”; otherwise, he was convinced, he “would have been assassinated by a band of night-prowlers.” On one occasion the man he shared the stand with at a speech in Columbus, Georgia, was murdered by the Klan, who also sought to kill Turner but could not discover his whereabouts after the meeting. During one spate of violence in Macon, a group of some 150 armed blacks guarded the homes of both Turner and Jefferson Long, Georgia’s only black Congressman during Reconstruction, to prevent whites from doing any harm to their political leaders.53

African American churchmen put themselves at risk when they became preacher-politicians. In addition to antagonizing whites for subverting their ideas about the proper distance that ministers of the gospel were to keep from the political arena, they put themselves in the spotlight as community leaders militating for racial progress. Their alternative religious vision compelled many of them to take up the cause of both seeking freedom from both spiritual and temporal bondage, and they often paid the price, both for

their prominence as outspoken leaders and for their challenge to the social order. As the political landscape around them changed and the African American clergy became less politically active and somewhat more accommodationist, white violence against them subsided substantially even as the lynching era came into full bloom.

2.4 Retreat, Accommodation, and the Decline in Violence

As Democrats gradually reclaimed, or “redeemed,” the South in the 1870s and 1880s, bringing Reconstruction to an end, the African American religious leadership became increasingly disenchanted with the ability or sincerity of politicians to deliver on their promises to the freedpeople. The optimism of the immediate postwar years faded as full equality remained a chimera and racial progress seemed stalled. Many of the signs of growing racial equality that had seemed so encouraging in the late 1860s were reversed, as northern Republicans became less interested in mobilizing around the needs of the freedpeople, and southern Democrats retrenched and regained power on all levels of government. As Reconstruction ended and white terrorist violence continued unabated, fewer and fewer black ministers believed in the efficacy of politics, and the black church gradually slid into a phase of marked conservatism. There still existed radical voices such as Henry McNeal Turner, but even he became disgusted with the leadership of both political parties, and declared himself in 1880 to be “as near a rebel to this Government as any Negro

ever got to be.”55 After the 1883 U.S. Supreme Court decision that declared unconstitutional the Civil Rights Act of 1875, Turner railed that the judgment “absolves the negro’s allegiance to the general government, makes the American flag to him a rag of contempt instead of a symbol of liberty. . . . [It] revives the Ku-Klux Klan and the white leaguers, resurrects the bludgeons, sets men to cursing and blaspheming God and man, and literally unties the devil.”56 His bitterness still unabated seven years later, he wrote to former U.S. Senator Blanche K. Bruce that “The Supreme Court is an organized mob against the negro.”57

It was not just the “mob” in Washington that inspired the retreat of the African American preacher-politicians back into their churches. One of the major factors involved in their withdrawal from formal politics was the violence they encountered from southern mobs intent on squelching black political ambition after emancipation. For instance, largely because they were faced with the futility of more proactive methods, the black leadership in Louisiana struck a compromise with white conservatives and moderates in the 1870s. Beginning in 1876, as a direct result of white intimidation or disenchantment with the empty promises of Republican leaders, many Louisiana blacks either abstained from voting altogether or voted for Democrats.58 In the wake of violence, most African American ministers “adopted a strategy of lying low and avoiding language and behavior that might provoke white attacks.”59 One example was Henry Giles, a minister whose church in Coosa County, Georgia, was burned before his eyes by a group of sixteen masked Klansmen on horseback who also killed at least one man and whipped several others that night, all because

55 Christian Recorder, 25 March 1880; quoted in Redkey, Respect Black, 49.
56 Christian Recorder, 8 Nov. 1883; quoted in Redkey, Respect Black, 60-61.
57 Open letter to Blanche K. Bruce, quoted in Redkey, Respect Black, 78.
58 See Vandal, Rethinking Southern Violence, 184-189.
59 Montgomery, Under Their Own Vine, 214.
they voted the Republican ticket. Giles was forced to flee the county and move to
Montgomery for his own safety, fearing to return because of repeated threats the Klan gave
his family that he would be killed if he came back.\textsuperscript{60} When black ministers could be dragged
from their church and whipped for apparently no provocation, and Sunday School teachers
could be taken from their classes and have their teeth filed down to the gums to discourage
them from opening their mouths for the cause of racial advancement, it is no wonder that
many, perhaps most, black preachers grew intimidated and adopted a survivalist mentality.\textsuperscript{61}

By the late 1870s the era of the preacher-politician had all but ended. Although
many church leaders remained active in movements that had political implications such as
temperance and emigrationism, their involvement in these causes simply paralleled the moral
activism of white clergy.\textsuperscript{62} In essence, the majority of black churchmen accommodated
themselves to whites’ critiques and traded political causes of rights and representation for
moral crusades of right-living. The black church’s increasingly conservative and
accommodationist character in the final two decades of the century paralleled and supported
the rise of Booker T. Washington and the black middle class. Partly because of their own
class interests, many black ministers came to espouse a bourgeois ideology emphasizing hard
work, temperance, morality, and frugality as the foundations of racial uplift, believing that if
they accommodated to the ideals of middle-class white society they would be accepted by it.
Betrayed by their earthly allies and besieged by their enemies, African Americans and their
religious leaders continued to espouse a providential view of history in which they hoped
and prayed that God would redeem them from their suffering. At the same time, in a shift

\textsuperscript{60} Ku Klux Conspiracy, IX, 1009-1011.

\textsuperscript{61} See Savannah Colored Tribune, 15 Jan. 1876.

\textsuperscript{62} On the church’s importance in the emigration movement, see Hahn, Nation under Our Feet, chap. 7.
On ministers’ involvement in the temperance crusade, see Wheeler, Uplifting the Race, chap. 3.
from the earlier emphasis on liberation, the more passive elements of their Christian faith
dictated that they love their enemies and seek to be conciliatory toward them rather than
returning violence for violence.\textsuperscript{63} With all this said, however, the decline of political activism
by the African American clergy after Reconstruction should not be seen as a sign of
cowardice, defeatism, or fatalism, as some scholars have suggested.\textsuperscript{64} Rather, it was the only
pragmatic option available to a group that was outnumbered and outgunned by white
terrorists, and abandoned by their erstwhile champions in Congress and the North.

Despite its increased conservatism, the black church was still not immune from the
racial violence that plagued the South in the final two decades of the nineteenth century.
One of the signature episodes involving nonpolitical but still prominent black church leaders
occurred in September 1889 at the small railroad town of Baxley, Georgia. Reverend
Emanuel King Love and a small entourage of other delegates were en route to Indianapolis
for the annual meetings of the Baptist Foreign Mission Association, a loose organization
representing over one million black Baptists and eighteen colleges, and whose principal
objective was evangelization in Africa. Love, a former slave who hoed cotton and dug
ditches to support himself through divinity school, was pastor of First African Baptist
Church in Savannah, the largest Baptist congregation in the country with over five thousand
members. A railroad agent had approached Love and promised that he could provide the
Georgia delegation first-class travel, guaranteeing that they “would not be molested,” an
offer that Love accepted. The delegation rode in the first-class car, remaining fixed even

\textsuperscript{63} See Montgomery, \textit{Under Their Own Vine}, 157, 184-185, chap. 6; Wheeler, \textit{Uplifting the Race}. On the

\textsuperscript{64} One of the most prominent critics of the conservatism of the black church in this era was E.
criticizes the “otherworldliness” and “fatalism” of black ministers (\textit{Black Politicians}, 46-47, 161).
after a black porter told Love that he thought there would be trouble as they went through
“Cracker country.” When the train slowed as it approached the station at Baxley, the
passengers looked out their window and saw approximately seventy-five white men standing
on the platform, armed with pistols, clubs, and brickbats.

The mob poured into the train, “yelling like demons,” and immediately rushed the
members of the delegation. Deacon J. H. Brown was hit over the head with a piece of iron,
cutting his head and neck. He was knocked down, beaten, and thrown off the train. The
mob grabbed the lone woman of the delegation, Janie Garnett, hurled her to the ground,
pointed a pistol at her head, and “called her vile names.” Reverend Love ran to the door,
but was struck by a piece of lumber before he could exit, receiving “a severe blow on the
arm.” Reverend G. M. Spratling was also beat over the head with a ragged piece of iron;
when he fell to the ground, the mob continued to kick him, cutting his head open and
severing an artery in his wrist. An elderly Methodist minister traveling with the group, John
Williams, also fell prey to the mob’s assault. A three-year veteran of the Civil War, he later
said, “I have seen men fall in battle, but never saw anything that shocked me as the wild
brutality of those Cracker ruffians.”

The delegation, battered and bloodied but still intact, tended to their wounds then
caught another train to Indianapolis, determined not to let the assault hinder them in
performing their duties. The “outrage” immediately became the focal point of conversation
at the convention. Some of the ministers in attendance recommended that southern blacks
take up arms to defend themselves against white mobs, but the majority, reflecting the

65 “The Story of an Outrage,” Indianapolis Journal, 12 Sep. 1889. For a short biographical sketch on
Love, see “They Came from the Ranks,” Indianapolis Journal, 15 Sep. 1889. For another account of the assault
on Rev. Love and his entourage, see James Melvin Washington, Frustrated Fellowship: The Black Baptist Quest for
increasingly conservative element of the black church, recommended less strident measures. Resolutions were passed condemning the affair and southern violence in general, and a committee was created with the charge of presenting the details of the case to the President and Attorney General of the United States. The fact that the attack was so clearly unprovoked, and that the victims were clergy on the way to a church convention, drew moral outrage from around the country. The Indianapolis Journal editorialized that “Never before has the race problem in the South presented a more serious aspect or been brought more directly home to the Northern people than it is by this incident.” If “educated, intelligent, pious people” were not safe from white terrorism, then who was? The Journal writer presaged the sentiments that the civil rights movement would capitalize on over a half century later when he commented, “Their only offense was that they were honest, inoffensive, pious people—and black.”

Reverend Love and his party survived their attack; ten years later, black preacher Elijah “Lige” Strickland was not so fortunate. Early in the morning of 24 April 1899, Strickland’s body was found hanging from the limb of a persimmon tree in Palmetto, Georgia. Both his ears were cut off, and the small finger of his left hand was severed as well; these “trophies” were soon displayed in downtown Palmetto. Pinned to Strickland’s chest was a “blood-stained paper.” On one side was scribbled, “We must protect our Ladies”; the other side contained a warning, “Beware all darkies. You will be treated the same way.”

Strickland’s horrid death was a kind of “collateral damage” from one of the South’s most infamous lynchings, that of Sam Hose, falsely accused of brutally killing his employer,

66 “Southern Brutality’s Latest Victims,” Indianapolis Journal, 13 Sep. 1889. See coverage in the Journal, 12-15 Sep. 1889. Reverend Love was elected president of the association at the meetings, his election almost surely cemented by the strength of leadership he showed in wake of the attack on him and his entourage.

repeatedly raping his wife, and then hurling their small baby across the room. In the midst of being burned at the stake, a “confession” was extracted from Hose, in which he claimed that Lige Strickland had paid him twenty dollars to kill his employer. Despite no substantiating evidence for this allegation, part of the mob, already in a state of hysteria, set out to also bring Strickland to “justice.” Thus, on the night after Hose had been killed, a mob of fifteen men proceeded to the plantation of Major W. W. Thomas, a former state senator and distinguished citizen, and abducted Strickland from his little cabin in the woods, leaving his wife and children behind in a state of panic. Major Thomas unsuccessfully pled for his employee’s life, and Strickland was marched to Palmetto, where a noose was hung around his neck, and he was “strung up two or three times in an effort to get a confession from him, but each time he refused to say that he had any connection” with Hose’s alleged crime. The proceedings lasted into the early morning hours, when Strickland was finally tortured and hung to death.69

Public opinion following the black preacher’s death was divided, largely along racial lines. African Americans naturally condemned the lynching. An assembly of black ministers in New York gathered in St. Mark’s Episcopal Church and passed resolutions denouncing

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68 A compelling account of the Same Hose lynching is Philip Dray, *At the Hands of Persons Unknown: The Lynching of Black America* (New York: Random House, 2002), chap. 1. Curiously, Dray does not even mention the associated lynching of Lige Strickland. Also see various articles in the *Atlanta Constitution,* especially “Sam Holt, Murderer and Assailant, Burned at the Stake at Newnan,” 24 Apr. 1899. Several contemporary accounts mistake the victim’s last name as Holt.

69 “Lige Strickland in Hands of Mob and He May Be Lynched,” *Atlanta Constitution,* 24 Apr. 1899; “Major W. W. Thomas Pleading in Vain,” *Atlanta Constitution,* 25 Apr. 1899. It is unclear what the nature of the connection between Hose and Strickland was, and why Hose would have singled out Strickland while in the throes of torture. Thomas rejected Hose’s claim on the grounds that Strickland was “a lawabiding negro,” and furthermore that “Lige has not had $20 since he has been on my place.” Also see “Georgia Mob Kills an Innocent Man?” *New York Times,* 25 Apr. 1899. In their rush to find Strickland, the mob nearly lynched the wrong person. After hearing Hose’s confession implicating Strickland, a number of citizens went to Fayetteville, where they believed Strickland to be, and apprehended another black preacher named Tharpe, who had recently moved from Palmetto where he had made some “indiscreet remarks” after some whitecap violence that had killed four blacks the previous month. Tharpe was saved on the word of two prominent white citizens who vouched that he was not the preacher the mob was looking for. “Negro Preacher is Taken by a Mob,” *Atlanta Constitution,* 25 Apr. 1899.
the Hose-Strickland lynchings. Reverend B. L. Tompkins declared, “I would much rather be a Filipino and be under the Spanish yoke than under the law and order now practiced in Georgia.”

An A.M.E. conference meeting in Jersey City similarly adopted resolutions critical of mob violence in the South, saying that “the instincts of the lynchers were below animals of the lowest type.” In the interest of not engaging in controversy and therefore threatening the peace and stability he enjoyed at Tuskegee Institute, Booker T. Washington refused to comment specifically on the lynchings, although he did say that in general he was “much opposed to mob violence under all circumstances.” Among the white South, some newspaper editors decried the “temporary abolition of law and order” associated with lynching, but still blamed blacks for necessitating such “lawlessness,” as they were the ones who allegedly continued to perpetrate “the crime which is made the justification of lynching.” Numerous commentators specifically condemned the black church and its leaders. These criticisms followed one of two lines of reasoning: first, they held black ministers responsible for not strongly enough working to prevent “the besetting sin of the colored race . . . the crime of assaulting women”; second, black preachers were blamed for celebrating the lynching victims as “martyrs” instead of the “criminals” they truly were.

The Waycross Herald put it most baldly: “The lynching of the negro preacher for hiring Sam

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70 “Preachers Talk of Lynching,” Atlanta Constitution, 26 April 1899.
72 “He Cannot Talk of Lynching,” Atlanta Constitution, 26 April 1899.
Holt to kill Cranford brings up the question as to whether the colored preachers as a rule are giving their people the right kind of advice.”

African American church leaders responded to white criticism and violence in one of two ways. The conservative response was to not disagree with the white critique, condemning black criminality while keeping quiet about white lynching, all in the name of trying to keep the peace and limit further violence. This position was embodied by a group of A.M.E. ministers who met two weeks after the Strickland lynching very near the scene of the crime in Newnan, Georgia, and made a public statement declaring, “We condone no crime, neither do we wish to shield criminals from any crime for which they deserve punishment.” They made no specific comment on Hose and Strickland, or on the epidemic of lynching in general, vaguely concluding their statement with an appeal that white and black church leaders would stand together to “hold up the majesty of the law.”

As usual, Henry McNeal Turner represented the more aggressive “radical” wing of the black church, which by the turn of the century had become a distinct minority voice drowned out by accommodationism (or survivalism). Turner preached in Athens, Georgia, on 30 April 1899, a week after the lynching, and roundly condemned the white press for doing “negro preachers a great injustice.” He asserted that black churches did as much or more than white churches in preserving community morals, and said that the white newspapers “knew as much about what the negro preachers were preaching as a gang of monkeys.” He leveled harsh criticism at the failure of southern society to prevent lynching, saying that in some respects his people were better off in slavery, “with the protection it


75 “Negro Preachers Denounce Depraved of Their Race Who Assault Women,” Atlanta Constitution, 6 May 1899.
afforded, than in their present condition.”  Although Turner would not have in fact traded even the stunted freedom of Jim Crow with slavery, he had a point—in the last two decades of the nineteenth century, at least 157 African Americans were lynched in Georgia alone, and the Afro-American Council recorded 332 persons lynched in the United States from January 1897 to April 1899, almost all of whom were African Americans in the South. 77

Lige Strickland’s death proved that black preachers were still subject to the same vagaries of racial injustice as other African Americans under Jim Crow. Just as political conflict had spurred violence against black religious institutions during Reconstruction, the pressing issues of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, such as sexuality and competition in the cotton market, were at the root of attacks on black churches in that period. 78 That ministers were not the victims of more violence during the lynching era demonstrates how substantially they had withdrawn from the public spotlight, at least in terms of who whites identified as the most troublesome and threatening elements of the black community. When black preachers did step out of line and violate the social codes, as Strickland was accused of doing and Love did by riding in the first-class car, they were punished just like other African Americans. A minister who still acted as a prominent community leader might be labeled a “public disturber and incendiary,” as Strickland was

76 “Bishop Turner in Athens, Ga.,” Atlanta Constitution, 1 May 1899.


after the fact. Those who took unpopular stances on controversial public issues were punished, as was Reverent H. B. Battle, killed for speaking out against lynching, or a preacher in Johnson County, North Carolina, severely beaten by a band of masked men for being an “enthusiastic advocate” of African emigration. In general, however, by the end of the nineteenth century, the black church was no longer the clear center of political activism and the attendant controversy that it had been during Reconstruction. As a result, there was not the same degree of systematic violence against black religious institutions and leaders in the final two decades of the century that there had been earlier, as they shaped their religious vision to look less like the radical “sacred cosmos” of Reconstruction and more like a white-approved moderate differentiation of religious and political worlds.

2.5 Southern Violence and Cultural Captivity

Making direct links between southern white churches and violence against black churches and ministers is difficult if not impossible in most instances. While a compelling case can be made that virtually everyone in the South operated under a broadly shared evangelical Protestant ethos that pervaded the region, the apolitical nature of white churches and lack of documentation about what was said in their meetings means that correlations between actual white churches and vigilante violence are piecemeal at best. Some evidence is available, such as the tombstone epitaph for one Tennessee Confederate veteran that reads, “Belonged to the Ku Klux Klan, a deacon in the Baptist Church and a Master Mason for

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79 Excerpt from the *Wilmington (NC) Messenger*, in “And This from Wilmington!” *Atlanta Constitution*, 30 Apr. 1899.

forty years.”\footnote{Quoted in Harvey, \textit{Freedom’s Coming}, 39.} Most of this evidence only exists on the individual and not institutional level. Nevertheless, Daniel Stowell is surely correct when he writes, “Although these acts of violence [against freedpeople’s schools and churches] cannot be linked directly to southern churches, they tacitly encouraged such actions by insisting that independent bodies of black Christians or those linked with ‘radical’ northern denominations were dangerous to southern society.”\footnote{Stowell, \textit{Rebuilding Zion}, 89.} This chapter suggests that southern white churches were not only upset at the alliances of black churches to northerners and Republicans, but that the black church’s overt politicization ran directly counter to the disestablishment ideal embraced, if selectively practiced, by southern white evangelicals. The violence against black preachers and churches was at least in part a function of conflicting religious visions that battled in the explosive sphere of political action, in which black ministers paid a terrible price for their prominence as community leaders and spokesmen. With so much violence conducted by so many white church members, it is impossible to leave the institutional white churches blameless, as their silence was a form of complicity.

Indeed, one can hardly come away from an encounter with the history of religion in the postbellum South without agreeing in general terms with the “cultural captivity” thesis articulated by scholars such as Rufus Spain, John Lee Eighmy, and Samuel Hill.\footnote{See John Lee Eighmy, \textit{Churches in Cultural Captivity: A History of the Social Attitudes of Southern Baptists}, with an introduction and epilogue by Samuel S. Hill Jr. (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1972; rev. ed., 1987); Spain, \textit{At Ease in Zion}; Samuel S. Hill Jr., \textit{Southern Churches in Crisis} (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1966); Hill, “The South’s Two Cultures,” in Hill, \textit{Religion and the Solid South} (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1972).} Simply put, it is that southern white evangelicals, and Southern Baptists in particular, all but neglected the church’s prophetic role, not only accepting but in fact sanctifying the racist and
sexist worldview of white southerners. Rather than creating tension particularly on the issue of race relations, white churches became complicit in the South’s racist ideologies and hierarchical caste structure. Religion served as a socially conservative agent reinforcing and giving divine mandate to attitudes that white southerners had come to by other means, eschewing self-criticism or even debate on potentially controversial social issues. This is not to say that southern evangelicals retreated into a cocoon and ignored social issues—to the contrary, they were at the forefront of defending slavery, secession, segregation, temperance, the sanctity of the family (revolving largely around the protection of female purity), and a host of other matters that defined the nineteenth-century southern white ethos. Evangelicals constituted a radical countercultural voice in their early years in the South, but by the late nineteenth century, as Joseph Creech notes, they clearly had become “cultural insiders, though they may not have always thought so themselves.” Originally foes of the religious establishment, in the postbellum South evangelical Protestantism “had become the established religion, legitimating multiple and even contradictory elements of southern cultural, economic, and political life.”

Rather than being silent on social issues, evangelicals were the most prominent spokesmen of the southern mind. In exchange for cultural hegemony, white evangelicals essentially made a deal not to do or say anything to upset the traditional southern way of life; so long as they did not steer the ship into troubled or dark waters, they remained at the helm.

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84 Creech, “Righteous Indignation,” 213. Although Creech acknowledges that evangelical Protestantism had essentially become the southern religious establishment in the postbellum period, he is nonetheless critical of the cultural captivity thesis, arguing that evangelicalism was in fact “full of diverse options for political and social involvement” prior to 1900. He persuasively demonstrates that even theologically conservative southern evangelicals sometimes held surprisingly progressive views on labor activism, capitalism, and social injustice. In the end, though, he admits that they “held to conventional cultural constructions of race and gender” (67-69). On the countercultural aspect of early evangelicalism in the South, see Heyrman, Southern Cross; and Isaac, The Transformation of Virginia.
The southern white church’s cultural captivity becomes particularly visible in regards to its stance, or lack thereof, toward violence against blacks. Although the particular identity of most white vigilantes was by definition secret, it is no stretch to say that they were mostly evangelical Christians or at least were deeply imbued with the language, images, and attitudes associated with southern evangelical religion and culture. Despite this fact, the southern white churches remained almost completely silent on the matter of racial violence, particularly during Reconstruction. This was starkly illustrated during the celebrated 1871 Ku Klux Klan trials in South Carolina. Federal judge Hugh Bond asked several witnesses whether white ministers had spoken out against the Klan and other white vigilante groups. Not only had the churches refused to condemn the racial violence, but to his surprise the judge learned that in fact “pretty much” all the members of the churches belonged to the Klan. White evangelical publications gave tacit approval to white violence and “obliquely sanctioned” the Klan’s terrorist tactics. As Rufus Spain concluded, “At no time during Reconstruction did Southern Baptists condemn unequivocally the extra-legal methods employed by Southern whites to bring the Negroes under control.”

By the end of the century many evangelicals had come to condemn lynching, but they almost always qualified their opinion by saying that there were cases in which extralegal violence was in fact necessary to preserve the virtue of the community, and they condemned black criminality—the alleged root of the problem—even more vigorously. In short, the southern white church

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85 Joseph Creech notes that everyone in the South, regardless of denominational or theological distinctions, shared “a common religious vision and language” that was symptomatic of evangelicalism’s “cultural predominance.” “Righteous Indignation,” 26. Edward Ayers similarly observes that in the evangelical South, “Religious faith and language appeared everywhere in the New South. It permeated public speech as well as private emotion. . . . Even those filled with doubt or disdain could not escape the images, the assumptions, the power of faith.” Promise of the New South, 160.

86 Stowell, Rebuilding Zion, 159.

87 Spain, At Ease in Zion, 111.
utterly failed to take a prophetic stance against the racism and violence of the late nineteenth-century South. White evangelical churches actively and openly endorsed southern racial views along with the resultant segregation, disenfranchisement, and gradual stripping of black civil and political rights. While they may not have overtly promoted violence from the pulpit, their silence in the face of overwhelming injustice was tantamount to approval.

Black Christians in the South, particularly during Reconstruction, offered another vision. Theirs was a God intimately involved in all of life, from the mundane to the eternal. “Sacred” and “secular” were largely irrelevant categories, because reality was a single whole. At least some of this worldview was a survival of West African spirituality transported across the ocean in slave vessels and adopted into the slaves’ appropriation of Christianity. For African American Christians there was, as Samuel Hill notes, no distinction between the “social gospel” and the “gospel.” They had adopted what Hill calls a “functional monism,” in which the heavenly and earthly did not inhabit separate spheres or even reside side by side, but existed within one another.\(^{88}\) Combining this with a providential view of history and their own special relationship with the Suffering Servant Jesus, forged in the crucible of slavery, African Americans created their own theology, unique and separate from, and ultimately more redemptive than southern white theology. In the face of unspeakable hardship, this religious vision sustained them and eventually gave birth to a new era of liberation nearly a century later.

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\(^{88}\) Hill, *One Name but Several Faces*, 36-38.
CHAPTER THREE

THE BLOOD OF MARTYRS:

TWO CASE STUDIES IN SOUTHERN ANTI-MORMON VIOLENCE

...we have made double the number of converts throughout the southern states on account of that murder. Bullets and bayonets will never compel a people to relinquish a faith.

-- John Morgan, speaking of Joseph Standing’s murder (1879)\(^1\)

The field of Abel, the Mount of Calvary and the gaol of Carthage are the trinity of tragic scenes whose number is now increased to four.

-- LDS editorial on the massacre at Cane Creek, Tennessee (1884)\(^2\)

3.1 Overview

Anti-Mormon violence was the most clear-cut example of religious violence in the postbellum South. Even so, the violence was not simply the result of blind religious prejudice. In the next two chapters, I argue that the hundreds of episodes of southern anti-Mormon violence should be understood as efforts by southern men to purge their communities of perceived threats to the social order, not as wholly irrational spasms of bigotry. Latter-day Saint (LDS) missionaries were seen as home-wreckers who converted women so as to lure them away from their families and entice them into polygamous marriages far away in the West. Violence against Mormon missionaries was therefore located at the convergence of two fundamental aspects of southern culture: the protection


of home and hearth from potential invaders, and the justified use of extralegal violence to defend the integrity of womanhood, the family, and community values.

In this chapter I examine in detail two of the most prominent cases of southern anti-Mormon violence, the 1879 murder of Joseph Standing in Georgia and the 1884 killing of four Mormon converts and missionaries in Tennessee, which came to be known as the Cane Creek Massacre. Basic narratives of these two episodes appear elsewhere, but no other treatment fully accounts for the interaction of local and national causes in spurring the violence. Although there were several other times when southern mobs attempted to murder Latter-day Saints, these incidents are the only two in which Mormons were actually killed by vigilante mobs in the postbellum South; as such, they are atypical in their results. They are still valuable case studies, however, for their richness in showing how and why local southerners became so irate at the presence of Mormon missionaries that they resorted to vigilantism. These cases also demonstrate how actions of seemingly local mobs were influenced by national factors, and how these killings in remote outposts helped strengthen Mormon resistance to anti-polygamy efforts in Utah by adding to their mythology of persecution and martyrdom and thus reinforcing rather than deflating their oppositional identity. The next chapter will pursue these and other themes in greater detail, analyzing the trends that arise from a study from over three hundred twenty cases of anti-Mormon violence in the late nineteenth-century South.

3.2 “There Is No Law for Mormons”: The Joseph Standing Murder

On 18 July 1879, Joseph Standing, a seasoned Latter-day Saint missionary in the church’s Southern States Mission, wrote a casual letter to a friend in Centerville, Utah. He complained of the “simply awful” summer heat in northern Georgia, which wilted not only the local crops but also the missionaries, whose work had them doing “considerable
walking” from house to house and town to town. Standing reported having “some success” in his proselytizing efforts, but also that not everyone was particularly warm toward the Mormon faith. Most of the people he met, Standing said, were “prejudiced,” but he identified members of the local Protestant clergy as the worst offenders. With unveiled bitterness, he asked, “How would you like it after having preached to have two preachers get up and lie about you and shake their fists nearly in your face, and that before an audience of 150 people?”

Three days later, Standing lay dead, his body mutilated from repeated bullet wounds to the face and neck. Although everyone in the community knew who had committed the awful crime—the murderers made no attempt to conceal their identity before or after the act, a coroner’s jury immediately identified the perpetrators by name, and a public trial was held—no one was ever convicted in the murder. Indeed, the mob leader’s claim upon apprehending Standing, that “There is no law in Georgia for Mormons,” held true.

Joseph Standing, a twenty-four year old native of Salt Lake City, first served a mission for his church in Tennessee in 1875-76. After a short hiatus, he was called to resume his missionary labors in the South in early 1878, this time being assigned to northern Georgia, where he organized the first branch of the LDS Church in Varnell’s Station later that same year. Well-liked and faithful, he was entrusted with the responsibility of presiding over the fledgling Georgia Conference of the church in May 1879, and became well known

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in the region to Mormons and non-Mormons alike. Standing’s missionary companion since the late spring was Rudger Clawson. The twenty-two year old son of a polygamous marriage (his mother was the second wife of four; Clawson had ten direct siblings and another thirty-one stepbrothers and -sisters), Clawson became a minor celebrity in Utah as the surviving witness of the Standing murder. His real rise to prominence, however, came five years later, when he became the first prisoner for polygamy under the Edmunds Act; after his conviction was upheld by the U.S. Supreme Court, he triumphantly paid a fine of eight hundred dollars and served a four-year prison sentence. A beloved champion of the faith, he was ordained one of the church’s twelve apostles in 1898, and served in that leadership position until his death in 1943.

Throughout the early summer of 1879 Elders Standing and Clawson had been preaching in Dalton, the county seat of Whitfield County. In July the elders were invited to a district conference being held in Rome, some thirty-five miles to the south, and Standing suggested that on their way they visit the members of the church in Varnell’s Station. When they arrived at the home of a Mormon family, the elders were shocked at the cold reception they received. They were refused lodging, although it was nine o’clock in the evening and the family had always been friendly on previous visits. According to Clawson’s later reminiscence, the woman at the door told them, “You cannot remain because the mob in this place has threatened your life. They have said that if they ever get hold of you they will

5 Driggs, “There is No Law in Georgia,” 750.

6 Biographical information taken from the register to the Rudger Clawson Papers, Manuscript Division, J. Willard Marriott Library, University of Utah, Salt Lake City, Utah. Also see Sarah Barringer Gordon, The Mormon Question: Polygamy and Constitutional Conflict in Nineteenth-Century America (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 157; John Nicholson, The Martyrdom of Joseph Standing or, the Murder of a “Mormon” Missionary (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret News, 1886; republished, Grantsville, UT: LDS Archive Publishers, 1997), 7-8; and Driggs, “There is No Law in Georgia,” 751-52. For additional insight into Clawson’s character, as well as the broader culture of Latter-day Saints during the polygamy prosecutions of the 1880s, see his writings while in prison, published as Stan Larson, ed., Prisoner for Polygamy: The Memoirs and Letters of Rudger Clawson at the Utah Territorial Penitentiary, 1884-87 (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993).
kill you. If they know you are here, and possibly they do know it, they will be out tonight in search of you.” She repeated again, “You cannot remain.”

Set on edge after being turned away by their friends, the missionaries became particularly uneasy upon recalling a dream that Standing had some months earlier that was eerily similar to what they had just encountered. This premonition of danger hanging heavily in their hearts as darkness approached, the two missionaries finally found lodging for the night with Henry Holston, a local non-Mormon friendly to the elders. Holston informed them that there had been “threats of mobbing, whipping and even killing the Elders” circulating in the area, and that “he expected to get into trouble on account of entertaining them,” but would “defend them so long as they were under his roof.” After the foreboding talk of the mob activity in the area, the elders retired for the night. Standing rested uneasily, telling Clawson that he had “an intense horror of being whipped” and would “rather die than be subjected to such an indignity.” He reportedly kept an iron bar beside his bed that night, almost certain that he would be required to put it to use in self-defense.

The next morning, 21 July 1879, Standing and Clawson were making their way on the densely wooded road, not far from Holston’s, when they suddenly came upon a posse of about a dozen undisguised men, three on horseback and the others on foot, “armed to the

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8 Shortly after the two men met for the first time, Standing told Clawson that he had dreamt of “a very heavy black cloud, ominous and forbidding in appearance, hanging over Varnells [sic] Station.” While the cloud rested over the hamlet, Standing saw himself approach the home of one of the local church members. “As I entered,” he related, “the woman of the house turned deathly white and appeared very much agitated, and she said to me, ‘Elder Standing, I cannot entertain you; you cannot remain here. You must go on!’” Clawson, *Memoirs*, 44. Also see Nicholson, *Martyrdom*, 13-14, which reports that upon being rejected at the house, Clawson thought to himself, “This is the fulfillment of Joseph’s dream.”

teeth with clubs, pistols and guns.” Tension hung in the air as the parties faced each other, and after a brief pause, the gang “took off their hats and swung them over their heads with an awful yell and came charging down” toward the elders, shouting “We’ve got them, we’ve got them!” The missionaries were immediately apprehended and forced to march down the road. Being in no hurry to get to their unknown destination, Clawson slowed his pace and was struck in the back of the head. Indignant, Standing demanded to know of the mob under what authority they had accosted the elders, affirming that the United States was a country of religious liberty and that the elders had done nothing illegal. He was gruffly answered, “The United States of America is against you, and there is no law in Georgia for the Mormons.”

Standing apparently did not mount a counterargument. Indeed, for Mormons in 1879, it certainly would have seemed that the United States was against them—and with good reason. In January of that year, the Supreme Court had ruled against the church in the case of Reynolds v. United States, which was the first high court ruling to interpret, and then fix, the specific meaning of the free exercise provision of the First Amendment. Essentially, as legal historian Sarah Gordon describes, the Court “decided that the establishment and free exercise clauses would not protect local difference in domestic relations.” In other words, according to the court Mormons could not claim that their alternative form of marriage was protected under the First Amendment as an expression of their religious belief, which struck a major blow to their resistance to the imposition of federal authority. Later that same

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10 “The Murder of Joseph Standing,” Deseret Evening News, 1 Aug. 1879; Nicholson, Martyrdom, 24-25; and Clawson, Memoirs, 48-49. Nicholson reports that when Standing asked under what authority the posse acted, he was greeted by a cocked revolver in the face (19).

11 Gordon, The Mormon Question, 122; for broader context, see all of chapter 3, which is an outstanding extended treatment of the Reynolds case and its importance in constitutional law. George Reynolds, former private secretary to Brigham Young, was the first person convicted under the federal anti-bigamy law of 1862.
year, President Rutherford B. Hayes implored Congress to amend the 1862 federal anti-polygamy bill, which had been largely ineffectual in stemming the practice or even bringing alleged polygamists to trial. He recommended “more comprehensive and searching methods for preventing as well as punishing” polygamy, and if necessary, stripping its Mormon practitioners of “the enjoyment and exercise of rights and privileges of citizenship” in order to cajole them into cooperating with “the enforcement of the law.”

Hayes’ pleading helped set the table for passage of the 1882 Edmunds Act, which, along with the Reynolds case, marked the real beginning of the end for Mormon plural marriage. In addition, in August 1879 the Hayes administration sent a letter to the governments of Great Britain, Germany, Norway, Sweden, and Denmark, asking them to prevent Mormon converts from immigrating to the United States. The rationale was that each of the countries had agreements not to allow anyone to depart from their shores to the United States who was known to have “criminal intention,” and that “all who come to this country for the purpose of affiliating with the Mormon Church do so with the avowed intention of becoming criminals,” by practicing polygamy once in Utah. Although the European governments respectfully declined the request—London cited the “difficulties” of prosecuting people for their beliefs, short of any actual illegal action—they agreed that Mormonism was a “gross
superstition that should be speedily dissipated.” Indeed, to be a Mormon in 1879 was to feel that you had very few friends.

The mob’s statement that there was “no law in Georgia for the Mormons” would have also rung true in Standing’s ears, even before the events that were to follow. While Latter-day Saints in the South had become accustomed to occasionally rough treatment, the harassment of Mormon elders and converts in Whitfield County, and especially Varnell’s Station, had reached such a point in early 1879 that Standing had written to Georgia’s governor, Alfred H. Colquitt, asking for redress. He reported that numerous Mormon elders had “been obliged at times to flee for their lives, as armed men to the number of forty and fifty have come out against them, and have also on various occasions entered [local church members’] houses in search of said Elders.” Asserting that all citizens had “the right to worship God according to the dictates of conscience,” he appealed to the governor to provide at least a “word or line” in support of religious toleration, so that the missionaries “could then travel without fear of being stoned or shot.” The only response that Standing received was from the governor’s secretary, J. W. Warren, who affirmed the importance of religious freedom and agreed that government authorities existed for the purpose of guaranteeing such rights. He conveyed the governor’s “regrets” and promised that the state prosecuting attorney would be informed of the situation. No further steps were taken, and


14 This exchange of letters was reprinted several times after Standing’s murder, first in “Another Martyr for the Truth,” Deseret Evening News, 22 July 1879; also see “The Mormon Feud,” (Atlanta) Daily Constitution, 5 Aug. 1879. Standing’s letter was sent on June 12, and the reply from Warren was sent on June 21.
no protections were extended to the local Mormon community. The only real value of Standing’s letter proved to be its prophetic quality.

Unprotected by the law and vilified by the nation, Standing and Clawson continued their march until the group stopped at a spring just off the road for a drink, while the three horsemen rode off to find “a more secluded place for the punishment of the Elders.” It became increasingly apparent that the mob’s intention was to abduct the elders, beat them, and send them on a train out of the county. Their leader, James Fawcett, suggested this when he threatened, “I want you to understand that if after to-day you ever come back to this part of the country, we will hang you up by the neck.”15 That the mob’s original intent was probably not murderous was also confirmed years later by Clawson, who wrote that he believed “they intended to give us a severe whipping,” to impress upon the two elders the seriousness of previous demands that the missionaries leave the region. For upwards of an hour, the captives and their captors sat by the spring, waiting for the scouting party to return. In the meantime, they engaged in spirited conversation, in which the elders were variously insulted and “charged with many crimes.” The “catalog of offences” leveled at them was long, but the primary grievance was that the missionaries were coming to Georgia “for the purpose of stealing their wives and daughters and taking them to Utah.”16

15 “The Murder of Joseph Standing,” Deseret Evening News, 1 Aug. 1879. In Nicholson’s account, Fawcett’s threat reads slightly different, but with the same effect: “I want you men to understand that I am the captain of this party, and that if we ever again find you in this part of the country we will hang you by the neck like dogs” (Martyrdom, 27).

16 Clawson, Memoirs, 51; “Told to Go Free,” (Atlanta) Daily Constitution, 23 Oct. 1879. Early reports agree that the mob’s original intent was not to kill, but rather to give the elders a “handsome thrashing” and send them out of town; see “The Murder of Elder Standing,” New York Times, 24 July 1879; “The Dead Mormon,” (Atlanta) Daily Constitution, 25 July 1879. Concerning testimony at the trial, John Morgan reported that “It was proven that at a meeting held prior to the killing, it was decided to get rid of the Elders peaceably if they could, but forcibly if they must.” Letter from John Morgan to Editors Deseret News, 29 Oct. 1879, printed in “Bad Law and Good,” Deseret Evening News, 3 Nov. 1879.
With the tension between the missionaries and their captors thus building, the three men on horses returned from their scouting trip and bade the elders, at rifle point, to follow them. In a flash, Standing somehow grabbed a pistol from a nearby guard and pointed it at the horsemen, demanding that they surrender. Just as he did, another one of the mob members stood and fired into Standing’s face. The missionary “reeled twice and fell with scarcely a groan.”

All eyes turned toward Clawson, who was convinced that his “time had come . . . to follow Joseph Standing.” One of the mob gave the order to “Shoot that man.” As Clawson looked “down the gun barrels of the murderous mob,” he calmed himself, folded his arms and firmly said, “Shoot.” When the guns remained silent and the order to fire was countermanded, Clawson stepped over to the spot where Standing had fallen. He found that his companion had not been killed immediately, and despite lying unconscious with “a great, gaping bullet wound” in his forehead and his right eye being shot out, he was “breathing heavily,” with “the death rattle” in his throat. As the stunned group stared down at the dying man, realizing he was “beyond all earthly help,” one of the assailants murmured, “Oh, isn’t this terrible, isn’t this terrible that he should have shot himself.” The other members of the gang “took up the ingenious subterfuge” and tried to convince Clawson that

17 “The Murder of Joseph Standing,” Deseret Evening News, 1 Aug. 1879. The moment just before the shooting is a matter of some controversy. As quoted here, Clawson’s early statements indicate that Standing was fired upon after grabbing a pistol from a guard, pointing it at his captors, and demanding their surrender. Later on, Clawson changed his story somewhat, saying that Standing “jumped to his feet, turned to face the horsemen, clapped his hands firmly together, and . . . said in a commanding voice, ‘Surrender.’” Here Clawson asserts that to his “certain knowledge” Standing was unarmed, and that “he had never carried arms in the mission field,” right up to his death. Clawson, Memoirs, 52, 54; also given in Nicholson, Martyrdom, 27. The fact that all of the earliest accounts of the murder say that Standing had by some means seized a pistol from one of his captors suggests its verity, although it may also be true that Standing did not regularly carry a firearm of his own. In addition to the August 1 Deseret News story (cited above), see “A Mormon Elder Murdered,” New York Times, 22 July 1879; and “Put to Death,” (Atlanta) Daily Constitution, 22 July 1879. Two days later a third version of the story emerged, saying that Standing was shot after adamantly refusing to be whipped, which “infuriated the mob.” See “The Murder of Elder Standing,” New York Times, 24 July 1879. Although Standing had previously expressed his wish to die rather than be whipped, there is no evidence that the mob actually tried to whip him before he was shot. Although it is impossible to verify either way, I believe that Clawson’s alternative version of the story—that Standing simply clapped his hands together—seems to have been invented to help protect the character of the fallen missionary and to undermine the mob’s claim that they fired in self-defense. Also see Larson, Prisoner for Polygamy, 134 n. 5.
his companion “had accidentally killed himself while bringing his weapon into position.”

Thinking fast, Clawson, who knew the suggestion of suicide was “ridiculous,” took advantage of the situation to secure his own escape. He played along with the charade by agreeing that “Yes, it is terrible; it is a terrible tragedy,” and earnestly added that either they must get help for the dying man or they must let him go. After what must have seemed like an interminable pause, he was released. As he walked back toward the road he took care not to run, confident that a show of fear would have only brought him a shot in the back.18

Clawson hurried the approximately two miles down the road to fetch Henry Holston, the man who had given the missionaries shelter the previous night. Holston hurried to the site of the shooting and built a shade over Standing, who was still not yet dead, and then returned home, reporting later that he spied some of the posse lurking in the woods nearby. Clawson borrowed a horse and rode five miles to Catoosa Springs to get the coroner. As he rode, the missionary ran into six or seven members of the gang who were apparently fleeing the scene of the crime. They stopped him and demanded to know where he was going. When he pointed west, they let him go, thinking he intended to ride all the way back to Utah for fear of his life. Upon arriving in town, Clawson soon found the coroner and then quickly telegraphed the governor, the prosecuting attorney of Whitefield County, and John Morgan, the president of the Southern States Mission, who was away in Salt Lake City at the time, to tell them what had transpired.19

When Clawson returned with the coroner, Holston and a few other onlookers joined them as they went to the spot where Standing’s body lay, dead at last. Immediately they

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noticed that the body had been “frightfully mutilated” with multiple gunshot and possibly knife wounds. Clawson surmised that at least some of the mob had returned after he and Holston had left the body and had emptied their guns into Standing while he was “presumably” still alive, leaving “ugly wounds” all over his face and neck. The only explanation, it seemed, was that the one man who had done the original shooting had convinced his comrades to return and become “accessories to the crime and thus share with him in the guilt by shooting into the dead man’s body.” This strategic spreading of guilt, which ex post facto implicated all the members of the mob in the murder, would become particularly important in the later trial. A coroner’s jury was quickly assembled, which determined that Standing had been killed by “20 shots or more from guns and pistols,” inflicted on the head and neck. After interviewing witnesses from the gathering crowd, the jury released the names of the twelve men in the mob, and recommended that a warrant be issued for their arrest. Standing’s body was taken back to Holston’s, where Clawson stayed up far into the night cleaning and dressing it by candlelight.20

In the aftermath of the murder, the Mormon reaction was a mixture of fear and anger. One elder in Kentucky wrote to a fellow missionary in England expressing his concern that if the “perpetrators of that black deed” went unpunished, as they almost surely would, “it will renew the energy of the ministers and the lawless to do acts of violence

20 Clawson, Memoirs, 57-59; Nicholson, Martyrdom, 42-49; “Told to Go Free,” (Atlanta) Daily Constitution, 23 Oct. 1879. Clawson surmised that the shots that mutilated Standing’s face and neck must have been fired from point blank, as his skin was “powder-burnt” (Nicholson, Martyrdom, 43). The twelve men identified by the coroner’s jury were David D. Nations, Jasper N. Nations, A. S. Smith, David Smith, Benjamin Clark, William Nations, Andrew Bradley, James Fawcett (or Faucett), Hugh Blair, Joseph Nations, Jefferson Hunter, and Mack McClure. The statement by the coroner’s jury is reprinted in multiple places, including “The Murder of Joseph Standing,” Deseret Evening News, 1 Aug. 1879.
against the Saints.” Sensing this general apprehension, mission president John Morgan immediately sent a letter from Salt Lake City to all Latter-day Saints in the Southern States Mission. In general, it was an epistle of counsel and encouragement, calling on the missionaries to “continue to perform their duties,” and for members of the church to remain faithful and undaunted. He pleaded that there would be “no act of recrimination, on the part of any one, either by word or deed.” While such longsuffering would be good for public relations, the suggestion actually came from a position of weakness. Latter-day Saints would undoubtedly be overwhelmed in any kind of open conflict, and so they smartly realized that the best—and only viable—strategy would be to take the moral high ground by not retaliating. Morgan’s closing paragraph was especially telling. While the bulk of the letter encouraged Latter-day Saints in the South to stand their ground and maintain “the hitherto bright record that the saints have made in the mission,” Morgan concluded by suggesting, almost whispering, that “Those who are in a situation to do so would do well to prepare to emigrate and gather where they can be protected.”

This pro-emigration statement is conspicuous in its inclusion, especially given its seeming inconsistency with the rest of the letter. It makes the most sense when placed in historical context. During this era Mormons still actively practiced the “gathering,” in which the Latter-day Saints were called to assemble together in one place, both for protection and for preparation. For nineteenth-century Mormons, gathering to “Zion” would, in a very real sense, “be for a defense, and for a refuge from the storm, and from wrath when it shall be poured out,” a notion that would have rung particularly true for southern Mormons in the

21 Letter from Elder Francis McDonald, Paintsville, KY, to Elder John Nicholson, in Southern States Mission Manuscript History (hereafter referred to as Manuscript History), 4 Aug. 1879, Archives, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah.

wake of Standing’s murder. In addition, as fervent premillennialists, early Mormons were convinced that their task was to prepare the kingdom of God and to call out the righteous from Babylon to gather to Zion in anticipation of the return of Jesus Christ to the earth. Thus, when converts were made they were encouraged to pick up and move, as soon as possible, to the Saints’ gathering place. Originally practiced in Ohio and then in Missouri, Illinois, and eventually Utah and the intermountain West, gathering was the impulse that inspired Mormons to build cohesive communities and then maintain a high degree of separation between themselves and the outside world.

The question arises, however, that if the general advice to all converts was to gather to Zion, and considering the dangerous hostility towards Mormons throughout the region, why was the primary message of Morgan’s letter for southern Mormons to stay put? One explanation is that Morgan sought to keep a lid on the inevitable panic that may well have arisen among southern Mormons in the wake of Standing’s murder. An open call from Salt Lake City for Latter-day Saints to leave the region would have only exacerbated an already tense situation, so while Morgan quietly encouraged emigration for those who could arrange it, he did not want to make the option sound imperative. In circumstances already loaded with hostility and suspicion, Morgan was thus wise to downplay the Mormon doctrine of the gathering, making it seem to be an afterthought in his public advice to the southern Saints.

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23 The Doctrine and Covenants of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Containing Revelations Given to Joseph Smith, the Prophet, with Some Additions by His Successors in the Presidency of the Church (Salt Lake City, UT: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1989), 115:6. The origin of the doctrine of the gathering was a revelation to Joseph Smith in December 1830 calling the Latter-day Saints to gather to Ohio (see Doctrine & Covenants 37).


While the initial reaction to Standing’s death among many southern Mormons was fear, for those in the protected mountain valleys of the West it was anger. Given the offensiveness of the tragedy, this feeling is not particularly surprising. However, what is interesting, and telling, is where Mormon anger was most specifically focused. The Mormon press in Utah emphasized, almost certainly as part of a public relations gesture, that southerners in general were not to blame, saying that “the general sentiment of all good citizens . . . is one of abhorrence for the murderers and sympathy for the deceased.”

