

The Mountain Meadows Massacre Site: A Tragic Heritage Site for All America

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Abstract

The Mountain Meadows Massacre (MMM) is “widely considered to be the most violent and controversial event in Utah’s history.” The intensity of its tragedy has created immense interest from within and without Utah and Mormonism that ranges from popular television to rigorous academic debate. Though discussed as a heritage site for Utah, this article will explore the massacre site as a heritage location in Utah for all of America, as it sits at the intersection of several primary issues and tensions that define modern American identity. Firstly, a general history of the MMM will be explored, discussing the context of its occurrence and a brief overview of its immediate events. Following that is a discussion of cultural engagement with the MMM, examining the ways in which the media has engaged with the massacre. Next is a brief overview of the history of the site itself: focusing not so much on the massacre that occurred there but on the history of remembrances and memorialisation at the MMM site. Finally, there is a note on the direct significance of this site to America as a whole, and suggestions as to how this significance can be utilised for the benefit of all included parties, as well as nationally.

Keywords

Mountain Meadows Massacre, Mormonism, heritage, violence, landscape

Introduction

The Mountain Meadows Massacre (MMM) is “widely considered to be the most violent and controversial event in Utah’s history.”¹ The intensity of this tragedy has created immense interest from within and without Utah and Mormonism, which has extended from popular television to rigorous academic debate. Though discussed as a heritage site for Utah, this article will explore the massacre site as a heritage location in Utah for all of America, as it sits at the intersection of several primary issues and tensions that define modern American identity. First, a general history of the MMM is explored, discussing the context of its occurrence and a brief overview of its immediate events. Second is a discussion of cultural engagement with the MMM, examining the ways in which the media has

1 Casey W. Olson, ‘The Evolution of History: Changing Narratives of the Mountain Meadows Massacre in Utah’s Public School Curricula’, PhD (Utah State University, 2013), v.

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represented the massacre. Next is a brief overview of the history of the site itself: not the massacre itself so as much as the history of remembrances and memorialisation at the MMM site. Finally, there is a note on the direct significance of this site to America as a whole, and suggestions as to how this significance can be utilised for the benefit of all included parties, as well as nationally.

I begin with a brief coverage of terminology focused on the use of the term “Mormon.” This term has always been contentious as an identifier for members of the broader Smith-Rigdon movement, with most consistent protest against the name coming from the Community of Christ.² In recent times, under the leadership of Russell M. Nelson, the largest denomination of the Smith-Rigdon movement, located in Utah, has also critiqued this term.³ This article will use this contentious term, as it provides an effective way to distinguish two discourses surrounding the Latter-day Saints. In general, the term “Mormon” will be used to refer to the Smith-Rigdon movement viewed through the outsider’s gaze of “mainstream America,” while LDS is used in a more neutral sense, either to refer to members on their own (in that case Latter-day Saints), or to describe institutions or structures connected to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS Church). While this distinction will be maintained, in some instances either terms would work; at those moments one of either term is chosen rather than both.

It is also necessary to define “heritage,” as it is a complex and malleable concept that is contested in both academic and popular discourses.⁴ While there is a substantial mainstream discourse viewing heritage as an intrinsic aspect of historic sites or activities, this perspective has faced recent challenges,⁵ and due to the complex history of recognition for the MMM site, will not be used in this research as the primary understanding of heritage. Instead, “heritage” will be understood as a process of memory and remembering, building upon Kevin Walsh’s work on presentations of World War II in museums and other vessels of heritagisation discourse.⁶ Heritage here is a discourse attempting to capture memory and preserve the past in a particular narrative that is perceived as “important” or the “correct” way of maintaining it in perpetuity. Thus, a heritage site is a location that has been set aside, akin to sacralisation, for the intent of maintaining a specific selection of its aspects to convey an intended narrative. While Sasitsaya Saengphueng has problematised the propagation of western hegemony in contemporary heritage discourse,⁷ demonstrating the complexity of implementing definitions, this is not a substantial issue for the MMM, which is a site well within the western sphere, in the Americana of Mormonism. I focus primarily on narrative formation and sacralisation rather than heritage, though heritage remains a component of the research.