Government and law enforcement officials were painted as morally paralyzed and ineffective, either through their own indifference or because of political expediency. While not held blameless, these officials were generally treated as though no other response could be expected, as the Latter-day Saints’ experiences with state governments in Missouri and Illinois and the federal government in Utah had taught them to have low standards of expectations for non-Mormon public authorities. The most natural and obvious targets of Mormon resentment were of course the members of the mob that actually killed Standing. However, while the “mobocrats” were impugned for carrying out the murder, they came across as secondary actors in the drama.

The root cause of the problem, Mormons asserted, was not in politics or sociology but rather in religion. In its very first article reporting Standing’s murder, the church-owned Deseret Evening News immediately drew conclusions about where “the real responsibility of this terrible crime” lay: “In the eyes of Heaven the greatest culprits are those who under the guise of religion instigated the attack, who circulated falsehoods to stir up the unthinking,

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who planted the seeds of prejudice and hatred which have brought forth this crop of violence.”

A later estimate reinforced this opinion even more specifically, asserting that the horrid act was instigated by the preaching of three “Christian” ministers, two Methodist and one Baptist, who, jealous of the increasing success attending the labors of the Mormon missionaries in that region, had in the heat of their holy passion let fall remarks which were seized upon by the ignorant perpetrators of the act as an incitement to their wicked deed.

This indictment against the local evangelical establishment was supported with “corroborative evidence” that “one of the band of assassins,” Benjamin Clark, “was a Baptist deacon.” Further proof came when the defense attorneys at the trial of three of the mob members were regularly consulted, in the courtroom, by a “leading minister, and the deacons of two Baptist churches.” According to John Morgan and Rudger Clawson, who were both present at the trial, these three churchmen were “openly and shamelessly seeking to protect the murderers from their just dues.” All of this combined to convince Mormons that it was the clergy who were to blame for the murder.

In subsequent weeks, Mormons expanded the circle of blame to include not just the killers and the local religious establishment, but also the anti-Mormon faction in Utah. The first intimation of this came five days after the murder in “Resolutions of Respect and Condolence” adopted by the Young Men’s Mutual Improvement Association, the LDS youth organization for teenage boys. The resolution “strongly condemn[ed] the men who in so cowardly a manner deprived [Standing] of life.” However, the killers were not alone in their crime. The anti-Mormons in Utah were accused of “sending false reports to the world, slandering the Saints under a cloak of religion,” which had “incited lawless men to


The Mormons’ religious and political opponents in Utah were thus portrayed as accomplices in Standing’s death. This opinion was repeated in two other editorials, which impugned the “fiendish and corrupt persons, male and female, in this city [Salt Lake City], who have sent forth their hellish falsehoods to poison the minds of the people in the North and in the South.” Although the Deseret News reportage had been consistent in reminding its readers to let God be the final arbiter of justice, these articles felt free to infer what His final verdict would be: “Before God and Eternal Justice,” they surmised, “the souls of [the anti-Mormons] are stained with the innocent blood of Joseph Standing.”

Drawing a straight line from anti-Mormon reports originating in Utah to a murderous mob in rural Georgia is nigh on impossible. Rather, it seems likely that the Standing murder provided Latter-day Saints with an opportunity to vent their frustration with the steady stream of reports coming from Utah impugning their character to a national audience with no other reliable source of information. Certainly the Standing case fits within the national context of widespread hostility toward Mormons, much of which was fed by salacious accounts of Mormon debauchery in letters, tracts, and books by non-Mormon residents and visitors to Utah. Despite the Mormons’ claims of a vast conspiracy, however, it seems that Standing’s murder was, as the New York Times concluded, “a local affair—a Southern way of disposing a knotty case.”


32 The best analyses of this anti-Mormon literature from the second half of the nineteenth century are Terryl Givens, The Viper on the Hearth: Mormons, Myths, and the Construction of Heresy (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), esp. chaps. 6-7; and Gordon, The Mormon Question, chap. 1.

33 “Mormonism Shaken,” New York Times, 14 Aug. 1879, p. 4. In an interview with a newspaper reporter, John Morgan contended that there was a connection between the anti-Mormon machine in Salt Lake
In locating responsibility for the killing in the community, rather than assigning blame to an impersonal (if powerful) national anti-Mormon campaign, we should seriously consider allegations that local religious leaders were involved. Available evidence does not allow us to ascertain precisely how much direct influence the evangelical Protestant establishment had in the case. Nevertheless, we can analyze two factors related to Mormon charges of ecclesiastical complicity in the murder: first, the reality of religious competition introduced, or at least exacerbated, by Mormon missionaries in southern communities; and second, a well-developed Mormon persecution complex that simultaneously denounced and fed on anti-Mormon rhetoric and actions.

Religious competition was purportedly one of the primary motivations behind the mob action against Standing and Clawson. The *New York Times* reported that the two elders “had been unusually active in their efforts to obtain converts to Mormonism,” and that this rivalry raised the ire of members of other Christian churches in the community. Mormons were no strangers to the fierce competition of the American religious marketplace. Indeed, the faith was born out of the “war of words and tumult of opinions” that characterized the Second Great Awakening in upstate New York, where Joseph Smith had his earliest prophetic visions. Mormonism is at its heart a missionary faith, resulting in a high proportion of its membership being converts from other (usually Christian) churches. This

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City and Standing’s murder. He told the journalist, “I believe I could prove to a dead moral certainty, that the killing of Elder Joseph Standing is directly traceable to the letters written by a certain semi-reverend and semi-professor who has resided in Salt Lake for a number of years, together with the press influences referred to.” The precise identity of the “semi-reverend” and “semi-professor” Morgan referred to is unclear, and while I find Morgan a trustworthy source in general, I have found no corroborating evidence of this particular claim. Typescript of interview with unidentified newspaper reporter, titled “Another Mormon Elder Shot!,” (newspaper unknown) 20 Aug. 1884; in John Hamilton Morgan Papers, Manuscript Division, J. Willard Marriott Library, University of Utah, Salt Lake City, Utah.


was especially true in the nineteenth century, when all of the original members of the church were converts who identified with the spiritual anomic experienced by Smith, and missionizing was unquestionably the lifeblood of the fledgling church. Indeed, many LDS missionaries had personally been consumers in the spiritual marketplace before settling on Mormonism, and so they well understood the variety of options available to the seeker, and the passions associated with religious rivalries, which set Protestant churches against each other as often as against outsiders. Mormon elders were therefore unsurprised when they stirred up emotions among preachers who not only deemed Mormon doctrine corrupt but saw the very presence of missionaries as a threat to their congregations and thus their livelihood.

Mormon elders certainly recognized that they brought unwelcome competition for local preachers. Indeed, as will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter, they


37 During Reconstruction, “southerners viewed northern missionaries and religious scalawags with suspicion and contempt. . . . White southern evangelicals loathed the northern missionaries and teachers who, in their minds, came only to steal their churches, engender strife among the races, and destroy the southern racial order.” Daniel W. Stowell, Rebuilding Zion: The Religious Reconstruction of the South, 1863-1877 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 133, 145, see all of chap. 8. Considerable rivalry existed between southern denominations as well. C. Vann Woodward commented that “Denominational orthodoxy was as strict and obstinate in the South as theological orthodoxy, and a fierce competitive spirit kept alive hundreds of depleted rural churches to waste duplicated effort. Imperceptible differences over doctrine and policy split up larger denominations into rival splinters. . . . If there was a ‘solid religious South,’ it was not a denominational solidarity.” Origins of the New South, 1877-1913 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1951/1971), 451.

38 As Heather Seferovich notes in her history of the Southern States Mission, “The Mormon perception was that ministers tended to be possessive of their congregations, and they sometimes reacted violently to anyone who encroached upon their sphere.” Because “Mormon missionaries frequently gained converts from those who were already associated with organized religions . . . some ministers may have feared diminished membership and waged a war for power within their communities.” Heather M. Seferovich, “History of the Southern States Mission, 1875-1898” (M.A. thesis, Brigham Young University, 1996), 125.
frequently reported that opposition from evangelical ministers was one of their primary challenges, citing everything from anti-Mormon sermons to preachers actually participating in or leading mobs.\textsuperscript{39} This, combined with the slew of anti-Mormon epithets that circulated on all levels of society and the Latter-day Saints’ long history of victimization, contributed to a well-honed persecution complex in which the Mormons saw themselves as the besieged but righteous saints of God embattled by the forces of evil guised as the respectable institutions of government and churches. Of course, the persecution was anything but a figment of their collective imagination, but they learned to not only absorb the blows of anti-Mormonism but to redirect them into a positive—if oppositional—self-identity, rooted in their millennialist eschatology.\textsuperscript{40}

In this way, Standing’s death, tragic as it was, represented not a loss but a victory. The fallen elder was hailed as a martyr for the truth back in Utah, and his funeral was a grand affair coordinated by the highest levels of church leadership and held in the Salt Lake Tabernacle. George Q. Cannon, one of the most powerful church leaders of the late nineteenth century and Utah’s territorial representative in Congress, began the ceremonies and set the tone by reading from the twenty-third chapter of Matthew, in which Jesus pronounced woes on the house of Israel for killing the prophets and holy men sent by God, and the sixth chapter of Revelation, which depicts the white robes and adulations given


those martyrs “slain for the word of God.” 41 Upon returning home from the sham trial of Standing’s killers, John Morgan and Rudger Clawson were triumphant, rather than despondent as one might expect. In response to a question from a reporter for the St. Louis Post-Dispatch if the murder would bring a halt to missionary work in the state, Morgan emphatically declared, “Not at all. On the contrary it proved very beneficial towards our cause. It caused agitation, created comment, and the result is that we have made double the number of converts throughout the southern states on account of that murder. Bullets and bayonets will never compel a people to relinquish a faith.” 42 In the economy of God, temporary setbacks were thus transformed into triumphs, as the blood of the martyrs proved to be the seed of the church.

Even as the Mormons portrayed themselves as innocent victims of religious bigotry, martyrs for the truth, native Georgians painted a different picture. The various local accounts, though disagreeing on whether or not the murder was justified or desirable, all concurred on the moral bankruptcy of the Mormon elders and the threat they posed to the Christian morality of southern communities. Northern Georgia’s Catoosa Courier, for instance, thought the killing was justified because “the good citizens” of the region “could not stand any longer the bad influence that [Standing’s] preaching had upon the female portion of the neighborhood.” 43 The Sparta Ishmaelite was even more belligerent, referring to all Mormons as “lawless and licentious fanatics,” “scoundrels,” and “moral lepers.” It called on state authorities to “wage war” on the Mormons before they became too “strongly entrenched” and their “lawless and shameless teachings” irrevocably polluted all that was


“pure in society.”⁴⁴ The Atlanta Constitution was the most temperate of the state’s news organs. Although the editors of the newspaper were hardly advocates of Mormonism and its doctrine of plural marriage, they did not see violence as the answer. Rather, they condemned the murder as “almost without excuse” and “entirely unwarranted,” and emphasized that mob law in general was not “prudent, wise or lawful.” The “one remedy for Mormonism,” according to the Constitution, was not extralegal vigilantism but instead “a rigid and impartial enforcement of the law.”⁴⁵

The common denominator to all these accusations was the moral danger that southerners perceived that Mormonism, and especially Mormon elders, posed to their communities because of the threat of polygamy. By the late 1870s Mormon polygamy had come to represent something much more than what a few half-cracked or deluded religious zealots were doing in the privacy of their desert homes. Beginning in the 1850s but especially in the late 1870s and 1880s, the anti-polygamy crusade became the cause célèbre for moral reformers across the nation. The LDS Church was called a “society for the seduction of young virgins,” and Salt Lake City was dubbed “the biggest whorehouse in the world.” Most Americans considered Mormonism, with its perceived pillars of polygamy and theocracy, to be an insidious threat to the cherished public institutions of republican government, the rule of law, and the monogamous family. Polygamy, the target of both moralistic and voyeuristic commentators nationwide, was derided as “an institution founded in the lustful and unbridled passions of men, devised by Satan himself to destroy purity and authorize whoredom.” In short, just as LDS proponents of plural marriage were firm in

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their resolve to defend the practice, anti-polygamy moral crusaders exhibited “a zealous, polarized quality, an unyielding insistence on their exclusive moral rightness.” Given this context, even non-polygamist Mormons were presumed guilty of moral degeneracy. While Mormon women and especially girls often passed as objects of pity, Mormon men were “monstrous fanatics” who preyed upon unsuspecting females to fulfill their insatiable sexual appetites.

This pattern of prejudice and sexual paranoia is essential in understanding national attitudes toward Mormons, but it also helps explain the specific case of Joseph Standing’s murder. A month after his killing the Atlanta Constitution, which had heretofore been the most moderate voice in Georgia, ran a sensational profile of the young missionary, titled “A Lustful Lout.” Up to this point, even non-Mormon newspaper accounts had essentially ascribed the cause of the murder to religious competition, describing a vague unhappiness among local residents about the intrusions of the Mormon elders, who had enjoyed some previous success in the area of Varnell’s Station. These accounts were usually sprinkled with insinuations of the inherently immoral Mormon character, but this was the normal contemporary discourse about Mormons in virtually any published source. In fact, some articles even made a point of saying that polygamy was neither preached by Standing and Clawson nor practiced by local Mormon converts.


48 See ibid.; “In Brigham’s Bosom,” (Atlanta) Daily Constitution, 7 Aug. 1879; “Georgia Assassins Arrested,” Desert Evening News, 14 Aug. 1879. There were occasional accusations that the elders did preach polygamy, but they were usually couched in general terms, such as the suggestion that Mormon elders existed
“A Lustful Lout” is a salacious bit of nineteenth-century journalism. Its claims are significant less as historical fact—no substantiating evidence exists for any of its accusations—but rather as part the broader milieu of late-nineteenth-century anti-Mormon literature that contributed to a culture of violence against Mormons. The article, listed as a “Special to The Constitution,” purported to provide readers information about Joseph Standing’s “character and the circumstances leading to his murder.” It describes a series of sexual conquests by Standing throughout the counties of northern Georgia, beginning with him “accomplishing the ruin” of two young daughters of a widow (all unidentified) in Walker County. From there he went to Catoosa County and stayed with the Elledge family, where he “very soon succeeded in converting Mrs. Elledge and her daughters to the Mormon faith.” One of the daughters, Jane, gave birth to a child by Standing, “which mysteriously disappeared immediately after its birth.” The elder then impregnated Jane a second time, after which the family “emigrated to the Mormon country,” leaving Georgia shortly before Standing’s murder. His licentiousness did not stop at the Elledge household, as he allegedly became “too intimate” with some of the married women in the area, which “caused one husband and wife to separate.” Worst of all, some “three or four, if not more, young ladies living in the vicinity of Varnell’s station [sic] . . . met with their ruin by this man”; tellingly, one of these deflowered young women was identified as “the daughter of one of the murderers.”

As mentioned, no available facts verify any of these stories of Standing’s alleged sexual escapades throughout northern Georgia. To the contrary, less than three weeks earlier, the Constitution had run an article remarking that “there has been a great deal of


general scandal about the morality of these elders”—or lack thereof—“but we could find no man who believed it.”\(^{50}\) The particulars of the article, therefore, can be dismissed a sensational attempt to reduce the real person of the murdered Joseph Standing to a caricature of the lecherous Mormon polygamist, a disturbing if not surprising episode in nineteenth-century anti-Mormon journalism.

The one possible connection between “A Lustful Lout” and what really happened may be in the story of the Elledge family. According to historian Ken Driggs, Elizabeth Jane Elledge, the one woman identified by name in the article, was probably a cousin of William, Joseph, and David Nations, three of the indicted mob members who never came to trial. Standing had in fact baptized Jane in March 1879 and her mother a few months previous, and the entire Elledge family—including Jane’s father and brother, baptized by John Morgan in August 1879, shortly after Standing’s death—emigrated to a Mormon colony in Colorado in late 1879, where Jane later married a Mormon. Driggs posits that it is “very likely that the mob’s abduction and murder of Standing was motivated by resentment over his part in converting the Elledge family to the LDS faith.”\(^{51}\) While this does not substantiate the claims of “A Lustful Lout”—to the contrary, it undermines the more sensational claims about Standing’s sexual conquests—it does indicate the volatility of situations in which Mormon conversion upset family and kinship networks. The fictional Standing disrupted local family bonds with sex; the real Standing disrupted them with baptism.

With Mormons and non-Mormons so readily willing (and able) to demonize one another, emotions were stirred up to a fever pitch on either side in the days and weeks following Standing’s murder. When the case eventually came to trial, curious onlookers


\(^{51}\) Driggs, “There Is No Law in Georgia for Mormons,” 764.
poured in from around the region to witness the spectacle.\textsuperscript{52} That there would be a trial at all was somewhat in doubt, given the widespread local hostility manifested toward the Mormons and the “disappearance” of the twelve men connected with the murder.

However, three of the men identified by coroner’s jury as members of the mob that killed Standing—Jasper Nations, Andrew Bradley, and Hugh Blair—were captured and brought to trial, each charged with murder, assault and battery, and riot. Although Governor Colquitt had, at the urging of the Catoosa County sheriff, offered a “nominal reward, conditioned upon conviction”—which the \textit{Deseret News} sarcastically commented “did not in the least endanger the treasury of the State”—the three men’s capture was actually secured through “the instrumentality of some of Elder Standing’s friends.”\textsuperscript{53} The trial itself was, as John Morgan recorded in his journal, “a farce.”\textsuperscript{54} Even the state attorney, arguing on behalf of the Mormons, admitted before the proceedings began that “it will be impossible to reach conviction on account of the prejudice of the people”; indeed, one hundred thirty men were dismissed out of hand before an acceptable jury could be assembled.\textsuperscript{55} Rudger Clawson was subpoenaed as a key witness (he and Morgan had come back from Salt Lake City together for the express purpose of attending the trial), and the boisterous crowd came to a complete

\textsuperscript{52} An unidentified reporter covering the proceedings for the Atlanta \textit{Constitution} wrote, “Never has a case in the annals of the criminal courts of this county excited the interest which has invested this trial.” “Told to Go Free,” \textit{(Atlanta) Daily Constitution}, 23 Oct. 1879.

\textsuperscript{53} “The Murderers of Elder Joseph Standing on Trial,” \textit{Deseret Evening News}, 28 Oct. 1879. Nicholson reports that the sheriff was in fact ambivalent on the point of hunting the men who killed Standing. According to the story told by the deputy, the sheriff told him, “The man they murdered was only a ‘Mormon,’ and it doesn’t matter about the perpetrators being brought to justice.” Based on this account, it was the deputy who was responsible for seeing that the alleged murderers be brought to justice, despite public threats and the sheriff’s apathy. See Nicholson, \textit{Martyrdom}, 59-61; “The Murder of Elder Standing,” \textit{New York Times}, 24 July 1879.

\textsuperscript{54} Quoted in Driggs, “There is No Law in Georgia,” 765.

hush as he related the events surrounding the murder. The defense sought to discredit his testimony not by any appeal to facts but rather through sensationalism, pointedly asking Clawson, “Are your parents living in the practice of polygamy and are you a polygamous child?” When it came to presenting their own case, the defense’s only witnesses were the three defendants themselves, who “never denied the killing of Standing.” Nonetheless, the verdict predictably came back as not guilty on all charges.  

The various reactions to the jury’s ruling were predictably mixed. Mormons greeted the verdict as expected but detestable nonetheless. In their report to the Deseret News, Morgan and Clawson identified the entire affair as yet another chapter in the long history of religious persecution, comparing the Georgia crowd with those who called for Jesus’ crucifixion, or for the martyrdom of the early Christians, or for the extermination of the Latter-day Saints in Missouri. They reached the lamentable conclusions that “Religious bigotry stood at the head of this murderous array and guided the current of popular opinion and prejudice,” and that, at least momentarily, “public prejudice was stronger than truth, and bigotry outweighed logic and reason.” The Atlanta Constitution provided a fairly objective account of the trial, and did not editorialize extensively on the outcome, other than a brief notice that the acquittal was met with the “intensest wrath” in Salt Lake City. The local newspaper, the Catoosa Courier, consistent with its earlier diatribes against the Mormons, applauded the not guilty verdicts, a stance which was roundly denounced by the Daily Times

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of Chattanooga.⁵⁹ As a general rule, newspapers in metropolitan areas such as Atlanta, Chattanooga, and New York took a measured stand, denouncing mob violence as dangerous to public order but taking care not to seem overly sympathetic to the Mormons.

A little over a year after Joseph Standing’s body was taken back to Utah and buried, a fifteen-foot tall marble monument was erected over his grave in the Salt Lake City Cemetery. Carved on the sides of the monument are the names of the twelve members of the mob that killed him, along with an inscription referring to the acquittal of the murderers “through bigotry and prejudice,” and closing with the refrain, “There is no law in Georgia for the Mormons.”⁶⁰

3.3 “Low Down Scrapings of the Devil”: John Gibbs and the Cane Creek Massacre

On Sunday morning, 4 May 1884, John Gibbs, a successful LDS missionary and recently appointed president of the church’s North West Tennessee Conference, went to Cane Creek to hold services with the small Mormon branch there.⁶¹ Upon arriving, rather than finding the newly constructed log meetinghouse with the group of assembled worshippers inside, he discovered a pile of ashes and a note. The anonymous author, presumably also the arsonist, ominously scribbled:

This is the last time that we will notify you that we will not have any more Mormons preaching in hickman perry and lewis we are the shilow men and we are going to have it stopped as we will take some or all of your lives . . . if you dont leave at this

⁵⁹ See Driggs, “There Is No Law in Georgia for Mormons,” 769.
⁶⁰ Quoted in ibid., 770.
⁶¹ John Gibbs was just shy of thirty years old when he was called as a missionary to the Southern States Mission, with a specific assignment to proselytize the rural counties of northwest Tennessee. He was born in 1853 in Wales, and baptized into the LDS church at the age of nine. Part of the massive influx of Mormon converts from the British Isles, his family emigrated to Utah in 1866, and settled in the lush mountain valleys of Cache County. He married Louisa Obray in 1874 in Salt Lake City, and together they had three children: Martha (b. 1875), John (1877), and Louisa (1879). Biographical information in John Henry Gibbs Collection, L. Tom Perry Special Collections Library, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, UT.
order we will use there hickory switches freely . . . the book speeks of faulty teaching and you are them you are low down scrapings of the devil and we are going to stop it if we will have to cause wore. 62

Gibbs, who had been warned the night before about possible mob activity, was unfazed by both the smoldering meetinghouse and the death threat. Aware that some in the congregation had come to hear him preach, others to see him shot or at least tarred and feathered, and others were still undecided, he proceeded to preach, ignoring the pistols and shotguns brandished by his foes in the crowd. Several people responded to his sermon by immediately demanding baptism, a request Gibbs honored while the shocked members of the Shiloh band watched from the banks of the creek. Gibbs rejoiced that God had transformed the efforts of the mob to hinder his work and drive him from the county into an opportunity to save eight souls. But he was not naïve about the situation, acknowledging that “It may be that this will only tend to incite them to persist in their bold plans. . . . Threats and notices of leave are now the order of the day.” 63

Nearly three quarters of the way through his mission, and three months after the church burning, Gibbs and his missionary companion William Jones were back in Cane Creek after a prolonged absence. They had just returned from a speaking tour through Tennessee and Mississippi, “lecturing on the political, historical, moral & social phases of the Mormon Question.” 64 The purpose of the tour had been for Gibbs—who from all accounts

62 “Notice,” unsigned and undated [4 May 1884, Cane Creek, TN], in Gibbs Collection; original spelling and punctuation retained. In addition to keeping the original note, Gibbs copied it into his journal, with slight changes to some of the syntax; see “Notice to Mormons,” in Gibbs journal, February-March 1883, 1884, in Gibbs Collection.


64 Gibbs journal, 8 May 1884, in Gibbs Collection. One of the many gems in the Gibbs Collection is his notebook that he used on his lecture tour, which contains an outline of LDS church history, scriptural
was a gifted public speaker\textsuperscript{65}—to plead the case of Mormonism to a misinformed southern populace. Although Mormon elders in the South had typically eschewed the cities, preferring to share their message with the humbler folk of the backwoods, Gibbs’ specific target audience on his lecture circuit were the “refined, educated people” of the urban South.\textsuperscript{66} The tour was part of a larger public relations campaign by Latter-day Saints in the mid-1880s to counter the swelling chorus of voices that called for (and eventually achieved) increasingly strict legislative and judicial measures to stamp out Mormonism.\textsuperscript{67}

While the idea of the tour was sound, and Gibbs was almost certainly the right man to do it, in retrospect the speaking tour must be judged as a qualified failure—qualified, because the Mormons generally shared the philosophy that any publicity was good publicity, but nevertheless a failure on every other count. Rather than dispelling southerners’ fears about polygamy, the series of lectures actually stoked the embers of their anxieties, as the missionaries’ presence gave urban southerners in Tennessee and Mississippi their first real

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\textsuperscript{65} After preaching in Indian Creek, TN, Gibbs reported, “They would not let me go off alone, and on foot. So they furnished me a fine horse and saddle. So now I am a Big Preacher . . . . The big preachers are using my name from the pulpits. But dare not meet me, I am getting quite a favorite with a great many of the church members, they all want me to preach.” Letter from John Gibbs, Waverly, TN, to Louisa Gibbs, 18 Sep. 1883, in Gibbs Collection.
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\textsuperscript{66} Letter from John Gibbs to Louisa Gibbs, no date or place [ca. June/July 1884], in Gibbs Collection. In the same letter, Gibbs told his wife how they drummed up an audience for their lectures: “I believe I told you how we introduce our lecture, i.e. we go to the lawyers and storekeepers and when we get their consent one of us at a time jumps up on a box or elevated platform and touches on a few points just to get them anxious to hear; then leave them till the lecture comes off.” They also used printed advertisements, which read, “Lecture on Utah and Its People. Representing the Historic, Moral, Social and Political phase of the ‘Mormon Question’ will be delivered [date/place] by Messrs. Jno. H. Gibbs and Wm. H. Jones. Admission Free! All are Invited! ‘Let equal rights all men enjoy, And always hear both sides!’” Advertisement, undated, in Gibbs Collection.
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opportunity to hear and engage in “hot debate” on the topic. In addition, rather than being welcomed as distinguished emissaries of the faith, the missionaries were vilified in the local newspapers. The elders, and the leaders of the church who sent them on the tour, had imagined taming anti-Mormon sentiment by cool, logical reasoning, but they found instead that they had walked straight into the lion’s den, facing a hostile crowd who came not to be persuaded but to see them eaten alive. To add insult to injury, the elders were forced to cut the tour short because of a lack of funds. On his return journey to his normal missionary field of labor in rural northwest Tennessee, Gibbs understandably confided with his wife that he was “anxious to get back.”

Part of the reason Gibbs was anxious to return was that all was not well during his absence. The Mormon elders in Tennessee had encountered as fierce a spirit of antagonism in the months following the church burning in May 1884 as they had ever witnessed. While Gibbs was on his speaking tour, he received periodic updates about the situation in Tennessee, all of which reported heavy opposition. In June, he read a letter from four elders in Humphreys County that complained of dwindling success and a climate of general hostility, including multiple threats demanding that they leave the area. Elder Willis Robison glumly spoke for the group when he wrote, “I neaver [sic] saw the day seem so dark as it

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68 Letter from John Gibbs, Camden, TN, to Louisa Gibbs, 7 June 1884, in Gibbs Collection. Gibbs’ letters home from his speaking tour reveal that the one issue that his audiences constantly wanted to speak about was polygamy. On June 24 he wrote, “the ladies were becoming very attentive while the subject of Polygamy came up”; on July 3 he said that he had to study law, because “it all comes up in the Mormon Question. Polygamy especially”; on July 31 he commented that “Polygamy they do go down on that subject most decidedly”; and in early August he complained that he had “to answer a thousand and one questions on Polygamy from the women.” All letters from John Gibbs to Louisa Gibbs, in Gibbs Collection.

69 Letter from John Gibbs, Jackson, TN, to Louisa Gibbs, 17 June 1884, in Gibbs Collection.

70 Letter from John Gibbs, Sarepta, MS, to Louisa Gibbs, 18 July 1884, in Gibbs Collection.

does now with us.”

Gibbs felt concern as a fellow missionary and responsibility as the ecclesiastical leader who had stewardship over the church in the region. He relayed his concerns about the situation to his wife: “The Elders under my charge in the N. W. Tenn. Con. [Conference] are in a bad fix. They have been driven and persecuted very much lately. They have not baptized any since I left.” He concluded by trying to reassure her that things would work out, but even his encouragement sounded flat: “We cannot tell what lies in the future, so all I can say is let the morrow take care of it self, and we will await the final decision of the future developments.”

It seemed that even the indefatigable Gibbs, who just a few months earlier had assured his wife that God would prevent his opponents from harming him, felt a heavy black cloud hovering over the work of the Latter-day Saint elders as he returned to Lewis County in early August. Indeed, Gibbs’ report to his wife of the gathering persecution in the area, followed by his hollow words of reassurance to her, would be among the last messages she ever received from him.

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Elders William Berry and Henry Thompson, both from Utah, had made an appointment to hold services at the home of James Condor in Cane Creek on Sunday,

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74 Gibbs had earlier written: “Do not be alarmed or have any fears in regard my safety. Have faith and plead with our Father for my protection. I have been in some rough storms, and where the waters have been up very high, but the Lord has protected me, and has the same with all the Elders, so we have no need to fear. . . . [Our enemies] cannot go any farther than God will allow them. . . . And if we are united and faithful He will not allow them to do anything at all.” Letter from John Gibbs, Centreville, TN, to Louisa Gibbs, 21 Apr. 1884, in Gibbs Collection.
August 10. The night before, they stayed at the home of Thomas Garrett, a non-Mormon who was one of the elders’ closest friends and allies in the area. They were unexpectedly joined by Elders Gibbs and Jones, recently returned from their speaking tour, who had come back to see if they could re-energize the work in Lewis County. On Sunday morning Elders Gibbs, Berry, and Thompson headed to the Condor home, about a mile away, while Jones lingered behind to finish reading some sermons sent from Salt Lake. A little less than an hour before the services were to begin, Jones started down the road but had not gone far when he was apprehended by a mob of masked men, armed with pistols and shotguns, who demanded that he surrender. He was forced over a fence into a nearby cornfield, and was kicked and punched with their guns until they got to a spot where he was searched and questioned, particularly about the whereabouts of Gibbs. The majority of them left in direction of the Condor farm, but they soon returned and queried Jones some more. When they finished their second interrogation, the mob hurried off, leaving one member (and his double-barreled pistol) to guard Jones, with orders to shoot if the missionary tried to escape.

Jones’ guard swore that he would shoot the elder if he tried “anything unfair,” but that if he cooperated he would be treated “like a brother.” The two men marched over a hill, where the guard confessed that he intended to release Jones, and revealed that “these mobbers intended murder, they were the meanest men in the county, and were old guerillas

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75 My relating of the story of the massacre at Cane Creek draws primarily on five sources, which together represent the best available narratives of the affair. Although they differ in some points, one is able to get the best possible estimate of what probably happened by piecing them all together. The five sources are: John Nicholson, The Tennessee Massacre and Its Causes; or, The Utah Conspiracy (Salt Lake City, UT: Juvenile Instructor Office, 1884; republished, Grantsville, UT: Archive Publishers, 2000); B. H. Roberts, “The Tennessee Massacre,” Contributor (Oct. 1884): 16-23; Marshall Wingfield, “Tennessee’s Mormon Massacre,” Tennessee Historical Quarterly 17 (March 1958): 19-36; B. H. Roberts, A Comprehensive History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 1965), vol. 6, chap. 158; and B.H. Roberts, The Autobiography of B. H. Roberts, ed. Gary James Bergera (Salt Lake City, UT: Signature Books, 1990), chap. 17. There are also numerous contemporary newspaper accounts, which I will cite only when making specific reference to them. On the spelling of names, nineteenth-century sources are notoriously inconsistent—thus Condor and Conder, Hutson and Hudson, even Cane Creek and Kane Creek. In each case, I have gone with the most common (and insofar as I can tell, most accurate) renditions.
who had ‘killed their dozen men.’” As the two conversed, they heard a gunshot in the distance, then two or three, then up to twenty more rounds. At that point the guard exclaimed, “It’s as I told you, they have shot among the women and children. Run! they will come back and take revenge on you.” As Jones began to flee, the guard followed until he surmised that the elder was safely away. When asked by the missionary why he was so generous, after having participated in the mob in the first place, the man said that “he was pressed into it, and wanted to see that we were not harmed, for he had always been a friend to the Mormons and had never seen anything wrong in them.” Jones knew full well that the man’s involuntary infiltration of the mob had quite likely saved his life.76

The shots they heard had indeed come from the Condor house, where the three other missionaries and a small congregation had gathered for Sunday services. The missionaries were singing hymns as people milled about the home, and Gibbs had just picked up his Bible to look up references for a sermon. All of a sudden, a group of approximately a dozen masked men burst through the woods and seized James Condor, the patriarch of the family and owner of the farm. He shouted to his son Martin Condor and stepson John Riley (J. R.) Hutson, who were in the orchard, to get their guns and protect the elders. The two young men ran to the house, Martin arriving at the back door just as the leader of the mob, David Hinson, barreled through the front door. They both headed for the shotgun resting on deer horns above the fireplace and grabbed it simultaneously, struggling for possession of the weapon. Hinson pulled out a pistol and snapped it at Condor. The gun failed to discharge, but Condor drew back, and Hinson wrestled the shotgun out of his hands. He immediately turned and fired the gun at Gibbs, who was

standing nearby. The shot entered his body just under the arm, and the elder slumped to the floor, instantly killed.

At the same instant, one of the masked men pointed a gun at Elder Thompson, but Elder Berry grabbed it with both hands, which allowed Thompson the opportunity to escape through the back door and into the nearby woods. Just as he left the house, he saw two guns being leveled at Berry, who was shot in the waist and fell without a sound. Martin Condor was still tangling with Hinson when another man shot him dead, and Hinson ran to the door to leave, apparently having had enough. At that moment, Martin’s stepbrother J. R. came down from the loft where he had stashed his gun. Two men grabbed him, but he twisted free long enough to shoot Hinson just as he was bolting out the front door. As Hinson dropped in the doorway, a voice was heard yelling, “I’ll have revenge,” and another shot rang out and hit J. R., who died an hour later. Before retreating with their fallen leader, some members of the mob came to the window and shot Elder Berry’s body again, with part of the buckshot wounding Malinda Condor, the wife of James Condor and the mother of the two murdered young men, in the hip; she recovered after some initial doubt, but for the rest of her life walked with pain and a serious limp. With that, the mob grabbed Hinson’s body and retreated, the entire melee seemingly over in a flash. When all was said and done, four Mormons—Elders John Gibbs and William Berry, and the two half-brothers, Martin Condor and J. R. Hutson—and the leader of the mob, David Hinson, lay dead.

For the next several days rumors flew, and conflicting accounts swirled as to the details of what alternately came to be known as the Mormon Massacre, the Tennessee Massacre, or the Cane Creek Massacre. The earliest newspaper stories not only had varying
details, but also different names and numbers of those killed and wounded. No one seemed to have accurate information, and all interested parties, from the press to church and state authorities, did their best to piece together exactly what had happened at the Condor farm. For the Mormons, the first priority was to discover precisely who was alive, dead, or wounded. The most trusted information came from the two elders (Jones and Thompson) who had managed to escape and eventually rendezvous with local church leaders, as well as from Elder Willis Robison, who made a daring scouting mission in and out of the county, which by that point was being heavily patrolled by vigilantes on the lookout for Mormons.

The Mormons’ second priority, once they more or less ascertained what had occurred, was to retrieve the bodies of the fallen elders so they could be shipped back to Utah for proper burial, away from their enemies. The retrieval of Gibbs’ and Berry’s bodies was undertaken by B. H. Roberts, the acting president of the mission and future chronicler of the episode (and the first century of Mormon history more generally). With the help of church members and other local sympathizers, Roberts fitted two wagon teams and recruited three other men to accompany him on the dangerous journey to Cane Creek.

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77 For the first two days of newspaper coverage, see “An Atrocious Deed,” Deseret Evening News, 12 Aug. 1884; “Horrible Butchery,” (Nashville) Daily American, 12 Aug. 1884; “Murder of Mormons,” Nashville Banner, 12 Aug. 1884; “More About the Murders in Tennessee,” Deseret Evening News, 13 Aug. 1884; “The Lewis County Butchery,” (Nashville) Daily American, 13 Aug. 1884; and “Murdered by Masked Men,” New York Times, 13 Aug. 1884. Willis Robison, one of the missionaries serving in the area at the time, later reminisced that the press accounts in the immediate wake of the episode “were very conflicting. One statement was that all were dead, another assumed the fact that only one or two were killed, and the others were hid in the woods, but desperately wounded. In fact no two rumors seemed to agree.” In Robison, “An Unpublished Letter on the Tennessee Massacre,” Improvement Era 2 (Nov. 1898): 3.


79 One man recruited for the retrieval job was Samuel Phillip Coleman, a non-Mormon who had worked for another of the men who accompanied Roberts on the trip. Coleman’s son, Robert, who was born four years after the massacre, talked with a reporter many years later about his father’s involvement: “It was not the type of journey that any would enjoy, the elder Coleman said later. . . . It was a long, hard trip in a wagon and it was August. When the bodies were recovered from their temporary graves, it had been six days since the men had been killed. Coleman recalled his father often told him it was ‘the worse job I ever got
who was known to some of the anti-Mormons in the area and would have been a prize catch for the mob—took care to disguise himself, shaving off his beard and mustache, donning an old set of clothes, a hat and boots, and smearing dirt on his face. With the help and armed protection of Thomas Garrett, the non-Mormon who had housed the missionaries the night before the massacre, the disguised Roberts and his small company placed the bodies in metal caskets, which they drove to Mount Pleasant before sending on the railroad back to Salt Lake. Despite an overwhelming urge to throw off his disguise and render some words of comfort to the brokenhearted people at the scene of the massacre, especially the Condor family, Roberts sadly concluded that “it was not wisdom to take such a course,” as “the enemy was still on the alert.”

As for Martin Condor and J. R. Hutson, they were promptly buried in a family graveyard on the corner of the farm, where their graves were later memorialized with a headstone reading “Noble Defenders of the Truth. Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for a friend. St. John 15:13.”

Unlike the Joseph Standing case, in which the wheels of justice rolled slowly before coming to a complete stop, in the Cane Creek killings there was not even a halfhearted or perfunctory effort to bring the mob to trial. The Mormons, who by 1884 were even more pessimistic than they were five years earlier about their chance to get a fair hearing anywhere in the United States, immediately presumed that the murders would go unpunished, and probably even uninvestigated. One of the earliest editorials in the Deseret News, even before

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80 Roberts, “The Tennessee Massacre,” 22-23. In the same account, Roberts tenderly reminisced about the wrenching experience of recovering the bodies: “The saddest moments of my life were when we moved from the spot where the Elders had been [temporarily] buried. As we passed Brother Condor’s house, we saw the grief stricken father chopping some wood; we thought of the bereaved mother in the house, where only a few days before she had seen her two sons murdered; I looked back to the little graveyard we had just left, and a few of the Saints were standing close together looking after us—while the shades of night were gathering round us.”
all the details of the massacre got to Salt Lake City, set the general tone: “‘No arrests have been made.’ So says the dispatch [from Tennessee]. It is quite likely that none will be made, or at any rate, that the cowardly murderers will escape punishment at the hands of the law.”

There were some early encouraging signs that the people of Tennessee might demand that authorities bring the guilty parties to trial, as evidenced in a strongly worded editorial in the Nashville *Daily American*, one of the state’s leading papers. Just three days after the massacre, it argued that “no matter” the prejudices held against Mormons, the county and state authorities could not afford to “ignore the crime of murder. . . . Butchery of this savage character for any cause cannot be tolerated in a civilized country.” However, such pleading would have no effect, and the Mormons’ cynicism was validated. In the first week after the incident, the *New York Times* reported that “There is no clue to the slayers of the Elders, and as yet the authorities have taken no steps in the matter.” Two reasons were given: first, that the mobs wore masks, and thus the only clearly identified member of their party was David Hinson, who was killed; and second, that especially because of the gravity of what happened, the “rioters” would “keep their own counsel” and take all necessary steps to guard their identities, thus requiring “extraordinary efforts to successfully track them.”

Partly in response to continuing criticism from “those who believe that the guilty persons should be ferreted out and punished,” Governor William Bate offered a one thousand dollar reward “for the apprehension and conviction of the parties who murdered the Mormon elders in Lewis county.” The gesture seemed more magnanimous than it actually was. Not only did it come nearly two weeks after the incident, but in requiring not


only the apprehension but also the conviction of the guilty parties, chances were slim to none that the reward would be claimed. Furthermore, Tennessee state authorities would hardly have been enthusiastic to pursue the mob members after Governor Bate received a telegram from Eli Murray, territorial governor of Utah and noted enemy of the Mormons. Murray began by condemning “lawlessness” as “reprehensible,” but then revealed the true intent of the message when he suggested that the real criminals in the case were actually the “murdered Mormon agents.” These men, Murray claimed, were not so much missionaries as “emigration agents” and “representatives of organized crime” whose real mission was to induce unwitting Tennesseans into immigrating to Utah. Considering all of these developments militating against an active pursuit of justice, the New York Times concluded, “Whether any attempt will be made to discover the perpetrators of this crime is a question concerning which there is much doubt. The general impression is that there will not be.”

Even had the civil authorities made a genuine effort to apprehend the guilty parties, their task would have been extremely onerous, as Lewis and Hickman counties essentially degenerated into mob law following the massacre. Outsiders were uniformly suspect, and the vigilantes were not afraid to use violence to protect their claimed territory. An unnamed eyewitness who returned to Nashville from Hickman County asserted that “it would be unsafe for any one to go to Lewis county for the purpose of arresting any of them.”

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84 “The Murdered Mormons,” New York Times, 23 Aug. 1884; “The Mormon Murder,” Nashville Banner, 23 Aug. 1884. William B. Bate was a native Tennessean, a Civil War general, and a lifelong southern Democrat who was elected to two terms as Governor of Tennessee beginning in 1882 (serving 1883-1887), and was then elected to the U.S. Senate, where he held a seat until his death in 1905. See Robert Sobel and John Raimo, Biographical Directory of the Governors of the United States, 1789-1978, vol. 4 (Westport, CT: Meckler Books, 1978), 1487-1488. Eli H. Murray, a Kentucky native, was a general in the Union Army, and was appointed as territorial governor of Utah by President Hayes in 1880. Immediately upon his appointment, Murray commenced a bitter anti-Mormon campaign that lasted throughout his six years as governor and spread beyond Utah’s borders to influence national policy, particularly in anti-polygamy legislation. See Miriam B. Murphy, “Territorial Governors (Utah Territory),” in Utah History Encyclopedia, ed. Allan Kent Powell (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1994), 549; and Thomas A. McMullin and David Walker, Biographical Directory of American Territorial Governors (Westport, CT: Meckler Publishing, 1984), 306-307.
testified that they “would have no hesitancy in killing anyone who attempted to obtain the names of any of the band.”\textsuperscript{85} Even non-Mormons were unsafe, particularly if they started asking questions, such as an Evansville, Indiana, detective who traveled to the county in response to the offer of reward money and was very nearly lynched.\textsuperscript{86} Short of utilizing sheer brute force and perhaps imposing martial law, then, the situation was hardly suited for outside authorities to be coming in to identify, arrest, and prosecute the murderers.

Rather than satisfying the anti-Mormons, the massacre, and the ensuing paralysis of law enforcement authorities, only encouraged the vigilantes. In early September, a month after the killings, the \textit{Deseret News} reported that “the murderous mobocrats in Lewis County are becoming bold in their immunity from punishment for their crimes. They are ordering members of our Church to leave the neighborhood.”\textsuperscript{87} Written notices were posted all over the county warning all Mormons to leave the county, on pain of death. The notification, which was ornamented with a drawing of a coffin, read:

\begin{quote}
Mormons, leave! Members of the Latter Day Saints are notified to leave this county, and 30 days are given for you all to go. An indignant and outraged people have said it, and go you shall. If any are found in this county after 30 days, you will go like the others. Go peaceably if you will, but you must.\textsuperscript{88}
\end{quote}

Similar notices were posted in Maury, Hickman, and Wilson counties, and the local residents watched nervously as the deadline approached, fearing another outbreak of violence. Lest anyone think the notices were empty threats, “masked men, armed with revolvers and wearing robes decorated with a red cross, skull and cross-bones were seen riding near the

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{85} “…Against Mormonism – Citizens of Lewis County Opposed to That Doctrine” (title incomplete), \textit{Nashville Banner}, 6 Sep. 1884.
\item \textsuperscript{87} “An Infamy and a Crime,” \textit{Deseret Evening News}, 8 Sep. 1884.
\end{itemize}
Mormon settlement” in Wilson County.\footnote{“The Mormons,” \textit{Nashville Banner}, 17 Oct. 1884. In his autobiography, B. H. Roberts records that the Cane Creek attackers were “masked men in Ku Klux Klan garb. This was a white sheet drawn together in a peeked hood, the sheet covering the entire body; in the hood were cut eye holes and space for breathing” (Bergera, \textit{Autobiography}, 139). Writing in 1933, nearly fifty years after the massacre, he seems to have conflated the fuller costume of this later vigilante activity with the simple masks worn by the original mob that killed Gibbs et al. A contemporary account reported that the mob attackers were “disguised with masks, fantastic hats, coats and pantaloons of bright colors” (“The Mormons,” \textit{Nashville Daily American}, 21 Aug. 1884); also see Nicholson, \textit{The Tennessee Massacre}, 9.} It became evident that the same vigilantes were mounting a concerted anti-Mormon campaign throughout the region, as there also appeared a white banner with a red cross in a circle near the site of the massacre at Cane Creek. The masked men reportedly constituted an “organization formed to preserve order and protect citizens from evil-doers,” making them part of a classic American vigilante tradition.\footnote{“Not Cheerful for Detectives,” \textit{New York Times}, 3 Sep. 1884. On the American vigilante tradition, see Richard Maxwell Brown, \textit{Strain of Violence: Historical Studies of American Violence and Vigilantism} (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975), esp. chap. 4.}

Latter-day Saints were greatly alarmed. Although some were determined to stay the course, most decided not to test the mob’s determination and quickly made arrangements to leave their homes and farms. As the end of September came closer, newspapers reported that in the wake of a second notice warning all Mormons to leave by October 1, many were closing their businesses, selling their farms (usually far below their actual value), and otherwise preparing to migrate; some had even allegedly “renounced their faith in order to save themselves trouble.”\footnote{“The Mormons,” \textit{Nashville Banner}, 25 Sep. 1884; “An Anti-Mormon Crusade,” \textit{New York Times}, 25 Sep. 1884; “All Quiet in Lewis,” \textit{Hickman (TN) Pioneer}, 26 Sep. 1884; “Mormon Converts Alarmed,” \textit{New York Times}, 29 Sep. 1884.} Not only were members of the church (including the surviving Condors) driven out, but so were sympathizers and other “good people who had been friendly” to the missionaries, such as Thomas Garrett. The expulsion was a coordinated, systematic effort, as families could apply for a “safe conduct patrol pass,” which they would then carry and show to any vigilantes they might encounter along their way, proving that they were indeed making their way out of the area. Some twenty to twenty-five people were
expelled from Lewis County alone, representing the greater part of the Mormon population there. The entire scene, with bedraggled Latter-day Saint families uprooted, piling their possessions in a wagon and leaving their homes for an unknown future, was reminiscent of the Mormons’ early troubles in Missouri and Illinois. The pattern was depressingly familiar: the arrival of Mormons followed by a gradual rise in community conflict, culminating in extralegal violence and capped off by forced expulsion.

In the weeks and months that followed the Cane Creek episode, Mormons and non-Mormons alike spilled a good deal of ink providing explanations and, ultimately, assigning blame for the murders. The non-Mormon refrain was familiar—so familiar, in fact, that the newspapers were able to explain why the massacre occurred even before they knew the details about what had occurred. The earliest reports talk about the “very bitter feeling” that had been growing against the Latter-day Saints. This growing hostility was due to the fact that they had “succeeded in inducing several persons to embrace their doctrines,” which led to the separation of families, most notoriously the breakup of husbands and wives and the emigration of young women to the West. The community became increasingly upset about the presence of the elders, and warned them several times to “quit the neighborhood.” When their warnings were refused repeatedly, more serious methods of persuasion were considered. The triple combination of the Mormon elders’ success, stubbornness, and alleged licentiousness was why, according to local tradition, “good citizens rose up against it


[Mormonism] with a determination to put an end to the corruption that was then becoming so notorious among certain families in the neighborhood.”

The first two charges—of the elders’ proselytizing success and their stubborn refusal to leave the area when asked (or told)—were unquestionably true. The missionaries, and most notably John Gibbs, had indeed enjoyed considerable success in the area, especially in Lewis and Hickman counties, which had in turn caused quite a sensation among the local population. According to Gibbs’ record, there were forty-four baptisms in northwestern Tennessee from September 1883 through May 1884, with the majority (twenty-eight) coming in April and May 1884. Growth in that region was substantial enough that on 27 April 1884 the church’s West Tennessee Conference was divided in two, with the northwestern division having seven branches and seventy members.96 William Jones, the missionary who had been released by his captor on the day of the massacre, later testified that “one of the chief causes of the bitter enmity against us” was the success enjoyed by the elders. Specifically, he cited the baptism of “an intelligent young lady” (otherwise unidentified) in the late spring of 1884. Upwards of two hundred people came from all over the area “to see if it could really be true that she was about to espouse so despised a cause as ‘Mormonism.’”97 Gibbs was particularly effective in persuading people in the Cane Creek region to accept the faith, personally baptizing twenty-six people in April and May 1884.98 J. D. Westbrook, who joined the church in Cane Creek and then migrated to Utah, said that of the thirty-one

95 WPA Project, 3.

96 “Account of Baptisms Etc. in the North West Tennessee Conference and scattered branches South – Recorded by Elder John H. Gibbs,” Gibbs Collection. Information on the division of the conference, along with membership statistics, comes from the Manuscript History.


98 “Account of Missionary Labors,” in Gibbs journal (Feb.-Mar. 1883, 1884), Gibbs Collection. Gibbs had baptized a total of only fifteen in the twelve months of his mission until then.
members of the Cane Creek branch at the time of the massacre, twenty-two had been
baptized by Gibbs since the beginning of January 1884, including two members of the
Condor family.99 Had Gibbs—who seemed to be the catalyst of the explosive growth in
Lewis and Hickman counties—remained, instead of being reassigned to go on his lecture
tour in the early summer of 1884, the LDS church may have continued to enjoy remarkable
growth in the area.

However, while the church’s rapid progress was a source of inspiration and delight
to the missionaries and converts, it engendered considerable resentment and bitterness
among the segment of the local population who felt threatened by the Mormons’ presence
and success. As Gibbs’ ministry in the region enjoyed increased success, the incidence of
threats and minor violence against the Mormons began to rise dramatically in the early
months of 1884. In January, Gibbs received a written threat that was unsigned, but was
supposedly from a man named F. T. Smith, who had publicly boasted that “he could shoot
down a Mormon Elder as quick as he would a squirrel.” The barely decipherable note
threatened that if the missionary did not leave, he could expect to be either hung or shot and
then left to the buzzards, as it was the author’s “intention to kill.”100 Then in early May there
was the warning from the Shiloh band, left with the ashes of the burned log meetinghouse.
Shortly thereafter Gibbs received another notice from the postmaster of McEwen

Collection.
100 Undated entry, Gibbs journal (Feb.-Mar. 1883, 1884), in Gibbs Collection. Gibbs copied down the
entire notice in his journal, just as it was written:
January 17, 84
Mr. Elder Gibbs Sir We ar Giveen you warnen In time our time is for you to get away from
Tomlin Creek Jest as soon as you can we are Gettin tard of you low Down Mormons Iff you
dont get away you no not what time you look up a line (rope) or what time a shot or ball will
whisel at your Celpes and we will give the buseardes (buzzards) a invitation to the Mormon.
That is our intention to kill as we Com up with a Mormon on from the first of a Sartin
month you Can Com or stay we will be with you with powder and led we dont mean to bluff
you and so look out
announcing that there was a mob already assembled waiting to drive all the Mormons out of Hickman, Dickson, Humphreys, and Perry counties by the first of June. If any remained after the appointed date, they would be tarred and feathered and then killed. Gibbs was not alone in receiving death threats, as he read letters from other elders in the region who had similar notices and heard that missionaries in other states were experiencing much of the same. He confided in his journal, “I have never seen a hotter time since I have been out. We have been threatened on every hand. . . . The Devil . . . is doing his utmost.”

As their frustrated authors could attest, the threats were generally ignored, as the elders’ zeal and sense of divine protection typically overrode concern for personal safety. Of course, not all missionaries were so zealously committed as Gibbs, and some even went home, unable or unwilling to handle the stress of the increasing hostility manifested toward them. The rising level of violence (both actual and threatened) against LDS missionaries in the South was recognized by the church leadership, who encouraged the elders to exercise great caution. In a circular letter written in early 1884 to all conference presidents and traveling elders in the Southern States Mission, John Morgan and B. H. Roberts—the president and acting president of the mission, respectively—warned that “it may be that the ignorant and ungodly will take license to commit acts of violence against you; we therefore caution you in regard to this matter as we do not wish the Elders to expose themselves to danger if it [may] possibly be avoided.” Missionaries were admonished that if a spirit of violence arose among the people in any of the districts they were laboring in, “it would be

101 “Notice,” undated, in Gibbs journal (Feb.-Mar. 1883, 1884), in Gibbs Collection.

102 Undated entry, Gibbs journal (Feb.-Mar. 1883, 1884), in Gibbs Collection.

103 Gibbs wrote his wife, with a certain tone of disdain, that “There have been several [missionaries] gone home lately, they could not stand persecution etc.” He proudly affirmed, “I do not want to come home one minute before my time.” Letter from John Gibbs, Duck River, TN, to Louisa Gibbs, 2 May 1884, in Gibbs Collection.
wise to leave those localities and not expose your persons to their wrath.”

However, even with official permission to move on whenever antagonism arose, many elders stayed the course, giving little or no heed to menacing threats. The prevailing attitude among many missionaries was reflected by Gibbs, who frequently expressed his confidence that all the anti-Mormon persecution would eventually come to naught, and that he and his fellow laborers would be divinely protected in the meantime. Indeed, after his death the Nashville Banner said of Gibbs, in a eulogy he certainly would have appreciated, “the more he was threatened the harder he would work.”

The obstinate refusal of Gibbs and many of his fellow missionaries to pay attention to intimidation only served to further infuriate their opponents, which consequently drove them to apply increasingly extreme measures. Had Gibbs, who seemed to be a lightning rod for opposition, remained in Cane Creek instead of leaving on his speaking tour in the early summer of 1884, his continued presence might well have provoked his enemies to serious violence even earlier than August.

As important as the elders’ success and stubbornness were as factors in leading to violence, they were not in themselves sufficient causes. What separated Mormon elders from the itinerant preachers of other faiths who were common in the South were the rumors and accusations of their licentious behavior, all stemming from the Mormon doctrine and practice of plural marriage. The litany of abuses charged to the elders was stunning; any of them alone may well have sparked a community’s outrage. But added together, the

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105 Two examples from letters to his wife Louisa are illustrative: On 26 June 1883, Gibbs wrote, “Do not fret dear about me I feel in my heart that God will protect me and I shall have the privilege [sic] of returning home after my work is done.” And in an undated letter (ca. Feb. 1884), he comforted his wife, “You know that God has promised to protect His servants until they have finished their work, and I have work to do in the future. . . . God will protect us, if we are only faithful.” Both letters in Gibbs Collection.

cumulative effect of the missionaries’ alleged offences made them appear as demonic, rapacious fiends, enemies to all virtue. The most prevalent—and serious—charges were conveniently summarized in a petition to Governor Bate submitted by B. H. Roberts, J. Golden Kimball, William H. Jones, Henry Thompson, and W. H. Robinson, on 20 August 1884. Their statement recapped some of the prevailing myths that were used as excuses to justify anti-Mormon violence: that they baptized women in the nude; that they had a “special mission” to break up families; that they sought to establish polygamy in the South; that female converts were “initiated by degrees into prostitution”; and that the elders were “commonly licentious and corrupt.” The petition dealt with each of the accusations in turn, categorically denying that Mormons ever practiced nude baptisms or prostitution, or that families were broken up as a result of the elders’ teaching. While plural marriage was defended as a true religious principle and an appropriate practice in Utah, the petitioners swore that no effort was being made to introduce polygamy into any of the southern states, including Tennessee.  

In personal interviews, Roberts consistently maintained the same positions, adamantly defending the upright conduct of the elders in the mission and dismissing all accusations of Mormon immorality as scurrilous rumors. 

The Mormons’ attempts to defuse such allegations had almost no effect. Not only the press but also the other churches were happy to fan the flames of anti-Mormon sentiment. In a lecture at Edgefield Baptist Church in Nashville, Reverend W. H. Strickland endorsed the charges brought about by “law abiding citizens” against “these Mormon missionaries, so called,” specifically, “that under the guise of religion, they were attempting

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to seduce their wives and daughters from the paths of virtue.”

Elder Gibbs was a special target of the rumor mill. It was reported that he told a young female convert “that as a prerequisite to baptism God had revealed it to him to sleep with her, which he did.” He was then said to have attempted to seduce another young woman, who barely escaped from his clutches as he tore the clothing from her body. Finally, he was reportedly caught in yet another compromising situation with a young girl convert, this time on the public roadside “with one arm around her waist and the other in her bosom.”

Even decades later, Mormon missionaries were remembered in Lewis County folklore as moral degenerates. It was said that upon baptizing a married woman, the elder would tell her, in front of her husband, “Sister you are now as much my wife as you are your husbands [sic].” While men were ritually given the gift of the Holy Ghost on the banks of the creek after baptism, female converts were allegedly taken into a private house for the “laying on of hands.”

Speculations and stories such as these led one newspaper to conclude, “It is the business of the proselyting Mormons to break up families and destroy womanly purity, and they propose no church in Tennessee, but proselyte that they may swell the number of law breaking bigamists in Utah. . . . The Mormon is a libertine and his profession is bigamy.”

What is somewhat surprising is that the public anti-Mormon campaign did not latch onto the one verifiable, if hushed, instance of sexual impropriety by an LDS missionary in the South. Indeed, the fact that it was not widely publicized suggests that it was effectively kept quiet by church authorities and the other missionaries. The details are somewhat

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111 WPA Project, 2-3.


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sketchy, and appear only in John Gibbs’ private correspondence to his wife and another missionary, although he suggests that it had become common knowledge among the other elders in the mission. According to Gibbs’ telling, a former elder in Kentucky, who apparently was known personally by both him and his wife, had first attempted, then later succeeded in raping a young female member of the church, probably sometime in late December 1883 or early January 1884. Gibbs wrote that the man “struggled with the young woman, threw her down, lifted her clothes and accomplished his wicked desires.” In another letter, Gibbs suggested that the missionary’s terrible misdeed might not have come as a total surprise, saying that “I know his weakness, and also know what and how many temptations are strewn in the path of an Elder of Israel.” As much as anything, Gibbs felt the incident would be a significant hindrance to the reputation of the remaining elders in the mission: “We allways [sic] have told the people that we could testify to what President Morgan wrote to the Nashville paper some time ago, that there never was an Elder ever caught in lewdness or with bad women in the Southern States. But now we have to rein up on that point, which makes an Elder mourn for it was a fine subject to talk upon.” In a somber letter to his friend and fellow missionary Joseph Morrell, Gibbs briefly addressed the scandal, mentioning that he had received word that the perpetrator’s wife back in Utah was leaving him. In all, it was a sobering and painful experience for Gibbs to deal with, and a black mark on the reputation and performance of the Mormon elders in the South.

Other than this unsavory incident, which was by all indications a singular exception, there is no substantial evidence that the LDS missionaries were the “low-down lot of

113 Letter from John Gibbs, Cane Creek, TN, to Louisa Gibbs, 28 Jan. 1884, in Gibbs Collection.
114 Letter from John Gibbs to Louisa Gibbs (pages missing, no place or date), in Gibbs Collection.
115 Letter from John Gibbs to Joseph Morrell, 10 Jan. 1884, in Joseph Morrell Correspondence, LDS Church Archives.
scoundrels and blacklegs” they were accused of being.\textsuperscript{116} Although Mormons typically ignored the fantastic stories that circulated about them, the violence in Tennessee prompted them to publicly defend themselves from false charges and to explain what they believed to be the causes of the massacre. Four days after the massacre, B. H. Roberts responded to the barrage of accusations about Mormon polygamy. Although he unashamedly acknowledged that plural marriage was a doctrine of the church and was “believed in by the Mormons of Utah,” he was unequivocal in asserting that the missionaries in the South “had never taught any one to practice polygamy nor to violate in any way the laws of the land.”\textsuperscript{117} Roberts was less clear on whether or not the missionaries were themselves polygamists; as one newspaper reporter related after an interview with him, “he was not aware that any of the elders engaged in proselyting in the South had more than one wife, though he might have for all he knew.”\textsuperscript{118}

Roberts’ statements were, for the most part, true. One of the victims of the Tennessee massacre, William Berry, was in fact a polygamist, with two wives and thirteen children.\textsuperscript{119} Most of the elders in the South, however, were young (late teens or early twenties) and either single or monogamous—although constantly defending the principle of plural marriage left them increasingly convinced of its truthfulness, and they sometimes

\textsuperscript{117} “The Mormon Murders,” Nashville Banner, 14 Aug. 1884.
\textsuperscript{119} For biographical information on William Berry, see “The Martyred Elder, W. S. Berry,” Deseret Evening News, 18 Aug. 1884. Genealogical information provided by www.familysearch.org suggests that Berry had a total of three wives, but only two at any one time. He married Rebecca Beck (d. 1903) in 1860; Diantha Allen (d. 1873) in 1864; and Lovinia Sylvester (d. 1955) in 1874.
expressed their intentions to take additional wives upon returning home. Missionary journals and correspondence do contain numerous accounts of the elders talking with southerners about plural marriage and vigorously defending both the principle and practice, but in almost every case the topic was brought up by the hostile locals. John Gibbs wrote to his wife that “The folks all where we have been inquire how many wives I have, they are all taken up with Polygamy, more than any subject, they can’t take it in.” Later, he complained that “I have to answer a thousand and one questions on Polygamy from the women.” And when Elders Gibbs and Robison were on their lecture tour, polygamy was among the main topics of debate in every city they visited, so much that Gibbs prepared extensive lecture notes on the subject in his notebook, including a fifteen-point defense of polygamy based on the standard Mormon defense that both the belief in and practice of plural marriage were protected under their First Amendment rights.

But for most elders in most circumstances, caution was the watchword. The 1884 circular letter from mission presidents Morgan and Roberts to all the elders in the South clearly suggested, without specifically mentioning polygamy by name, that the subject should be handled delicately, if at all. They admonished the elders to “preach the First Principles of the Gospel . . . leaving the more advanced doctrines to be taught after the First Principles are

120 In several letters to his wife, John Gibbs mentioned his desire to enter into plural marriage when he returned home, even asking her if she could “stand the pressure after I come home to be again separated for a year or so from me for Polygamy? (in jail)” Letter from John Gibbs, Waverly, TN, to Louisa Gibbs, 25 July 1883, in Gibbs Collection.

121 Letter from John Gibbs, Blue Creek, TN, to Louisa Gibbs, 21 April 1883, in Gibbs Collection.

122 Letter from John Gibbs to Louisa Gibbs (first page missing, envelope says New Era, TN, 6 Aug. 1884), in Gibbs Collection.

123 John Gibbs mission notebook, in Gibbs Collection. On the general Mormon strategy of defending polygamy based on the First Amendment freedom of religion, see Gordon, Mormon Question, esp. chaps. 3-4; Bitton, “Polygamy Defended,” 38-41.
thoroughly understood.” The *Deseret News* reinforced these points, making an argument that preaching polygamy was not, in theory, improper or unlawful, but that the elders in Tennessee were “sent out not to preach plural marriage, but faith, repentance and baptism.” That these statements appeared genuine was hardly reassuring to southerners, who interpreted them as a cunning stratagem used by the missionaries to get in the door before revealing their true designs.

The other element that supported the Mormons’ case was that their southern converts did not, in fact, practice polygamy—either in the South or even when they moved out West. LDS converts from the South were generally encouraged to gather not to Utah but rather to the San Luis Valley in south-central Colorado. A major rationale for this directive was that southern converts were typically poor, and they could acquire government land in the San Luis Valley at much lower prices than they could purchase a home in Utah. It was also argued, though without much direct proof, that in Colorado the southern converts would be settling among like-minded people, rather than alongside the Yankees and northern Europeans that settled the Mormon heartland. Finally, polygamy was not practiced in the Mormon settlements in Colorado, and so there would be no pressure or expectation for the converts to adopt the practice. Just how significant a factor this was in the church’s original decision to steer southerners away from Utah is unclear, but after the fact it allowed the church to assert that the Colorado solution “effectually disposes of the charge that the

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object of our missionary work there [in the South] is to ‘obtain supplies for harems.’”

While never backpedaling on their stance that plural marriage was a spiritual truth that they had every right to practice, for the sake of public relations Mormons were quite willing to take advantage of the fact that it was not practiced universally within the church.

Like their arguments about polygamy, the Latter-day Saints’ explanations for the massacre were more effective at convincing themselves of the rightness of their cause than persuading others to agree. In the days and weeks following the tragedy at Cane Creek, the Mormon press was hot with indignation. Ultimately, the Latter-day Saints, both on the scene in Tennessee and back in Salt Lake, placed blame just where they had following Joseph Standing’s murder four years earlier—on the hostile religious establishment and on the anti-Mormon faction in Utah that fed the movement in rest of the country. Three days after the massacre the Deseret News issued a piercing judgment against the “orthodox preachers and writers for a licentious press in this city,” who had “stirred up the basest passions of lawless men” and thus “inflamed the blood of the mobocrats by their murderous suggestions.”

Multiple articles and editorials followed this one, all with the same basic message—that guilt for the murders of Gibbs, Berry, Condor, and Hutson laid not only with the mob, but also with the evangelical Protestant ministers in both Salt Lake and Tennessee and with the anti-Mormon press in Utah. Indeed, the mob was portrayed as simply the inevitable result of the machinations of the churches and the press, the unthinking puppet manipulated by a much larger and more diabolical puppet master. While Mormons were not afraid to level blame at the highest levels—“Cabinet officers, Members of Congress, Governors, Judges and other State, Territorial and county officers” were considered accessories to the crime, through


negligence if not open hostility—it was the “preachers and editors” who were the targets of the Saints’ fiercest ire.128

Mormon anger about the massacre and its causes climaxed in an address delivered by John Nicholson in Salt Lake City on 22 September 1884. Nicholson was an associate editor of the Deseret News who was a favorite among the Latter-day Saints in Utah for his writing and speaking abilities, particularly in his diatribes outlining government abuses against the Mormons. His lecture (later printed as a booklet), titled The Tennessee Massacre & Its Causes; or, The Utah Conspiracy, drew what was described as “probably the most densely packed audience ever within the walls of the Salt Lake Theatre.” His basic argument was that the Tennessee massacre was only the latest and most violent manifestation of a conspiracy against the political and religious freedom of the Mormons. Although it had tentacles reaching into the national press and the federal government, the nerve center of the conspiracy was in Salt Lake, among a “small minority” who sought to “seize the reins of government, and despoil, and crush, and injure an innocent community.” Nicholson asserted that what the Saints were facing in the early 1880s was something distinct from general prejudice, and entailed an actual, “systematic, determined” conspiracy that had both a political and religious wing. He located the roots of this conspiracy in a 7 May 1882 meeting in Salt Lake City, specifically convened “for the purpose of working up a prejudice against the ‘Mormon’ community.” The meeting, Nicholson reported, was an “amalgamation of church and state”—a principle, he slyly noted, that was “very objectionable to them, except, of course, when they engage in it themselves.” In attendance

at this anti-Mormon meeting were some of the most prominent non-Mormon preachers and politicians in the territory, including Governor Eli Murray. The Methodists took particular pride in leading the proceedings, as they “had always occupied the front rank in opposing ‘Mormonism,’” including lobbying Congress for more stringent anti-polygamy legislation.129

This group of political and religious leaders, still very much active in 1884, was identified by Nicholson to be the heart and soul of the vast anti-Mormon crusade. Although “conspiracy” was of course a loaded term, no one would have denied that the national anti-Mormon movement fed upon the reports they received from their faction in Utah, and the people Nicholson mentioned would hardly have been embarrassed to be identified with organized anti-Mormonism. What would be damning, of course, would be if it could be shown that the “Utah conspiracy” had some kind of direct link to the killings at Cane Creek. In the case of Joseph Standing, it was almost impossible to make a strong connection between the murder and the national anti-Mormon movement. But Nicholson claimed to have found the smoking gun. On 15 March 1884, the non-Mormon Salt Lake Tribune—“the organ of the conspirators”—published what it called “A Red Hot Address.” It purported to be a stenographical report of a sermon delivered the Sunday previous by a Bishop West in Juab, Utah. The address called for all-out war against the “Gentiles” (non-Mormons), who were “eyesores in the sight of the Lord,” specifically advocating the assassination of Governor Murray (alternately called the “high priest of the devil” and “the Cain of our generation”).130


130 The bishop’s statements had supposedly been confirmed to him as “the will of the Most High” from a vision of the martyred Joseph Smith, complete with “blood-red spots and livid wounds where the bullets of the cursed Gentiles had entered his sainted body.” The “Red Hot Address” is reprinted as an appendix to Nicholson, The Tennessee Massacre, 70-74.
The address, explosive as it was, turned out to be a forgery. Besides the issue of the ridiculously overblown language, there was in fact no “Bishop West” in the entire church in 1884. Furthermore, there was not even a church meeting held in Juab on the date on which the address was said to have been delivered, as there was a washout that day that occupied the labor of all available local church members. But the fact that it was a total fabrication did not prevent the “Red Hot Address” from being reprinted and circulated around the nation. Of course, there was never a shortage of anti-Mormon literature in circulation, but this particular piece became significant as it made its way to Lewis County, where a Baptist preacher named Vandever used it to stir up hostility against John Gibbs and the other Mormon elders laboring in the region.

Direct personal testimony of the effect of the “Red Hot Address,” along with other slanderous newspaper accounts, was given by Elder William Jones, who said the address was “thrust at me wherever I went,” and that “quite a feeling of enmity was created owing to the false newspaper stories so industriously circulated.” In another letter he made particular mention of Vandever, who “worked up prejudice against us in that section by giving it [the

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131 The president of the Juab Stake in 1884 was William Paxman, and the bishops over the four wards in the stake were William Warner, David Udall, John Haws, and Niels Aagaard. Information provided by Jeffrey O. Johnson, LDS Church History Library, in private e-mail correspondence with the author, 30 June 2004. Johnson also reported that there was no specifically designated Juab ward or branch. The claim about a washout was part of a refutation of the “Red Hot Address” made in a letter to the editor of the Deseret News from George Teasdale, a resident of Juab County, dated 18 March 1884. It is reprinted in Nicholson, The Tennessee Massacre, 75-76.

132 No details are known about this “Parson Vandever,” and I have only found him in Mormon sources. The 1880 Lewis County census lists two Vandever family heads, J. H. (age 54, wife and one daughter) and Allen W. (age 35, wife and seven children). See 1880 Census – Lewis County, trans. Byron Sistler (Nashville: Tennessee State Library and Archives, 1998).

In his Comprehensive History of the Church, compiled years later in 1930, B. H. Roberts suggested that the “Red Hot Address” was the final straw in what he characterized as a “Special Period of Anti-Mormon Misrepresentation” that led up to the Tennessee massacre. Although he acknowledged it was not the sole cause of the massacre, he asserted that “it was beyond any question a potent factor in producing the tragedy, the last thing needful to create the sense of justification in the minds of the people in that vicinity for the ferocious act of mobocracy.” Roberts, Comprehensive History of the Church, 89.

‘Red Hot Address’] wide publicity, and by his pretended credence to the falsehood, causing
great excitement.” Although Elders Jones and Gibbs reportedly sent Vandever a refutation
of the address, their protests had no effect.\(^{134}\) The most interesting, although ultimately
inconclusive, piece of evidence possibly linking Vandever to the actual massacre is an
undated entry near the end of one of John Gibbs’ mission journals. The entry has a heading
of “Dialogue between a Mormon Preacher and two Reverand Divines, named respectively,
Vandever & Henson of the Baptist and Methodist faith.” In it, he tells of a chance meeting
on the street between an unidentified elder and the two ministers, who roughly dismissed the
elder and then told him that his very presence in the area was unwelcome.\(^{135}\) Furthermore, a
published interview with J. D. Westbrook, who joined the LDS church at Cane Creek and
then migrated to Utah shortly before the massacre, stated that David Hinson, the leader of
the mob who was also killed in the melee, “was a local preacher, of the Methodist
persuasion,” who lived only about seven miles from the Condor farm.\(^{136}\)

Although none of this evidence is corroborated by non-Mormon sources, pieced

together it paints a picture of the nature of local anti-Mormon activity preceding the
massacre. The sources suggest that Vandever and Hinson were part of, and possibly led, an
interdenominational alliance against Mormon intrusion in Lewis County. Local resistance to
LDS proselytizing was fanned by, and included the distribution of, anti-Mormon literature,
which emanated from Salt Lake City for a nationwide audience. The Mormon elders and

\(^{134}\) Nicholson, *The Tennessee Massacre*, 32.

\(^{135}\) John Gibbs journal, containing fragments from February-March 1883 and 1884, in Gibbs
Collection.

\(^{136}\) “The Tragedy in Tennessee in Interesting Particulars,” *Deseret Evening News*, 16 Aug. 1884. Non-
Mormon sources do not mention Hinson being a preacher of any kind. Instead, they describe him as “a
1884); and “a well-known citizen and distinguished for his daring courage and good marksmanship. He was a
jovial man, and liked by all who knew him” (*Hickman Pioneer*, 15 Aug. 1884).
Protestant ministers in Lewis County knew each other personally, and even chance meetings were marked by tension and hostility. In addition, Hinson must have been well aware of Mormon activity at the Condor farm, since in rural Lewis County he would have been considered a not-too-distant neighbor. It is even conceivable that Vandever knew of or perhaps participated in the mob that attacked the Condor farm in August 1884. Put together, these relationships between the national and local anti-Mormon movements and between local Mormons and non-Mormons help sketch out some of the interactions that may have led up to the Cane Creek massacre, and suggest ways that anti-Mormonism was transformed on the ground from mere rhetoric to vigilante violence.

While non-Mormons blamed Mormon debauchery and Mormons blamed the anti-Mormon conspiracy for the massacre, another significant difference in the two sides’ respective treatments of the tragedy in its aftermath was a debate over the original intentions of the mob. Before releasing him, Elder Jones’ guard had clearly intimated that the objective of the mob was the death of at least John Gibbs, specifically stating (at least in the elder’s recollection of the episode) that “these mobbers intended murder.” However, this point became a matter of some dispute after the fact, split along predictably partisan lines. Mormons consistently asserted that the mob intended murder from the outset. B. H. Roberts summed up the Mormon position: “It seems strange that anyone should say the mob did not intend to commit murder, going in disguise as they did, armed with shot guns. Every indication is that they meant the mischief they performed.” Although the Deseret News conceded that there was no evidence that the mob designed to kill the Condor boys,
the Mormons were convinced that the missionaries’ deaths were no accident. On the other side, non-Mormons claimed that the mob simply aimed to drive the Mormons from the area and that the situation spiraled out of control. The New York Times reported that the mob was “bent on chastising the Elders and forcing them to leave the county,” a position reinforced by the Nashville Daily American. Other Tennessee papers did credit the mob with wanting to inflict some violence on the elders, but only in the limited sense of a whipping or “thrashing,” before sending them out of the county. While this dispute over original intentions was moot after the fact, it had important ramifications for the larger claims of each side. Whereas Mormons wished to construct the massacre, and by extension all anti-Mormon violence, as premeditated murderous bigotry, non-Mormon southerners wanted to show that this was a justifiable case of community defense gone awry.

This debate over the attackers’ intentions may have assumed more importance if the alleged perpetrators had ever been brought to trial. However, given the strong-arm tactics of the vigilantes after the massacre and the strong anti-Mormon sentiments the pervaded the area, it was doubtful that anyone would be arrested and tried. Over two months after the killings, a grand jury was finally assembled in the circuit court in neighboring Hickman County. Judge Thomas P. Bateman gave a strong charge to the jury, reminding them that both the federal and state constitutions guaranteed freedom of worship, “whether the worshiper be a Christian, a Jew, a Mohammedan, a Mormon, a Buddhist, or any other sect.”


Bateman also spoke boldly against mob violence, but recognized that the court’s proceedings were largely “futile” since “a part of the clergy, a portion of the press and a large number of the people” supported vigilantism, particularly in this case, and most likely would not support legal proceedings. The judge’s fears proved correct—no arrests were made, and no trial was ever held for the murders of Gibbs, Berry, Condor, and Hutson.

The Mormons, as usual, were unfazed by the failure of justice. Not only did they expect it, they reveled in it. The Deseret News opined:

This latter-day work thrives on persecution. It fattens on opposition. The fiercer the efforts to stamp it out by violence, the faster and stronger it grows and flourishes... The more persecution the more proselytism. For every good man slain a hundred will join the ranks. “Mormonism” cannot be put down by physical force, its advocates cannot be silenced with shotguns or frightened into submission by threats of the worst indignities.

Every setback suffered at the hands of the “Gentiles” was considered a triumph in an eschatological sense, as they were confident that they suffered as innocent victims and that God would ultimately wreak vengeance upon their enemies. In their cosmological arithmetic, every gain was a plus, and so was every hindrance.

Violent persecution was not southerners’ only weapon to suppress polygamy in particular and the spread of Mormonism in general. Increasingly in the 1880s, they followed the example of northerners by turning to legislatures and the courts to succeed in rooting out Mormonism when all other tactics—from polemics to murder—could not. Indeed, anti-Mormon crusaders around the country could agree with the Mormons on one thing—that the government had failed to live up to its duties in regards to the “Mormon Question.” Of

143 “The Mormons,” Hickman Pioneer, 24 Oct. 1884; also see “The Mormon Murders,” Nashville Banner, 25 Oct. 1884. Mormons were thrilled with Bateman’s charge to the jury, and saw him as a lone sympathetic voice. One LDS publication was so taken with the judge that it launched into poetic adulation: “the brave and manly words of Judge Bateman ring out clearly and distinctly as the chime of church bells on the frosty air of a winter’s morning.” “Judge Bateman’s Charge,” The Latter-day Saints’ Millennial Star, 22 Dec. 1884.

course, they meant very different things by this, and while the Latter-day Saints complained of not enough governmental protection, their antagonists complained that they received too much. As one minister put it, “For fifty years this ulcer [Mormonism] has sent forth its foul odors to defile the atmosphere of our Christian homes. Eight or ten Presidents have winked at it. Our Congress is too cowardly to administer heroic treatment and amputate it.”

The main target of the anti-Mormon opposition was polygamy, which many of them believed to be the very essence of the LDS faith. What was needed, they believed, was not only more stringent legislation, but also stricter enforcement and punishments.

In the wake of the Cane Creek massacre, which stirred up anti-Mormon sentiment in the state, Tennessee legislators rushed to do their part in the national campaign against polygamy. In the 1885 session of the state General Assembly, a bill “To define and suppress the teaching of polygamy” went virtually unchallenged, passing 25-2 in the state senate, and 69-2 in the House. The law made it illegal for anyone to “teach others the doctrine or principles of polygamy” in the state, or to “induce” others to “embrace or adopt polygamy” in any way. Furthermore, the statute proscribed encouraging anyone to “emigrate to another State or territory of the United States for the purpose of embracing, adopting or practicing” polygamy. Violators could face up to two years of hard labor in the state prison and a five hundred dollar fine. An even stricter bill was introduced two years later, which would have also made it illegal to bring any printed literature into the state that advocated “the

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146 “An Act to define and punish the crime of teaching polygamous doctrines and principles, and of persuading persons to embrace the same,” Acts of the State of Tennessee, Forty-Fourth General Assembly, Chapter 151, pp. 262-63. Also see “To define and suppress the teaching of polygamy,” Senate Journal of the Forty-Fourth General Assembly of the State of Tennessee, Senate Bill No. 65, pp. 137, 358-59. The sponsor of the bill was Republican Thomas A. Kercheval. Both of the senators who voted against the bill were Republicans, and in the House, the two representatives who voted nay were both Democrats. The law was repealed by chapter 591 section 1 of the 1989 Acts, as part of a widespread revision of the state penal code.
doctrine of polygamous marriages,” and which also upped the punishment to three to eight years’ hard labor. Although this bill quickly passed its first and second reading and was referred to the Judiciary Committee, it was never brought to the floor for a final vote, perhaps because it was clearly at odds with the First Amendment freedom of the press. Neither bill mentioned Mormons by name, but there was no question whom the legislation targeted. Latter-day Saints, and especially missionaries from the West, were thus delivered a strong message, at gunpoint and in the halls of the state legislature, that they were not welcome in Tennessee.

After Latter-day Saints officially gave up plural marriage in 1890, Tennessee’s anti-polygamy legislation quickly faded to obscurity, where it languished for over a century before being repealed. However, the passing generations in Lewis County did not quickly forget their contribution to the anti-Mormon crusade of the 1880s. In 1931, a Nashville newspaper sent a reporter to the county to discover how residents nearly fifty years later felt about the incident at Cane Creek. The reporter discovered that local citizens still retained “deep bitterness” toward Mormons for leaving the “scars of their faith” on the community, and that “old men and women” still “told and retold the story” of the massacre. As they did, the younger generation would “listen with bated breath to the tale of the death blow which their

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147 “To prohibit the teaching of polygamous doctrines in this State,” Senate Journal of the Forty-Fifty General Assembly of the State of Tennessee, Senate Bill No. 23, pp. 115, 168. The sponsor was Republican senator John M. Simmerly. Interestingly, when two Mormon elders were arrested and jailed under the provisions of the 1885 Tennessee law, the prosecuting attorney in the case was none other than John Simmerly, the sponsor of the 1887 bill. John Morgan suggested that Simmerly harbored personal resentment toward the missionaries, “on the grounds that his Father was about to become a convert to Mormonism.” The elders were originally imprisoned in a county jail for six days, after which they were released on bail. In their trial, the judge asserted that the anti-polygamy law was “unconstitutional in part,” and the rest of it was “of doubtful propriety” because of its limits on free speech. Charges were dropped against one elder, and although the other was found guilty, in the end he was liable only for paying a five dollar fine, rather than five hundred dollars as the law declared, due to a clerical error. See letter from John Morgan, Elizabethton, Carter Co., TN, to Pres. John Taylor, 18 May 1885, in Morgan Papers; and Manuscript History, 13 May, 13 July, and 5 Aug. 1885.
ancestors dealt to polygamy on Cane Creek.”148 As the next chapter will show, the mob in Cane Creek was not alone in using violence in their efforts to deal polygamy a “death blow.”

CHAPTER FOUR

THE MORMON MONSTER:

THE SOUTH’S VIOLENT CAMPAIGN AGAINST LATTER-DAY SAINTS

"This Mormon business is one of the foulest sores upon the body politic, and it is one that we seem to can never cure. . . . Every patriotic citizen will strive to secure the day when it shall be wiped from the face of the earth."

-- Yorkville (SC) Enquirer, 29 Sep. 1886

"The Mormon Elder must go from this region; he must go in a hurry. If he insists on staying his visit will be made very permanent, excessively quiet, and satisfactory to everybody except the Elder."

-- Greenville (SC) Weekly News

"It is lamentable to know that these poisonous, God-defying, self-assumed Saints, imposters and blasphemers, are tolerated in this community!"

-- (Selma) Alabama Baptist, 19 June 1879

"It is Mormonism itself that is to be hated, to be feared, to be crushed."

-- Alabama Baptist, 22 April 1886

4.1 Overview

Mormonism, as the quotes above indicate, was reviled by most late nineteenth-century southerners to the point that many encouraged using violence as a means of rooting it out. The last chapter treated two case studies of southern anti-Mormon violence in detail. As significant as the Joseph Standing murder and the Cane Creek massacre were, however,

1 Quoted in Southern States Mission Manuscript History (hereafter referred to as Manuscript History), in Archives of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah (hereafter referred to as LDS Archives), 31 Dec. 1885.

2 The Alabama Baptist was published in Selma through 1885, and in Montgomery beginning in 1886.
the story was much broader. I have documented over 320 cases of violence against Mormons in the South from 1876 to 1900. These episodes took place in every southern state, and each of the last twenty years of the nineteenth century witnessed at least five reported incidents of anti-Mormon violence somewhere in the South. They involved hundreds of Latter-day Saint (LDS) missionaries and converts who were victimized by organized vigilante efforts to rid southern communities of their small but apparently threatening presence, whether through intimidation or actual violence. In many of these incidents violence was only threatened, and in others it was attempted unsuccessfully, either because the targeted Mormons escaped or the mob showed mercy or ineptitude at the last minute. However, in dozens of cases Mormons were in fact whipped, kidnapped, forcibly expelled from towns or even their own homes, and in a few instances killed. Property damage was also extensive, whether through arson, shootings, or confiscation. While anti-Mormon violence paled in comparison to racial violence targeting African Americans, it exceeded attacks against all other religious outsiders in the South combined.

The previous chapter introduced many of the key themes in southern anti-Mormon violence. This chapter will build upon those themes and also analyze trends that arise from studying all three hundred-plus cases. Rather than relying on the common assumption that Latter-day Saints were persecuted simply out of religious bigotry, I argue that anti-Mormon violence in the postbellum South should be examined with more historical rigor. Specifically, it should be understood as a series of local actions and reactions embedded in regional and national contexts, spurred on by Mormon practices that clashed with prevailing southern norms. Although converts were occasionally targeted for chastisement, missionaries in particular became the focal point for southern anti-Mormon antagonism. Seen as religious carpetbaggers of sorts, LDS missionaries were objects of fear and scorn as
they were accused of breaking up families and seducing young women to join them in their mountain harems. In some respects, the image of the Mormon missionary as a seducer of white women thus became a kind of counterpart to the myth of the “black beast rapist,” which provided the rationale for much of the anti-black violence that occurred in the postbellum South. Mormon elders were perceived as religious and sexually aggressive outsiders who threatened traditional beliefs, disrupted family relationships, and drained southern communities of precious white labor. While the dangers introduced by Mormon missionaries differed from fears about black men forcing themselves on white women, southern white men rallied against both blacks and Mormons as part of their larger commitment to defend the purity of their women, homes, and communities from outside threats. Mormons on the other hand saw themselves as innocent martyrs unjustly persecuted at the hands of a prejudiced nation, and assigned primary blame for their victimization to the scheming of evangelical Protestant ministers.

Nineteenth-century Mormonism provides American historians with perhaps their best opportunity to study what can be termed “religious violence,” in which the religious identity of the victims serves as both the primary trigger and the target of violent opposition. After all, the main thing that set Mormons apart from their neighbors was their religion. Most Mormons were white, and generally came from the same Anglo-Saxon and northern European stock as the majority of other white Americans. They were almost without exception loyal citizens who participated in the democratic political process and carried American ideals and institutions with them to the edge of the frontier and beyond. They were farmers, carpenters, milliners, coopers, blacksmiths, gunsmiths, storekeepers, and merchants, just like most other rural and small-town Americans. In other words, they looked like most Americans, talked like most Americans, and very much considered
themselves to be good citizens of the United States. What differentiated Mormons from other Americans, then, was not race or ethnicity or class, but rather belief.  

While most Americans, including southerners, looked at Mormon doctrine as strange and heretical and even dangerous, it was primarily the social, cultural, and political implications of Mormon practices, and especially polygamy, that actually led to violent conflict. Mormons explained the persecution they consistently encountered in the first seventy years of their corporate existence as manifestations of Satan’s opposition to God’s true church; as Brigham Young said, “we expect the rage of all hell to be aimed at us to overthrow us.” Some modern scholars have taken up this view albeit in more academic terms, arguing that it was opposition to LDS religious belief that drove their neighbors to distraction and ultimately violence.  

As historian William Hutchison has recently pointed out in his study of American religious pluralism, however, nineteenth-century Americans were surrounded with a profusion of unorthodox religious beliefs, and while mainstream ministers and theologians railed against such heresies and lay Protestants snickered at or denounced their heterodox neighbors, “The most common and widespread response, even

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4 A recent example of this interpretive approach is Givens, *The Latter-day Saints Experience*, chap. 2; quote taken from p. 59. Givens argues that “the popular hostility that Mormonism engendered was, from first to last, rooted in—if not confined to—religious challenges to Christian orthodoxy, and its American Protestant variety in particular” (p. 60, emphasis mine). I am more sympathetic to Givens’ treatment of the nature of anti-Mormon opposition in his earlier work, *The Viper on the Hearth: Mormons, Myth, and the Construction of Heresy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997). Here he readily acknowledges the “social, economic, or political factors” that contributed to anti-Mormonism in general and anti-Mormon violence in particular, focusing especially on the violent clashes on the Missouri frontier in the 1830s. Although I still think he overplays the doctrinal aspects of religious difference, I agree that “even when the theological dimensions of conflict are not decisive, they are inescapable and present a constant feature in anti-Mormon antagonisms” (8).
to very radical opinions, seems to have been an amused (or bemused) tolerance.” In the Mormon case, even such “ridiculous” ideas as golden plates and modern prophecy “were tolerated even if thought wrong and peculiar.” In sum, Hutchison rightly argues that Mormonism provides “a clear example of the way behavior”—not belief—“operated to provoke intolerance or induce tolerance.”

Protestant southerners often made statements reviling the “baneful doctrines and poisonous practices” of the Latter-day Saint religion. In fact, they knew virtually nothing about “Joe Smith’s doctrine,” but were rather concerned almost exclusively about “the subject of plural marriage.” Polygamy was of course both a theological tenet as well as a real practice for Latter-day Saints from its public announcement in 1852 until its official abandonment in 1890, but southerners were not worried about “celestial marriage” in the abstract. When the mob abducted Joseph Standing, it was not because of the substance of his beliefs but rather because of fears and rumors that he was preying upon southern women. Spreading the word was tolerable if obnoxious; spreading his seed and seeking recruits for Mormon harems in the West was grounds for murder. Objectionable Mormon practices such as polygamy and the “gathering” were of course rooted in theology, but had they remained on a theoretical plane they would have incurred no worse than harsh words and accusations of heresy. Southern communities could absorb the impact of heterodox preaching and even conversions, but the Mormon threat that struck at some of the core commitments and institutions of southern society—the purity of womanhood, protection of home and hearth, and maintenance of strong family and kinship networks—would have to be, and was, met with stern resistance.


The story of nineteenth-century anti-Mormonism is almost always told through the persecution narratives of Ohio, Missouri, Illinois, and Utah. This focus on the Mormon center with scant attention on the peripheries consequently means that the experience of Mormons in the postbellum South has received very little sustained scholarly treatment. My analysis is less interested in chronicling the history of southern Mormonism per se than with considering how religion and violence interacted in the postbellum South, with anti-Mormon violence being one of the most striking examples of that interaction.

In doing so, in this chapter I rely heavily on an LDS source called the Southern States Mission Manuscript History. It is a remarkably thorough compilation of news clippings and any other available published information about events that transpired in the LDS church’s Southern States Mission; in other words, it is a veritable gold mine of historical information. While it is not necessarily comprehensive, I trust that it includes all major and most minor cases of violence, since the Mormons’ well-honed persecution complex led them to report in detail any opposition they encountered, however slight. Because Mormons had their own newspapers, they were able to publish information about many of these instances that otherwise would have been neglected in secular publications.

The resultant chronicle is extensive, often including a day-to-day account of notable events throughout the mission. It would be preferable to verify Mormon accounts with non-Mormon sources, but in most cases such cross-checking simply is not possible. In those instances when non-Mormon sources are available about particular events, they closely parallel Mormon accounts in terms of factual content if not necessarily analysis or interpretation, thus confirming that the sources compiled in the Manuscript History are generally reliable. While I do not claim to have found every episode that occurred, I am convinced that the more than three hundred twenty cases I have brought together from the Manuscript History and other sources represent the bulk of anti-Mormon activity, and certainly constitute a large enough sample for me to confidently make general statements about the character of southern anti-Mormon violence in the last quarter of the nineteenth century.  

Rather than focusing on anti-Mormon violence as a simple story of religious bigotry, this chapter will explore the ways in which the over-three hundred episodes of violence were rooted in a particular set of interactions between Mormonism and southern culture. In order to fully appreciate the various dimensions of southern anti-Mormon violence, we must move our attention beyond case studies and analyze some of the larger trends and themes pertaining to the violence and its historical and cultural context. Accordingly, this chapter

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8 Of course, my sampling represents only those cases that could be documented, and thus is most certainly an undercount. In addition, some times and places may be relatively overrepresented because of the richness of available source materials that chronicle the violence in a particular historical moment or place. Especially noteworthy on this score are the papers and journals of John Gibbs, which detail the anti-Mormon movement in west-central Tennessee in the years 1883 and 1884. While it is true that this was a particularly conflictive locale spurred on at least in part by the tremendous personal success enjoyed by Gibbs (as outlined in the previous chapter), the day-by-day account provided by Gibbs reveals a number of relatively minor acts of intimidation and violence that I have included in my sample but that might not be documented by other missionaries, especially in the brief retrospective narratives that many of them provided for LDS newspapers in Utah at the close of their missions that forms the basis for much of the Manuscript History. Nevertheless, I am confident that the information presented in this chapter accurately reflects broad trends and patterns and is faithful to the general situation on the ground.
will proceed first with a broad overview of the conflict between Mormons and non-Mormon southerners, including a consideration of the geographic and historical setting of the violence as well as a description of the many forms it took. Recognizing that the violence was distinctly southern but was also connected to national movements, I will sketch out some of the relationships between the nationwide anti-polygamy crusade of the late 1870s and 1880s and the local violence against LDS elders and converts in the South. In addition, it is essential to consider how anti-Mormon violence drew from the long tradition of American vigilantism that had gained a special hold in the Jim Crow South even as it was dying out in the rest of the country. Finally, I will explore in detail the causes of the violence, which more than anything else will demonstrate how Mormons in the South, and particularly Mormon missionaries, were targeted primarily as seducing lechers whose false religion, and especially the unorthodox practices it inspired, made them dangerous to the purity of southern communities.

4.2 Patterns of Anti-Mormon Violence

No southern state was free from anti-Mormon violence in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Some, however, experienced more than their share of intimidation, terror, and bloodshed. Of the fourteen states in the Southern States Mission, Tennessee and Alabama were decidedly the most violent, with 63 and 57 incidents, respectively. Other states that also saw significant violence were South Carolina, North Carolina, Mississippi, Georgia, and Kentucky; whereas West Virginia, Louisiana, Florida, Maryland, Texas, and Arkansas were tame by comparison if not wholly unscathed. (See Appendix, Table 1.)

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9 The fourteen states in the Southern States Mission were Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, and West Virginia. All but nine of the 323 anti-Mormon cases I have documented can be located in a specific state.
One feature that stands out in this geographic distribution is the lack of a clear Upper-Lower South division. This regional divide has been aptly demonstrated in prominent studies of postbellum racial violence, particularly in the form of African American lynchings. For instance, in Stewart Tolnay and E. M. Beck’s historical-sociological study of southern lynching, *A Festival of Violence*, they demonstrate that the top five lynching states from 1882 to 1930—Mississippi, Georgia, Louisiana, Alabama, and Florida—all came from the Lower South. In addition, when counting state-sponsored, legal executions of African Americans (sometimes called “legal lynchings”) during the same period, they conclude that “two-thirds of all black executions between 1882 and 1930 took place in the states of the Deep South.” Although scholars generally agree that the most profitable analysis of southern violence occurs on the sub-state rather than state level, they also provide concrete evidence that in terms of racial lynching at least, the Lower South was as a rule a far more violent place than were the states of the Upper South.  

Precisely because the Upper-Lower South distinction is so generally reliable in the study of lynching, the Mormon case becomes especially interesting as an anomaly. Indeed, there is no clear divide between Upper and Lower South states when it comes to tallying anti-Mormon violence. The two leading states, Alabama and Tennessee, are prominent representatives of their respective subregions, and states that saw very little violence (West Virginia, Louisiana, Florida, Maryland, Texas, and Arkansas) are also relatively evenly split.

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10 See Stewart E. Tolnay and E. M. Beck, *A Festival of Violence: An Analysis of Southern Lynchings, 1882-1930* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1995), 100-101. Tolnay and Beck actually use the categories of “Deep South” and “Border South,” including Florida in the latter rather than the former. Because of source issues, they do not include Texas, Virginia, or Arkansas in their analysis. The very fact that his analysis is limited to two carefully chosen states, Georgia and Virginia, reveals that Fitzhugh Brundage also wrote under the widely accepted truism that the Lower South was the site of far more mob violence than the Upper South. According to his count, from 1880 to 1930 Georgia had 460 victims of lynch mobs (441 black and 19 white), whereas Virginia had 86 (70 black and 16 white). W. Fitzhugh Brundage, *Lynching in the New South: Georgia and Virginia, 1880-1930* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 262. Tolnay and Beck analyze violence on the county level, whereas Brundage divides each state in his study into distinct sub-regions.
It seems therefore that the divide between Upper and Lower South that is so persuasive in terms of analyzing racial lynching has virtually no explanatory value for anti-Mormonism.

What does seem to be the primary determining factor in which states experienced the most anti-Mormon violence was the simple aspect of where the missionaries were located. A clear correlation exists between the states most heavily proselytized by Mormon elders and those in which they were subject to the most violence. Although it is impossible to calculate exactly how many man-hours were spent missionizing in each state, my survey of the Southern States Mission Manuscript History suggests that the most heavily canvassed states were Tennessee, Alabama, Georgia, Mississippi, and the Carolinas; without exception those were also the six states with the highest number of anti-Mormon incidents. This explanation also holds true in the negative: those states that had infrequent and spotty missionary activity, such as Louisiana, Arkansas, Maryland, and Texas, witnessed correspondingly low levels of violence. One of the most remarkable examples of this phenomenon is Georgia. Climaxing with the Joseph Standing murder in 1879 but continuous throughout the late 1870s and 1880s, Georgia gained particular notoriety among the elders as being virulently anti-Mormon, so much so that in 1890 church officials pulled all missionaries from the state. They did not return until March 1898, a period of some eight years, and in the span of their absence, there was not a single reported instance of anti-Mormon violence throughout the entire state.\footnote{See Manuscript History, March 1898. Georgia was not the only state to follow this pattern. Elders had been “obliged to leave Kentucky on account of hostile sentiment” in 1883 or 1884. There are no documented instances of violence during their absence, but upon their return a few years later, the violence began again with death threats and other examples of violent intimidation. See Manuscript History, 18 Apr. 1884; 11 Aug. 1887.}

This correlation of missionary activity and anti-Mormon violence should not be construed to mean that wherever LDS missionaries preached violence necessarily followed.
Some missionaries spent their entire missions without meeting violent persecution. Others found that “generally speaking, the people are kind and hospitable.” Most elders, however, did have at least some personal experience with violent persecution to report when they arrived back in Utah after their missions. The fact that the majority of missionaries were concentrated in a handful of states means that those states witnessed the greater share of conflict. Although more rigorous statistical analyses should be performed to test my hypothesis, it seems that Mormon elders precipitated antagonism and conflict wherever they went, with little regard to the subregional variations that were present in anti-black vigilantism.

Just as anti-Mormon violence was spread throughout the South geographically, it also was chronologically diffuse, although it concentrated in certain key periods. No year passed in the last quarter of the nineteenth century without at least two cases of anti-Mormon violence somewhere in the South. Indeed, most years had a substantial number of episodes, and on average, during this period the South witnessed one anti-Mormon mobbing, or the overt threat of one, approximately every twenty-eight days, or about once a month. The heaviest years were the 1880s, spiking in 1884 and consistently averaging thirteen or more incidents per year. These levels dropped significantly during the 1890s before briefly rising again at the close of the century. (See Appendix, Figure 1.)

Because the violence was spread throughout the region, and was never the result of a systematic pogrom promoted by any one centralized organization or government, there is no single rule that explains causation in a given time or place. Even the spike in 1884, which is

12 The newspaper article reporting the return home of an Elder Smith stated, “While there are plenty of people in that State [Virginia] who are opposed in their feelings to the Latter-day Saints and their religion, their opposition does not often take that active violent shape that it does in some other portions of the South.” Manuscript History, 23 Mar. 1885.

13 Manuscript History, 30 Jan. 1881.
attributable in part to the flurry of violence against John Gibbs and his associates leading up to the Cane Creek massacre, eludes simple explanation, as it was an extremely violent year for missionaries around the mission, not just in Tennessee. What is noteworthy, however, is that the levels of violence in the South have a relatively close correlation to the intensity of the national anti-Mormon, and specifically anti-polygamy, campaign in the nation as a whole. The trends in southern anti-Mormon violence demonstrate striking parallels to those in Jan Shipps’ research analyzing American perceptions of Latter-day Saints from 1860 to 1960, in which she finds that while popular attitudes about the Latter-day Saints were consistently negative throughout the period from 1861 to 1895, “the lowest point in negative attitudes for the entire century occurred . . . between 1881 and 1885.” According to Shipps’ analysis, public opinion gradually began to improve from its nadir in the mid-1880s until the trend was moving toward more favorable perceptions by the mid-1890s.14

That the 1880s would be the low point for the Mormon image in the American mind and the high point for violence against Mormons in the southern states is not terribly surprising. Although the federal government had long been concerned about Mormon polygamy and the political and economic power of the LDS church in Utah Territory, the nation became truly serious about putting an end to the “Mormon question” in the 1880s. Although historians have disagreed over whether it was Mormon politics or polygamy (or both) that was truly the target of Congress and the courts, polygamy was certainly the

14 Jan Shipps, “From Satyr to Saint: American Perceptions of the Mormons, 1860-1960,” in Sojourner in the Promised Land: Forty Years Among the Mormons (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 51-97 (her discussion of the 1860-1895 period is on pp. 62-66). Compare her chart of public opinion on p. 63 with my chart of southern anti-Mormon violence (Appendix, Figure 1). One admittedly limited measure of the relative prominence of Mormonism in the public mind during this period is the number of articles dedicated to Mormons in the New York Times. If the Times is at all representative, the overall pattern supports the conclusion that Mormonism was a significant fixture in American public debate in the mid-1880s, then attention waned somewhat in the early- to mid-1890s before picking up again at the very end of the century. (See Appendix, Figure 2.)
burning issue in the minds of most Americans. Just at the moment when Republicans and moral reformers had tired of their efforts in the South’s reconstruction, the Supreme Court’s ruling against the Mormons’ freedom-of-religion argument in *Reynolds v. U.S.* (1879) breathed new life into a frustrated anti-polygamy campaign and sparked what has been called a “second reconstruction” in the West.

In the immediate aftermath of *Reynolds* it seemed that the whole weight of the Republican party and the reform sensibilities of many evangelical Protestants came crashing down on Mormonism. National and local presses of the 1880s were filled with anti-Mormon books, articles, essays, letters, and cartoons; missionaries in the South during the decade frequently mentioned that the press was “very hostile” and that it was a major source for their “opposition and persecution,” even going so far as to denounce the elders as

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15 Shipps argues that polygamy was used as a “bludgeon to destroy the temporal power of the church.” “From Satyr to Saint,” 65-66. Klaus Hansen similarly posits that the anti-polygamy legislation was just the most convenient way to strike at the Mormon ecclesiastical-political hierarchy, whereas Edward Lyman asserts that the Mormon practice of plural marriage was in fact the primary reason for Utah’s repeated denial for statehood. See Klaus J. Hansen, *Quest for Empire: The Political Kingdom of God and the Council of Fifty in Mormon History* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1967; reprint, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1974); Edward Leo Lyman, *Political Deliverance: The Mormon Quest for Utah Statehood* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986).

Anti-Mormon literature focused on both issues of politics and polygamy, and this division is largely the reason for the two historical camps. There were of course countless exposés of polygamy written primarily by female authors that stirred up the moral fervor of the country. Two good analyses of this literature are Givens, *Viper on the Hearth*, esp. chaps. 6-7; and Sarah Barringer Gordon, *The Mormon Question: Polygamy and Constitutional Conflict in Nineteenth-Century America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), chap. 1. But there were also treatises that argued that polygamy, though an evil and debasing system, was only a symptom of the larger problem, and that the LDS hierarchy hoped that the nation would pay attention only to polygamy and thus ignore their broader schemes. The real problem, according to these authors, was the “bloody despotism” used by the LDS church to dominate its subjects both politically and economically, and that the church represented a rival and hostile system to the U.S. government and the Constitution. For a prominent example of this argument, see C. P. Lyford, *The Mormon Problem: An Appeal to the American People* (New York: Phillips & Hunt, 1886), quote from p. 11.

The most recent scholarship harmonizes these two views, showing how the issues of polygamous family relations and the church’s political power were interpreted as two sides of the same coin of debased patriarchy, and it was the LDS hierarchy’s unrepUBLICAN form of monopolistic control over all areas of Mormon life that Congress and the courts sought to overthrow. The most outstanding example of this new scholarship is Gordon, *Mormon Question*; also see Gaines M. Foster, *Moral Reconstruction: Christian Lobbyists and the Federal Legislation of Morality, 1865-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 54-68.

16 Gordon, *Mormon Question*, chaps. 4-5, quote from p. 144.
“thieves, fiends and murderers and advocating the tarring and feathering of them.”

Congress moved quickly and firmly to keep up with national opinion and cure Mormons of their illegality, immorality, and intransigence. Mobilized by presidential encouragement and bipartisan support, the Edmunds Act in 1882 and then the Edmunds-Tucker Act in 1887 galvanized national sentiment and crushed the Mormons’ will to resist by marshaling federal power to punish polygamists in particular and the LDS church in general.

Finally, in 1890 Wilford Woodruff, the newly installed fourth president of the church, announced that the LDS church would no longer sanction plural marriage, thus putting an end to an era.

Just as national opinion of the Mormons began to improve somewhat following Woodruff’s 1890 announcement, there was also a downturn in southern anti-Mormon violence, which fell precipitously from 1889 to 1890 and remained relatively low for several years. The violence spiked again in 1899, corresponding with the national controversy surrounding the election of B. H. Roberts, an LDS General Authority who still had plural wives, to the U.S. House of Representatives. Great coalitions of Christian ministers and laypeople mobilized to protest and ultimately nullify Roberts’ election. Southerners joined

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18 The Executive Branch helped lead the charge throughout the 1880s, beginning with the administration of Rutherford Hayes, who spoke out against polygamy in his annual messages of 1879 and 1880. James Garfield took up the issue in his inaugural address, and after his assassination Chester Arthur picked up the gauntlet and made multiple speeches against polygamy and Mormon-dominated politics beginning in December 1881. Anti-polygamy sentiment was not just limited to Republican administrations, as Grover Cleveland spoke strongly against polygamy in 1885 and reported glowingly about the effects of the Edmunds-Tucker Act in 1888. See James D. Richardson, comp., A Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Presidents, 1789-1897 (Washington, DC): Published by Authority of Congress, 1899), 10 vols.; see 7:559-560; 7:605-606; 8:11; 8:58; 8:184; 8:250; 8:361-362; 8:794. The best account of the anti-polygamy politics of this period is Gordon, Mormon Question.

19 Wilford Woodruff’s September 1890 “Manifesto” announcing the official end of plural marriage is published in LDS scriptures as “Official Declaration—1,” in The Doctrine and Covenants of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Salt Lake City, UT: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1989), 291-292 (hereafter referred to as Doctrine & Covenants).
with evangelicals nationwide, and local and regional conferences passed resolutions
denouncing Roberts and warning members of Christian churches against the “damnable
heresies and pernicious practices” of Mormon missionaries, who were to be denied any
“religious recognition” or “Christian hospitality.”

While it is difficult to make direct connections between anti-Mormon rhetoric and individual cases of actual violence, it is
generally true that violence against Mormons in the South reached its highest points during
the years in which Mormonism sparked the greatest controversy throughout the nation,
particularly during the anti-polygamy crusades of the 1880s and again during the 1899-1900
debates surrounding B. H. Roberts’ election.

Violent episodes were not distributed evenly throughout the year, but rather
concentrated in the summer months. The warmer months from March through September
were the high times for violence, with July being particularly prominent, whereas the late
autumn and winter months of October through February were more calm. This general
pattern in anti-Mormon violence mirrors the broader context of racial violence in the South.
Tolnay and Beck demonstrate that summer months experienced by far the most number of
lynchings, while the winter months were considerably less violent. Mormon elders
recognized this trend, and offered their own explanations for why summer was a particularly
hot time for them. In August 1899 Donald Urie wrote that “This is the time of religious

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20 The quote comes from the Tennessee River Association, quoted in Manuscript History, 3 Mar.
Lake City: Signature Books, 1990), chaps. 22-23. A similar national furor arose over the election of Reed
Smoot to the Senate in 1903; see Kathleen Flake, The Politics of American Religious Identity: The Seating of Senator
Reed Smoot, Mormon Apostle (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004); and Foster, Moral
Reconstruction, 134-138.

21 See Tolnay and Beck, Festival of Violence, 33. As shown in Chapter Two, the weeks and months
leading up to elections (in the fall) were particularly violent in the Reconstruction South, but this changed
somewhat after Redeemer governments assumed power and African Americans gradually stopped going to the
polls. Tolnay and Beck’s analysis is based on lynchings beginning in 1882, which represents a different type of
violence than the political killings related to Reconstruction-era elections.
revivles, & this Southern blood when hot is hell, therefore we are keeping low till revivle time passes.”

Furthermore, in the days following the Cane Creek massacre (which transpired on a hot August day in 1884), John Morgan told a reporter that elders had their greatest trouble with locals “in hot weather and during the season of revivals.” After citing several examples of summertime violence, he contemplated that the warm weather made people “seem more irritable.” Even more than that, however, summertime was also revival season, which built up considerable excitement among the people and led them to “deeds of violence which they would not be guilty during the colder months and when the enthusiasm awakened by the revivals has passed away.” As a matter of self-defense, Morgan accordingly counseled the elders “not to press the proselyting as vigorously” during the summer revival season.

Revivals were indeed among the most anticipated events in the evangelical South. Although they may have been scheduled primarily in July and August because the agricultural cycle had a natural pause then, before the harvesting season began, one observer suggested that the revivals were planned for “the height of the summer heat, possibly because at this season the emotional nature of individuals is more readily attuned to religious fervor.” Revivals were the religious, social, and emotional climax of the year for most rural southerners. It was a time when they assured their commitment to Christ, either for the first time or in rededication. It was also a time when community values were reinforced by the

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23 Typescript of interview with unidentified newspaper reporter, 20 Aug. 1884, in John Hamilton Morgan Papers, Manuscripts Division, J. Willard Marriott Library, University of Utah, Salt Lake City, Utah; hereafter referred to as Morgan Papers.

communal witnessing of individual professions of repentance and devotion. The power of
the word was in full bloom, as was the cultural influence of those who wielded it, the
preachers and ministers who conducted the revivals. Even backsliders and those who
normally scoffed at evangelical mores (usually men) were drawn in by the magnetic pull of
God’s spirit working amongst the people. Revival sermons were carefully crafted to achieve
the maximized emotional response, and the altar call provided a profound moment not only
for the seeker of salvation but also for those who were validated and strengthened in their
faith by seeing others experience spiritual rebirth. The most private and intimate struggles of
the soul were thus played out for all to see, and public rites such as mass baptisms capped
the feverish pitch of the revival season.  

There is no compelling evidence that any particular revival set off a wave of anti-
Mormon violence anywhere in the South during this period. Indeed, Mormon attitudes
toward the evangelical revival season probably had as much to do with their own anti-
evangelical prejudices as any concrete connection between revivalism and violence.
However, it would not be implausible to suggest that because the revival represented the
high point of in-group identification for southern evangelicals, and did much to reinforce the
evangelical Protestant ethos of the southern mind and heart, it concomitantly represented
the moment when the community had its greatest sense of differentiation from the outside
world of the religiously unconverted, or worse, the religiously apostate. Add that to the hard
numbers that most anti-Mormon violence occurred during the summer, as well as the
statistical evidence that shows the summer months were the most prone to communal
violence in terms of lynching, and we are left with a general framework that justifies the
missionaries’ uneasiness about proselytizing in the heat of the southern summer.

25 See ibid., chap. 8.
When violence against Mormons did occur, it took a number of different forms. (See Appendix, Table 2.) The most common result of mobbing was for missionaries to be forcibly driven out of an area, whether it was a neighborhood, town, county, or even state. Sometimes this expulsion was preceded by personal violence of a beating or whipping, but more often than not it was a kind of preemptive measure, with the elders being roughed up a bit and then released without any significant bodily harm done, but with the promise that if they returned they would not be treated so munificently. Although dire threats were leveled at virtually all proselytizing elders in the southern states at some point, and some mobs did in fact kill or intend to kill LDS missionaries or members, most mobs did not use deadly force in ridding their communities of what they perceived to be the threatening and obnoxious presence of Mormons, and specifically Mormon elders. This is not to diminish in any way the very real physical suffering endured by the scores of missionaries and members who did in fact fall prey to beatings, whippings, or shootings. Nevertheless, however extensive the violence was, the situation never degenerated to the point at which it looked like the contemporaneous Jewish pogroms in eastern Europe, or even like the state-sponsored anti-Mormon campaign in Missouri in the late 1830s. Perhaps this was because the race question dominated southern culture to the near-exclusion of all else, or because Latter-day Saints in the South never possessed the same kind of political or economic power that they did in Ohio, Missouri, and Illinois. Regardless, particularly in light of the African American experience, it is evident that anti-Mormon violence, without reducing its significance or its impact on the Mormon community, could have been much worse.

As will be shown in the remainder of the chapter, with some notable exceptions, most southern anti-Mormon mobs were not driven by irrational prejudice or bloodlust, but rather by a conservative impulse to defend traditional community values and relationships.
against the intrusion of unwelcome outside persons and ideas. Acting within the vigilante
tradition, the import of their task justified the use of varying levels of violence. Although
lethal force was not ruled out and even seemed the primary option if one listened to their
belligerent rhetoric, most vigilantes were content with defending their communities with less
violent (but violent nonetheless) measures such as whipping, beating, tar and feathering, and
expelling—rather than killing—targeted offenders.

4.3 Types of Anti-Mormon Violence

The most dramatic, and sometimes deadly, moments of southern anti-Mormon
violence were those involving gunfire. There were approximately forty recorded instances
where southerners, either as individuals or in mobs, shot at Mormon elders or local church
members. How many consciously intended to kill their targets, and how many simply
wanted to scare them with a theatrical show of force, is impossible to tell. However, only
five of these shootings resulted in a killing: the murders of Joseph Standing (1879), Alma
Richards (1888), George Canova (1899), and John Dempsey (1900), and the Cane Creek
massacre (1884), in which two missionaries and two local Mormons or Mormon
sympathizers were killed. Of these, only the Standing murder and the tragedy at Cane Creek,
both detailed in the previous chapter, were mob affairs clearly connected to the victims’
religious identities. The others were murders performed by individual assailants, and it is
unclear whether they were religiously motivated: Richards, a missionary working near the
Mississippi-Alabama border, was murdered mysteriously one night, probably as part of a
bungled robbery; Canova, president of the church’s branch in Sanderson, Florida, was shot
in the dark by an unknown assailant while returning home from a church conference (no one

26 See Manuscript History, 2 Aug. 1888.
was apprehended, and no cause or motive was ever identified);\textsuperscript{27} and Dempsey was killed by a Campbellite minister as they came to blows over a personal argument, the details of which are somewhat unclear.\textsuperscript{28} Even in the Cane Creek and Joseph Standing cases, the evidence is persuasive that the respective mobs intended to intimidate and even punish the offending elders, but not necessarily to kill anyone. Had things gone differently in those two cases, there may not have been a single mob killing in the Southern States Mission.

What is remarkable is that more Mormons were not killed, given the number of mobbings that occurred and the fierce anti-Mormon spirit that pervaded so many southern communities. That the Standing and Cane Creek episodes degenerated into killing when it probably was not the mob members’ original intent suggests that the same thing could have happened in any number of the dozens of incidents when armed mobs accosted LDS missionaries. On several occasions, however, mobs certainly did shoot to kill. For instance, in February 1884, while two missionaries were seated in a church member’s home in Jones County, Mississippi, a pistol shot was fired through a crack in the wall near the chimney, the bullet “passing unpleasantly close” to Elder William Crandall’s head. This shot was followed by several more at intervals throughout the night which succeeded in “killing the dogs, knocking down the door, shooting boards off the side of the house, and tearing down the

\textsuperscript{27} See Manuscript History, 5 June 1899.

\textsuperscript{28} William Hatch says that in 1900, “Elder John Dempsey was killed by a Campbellite preacher in Eugene, Mingo County, West Virginia,” giving no other details. Hatch, \textit{There Is No Law}, 93. However, a \textit{New York Times} article about the same incident does not mention that Dempsey was a Mormon elder, but instead says that Dempsey and the preacher had been “enemies for months” originating in a snub of the preacher’s daughter for a public school teaching position. The two men came to blows, Dempsey threw a hatchet at the minister, who responded by shooting Dempsey twice with a shotgun. “Clergyman Kills a Man,” \textit{New York Times}, 18 Aug. 1900. It is curious that the \textit{Times} does not mention that Dempsey was a Mormon elder—given the climax of national sentiment about Mormons in 1900 (in connection with the B. H. Roberts case), it is improbable that the newspaper would have omitted that fact if it were true. I have been unable to independently corroborate the verity of either account, and could not find the \textit{Deseret News} source that Hatch cites.
garden fence,” but leaving no one in the house harmed.29 Two elders in Georgia also nearly
missed being hit by bullets when members of an approaching mob, led by two Baptist
ministers, fired at them with double-barreled shotguns, shredding the brush next to where
the elders were standing but leaving them unscathed. That evening the same group of armed
men hovered by the post office, waiting for the elders to come that way again, swearing that
it was their “avowed intention to murder them.”30 Numerous other instances occurred in
which elders were shot at but were luckily (or in their view, miraculously) unharmed.31

Sometimes the shooters did hit their targets, but not fatally. In December 1887,
Elders Milo Hendricks and John Tate were assaulted by three men near Irish Creek, Virginia.
Their assailants stopped the elders from going down one road, so they turned and went
down another. The attackers took a path through the woods and intercepted them again, at
which point the elders spun around to go yet another way. As they turned their backs, one
of the men fired his shotgun at them and then ran away. Both elders were hit in their legs,
Tate receiving about sixteen shots and Hendricks about eight. Five months later Tate still
required the use of a cane to walk, and was given an early release from his mission on
account of not being able to get around.32 In 1885, Elders Wiley Cragun and F. A.
Fraughton had stopped for the night near the borders of the Catawba Indian reservation in


31 The most remarkable of these failed murder attempts involved Elder John Alexander, laboring near
Adairsville, Georgia. Three masked men each shot at him from within twenty feet—the first bullet went
through his hat, the second through his open coat (grazing his watch chain), and the third missed him
completely. Alexander passed out when the firing commenced, and the mob left thinking he was dead. See
Manuscript History, 1 June 1883. For other examples, see ibid., 10 Feb. 1882; 16 Nov. 1882; 10 Feb. 1887; 15
Mar. 1888.

Sometimes vigilantes simply demonstrated ineptitude in wielding their weapons. For instance, a
Tennessee mob gave one missionary twenty lashes on the back, but not before one of his attackers had
accidentally shot a fellow mob member in the leg, “quite seriously wounding him.” Ibid., 14 Feb. 1885.

32 Ibid., 23 Dec. 1887.
South Carolina. As they settled in, an armed mob of twenty-five men materialized and demanded that they come out of the house. Cragun bolted for the back door “amid a shower of bullets,” one of which struck him in the forehead and another in his face near the chin. Although neither wound proved to be serious, his chin wound was not properly treated, and continued to trouble him long after the shooting. The assailants in all these shootings clearly meant business, and the elders all escaped deadly harm by only a matter of feet or inches.

Most assaults on missionaries in the South did not involve gunplay, but while these other mobs did not take to using potentially lethal force, they were just as intent on accomplishing their task to punish or expel the unwanted elders. One of the common punishments issued to elders was a whipping or lashing. Mobs used a variety of implements to accomplish the task, including hickory withes, halter straps, persimmon sprouts, doubled-over ropes, and of course bullwhips. Some assailants preferred beating or clubbing the missionaries. While waiting for the ferry to cross the Cumberland River, Elder Richard Shipp was suddenly grabbed by several men. Forcing him to bend over a wagon and pinning him down by the neck, arms, and legs, they pummeled Shipp with an “oak barrel stave” some fifteen to twenty times. When he refused to answer their demands for him to leave the area and not come back, they administered another fifteen or twenty blows. They stopped only when the ferryman came near, warning Shipp in the name of “the citizens of this city” not to return. The missionary’s body was “black and blue for several days,” and he was “so sore I could scarcely move.” Thankful that the beating was no worse, however, he

33 Ibid., 25 May 1885.

34 Ibid., 31 July 1879; 27 May 1893; 24 July 1884; 17 Aug. 1884; 14 July 1893; 8 Mar. 1896; 23 or 25 Mar. 1898; also see “Elders Mobbed and Whipped,” Deseret News, 5 Aug. 1893.
chalked the experience up to being “one of the ‘amusing incidents’ of missionary life in the South.”

Elders were frequently abducted from the homes of local church members or other friends. Oftentimes these abductions were done with the express purpose of whipping the elders. In 1896, Elders R. E. Caldwell and Granville Pace were taken from a house in Livingston Parish, Louisiana, after holding a meeting there. The mob of about a dozen masked men marched the elders five miles to the county line, then administered thirty-six lashes to each before sending them out of the parish with a firm command “not to return.”

While a number of kidnappings followed this general pattern, many others ended relatively peacefully, though the elders were usually forced to leave the area. For instance, Elder J. B. Reid and his companion were dragged out of a house by a mob of forty men, “all armed with shot guns and clubs.” The elders were taken to the woods, where the mob pulled their hair and repeatedly thrust gun barrels into their faces. After some debate amongst themselves, the missionaries’ captors decided to let them go unharmed, provided that they left the county. To ensure compliance, they escorted the elders to the train depot eight miles away and put them under a guard of twenty armed men until the train arrived. Reid did not put up much of a fight to stay in the area—he later admitted, “If anybody was ever glad to see a train arrive I was.”

Oftentimes a mob apprehended missionaries with the intention to do them harm, but for various reasons did not follow through. Such was the case of Elders Gordon Bills and Daniel Densley, who were seized from their beds in Laurence County, Georgia, and


36 Ibid., 5 Dec. 1896.

37 Ibid., 11 April 1889; another example is 8 Dec. 1896.
carried to a dense thicket where the mob had made preparations to hang them, “ropes and suitable trees having been selected for their nefarious purposes.” When the would-be lynching victims arrived, their abductors got in some kind of argument, and by the time they made up their mind to proceed, some friends of the elders arrived and frightened the gang so badly that they immediately fled the scene. 38 In Sumpter County, Alabama, Elder William Cowan and his companion had stopped at a home when a band of over one hundred men converged on the site. They compelled the elders to go with them as they proceeded to an old church, threatening them and making wild noises all along the way. Once they arrived at the church, the mob debated for two hours about what to do with their prey—as Cowan recalled, “Some were in favor of shooting, others were for hanging and many other Christian acts.” The elders were forced to undress, and after thus humiliating them, the mob decided simply to expel them from the county. They were escorted through a rainstorm to the county line by twenty armed men on mules before being set free, with promises that murder would be their fate if they ever came back. 39

Although forced expulsions, whippings, beatings, and threatened murder were the most common forms of violence visited upon LDS missionaries, southern mobs used any number of methods to harass, intimidate, and punish these unwanted outsiders. Elder Charles Flake had a tub of two gallons of tar dumped over his head while waiting at a train depot in Mississippi, whereas Elder Charles Bliss was given a glass of water “well seasoned” with croton oil, a strong natural purgative, while giving a public lecture at the courthouse in

38 Ibid., 1 Oct. 1880.

Columbus, Alabama. Missionaries were also showered with all sorts of projectiles, including stones, rotten eggs, ice chunks, bricks, and chairs.

Sometimes would-be mobbers were not so brave as to appear in person, and left intimidating notes instead. John Morgan, who was a missionary in Georgia before becoming president of the Southern States Mission, received several of these notes, two that were particularly ominous. On one is a hand-drawn picture of a masked man standing next to what appears to be a Mormon elder hanging from a tree, with the caption, “A charitable hint to Mormons.” The second is a handwritten note, addressed specifically to Morgan, with a sketch of two men with rifles shooting at another man in a suit (presumably Morgan). The scribbled notice that accompanies the picture is barely coherent at points, but intensely purposeful nonetheless: “Runn Morgan . . . youd Better gitt Away Thou Serpent of the Devil A Prophet of Hell.” The note threatened that unless Morgan and his converts hastened to leave the vicinity, “wee will hang you and shoot you five hundred Times.”

Morgan was unmoved, as were most other missionaries who received similarly threatening notices.

Not all anti-Mormon violence in the South was directed personally at Mormon elders. One of the common forms of violence was the destruction of LDS property, particularly church meetinghouses or other places of worship. Church buildings were

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40 Manuscript History, 16 May 1884; 12 Apr. 1880.


42 Both notices can be found in the John Morgan Correspondence, 1863-1881, LDS Archives.

43 Other examples are in Manuscript History, 12 Dec. 1881; 5 Sep. 1883; 18 Nov. 1884; 24 Nov. 1886; 13 Jan. 1887.
reduced to ashes in Tennessee, Alabama, West Virginia, South Carolina, and Kentucky.\footnote{See letter from John Gibbs to his brother George Gibbs, 5 May 1884; reprinted in “An Interesting Experience,” 
Deseret Evening News, 21 May 1884; Manuscript History, 4 May 1882; 25 June 1884; 23 Dec. 1884; 11 Aug. 1895; 4 July 1897; 1 Dec. 1898.} In Fleming County, Kentucky, the mob took an innovative approach, surrounding an LDS church with guards then demolishing it with sledgehammers, saws, axes, and firearms. They said they chose to tear down the church rather than burn it so that the Saints could not collect insurance on the damage.\footnote{Manuscript History, 20 July 1899.} On several occasions mobs became so irate with the Mormon presence in their community that they went so far as to destroy local schoolhouses that the Saints used for their Sunday meetings.\footnote{See ibid., 26 June 1884; 17 Oct. 1887; Dec. 1893.} In May 1883 a school in Wayne County, Tennessee, was burned down when it was announced to be the site of the West Tennessee Conference’s annual meetings. The presiding elders then asked a local member if they could use his mill for the meetings but he declined, citing fear that his property would end up in flames as well.\footnote{Ibid., 27 May 1883.}

In addition to direct violence against Mormon missionaries and property, there was also structural violence against Mormons in the South, highlighted by a spate of anti-polygamy legislation passed in Tennessee, Georgia, and Mississippi. Although none of these laws specifically mentioned Mormons by name, their implications in attempting to curtail the spread of Mormonism were clear. The Georgia state legislature was the first to pass such a law, doing so in 1881. The provisions of the statute imposed a fine and imprisonment of two to four years upon anyone “who either publicly or privately is found to uphold, or sustain polygamy or bigamy.” The wording of the bill was vague enough so as to leave many to believe that it went so far as to outlaw the preaching of Mormonism, since the religion
was construed to be “based on polygamy.”\footnote{Letter from Elder John W. Taylor, Felton, Haralson Co., GA, to Pres. John Taylor, in Manuscript History, 3 Sep. 1881.} As outlined in the previous chapter, Tennessee legislators followed suit by passing their own anti-polygamy bill in the aftermath of the Cane Creek Massacre. The third southern state to pass anti-polygamy legislation was Mississippi. The law was rarely enforced, however, as the one time in which elders were brought before a judge for preaching polygamy, the charge was changed to vagrancy and they were thrown in jail for two days and nights and then released.\footnote{Manuscript History, 5 Aug. 1888.} Like Jim Crow laws, these anti-polygamy bills simultaneously revealed and reinforced a deep-seated southern antipathy toward Mormonism, and especially the doctrine of plural marriage. However, unlike laws aimed at stripping African Americans of their rights, these statutes had little or no bearing on the actual preaching or practice of Mormonism in the South. As John Morgan noted in a letter to a member of the church’s Quorum of Twelve Apostles, the various laws did not “interfere with our labors in the least,” but simply represented “a trap that we have to guard against.”\footnote{Letter from John Morgan, Chattanooga, TN, to Pres. Franklin D. Richards, Salt Lake City, in Morgan Papers. Nancy Cott argues that in the last third of the nineteenth century, the nation became increasingly interested in defining the state’s role and interest in marriage, even to the point of “obsession.” Accordingly, most states throughout the country passed legislation concerning marriage practices, including restrictions on polygamy and interracial marriage. See Nancy F. Cott, “Giving Character to Our Whole Civil Polity: Marriage and the Public Order in the Late Nineteenth Century,” in \textit{U.S. History as Women’s History: New Feminist Essays}, ed. Linda K. Kerber, Alice Kessler-Harris, and Kathryn Kish Sklar (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 107-124. The southern anti-polygamy statutes can thus be seen as responding to a number of simultaneous historical processes, both local and national.}

Although most anti-Mormonism in the South targeted the missionaries, a significant amount of intimidation and violence was also visited upon local residents who were either converts to the church or simply friendly toward it. The most notable example of this was documented in the previous chapter, when in the months following the violence at Cane
Creek, Tennessee, mob law descended on the region and all Mormon families and sympathizers were driven from their homes. The Cane Creek case, while the most dramatic, was not singular. A few years earlier, at the same time that Joseph Standing was killed in northern Georgia, the small community of Latter-day Saints in Brasstown, North Carolina, became the targets of a wave of vigilantism. In July 1879, local vigilantes dragged six men and women out of their homes and “cruelly whipped and clubbed them,” ordering them to leave the state within four weeks or risk further violence or death. Furthermore, the mob warned these Latter-day Saints that if any of them gave shelter to any missionaries “it should be at the risk of their lives.” The church members acted quickly to leave the area, trying to sell their property but getting so little in return that they had virtually no money with which to emigrate west. Having been thus robbed by the “mobbers and their colleagues,” at the end of the allotted four weeks they simply traveled across the Georgia state line and joined with the branch of the church in Fannin County until resources could be provided for them to move on. A missionary who observed the entire set of affairs noted that upon arriving in Georgia the exiles from North Carolina were “in a destitute condition; some have scarcely nothing.”

Sometimes individual families became the targets of anti-Mormon vigilantism. The J. R. and Jane Henson family of Decatur County, Tennessee, who were baptized by Mormon elders in November 1883, became the subjects of repeated mob harassment and aggression for several months, from April to September 1884, so much that they were forced to leave their home to save their lives. The trouble began almost comically in mid-April. Two elders were holding a meeting at the Henson home when several local roughs, “being under the influence of liquor,” tottered in and out of the meeting making abusive comments, scaring

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51 Manuscript History, 29 Aug. 1879; also see ibid., 20 July 1879.
the women with a large black snake, throwing rocks at the house, yelling, and occasionally wandering up to the preaching stand. They left when the meeting ended, with no real harm done other than the service being interrupted. The next Saturday, three of the same men came to the Henson home, again “all intoxicated,” and “pretended to want to make amends for the way they had acted at the meeting.” They asked for forgiveness of Jane and her daughters, and then queried where they could find J. R. His wife said he was in the field working, but as they left to find him she became suspicious and took a shorter route to warn him of their approach. When they found him, they “appeared very friendly,” apologized, and talked for upward of an hour. As the conversation ended and J. R. turned to go to the house, however, one of them suddenly pulled out his pistol and fired three shots at him. He missed, partly because Jane threw herself at him as he shot. The Hensons fled into the house, and after their assailants left, J. R. sought out a warrant. The three men were arrested by the sheriff and jailed, seemingly ending the story.

However, for reasons that are not entirely clear, the conflict continued and actually escalated in early August, when a mob surrounded the Henson home and began firing into it. Astonishingly, only one of the daughters, Laura, was hit, being slightly wounded in the temple. The ruffians threatened to drag J. R. out of the house and kill him, but knowing he had guns inside, none of them seemed particularly eager to be the first one in the door, and they eventually dispersed. Before they left, however, they warned J. R. to leave the area within five days or they would come back and kill him. Not wanting to press his luck any further, especially after hearing about the deadly mob attack at nearby Cane Creek the next day, J. R. fled the state and went to Jonesboro, Arkansas. His family stayed behind, hoping things would settle down, but instead, a month later, Jane received a note telling her to leave
within ten days or her home would be burned down “with herself in the flames.” She gathered her family and what possessions she could, and left to join her husband.52

Time and time again, southern vigilantes used violence and intimidation to impose their will, purging their communities of longtime residents whose only offense was to join with the Mormons.53 With southern Latter-day Saints generally too scattered and powerless to mount an effective defense against such terrorist activities, they became subject to the whim of mob rule, especially where local law enforcement was unable or unwilling to protect them.

The experiences of these converts suggest that the very act of joining the LDS church was seen by their opponents as a significant act of social disruption. They did not simply join a new church when they accepted the elders’ teaching and were baptized—they adopted an entirely new worldview and social situation. Their very membership in the most vilified of indigenous nineteenth-century American religions meant that they had chosen to alienate themselves from the religious and cultural orthodoxies of their upbringing. In becoming Mormon, these converts not only accepted a new faith but also intrinsically rejected at least part of their former faith commitments and social networks. While the explicit purpose of their Mormon baptism was to forsake sin and seek salvation, what these converts had implicitly done was renounce a key part of what it meant to be a southerner and thereby a mainstream member of their community—therefore in at least some sense they had exiled themselves even before the mobs forced them from their homes. Conversions to Mormonism thus disrupted individual lives, strained or broke family relationships, and to some extent unraveled the fabric of communities around the South.

52 Manuscript History, 19 April, 21 May, 9 Aug., 10 Sep. 1884.

53 See ibid., 5 Apr. 1884; 23 Dec. 1884.
Whether or not converts were ever visited by mobs, they were aware of the possibility of vigilante action against them. That possibility meant that the converts knew they were seen to have transgressed the boundaries of community orthodoxy and could be punished accordingly.\(^5\)

It was not just Mormon missionaries and converts that were subject to persecution, but also anyone who overtly sympathized with them. Particularly poignant was the story of William Metz. A prominent farmer in Calhoun County, West Virginia, Metz sheltered, supported, and championed the Mormon elders who worked there, although he never chose to join their church. Despite his efforts the elders were banished from the county, after which point Metz’s life became “one continual round of abuse and persecution.” One night in early spring 1888 his house and barn were burned to the ground, he and his family barely escaping the fire. He received numerous letters and notices ordering to leave the area, threatening violence if he did not. Metz sold the farm he lived on, with its home and barn in ashes, and bought another one several miles away. He came to check on the new house the night before he was to move in, and found it in flames as well. Following that he bought yet another piece of property but shortly thereafter “found only an ash heap” in place of the home, accompanied by yet another warning to leave. In addition to the repeated destruction of his property, which led to his financial ruin, his cattle were poisoned, his wells choked, and his fences torn down. His children were the subjects of taunts and scorn from their

\(^5\) My own family history reveals some of these tensions. The Dotson, Quinn, and Bagwell families (all members of my ancestry) all attended the same Baptist church and held various positions of some importance within the congregation. In 1880 eleven members of the congregation (including several of my ancestors) were “lost to the Mormon church,” and in 1896 several others were excommunicated for also being baptized as Latter-day Saints. In converting to Mormonism, these men and women consciously severed ties with their community church, which had played such a central role in their families’ lives for three generations. Several of their relatives remained at Bethlehem Baptist, at least some of whom essentially disowned their Mormon family members. Some of the Mormon converts were baptized before dawn because they feared a violent mob attack. See Elizabeth Buckner Rester, “A History of Bethlehem Baptist Church” (July 1994), online at www.rootsweb.com/~mschocta/BethlehemChurch.html; and interview of Lena Lillian Quinn Later by Matthew Mason, 1 May 2004, Sandy, UT.
former playmates, and his wife became “almost deranged” over the sustained persecution. The general feeling was that because of the strong anti-Mormon sentiment in the area, even if Metz was able to prove who the arsonists were, they would be allowed to go free.\textsuperscript{55}

Mormons and their friends were not always passive victims of southern mobbing. In Lawrence County, Tennessee, elders were saved from a serious beating (or potentially worse) by the intercession of their friends, especially some women who gave the would-be assailants a thorough “tongue lashing.” The missionaries were actually forced to restrain their protectors from “doing violence to the mob,” who then chose to retreat rather than press the issue.\textsuperscript{56} Another remarkable example of resistance against anti-Mormon vigilantism occurred in northern Alabama in March 1886. The elders had recently made some converts there, and were meeting with other families who were receptive to their message. One night a “committee of citizens” surrounded the home of Hiram Harrison, who was not a member of the church but who frequently housed the elders. When the vigilantes did not find the missionaries, who were staying elsewhere that night, they notified Harrison that he must not ever let the elders stay at his house again. Harrison apparently did not take kindly to the threats leveled against him and his family. The next morning he bought a gun and ammunition, and his son scribbled out the following note: “Come to our house another night and some of you will eat breakfast in hell next morning.” The younger Harrison then shot a pistol ball through the note and attached it to the gatepost of one of the men they


\textsuperscript{56} Manuscript History, 23 June 1884.
suspected was part of the previous night’s mob. No more trouble was reported at the Harrison home.\textsuperscript{57}

Concerted resistance efforts like these were rare. Whereas southern blacks were sometimes able to ward off white aggression during Reconstruction by arming themselves and forming self-defense organizations, Mormons never enjoyed the kind of presence in any one locale that would allow them to organize for an armed defense.\textsuperscript{58} Mormons were particularly vulnerable targets because they had so few allies; by the 1880s virtually the entire nation had turned against them, and they learned that no recourse could be found in courts, legislatures, or the executive branch, on both state and federal levels. Much like anti-black lynch mobs, anti-Mormon vigilantes knew they could act with relative impunity, and oftentimes did not even bother to disguise themselves as they conducted their raids. Furthermore, mob behavior was positively reinforced every time it successfully induced Mormon elders or converts to leave a community, thus legitimizing the logic that the ends of community preservation justified the means of extralegal violence.

The pragmatic Mormon response to all this southern violence was to lay low or avoid open confrontation, as suggested by LDS leaders in the South during particularly violent times.\textsuperscript{59} The cosmological response was an appeal to the persecution and martyrdom

\textsuperscript{57} Ibid., 8 March 1886.


tradition that had a history as long as the religion itself, casting themselves as innocent lambs before the slaughter who would ultimately be vindicated by the judgments of a just God avenging His people.\textsuperscript{60} The pragmatic approach almost certainly kept the violence from becoming even more widespread, as many missionaries avoided conflict whenever possible; the cosmological approach allowed the Latter-day Saints, both as individuals and as a group, to cope with the violence they did receive, focusing on how their immediate plight would lead to ultimate glory and redemption. Mormons believed that opposition was a sign of success, that the “mobocratic feeling against the Elders is very strong [because of] the fact that the brethren have succeeded in making some converts.”\textsuperscript{61} While a non-Mormon newspaper despaired that “Mormonism flourishes under forcible opposition,” Latter-day Saints adopted a martyr’s view that the concerted efforts of violent southerners to stamp them out would only further their cause and hasten their triumph.\textsuperscript{62}

4.4 Anti-Mormonism and the Tradition of Southern Vigilantism

Although contemporary Latter-day Saints were more interested in fashioning southern anti-Mormon violence in cosmological rather than historical terms, in hindsight it is apparent that much of the violence they experienced can be placed within a broader context of American, and particularly southern vigilantism. Violence as an effective means of


\textsuperscript{62} “Mormon Missionaries,” (Chattanooga, TN) \textit{Times}, 18 Feb. 1889, in Manuscript History, 18 Feb. 1889. Laurence Moore argues that an oppositional mentality, or a persecution complex, was an essential aspect of nineteenth-century Mormonism that helped the new religion to define itself and ultimately succeed; see \textit{Religious Outsiders}, 34-35.
conservative social control and community preservation has been a long-standing tradition in America, stretching back to the Revolutionary era. Public opinion has generally supported limited vigilantism, especially from the position of acting extralegally in the short-run on behalf of ultimately upholding the law and preserving social order. Rather than being a radical force of social change, most American vigilante violence was “dedicated to the defense of traditional structure and values of the local community against the threatening presence of the criminal and the disorderly.”

While this category included real criminals such as horse thieves and outlaw bands, vigilantes also targeted “subversive” groups such as Mormons, Catholics, and Masons, who were deemed to undermine democratic institutions or community values. Although the destruction of these groups and their ideologies would have been a desired goal in the long-term future, the proximate objective for local vigilantes was simply to rid the community of their noxious and potentially dangerous influence. As Latter-day Saint missionaries and the gospel message they preached most certainly represented a challenge to southern beliefs and folkways, they were repeatedly dealt with in the time-honored tradition of local vigilante activism.

Obviously there can be no uniform profile that fits all cases, but we can describe, however imprecisely, the “typical” vigilante movement. While some vigilante groups

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numbered in the thousands, most groups consisted of between a dozen and perhaps a few hundred members. Some groups appeared spontaneously, but especially larger groups were often extremely well organized, with a constitution or manifesto that stated their objectives and which their members would subscribe to before any action was taken. Most groups came together only temporarily and disbanded once they had accomplished their stated purpose; the Ku Klux Klan and other permanent and semi-permanent organizations represented exceptions rather than the rule. Vigilantism characteristically sprouted where regular law enforcement was either absent, ineffective, or too costly. Especially by the late nineteenth century such violence was primarily limited to rural areas, as cities had developed increasingly efficient police forces that monopolized the use of violence to control the social order. The common perception is that mobs were composed of the dregs of society, but in fact they were often made up of middling farmers or workers who had some stake in the community. However, the leadership of vigilante movements, especially the larger and more organized variety, was frequently made up of a cross-section of community elites, who had a particular interest in maintaining the status quo and who used their influence to ensure that the violence would in the end preserve and reinforce the existing social order. Finally, mobs were almost always selective in their target groups. Social violence was not a spasmodic manifestation of irrational fury and fear, but rather a calculated action to enhance the social, cultural, political, or economic standing of those who participated, at the expense of those targeted. While the mob was often rallied with emotional pleas, and the act of violence itself was an intense emotional and psychological experience, at its root vigilantism was typically a highly ordered and rational phenomenon.65

65 The general insights in this paragraph represent a distillation of the conclusions of multiple scholars. See Brown, Strain of Violence, esp. chap. 4; Grimsted, “Rioting in Its Jacksonian Setting”; Feldberg, Turbulent
Anti-Mormon vigilantism in the South followed these general patterns very closely. The fact that Mormons were a religious group made their experience somewhat exceptional, but southern mobs followed well-established patterns in dealing with Mormon elders and converts as they would with a whole range of other undesirables. As was common with vigilantism across the nation, there were a significant number of instances in which mass meetings were held and resolutions passed before any action was taken against LDS missionaries. These meetings had a very democratic element to them, with open debate and votes taken before any action was decided upon. Thus, those who punished or drove out Mormon elders frequently did so in the name of or with the explicit blessing of the community, acting in the name of the common good. Most meetings similarly ended with the passing of resolutions urging the elders to leave. One example came in York County, South Carolina, where citizens called an “indignation meeting,” where they adopted resolutions demanding that the elders leave the region. No timetable was given, but they were urged to “depart in peace before the indignation of our people becomes uncontrollable and they do them bodily injury.” The elders did not evacuate the area, as it was one of the more fruitful proselytizing fields in the entire mission. Another meeting was called by the leading citizens of York County two years later, in August 1884, commanding the elders to “vacate the state and to return no more among us.” This time, a deadline of five days was given, and if they chose not to obey the warning, they would suffer “the consequences to

disobedience.” The order ominously concluded, “We are going to be rid of you.”

The resolutions from these citizens’ meetings were hardly empty threats, as York County proved to be one of the most violent anti-Mormon counties throughout the South throughout the 1880s.

As was common in other cases of American vigilantism, many participants in anti-Mormon actions were notable for their social respectability. Although there were numerous instances when Mormons were accosted by men who were little more than common ruffians, there were also a significant number of cases in which the most respectable institutions and members of society were mobilized to oppose Mormonism, even endorsing violence if necessary in doing so. Anti-Mormon mobs originated in such reputable places as local granges and debating societies, and were often mobilized by “prominent citizens” who argued against Mormons in the name of civilization and refinement.

Over the years Latter-day Saints learned to be ambivalent about the role of government officials and law enforcement authorities. On the one hand they knew that there were some officials—including a handful of judges, congressmen, and senators—who

66 Manuscript History, 21 Aug. 1882, Aug. 1884; other examples are ibid., 12 June 1878; 6 Oct. 1886.

67 With nine documented episodes of anti-Mormon violence, all in the 1880s, York County was statistically the most violent county in the South. It was also among the most notorious Ku Klux Klan counties, so there was already a significant tradition of local vigilantism in the area when Mormon missionaries arrived. See Jerry Lee West, *The Reconstruction Ku Klux Klan in York County, South Carolina, 1865-1877* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co., 2002); Trelease, *White Terror*, 362.

68 See Manuscript History, 23 Dec. 1881; 18 Apr. 1882; 25 Sep. 1882; and *Alabama Baptist*, 27 Apr. 1882. In his extensive research on lynching in the New South, Fitzhugh Brundage finds ample support that many southern mobs during this time were led by “the best citizens” of the community. For instance, he documents mobs led by, respectively, a former judge and prominent local politician, a railroad auditor, a manager of the local ice company, an accountant, the manager of a local hotel, and the president of an insurance company. See Brundage, *Lynching in the New South*, 38. Richard Brown also asserts that vigilante movements were often led by the “social and economic elite of an area,” including politicians, judges and other law enforcement officials, wealthy businessmen, and prominent writers. See Brown, *Strain of Violence*, 120.
made efforts to protect Mormon interests, both on the local and national level.⁶⁹ On the other hand, most government and law enforcement officials tended to side with the anti-Mormons. Authorities were often complicit in the violence out of sheer apathy or unwillingness to intervene, and in some cases they actively participated in anti-Mormon vigilantism. The most prominent example of this came in 1886, when Rufus Cobb, president of the local iron works and former governor of Alabama (from 1878 to 1882), led a mob of 150 men against a Mormon elder and threatened him with death if he continued to preach and hold public meetings.⁷⁰ The leadership of the Southern States Mission frequently appealed to state authorities to help enforce the law and bring vigilantes to justice, which in most cases brought only cool indifference or at best elicited congenial but shallow statements of sympathy, often ending in the declaration that these were local matters that

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⁶⁹ For local officials who aided Mormons, even if it was just in fulfilling their duty to bring vigilantes to justice, see Manuscript History, 28 Feb. 1882; 21 May 1884; 26 Oct. 1884; 13 July 1885; 31 July 1892; 13 Dec. 1896; 24 Apr. 1897.

Among many southern politicians at the national level there was a strand of sympathy for the Mormon situation, if not necessarily the Mormon faith, which came from southerners’ experience with a heavy-handed federal government that imposed itself on what they saw as local matters. Indeed, for nearly twenty years after the Civil War there was something of a political alliance between southerners and Mormons based on a states’ rights or popular sovereignty ideology. This coalition fell apart in the mid-1880s, when any alliance with Mormon interests became politically poisonous. See Gordon, *The Mormon Question*, 82, 151.

Before the mid-1880s, many southern senators and congressmen voted against anti-polygamy legislation, a fact that was often brought up by their opponents on the campaign trail but appeared not to be too much of an albatross. For instance, Thomas Williams, a Representative from Alabama, defended his vote against the Edmunds Bill of 1882 and said he would do it again; he handily defeated his opponent to retain his seat in the House. See Manuscript History, 17 Oct. 1882. For other references to southern politicians and southerners who opposed the Edmunds Bill, see Manuscript History, 4 Jan. 1879; 10 Oct. 1879; 23 Nov. 1882; and letter from John Morgan, Nashville, to John Taylor, 20 April 1882, in Morgan Papers.

⁷⁰ Manuscript History, 23 Sep. 1886. Rufus Cobb is described as “a perfect exemplar of a New South Democrat.” He was trained in the law, served as an officer in the Confederate army, and worked for the railroad and iron industries following the war. His administration as governor was marked by tax reductions and the slimming of government (if not fiscal responsibility and integrity), a debate over the state’s administration of the convict lease system, moderate increases in government regulation of the railroads, and the founding of Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute. See Robert David Ward, “Rufus W. Cobb, 1878-1882,” in *Alabama Governors: A Political History of the State*, ed. Samuel L. Webb and Margaret E. Armbrester (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2001), 106-109, quote from p. 107.

Another example of anti-Mormon hostility from local authorities was a Haversham County, Georgia, judge who reportedly declared that “if the mob would kill the ‘Mormon’ Elders he would clear the perpetrators of the deed for 25 cents apiece.” Manuscript History, 4 Mar. 1882.
state officials had no authority over. For the most part, then, Mormons in the South could count on either indifference or opposition from local elites.

While all manner of community elites participated in anti-Mormon activities, it was the evangelical Protestant clergy who were blamed by Mormons as the group most responsible for the bitter spirit against them. In their persecution narratives, newspaper articles, and personal correspondence, Latter-day Saints certainly overemphasized the complicity of ministers in anti-Mormon violence. Nevertheless, the mobilization of the evangelical establishment against Mormonism in the 1880s, both in the South and in the nation more generally, suggests that elders in the South were not entirely fabricating the claim, even if they delighted in revealing the un-Christian behavior of the “insidious and adulterous priests” who made up the Protestant clergy. The clergy’s stringent opposition to Mormonism was often expressed through various publications, with names like *The Mormon Monster* and *The Mormon Problem*. Some, such as the members of the Tennessee Baptist Convention, even passed formal resolutions that all pastors should warn their congregants of “this pernicious system” and then prepared a “Catechism on Mormonism” to teach their members how to counter its spread. The *Alabama Baptist*, the denomination’s chief organ in that state, did not openly call for violence against Mormons, but left no doubt about how it felt about them, referring to Latter-day Saints as “blasphemous,” “open defiers of the laws of God and man alike,” and “hyenas of society,” and calling Mormonism a “monster of

71 See Manuscript History, 26 Nov. 1884; Dec. 1889; Nov. 1896; 5 Dec. 1896.

72 Ibid., 3 Sep. 1881.

vice,” “the most repulsive of all false religions,” and “the fiend of lust and crime set up under the garb of religion.”

Individual ministers, regardless of their denomination, took these general sentiments even further. Some pastors stood in the pulpit and “advocated mobbing, hanging, and other violent measures” to put an end to the Mormon menace. On at least fifty occasions, members of the Protestant religious establishment were directly involved in southern anti-Mormon vigilantism, moving beyond rhetoric and actually organizing or leading violent efforts to punish or expel Mormon elders. The most extreme example of this was the Cane Creek massacre, in which the vigilante band that attacked the Condor farm was led by local Methodist preacher David Hinson (who was also killed in the melee), but there were several others. Clerical opposition to Mormonism crossed denominational lines, and featured participation from Methodist, Freewill Baptist, Hardshell Baptist, Cumberland Presbyterian, and Campbellite ministers alike. Methodists and Baptists were by far the most active, but they also represented the vast majority of southern evangelicals, and so their involvement was probably simply proportional to their numbers. It should be emphasized that the majority of anti-Mormon mob actions were not in fact directly spearheaded by evangelical Christian ministers. Nonetheless, the clergy’s vocal opposition to Mormon influence in the

74 “Mormonism,” *Alabama Baptist*, 19 June 1879; “Is a Community Safe When Mormon Elders are Allowed to Inhabit It?” ibid., 17 Nov. 1887; ibid., 28 Aug. 1879; “Falsest of Prophets,” ibid., 10 June 1886; and ibid., 2 Mar. 1882.


77 See Manuscript History, 1 Apr. 1879; 3 Apr. 1879; 15 May 1879; 15 June 1879; 8 Sep. 1881; 23 Dec. 1881.
South, the occasional minister that did lead anti-Mormon mobs, and the Latter-day Saints’
general resentment toward and competition with evangelical Protestants, all combined to
convince Mormons that they were victims of a sustained campaign of persecution inspired
and organized by the Protestant establishment.

Southern anti-Mormon violence not only displayed many of the broad characteristics
of American vigilantism, but also had a distinctly southern flavor in that many of the
attackers clearly drew inspiration from, or were former members of, the Ku Klux Klan. On
multiple occasions elders reported being assaulted by members of the “K.K.K.,” “Ku Klux
combination,” or “Ku Klux gang.” Church members in Tennessee were terrorized by
vigilantes wearing “the garb of ku-klux,” and in South Carolina missionaries were assaulted
by a mob led by “an old Ku Klux leader.”

Strictly speaking, it is an anachronism to speak
of Mormons being attacked by the Ku Klux Klan in the late 1870s or 1880s, as the
paramilitary organization had been outlawed and effectively disbanded by federal legislation
and military enforcement beginning in 1871.

It should be noted that being “ku kluxed” was a shorthand reference to being victimized by any
secretive paramilitary group in the South, not necessary just the actual Ku Klux Klan. Even explicit references
to the “Ku Klux Klan” by contemporaries can be misleading. Although there was an actual Ku Klux Klan
constituted in Tennessee in 1866 that spread throughout the South, the Klan’s name came to serve as an
umbrella term for a variety of secret vigilante and paramilitary bands throughout the postbellum South. Thus,
several local organizations were placed under the broad rubric of the Klan, but in fact had their own names,
such as the White Brotherhood, the Invisible Empire, the Constitutional Union Guard, the Knights of the
White Camelia, the Swamp Fox Rangers, the Seymour Knights, the Innocents, the Knights of the Black Cross,
and Heggie’s Scouts. Hahn, A Nation Under Our Feet, 267.

Following the wave of Klan violence that terrorized southern blacks and undermined the rule of
law throughout the Reconstruction South, in 1870 Congress passed the Enforcement Act, followed by the
strictest 1871 Ku Klux Act, which for the first time in American history made individuals who committed
certain crimes punishable under federal law. The law was enforced by earnest prosecution particularly in North
Carolina and Mississippi, and by federal military occupation of parts of South Carolina (including York
County). Although the number of convictions paled in comparison to the actual number of violent acts
committed by Klan members, “enforcement” proved generally successful, breaking the Klan’s back and

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78 See Manuscript History, 12 June 1878; 16 Nov. 1882; 31 Oct. 1884; 25 May 1885; 13 June 1887; 17
June 1887; and typescript of Morgan journal, 1 Oct. 1877 and 14 Nov. 1877 entries, in Morgan Papers. The
vigilantes who instituted mob rule in Lewis and Hickman Counties after the Cane Creek massacre were also
described as wearing clothing reminiscent of the Klan; see Nashville Banner, 21 Aug. 1884 and 17 Oct. 1884.
Also see handwritten note to “Elder Morgan” from “K K K,” in Morgan Correspondence.

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“Klan” violence and anti-Mormon vigilantism in 1882, when an LDS family in Tennessee who had been subjected to what they dubbed a “Ku Klux outrage” went to a federal commissioner in Nashville seeking prosecution. The family was referred back to state officials for redress, with the clear message that even if anti-Mormon crimes looked like Klan violence, and even if they were committed by men who had former Klan ties, they did not qualify as a federal offense under the provisions of the Ku Klux Act.\(^ {80}\) While the Klan was technically disbanded after the early 1870s, and anti-Mormon violence was not prosecutable under federal anti-Klan statutes, the fact remains that the Klan left a “continuing legacy of violence” in the postbellum South, casting a long shadow that influenced vigilante actions against not just African Americans but also Mormons and, as we shall see in the next chapter, Jews.\(^ {81}\)

Southerners were virtually unanimous in expressing their disregard for the federal imposition of authority as constituted in the Ku Klux Act. After federal troops left the South according to the Compromise of 1877, however, southerners became somewhat less defensive about some of their institutions, and began an internal debate (albeit an often tepid one) over the merits of the violence that plagued their region. Anti-lynching campaigns sprung up across the South, although they emerged at different times and advanced at varying paces, even developing competing arguments to achieve the same goal of increased 

\(^{80}\) Manuscript History, 16 Nov. 1882. The Klan Act of 1871 made only certain crimes punishable under federal law. These included conspiracies “to deprive citizens of the right to vote, hold office, serve on juries, and enjoy the equal protection of the laws” (Foner, *Reconstruction*, 454-455). The record does not make it clear, but the Mormons may have tried making a case under the last provision (equal protection). The law was primarily applied to Klan depredations against African Americans; even so, by 1882 it was only intermittently enforced.

\(^{81}\) Quote from Trelease, *White Terror*, 420.
legislation and more stringent punishments against perpetrators of extralegal mob violence.\textsuperscript{82}

While most of their discussions centered on the race issue, it was in this context that southerners also debated the efficacy and appropriateness of using violence to rid their communities and their region of the Mormon menace. As with race relations, there were both “radical” voices that considered violence to be the primary means of keeping the South pure, and a “conservative” voice arguing that mob violence was unacceptable because it fostered disrespect for the law and disrupted the stability of the social order.\textsuperscript{83}

The hundreds of acts of violence against Mormon elders and converts spoke for themselves, in that many rural southerners asserted through their actions that violence, or the very real threat of it, was indeed the most powerful and effective cleansing agent they had available to them. There were, to be sure, voices supporting this position. The \textit{Lauderdale (Ala.) News} was incredulous that any “respectable people” would “permit these contemptible whelps [i.e. Mormon elders] to roam at will through their neighborhood, scattering immorality and discord.” The recommended solution was to “Decorate them with tar and feathers,” or better yet, “ornament a tree with seven Latter-day saints.” The best way to stop “this ‘Mormon’ business,” according to the article, was the “Georgia method,” an apparent reference to Joseph Standing’s murder.\textsuperscript{84} The \textit{Greenville (SC) Weekly News} likewise warned that “The Mormon Elder must go from this region; he must go in a


\textsuperscript{83} See Brundage, \textit{Lynching in the New South}, 192; the categories of “Radical,” “Conservative,” and “Liberal” are developed in Joel Williamson, \textit{The Crucible of Race: Black/White Relations in the American South since Emancipation} (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984).

\textsuperscript{84} Quoted in Manuscript History, 7 Apr. 1884.
hurry. If he insists on staying his visit will be made very permanent, excessively quiet, and satisfactory to everybody except the Elder.  

In the midst of these “radical” calls for violence, there also emerged a “conservative” opinion that as bad as Mormonism was, violence was not the way to approach it. For one thing, the argument went, violent efforts to suppress Mormonism may have been immediately effective, but in the long run the only effect of “killing the Elders” was that it “strengthened the church.” The more prominent rebuttal to extralegal violence was a law-and-order argument. After an incident in Georgia in which two missionaries had been forcibly expelled from the county and the woman of the house where they had been staying was shot in the jaw, tearing off the left side of her face, southern newspapers expressed their disregard for mob action. The Atlanta Constitution admitted that Mormonism was a “despised sect” and called the elders’ work “distasteful,” but it argued that lynch law was even a greater threat to the stability of society. The Chattanooga Times was even stronger in its denunciation, calling the attacks on the Mormon elders “un-American and cowardly.”

A related argument was that mob law was simply uncivilized. Usually one of the more strident voices against Mormon influence in the South, the Alabama Baptist admitted that the Cane Creek Massacre was “a shame to our civilization.” (Lest it appear soft, the article then declared that “Mormonism itself is a shame and should be wiped out, indeed, it should have been throttled long ago.”) The Meridian (Miss.) Mercury similarly denounced Mormonism as “a repugnant religion,” but simultaneously asserted that “the shot gun is not

85 Quoted in ibid., 31 Dec. 1885.
88 Alabama Baptist, 28 Aug. 1884.
the proper instrument among civilized men to repel it with.”\textsuperscript{89} The Atlanta Constitution, which was among the most prominent voices of the pro-business, law-and-order New South, agreed that “The shotgun, of course, is a remedy, but it is a very brutal one—not less brutal certainly than Mormonism, but too brutal to be employed by those who claim to be civilized.”\textsuperscript{90}

None of these newspapers were particularly sympathetic to Mormonism per se—indeed, all of them went out of their way to denounce the religion and its practitioners—but they approached anti-Mormon violence in the typical fashion that southern conservatives would approach racial violence, focusing less on the victimized community and primarily considering instead the moral and social detriment to the white Protestant majority, and the social order in general. Mormons were quick to embrace these and other denunciations of mob law, even if they recognized that the welfare of their religion was not necessarily foremost in the minds of their temporary allies. For instance, in 1899 Governor Allen Candler of Georgia took a strong stand on vigilantism, publicly declaring that “We must do away with the mob. We must re-enthrone the law.” Although his address specifically talked about protecting “the lives and liberties of all of the law abiding negroes in Georgia,” the president of the Southern States Mission, Benjamin Rich, seized the opportunity and met with the governor, who gave his assurances that the perpetrators in anti-Mormon mobbings would be brought to justice.\textsuperscript{91}

The anti-Mormon campaign in the South thus followed the patterns of both a broad American and a distinctly southern vigilantism, from the typical organization and makeup of

\textsuperscript{89} Quoted in Manuscript History, 28 Aug. 1884.

\textsuperscript{90} Quoted in ibid., 22 July 1883.

\textsuperscript{91} Ibid., 31 July 1899.
anti-Mormon mobs to middle-class calls to end the violence in the name of civilization and social order. What remains to be explored are the specific causes of southern anti-Mormonism. Although this conflict was clearly situated in the contexts of nineteenth-century American vigilantism and the national anti-polygamy crusade, a fuller analysis of the proximate causes of anti-Mormon violence in the South will not only enhance our understanding of the violence as a distinctly southern phenomenon, but also help us consider the multiple religious dimensions of that violence.

4.5 The Causes of Southern Anti-Mormon Violence

In 1889, a report emerged about a secret organization of young men in northeast Alabama being “rapidly though cautiously formed to fight Mormonism” in the South. The group was so secret—or perhaps so small—that “in several towns not a soul outside its membership is aware that there is such an organization.” The underground band called themselves “The Friends of Right,” and their stated purpose was to stop the spread of Mormonism in southern communities. Their primary means of opposing Mormon proselytizing would be to flood a community with information about the “poisonous nature” of Mormonism, “physically, morally, and socially.” They professed that overt violence would be resorted to only “in case of great need,” but vowed that if a Mormon missionary would not willingly leave a town after being so urged, he would be “assisted to depart.”

Regarding their origins, the group told the story that two years previous, an unnamed Mormon elder came through the area and began preaching. One of his first converts was Myra Hutton, the daughter of a small farmer, who was described as “rather pretty, unusually intelligent, and a great favorite.” At the time of her first acquaintance with the Mormon elder, Hutton was engaged to be married to a young man named Huston. However, upon
being converted the young girl left behind her budding romance and her family as she emigrated to Utah at the behest of the elders. Huston was naturally upset, and became virtually deranged when he heard that his former fiancée had married a Mormon (assumedly a polygamist). In what seemed to be a reprise of Shakespearean tragedy, the girl, who soon grew “disgusted” with Mormonism in Utah, fled back to her native Alabama, only to discover that her former lover had committed suicide in his grief, which in turn led her to insanity. This chain of events spurred the brothers of the erstwhile lovers to join together to fight the further invasion of Mormonism, and out of their determination sprang the Friends of Right.  

92 Leslie M. Mann, “Deviltry of Mormons,” The (Tucson, AZ) Star (8 Feb. 1889); quoted in Manuscript History, 8 Feb. 1889.

There is no independent evidence confirming the existence of an organization called the Friends of Right. Whether the story is true and the covert band actually existed, or whether the whole thing was simply salacious rumor concocted to sell newspapers, it is significant as an indicator of the some of the prevailing myths and fears that dominated southerners’ thinking about Mormonism, and begins to explain the violent lengths they went to in order to expel Mormon elders from their midst. Latter-day Saint missionaries were widely seen as transient outsiders who imported heterodox religious beliefs and disrupted family ties and communities. Most seriously, however, they were perceived to be sexual predators who seduced young women and lured them away to their polygamous harems in the West. Although of a different type than the “black beast rapist” who supposedly forced himself on unwilling white women, the image of the Mormon seducer tapped into many of the same fears that captivated southern white men in the late nineteenth century and provided the rationale for hundreds of lynchings. The violence that targeted Mormon elders
in the South was therefore not only a socially conservative defense of community from the intrusion of outsiders, but it was also very much a reflection of late nineteenth-century cultural ideals in which the protection of innocent and helpless white women from those who would take advantage of them represented a central defining point of southern manhood. These sexually and culturally rooted tensions were further reified and deepened by religious conflict—on the one hand, southern Protestants felt compelled to protect themselves from the danger of “bad” religion, whereas Mormons portrayed themselves as the saints of God being persecuted for doing nothing more than bringing light into the darkness.

Southerners often painted a picture of Mormon missionaries as “bad, low men” who went about their work in secret, and this combination of strangeness and stealth automatically made them suspect.93 Historian Edward Ayers has argued that one of the features common to many lynching victims was that they were newcomers, strangers, or vagrants, with little or no established reputation in a neighborhood and no one to speak up for them if they got in trouble.94 Rene Girard, the prominent literary critic and theorist of violence, posits that communities often seek out precisely such marginal characters to vent their fears on. These strangers, who are not fully integrated into the social landscape, “can easily be disposed of,” and thus represent “a ‘sacrificeable’ victim” that allows for community frustrations to be released through the enactment of violence without a high risk of vengeance or retaliation.95 The fact that the vast majority of Mormon elders were not


native southerners, and that none of them were members of local communities or established social networks, was the first strike against them.

Latter-day Saint missionaries were portrayed not just as outsiders, however, but also as deceptive agents of degradation, “emissaries of hell.”

96 A North Carolina newspaper described how missionaries, when they first arrived in a new area, went around to all the homes simply asking for a meal or a drink of water, in this way getting to know the women, after which “the weaker of these are selected as victims.”

97 In Georgia the elders supposedly relied primarily on making “nocturnal calls,” a “stealthy” technique that insured that “intelligent people are seldom aware of their presence.”

98 A Tennessean penned similar comments about Mormon proselytizing techniques: “Lion-like they den themselves during the day, and at the approach of night go forth in search of prey until the dawn of day, then sneak off to their hold and plan and set snares for others.”

99 Although missionaries did in fact often hold meetings in the late evening or early morning hours, precisely to avoid potential trouble, the images of them as nocturnal predators represented tropes used to make the elders seem strange and mysterious and therefore dangerous.

Southern elites and townsfolk were further convinced of the “lowness” of the Mormon missionaries’ character by observing the kinds of people they targeted with their preaching. Newspapers frequently commented that the elders worked only among the “ignorant and vicious.” Their success came as they worked among the “ignorant country people” and “simple-minded” folk in rural areas “who, for want of knowledge, are beguiled

96 “Is a Community Safe When Mormon Elders Are Allowed to Inhabit It?” Alabama Baptist, 17 Nov. 1887.

97 Quoted in Manuscript History, 22 July 1883.

98 Quoted in ibid., 16 Aug. 1883.

99 Quoted in ibid., 18 March 1883.
into their nefarious snares.” According to their antagonists, the elders consciously preferred the “piney woods, where the people are poor and illiterate,” to more urban areas, “where people have access to books, schools and newspapers.” Indeed, those who observed that the missionaries worked primarily in “the mountain districts and localities removed from the influence of the enlightenment of cities or towns” were for the most part correct. The vast majority of missionaries in the South labored principally in rural areas, avoiding cities whenever possible. Although the headquarters of the Southern States Mission was in Chattanooga, most of the other major cities of the South were entirely vacant of Mormon missionary activity. When John Gibbs and Williams Jones were assigned to deliver a series of lectures on Mormonism in the “principle cities, and County seats” of the South in 1884, it was a novelty in the mission’s history. The fact that the lecture tour was in most regards a failure confirmed the Mormons’ collective attitude that they would fare better in the countryside.

In letters to his wife about the tour, Elder Gibbs revealed the two major reservations that missionaries had about cities. First, they believed that the cities were more violent and dangerous than rural districts. Gibbs, who had seen his share of intimidation and violence in the small towns and hamlets where he had spent most of his mission, admitted that his “greatest fears” were in going to the “large cities,” as he “expect[ed] some bad treatment among them.” In retrospect these fears were unfounded, as southern cities were relatively tame bastions of law and order compared to rural areas where law enforcement was less

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103 Letter from John Gibbs, Centreville, TN, to Louisa Gibbs, 21 April 1884, in Gibbs Collection.
present and more informal (and thus more given to vigilantism). Not only most anti-Mormon violence but also most southern violence in general occurred in the countryside, ironically making rural areas more, not less, of a threat to the missionaries’ personal safety.\footnote{104} The second reason that Mormon elders preferred rural to urban fields of labor was precisely what the newspapers pointed out—city residents presumably possessed higher levels of culture and education, which most missionaries were personally intimidated by and saw as an impediment to their work. Most Mormon missionaries, like the majority of other nineteenth-century Americans, came from rural backgrounds, and were somewhat suspicious of and intimidated by city life. Part of their feeling was a kind of Jeffersonian critique of the less noble existence that city-dwellers lived, but for Gibbs and many others, there was also a sense of inferiority to the refinement and education that cities represented.\footnote{105} In addition, there was a strong sense among the missionaries, reaching back to scriptural precedents, that success would be better found among the humbler folk of the backwoods than among the rich and proud urban sophisticates. Nevertheless, while the elders saw their rural ministry as a pragmatic decision to maximize success and personal security (half of which proved true), many middle-class and elite southerners saw Mormon proselytizing patterns as an indication that they had something to hide, and thus equated their failure to approach the cities with the degraded quality of their religion.

It was, no doubt, the Mormons’ religion that initially set them apart and qualified them for such rough treatment. Throughout the South missionaries were accosted on account of their religious identity. Mormonism was seen as a colossal fraud and a seditious

\footnote{104} See Brundage, \textit{Lynching in the New South}, 159; Vandal, \textit{Rethinking Southern Violence}, 25; Tolnay and Beck, \textit{A Festival of Violence}.  

\footnote{105} See letter from John Gibbs to Louisa Gibbs, no date or place, in Gibbs Collection, in which he confides that he felt more comfortable among “the back-woods folks” than among the “refined, educated people” of larger towns and cities.
danger. As one Alabama mob put it in a threatening notice to Elder James Lisonbee, the Mormon religion was not only “the worst Delusion that has ever been practiced on a civilised People,” but also “The most deadly Engine that could be plied against civil and Religious liberty and the most dangerous to our Republic.” 106 Although most mobs were not exactly well versed in the finer points of Mormon theology, they knew they didn’t like it. When given the chance, missionaries would often ask their attackers what was so offensive about them that they became subjected to violence. As he was being whipped, Elder Joseph Parry asked “why [he] had to submit to such a cruel indignity,” and the only answer he received was, “you’re a Mormon and preach . . . principles of the Gospel that we don’t believe in.” 107 A group of elders in Tennessee were assaulted for teaching “doctrines that were got up by Joe Smith, and doctrines that are contrary to the laws of the U.S.” 108 Other southern mobs variously described LDS doctrine as “false,” “baneful,” “corrupt,” “wickedness,” “heresies,” “poisonous,” “rotten,” and “d--- rotten.” 109

On the surface, statements like these suggest that southern mobs held deep theological or doctrinal grudges against the Mormons. Indeed, LDS theology was profoundly contrary to the evangelical Protestantism that most southerners subscribed to. However, with the notable exception of plural marriage, which will be discussed below, not a single instance is recorded in which anti-Mormon vigilantes expressed disagreement with any specific Mormon doctrine that diverged from traditional evangelical belief—no mention is made of the “wickedness” of such distinctive core LDS tenets as continuing revelation

106 Notice copied into Lisonbee mission diary, 13 Feb. 1877, in James Thompson Lisonbee Correspondence, in LDS Church Archives.

107 Manuscript History, 29 Aug. 1879.

108 Ibid., 23 June 1884.

through modern prophets and apostles, the Book of Mormon, restored priesthood authority, plurality of gods, temple worship, eternal family relationships, and so forth. When grievances more specific than “false doctrine” were elicited, they invariably centered on Mormon character or practice, not Mormon belief. Several mobs, for instance, mentioned vengeance for the 1857 Mountain Meadows Massacre—where Mormons and Native Americans combined to slaughter virtually an entire company of emigrants, many of them southerners—as one of their primary motivations. Other attempts to impugn the Mormon character were more spurious. For example, in 1884 an anti-Mormon mob was organized in Alabama after a minister told his congregation that the Mormons had assassinated President Garfield, and later that year ministers in Georgia told their congregants that Mormon elders were the causes of the cyclones that had recently swept through the area. There were of course innumerable verbal contests between the missionaries and local ministers or laypeople over the superiority of Protestant versus Mormon doctrine, but these were conducted more as public or private debates and did not lead to violence. Theological disagreements were at the root of Mormon practices that southerners objected to; however, anti-Mormon violence did not stem from doctrinal quarrels but rather the way Mormon tenets played out in lived experience. Latter-day Saints’ heterodox beliefs placed them outside the religious mainstream, but the real-life manifestations of those beliefs turned them into targets for violence.

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111 Manuscript History, 26 June 1884, 18 Nov. 1884.
One LDS doctrine-turned-practice that raised southerners’ ire was the “gathering.” As discussed in the previous chapter, Joseph Smith had received multiple revelations recapitulating the biblical theme that God’s people should leave wicked Babylon and gather to righteous Zion. Christians and Jews had traditionally interpreted such passages in spiritual terms, but Smith’s revelations made clear that while Latter-day Saints were indeed commanded to avoid the “wickedness” of “spiritual Babylon,” there was also very much a temporal or spatial quality to the injunction, and they were to “gather . . . from among the nations . . . unto the land of Zion.”¹¹² While earlier gatherings took place in Missouri, Ohio, and Illinois, in the last half of the nineteenth century the doctrine impelled emigration to Utah or its surrounding colonies; most southern converts were directed to the San Luis Valley in Colorado. Many newly baptized members in the South were too poor to make the trek to Zion, and others seemed uninterested or otherwise unable. However, in the last two decades of the century thousands of southerners did heed the call to gather and left their friends, families, and homes to move west. A New York Times article on the progress of Mormonism (despite its “evident immorality” and “viciousness”) in the South reported that from October 1880 to September 1888, 2292 southerners were baptized Mormon, and of those, 1169 had emigrated to Utah, Idaho, Colorado, and Arizona, leaving “about 1,000 misguided ones remaining within our gates.”¹¹³ My own statistical sample drawn from Southern States Mission records covers a slightly later but overlapping period, February 1885 to August 1893, and reveals 2065 converts and 1063 emigrants (see Appendix, Table 3). In both sample sets, the percentage of emigrants versus total converts was almost exactly the

¹¹² Doctrine & Covenants 133:7-9, 14; see also Jeremiah 51:6; Revelation 18:2-5. Of course, Zionist Jews in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries also gave these biblical passages a distinct spatial interpretation.

same: 51.0% for the data in the New York Times article, and 51.5% for the mission-generated statistics.

These numbers demonstrate that while many southern converts did indeed emigrate to the West after joining the church, at least an equal number stayed. Even those who left did so in a trickle rather than a rush, usually less than two hundred people per year, so there never was a mass exodus of Mormon converts from the South as some critics accused. The Atlanta Constitution, while at times fomenting rumors of a mass Mormon exodus, accurately informed its readers that the Mormons’ “policy is not, as has been supposed, to take all their converts to Utah. The truth is, they take only a small proportion of them.” Nevertheless, the images of Mormon converts heading west by the trainload were sufficient to convince many observers that the elders’ mission was not just to persuade people to accept a set of doctrines but to sweep them out of the South and into Mormon strongholds in the West. One newspaper report argued that LDS missionaries went “among the people more as emigration agents than as emissaries of the new religion.” They wooed them with talk of Utah being a veritable Garden of Eden, a land of milk and honey, thus capitalizing on the dreams of southerners, like northerners after the Civil War, to move to more fertile lands further west and capitalize on the opportunities that awaited them there. The missionaries, it was said, “[took] advantage of this feeling” and induced people more to emigrate than to change faith, knowing once they moved to Mormon territory the migrants would be in their clutches.116


Some southerners were concerned about the economic impact of Mormon converts leaving a region already desperate for white labor in the post-Reconstruction agricultural economy.\(^{117}\) For most, however, emigration was problematic as a social and moral issue. A *New York Times* report on Mormon proselytizing in the South aptly articulated this sentiment: “The circle at many a Southern hearthstone is incomplete because of the influence of these emissaries of an outlawed dogma. Neighborhoods have been divided and communities shaken.”\(^{118}\) The problem of emigration was that it broke up the family—the fundamental unit of Victorian society—and disrupted the networks of kin and community that were so vital to the southern social order.

Related to but overshadowing the threat of emigration from the “Southern hearthstone” was the distress, sometimes reaching the point of paranoid frenzy, over the abomination of Mormon plural marriage and the depravity that attended it. Sometimes the two issues were connected, as in the *New York Herald* article that explained the grounds of Joseph Standing’s murder by reporting that because of his influence, “There were many men and women who had become converts to the polygamic faith, and had expressed a determination to leave for Utah.”\(^{119}\) They may not actually practice polygamy here in the

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\(^{117}\) The post-Reconstruction South was starved for white labor, particularly in rural areas. The shortage became so acute in some areas that business and civic leaders actively pursued campaigns to induce immigration from Europe (particularly the nations of northwest Europe). See Rowland T. Berthoff, “Southern Attitudes Toward Immigration, 1865-1914,” *Journal of Southern History* 17 (Aug. 1951): 328-360. Although European immigration to the South was never more than a drop compared to the North, these pro-immigration efforts reveal how precious white labor was in the New South, and how the emigration of white Mormon converts could be seen as a serious blow to the economic interests of communities hit hardest by Mormon proselytizing. Although this fear of Mormon gathering causing a labor shortage was never a widespread view, it did reflect the ways that conversion was sometimes perceived not only as an affront to religious orthodoxy but also as a very real and substantial threat to the social and economic fabric of southern communities.

\(^{118}\) “Mormonism in the South,” *New York Times*, 1 Feb. 1889.

\(^{119}\) “The Georgia Murderers to be Brought to Justice,” *Deseret Evening News*, 23 July 1879; reprint of article from *New York Herald*.
South, the argument went, but once they convert our wives and daughters, they will steal them away to their polygamous harems in Utah.

Of course, the antipathy toward Mormon “plurality” had a life of its own, entirely separate from the emigration question. The fact that after the official pronouncement of plural marriage in 1852 the Mormons never practiced it outside of the Mormon corridor in the West was irrelevant, both to vociferous anti-Mormons nationwide and to local southerners encountering Mormon missionaries in their communities. In the nationwide moral crusade that demonized not just practicing polygamists but the entire Latter-day Saint religion and its adherents, even non-polygamous Mormons were presumed guilty of moral degeneracy. Mormon men in particular were “monstrous fanatics” and “hyenas of society” who preyed upon unsuspecting women to fulfill their lustful desires.\(^{120}\) Polygamy, as the editors of the *Alabama Baptist* asserted, led to “great depravation of manners,” to “pauperism,” and to “scandals of the grossest character.”\(^{121}\) Indeed, more than any other thing, it was fears about polygamy that made Mormons, and especially Mormon missionaries, so monstrous in southerners’ eyes, and which qualified them to be targets of violence when they entered into southern homes and communities. In the words of a note handed to Elder Francis MacDonald by a mob of some fifty men in 1879, Mormons were “An adulterous Set” who should remove themselves from the South, and if not, their “punishment Shall be great.”\(^{122}\) Although not all three hundred-plus cases of southern violence against Latter-day Saints can be directly linked to fears about polygamy, certainly


\(^{121}\) “Mormonism, Prohibition, Sunday Laws,” *Alabama Baptist*, 6 Nov. 1884.

\(^{122}\) Note dated 23 Aug. 1879, quoted in Francis MacDonald, “The History and Journal of Francis MacDonald – 1851-1887,” pp. 33-34, in LDS Church Archives.
the poisoned atmosphere that precipitated such instances found its major roots in the moral outrage over Mormon sexual and marital practices.

Latter-day Saints repeatedly emphasized that they did not actually practice plural marriage anywhere in the South, and in fact did not even preach it as a core component of the faith in their proselytizing efforts. Non-Mormon sources throughout the South independently corroborated these claims. The Atlanta Constitution said in the aftermath of the Joseph Standing tragedy that Mormon elders “have not preached licentious doctrines at all, but have kept the polygamic feature of their religion in the background.” The Alabama Baptist begrudgingly admitted that the elders “carefully concealed their polygamous views in their sermons as well as conversation,” although the author of the article was certain that such a course was a plan “carefully laid to entrap the unthinking.” Even the Yorkville Enquirer, one of the fire-eating anti-Mormon publications in South Carolina, made a similar concession: “True, the elders in York county may not preach this doctrine, but the fact remains that it is a cardinal principal of the Mormon faith.” Non-Mormons could concede that Mormons did not talk much about polygamy, but that the missionaries “carefully concealed” their polygamous intentions in the guise of teaching religion made them all the more sinister in the southern mind.

Southerners were not so afraid that Latter-day Saints would institute polygamy in the South in any kind of substantial way. However, they were terrified that Mormon elders, through their guile and secret machinations, would seduce southern women, steal them from


their homes (and their husbands and fathers), and whisk them away to their polygamous brothels in Salt Lake City. The problem was therefore not so much what Mormons did when they were in the South—where one non-Mormon report described them as “models of morality”\textsuperscript{125}—but rather what they did with women once they managed to get them out of the South. Of course, there were the occasional stories that they baptized their converts naked or traveled from town to town impregnating women, but these were clearly salacious attempts at character assassination rather than actual reporting of the facts.\textsuperscript{126} What southerners were really worried about was that the Mormon elders were essentially kidnapping southern women and taking them to Utah “to make worse than slaves of them,” robbing them of the virtue of their womanhood by prostituting them under the guise of plural marriage. The existence of these converted women was described as being “a condition of life far worse than slavery every developed,” a statement that had special resonance less than a generation after emancipation. Every baptism of a southern woman or girl thus served to “aid and abet the crime of bigamy,” and led the daughters of the South down the path of degradation to the ultimate end of “a life of misery and shame.”\textsuperscript{127} It was not the doctrines of salvation offered by the elders that stirred up the violent fury of southern men, but rather the insidious threat they posed to the sanctity of the southern home and the chastity of southern women, which were the cornerstones of society that southern men had taken it upon themselves to protect at all costs.


\textsuperscript{127} “Letter from Hickory Grove,” \textit{Yorkville Enquirer}, 25 Sep. 1889; \textit{Alabama Baptist}, 3 July 1879, 3 Nov. 1881; \textit{Deseret Evening News}, 9 Aug. 1879. In late nineteenth-century popular fiction, plural wives were commonly portrayed as being under a special kind of bondage, and were sometimes even described as being white slaves; see Givens, \textit{Viper on the Hearth}, 146-149.
It is common for historians to discuss the exalted place that white womanhood held in the southern mind, and the centrality of protecting that womanhood in southern men’s conceptions about honor and manliness. This is typically—and appropriately—seen through the lens of race relations. Since antebellum times, southern men had defined their roles as men to a substantial degree by the protection they provided for virtuous white women. This self-appointed role was elevated to even greater importance in the postbellum period, as emancipation meant that blacks were free to roam the countryside at will. Whites described blacks in various ways, but one of the common tropes was that they were uncivilized, savage brutes who would, without proper controls, descend into orgies of rape and murder, targeting in particular the innocent white women they lusted after. Particularly in the late 1880s and 1890s lynching thus became a primary means of controlling this “black beast rapist” and preventing him from carrying out his malevolent designs. Violence was always seen as justifiable in defense of home and hearth, and according to the “rape complex” that pervaded the late nineteenth-century South there was no more important function for white men to perform than to protect their wives and daughters from the beasts that stalked about them. The fact that this myth of the black rapist was indeed a myth, and was proven to be so by contemporaries such as Ida B. Wells and many other black intellectuals in her day, did not alter the fact that white men were quite willing to use the most extreme measures of violence to fulfill their manly duty to protect the chastity of their women and the sanctity of their homes. Historian Jacquelyn Dowd Hall described this

128 Diane Miller Sommerville persuasively demonstrates that “antebellum white southerners were not nearly as consumed by fears of black men raping white women as their postbellum descendents were.” See Sommerville, “The Rape Myth in the Old South Reconsidered,” Journal of Southern History 61 (Aug. 1995): 481-518, quote from p. 485. Martha Hodes makes a similar argument, especially showing that there was a certain toleration, if not tolerance, for illicit sexual relationships between white women and black men in the slave South because “such liaisons did not sufficiently threaten the social or political hierarchy—as they would after emancipation.” White Women, Black Men: Illicit Sex in the Nineteenth-Century South (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1997), 6.
entire complex of beliefs and practices as a “southern obsession with rape,” which spun the
myth of the black rapist into “pathological proportions,” thus engendering a “hysterical
counterattack from the spokesmen of sexual orthodoxy.” Regardless of its grounding in
fact, the myth became preeminent in the southern white mind, and the assault on white
womanhood became the principal explanation and justification for a generation of male
lynchers.\textsuperscript{129}

Although to my knowledge no one at the time made the explicit connection between
Mormon polygamy and black rape, in retrospect the rhetoric and fears about the lustful,
lecherous, seducing Mormon elders on the hunt for sexual prey was remarkably similar to
the images and language commonly used to describe African American men. Ben Tillman of
South Carolina spoke on the Senate floor about how white women in the South were in
constant danger from the black beasts roaming the countryside seeking their next victim,
their “breasts pulsating with the desire to sate their passions upon white maidens and
wives.”\textsuperscript{130} In comparable fashion, an article in the \textit{Alabama Baptist} declared that the “great
and ultimate object” of Mormon men was “Polygamy and a Harem with the faithful,” and

\textsuperscript{129} Quote from Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, \textit{Revolt Against Chivalry: Jessie Daniel Ames and the Women’s
Campaign Against Lynching} (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979), 147-148. The concept of the “rape
complex” is discussed in W. J. Cash, \textit{The Mind of the South} (New York: Knopf, 1941), 114-117. The literature
on southern manhood, its conceptions of the virtue of white womanhood, and the relationship of the myth of
the black rapist to southern violence, is voluminous. Some of the key works besides Cash and Hall include
Bertram Wyatt-Brown, \textit{Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South} (New York: Oxford University Press,
1982); Joel Williamson, \textit{A Rage for Order: Black/White Relations in the American South Since Emancipation} (New
York: Oxford University Press, 1986), chap. 3; Brundage, \textit{Lynching in the New South}, 58-72; Tolnay and Beck, \textit{A
Festival of Violence}, 46-50, 96; Gail Bederman, \textit{Manliness & Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the
United States, 1880-1917} (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), esp. chaps. 2 and 4; Glenda Elizabeth
Gilmore, \textit{Gender & Jim Crow: Women and the Politics of White Supremacy in North Carolina, 1896-1920} (Chapel Hill:
University of North Carolina Press, 1996), chaps. 3-4; Martha Hodes, \textit{White Women, Black Men}; Laura F.
Edwards, \textit{Gendered Strife & Confusion: The Political Culture of Reconstruction} (Urbana: University of Illinois Press,
1997), chaps. 5-6; Wyatt-Brown, \textit{The Shaping of Southern Culture: Honor, Grace, and War, 1760s-1890s} (Chapel Hill:
University of North Carolina Press, 2001); Philip Dray, \textit{At the Hands of Persons Unknown: The Lynching of Black
America} (New York: Random House, 2002), esp. chap. 3.

\textsuperscript{130} Quoted in Williamson, \textit{A Rage for Order}, 84.
that they were “bent upon gratifying their unbridled lust to their hearts’ content.”

Although there was a distinction in that the black rapist forced himself on unwilling white women while the Mormon seducer charmed them with his wiles, southerners used emotionally charged rhetoric to depict these dual threats to southern womanhood.

It would be overstating the point to draw a direct comparison between the Mormon and the African American experience in the postbellum South—indeed, the levels of violence were so disparate as to render the two virtually incomparable. However, the nature of the language and imagery used to describe each group, and the violent passion employed to keep them out of southern homes and away from southern white women, was parallel if not entirely similar. The Mormon case thus provides another piece of evidence for the centrality of the home and the virtue of womanhood in southerners’ conceptions of themselves. The fact that actual instances of blacks raping white women were relatively rare is of only theoretical importance when considering the profound fear that such an image generated in the southern white mind, and the ways that fear was translated into action. Similarly, the fact that Mormons never attempted to introduce polygamy into the South, and that almost without exception the conduct of LDS missionaries in regards to southern women was without reproach, failed to effectively counter the dominant myth of the lustful Mormon elder come to steal away the daughters of the South and take them away into mountain harems, never to be seen again. In this sense, Mormon missionaries may well have served as the white counterparts to the mythical black rapist. Their small numbers, white skins, and the subtle but key distinction between a seducer and rapist help explain why Mormon elders were not killed more often or subjected to the grisly and highly sexualized torture common in spectacle lynchings and associated with the southern defense of

womanhood. Nevertheless, the widespread violence against Mormons attested to the fact that many southern men simply would not tolerate such an insidious threat in their communities or in their homes.
CHAPTER FIVE

STRANGERS IN EDEN:
THE PARADOX OF THE SOUTHERN JEWISH EXPERIENCE

We have often noticed that no section of the country is freer from bigotry and sectarian hatred than the South. Its citizens have ever been as ready to recognize patriotism and ability in Jew as in Christian.
-- (Cincinnati) American Israelite, 27 May 1887

It takes perseverance to hate Jews and Negroes and Catholics all at the same time.
-- Hodding Carter

5.1 Overview

Jews in the South found themselves in an ambivalent position. On the one hand, they hailed the South as a land of freedom and opportunity, far better than eastern Europe with its pogroms, or even the urban North with its slum conditions. For the most part they were a welcome segment of society, some families tracing their southern roots back to colonial days and most having loyally supported and fought for the Confederacy. As a group, Jews enjoyed a mutually beneficial and upwardly mobile relationship with the New South economy; because persecution in Europe had prohibited them from owning land, most Jewish immigrants had little or no experience with agriculture but could fill an important niche selling goods and extending credit to white and black southern farmers.

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Embracing the opportunities afforded them in their new homeland, most Jews were conscientious not to stick out or disrupt the status quo, and made acculturation to regional mores and customs a virtual article of faith. This included religious adaptation, manifest largely (but not exclusively) in the emergence of a network of Reform congregations and rabbis in cities and towns throughout the region. As Jews made efforts to be good southerners, for the most part their Protestant neighbors, particularly in urban settings and in the middle and upper classes, received them as such.

On the other hand, Jews in the South could not entirely escape antisemitic discrimination and even violence. There clearly existed a pervasive, low-level antisemitism in southern culture that periodically became exacerbated by xenophobia, nativism, and economic downturns. Thus, when southerners needed a scapegoat, they were able to draw on the usually latent symbols and attitudes of traditional antisemitism, including the images of the merciless Christ-killer and the avaricious Shylock. These images were most famously employed by Tom Watson during his days of demagoguery, but the very fact that his vitriolic rhetoric resonated so well with a certain segment of the southern populace suggests that the antisemitic themes he employed were neither new nor foreign to his listeners. Of course, southerners scapegoated Jews for their troubles much less frequently than they did African Americans—so much so that the comparison is hardly apt. Jews also experienced far less overt prejudice and violence than they did in Europe, and overall were subject to less vigilantism than Mormons in the late nineteenth-century South. Regardless of their comparative good fortunes, the threat of losing their tolerated and even integrated status constantly hung over their heads and occasionally became real. When southern Jews acculturated to southern customs so as to blend in with the majority, it was done partly out of a desire to be accepted but also out of very real fears of the consequences of rejection,
which sometimes translated into violence. This anti-Jewish violence typically took the form of robbery, murder, or forcible expulsion. Other than brief and localized stretches, however, there was nothing that approached a systematic and extended antisemitic campaign in the South, even during the era of the Leo Frank lynching in 1915 and the concomitant rise of the second Ku Klux Klan, which marked the low point of southern Jewish-gentile relations.

What we should not do is assess the southern Jewish experience as an either-or proposition, arguing either that the South was a virtual garden spot of tolerance, or that it was a den of bigotry and prejudice fueled by religious fanaticism. An absolute argument for southern toleration would slight the numerous cases of violence that actually did include a significant component of antisemitism, but assertions of a virulent antisemitism pervading the South would similarly obscure the generally friendly relations that marked most Jew-gentile interactions in the region. Although he would not argue that antisemitism was necessarily the dominant motif the South, Leonard Dinnerstein represents the more pessimistic view of Jewish-gentile relations, blaming widespread southern antisemitism on the narrowness of “Protestant fundamentalist faith.”² Howard Rabinowitz, on the other hand, argues for the tolerant South. Although he acknowledges episodic moments of prejudice and violence, he goes so far as to suggest that the South may have been “the least anti-Semitic region in the nation,” and certainly “no worse than the norm.”³

In my research I have uncovered a greater number of cases of anti-Jewish violence than Rabinowitz considered, which raises questions about whether his estimation was perhaps overly sanguine. Although the violence I document was more occasional and

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³ Rabinowitz, “Nativism, Bigotry, and Anti-Semitism in the South,” 446-447.
sporadic than in either the African American or Mormon cases, taken as a composite it does
darken the fairly optimistic portrayal that Rabinowitz provides. I argue that although a
relatively high degree of acceptance and tolerance typically characterized the daily
interactions of most southern Jews with their Christian neighbors, discrimination and
violence were realities that they could not ignore, nor should historians. Therefore, in order
to fully appreciate the complexity of the southern Jewish experience, we must seek to
understand not only its broadly congenial contours but also its darker underside of violent
rejection.

This chapter will begin with a case study of one particularly brutal incident of anti-
Jewish violence, the vicious murder of Jewish peddler Abraham Surasky in rural South
Carolina, which I use to introduce some of the themes I will develop later on. A brief
recapitulation of southern Jewish history from colonial times through the Civil War will
follow, in order to situate the ambivalence of the postbellum Jewish experience in a longer
perspective. I then consider the positive aspects of Jewish-gentile relations in the late
nineteenth-century South, demonstrating the goodwill that dominated most of their
interactions.

The most original contribution of this chapter is my subsequent description and
analysis of twenty-six cases of violence against Jews during Reconstruction and the New
South, many of which I have freshly discovered. I make no claim that these twenty-six
episodes were all the anti-Jewish violence that occurred or even that they constitute a
representative sample—my analysis here is substantially weighted toward particularly
grievous acts (especially murders) that were more likely to receive newspaper coverage, and
is much thinner on lesser acts of violence that would have gone unreported. Unlike the
Mormon case, which relied heavily on a centralized and highly reliable compilation of
southern LDS historical sources, my search for Jewish records was necessarily more patchy, requiring the selective perusal of Jewish periodicals and visits to several archives with significant Jewish holdings in New York and throughout the South. There are unquestionably many cases (perhaps an equal or greater number) that I was not able to find or document; thus, future scholars will surely build upon the number of incidents I treat here. Nevertheless, my research still represents the largest collection of cases of anti-Jewish violence in the postbellum South heretofore assembled. While my claims are therefore subject to revision in light of further evidence, they are based on a broader sample of cases than previous scholars have used.

With this group of cases of anti-Jewish violence as the focus, this chapter examines how individuals’ economic roles, particularly when influenced or determined by their group identity, can trigger violence that is justified with an appeal to religious and ethnic stereotypes. The majority of violence that Jews received was related to their respective roles as peddlers, merchants, and storeowners in the postbellum southern economy. In most cases, peddlers and merchants were robbed and sometimes killed, and storeowners were intimidated and expelled from town, not because of their explicit religious affiliations but rather because they had cash in their pockets, wares in their cart, or credit extended to hopelessly indebted farmers. Even if attacks were not directly motivated by religious antagonism per se, however, religion still played a key role in validating the violence, in terms of the perpetrators’ cultural understanding of Jews’ otherness, which they used to explain their actions. In cases of simple robberies and murders, when the victims’ Jewish identity seemed entirely incidental rather than determinative to the crime, religion was still subtly interwoven into the narrative: the long tradition of religiously based antisemitism that had forced European Jews off the land and into mercantile trades, and then inspired them to
leave Europe for America, helped explain why the Jewish victim was an immigrant peddler trudging the dusty roads of the rural South. In other instances antisemitic motivations were more overt, and in these cases religion played an important role in dehumanizing Jewish victims. The Jewish case thus demonstrates some of the subtle ways that religion worked in shaping violent interactions between southerners and religious outsiders in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

5.2 The Murder of Abraham Surasky

Late in the morning of 28 July 1903, Abraham Surasky stopped at the home of Lee and Dora Green, situated in the rural woods outside Aiken, South Carolina. The Greens’ home was part of Surasky’s regular circuit as he guided his horse-drawn wagon through the area peddling goods. Virtually everyone in the neighborhood knew Surasky, as most of them were his clients, and he enjoyed an “excellent reputation” in the county. The thirty-year old Jewish peddler, who had recently immigrated from the Polish shtetl of Knyshin, had packed his cart the day before to make his usual rounds. Surasky’s purpose when he visited the Greens, as with many of his customers, was twofold: to sell his wares, and to collect debts on merchandise previously purchased on credit. He was one of hundreds, perhaps thousands, of Jewish peddlers who rattled through the southern countryside and who played

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4 Surasky’s first name was spelled both Abraham and Abram by contemporaries; here I use Abraham, as it is the spelling preferred in most (including family) sources. Also confusing is the day that Surasky visited the Greens’ home and was murdered. Most sources agree that it was July 28, which would have been a Tuesday. However, witnesses variously identify the day as a Wednesday or Friday, somewhat clouding the actual chronology.

a crucial but often underappreciated role in the economy of the New South, bringing manufactured goods, and, in a sense, modernity, into the maze-like backroads of rural Dixie.  

When Surasky’s cart rolled to a stop in front of the Green homestead, he found only Dora at home. This was perhaps a bit of a relief for the peddler, because her husband Lee was known to be a rough and dangerous character, and the matter of collecting a debt might be easier with him absent. So Surasky, whose peddling represented the sole support of his two daughters after the death of his wife, ambled up the front steps to do his business with Dora Green. She invited him in, but they had not been talking long when Lee arrived. According to what he told his neighbor George Horsey a week later, Green immediately recognized the peddler’s cart, and upon not seeing Surasky, assumed that its owner was inside with his wife. Green burst through the front door, where he later testified he caught


Other than Schmier’s work, the scholarship on peddlers focuses almost exclusively on antebellum peddlers in the North and West. See David Jaffee, “Peddlers of Progress and the Transformation of the Rural North, 1760-1860,” Journal of American History 78 (Sep. 1991): 511-535; Henry L. Feingold, Zion in America: The Jewish Experience from Colonial Times to the Present (New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1974), 73-78; and Rudolf Glanz, “Notes on Early Jewish Peddling in America,” Jewish Social Studies 7 (1945): 119-136. In her keynote address at the 2004 conference of the Southern Jewish Historical Society, Hasia Diner spoke about the importance of peddlers and peddling as engines of Jewish immigration and economic development. Diner, “Wandering Jews, Peddlers, Immigrants, and the Exploration of New Worlds,” speech at the Southern Jewish Historical Society annual meeting, Charleston, SC, October 2004. All of these authors agree that Jewish peddlers were important players in the rural economy. Jaffee most explicitly makes the argument that by bringing consumer goods to rural homes, peddlers also integrated them into a market culture and to a certain degree introduced them to modernity. Many of Jaffee’s observations about peddlers in the antebellum North also ring true for the postbellum South, raising questions not only about the different chronologies of the introduction of the market to each section, but also about the ambivalences inherent when a culture embraces a market economy. Stephen J. Whitfield briefly makes this point for southern peddlers, saying that “their peddler’s packs and sample cases helped cultivate a taste for the products of the modern world. . . . In helping to make the South more modern, more like the rest of the United States, Jewish businessmen altered the moral climate which all Southerners breathed.” Whitfield, “Commercial Passions: The Southern Jew as Businessman,” American Jewish History 71 (March 1982): 356.

Edward L. Ayers discusses the importance of small-town merchants and stores in integrating the South into the modernizing national economy after the Civil War; however, he omits any mention of Jews. See Ayers, The Promise of the New South: Life After Reconstruction (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), chap. 4. While Jews were a tiny minority of the population throughout the South, they were disproportionately represented in commercial trades. See Whitfield, “Commercial Passions.”
Surasky holding his wife’s hand. Enraged, he “did not multiply any word with him at all,” but immediately shot the peddler. (It is unclear whether Green had his gun with him when he came in the house, or whether he grabbed one that was kept inside.) Surasky, wounded but not downed, ran out the back door and rounded the house with the obvious intention of getting his cart and fleeing. But the enraged Green was not to be cheated of his prey. He burst through the front door, put another shell in his gun, and intercepted Surasky as he came around the corner of the house, shooting him a second time. Surasky stumbled through the front door and begged Dora to intervene with her husband, but he was greeted only with a third shot from Lee’s gun. Mustering all his strength, the peddler staggered back outside and fell to his hands and knees. Green followed him and then spied an axe nearby. Surasky apparently saw the same thing, and begged, “Mr. Green don’t kill me: I have got two little motherless children.” Past the point of mercy, Green snarled back, “Goddamn you and your motherless children. I am going to kill you.” As he said this, he raised the axe and swung it down on the peddler’s skull with all his force. He finished the horrid deed with several more swings, and by the time he was finished, Surasky’s face and body were “hacked horribly,” and one of his arms was almost completely severed.7

As gruesome as it is, this version of the story was the one that Green wanted people to hear; indeed, it was the narrative he unashamedly related to George Horsey just a week after the murder, and on which Horsey later based his affidavit. In fact, Green never denied committing the murder. Even when he was on the run from law enforcement officials who

7 This account relies primarily on two sources: “Gruesome Murder in Aiken,” (Charleston) News and Courier, 2 Aug. 1903; and especially the sworn affidavit of George H. Horsey, 18 Feb. 1904, Aiken County Indictments, Bundle 164, June 1904, South Carolina Department of Archives and History (hereafter cited as ACI). Original reports were that the murder was carried out by Lee Green and George Toole, but Green was the only one charged and tried. There was some disagreement about whether Green shot Surasky two or three times. Regardless, the doctor to inspect Surasky’s body found his upper back “well sprinkled with shot.” He declared the cause of death to be either the “large wounds” in his flesh near his shoulder and collarbone or the “blow on head,” all from the axe. Testimony of Dr. W. S. Eubanks, Aug. 1903, ACI.
had come to arrest him several days after the incident, he bragged to Luther Cordon, who
found him hiding at the edge of the woods, that he had killed Surasky. Green wanted to
portray the murder as a crime of passion after he happened on the peddler attempting to
seduce his wife. Like any good nineteenth-century husband, he then flew into a rage and
killed the seducer, his better nature clouded by his loyal and loving instinct to protect his
innocent and hapless wife. In this scenario, not only would Green have been justified in
killing Surasky, but he would have been held at greater fault had he not protected his wife’s
(and by extension his own) honor. So rather than attempting any real cover-up—his feeble
attempt to hide the body and the cart in the woods was soon betrayed by the circling
buzzards—Green was happy to share the story. To provide support, Green’s lawyer
proffered the testimony of two other women who swore that “the peddler’ tried to rape
them.” Although there is no corroborating proof of these claims, they may have helped win
the day for Green’s defense, as the jury returned a verdict of not guilty.9

8 Luther Cordon affidavit, 17 Feb. 1904, ACI.

9 Note, dated 15 June 1904, on back of testimony of Morgan Halley and his wife, 18 Feb. 1904, ACI;
verdict issued on 25 June 1904, ACI. According to the “unwritten law” of nineteenth-century legal culture, still
prominent after the turn of the twentieth century, “if a man found his wife in the arms of another man and he
killed the other man on the spot, he would never be convicted of murder. His exemption was part of a
complex of self-defense rights, at one with his right to shoot a burglar or a malicious trespasser, to repel,
violely if necessary, someone who had invaded his property (although, like other property holds acting in
self-defense, the man might be convicted of manslaughter). His exemption was part of the privileged identity
of a husband. . . . This was the unwritten law.” Hendrik Hartog, “Lawyering, Husbands’ Rights, and ‘the
Unwritten Law’ in Nineteenth-Century America,” *Journal of American History* 84 (June 1997): 67-96 (quote from
67-68).

In promoting his story of Surasky making sexual advances upon his wife, Lee Green may have been
drawing upon rumors and fears about Jewish sexuality. However, based on available evidence I am more
persuaded by a historical rather than psychosexual reading of this event, seeing Green’s rape narrative more as
a convenient rationale for his own violent behavior, fabricated after the fact, than a manifestation of cultural
beliefs about Jews’ sexual deviance. Although they were sometimes constructed as hypersexual, more
frequently Jews were seen as deviant or feminized, and often homosexual. Green’s defense that Surasky was a
rapist is therefore more akin to southern fears of black “beasts” (a myth commonly used to justify violence
against African American men) than antisemitic narratives of Jewish sexual deviance. On ideas about Jewish
sexuality, see Sander L. Gilman, *The Jew’s Body* (New York: Routledge, 1991); and Jeffrey Paul Melnick, *Black-
Jewish Relations on Trial: Leo Frank and Jim Conley in the New South* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi,
2000), esp. chap. 3.
Green’s story was more convenient than it was true. While the basic skeleton of the narrative—that he had come home to find Surasky with his wife and then killed him—remained intact, the motives behind Green’s actions shifted significantly in light of additional testimony provided at the trial that apparently had little effect on the jury. According to the lengthy statement of Mary Drayton, supported by sworn depositions of several others, Lee Green was less a noble defender of family honor and southern womanhood than he was a violent, dangerous, and even antisemitic criminal. Drayton, an African American neighbor who occasionally worked for the Greens, testified that Lee and Dora Green came to her home about four o’clock on the afternoon of the murder. Reassuring her that the gun Lee held in his hands was not intended for her, as he had already “done too much damn shooting,” he demanded that she come to his home immediately and scour the floors. When Drayton expressed hesitation at the strange request, she said that Green admitted that he had killed the “damn peddler,” and that he wanted her to stay with his wife and for them to clean the blood off the floors while he found someone to help him dispose of the body. He then related to her the sequence of that morning’s events. According to Drayton, Green told her that as he arrived home, Surasky came out the front door of the house and helped with Green’s horse. Just as the peddler turned to go back into the house, presumably to continue his business transaction, Green shot him in the back. At first Surasky ran into the house, but then turned toward Green and cried out, “Oh, Mr. Green what have I done to you? Don’t shoot me; I will give you all I have got.” Green callously replied, “Stand back, you son of a bitch, don’t come on me,” and shot him a second time. When Surasky dropped to his elbows and knees, Green “put the muzzle of the gun to his head and shot him again and then he took the axe and knocked him in the head twice.”

The most significant addition of Drayton’s testimony is not the details of the murder itself, but rather her account of what happened before and after the shooting, which seriously undercut Green’s later story that it was a crime of passion against his wife’s seducer. As to motive, Drayton revealed that Green had long held a grudge against Jewish peddlers in general, and Surasky in particular. Some three weeks before the murder, Drayton testified, Green had confided to her husband “that he intended to kill him [Surasky].” In addition, she noted that part of the reason she considered Green a “dangerous man” was because he had bragged in her presence “about shooting at Levy,” another Jewish peddler in the area, just “to make him drop his bundle.”

That Surasky’s murder was premeditated to a certain degree, and that it grew at least partly out of a prejudice against Jews, was backed up by other depositions. David T. Parker made a sworn statement that George Toole (who was originally accused of the murder along with Green but never tried) had told him that Green said, “the pedlars took all of his wife’s change and that he was tired of them and that he was going to kill ever damned Jew pedlar that came around and get shed of them.” Parker additionally testified that after Toole found the dead body in the woods, Green came to his house and confessed, rather triumphantly, “I have done what I said I was going to, I have killed that damned pedlar.”

Further building the case against Green, H. B. Heath affirmed that while visiting his home a month or two before Surasky’s murder, Green said he had recently shot at Levy (the same peddler Drayton mentioned) “to scare him,” and that “the first thing some of them Jew peddlers knew he was going to kill some of them, that he wouldn’t have them a deviling around him.”

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11 Drayton affidavit, 3, 8.
12 David T. Parker statement, undated, ACI.
13 H. B. Heath affidavit, 18 Feb. 1904, ACI.
witnesses’ statements raise serious doubts about Green’s story and make a compelling case that the crime was not motivated by a chivalrous protection of his wife’s virtue.

On their own the testimonies of Parker and Heath do not necessarily incriminate Green. It is conceivable, after all, that even following the series of threats and the Levy shooting, he could have legitimately discovered Surasky making advances upon his wife, which could have justified the killing in the eyes of a nineteenth-century jury. However, Drayton’s deposition shatters this possibility as well. Drayton testified that while she was at the Greens’ home the night of the murder, Lee Green bemoaned his situation to Arthur House, another neighbor who had come to the house but refused to help dispose of Surasky’s body. “Arthur,” Green asked, “what will I do now; how will I get out?” House replied, whether seriously or flippantly is not clear, “I don’t know unless you tell it that you came up on this man committing rape on your wife.” The light seemed to go on in Green’s head, and he immediately concocted a plan. He forced all the people in the room—his wife, Arthur House, and Mary Drayton—to swear that they would stick to this story of attempted rape.\(^{14}\) Although Drayton reneged on her pledge, the other conspirators, particularly the Greens, promoted the story as their primary defense. In fact, Lee Green was scheduled for trial in October 1903, but Dora had given birth at the beginning of the month and was bedridden. This led the judge to grant the defense’s request for a continuance of the trial until the court’s next session—not only was Dora the sole eyewitness to the murder, but the defense rested on her testimony that Surasky was guilty of “criminal assault with the intention to commit a felony upon her,” and that her husband was simply defending her

\(^{14}\) Drayton affidavit, 7. In Arthur House’s sworn testimony, he says that while at the Greens’ home the night of the murder, he had asked Dora Green “what was the trouble between [her husband] and the pedlar.” She replied that “the pedlar had been bothering me,” but did not give any details. House does not mention suggesting to Green that he fabricate the rape story, nor being sworn to abide by it. Arthur House affidavit, 17 Feb. 1904, ACL.
from the peddler’s sexual advances.\textsuperscript{15} Although transcripts of Dora Green’s testimony have not survived, we can infer by the trial’s outcome that she stuck to the prearranged story and delivering an emotional performance capable of persuading the jury to deliver the verdict of not guilty. The significant evidence and testimonies portraying Lee Green as a violent antisemite wilted in the face of a wife’s trumped-up declaration of her husband’s loyalty, fidelity, and honor.

Abraham Surasky’s murder was in part made possible because he was a lone peddler walking the country roads of the South. Solitary Jewish peddlers were highly vulnerable figures. They usually began as recent immigrants who spoke little or no English and had few established personal connections in the vicinity. The wares in their cart and the cash in their pockets also made them attractive targets. In the cash-poor economy of the rural South, the local peddlers and merchants were among the few people who had currency at hand. Beyond that, their account books represented written records of the chronic indebtedness that plagued individual southern farmers, especially during bad years. So when Lee Green not only murdered Abraham Surasky, but then stole his money and ripped the page recording his debt out of the peddler’s account book,\textsuperscript{16} he was lashing out at Surasky as a Jew, as his direct creditor, and as the most immediate (and vulnerable) symbol of the economic system that frustrated many southern farmers in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

\textsuperscript{15} Request for continuance of trial, 19 Oct. 1903, ACI; Order continuing case, 21 Oct. 1903, ACI.

\textsuperscript{16} According to David Parker’s affidavit, Green confessed to George Toole that after he killed Surasky, “I taken his account book, tore out my account and then taken the book and his hat and dug a hole by a stump in the cotton patch and buried them just back of the house.” In her affidavit, Mary Drayton testified that Green owed Surasky fifteen dollars, and stole $3.05 from his dead body, which he complained did not even “pay me for my trouble.”
What differentiated Abraham Surasky from many other Jewish peddlers in the South was that he was not in fact an isolated and marginalized figure in the community. As mentioned earlier, Surasky enjoyed a solid reputation in the area. Morgan Halley described the peddler to be “as nice a man as I ever saw,” who “always behaved himself as a gentleman” on his periodic visits. “Everybody, white and colored in the neighborhood,” Halley concluded, “spoke in the highest terms of him.”

Even beyond his reputation and business relationships, however, Surasky was tied into the Aiken community through respected family and religious connections. The Surasky family had been integrated into Aiken society for over a decade, ever since Abraham’s older brother B. M. (Benedict Morris) had traveled to the South as a peddler shortly after 1890 and eventually opened a store. He prospered enough to pay for the immigration of his wife, children, and three of his four brothers, including Abraham. Over time the Suraskys became something of an Aiken institution, with B. M. serving on the city council for a decade and his wife Sarah actively involved in civic affairs.

In addition to his family ties, Abraham was connected to Aiken’s fledgling Jewish community. When the body was discovered two days after the murder, men were immediately sent to town “to let the Jews know it,” a token of the recognition of and respect for the small Jewish community in the area. Moreover, several weeks after the incident, one of the county newspapers and “several prominent citizens and leading

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17 Morgan Halley testimony, 18 Feb. 1904, ACI.

18 For biographical information on the Surasky family and their place in the Aiken community, see Surasky family file, College of Charleston Special Collections. Sources in the file include a typed Surasky family history (author unknown, May 1978); Arnold Shankman, ed., “Jewish Life in Aiken, S.C.: Childhood Memories of Esther Surasky Pinck,” SJHS Newsletter (March 1982): 2-3; and various local newspaper articles.

19 Burrel Holley affidavit, 18 Feb. 1904, ACI. Two of Lee Green’s uncles, Robert and James Green, were among this particular group that discovered the body. (It was actually “discovered” at several different times by multiple people in the days after the murder.) James wanted to quietly bury the body and thus “settle up the question,” but Robert and the others insisted that the incident be made known, both to the local Jews and the larger populace.
ministers” pressed the sheriff to work diligently to apprehend Green, who had gone into hiding. Clearly, Surasky was a known figure who was part of a respected and included segment of Aiken society, and his death was not swept under the rug or deemed to be of minor consequence simply because he was an immigrant Jewish peddler.

The experience of Abraham Surasky and his extended family thus models the many tensions facing Jews in the South. While it represented a land of opportunity where they could flourish and become integrated into communities, their immutable Jewishness meant they could never become true insiders. Antisemitism usually remained dormant, but particularly among poor and frustrated farmers in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, their Jewish creditors became symbols of the economic system that held them paralyzed, and they grasped at stereotypes and prejudices that helped them make sense of their world, lashing out in violence against anyone they could blame. Unless we believe Green’s story of attempted rape, Surasky did nothing wrong on the day of his murder; his only offense was to fulfill a stereotype and to be in the wrong place at the wrong time. Precisely because they knew that such acts of violence could occur at any time, and because they did not want their new homeland to go the way of Eastern Europe, southern Jews did all they could to minimize the likelihood of antisemitic violence by adapting themselves to southern culture and making sincere efforts to become southern themselves. Their acculturation was thus a byproduct of their simultaneous fear of violence and desire for acceptance.

5.3 Jews in the Antebellum and Confederate South

Jews’ history of acculturating into southern society long predated the murder of Abraham Surasky. In order to fully understand the complex dynamics of the Jewish experience in the postbellum South, then, it is important to be familiar with the longer history of southern Jewry, stretching back to colonial origins and leading up to their support of the Confederacy in the Civil War. The colonial Jewish population was heavily concentrated in the South, with Charleston boasting the nation’s largest Jewish community in 1800. Jews had originally been attracted to the Carolinas beginning in the late seventeenth century, largely because of the liberal nature of its constitution, which was the first in the modern world to grant Jews the franchise.21

During the Revolutionary War most Jews supported the colonies, a decision that boded well when independence was achieved. They became eager supporters of the new order, especially when it came to include constitutional separation of church and state, which they saw as working distinctly in their advantage. Of course, old prejudices were not erased with the creation of the American republic, and southern Jews did experience some antisemitism in the nation’s formative decades. Two examples from Charleston are

21 Although the Church of England was acknowledged as the official religion of the colony, the author of the constitution, John Locke, inserted into the first draft that “Jews, Heathens,” and others should be allowed into the colony, for the express purpose of exposing them to “the purity of the Christian religion” and hoping—or more accurately, expecting—that they would “be won over to embrace . . . the truth.” Explicit mention of Jews was stricken from the final version of the constitution in 1669, but they were granted the right to vote. Eli N. Evans, The Provincials: A Personal History of Jews in the South, rev. ed. (New York: Free Press, 1997 [1973]), 49.

illustrative. In September 1798, Abraham Mendes Seixas, president of the Beth Elohim congregation and a war veteran, posted an advertisement, with an accompanying “forty dollars reward,” in the Charleston Gazette. Seixas specifically sought to bring to justice “a number of ill-disposed and refractory persons” who had broken up a Tuesday night meeting at the synagogue “in the most outrageous and indecent manner,” interrupting the worship service and then “beating and insulting several members of the Congregation.” A year and a half later, another forty-dollar reward (“Twenty if a Negro”) was offered for the apprehension of “some ill-disposed person or persons” who had “lately made it a practice of flinging stones and breaking the windows of the Hebrew Synagogue, during divine service.”

Notwithstanding these few cases of violence against the synagogue, Jews found the South to be a hospitable place to live and do business. Given the small size of the southern Jewish population and the fact that it was almost entirely concentrated in the larger port cities, most southerners probably had little or no contact with Jews. Those who were aware of their Jewish neighbors generally accepted them as equal members of the new nation. This was epitomized in an 1816 letter from Charleston intellectual Isaac Harby to Secretary of State James Monroe, in which Harby said that his fellow Jews “are by no means to be considered as a Religious sect,” but rather as “a portion of the People . . . woven in and compacted with the citizens of the Republic” in every respect. “Quakers and Catholics;

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22 “Forty Dollars Reward,” Charleston (SC) City Gazette, (ca. 28 Sep.) 1798. Abraham Mendes Seixas was captain of a Charleston militia company in the Revolutionary War, making him the only Jewish officer among South Carolina patriots. For biographical information on Seixas, see Rosengarten and Rosengarten, Portion of the People, 80.

23 “Forty Dollars Reward,” Charleston (SC) City Gazette, (ca. 19 Mar.) 1800. This advertisement was posted by Daniel Hart, who had become the new president of Beth Elohim after the death of Abraham Mendes Seixas in 1799. Hart immigrated to Charleston from Germany shortly after the close of the Revolutionary War. He was instrumental in rebuilding the economy after the war and helped revive the Chamber of Commerce. He also served as consul of the Kingdom of Holland. See Rosengarten and Rosengarten, Portion of the People, 68.
Episcopalian and Presbyterians, Baptists and Jews,” Harby remarked, “all constitute one great political family.”

As both a cause and result of their acceptance, Jews made conscious efforts to blend in to their surrounding culture and become good southerners, virtually indistinguishable from their Christian neighbors. They “ subscribed to the dominant morality of the time and place,” and “accepted slavery along with other distinctively southern institutions” such as dueling and faith in the nullification doctrine. Southern Jews were also profoundly influenced by the religious ethos that surrounded them. Although the roots of Reform Judaism in America are often located further west (in Cincinnati) or north (in New York), in fact the movement for reform first saw life in Charleston in 1824, with a group who specifically noted that by incorporating features similar to Protestant models they would elicit respect from their Christian neighbors. As progressive elements gained more power in the synagogue, it was clear that southern Jews were both imitating and reacting to southern

24 Quoted in Rosengarten and Rosengarten, Portion of the People, 75. A recent biography of Harby is Gary Phillip Zola, Isaac Harby of Charleston, 1788-1828: Jewish Reformer and Intellectual (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1994).

25 Rosengarten and Rosengarten, Portion of the People, 4, also see 108-111. According to Mark Greenberg, “ between 1789 and 1865 an estimated one-quarter of all Southern Jewish adults kept slaves.” He argues that slave ownership not only brought economic benefits, but also “marked Jews as part of the dominant group in a region whose economy, political ideology, and social order rested upon the subjugation of the black race.” Jews thus used racial politics as one strategy to ensure their own security in antebellum southern society, by not only setting themselves above blacks and establishing their “whiteness” but also demonstrating by their commitment to slavery that they were not “a threat to established cultural patterns.” Mark I. Greenberg, “Becoming Southern: The Jews of Savannah, Georgia, 1830-1870,” American Jewish History 86, 1 (1998): 61-63. Two recent works on Jews and the slave trade are Eli Faber, Jews, Slaves, and the Slave Trade: Setting the Record Straight (New York: New York University Press, 1998); and Saul S. Friedman, Jews and the American Slave Trade (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1998). Faber argues that given Jews’ transatlantic connections, linguistic skills, and mercantile experience, it is surprising that they were not more heavily involved in the slave trade than they were.
evangelical Protestantism as they made incremental adaptations and became pioneers of the
Reform movement that swept across worldwide Judaism in the mid-nineteenth century.\footnote{26}

Having prospered in antebellum southern society, Jews in the South overwhelmingly
supported secession and the Confederacy. Not only was the vast majority of the southern
Jewish citizenry enthusiastic about secession, but they were encouraged by their rabbis, who
joined their Christian counterparts in sanctifying the Cause.\footnote{27} Jewish Confederates, who
probably numbered around two thousand but may have reached as many as three thousand,
fought for a number of reasons, but a major factor in Jews’ support of the war was to
counter antisemitic stereotypes and demonstrate that the Jew was in fact “a man and a

\footnote{26} At Beth Elohim congregation, forty-seven members petitioned their trustees to shorten the length
of the service, for prayers to be offered in English as well as Hebrew and Spanish, and to include a Protestant-
style sermon at each worship service. The requests were roundly refused by the more conservative trustees,
spurring the petitioners to organize the Reformed Society of Israelites, patterned after similar societies created
by Methodists and Baptists and complete with a choir, hymns, instrumental music, and increased involvement
by women. The society slowly petered out, but reform elements essentially took over the main congregation in
1838 after a “minor civil war” that led to a schism in the community and the creation of an Orthodox
synagogue. The more liberal Beth Elohim eventually added an organ and hymnals, both major innovations in
Jewish worship. For a good short summary of the early Reform movement in Charleston, particularly in terms
of connecting it to the influences of southern Protestantism, see Deborah Dash Moore, “Freedom’s Fruits:
The Americanization of an Old-time Religion,” in Rosengarten and Rosengarten, A Portion of the People, 10-21.
The definitive accounts of the Reform movement in Charleston are Zola, Isaac Harby of Charleston; and Hagy,
This Happy Land.

It should be emphasized that Jewish Reform is not appropriately called an “assimilationist”
movement, although its critics (then and now) have typically labeled it as such. Reform Judaism, not only in
the South but also in the North and in Germany and throughout Western Europe, was primarily about
modernity, education, and enlightenment, aiming to shake off marginalization and antisemitism by fully joining
the modern world, culturally and religiously. Like many nineteenth-century Protestants and Catholics who
were also engaged in their own “reform” movements, many Jews came to believe that religion did not
necessarily have to be irrational, and that God was the author of knowledge and progress. Moreover, they
emphasized that Jewish identity could coexist with national identity and citizenship. For representative recent
scholarship, see Shmuel Feiner, The Jewish Enlightenment, trans. Chaya Naor (Philadelphia: University of
Pennsylvania Press, 2002); Alan Silverstein, Alternatives to Assimilation: The Response of Reform Judaism to American
Culture, 1840-1930 (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England for Brandeis University Press, 1994);
University Press, 1988); and Leon A. Jick, The Americanization of the Synagogue, 1820-1870 (Hanover, NH:

\footnote{27} See Selma S. Lewis, A Biblical People in the Bible Belt: The Jewish Community of Memphis, Tennessee, 1840s-
1960s (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1998), 32. Many rabbis were staunch Confederates, such as
Rabbi James Koppel Gutheim, who refused to swear an oath of allegiance to the Union when General Butler’s
troops captured New Orleans. See Leo Shpall, The Jews in Louisiana (New Orleans: Steeg Printing and
Publishing Co., 1936), 12. On the important role that religion played both leading up to and during the Civil
War, see the collection of essays in Randall M. Miller, Harry S. Stout, and Charles Reagan Wilson, eds., Religion
and the American Civil War (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).}
worthy citizen.” Jews also but filled a number of important leadership roles in the Confederate government and army. The most prominent was Judah P. Benjamin, known as the “brains of the Confederacy,” who in the short history of the C.S.A. served as attorney general, secretary of war, and secretary of state. Other Jews in significant positions included the lieutenant governor of Louisiana, a district judge, the chief commissary for Generals Toombs and Longstreet, and a total of twenty-four army and eleven navy officers.

The Civil War proved to be a fickle friend to southern Jews. While on the one hand the war provided them a unique opportunity to firmly establish their loyalty as citizens and patriots, it also gave rise to increased antisemitism. This spike in antisemitic sentiments and activities during the war generally did not come from official channels. In fact, while Grant and Sherman issued blatantly antisemitic orders and proclamations during their invasion of the South, there was nothing similar that came out of the armies of Lee and Johnston or Davis’ executive offices. Southern antisemitism was more of a grassroots sentiment that

28 Robert N. Rosen, The Jewish Confederates (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2000), xi-xiii. Determining the exact number of Jews who fought for the Confederacy is impossible, since the army did not record men’s religion. The one attempt to make an exact tally—a response by Jewish lawyer Simon Wolf in 1895 to charges that the Jews did not fight but just made money off the war—was marked by undercounting in some cases and overcounting in others. (Wolf and others often made the error of mistaking any German-sounding name to be Jewish.) Wolf’s compilation listed 1340 Jewish Confederates; Rosen suggests that “two thousand is a good estimate,” although it may have been as high as three thousand (Rosen, 161-62). By 1861 Jews were settled in almost every corner of the South, and Jewish soldiers enlisted from Charleston, Richmond, Memphis, Nashville, Mobile, Shreveport, and especially New Orleans, in addition to smaller Jewish settlements in places like Arkansas and Mississippi. For the most part, Jewish Confederates came not from the “old families,” but rather reflected the massive influx of German, Polish, Hungarian, and Russian Jews who immigrated in the 1840s; indeed, by that time the old Sephardic lines had almost entirely disappeared, primarily through marriage with Ashkenazi or Gentiles (Rosen, xi).

29 A fascinating and often elusive figure, the most recent full biography of Benjamin is Eli N. Evans, Judah P. Benjamin, the Jewish Confederate (New York: Free Press, 1988). Also see Rosen, chap. 2.

30 Rosen, Jewish Confederates, xi; Raphael J. Moses Autobiography, Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Division, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (hereafter cited as Southern Historical Collection); Evans, Provincials, 60.

31 Rosen, Jewish Confederates, xii.
typically took the form of scapegoating, whether it was criticism of Judah Benjamin\textsuperscript{32} or murmurs about a general Jewish conspiracy to steal the wealth of the South through speculation and unfair mercantile practices.\textsuperscript{33}

The most egregious manifestations of southern antisemitism during the Civil War era went beyond verbal criticism to enter the sphere of actual threats, intimidation, and violence. These incidents, though relatively few, were enough to make an impression on southern Jews, and made them realize that despite all their efforts as patriotic Confederates, they were to still outsiders vulnerable to the whims of the majority. The first of these violent episodes occurred in late 1860, a few months before Fort Sumter was fired upon. In a letter to his aunt, William Watson of Greenville, South Carolina, wrote that the town had “been relieved in a very singular manner of some of our friends the Jews.” He reported that “some of the young men” of Greenville accosted a merchant named Levy and shaved one half of his head and the opposite half of his beard, then forced him to “swear most solemnly to leave town in three days.” The same group of ruffians warned other Jews to also leave town, who in

\textsuperscript{32} Although Benjamin never made any effort to publicly assert his Jewish identity, and even seemed to shy away from it, he was nonetheless commonly referred to simply as “the Jew” in Confederate circles. Jews across the South took great pride in seeing one of their own in such a lofty position, but his status also made him an obviously lightning rod for internal criticism of the Confederate government—it was much easier to blame “the Jew” than Lee or Davis. As such, he became the scapegoat for many of the Confederacy’s troubles as the war progressed. Benjamin was blamed for military defeats as secretary of war and for failures in diplomacy with European nations as secretary of state. One Richmond writer suggested that the prayers of the Confederacy were of virtually no effect so long as a Jew held such high office in the government, and another writer denounced him as “Judas Iscariot Benjamin.” Jefferson Davis unfailingly stood by his besieged lieutenant, and those who actually associated with Benjamin affirmed both his talent and loyalty. See Bertram Wallace Korn, American Jewry and the Civil War (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1957), 177; Evans, Judah P. Benjamin; Berman, Richmond’s Jewry, 181-182.

\textsuperscript{33} Jewish merchants were increasingly criticized as the war dragged on and necessities grew scarce. As southerners searched for someone to blame, “the Jew” was accused of extortion, illegal trade with the enemy, and artificial price inflation. Jews were referred to as the “Yankee within our midst,” and numerous southern writers and politicians complained of the “Shylockism” defeating the Confederacy from within. Berman, Richmond’s Jewry, 184-185. Congressman Henry S. Foote of Tennessee said in a congressional debate that Jews controlled some ninety percent of the South’s business enterprises, and that “if the present state of things were to continue, the end of the war would probably find nearly all the property of the Confederacy in the hands of Jewish Shylocks.” Korn, American Jewry and the Civil War, 178-179. Also see E. Merton Coulter, The Confederate States of America, 1861-1865 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1950), 223.
turn “acted upon the suggestion.” The running joke in town, according to Watson, was that the sign above Levy’s store that read “Levy’s Cheap Store” should have been changed to read “Cheap Levy’s Store.” Although Watson himself seemed sympathetic to the Jewish plight, he noted that the incident was “much to the satisfaction of the majority of our citizens,” revealing a widespread antisemitic feeling in the region.34

The most contentious instance of Civil War-era antisemitism occurred in Thomasville, in southern Georgia.35 On 30 August 1862, a group of angry citizens gathered at the courthouse square to take action against the Jewish peddlers and merchants in the area, who were accused of leading a conspiracy to work with counterfeiters and profiteers to hoard goods and then extort outrageous prices.36 A series of resolutions were quickly drafted and unanimously accepted, mercilessly denouncing the Jews as traitors and stating that they would be forced to leave the county, by force if necessary. To enforce the resolutions, the formation of a Committee of Vigilance was approved.37


36 There were only five Jewish households in Thomasville during the war, all of whom participated in the merchant trade. Thomasville had approximately thirty stores in 1860, meaning that Jews controlled roughly one-sixth of the town’s merchant trade. See Greenberg, “Ambivalent Relations,” 15, 18, 24. On conditions in Thomas County up to the August 1862 incident in Thomasville, including the rise of a speculating enterprise, see William Warren Rogers, Thomas County during the Civil War (Tallahassee: Florida State University, 1964). Despite there being some corruption, Rogers does mention any antisemitic sentiment connected with this earlier profiteering, thus supporting the case that the Thomasville Jews were a scapegoat rather than the actual cause of the town’s economic hardships. Also see Greenberg, “Ambivalent Relations,” 22.

37 The Thomasville resolutions were reprinted in the Savannah Daily Morning News on 12 Sep. 1862; due to the scarcity of other local newspapers, this is the most readily available version, also reprinted in Schmier, “Notes and Documents,” 12-15. Also see Schmier, “An Act Unbecoming,” 22-23; and Rosen, Jewish Confederates, 267. Mark Greenberg suggests that southern religious attitudes may have been a factor in why Jews were specifically targeted for unfair economic practices. Basing his reasoning on Drew Gilpin Faust’s argument...
In Savannah, where some Thomasville Jews voluntarily moved after the resolutions were passed, the response of the Jewish community was “sharp and determined.” They called their own public meeting, and drafted a proclamation vigorously denouncing the action taken in Thomasville. The Savannah proclamation condemned antisemites anywhere as “enemies of human liberty and freedom of conscience.” They also recommended that Jews should not patronize any newspaper that further published or supported the anti-Jewish slander of the Thomasville resolutions.\(^\text{38}\) Jewish Confederate soldiers who caught wind of the affair made similar statements of outrage and denunciation, and said that the natives of Thomas County need look no further than themselves for the source of inflation and high prices.\(^\text{39}\) In the end, the Thomasville incident turned out to be more bluster than substance. Despite all the threats, no Jew was personally harmed, and no Jewish store was ransacked. Although some members of Thomasville’s Jewish community left town, most stayed and carried out normal lives with no further harassment.\(^\text{40}\)

In sum, the Jewish experience with the Confederacy was mixed. As patriotic southerners, Jews supported the cause as much as their Gentile neighbors did, shedding their blood and making substantial sacrifices on behalf of the Confederate nation. However, when prices skyrocketed, the value of currency plummeted, shortages of necessary goods

that Confederate nationalist ideology tied religious belief to economic issues, Greenberg asserts, “Clergymen considered avarice to be a sin, and politicians campaigned to make speculation and extortion a crime. Much of the Southern discussion of extortion lapsed into anti-Jewish sentiment founded not on the belief that Jews and killed or rejected the Messiah, but on the idea that Jewish business practices were un-Christian and therefore sinful.” Greenberg, “Ambivalent Relations,” 23.


\(^{40}\) In 1866 there remained five Jewish-owned dry goods stores in Thomasville, and in March of 1880, less than twenty years after the incident, Jews founded the first synagogue in the county. As Mark Greenberg concludes, the Thomasville resolutions and the furor that followed “ostensibly had no lasting consequences for Jewish economic success or social integration.” Greenberg, “Ambivalent Relations,” 15. Also see Roy W. Trefftzs and Lillian Britt Heinsohn, Thomas County Heritage (n.p. [Thomas County, GA]: 1976), 26.
became increasingly acute, and Union advances drew the enemy near, many southerners were desperate for an explanation. Some who refused to blame their Confederate government leaders or the military drew upon centuries-old prejudices against Jews that had generally lain dormant in southern society. In rhetorical attacks in the press and the halls of Congress, and in grassroots community efforts to demonize and expel Jewish citizens, the war exacerbated southern antisemitism to hitherto unseen proportions.

Southern society leading up to and during the Civil War cannot be properly be referred to as antisemitic in any general sense, as there was no systematic movement to vilify or persecute Jews. Outbreaks of antisemitism were sporadic, but nevertheless frequent enough that they should not be passed off as insignificant. Southerners experiencing the massive cultural, political, and economic upheavals associated with Reconstruction and the dawning of the New South had a wide range of antisemitic precedents that typically remained unspoken and latent but were readily available for use when deemed necessary or desirable. But rather than being the general rule, antisemitism was a kind of shadow always lurking in the background. The postbellum South was in most respects a hospitable place for Jews, and it is to that aspect of their experience that we now turn.

5.4 “The South Is a Very Good Place to Live”: Jewish Acculturation and Acceptance

Just like her Christian friends, Clara Lowenburg looked forward every year to the coming of Christmas, when she would receive presents from Santa Claus. Raised in the river city of Natchez, Mississippi, in the 1870s and 1880s, she grew up with boiled shrimp as a staple of her diet. At the same time, her parents went to Friday night Shabbat services and she said her Hebrew prayers at night. Such was the duality of southern Jewish identity in the late nineteenth century. Clara and her family were self-consciously southern and Jewish at the same time, and saw no conflict between the two. Indeed, thousands of southern Jews
like the Lowenburgs saw the South as one of the only places in the world where they could put down roots, enjoy the privileges of citizenship, and shed the image of the “eternal alien.”

In Natchez, Jews, who represented only five percent of the town’s white population, could operate nearly one-third of the city’s mercantile establishments. It was also a place where Clara’s father, Isaac, could be elected mayor, and where a total of thirteen Jews could serve as city aldermen over the last third of the nineteenth century. In sum, Natchez Jews were “integrated in virtually every aspect of the city’s economic, social, and civic life.”

Across the state in Meridian, Mississippi, Leo Stamm sent a letter back to the Industrial Removal Office in New York City five months after he arrived. Stamm was one of 79,000 immigrant Jews who the IRO relocated around the country in the early twentieth century so they could find good jobs. His letter was full of gratitude, and reflected a sunny disposition toward his new home in the South. He described Meridian as a city consisting of “about 75 Jewish families,” who “all are well-to-do,” and many of whom were “very rich.” The city’s Christian population was “very friendly to the Jews,” he said, largely because the Jewish merchants were known to be “very honest.” He asserted that “For an honest working man, the South is a very good place to live,” and concluded by encouraging the “enslaved Jews of New York” to “leave that town as fast as they can, and come here to get the benefit of the good climate and the chance to make a good living.”

41 Wendy Machlovitz, Clara Lowenburg Moses: Memoir of a Southern Jewish Woman (Jackson, MS: Museum of the Southern Jewish Experience, 2000), 5-11; quotes on pp. 11, 7.

42 Stamm letter quoted in Robert A. Rockaway, “I Feel As if Newly Born': Immigrant Letters to the Industrial Removal Office,” American Jewish Archives 45 (Fall/Winter 1993): 160, 169-70. There is no date on Stamm’s letter, but his optimism about the South strongly suggests it originates prior to the wave of antisemitism that swept the South in relation to the Leo Frank case in 1913-1915. On the IRO, also see Rockaway, Words of the Uprooted: Jewish Immigrants in Early Twentieth-Century America (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998).
suggested, was a veritable paradise for Jews, a haven of tolerance and prosperity superior even to New York, the burgeoning capital of American Jewry.

While there were a number of ugly incidents, which will be highlighted later in the chapter, on most days and in most locales Jews were remarkably well integrated and accepted in southern society. Historians usually offer three explanations for why Jews enjoyed such a high degree of toleration in the South: the significant economic role that Jews played in the New South; the omnipresence of the race issue in the South, which deflected negative attention away from Jews; and the Jews’ acculturation into southern society.

Precisely because of the devastation of the antebellum economy, the postbellum South was a land of opportunity for entrepreneurs. Of course, this meant the invasion of opportunists, but it also opened up space for those, like Jewish immigrants, who were looking for a place that not only wanted but also needed their enterprise, and would welcome them with virtually no strings attached. Indeed, the poverty of the region and lack of commercial infrastructure actually made it an ideal place for Jewish merchants to set up shop, and while the arrangement certainly worked to their financial benefit, they in turn became an essential cog in the rebuilding of the economy and the emergence of the New South. Because Jews were willing to put down roots and become a permanent fixture in southern towns, they were regarded in very different terms than carpetbaggers who were only there to make a quick buck, or even northern companies whose profits really benefited the industrial North more than the “colonial” South. On the flip side of the Shylock coin, Jewish merchants and immigrants earned a reputation for being industrious, enterprising, and resourceful, and New South boosters of commercial growth noted their “renowned

business capacity.” As such, they played a needed economic role, both in booming cities like Atlanta, and perhaps to an even greater degree in the smaller towns and hamlets sprinkled throughout the southern countryside.\textsuperscript{44}

It was not by accident, or even through the predeterminations of antisemitic prejudices, that immigrant Jews found their niche as peddlers and merchants in the South. Throughout most of eastern Europe Jews were the subjects of considerable religious and cultural persecution. They were prohibited from owning land, thus excluding them from the land-based economy and forcing them into trade-based professions. When they immigrated to America virtually all European Jews had neither the skills nor the inclination for agriculture—indeed, the multiple attempts to establish Jewish agricultural colonies throughout the South all turned out to be dismal failures.\textsuperscript{45} In addition, their poverty meant that they had no capital to invest in large-scale financial ventures like plantations, railroads,
factories, and mills. The combination of these factors meant that once in the South, Jews naturally gravitated to mercantile professions.\textsuperscript{46}

Most Jews began as peddlers, traveling through the countryside as Abraham Surasky did, at first owning nothing but a pack full of goods, then eventually graduating to acquire a horse and cart. No one saw peddling as an end, however, but rather as a means to eventually opening a retail or wholesale shop of one’s own, becoming a supplier for other peddlers. While shopkeeping was still hard work and subject to the fluctuations of the market, through it Jews were able to achieve a substantial measure of stability and respect in many southern communities.\textsuperscript{47} Although they constituted only a tiny minority of the southern population, their contribution to the rebuilding of the southern economy after the war, and the diffusion of modern manufactured clothing and goods into the southern countryside, was an important factor in why Jews were so well tolerated, even welcomed, into many regions in the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century South.

The second reason why Jews fared well in the South was the nature of racial politics in the Jim Crow era. Many southern newspapers focused on the transgressions—alleged and real—of the freedmen while extolling the virtues of the Jews. As Louis Schmier notes, Jews were portrayed as “the lesser of two evils,” and in turn, they “were only too happy to let the freedmen act as a social lightning rod absorbing bolts of animosity that might otherwise have struck them.”\textsuperscript{48} Especially given their relatively small numbers, Jews receded in the


\textsuperscript{47} See Ashkenazi, \textit{The Business of Jews}, 133. This also parallels the arguments made by Hasia Diner in “Wandering Jews, Peddlers, Immigrants, and the Exploration of New Worlds.”

background as whites vented on blacks and Protestants vented on Catholics. Pulitzer Prize-winning Mississippi newspaperman Hodding Carter perhaps said it best when he remarked years later that “it takes perseverance to hate Jews and Negroes and Catholics all at the same time.”

Although Jews certainly did not escape unscathed from interactions with southern prejudice, in many southerners’ minds they were something of an afterthought in comparison to the South’s other racial, religious, and ethnic minorities.

Jews were beneficiaries of the southern racial climate simply by being not-black. Their racial status in the South had rarely if ever been questioned, largely because they had accepted and participated in the distinctly white practice of slaveholding. However, the rise of the racial sciences in the second half of the nineteenth century complicated their categorization as full-fledged whites. Eugenicists, anthropologists, and other racial theorists were hopelessly divided on where to place Jews. In the debate over Hebrew origins, as Leonard Rogoff explains, “Jews were described variously as purely Caucasian Semites, dark Egyptians, ruddy Edomites, black Cushites, mixed-blood Chaldaeans, and so on”; one North Carolina minister even published a book in 1910 entitled The Jew a Negro. Despite the

49 Quoted in Rabinowitz, “Nativism, Bigotry, and Anti-Semitism,” 447.

50 Oral histories conducted by Louis Schmier bear this out on an anecdotal level. Commenting on southern attitudes toward Jews, one Protestant man said, “Loved the Jews, yes sir, loved the Jews!” When asked why, he said, “Because my daddy didn’t want us to be actin’ like those damn papists!” Quoted in Schmier, Reflections of Southern Jewry, 174. This southern brand of anti-Catholic nativism found particular expression in places like Savannah, where there were approximately ten times as many Irish Catholics as Jews. Thus, “Irish Catholics posed an economic, religious, and political challenge to the Protestant elite and native white laborers. The small number of local Jews did not.” Greenberg, “Becoming Southern,” 73.

51 Mark Greenberg argues that “slave ownership helped solidify Jews’ racial status. . . . Because Jews clustered in commercial ventures and purchased blacks rather than toiling as manual laborers, their ‘whiteness’ was rarely questioned, and they faced relatively less social ostracism than other immigrant groups” (“Becoming Southern,” 62-63). Also see Lewis, Biblical People, 34.

voluminous academic debates over Jewish racial origins and physiognomy, and the fact that “their precise racial place was not fixed,” in actual practice Jews were widely accepted as white in the postbellum South.\textsuperscript{53} Indeed, white southerners’ romantic notions exalting blood and heritage—and conversely, their hostile fears of race-mixing—led them to praise their Jewish neighbors “for their alleged racial purity, their unbroken line from antiquity.”\textsuperscript{54}

For their part, southern Jews also took significant pride in their “race.” Ample proof of this fact came in the writings of Raphael Moses, who mingled in the highest ranks of southern society. In his 1892 autobiography, Moses asserted that “to be a descendent of the [Jewish] race is a lineage to be proud of.”\textsuperscript{55} Moses also produced one of America’s most notable documents of Jewish racial pride in 1878, when as an active supporter of a political campaign he was attacked by the opposing candidate on antisemitic grounds. In an open letter to his antagonist, Moses boldly affirmed, “I am proud of my lineage and my race.” He recounted the glorious history of Jews and their survival and thriving through centuries of open persecution, and then exulted, “Would you honor me? Call me a Jew!”\textsuperscript{56}

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\textsuperscript{53} Rogoff, “Is the Jew White,” 195.
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\textsuperscript{55} Raphael J. Moses Autobiography, 84. Moses followed a distinguished Civil War record by serving as chairman of the judiciary committee in the Georgia state legislature in 1866, a presidential elector in 1868, and a state legislator again in 1877, and was well acquainted with such Confederate and New South luminaries as Robert E. Lee, James Longstreet, Alexander Stephens, and Henry Grady.
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\textsuperscript{56} Raphael J. Moses, “An Open Letter to the Hon. W. O. Tuggle of Lagrange,” Columbus, GA, 29 Aug. 1878, attached at end of Autobiography. A slightly different typescript copy of this letter is located in the Irvin Rosenberg Family Papers, 1866-1944, William Breman Jewish Heritage Museum, Atlanta, Georgia; yet another copy is included in the autobiography typescript in the Raphael Moses Papers, also at the Breman Museum.
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Raphael’s son copied many of his father’s letters (Moses Papers). Commenting on this letter he says, “This letter, written on August 29, 1878, has been printed and reprinted, and widely circulated. On one occasion it was reprinted in ‘The Independent,’ with a foreword by George Creel. Mr. Creel, in that foreword, is slightly mistaken as to the facts and circumstances under which the letter was written. He states that Major Moses was a candidate for election to Congress, and was opposed by Mr. Tuggle, who attempted to raise the
believed that Jews in America should work diligently and visibly to establish themselves as loyal patriots and citizens, a sentiment that led him to both military and political office. He expressed this sentiment to his son when he exhorted, “beside this love of Country, you have the pride of Race to Battle for.” In short, while racial theorists debated over the origin of the Jewish species, southern Jews simultaneously enjoyed the privileges of whiteness and gloried in their distinctive racial-historical heritage. The presence of other, more threatening, minorities—particularly African Americans and perhaps even Mormons—was a significant contributor to the remarkable degree of acceptance Jews enjoyed in most southern communities.

The third major factor in the widespread tolerance for Jews throughout the South was their acculturation to the southern way of life. Indeed, southern Jews were not just in but also of the South—that is, Jews did not ghettoize themselves once in the South, but made conscious efforts to become distinctly southern in their cultural, civic, and even religious attitudes and practices. The first and most obvious marker of the deep identification of Jews with the South was their active participation in the Confederate struggle for independence. When Abraham Ehrlich opened his store in Valdosta, Georgia, no one could question his genuine southernness—one look at his arm, wasted by a miné.

Semitic race issue, and that Major Moses was nominated by acclamation. This is a mistake. Major Moses, in a letter to Henry A. Alexander, of Atlanta [dated 21 Oct. 1892], gives the actual facts.” In his explanation, Moses clarifies, “I was not in a race for Congress. Tuggle and Harris were the aspirants and I was advocating Harris, hence Tuggle’s remark.” See “Letters of Raphael J. Moses,” Moses Papers, pp. 1-2. Many of Raphael Moses’ letters are published in Mel Young, comp. and ed., Last Order of the Lost Cause: The Civil War Memoirs of a Jewish Family from the “Old South” (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1995).

57 Letter from Raphael J. Moses, Esquiline Hill, GA, to Stanford Moses, 23 Sep. 1891, in “Letters of Raphael J. Moses,” 9-10. Also see Moses Autobiography, 83, where he states that the “predominating motive” for his desire to hold political office was that “I was a Jew and believed that I might elevate our people by my public course.” Another example of a southern Jew making public statements about racial pride is J. Barrett Cohen, Judaism and the Typical Jew: An Address Delivered before the Jews of Charleston, S.C., on the Celebration of the Centennial Anniversary of the Birthday of Sir Moses Montefiore at the Hasel Street Synagogue, October 26th, 1884 (Charleston: The News and Courier Book Presses, 1884).
ball at Chickamauga, unassailably proved his Confederate credentials.⁵⁸ Personal examples of Confederate patriotism went far in establishing individual Jews as reputable and integrated members of southern communities.

Another important way that Jews acculturated into southern (and more broadly, American) culture was their warm embrace of America’s voluntaristic, democratic system. Having suffered for centuries at the hands of European autocrats, Jews found American pluralism a refreshing change.⁵⁹ They became heavily involved in civic affairs, and in many southern locales held a disproportionate share of political offices.⁶⁰ Southern Jews readily expressed their patriotic fervor. As war with Spain approached in 1898, Herbert Ezekiel, the editor of The Jewish South, the most prominent Jewish publication below the Mason-Dixon line, implored his readers to rally to the cause of “the first [country] in the world that granted

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⁵⁹ In 1871, The Hebrew, a prominent Jewish newspaper published in San Francisco, noted that “No one but a Jew can commensurately appreciate the intense happiness of the Hebrew people in this country.” It exulted, “Free America is the modern Moses, who has delivered them from European bondage, perhaps far worse than the Egyptian.” Eight years later, the newspaper continued to strike a positive tone about the reception of Jews in America, and their resultant loyalty to their new homeland: “Their warm welcome in this land of liberty is the perpetual topic of the Hebrew pulpit and press. . . . Their gratitude to this nation . . . brought them into the foremost ranks of the patriotic.” See “An Official Report on American Hebrews,” The (San Francisco) Hebrew, 3 Mar. 1871; and “The Jews of Many Countries,” The Hebrew, 5 Sep. 1879.

One possible contributor to the Jews’ relatively easy accommodation with American democracy was that even before the Reform movement made their religious practice increasingly “modern” and “Protestant” in appearance, their rabbinic system did not have the strong elements of hierarchical authoritarianism that was such a strong factor in the anti-Catholic and anti-Mormon crusades in nineteenth-century America. See John Higham, Send These to Me: Jews and Other Immigrants in Urban America (New York: Atheneum, 1975), 179.

⁶⁰ From 1870 to 1915, Jewish were elected mayor in such prominent southern cities as Montgomery and Mobile, Alabama; Savannah, Georgia; Pensacola, Florida; Shreveport and Alexandria, Louisiana; Natchez, Mississippi; Pine Bluff, Arkansas; Brownsville, Texas; and Georgetown, South Carolina. This was in addition to scores of city aldermen and councilmen, as well as other offices ranging from state supreme court justice to state legislature to president of the local Board of Trade. Schmier, Reflections on Southern Jewry, 72, 129-30; Arsenault, “Charles Jacobson,” 55-58; Rubin, Third to None, 216; Machlovitz, Clara Lowenburg Moses, 7; Louise Matthews Hewitt, Days of Building: History of a Jewish Community (Shreveport: The Jewish History Committee of Shreveport, Louisiana, 1965), 51, 57.
our people full religious and civil rights, a debt that they can never discharge.” Just as African American leaders encouraged their young men to fight so as to prove their loyalty and manhood and undermine prejudice, Ezekiel proclaimed that the impending war was a priceless “opportunity to silence the anti-Semite and perform an act that will redound to the credit of and benefit our entire race.” If Jews were to “do our whole duty now,” Ezekiel prophesied, “thirty years hence it will not be necessary to publish a volume to prove that Jews are loyal citizens.”

Their acculturation to all things American and southern made them not only southern Jews but also very much Jewish southerners. For instance, Charles Jacobson, a prominent player in turn-of-the-century Arkansas politics, never downplayed or hid his Jewish identity. His religious identity never became an issue, however, because he was the consummate southerner along with being a devout Jew. As historian Raymond Arsenault notes, “In his white supremacist views, in his romantic patronage of the Lost Cause, in his ambivalence toward Northern business interests, in his sense of place, in his style of speech and dress—indeed in every respect but his religion—[Jacobson] was a classic New-South gentleman.” Another example of Jews’ deep acculturation into the South came from financial leader and presidential advisor Bernard Baruch, who recalls that when he was five

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or six, he and his brother discovered a trunk hidden in the attic of their home in Camden, South Carolina. Upon opening it, they found the Confederate uniform of their father, Simon Baruch, who had served with distinction as a field surgeon. Their curiosity whetted, the two boys continued to dig deeper, when they “pulled out a white hood and long robe with a crimson cross on its breast—the regalia of a Knight of the Ku Klux Klan.” Baruch explains that he of all people understood the Klan of the 1920s to be “an odious symbol of bigotry and hate,” but that the Reconstruction Klan, at least at the time, “seemed a heroic band fighting to free the South from the debaucheries of carpetbag rule.” That their father was a member of the Klan was, for these two young southern boys, a mark of great honor and accomplishment. Only their mother appearing behind them and scolding them, swearing them to secrecy, tempered the excitement and pride that came by knowing their father was a member of Nathan Bedford Forrest’s Klan.  As Wendy Machlovitz asserts, for Jews throughout the South, the “blending of these multiple cultural identities manifested itself in myriad ways and suggests that Jewish and southern identities were not incompatible.” One need only think of Clara Lowenburg chomping on boiled river shrimp then reciting her Hebrew prayers to understand that Jews made themselves very much at home in the South.

As southern Jews found it easier and more effective to be part of the surrounding culture rather than separated from it, one of the major areas in which they accommodated to regional norms was in religious practice. Rather than clinging to traditional forms observed in the East European shtetl, all across the South Jews chose to modify and in some cases

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64 Machlovitz, *Clara Lowenburg Moses*, 11.
abandon religious practices that they no longer considered tenable in their new homeland. Although many of these modifications were formalized with the development of Reform Judaism, many southern Jews simply tailored their personal and family observance on their own accord. The two most obvious issues were keeping kosher and observing the Jewish Sabbath. Kosher food was simply unavailable in many of the more isolated parts of the South, and inevitably the early Jewish pioneers in any given southern community were forced to loosen many of the dietary restrictions they had previously held. In addition, strict Sabbath observance was all but impossible for Jewish peddlers and merchants in a majority Christian society, as Saturday was often the best day to do business and Sunday was considered the day of rest.  

The extent of Jewish religious accommodation varied from community to community. In Clinton, Louisiana, by 1890 the Jewish population of approximately 85 persons had almost totally assimilated into gentile culture. Many Clinton Jews attended Protestant services and dated non-Jews. They utterly abandoned Shabbat observance and kosher laws, and only rarely met for Jewish religious services on the high holy days in the public school building. For most Jews in and around Clinton, “Jewish living became the observance of a very limited ritual and charitable gifts to Jewish causes,” and their

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65 Esther Surasky Pinc recalled the struggles that the first Jews in a southern community would have in observing traditional Jewish practices. She relates that when her uncle, H. L. Polier, first brought his family to the South, “They cared very little about their Jewishness. The last thing they thought of was keeping kosher.” That changed when his sister, Sarah, came to town. She insisted on keeping kosher, which entailed traveling 40 miles each way to Augusta, Georgia, to find kosher food. Esther recalls that her mother “soon converted her relatives. They now took turns obtaining orders for kosher beef and chickens. And how they complained about carrying live chickens to Augusta and returning with the meat that had already been picked over by the Augustans.” Although her father, B. M. Surasky, “had learned to kill chickens the kosher way,” his wife forbade him, “because he kept his store open on Saturday.” Esther rhetorically asks, “How else could one make a living in Aiken, where Saturday was the big business day when farmers from far and wide came to do their shopping?” Shankman, “Jewish Life in Aiken,” 2-3.
Jewishness became an exclusively individual, not group, identity.\textsuperscript{66} Most other cases were not so extreme, and the Jewish acculturation to southern Protestant norms was gradual and limited. The Norfolk, Virginia, example is more typical. By 1869, progressive-minded members of the synagogue were demanding reforms in the ritual. In response the prayers were shortened, an organ was installed, and a Christian organist was hired. By 1871 the bylaws had been amended so as to allow businessmen who did not close their shops on the Jewish Sabbath to become president or vice-president of the synagogue. However, a motion in 1876 to remove the traditional head-covering in worship services received only two affirmative votes, a sign that modernizing tendencies did not march on with inevitability. Nonetheless, in 1899 the congregation acquired its first Hebrew Union College graduate who “wore the collar and garb of an Episcopal minister,” completing the slow but sure movement toward Reform.\textsuperscript{67}

Unlike many other religious groups where ecclesiastical authorities provided conservative resistance to change, southern rabbis were usually the vanguard of reform. Consciously emulating the Protestant model while retaining a strong sense of Jewish identity, many Reform rabbis abolished skull caps, held Sunday morning services, minimized the use of Hebrew in the liturgy, and emphasized good relations with their Christian counterparts, all in an attempt to defuse prejudice.\textsuperscript{68} Of course, most communities in the South had too small a Jewish population to support a full-time rabbi, and so they depended on lay

\textsuperscript{66} Kaplan, \textit{The Eternal Stranger}, chap. 4, “The Clinton Community”; quote on p. 86.

\textsuperscript{67} Malcolm H. Stern, “The Role of the Rabbi in the South,” in Kaganoff and Urofsky, \textit{“Turn to the South”}, 26. For a parallel story of the movement to reform in another congregation, see Rubin, \textit{Third to None}, chap. 7.

\textsuperscript{68} Rabinowitz, “Nativism, Bigotry, and Anti-Semitism,” 449; Stern, “Role of the Rabbi,” 21-22.
leadership, which may well have accelerated the movement away from traditional European forms that relied so heavily on rabbinical knowledge of proper ritual and worship forms.\textsuperscript{69}

With few exceptions, Jews who came to the South embarked on a conscious, if not always ordered or systematic, path of acculturation. Recognizing the unique opportunities afforded them in the South, Jews strove to fit in with their gentile neighbors as much as possible. Relinquishing their Jewish identity was never even an option worth considering for most of them, but nearly all Jews in the South worked hard to prove that they were good southerners too. Indeed, in the negotiation of their multiple identities, many Jews showed similar loyalty to both their region and their religion, combining devotion to their heritage with a pragmatic accommodation to their new surroundings.

5.5 Anti-Jewish Violence in the South

Even given Jews’ best efforts to blend in, and despite the general goodwill of most southern gentiles, not all was well for Jews in Dixie. The very fact that southern Jews took such great pains to accommodate themselves to southern culture suggests concern for the consequences of not doing so. Indeed, as Howard Rabinowitz has indicated, a major reason for their accommodationist efforts was their “appreciation for the region’s penchant for violence and the frightening potential for latent anti-Semitism to become blatant.”\textsuperscript{70}

Furthermore, Malcolm Stern notes that “The major impetus toward assimilation was the

\textsuperscript{69} In Albany, Georgia, due to his “extensive biblical and talmudic training, his fluency in Hebrew, his knowledge of ritual and ceremony and his oratorical ability,” Charles Wessolowsky became the leader of the local Jewish community, a position he held for 23 years, performing all the services demanded of a rabbi, even acting as a kind of circuit rabbi in conjunction with his peddling. Schmier, \textit{Reflections on Southern Jewry}, 13-14. Esther Surasky Pinck gives this insight about the nature of the small Jewish community in Aiken, South Carolina: “Who acted as rabbi? My father. Who was cantor? My father. Who sang Kol Nidre? My father. It was all voluntary.” Shankman, “Jewish Life in Aiken,” 3.

\textsuperscript{70} Rabinowitz, “Nativism, Bigotry, and Anti-Semitism,” 450.
growth of public anti-Semitism.” It was not only the South’s reputation but also the actual occurrence of antisemitic violence that hastened southern Jews’ movement toward acculturation. Although these violent episodes were relatively sporadic and scattered, each one served as a grim reminder of the possible consequences that awaited outsider groups in the South who did not conform to the social order, which in turn made the allure of insider status, however elusive, all the more appealing. Violence against Jews in the late-nineteenth-century South fell far short of what African Americans experienced, but it was frequent enough to make Jews take notice and consciously try to avoid it. It also paved the way for the uglier manifestations of southern antisemitism that eventually culminated in the 1915 lynching of Leo Frank and the rise of the second Ku Klux Klan.

Four cases, all of which occurred in the span of a few months in the spring and summer of 1887, aptly illustrate the range of antisemitic violence that occurred in the South in the fifty years following the end of the Civil War:

1. In the northeastern Louisiana parish of West Carroll, longstanding resentment against Simon Witkowski, “the leading merchant and richest man in the parish,” finally turned into actual violence in the early spring of 1887, resulting in the death of one unidentified man and the driving of Witkowski from the area. As reported in the *American Hebrew*, “It was stated that Witkowski had ground down those who were indebted to him, and had pursued a very hard policy in dealing with them.”


72 There is no specific explanation that suggests why there was this unusual spike of anti-Jewish violence in 1887. I choose these particular cases only because they illustrate a range of experiences of anti-Jewish violence; other than chronological proximity, however, these four cases are unconnected. In general terms, based on my research there seems to have been more southern anti-Jewish violence in the years 1887-1893 than at any other time, with most of the episodes being rooted in farmers’ grievances related to poor agricultural and economic conditions.

73 “Anti-Semites in Louisiana,” *New York* American Hebrew, 1 Apr. 1887.
2. Shortly after the Witkowski incident, one hundred-seventy miles downriver in Avoyelles Parish, a store owned by two Jewish merchants, Kahn and Bauer, was attacked by a mob of “wild young men.” The store had been “doing a fine business,” which engendered some local jealousy. Directing their violence against property and not persons, the assailants riddled the store and surrounding fence with bullets. The following day, Kahn and Bauer were delivered a warning that they must leave the area or be killed. Additional proclamations were posted by the mob in a number of public places “declaring that the people of Avoyelles—as they styled themselves—wanted no more Jews among them, and therefore advised all Jews to leave the county by April, under penalty of death.” To the vigilantes’ surprise, the local populace, who they presumed to speak for, was aroused not in their favor but rather in support of the Jews. The parish’s two newspapers called for the mob’s apprehension and punishment, a mass meeting was held to the same effect, and the governor was persuaded to offer a large reward for their conviction.⁷⁴

3. On the night of 20 July 1887, Jacob Simon’s store in Beaux Bridge, in south-central Louisiana, was broken into by “a number of negroes.” The merchant was choked to death, after which his attackers robbed the store and “made away with the booty.” Simon, a 57-year-old bachelor, had moved to Beaux Bridge from Cincinnati, where his family lived, sixteen years earlier, and was “the only Israelite in that town.” When his brother and nephew came down to retrieve the body, they had to travel to Lafayette, the nearest community with a Jewish burial ground, to inter him.⁷⁵

4. The same day as Simon’s death, Solomon Dreeben, a peddler working out of Dallas, was murdered near Wylie, in northeast Texas. The crime appears to have been a


simple robbery, as money and clothing were discovered missing from the dead man’s valise. Dreeben left behind a wife and two teenage children, who he had supported by peddling.\textsuperscript{76}

From the more than two dozen cases I looked at, most of the violence leveled against Jews in the late-nineteenth-century South followed the patterns represented by these four episodes. To begin with, most instances of anti-Jewish violence that I examined had an economic component to them. Many were linked with robbery, as in the Solomon Dreeben and Jacob Simon cases, and not unlike the Abraham Surasky murder detailed at the beginning of the chapter. As mentioned previously, Jewish merchants and peddlers were vulnerable and attractive targets for thieves and other desperate men. For every assaulted or murdered peddler, there were surely at least an equal number who narrowly escaped harm, like B. M. Surasky (Abraham’s older brother), who, according to the recollection of his daughter, “overheard the family with whom he found refuge for the night plotting to make away with him,” but made his flight before they could carry out their plan.\textsuperscript{77} Not only peddlers, but Jews in small towns could be vulnerable targets as well. Although Simon had been a resident of his town for sixteen years and owned his own store, thus achieving a certain degree of stability and acceptance, the fact that he had no kin or religious networks nearby increased his susceptibility to violence. Most southern Jews were not so completely separated from family or coreligionists as Simon was, but there were only a few cities throughout the South that had a large enough mass of Jews to provide reasonable insulation from the possibility of violent attack—and as the Leo Frank case would prove, even a sizeable Jewish population did not always guarantee security.


\textsuperscript{77} Shankman, “Jewish Life in Aiken,” 2.
Southern Jews were not targets of violence only when they dealt from a position of relative weakness. As the Witkowski and Kahn and Bauer examples demonstrate and I will show further, there were many instances in which it was the economic strength of Jewish merchants that led to resentment among their competitors or other local residents (often their debtors). In fact, it was in these cases, when Jews held an economic position of power, that antisemitism became the most explicit and virulent. These incidents also displayed a greater tendency to inspire mob violence. Jewish proprietors were culpable in their enemies’ eyes not only as individual transgressors, but also as symbols of a larger system of oppression and economic injustice. Thus, it was not just the individual business practices of Simon Witkowski that drew the ire of the mob, but his personification of the image of the greedy and manipulative Shylock, who lined his pockets by stealing from honest farmers and workers who suffered in a spiraling cycle of indebtedness and poverty. Violence fueled by prejudicial and conspiratorial images thus failed to differentiate between individual merchants, whom indebted customers may have had a legitimate complaint against, and the remainder of the Jewish population, that was guilty of nothing more than filling an antisemitic stereotype.

The least complicated, and usually least explicitly antisemitic, of the violent episodes against southern Jews were the robbery cases in which itinerant peddlers also became murder victims. In April 1870, the mangled remains of Samuel Friedman’s body were found under a tree trunk on the banks of the Duck River two miles outside Williamsport, Tennessee. Friedman, a well-known peddler in the region, was a native of “Russia Poland,” but had resided in America for several years and was a Confederate veteran. Although the body was in a fairly advanced state of decomposition when searchers found it, they were able to ascertain that Friedman had been shot in the back of the head, through one leg near his
knee, and near the bottom of the spine, and that his throat had been cut. Because the peddler’s goods were missing from the murder scene, it was assumed that the primary motivation behind the murder was robbery. Twenty years later, in December 1890, Morris Brown disappeared near Fairmount, in central Louisiana. After several organized searches failed to turn up anything, a ten-year old boy came forward with information that Brown had stayed at the house of Jack Chambers, and just as he left the house in the morning, Chambers came from behind and struck the peddler in the back of his head with an axe, put the body in a sack, and carried him off. Brown’s body was later found in a seven-foot-deep hole under a large tree; thrown on top of his corpse were his coat, hat, boots, and valise, with “a portion of [the] goods that had cost him his life.” The murdered peddler had only been in the country for three months, having come from Russia at the solicitation of his older brother. His earnings were eventually to have allowed his wife and child to join him in America. Five years later and sixty miles south, another “brutal, dastardly and atrocious murder was committed” against Jewish peddlers Israel Tucker and Charles Bernstein. The two men were traveling along the Calcasien River in their mule-drawn wagon when they were suddenly besieged by a volley of rifle shots. Tucker was immediately killed, and Bernstein severely wounded. Hardly strangers to their victims, the murderers, James and Aaron Johnson, were among the peddlers’ regular patrons. Indeed, the day of the attack Aaron was wearing a red shirt that he had bought from the peddlers the previous Saturday, and when the shooting had begun, Bernstein pled, “Aaron, don’t shoot at me.” Although the newspapers explained that “robbery was the sole and only motive for the commission of


this heinous crime,” and that the “whole affair was concocted . . . for the purpose of getting the peddlers’ money and goods,” it was also a personal grudge that led to the shooting. Aaron Johnston had told others that he “wanted to shoot the ---- peddler . . . for accusing him of trying to steal a suit of clothes.” Following the usual pattern, Tucker and Bernstein both had young families dependent on them for support.®

Robbery-murders such as these clearly fall more in the category of violent crime than hate crime, as the victims’ Jewish identity seemed to have been incidental than causal. Even in the last example in which revenge joined theft as the motivation, there is no indication from contemporary accounts that Tucker and Bernstein were targeted because they were Jews. On the other hand, all of these examples demonstrate the vulnerability of Jewish peddlers in the rural South. Nonetheless, these violent robberies were the exception to the rule of general cordial treatment that Jewish peddlers received along their routes. In all of these cases law enforcement officials acted quickly to locate and apprehend the perpetrators, newspapers roundly condemned the actions of what were portrayed as an isolated handful of violent individuals, and a number of citizens, particularly many community elites, publicly denounced the murders. In the Friedman case, “both Jew and Gentile joined in offering of their condolence” to his widow, and local citizens “determined that nothing short of full measured justice should be meted out upon the heads of the criminals.”®¹ Certainly these Jewish peddlers were not pariahs or outcasts in their communities. Even so, such violent incidents must have made other Jews in the vicinity at least somewhat uneasy about the security of their place in southern communities.


Far more venomous and intimidating than isolated robberies and even murders were the occasional spates of organized agrarian violence against southern Jewish storeowners. Most of this violence occurred in the late 1880s and early 1890s when conditions for small farmers in the South became increasingly hopeless and drove them to desperation. Several historians have connected this general discontent among southern farmers in the period with a growing antisemitism that eventually exploded into violence. Leonard Dinnerstein argues that beginning in the late 1870s, some of the victims of the South’s agricultural depression “began to identify Jews as sources of their woes. . . . Farmers especially disliked Jews, the ‘detested middlemen’ who did not work with their hands or till the soil, and whom they associated with wealthy bankers who had allegedly forced the demonetization of silver.”

This sentiment intensified in proportion to the deterioration of the southern agricultural condition over the next two decades. Although farmers’ discontent was not exclusively pointed at Jewish merchants, uncomplimentary references to Jews appeared more frequently in southern newspapers, and more and more, “Jews, Jewish Shylocks, Jewish money and Jewish mortgage holders were blamed for all the troubles besetting the nation,” including those particular to the South. It is important to make distinctions, as historians John Higham and David Gerber do, between the “rural and small town anti-Semitic propagandists, most from the South, Midwest, and Great Plains,” and the “agrarian political

82 C. Vann Woodward’s account of the period is worth recounting: “The annual defeat of the crop market and the tax collector, the weekly defeat of the town market and mounting debt, and the small, gnawing, daily defeats of crumbling barn and fence, encroaching sagebrush and erosion, and one’s children growing up in illiteracy—all added up to frustration. The experience bred a spirit of desperation and defiance in these people. ‘The basest fraud on earth is agriculture,’ wrote a Mississippi farmer, and then he said the most blasphemous thing ever spoken by one of Jefferson’s ‘chosen people of God’—‘No wonder Cain killed his brother. He was a tiller of the ground.’” Origins of the New South, 188.

83 Dinnerstein, Antisemitism in America, 49.

84 See Berman, Richmond’s Jewry, 247.

85 Dinnerstein, Uneasy at Home, 91.
radicals of the 1890s such as the Populists, who were not particularly drawn to anti-Semitism.”

It was these “rural and small town anti-Semitic propagandists” who initiated the closest thing to a systematic violent campaign against Jews that the South had ever seen.

Early Saturday afternoon, 25 October 1889, a “large party of armed men” rode into the northeastern Louisiana city of Delhi, not far from where Simon Witkowski had been violently driven from town two years previous. The mob fired their pistols into the showcases and front windows of the Jewish-owned mercantile establishments in the town, discharging about fifty shots into T. Hirsch’s storefront window, smashing up S. Blum & Co., and sending bricks through the windows of Karpe, Weil & Co. Threatening the Jewish storeowners and “putting them in terror for their lives,” the rioters “ordered them to leave the place” within the next twelve to fifteen hours, then rode away as fast as they had come.

The townspeople, who were “friendly” to the Jewish merchants, expressed a “general regret” over the incident, and their disapproval of the mob’s activities probably protected the merchants from further harm, at least in terms of making empty the threats of expulsion. Although the attackers were not publicly identified in the newspapers, their identities must have been known, as it was immediately ascertained that the motivation behind the violence was that the merchants held mortgages on the land of many small farmers in the area, and that “certain debtors in the neighborhood were banded together, to run their creditors away.”

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87 “Mobbing Merchants,” *Cincinnati* American Israelite, 31 Oct. 1889; “Trouble in Delhi,” *Rayville, LA* Richland Beacon, 2 Nov. 1889; “The Delhi Trouble,” *Richland Beacon*, 2 Nov. 1889. Coverage of the incident was also provided in the *Jackson, MS* Clarion-Ledger, 31 October 1889. C. Vann Woodward sanguinely asserted that the Delhi incident “is not indicative of widespread antisemitism, for there seems to have been very little”
The public outcry was swift and determined in its denunciation of the violence, if not wholehearted sympathy for the victims. One of the earliest local reports wryly noted that “This is certainly a new way to clear off old debts.” Although making a jab at “certain merchants” for charging high prices and then demanding collection of debts arising from late mortgage payments, the newspaper’s opinion was decidedly pro-business, if not pro-Jewish. The editor wrote, “If a man agrees to pay a hundred, or a thousand per cent . . . he should be made to stand up to his contract.” A week after the “riotous acts,” a mass meeting, “one of the largest and most respectable ever held in Delhi,” was held. The unanimously accepted resolutions denounced the violent attacks as being performed “maliciously, wantonly and without just cause of provocation.” They went on to say that such behavior, “if left unrebuked,” would “disparage and disgrace” the community “in the opinion of all honest and honorable people.” The citizens then asserted their unflagging support of the rule of law, advising everyone to take matters of perceived injustice to the courts, rather than taking the law into their own hands “so as to regulate society to their own views” and disrupting the “peace and christian sentiment of our community.” The local newspaper printed the resolutions in full, and applauded the actions taken by the assembly to show that the citizenry of Delhi was as committed to “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness as the inalienable right of the citizen” as much as any other place in the Union.

Public statements condemning the violence were also made by the Delhi Farmers’ Union (that some suggested had sanctioned the violence as part of their activism in support of...)

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(Origins of the New South, 188 n. 42). I have identified at least eight other episodes of anti-Jewish violence in the region from 1887 to 1893 (and am relatively confident there are even more), which suggests that Woodward’s estimation was perhaps overly optimistic.


89 “Mass Meeting at Delhi,” and “The Outrage Denounced,” ibid., 9 Nov. 1889. Sources do not say how many people attended the mass meeting, only that it was quite large.
farmers and in opposition to merchants), and by the citizens of Charlieville, thirty-five miles away.\textsuperscript{90}

Despite the general antipathy toward extralegal violence exhibited by the majority of “respectable” citizens of northeastern Louisiana, mob violence struck again near the Mississippi River town of Lake Providence, fifty miles northeast of Delhi. In mid-November, a Jewish store in Tompkins Bend was riddled with some fifty rifle shots in the middle of night. A sign was also left, reading: “No Jews after the 1st of January. A Delhi warning of fire and lead will make you leave.” Another store, Bernard & Bloch, was also targeted with approximately fifty-five rifle shots, and twenty shots were fired into the home of one of the store’s proprietors, Gus Bernard, one bullet narrowly passing over the bed where his family lay in fear.\textsuperscript{91} This attack, especially coming on the heels of the “Delhi outrage,” is interesting on several accounts. First, it was imitative of the Delhi episode, raising the question of whether some of the same people may have been involved. Second, it was more explicitly antisemitic, overtly identifying “Jews” in general, and not just individual storeowners, as the target. Finally, the violence became personal and not just institutional when it targeted one a merchant and his family rather than just his store. In the wake of the attacks, the people of East Carroll Parish denounced the “wanton” and “flagrant” assault on the Jewish merchants in their midst.\textsuperscript{92} However, the purpose of the terrorist violence was at least partly fulfilled when some of the Jewish merchants who had been targets of the mob decided to give up their businesses and leave the area.\textsuperscript{93}


\textsuperscript{91} “The Louisiana Outrages,” \textit{(Cincinnati) American Israelite}, 21 Nov. 1889.

\textsuperscript{92} “Notes,” ibid., 5 Dec. 1889.

\textsuperscript{93} “Notes,” ibid., 23 Jan. 1890.
Things seem to have settled down somewhat after the Lake Providence shootings, but only briefly. As the 1890s dawned and the agricultural condition of the South reached its lowest point leading up to the depression of 1893, rising costs, falling prices, high railroad rates, an inelastic currency system, the crop lien system, and a perpetual cycle of debt led farmers in the Deep South to lash out in desperation. The region of western Mississippi and northeastern Louisiana had a long tradition of violence illustrated in part by the incidents related above. It was agricultural depression, however, that provided the proximate cause for Whitecapping, a dirt farmer movement that espoused an antisemitic and racist ideology and used violence against black tenant farmers and Jewish merchants to achieve its aims.

Convinced that they were the victims of a vast Jewish conspiracy, hundreds of poor farmers in southwestern Mississippi formed secret clubs late in 1891 that became known as Whitecap societies.\(^94\) One of their main platforms, often published in local newspapers, was that area merchants (depicted primarily as Jews) should not allow blacks to tenant farm their land, as the cheaper labor made it virtually impossible for white farmers to compete. For instance, the central club of Lawrence County complained, “The accursed Jews and others own two thirds of our land. They control and half bind the Negro laborers who partly subsist by thefts from the white farmers; thereby controlling prices of Southern produce.” As a solution to the problem, the club proposed to “control negro laborers by mild means, if possible; by coercion if necessary,” and “to control Jews and Gentile land speculators, and, if

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\(^94\) William F. Holmes, “Whitecapping: Anti-Semitism in the Populist Era,” *American Jewish Historical Quarterly* 63 (Mar. 1974): 245-47. Although the Whitecaps did not always wear costumes and only sometimes rode disguised, their name may have been a nod to the similarities between them and Reconstruction terrorist groups such as the Ku Klux Klan and Knights of the White Camelia, who typically wore white hoods or caps. Richard Maxwell Brown argues that “white capping seems to have been an important link between the first and second Ku Klux Klans. White Cap methods, in regard to punishment and costume, seem to have been influenced by the first Klan.” Brown, *Strain of Violence: Historical Studies of American Violence and Vigilantism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975), 25.
necessary, force them to abandon our country and confiscate their lands for the benefit of the white farmers.”

Propelled by this ideology of victimization and retribution, violence erupted in the election season of 1892. African American tenants on lands owned by Jewish merchants were driven from their homes, to which notices were affixed declaring: “This Jew place is not for sale or rent, but will be used hereafter as pasture.” Numerous blacks were beaten, whipped, and even killed, and scores of tenant homes were burned to the ground. One of the major targets of the Whitecap violence was H. Miller, a Jewish merchant in Pike County who had built a flourishing business over several decades. Miller had obtained four hundred small farms in the area, mostly through mortgage foreclosures, which made him doubly despised because he rented out his land to black laborers and had acquired wealth based on the misfortunes of white farmers who defaulted on their mortgages. During the last two months of 1892, Whitecaps burned twenty-seven homes on Miller-owned land, and through damage and abandonment, Miller estimated his losses at $30,000. Fearful for his life, he hired an armed guard to watch his home at night “to prevent it being burned over his head,” and in February 1893 sold his business and moved to New Orleans.

Many local officials and businessmen decried the Whitecap violence because of fears of lawlessness and negative effects on the area’s economy. Even the governor stepped in, issuing a proclamation condemning the movement and offering a $100 reward for each offender apprehended and convicted. Nevertheless, the violence continued into 1893 and was ended only after a concerted effort by law enforcement officials. Although individual

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96 Holmes, “Whitecapping,” 249.

Jews were typically not targets of direct violence, several were given notices to leave town, and many Jewish merchants and landholders suffered considerable economic losses because of the violence against their black tenants and their properties. In one case, farmers even threatened lawyers who represented Jews in court. Jews were by no means the only victims of the Whitecaps, but the threats and violence against them revealed not only the standard agrarian tensions of the period but also rising antisemitic sentiments among many rural southerners.

A common feature in many of these incidents of anti-Jewish violence was the alliance of “respectable” citizens with the Jewish victims rather than with the vigilante mobs who assailed them. While vigilantes typically claimed to speak for the interests of the entire community, it became clearer in anti-Jewish violence than in either the African American or Mormon cases that there were in fact significant divisions among southern communities in their attitudes toward both extralegal violence and certain outsider groups, in this case Jews. This distinction typically fell along class lines. As was shown in previous chapters, southern elites were hardly adverse to the principle of vigilantism, as business, civic, religious, and government leaders not only supported but also participated in and sometimes led mobs against African American and Mormon offenders. While elites shared the belief that citizens had the right to use violence to defend honor and preserve the social order, however, they were also afraid the mob rule would threaten law and order. Accordingly, they advocated vigilantism as a surgical instrument to be used in certain situations rather than a blunt

98 See Holmes, “Whitecapping,” 251, 259. Notice of this violence against Jews reached the highest levels of the nation’s government. U.S. Senator Donelson Caffery from Louisiana, after hearing about the expulsion of Jews from one town, asked in a letter to a friend, “What is the matter with the itinerant Jews in Franklin, that they were the subjects of extradition, not of a legal but of an actual kind?” Typescript letter from Donelson Caffery, U.S. Senate, Washington, DC, to Harry, 23 Nov. 1893, from letter file book, vol. 6, p. 105, Caffery (Donelson and Family) Papers, Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collection, Special Collections, Hill Memorial Library, Louisiana State University Libraries, Baton Rouge, LA.
weapon to be applied indiscriminately, so they encouraged some forms of vigilantism as
necessary and good while condemning others and excessive and dangerous.

Jews generally had the support of community elites because even if they were not
fully accepted as cultural insiders, their mercantile interests allied them with the southern
middle class. As upwardly mobile Jews sought respectability in southern society, they did so
not by seeking common cause with poor farmers but by building relationships with more
influential southerners. In their geographic location in towns and cities, economic location
in entrepreneurial and commercial interests, and social location as the aspiring middle class,
Jews naturally gravitated toward the business elements of the New South, who in turn
showed an affinity toward them. The violence against Jewish merchants and storeowners
reified their class position, both by reinforcing their sometimes antagonistic relationship with
poor farmers and by strengthening bonds with middle- and upper-class southerners who
repeatedly demonstrated solidarity with the victims of class-based vigilantism. To be sure,
these class lines were not sharply drawn, as many southern Jews had friendly relations with
neighbors and customers from across the economic and racial spectrum, and southern elites
consistently barred Jews from certain parts of high society. Nevertheless, anti-Jewish
violence exposed deep tensions within southern society, not only between Jewish merchants
and poor farmers but also between the mercantile and agrarian classes more broadly. In the
next section, we will consider antisemitism in both its ideological and religious forms, which

99 For instance, Steven Hertzberg shows how Jews’ role as merchants brought prosperity and fostered
civic-mindedness, which helped them integrate into Atlanta society. Strangers within the Gate City, 155-156.

100 As Wendy Lowe Bessman explains, “the genteel brand of social anti-Semitism kept Jews out of
exclusive clubs, led to restrictive covenants against Jews in many neighborhoods, and produced quota systems
in universities and professions.” A Separate Circle: Jewish Life in Knoxville, Tennessee (Knoxville: University of
Tennessee Press, 2001), 51. David Gerber argues that this pattern of social exclusion in the South was “no
combined with economic tensions to trigger prejudice against southern Jews and was often used to further legitimate acts of violence against them.

5.6 Southern Antisemitism

Economic hardship, class antagonism, and populist protest were the immediate causes of the agrarian violence that racked the Deep South in the late 1880s and early 1890s. However, the anti-Jewish element of that violence can only be fully understood when put into the larger context of intensifying antisemitism throughout the United States and Europe during the same era. Especially in America, as Michael Dobkowski notes, for the most part “the kinds of accusations that anti-Semites and others leveled against Jews remained relatively constant. . . . The big changes were not so much intellectual or conceptual, but emotional and a matter of degree.”

Unlike scholars including Oscar Handlin and Richard Hofstadter, who connected the rise of rural American antisemitism to agrarian protest movements and especially the Populists, Dobkowski demonstrates that “there were many misconceptions and falsehoods, including conspiracy theories, circulating in America well before the 1890s that had nothing to do with the agrarian protest or social claustrophobia.” From 1865 to 1915, longstanding prejudices and stereotypes were simply given new expression and found resonance with a new set of social, cultural, and economic circumstances.

There were complex religious and economic sources of antisemitic attitudes in American culture. Leonard Dinnerstein unequivocally argues that “Christian viewpoints

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underlie all American antisemitism. No matter what other factors or forces may have been in play at any given time the basis for prejudice toward Jews in the United States . . . must be Christian teachings." While compelling in its boldness, Dinnerstein’s thesis must be nuanced by a fuller representation of how Christians viewed Jews. Jews became both indirect and direct victims of nineteenth-century American Protestant triumphalism in a number of ways, including laws upholding the Christian Sabbath as the national day of rest; Bible readings, recitations of the Lord’s Prayer, and the singing of Protestant hymns in public schools; explicit Christian references in official government language and proclamations; missionary drives to convert (or worse, “reclaim”) Jews to Christianity; and general disdain among Protestant ministers and intellectuals for Judaism as a viable and respectable religious system in its own right (rather than as a precursor to Protestant Christianity). In addition, Jews were often depicted in unflattering terms in religious sermons and popular novels throughout the nineteenth century. Some southerners acted out anger against Jews as unforgivable Christ-killers, but for others they were the chosen people of God who had providentially survived centuries of persecution.

While America’s “Protestant century” was certainly not a structurally or culturally inviting place for non-Protestants, Jews did fare better on the whole than other religious outsiders such as Mormons and Catholics. Although some Jewish sources pointed to

103 Dinnerstein, Antisemitism in America, ix.
106 Joseph Proskauer, who grew up in late nineteenth-century Mobile, Alabama, was beat up in high school for being a “Christ killer”; other Jewish boys in the South shared similar experiences. Dinnerstein, Uneasy at Home, 89.
southerners’ Christian faith as “the root of popular prejudice,” viewing Jewish-Christian interactions in the South as a whole makes it difficult to argue for a substantial religiously based antisemitism in the nineteenth-century South. Many southern evangelicals saw Jews as part of the great unsaved mass of humanity that needed conversion, but relatively few Jews recalled specific attempts to convert them personally. Jews were rare enough in the South that many people, especially in rural areas, saw meeting a Jew as something of a novelty or special event. As “people of the Old Testament,” Jews were considered religious authorities by many southerners, who loved to talk religion. One North Carolina peddler recalled how his customers insisted “that I stay overnight and discuss the Bible with them.” Similarly, a Jewish pawnshop owner in Durham spent hours discussing passages from the Bible with customers. Another peddler remembered a poor farm family who turned their home into a kind of boarding house for Jewish peddlers: “They reminded the Jews of their religious duties, loved to hear Yiddish spoken, and carefully separated pork from the eggs that they fed them.” Rabbis in Reform temples across the South were often invited to

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108 Rogoff, Homelands, 88. Attempts at conversion were common enough, however, that Jewish leaders sometimes became impatient and struck back. For instance, Rabbi Louis Weiss wrote an apologetic work expressly designed to defend Judaism in a southern climate in which “some missionaries and some fanatics hurl at us the imputation that we are blind and stubborn for not believing in Christ.” Weiss, Some Burning Questions Pertaining to the Messiahship of Jesus – Why the Jews do not Accept Him, rev. and enl. (n.p., 1900), 5, in Tennessee State Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.

109 David Steinheimer related that on his very first day as a peddler, fresh off the boat from Bavaria and knowing almost no English, a family took him in for the night. He recalled: “After supper I was the hero of the farm house . . . they wanted to Know all about me and my country as well as my religion, when I told them I was a Jew, they were astonished, they thought a Jew had horns.” Steinheimer life sketch, date unknown, p. 2, in David Steinheimer Family Papers 1869-1952, William Breman Jewish Heritage Museum, Atlanta, Georgia.

110 Rogoff, Homelands, 85-86.
give sermons in Christian churches and Bible classes. As Eli Evans notes, “To rock-ribbed Baptists they seemed the very embodiment of the prophets themselves.”

Although many of these relationships were patronizing and Jews were treated at least somewhat condescendingly, most southerners saw Jews and Judaism as a curiosity, something like a great-uncle who was endearingly odd but nonetheless part of the family, not as some kind of demonic anti-Christian threat. This is not to say that religious prejudice did not feed southern antisemitism where it did exist. However, it should be emphasized that the pervasiveness of evangelical Protestantism did not deterministically lead to conscious antisemitic feelings among all southern Christians, and that among many of them, strains of religious philosemitism were juxtaposed with classic images of Jews as Christ-killers.

The second major source of antisemitism in the late nineteenth century was a wide array of negative stereotypes of Jews as greedy, unproductive Shylocks. Like religious prejudices, however, these images were also complicated. Michael Dobkowski aptly describes this duality of virtues and vices that Jews inspired based on economic stereotypes:

On the positive side, the Jew commonly symbolized an admirable keenness and resourcefulness in business. In this sense, his economic energy seemed very much in the tradition of Yankee America. . . . In another mood, however, keenness might mean cunning; enterprise might shade into greed. Along with encomiums of the Jew as a model of commercial skill went frequent references to avaricious Shylocks.

Dobkowski further observes that the image of the Jew featured in the pages of the nationally circulated magazine Puck from 1885 to 1905 was “the inveterate materialist who strives his

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111 Evans, Provincials, 95. On the important role that rabbis played as liaisons between their Jewish congregation and the larger community, see Stern, “Role of the Rabbi.” As an example of this, in 1910, Julian Morgenstern, then a young college professor and latter the president of Hebrew Union College, was selected by the Jewish Chataqua Society to fill an invitation from the University of Tennessee to give three lectures on the Bible, which were warmly received despite some earlier resistance from conservative Protestant preachers that a Jew should not be teaching Christians about the Bible. See Bessman, A Separate Circle, 51-52. An informative biography on a prominent southern Reform rabbi in this period is Bobbie Malone, Rabbi Max Heller: Reformer, Zionist, Southerner, 1860-1929 (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1997).

112 Dobkowski, Tarnished Dream, 79.
entire life for pecuniary advantage, receives his greatest satisfaction from a particularly
profitable business transaction, and looks out upon the world with cash-register eyes riveted
to the possibilities of a quick profit.”

Although many of these images were churned out of popular presses in northern
urban centers where Jews had a much stronger numerical presence than in the South, the
stereotypical representations resonated strongly with many southerners. New South
boosters were energetic advocates of commercial enterprise, to be sure, and in many ways
they adopted “Yankee” attitudes of “the businessman as provider, community builder, and
industrious trader.” But even many of the most dedicated among them were never
entirely comfortable with the merits of creditors who earned money based on economic
concentration and who made profits, it seemed, based on the hard work of others.

Despairing farmers throughout the Midwest and South, searching for an explanation for the
never-ending cycles of debt and failure they suffered, summoned up images of the Jew as
merciless creditor, the Wall Street banker, or the international financier, “the epitome of the
exploitative moneyed interests.” Individuals who believed they had been shortchanged on
business transactions with Jewish lenders or merchants often reverted to stereotypes to make
sense the situation. For instance, Philip Pitts complained to his diary that he had received
only forty-three of the fifty pounds of meat he had ordered from “Ernst Bros.” He then

\[\text{\footnotesize 113} \text{Ibid., 94.}\]
\[\text{\footnotesize 114} \text{Higham, \textit{Send These to Me}, 180. Also see Paul M. Gaston, \textit{The New South Creed: A Study in Southern Mythmaking} (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1970); Ayers, \textit{Promise of the New South}, esp. chap. 3; and Woodward, \textit{Origins of the New South}, chaps. 5-6.}\]
\[\text{\footnotesize 115} \text{See Dobkowski, \textit{Tarnished Dream}, 103-04; Higham, \textit{Send These to Me}, 180-81.}\]
remarked, “No Jew that I ever met with, was honest. My Bible tells me ‘A false ballance [sic] is an abomination to the Lord’ – These Jews then must be an abomination to the Lord.”

Such attitudes were not unique to the South, nor did they originate there. However, as they became more pervasive in the popular imagination throughout Western Europe and America in the closing decades of the nineteenth century, antisemitic images were perpetuated by southern demagogues such as Tom Watson and by local vigilante groups such as the Whitecaps. While the mass of southerners were generally neither more nor less antisemitic than other Americans in the period, the depressed agricultural and financial condition of the postbellum South allowed for scapegoat images of “the Jew” to be exploited by willing parties and then given a southern flavor as expressed in anti-Jewish vigilante violence.

5.7 Conclusion

The antisemitic violence that racked rural Louisiana and Mississippi in the late 1880s and early 1890s struck a chord with Jews around the country. Due to his proximity in New Orleans, Reform rabbi Max Heller felt compelled to make public comment about the tragedies. However, his response to the violence in Delhi, Lake Providence, and western Mississippi is intriguing, even surprising. Rather than issuing blanket condemnations of southern antisemitism, Heller assumed a moderate pose. He argued that the charge of “Antisemite” had been bandied about too lightly, and that most Christian and Jewish

117 Philip H. Pitts Diary, Alabama, typescript, Southern Historical Collection, v. 2 (1882-1884), 44. In another example of a personal reaction to Jewish business practices, Donelson Caffery complained of his indebtedness on his sugarcane plantation: “I pay the Jews in the neighborhood of 20% when I ought to pay 6%. The business won’t stand the interest.” Letter from Donelson Caffery, Bethia Plantation, Teche P.O., Louisiana, to his child (Don?), 14 Dec. 1901 (letter file book, v. 4, p. 159), Caffery Papers, LSU.

commentators demonstrated “utter misunderstanding” about what the term really meant. Jewish circles in northern cities exaggerated the antisemitic content of the violence, Heller argued, as he differentiated between the true “Jew-hatred” of Germany and eastern Europe and the “lawless rowdyism” that Jews occasionally fell victim to in the South. A culture of vigilantism was not the same as epidemic antisemitism, and he assured his readers “how little these troubles mean as regards the general feeling in Louisiana towards the Jews.” Heller’s scrapbook for the period has clippings from various newspapers describing antisemitic atrocities in Russia occurring at the same time as the anti-Jewish violence in northern Louisiana, clearly trying to show by comparison how good Jews in America, and particularly in the South, really had it. When the southern press denounced the antisemitic violence, Heller extolled the “perfect harmony prevailing between Jew and Gentile” in the region.\footnote{Malone, \textit{Rabbi Max Heller}, 47-48.} Perhaps Heller was overly sanguine about the situation of Jews in the South, but he was certainly right when he asserted that their treatment far excelled that of Jews in Russia or African Americans in the South.

Heller’s reaction illustrates that complexity of the southern Jewish experience in the half century after Appomattox. On the one hand, Jews were victims of repeated, if sporadic and localized, aggression and violence, resulting in several murders and the destruction of countless thousands of dollars of property. On the other hand, most southern Jews made ready peace with their dual identities as southerners and Jews, and lived undisturbed throughout the South as relatively well-integrated members of their communities. In some ways, however, it was precisely because southern Jews chose not to ghettoize themselves that they were assaulted as much as they were. Their economic interactions with southerners sometimes opened them up for violence, whether because of their vulnerability as in the case
of peddlers or their relative economic strength as in the case of merchants and creditors. Thus, while Jews generally enjoyed congenial relationships with their Protestant neighbors on a day-to-day basis, and were deeply acculturated into southern society, they were never immune from southern violence.

The real story is therefore one of complexity and paradox, not singular and exclusivist explanations. Accepting the complexity of the situation not only prevents us from trivializing the suffering of the many Jews who did indeed suffer violence or discrimination at the hands of southern antisemites, but it also stops us short of demonizing southern gentiles or evangelical Christians as a whole. In fact, tolerance of Jews in the South and violence against them were not competing, but rather complementary and parallel processes. The palette of antisemitic images and stereotypes, which had existed for hundreds of years in religious sermons and popular art and literature, was readily available for those who chose to paint their world with them. And certainly the agricultural depressions and societal instability of the late-nineteenth-century South provided ample opportunity for would-be antisemites to act out their prejudices, and for others to turn to Jews as convenient scapegoats. This combination of antisemitism and violence would reach its peak in the 1915 lynching of Leo Frank. Although the Frank case was of a markedly different character than most of these earlier episodes due to its urban setting, the sexual paranoias it revealed, and the virulent antisemitism it sparked, put in its broader historical context it can be interpreted as the climax or culmination of decades of southern anti-Jewish violence.120

120 See Steve Oney, And the Dead Shall Rise: The Murder of Mary Phagan and the Lynching of Leo Frank (New York: Pantheon, 2003); Leonard Dinnerstein, The Leo Frank Case (New York, 1968); Dinnerstein, Uneasy at Home, chap. 6.
Violent antisemitism in the postbellum South could have been much worse, as the Mormon and African American examples prove. One of the key factors differentiating southern Jews from other groups was their unique social and economic location, which led them to build relationships with the southern middle class, moving them away from the fringes of society and closer to the cultural center. Although sometimes it was Jews’ very success at integration and upward mobility that fueled new hostility, particularly from marginalized poor farmers, in most times and places southern Jews were adept at being southern enough that their Jewishness was deemed by their neighbors to be either irrelevant or merely curious. While overt antisemitism and violence would never be dominant themes in the nineteenth-century southern Jewish experience like they were in Europe at the same time, they were persistent enough to constitute essential elements of Jewish-gentile relations in the New South. That southern anti-Jewish violence was scattered and unpredictable suggested that there was no formula invariably resulting in conflict, and no single set of indicators to predict when and where violence would occur. The episodic nature of the violence thus proved that no amount of integration and acculturation could guarantee Jews complete immunity from the capricious whims of southern vigilantism, particularly when vigilantes drew upon the antisemitic images and attitudes that existed but usually laid dormant in southern culture. In the end, Jews’ integration in communities across the South did in fact reflect a wide degree of acceptance. However, the omnipresent threat and occasional reality of anti-Jewish violence in the New South demonstrated the precarious and limited nature of that acceptance.
CHAPTER SIX
CATHOLICS AND CONCLUSIONS

6.1 Overview

In this chapter I sketch the contours of the Catholic presence in the postbellum South in order to discover why, despite the pervasiveness of anti-Catholicism, there was relatively little violence against Catholics, qua Catholics. With these considerations in mind, I then compare the patterns of cultural accommodation or resistance adopted by the religious outsider groups studied in this dissertation, by way of offering explanations for the different levels of, and the motivations for, the violence they experienced. In doing so, I argue that each group’s unique sense of peoplehood—dialectically constructed by themselves and imposed by others—influenced their interactions with the mainstream and dictated in large part the degree of violence or acceptance they experienced in the postbellum South.

6.2 The Catholic Case

In the largest lynching in American history, eleven Sicilian Catholics were unceremoniously slaughtered by a mass mob in New Orleans in 1891. The day before they were murdered, a jury had found the eleven men not guilty for the murder of the city’s police chief, but the judge ordered them to be held in prison nonetheless. Indignant at the jury’s verdict, a mob consisting of perhaps ten thousand people, including many of the city’s leading citizens, converged on the prison and hunted down each of the men. The tragic event, and the feeble response to it by Secretary of State James Blaine (a noted anti-
Catholic), severed diplomatic relations between the United States and Italy for over a year, and some feared it would spark a war.¹

More Catholics were lynched in the late nineteenth-century South than any other religious group (excepting black Christians), more than Mormons and Jews combined. In just the ten years from 1891 to 1901 at least nineteen Italians and twenty-four Mexicans—virtually all of whom we can assume were at least nominally Catholic—fell to southern lynching mobs.² Anti-Catholic violence should therefore presumably be at the center of a study exploring religion and violence in the South.


Drastically understudied, anti-Mexican lynchings were prominent in nineteenth-century America. Recent research has verified at least 597 Mexicans lynched between 1848 and 1928, the majority of which (282) were in Texas. Other than the borderland state of Texas, however, among southern states only Louisiana and Kentucky had any anti-Mexican lynchings in this period, each registering only one. See William D. Carrigan and Clive Webb, “Muerto por Unos Desconocidos (Killed by Persons Unknown): Mob Violence against Blacks and Mexicans,” in Beyond Black & White: Race, Ethnicity, and Gender in the U.S. South and Southwest, ed. Stephanie Cole and Alison M. Parker (College Station: Texas A&M University Press for the University of Texas at Arlington, 2004), 35-74; William D. Carrigan, The Making of a Lynching Culture: Violence and Vigilantism in Central Texas, 1836-1916 (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004), esp. chap. 1.
What complicates matters is that the mass mob that performed the New Orleans lynching was comprised largely of Irish and Italian Catholics, many of whom were community elites. Additionally, the religion of both the perpetrators and victims is rarely if ever mentioned, let alone highlighted, in both primary and secondary sources concerning the various lynchings. The episodes of violence are never referred to as “anti-Catholic,” but rather as anti-Italian, anti-Sicilian, anti-Mexican, racist, nativist, xenophobic, and so forth. In other words, historians and contemporary observers alike concur that the lynchings of these Sicilian, Italian, and Mexican Catholics had virtually nothing to do with religion, but rather reflected racial and ethnic prejudices stimulated by fears about labor and crime in southern communities. 

Having examined the varied and nuanced ways in which religion operated in violence against African American Christians, Mormons, and Jews in the postbellum South, what are we to do with scholars’ claims (which we can infer from their silence on the matter) that there was no religious element worth mentioning in these lynchings? There is no compelling evidence that religion played a direct role in the New Orleans lynching or any of the others. Nevertheless, religion was in fact present, but it was deeply buried, far more than in any of the other cases heretofore considered. The case of Catholics in the late nineteenth-century South demonstrates how religion can be subsumed in ethnic and racial identities, both by outsiders who see religion as one of a group of characteristics used to define a minority group’s ethnicity or nationality, and by insiders who seek to downplay religious difference in the effort to be accepted by the mainstream. Because anti-Mexican violence was more of a

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3 Precisely because religion is not mentioned in most available accounts, I do not have any evidence concretely identifying individual Sicilian or Mexican lynching victims as Catholics. In making these claims I am admittedly making broadly generalized assumptions about their religious identity as tied to their national and ethnic origins.
southwestern than a southern phenomenon, my analysis here will focus on Italian immigrants in the South, particularly in Louisiana, although many of the same insights are also applicable to the Mexican American case.

Despite being largely obscured by other more prominent variables such as ethnicity, race, and class, religion worked in anti-Italian violence in two subtle ways. First, while anti-Catholicism was not an explicit factor in any of the violence, Catholicity was a key element in the constellation of traits that made up the racial-ethnic-national identity of Italians, particularly as that identity was constructed by Anglo-Saxon Protestants. That “Italians” were Catholic was simply understood, and so the religious element of their national identity was taken for granted when late nineteenth-century Anglos spoke of them. Put another way, Americans knew that Italian immigrants were Catholic simply because they were Italian, and because Italians were Catholic. With their actual religious affiliation not even needing to be explicitly referred to, Italians—both as individuals and as a group—were intimately connected in the Protestant mind to the ever-perilous papist threat, and that was part of what made them marginal, dangerous, and Other, particularly in a nineteenth-century American culture that was so deeply imbued with traditional Protestant images, values, attitudes, and fears. Catholic immigrants were perceived as the advance guard of papal infiltration of American political institutions, and the Sicilian “Mafia” (such as those accused of killing the New Orleans police chief) were seen as “willing tools of the priesthood.” Of course, there were numerous reasons—racial, economic, political, cultural, and otherwise—


why Sicilian Americans were so bitterly reviled and became targets of violence in this period while other Catholic ethnic groups in the South, such as German, Irish, and French Americans, did not. Indeed, just as their common Protestantism did not stop southern whites from lynching African Americans, their shared Catholicism did not prevent well-established French and Irish Catholics from being among the leading proponents of anti-Sicilian sentiment throughout Louisiana.

Second, the fact that race and ethnicity trumped religion in the Italian lynchings, insomuch that the victims’ religion was not even mentioned in reports of the violence, was because southern Catholics made conscious efforts that it be so (or at least perceived as such). Indeed, the reason why the lynching victims’ Catholic identity was so negligible speaks to the character of southern Catholicism, and why there was not more anti-Catholic given the pervasiveness of anti-Catholic rhetoric and sentiment in southern culture. Very much like Jews, Catholics pursued a path of accommodation and integration with southern mainstream culture as far as they were able. There were some aspects of their Catholic identity that were above compromise and which consequently attracted negative attention—the most prominent example being the very existence of nuns and priests, whose perceived

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deviance from traditional family practices represented challenges to the social order rooted in Victorian conceptions of family life and gender roles. In most ways, however, Catholics in the South made their religion a private affair and readily accommodated themselves to the prevailing social order. As one historian puts it, “Catholicism sought consensus and cooperation with the Southern social order so that it could freely cultivate its inner spiritual garden without undue molestation.” Because southern Catholics did their best to fashion themselves as cultural insiders, their religious outsiderhood became less threatening and did not end up triggering explicitly anti-Catholic violence.

Catholic acculturation in the South took many forms. That Catholics accommodated to the southern culture of violence is apparent from their participation in the 1891 New Orleans mob. Indeed, the city’s Irish Catholics were particularly incensed since Police Chief Hennessy, whose mysterious murder sparked the chain of events that climaxed in the lynching, was one of their own, and they turned out in force to show their vehement displeasure. Catholics could also boast that they had diligently supported the Confederate cause, sending chaplains as well as soldiers to the front. One celebrated example was the Jesuit priest Darius Hubert, who “was in all the great battles of Virginia, Pennsylvania, and Maryland”; the bullet he received at Gettysburg was extracted and later placed in the New

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8 The best analysis of the centrality of the priest and nun to anti-Catholic critiques is Jenny Franchot, *Roads to Rome: The Antebellum Protestant Encounter with Catholicism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994). Although Franchot deals with the antebellum period, the same attitudes and prejudices toward priests and nuns carried through the entire nineteenth century. Also see Michael Schwartz, *The Persistent Prejudice: Anti-Catholicism in America* (Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor, Inc., 1984).


10 Hennessy’s funeral was held at St. Joseph’s Catholic Church, where Mass was said by five Irish American priests. See Gambino, *Vendetta*, 6, 24.
Orleans Confederate Memorial Hall.\textsuperscript{11} In addition, Father Abram Ryan, the so-called “poet-priest of the Confederacy,” emerged as a major voice advocating the Lost Cause, comparing northern aggression to the persecution of the early Christians. Father Ryan continued to defend white southern interests throughout Reconstruction, attacking Republican rule and decrying the “fungus” of “negro equality.”\textsuperscript{12}

As indicated by the example of Father Ryan, most Catholics embraced the southern racial order. In the antebellum period they had consistently defended slavery in principle, receiving praise from many leading southerners for not meddling with the “peculiar institution,” as many northern evangelicals did.\textsuperscript{13} They were slower in doing so than their Protestant counterparts, but by the 1890s southern Catholics began to establish separate, segregated parishes for African Americans, a move that reflected at least tacit rejection of statements from the Vatican that set forth a relatively liberal policy encouraging racial integration.\textsuperscript{14} By the turn of the century, a Jesuit leader in Georgia considered open relations


\textsuperscript{13} See McGreevy, \textit{Catholicism and American Freedom}, chap. 2. A valuable collection of essays on how Catholics situated themselves in the antebellum South and responded to the institution of slavery is Randall M. Miller and Jon L. Wakelyn, eds., \textit{Catholics in the Old South: Essays on Church and Culture} (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1999 [1983]). Also see Bowes, “Glory in Gloom,” chap. 2.

\textsuperscript{14} See Dolores Egger Labbe, \textit{Jim Crow Comes to Church: The Establishment of Segregated Catholic Parishes in South Louisiana} (Lafayette: University of Southwestern Louisiana, 1971); also see Bowes, “Glory in Gloom,” chap. 3. In the late nineteenth century the Josephite order was created to minister to African Americans; see Stephen J. Ochs, \textit{Desegregating the Altar: The Josephites and the Struggle for Black Priests, 1871-1960} (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1990). Throughout the nineteenth century the Vatican was consistently opposed to rigid segregation laws and biological notions of racial inferiority, and insisted on the validity of
with blacks “injurious to the social if not moral culture of his charges,” and openly expressed his desire for mainstream acceptance by discouraging any interracial efforts that “would antagonize Southern sentiment to the prejudice of Catholic interests.”\textsuperscript{15} In short, Catholics never challenged the southern racial order, and most openly supported it. Through their ready participation in some of the key elements of southern society, including support for the Confederacy, the establishment of racial segregation, and even involvement in extralegal violence, Catholics repeatedly asserted their similarities rather than differences with their surrounding culture.\textsuperscript{16}

Although it frustrated church leaders to no end, a key reason why southern Catholics did not antagonize their neighbors to the point of provoking violence was that so many of them were in fact bad Catholics. Priests and nuns assigned to the South—of which there were too few to serve the needs of the scattered Catholic populace—constantly bewailed the poor spiritual condition of their flock. In an 1887 letter, Jesuit priest A. B. Friend, who worked primarily in Alabama, wrote that particularly in the outlying areas Catholics “do not usually show off their faith in words, and still less in conduct.” He lamented that most Alabama Catholics, typically “of the humbler and poorer class,” were so “badly instructed” in the religion that they were “frequently not able to repel the attacks they had to encounter from the sophistry of the preachers.” Isolated in communities that did not have a parish, and rarely visited by priests, Friend observed that southern Catholics had to “go to

\textsuperscript{15} Kenny, “Jesuits in Our Southland,” 142.

\textsuperscript{16} David Gleeson reaches the same conclusion about Irish Catholics in particular, noting that “the Irish communities in the brave ‘New South’ would become more southern and less Irish. . . . Irish southerners . . . continued to prosper, celebrate their heritage, practice their faith, and take part in New South politics. They now felt they were just as southern as their Anglo-Saxon Protestant neighbors.” \textit{Irish in the South}, 186.
Protestant churches if they want to go to church at all.”

Mother Mary Hyacinth Le Conniat, who worked in north and central Louisiana from 1855 to 1882, similarly bemoaned the “wildness” of the Catholic flock: “Most of them NEVER go to church, not even to get their marriages blessed.” Because they were so scattered, they were able to see a priest “only two or three times a year,” clearly not enough to keep most of them devoted to the church.

The thinness of the Catholic community in most areas of the South—southern Louisiana being the primary exception—meant that parish life was difficult if not impossible to maintain, which translated into a lapse in explicit devotional activity by many southern Catholics. Even in those places, particularly larger cities, where parishes did exist, the Catholic population was still too small to represent a significant force in local politics or culture. Besides, many Catholics who emigrated from Europe were lapsed before they even arrived and maintained little or no contact with the church. This lack of institutional strength combined with the widespread cultural accommodation of southern Catholics to make the church less like the ominous leviathan of conspiratorial anti-Catholic fears and more like a small denomination struggling even to exercise spiritual power over its own members. To say that southern Catholics privatized their faith would be generous, as for many of them the church was largely irrelevant to the daily patterns of their lives. In short, between their weak ties to the church and their ready acculturation to most aspects of southern society, Catholics in the South did not pose a sufficiently strong challenge to religious or cultural orthodoxies to inspire vigilante violence against them.

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This did not mean that Catholics’ faith was accepted or loved by the Protestant South. Anti-Catholicism remained a fixture in southern thought, but unlike the North—where anti-Catholicism translated into nativist organizations like the American Protective Association, restrictive immigration legislation targeting Catholic nations, and eugenicist science that affirmed the inferiority of traditionally Catholic “races”\(^\text{19}\)—in the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century South anti-Catholicism existed almost exclusively on a rhetorical plane. Southerners widely shared the stock images of Catholics that had existed since the Reformation. Robert Lewis Bolton, who assumed duties as pastor of a Baptist church in New Orleans in 1909, reported that he was “surrounded with Catholics, who are just as ignorant and superstitious as any body found in the valley of the Ganges in India, or in Canton, China.” He complained of the “idolatry” and “immorality” of the city, specifically linking these traits to its Catholic majority.\(^\text{20}\) Robert Parish, an itinerant Methodist preacher in Louisiana, similarly noted that the Catholics he met (and tried to convert) were “quite ignorant and superstitious [sic].”\(^\text{21}\)

While Bolton and Parish recapitulated standard depictions of the degraded and deluded Catholic masses, southern Methodist minister L. L. Pickett focused on the well-rehearsed evils of the “popish system.” In his fairly typical (if extensive) anti-Catholic tract entitled *The Danger Signal*, Pickett (also the author of such works as *Why I Do Not Immerse* and *How to Get Rid of the Devil*) covered such topics as infallibility, transubstantiation, relics and miracles, celibacy and the confessional, “bloodshed,” temporal power, and education. He


\(^{20}\) Letters from Robert Lewis Bolton to Mrs. Compton, 6 Nov. 1909 and 17 June 1910, in Robert Lewis Bolton Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Division, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (hereafter cited as Southern Historical Collection).

\(^{21}\) Robert T. Parish diary, 30 Sep. 1861, Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collections, Special Collections, Hill Memorial Library, Louisiana State University Libraries, Baton Rouge.
claimed that Roman Catholicism was “beyond a doubt . . . the greatest apostasy” in the world, which had “violated nearly if not every law of God.” Although he worried about the ignorance, superstition, immorality, and poverty that Catholicism inevitably led to, he was most concerned about the political threat posed by Rome. Pickett argued that Catholics cared “only for the triumph of the Pope,” and manipulated the American political system to achieve their ends of subverting republican government, crushing Protestantism, and gaining “universal temporal and spiritual sovereignty” for “the old man at Rome.” The progress of Romanism in achieving its nefarious goals was driven primarily by the “rapid influx” of Catholics into the country with “floods of immigration,” and the only way to protect Protestant America, including the South, was to sharply restrict immigration and create stricter naturalization procedures.  

While a certain degree of anti-Catholicism was inherent to southern Protestantism, it became increasingly powerful in the late nineteenth century as it associated with growing plainfolk fears of foreign hierarchy and conspiracy. The culmination of this populist strain of southern anti-Catholicism came in the form of Tom Watson’s diatribes against the impending dangers of growing Roman influence. In a tirade at the courthouse in Thomson, Georgia, Watson fumed that Catholicism stood for monarchy, superstition, idolatry, tyranny, bigotry, and the union of church and state, and stood against democracy, individual liberty, free speech, the free press, public schools, and marriage. He quoted Abraham Lincoln’s

22 Rev. L. L. Pickett, *The Danger Signal; or, a Shot at the Foe* (Nashville: Publishing House of the M. E. Church, South, 1891), 3, 275, 277, 282, 301.

23 For an excellent treatment of the ways that evangelical Protestantism combined with and sacralized southern populist beliefs in popular democracy, egalitarianism, liberty, economic liberalism, and anti-elitism, all of which were used to critique Catholicism, see Joseph W. Creech, Jr., “Righteous Indignation: Religion and Populism in North Carolina, 1886-1906” (Ph.D. diss., University of Notre Dame, 2000). Evangelicals consistently equated “Romanism” with tyranny; as Creech notes, the “ultimate epithet” that evangelicals could hurl was that of “Romanism,” which they “understood as a system of religion that replaced individual conscience with centralized pronouncements enforced by a centralized civil government—a state of tyranny if there ever was one” (32).
famous declaration that “This Republican cannot exist half slave and half free,” and applied it to his current struggle against Catholic tyranny: “As sure as you live, the autocratic principles of Popery, and the historic principles of Democracy and Republicanism, cannot travel the same track, going in opposite directions, without a collision and a tragedy.”

While Watson was unsparing in his criticism of the Roman Catholic church and of “popery” more generally, he was more generous to individual Catholics, particularly “so long as they confined themselves to their so-called ‘religion’ as a form of worship” and not politics. He noted that “Individual Protestants coming in contact with individual Catholics found them to be average Americans,” a telling statement rooted in Watson’s southern experience. In short, Watson’s fight was with “Romanism” on an international and political level, not necessarily with individual Catholics. Watson was indicative of a larger trend: while anti-Catholicism was present at all levels of southern society and arguably even intensified from the 1890s to the 1910s, it was usually manifest as fear of the international, but not necessarily local, Catholic menace.

The shadowy Catholic conspiracy in Rome was cause for concern and action, but the local Catholic parish was did not seem to constitute much of a threat. Some southern parishes even received the support and patronage of Protestant community leaders. For

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24 “Address by Hon. Thomas E. Watson in the Court House in the City of Thomson, Georgia, 10:00 A.M., February 12th, 1916,” typescript, 14, 25-26, in Thomas Edward Watson Papers, Southern Historical Collection. The definitive biography of Watson is still C. Vann Woodward, Tom Watson: Agrarian Rebel (New York: Rinehart & Co., 1938). For a treatment of his anti-Catholic rhetoric, see chap. 22, which characterizes Watson’s anti-Catholic writings as “a curious mixture of erudition and sensationalism bordering upon the pathological” (420).


26 “Where the American” (no date, place, or publication info), in Watson Papers.

27 In his treatment of Irish Catholics in the South, David Gleeson concludes, “The Catholicism practiced by Irish immigrants was of little concern” to Protestant southerners, and thus “Irish southerners did not suffer serious discrimination because of their faith.” Irish in the South, 193.
instance, when a new Catholic church in Yazoo City, Mississippi, burned down in February 1900, the congregation “received many offers of assistance from non-Catholics” to rebuild the church.\(^{28}\) Good will toward local Catholics and fear of the distant Catholic menace often operated simultaneously in southern communities. In Greenville, South Carolina, Protestant civic and business leaders contributed toward the construction of a new Catholic church. While their generosity inspired gratitude among local Catholics, it also inspired virulent protests from nearby nativists who saw the church as a “fortification for the troops of an enemy.”\(^{29}\) In some places the dedication of a new Catholic church was seen as “interesting” and “novel,” whereas in other communities Catholics had a difficult time even getting tiny notices of their meeting time and place into the local newspaper.\(^{30}\) In general, southern Protestants’ treatment of their Catholic neighbors reflected elements both of standard anti-Catholic attitudes and a more welcoming and open approach toward coexistence in the community.

Catholics did experience a certain amount of structural and cultural violence in the South, but it was uneven and somewhat idiosyncratic in its application. The anti-Catholicism that pervaded the Protestant South rarely if ever translated into direct violence, and daily relationships between Protestants and Catholics were usually congenial. Although church leaders sometimes complained of the lack of devotion shown by the majority of southern


\(^{30}\) For positive reviews of church dedications, see “Selma, Ala. How it came to be: Its subsequent history Jesuit Residence & Church, from 1880 to 1931” (no pub. Info), in Special Collections, Loyola University, New Orleans; numerous articles on front page about dedication of St. Joseph’s church, *Atlanta Constitution*, 15 Nov. 1903; “Dedication of St. Joseph’s Church with Impressive Ceremonials,” *Macon Telegraph*, 15 Nov. 1903. For the more negative experience, see Rev. Albert Biever, S.J., typescript memoir, 262, in Special Collections, Loyola University.
Catholics, it was their collective understatement of faith that made the religion seem innocuous in a region that was otherwise suspicious of the Catholic presence in America. Much like southern Jews who felt that the South was “a very good place to live,” especially in comparison to the bigotry they experienced in Europe, many Catholics found the South a hospitable home, especially as they muted their Catholic identity and emphasized what they had in common with their neighbors. When they did run into trouble, as in the case of the lynching victims, religious difference was only in the distant background. While southern Catholics would remain religious outsiders and as such would always be at least a little uncomfortable in the evangelical Protestant South, they felt most at ease as they shaped themselves in the mainstream mold, downplaying their difference and portraying their faith as just one religious expression among many.

Perfectly capturing this sentiment, and explaining in part why Catholics did not become common targets of vigilante violence in the late nineteenth-century South, is a letter from Sister Anne of Jesus, a nun at St. Vincent Academy in Shreveport, Louisiana. As a sign of hope that “little by little our holy religion will spread itself in this beautiful country,” Sister Anne reported that Catholic churches were springing up “in almost every town where there is a railroad station.” She then qualified her statement, acknowledging that “if the Catholic churches are arising on all sides, so are the Protestant ones, as well as the Jewish temples.” Most striking is her conclusion about this abounding religious pluralism: “This is a very good sign, a sign people are worshipping God.”

31 Letter from Leo Stamm to Industrial Removal Office, quoted in Robert A. Rockaway, “‘I Feel as if Newly Born’: Immigrant Letters to the Industrial Removal Office,” American Jewish Archives 45 (Fall/Winter 1993): 169-70.

exclusivity, these statements by Sister Anne blended a sincere faith in Catholic triumphalism with the distinctly American notion of religious pluralism. So long as southern Catholics thus adhered to a privatized religion that seemed more like a Protestant denomination than an international conspiracy seeking to “throttle Republicanism, bruise freedom, crush Protestantism, control the press, shape legislation, direct our institutions, manipulate our national wealth, and enthrone the pope in our midst,”33 they could be, and were, tolerated in the evangelical South.

6.3 Comparative Conclusions

When I began this project two years ago, I knew of a smattering of anti-Mormon violence that had gone largely unexamined in the literature on southern vigilantism. I also accepted generally received historical wisdom about a violently prejudiced South, which inspired my expectation that there would a strong record of violence against Catholics and Jews in the region. After all, I knew the Ku Klux Klan of the 1920s had been not only racist but also deeply antisemitic and anti-Catholic, and so I bought into the myth (especially popular in the North and West) of the South as an intolerant and bigoted backwater. I conceived of writing the dissertation as a three-part story about Catholics, Jews, and Mormons, with violence against black ministers and churches serving as a kind of bridge between the extant literature on southern violence and my topic. Indeed, when I told people (including many experts in southern history and religion) about my research on violence against religious outsiders in the South, their typical reaction was, “So it’s about Catholics and Jews?”

33 Pickett, Danger Signal, 275.
My research into anti-Mormon violence proceeded much better than I expected—I had imagined perhaps a few dozen cases of anti-Mormon violence, not the more than three hundred I turned up. Given my success with the Mormon example, I anticipated unearthing at least an equal and probably a greater number of Catholic and Jewish cases, especially given the fact that anti-Catholicism and antisemitism were pervasive cultural forces that if anything gained strength during this period. I was as surprised as anyone, then, to find that there had been virtually no violence against Catholics per se, and that while there was a fair amount of violence against Jews, only some of it had a distinctly antisemitic component. Catholics and Jews, I discovered, actually fared pretty well in the postbellum South compared to Mormons, who in many ways came to form the core of my narrative.

Given the level of anti-Catholicism in American culture, including the South, why was there not more violence against Catholics in the late nineteenth century? For that matter, why were black churches and ministers targeted so frequently during Reconstruction but very rarely in the 1880s and beyond? Furthermore, why were Mormon missionaries consistently subjected to violence while Mormon converts were only sporadically victimized? What explains the killing of Jewish merchants and peddlers throughout the South at the same time that most Jews considered the region a haven of goodwill and opportunity? Finally, what, if anything, connects the disparate experiences of these four groups in any more than a simple side-by-side comparison? It is in answering these questions that an analysis of the multiple religious dimensions of violence becomes particularly helpful.

The varied nature of each of these religious groups’ experiences speaks to the complex and multiple ways in which religion operated in identity construction, social relations, and even political and economic structures. Viewing religion working in a range of diverse functions, from the explosive to the subtle, all while situated in one particular
window of time and place (i.e. the late nineteenth-century South), helps break open our understanding of the multiple dimensions that religion can assume in personal interactions, social structures, and the construction and development of culture. While religion did not operate in isolation in any of these cases, it was a key element in the ways that each of these four groups related to the evangelical Protestant South.

The case of violence against African American religious leaders and churches demonstrated how southern whites and blacks, operating within the same broad tent of Protestantism, constructed very different religious worldviews that shaped and gave meaning to their conceptions of themselves and their relationship to the social-political order. African Americans developed a theology of liberation that asserted God’s solidarity with the oppressed as they emphasized the freedom and redemption narratives of the Old Testament. This came in direct conflict with white evangelicals’ notions of a hierarchical society in which any challenge to white male supremacy was an affront to God’s ordering of the world; while white evangelicals cherished the principles of individual conscience and liberty, they believed that freedom in social and political spheres was constrained by the need to maintain a well-ordered society. This competition of religious visions further fueled the already violent antagonism between the races as the freedpeople, inspired by the notion of an undifferentiated sacred cosmos, blended religion and politics in ways that whites found both sinful and dangerous. Violence against black ministers and churches came when they played an active role in the challenge to white supremacy that was inherent in freedpeople’s post-emancipation struggle for a greater share of freedom, civil rights, and political power.

The Mormon case provided a more classic example of religious violence, in that a direct challenge to religious orthodoxy sparked opposition that ultimately led to violence when Mormons refused to either accommodate or retreat. In this case, however, while
radical Mormon doctrines precipitated heated theological disputes, actual violence occurred only when the core Mormon principle and practice of polygamy came into direct conflict with an equally fundamental article of faith for southern white men, the need to uphold and defend the purity of Victorian womanhood. Although men throughout the country were dedicated to the protection of “innocent” and “helpless” women in the nineteenth century, when images of the lecherous Mormon elder ran up against the longstanding southern tradition of vigilantism (rooted in a culture of honor), religious difference quickly escalated into a violent defense against perceived assaults on the integrity of southern women, homes, and communities. Rather than crumpling in the face of sustained violence, Mormons used it to reinforce their own oppositional identity by furthering their self-image as martyrs persecuted for the truth. Any opposition they encountered thus became further proof that they were the chosen people of God besieged by the forces of evil, led in particular by the “false priests” of Protestantism.  

Religion was more muted in the Jewish case, as most anti-Jewish violence was not directly motivated by religious antagonism. Religious outsiderhood was still an important part of the story, however, as southern Jews typically worked in mercantile trades rather than agriculture as a direct result of their experience with religious persecution in Europe, where they were barred from owning land. Being shut out from agriculture forced Jews to assume a greater role in business and enterprise, which skills they carried with them when they immigrated to the New World. Jews in the South were usually tolerated if not embraced by evangelical Protestants for their religion, but their economic roles as peddlers and merchants

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34 Latter-day Saints frequently used this epithet to describe the Protestant establishment. One example is an 1882 article blaming the “false priests” who “in envious anger” were tearing down “the underlying principles of the Constitution” by supporting the anti-polygamy Edmunds Bill. “The Edmunds Bill,” The Contributor 3 (April 1882): 212-213.
often put them in the way of harm, whether through simple robberies or by being on the wrong end of farmers’ frustration at indebtedness brought on by poor agricultural and economic conditions. Perpetrators in many of these violent incidents, such as Lee Green in his murder of Abraham Surasky, rationalized their actions by drawing on traditional antisemitic images that emphasized the Jews’ cultural and religious otherness. While religion did not motivate anti-Jewish violence as it did in the Mormon or even the African American case, it was a persistent element that allowed would-be antisemites to marginalize and even demonize Jews who they originally found offensive for reasons other than their explicit religious identity. Jews responded to the violence by trying to acculturate as much as possible to southern norms. They pointed to their Reform religious practices, which did indeed have strong resemblances to Protestant models, as proof that they were not the Christ-killers and Shylocks of legend but rather good, God-fearing southerners who wanted and deserved inclusion.

Southern Catholics pursued a strategy very similar to that of their Jewish neighbors. Although they operated in a profoundly anti-Catholic culture that found expression not just in religious prejudice but also in serious structural limitations on Catholic opportunity and acceptance in Protestant America, Catholics in the South adopted an accommodationist stance toward their surrounding culture. More than their coreligionists in the urban North, southern Catholics strove to downplay religious difference and elevate cultural similarities; like southern Jews, their relatively thin numbers (except in southern Louisiana) made ghettoization virtually impossible. Religion still played a key role in whites’ imposition of allegedly inherent traits of inferiority on marginalized groups such as Sicilians and Mexicans. However, religious difference was essentially subsumed in and reduced to those ethnic differences, insomuch that their religious identity was not even mentioned when nominal
Catholics became lynching victims. While Catholicism continued to exist and even grew in the South during this period, in most ways it was effectively neutralized as a significant category of difference, both by antagonists and by Catholics themselves. So long as Catholics spoke and acted like southerners, muffled their explicit religious distinctions as much as possible, and generally conformed to a pluralist denominational and political model, the growth of the Catholic church in the South thus represented less of a conspiratorial threat of foreign invasion than simply an innocuous novelty.

What differentiated Catholics, Jews, Mormons, and African Americans from white Protestant America, and largely what constituted and explained their status as cultural and religious outsiders, was that they each were perceived as, and to some degree saw themselves as, a people set apart. Their peoplehood was constructed as both a positive and negative identity; that is, while there remained variation and pluralism within each group, individual members still understood themselves as a constituents of a larger people, defined both by who and what they were, and who and what they were not; thus, even in their most assimilationist moments, blacks were still not white, and Mormons, Catholics, and Jews were still not Protestant. Each group saw themselves united by a common culture, history, tradition, and (excepting the Catholic case) kinship. Furthermore, these common traits transcended political boundaries and ran deeper than theological affinities—peoplehood was more visceral than geographic or intellectual.

For instance, within decades of their founding, late nineteenth-century Mormons already had constructed a shared history, a common theological language, distinctive marital and family practices, and an organic vision of the social, political, and economic aspects of their ideal society. These positive identity traits were reinforced and sharpened by setting themselves in opposition to mainstream American Protestantism and Protestant America,
particularly in the form of religious, marital, and political orthodoxies. Mormons viewed
themselves not just as a new American church but as God’s chosen people, a notion that
was born out in their revelations.\textsuperscript{35} Non-Mormons also recognized that there was something
about Mormonism that went beyond denominational affiliation, even attaching
physiognomic particularity to Latter-day Saints.\textsuperscript{36} Jews, Catholics, and African Americans
similarly had deep ties that bound members of the group to each other and gave them a
sense of peoplehood that existed simultaneously with or in some cases supplanted other
personal and group identities. Their peoplehood was rooted in their respective theological
visions—Jews as God’s ancient covenant people, Catholics as the universal “people of
God,” and African Americans as God’s newly liberated Israel—but it took form in
distinctive cultural, social, and political characteristics.

Particularly in nineteenth-century America, the peoplehood of each of these four
groups was an unavoidable and unshakeable fact. When people spoke of a Baptist or a
Methodist, they spoke only of a religious affiliation, but when they referred to a Jew or a
Mormon, there was not only an inference of their being exotic and alien, but a notion that

\textsuperscript{35} For instance, a February 1831 revelation to Joseph Smith told the Latter-day Saints that “ye may be
my [God’s] people and I will be your God.” \textit{The Doctrine and Covenants of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day
Saints, Containing Revelations Given to Joseph Smith, the Prophet, with Some Additions by His Successors in the Presidency
of the Church} (Salt Lake City, UT: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1989), 429. Some key works
that discuss the notion of Mormon peoplehood are Jan Shipps, \textit{Mormonism: The Story of a New Religious Tradition}
(Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1985); Shipps, “Making Saints: In the Early Days and the Latter Days,”
in \textit{Contemporary Mormonism: Social Science Perspectives}, ed. Marie Cornwall, Tim B. Heaton, and Lawrence A.
Young (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 64-83; Patricia Nelson Limerick, “Peace Initiative: Using
the Mormons to Rethink Culture and Ethnicity in American History,” \textit{Journal of Mormon History} 21 (Fall 1995):
1-29; Dean L. May, “Mormons,” in \textit{Mormons and Mormonism: An Introduction to an American World Religion}, ed.
Eric A. Eliason (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2001), 47-75; and especially Charles L. Cohen, “Jews,
Gentiles, Israel, and the Construction of the Mormon People,” Obert C. and Grace A. Tanner Lecture,
delivered at the Mormon History Association annual conference, Killington, Vermont, May 2005.

\textsuperscript{36} Some nineteenth-century Americans argued that Mormons constituted a “new race,” based on the
numerous physiological features they allegedly shared. Phrenologists and ethnologists were fascinated with
Mormons, who were classified in the \textit{Phrenological Journal} as a “more distinct type than any other of modern
communities.” See Terryl L. Givens, \textit{The Viper on the Hearth: Mormons, Myths, and the Construction of Heresy} (New
York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 135-137, quote from p. 137. Also see Davis Bitton and Gary L. Bunker,
they constituted religious nations that were ultimately unassimilable. Jews and Mormons did not argue with this assessment, at least in theory, because for them being Jewish or Mormon was in the blood, an essential part of who a person was from the very moment of his or her birth (or, for converts, spiritual rebirth). Catholics had a different notion of peoplehood, one that relied primarily on a notion of spiritual communion with the people of God as found in the universal church. “Catholic,” then, was not a designation of *ethnos* in the way that “Jew” and “Mormon” were, but rather represented a universal (catholic) peoplehood subdivided by national inheritances—thus, Irish Catholic, Italian Catholic, German Catholic, and so forth. Of course, in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and in many places still today, a person’s national and religious identities were often assumed to be conflated to the point of being indistinguishable, so Italians were Catholic by virtue of being Italian, Anglo-Saxons were Protestant, and so forth. These religious-national identities had remarkable staying power among many communities even well into the twentieth century.37

Although set apart and excluded from the white mainstream through America’s racial structure, African Americans also came to understand themselves as having a distinct historic and even eschatological role. Their suffering in slavery and the shared experience of limited freedom in postbellum America provided remarkable unity for an otherwise disparate group. African Americans’ peoplehood was thrust on them as an othering device constructed for the needs of economic and racial hierarchy, but they embraced it and transformed it into a powerful tool of group cohesion and ultimately mobilization.38

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38 Throughout the nineteenth century, black churchmen sought to understand the African American experience in terms of the race’s relationship to God and His will. Prominent African American religious
An outsider group’s relationship to the mainstream—to the American nation, which in the nineteenth century was decidedly white and Protestant—was thus largely dictated by how they understood and deployed their peoplehood. That in turn determined to a large degree the likelihood of their becoming potential targets of violence. Sometimes, particularly in cases of racial conflict, the choice was imposed by the majority—even after emancipation African Americans were confined to their racial identity and never allowed to fully integrate into the mainstream. Groups who escaped the confining strictures of the biracial order had more options available to them. In the South, Catholics and Jews both downplayed the distinctive aspects of their peoplehood, asserting in a variety of ways their acceptance of mainstream southern attitudes, norms, and practices. They retained the fundamental aspects of their religious identities while minimizing or casting aside other traits that would have been offensive to the southern way. These were vital decisions, as they defined who they were as individuals and as a people. In self-identifying as both southerners and Jews or Catholics, respectively, they insisted that there would be no conflict between their loyalties to their religion and region.

Nineteenth-century Mormons, on the other hand, consciously elevated their Mormon peoplehood and spurned (or at least diminished) their affinities with all others. To be sure, even in the midst of their conflict with federal, state, and territorial governments Latter-day Saints remained patriotic, believing that God had established the United States leaders such as Richard Allen, Prince Hall, Henry Highland Garnet, Alexander Crummell, and Edward W. Blyden all preached or wrote on the “Ethiopian prophecy” of Psalm 68:31: “Princes shall come out of Egypt; Ethiopia shall soon stretch out her hands unto God.” While African Americans struggled to interpret two and a half centuries of bondage, many latched on to this prophecy as a sign of God’s omnipresent care and the eventual triumph of African peoples. Many rationalized that their years in slavery were God’s means of Christianizing the African race; thus rather than cursing God for their unparalleled burdens, most African Americans chose to adopt a longer view of providential purpose in their suffering. See Gayraud Wilmore, Black Religion and Black Radicalism: An Interpretation of the Religious History of African Americans, 3rd ed., rev. and enl. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1998), 145-149. See also Wilson Jeremiah Moses, ed., Classical Black Nationalism: From the American Revolution to Marcus Garvey (New York: New York University Press, 1996).
and then inspired the Founding Fathers as they drafted the Constitution and Bill of Rights. Arguably, because most of them were of Anglo-Saxon or northern European ancestry they could have integrated into the American mainstream much easier than Jews or Catholics, who increasingly in the late nineteenth century came from the less “white” nations of southern and eastern Europe. But Mormons’ primary commitment was to the kingdom of God, and all their efforts were directed toward expanding the church in preparation for the advent of Christ’s millennial reign on the earth. Nationality of birth was rendered all but meaningless—those who were baptized in the church were adopted into the House of Israel, everyone else was Gentiles, and the Mormon mission was to spread Israel throughout the whole earth. For those who joined the church, any aspects of their national, regional, or ethnic culture that clashed with Mormon doctrine and practice would have to be discarded. Therefore, while Utah was a melting pot of converts from around the world, once they gathered to Zion they were no longer considered Britons or Scandinavians or even Americans but rather members of the kingdom of God on the earth, and they would be known as Latter-day Saints.

Of course, in reality individuals retained many of the customs and manners of their native cultures, and nineteenth-century Mormonism was profoundly shaped by its American setting. But Latter-day Saints were remarkable in their commitment to the idea that they were a holy nation drawn from out of the world and chosen by God. Their elevated sense of peoplehood does much to explain why missionaries in the South made only token efforts in deference to local customs. Polygamy was an essential part of what set apart the Mormon people, and became increasingly so as the church and its members were persecuted for their commitment to the principle, whether or not they actually practiced it. In this way Mormons were very similar to Civil War-era southerners who were willing to fight and die
for the principles of slavery and states’ rights, even if they did not themselves own slaves.

Just as antebellum southerners’ sense of what made them a people was so different from northerners’ that the clash of cultures culminated in a bloody war, so did Mormon and southern commitments to competing visions of peoplehood lead to violent conflict in the last quarter of the century.

Not all members of a group were equal offenders. Politically involved black ministers and churches were attacked far more often than apolitical freedpeople, and when the preachers left politics they were usually left alone. Converts to Mormonism were occasionally driven from their homes, but they were never targeted as consistently or as ferociously as were the itinerant missionaries. Jews and Catholics were subject to the burden of living under an omnipresent cloud of cultural antisemitism and anti-Catholicism, but the worst manifestations of those prejudices could usually be headed off by a proactive program of acculturation.

The general pattern that emerges from all these cases is that violence usually followed those outsiders who disrupted or sinned against the social order, particularly in ways that seriously undermined the foundations of society as conceived by white evangelical southerners. While the images of the “international Jew” and “papist menace” troubled white Protestants across the nation, Jews and Catholics in the South were conscious not to challenge the status quo in any significant way. Their accommodation to cultural norms would not earn them insider status, but it did help them gain acceptance in their daily interactions with most fellow southerners.

On the other hand, the racial and religious politics pursued by black clergy, and the alternative marriage and sexuality practices promulgated by the Mormons, struck at the heart of white southerners’ conceptions of a good society. While white evangelicals believed in
religion’s wide-ranging social and cultural influence, they could not countenance overt ties between the pulpit and partisan politics. In doing so they were blind to the many ways that their own religious establishment shaped their sociopolitical world, but they correctly saw the combination of religion and politics in the African American community as a powerful means of mobilizing the freedpeople in their quest for full equality. In addition, the roaming Mormon seducer, as imagined in the southern mind, mounted a direct challenge to white men’s patriarchal claims of protecting the sanctity of womanhood and thus undermined the hierarchy they maintained as a necessary means of effectively accomplishing their protective duties. Polygamy did in fact represent a substantial challenge to the traditional model of monogamous Victorian marriage, and so to a certain extent southerners were absolutely right in noting its potential disruptive qualities. Whereas Americans in the North and West mobilized Congress and the courts as weapons to defeat the “Mormon monster,” southern men grabbed whips and guns to drive the dangerous seducers out of their communities.

It is not particularly startling that white southerners responded to African American religious politics with extralegal violence, given the predominance of vigilantism in the white reaction to black freedom. What is more surprising, however, is the widespread use of vigilante tactics against Jews and especially Mormons. This suggests that the Ku Klux Klan continued to cast a long shadow over the South even after it was officially disbanded in the early 1870s. That anti-Mormon and anti-Jewish mobs often wore the same garb, invoked the same rhetoric, employed the same tactics, and even involved some of the same participants as did the Klan shows that even after the umbrella organization was broken up, its component parts (especially individual members) did not forget the lessons they had learned in Reconstruction—namely, that terrorist violence can be remarkably effective, especially when conducted against a minority group with few allies and little political pull.
The terrorist campaigns of the Reconstruction Klan thus had ramifications far beyond its few years of formal existence. Thousands of southern white men had fine-tuned the art of violent intimidation, and they translated those skills into defending their communities against a wide variety of perceived threats, not just black political activists. Although vigilantism was by no means a purely southern phenomenon, as a culturally acceptable tradition it tenaciously held on in the South even as it began to wane in other parts of the country in the decades after the Civil War. It would never be an exclusively southern practice, but by the end of the century American vigilantism was sounded with an undeniably southern accent.

Leo Frank was lynched in 1915, climaxing a wave of antisemitic hysteria that swept the South. That same year, in a mysterious ceremony on a mountaintop in Georgia, the Ku Klux Klan was revived, with Jews and Catholics now formally identified as groups that southern society needed to be saved from; Mormons no longer posed a threat, as a quarter of a century earlier they had officially abandoned polygamy and retreated from their ambitious aim of establishing a political kingdom of God. While the Frank incident and the rise of the Second Klan were clearly related to the lynching culture that reached its peak in the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century South, they also had roots in a long southern tradition of deploying vigilantism in a socially conservative defense of white Protestant hegemony. Extralegal violence, southerners learned, could be put to use against not only racial but also religious outsiders, particularly those who sinned against the social order. Throughout the twentieth century, religion would continue to help shape the contours of social conflict in the South. At the same time, religion gave power and inspiration to those who would challenge the inequalities that white violence had so long sought to preserve. After over a half century of being stifled by the white Protestant establishment, the liberationist impulse in southern religion finally broke through, culminating in the rise of a
deeply religious movement of people who declared to all America that in God’s beloved community there are only insiders.
APPENDIX

A STATISTICAL VIEW OF MORMONISM AND ANTI-MORMONISM
IN THE SOUTH, 1876-1900

The tables and figures in this appendix provide numerical and graphical support for my analysis of anti-Mormon violence in the South, particularly in Chapter 4. They show the breakdown by state, year, and type of the 323 cases of anti-Mormon violence I documented in my research. Also included here are membership, conversion, and emigration statistics from the Southern States Mission, and a graph tracing the number of articles per year about Mormons or Mormonism in the *New York Times*, suggesting how prominent they were in the national public imagination in a given year.

The numbers in Tables 1 and 2 and Figure 1 are tallies derived from my own compilation of 323 incidents of anti-Mormon violence. Most of these cases can be found in the Southern States Manuscript History in the LDS Church Archives, but I have also documented a number of other episodes from research in historical newspapers, diaries, and correspondence.
### TABLE 1

NUMBER OF CASES OF ANTI-MORMON VIOLENCE PER STATE:

1876-1900

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Number of Cases</th>
<th>% of Total Cases</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alabama</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arkansas</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Florida</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Georgia</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kentucky</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Louisiana</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maryland</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mississippi</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Carolina</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Carolina</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tennessee</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Texas</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virginia</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Virginia</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>314</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
TABLE 2
NUMBER OF INCIDENTS OF SOUTHERN ANTI-MORMON VIOLENCE

BY TYPE OF VIOLENCE:
1876-1900

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Violence</th>
<th>Number of Incidents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Elders driven out of locality</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Threatened/attempted mobbing</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meeting broken up or disrupted</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Threatened murder</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mob visits, no violence occurs</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Written threat or notice</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whipping</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shooting, no one hurt</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rocks or other projectiles thrown</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verbal incitement to violence</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Church or other meeting place destroyed</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elders forced to hide from mob</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beating or clubbing</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elders kidnapped/violently abducted</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elders arrested/jailed</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shooting, wounded but not killed</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Citizens’ meeting to expel elders</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LDS members expelled from community</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vandalism/property damage</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Murder</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anti-Mormon legislation passed</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tarring (and feathering)</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poisoning</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NOTE: In some cases there were multiple forms of violence present, in which case one incident would be counted in more than one category. For instance, an elder or group of elders might be kidnapped from a home, whipped, and driven from the county, all in one episode.
TABLE 3
NUMBER OF MEMBERS, BAPTISMS, AND EMIGRANTS
IN THE LDS SOUTHERN STATES MISSION:
1884-1893

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Total members of LDS Church in Southern States Mission</th>
<th>Converts baptized in Southern States Mission</th>
<th>Total emigrants from Southern States Mission</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sep 1884 – Feb 1885</td>
<td>1149</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mar 1885 – Aug 1885</td>
<td>1093</td>
<td>136</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sep 1885 – Feb 1886</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mar 1886 – Aug 1886</td>
<td>1160</td>
<td>134</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sep 1886 – Feb 1887</td>
<td>1084</td>
<td>135</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mar 1887 – Aug 1887</td>
<td>1205</td>
<td>238</td>
<td>143</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sep 1887 – Feb 1888</td>
<td>1368</td>
<td>178</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mar 1888 – Aug 1888</td>
<td>1259</td>
<td>195</td>
<td>131</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sep 1888 – Feb 1889</td>
<td>1289</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mar 1889 – Aug 1889</td>
<td>1283</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sep 1889 – Aug 1890</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sep 1890 – Feb 1891</td>
<td>1241</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mar 1891 – Aug 1891</td>
<td>1395</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sep 1891 – Feb 1892</td>
<td>1336</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mar 1892 – Aug 1892</td>
<td>1481</td>
<td>161</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sep 1892 – Feb 1893</td>
<td>1589</td>
<td>124</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mar 1893 – Aug 1893</td>
<td>1748</td>
<td>224</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* No information available for this period

SOURCE: Southern States Mission Manuscript History, Archives, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah.

NOTE: During this era, reports were made semiannually, on the last day of February and August, respectively. According to the LDS Church History Library, there are no “reliable statistics showing the number of converts emigrating from the South to the West during 1875-1900,” either in official church sources or secondary literature (personal communication, 26 April 2004). The numbers here, provided in the semiannual reports from mission headquarters, therefore seem to represent the best available estimates, but due to imprecise counting methods and reporting procedures they should not be taken as absolute or definitive.
Annual Number of Cases of Anti-Mormon Violence in the South, 1876-1900
FIGURE 2

Annual Number of *New York Times* Articles about Mormons or Mormonism, 1876-1900

SOURCE: Based on an online search of the *New York Times* conducted on 13 April 2004.
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  Philip H. Pitts Diary
  Thomas Edward Watson Papers
  William H. Wills Papers

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*Columbia Herald* (Tennessee)

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*Daily American* (Nashville)

*Daily Constitution* (Atlanta)

*Daily Democrat* (Natchez, MS)

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*Greenville Weekly News* (South Carolina)

*The Hebrew* (San Francisco)

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News and Courier (Charleston)
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