2 Historically known as the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. See Rich Brown, ‘Still Claimed by a “New” Name’, *Wheat & Tares* (blog), 6 April (2021). At: <https://wheatandtares.org/2021/04/06/still-claimed-by-a-new-name/>.

3 *The Correct Name of the Church*, General Conference October 2018 (Salt Lake City, UT: Conference Center on Temple Square, 2018). At: <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/eng/general-conference/2018/10/the-correct-name-of-the-church>.

4 For a thorough overview of the debates around heritage, presented in an accessible taxonomy, see Sasitsaya Saengphueng, ‘Managing Religious Heritage — Competing Discourses of Heritage and Conflicts in Cultural Heritage Management: A Case Study of Lamphun, Northern Thailand’ PhD (University of York, 2011), Ch. 2.

5 Rodney Harrison, ‘Heritage as Social Action’, in *Understanding Heritage in Practice*, ed. Susie West (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010), 240–276.

6 Kevin Walsh, *The Representation of the Past: Museums and Heritage in the Post-Modern World* (London, UK: Routledge, 2002). See also Kevin Walsh, ‘Collective Amnesia and the Mediation of Painful Pasts: The Representation of France in the Second World War’, *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 7, no. 1 (2001): 83–98, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13527250120043366>.

7 This is an underlying concept throughout the whole thesis. See Saengphueng, ‘Managing Religious Heritage’.

History of the Mountain Meadows Massacre

In 1857, a wagon train from Arkansas, named the Baker-Fancher party, was travelling through Utah, carrying an immense amount of wealth, especially in the form of cattle.⁸ Travelling through the state of Utah after Brigham Young's theocratic declaration of martial law in the state, they encountered significant resistance to their visit, including accusations of their poisoning local water supplies, which was virtually impossible as they would not have been able to carry enough poison to have rendered so large a body of water as Corn Creek toxic.⁹ Thus this antagonism demonstrates the distrust of the local Mormon population more than to the malice of the Baker-Fancher party. Debating how the martial law should be implemented against these outsiders, an eventual plan was formed by local leaders, though not without protest, wherein Mormon militiamen, headed by John D. Lee, would raid and attack the wagon train. Brigham Young had been informed of the plan by a messenger on horseback; however, his reply, discouraging Lee and his men to go ahead with the plan, did not arrive until two days after Lee carried out the massacre. Dressing as Native Americans and accompanied by some Paiute people who had been convinced to join them, the initial attack on the Baker-Fancher party resulted in a few deaths and several injuries of the Arkansas wagon train's members. A few days later, on 11 September, the Baker-Fancher party was approached by two men carrying a white flag of peace, and was soon informed by Lee that he had negotiated a truce with the Paiute attackers. As the Baker-Fancher party accepted Lee's offer to escort them to safety, Lee's men murdered every adult and child beyond early infant years in the wagon train, burying some but mainly leaving their bodies to be scavenged by animals.¹⁰

The motive for this slaughter has been the topic of much speculation throughout history. Almost entirely discardable are the several attempts to attribute malice or some other negative attribution to the victims—as Barbara Jones Brown and Richard E. Turley demonstrate, this victim blaming largely emerged in the context of local LDS attempts at rationalising the Massacre.¹¹ What remains is still complex, and can be categorised in two differing causal accounts: contextual and immediate causation.

The MMM's contextual causation requires touching upon a further central concern of debate around the massacre: the role and responsibility carried by Brigham Young, the Prophet-President of the LDS Church who led its exodus into Utah, and who became Utah's subsequent theocrat. Brown notes that the extent of the massacre's violence was highly facilitated by the incredibly violent and contentious environment that Young had created within the Mormon sphere.¹² It was under Young that Blood Atonement, the doctrine that violent slaughter of certain egregious transgressors was required for their sins to be properly atoned for, was introduced.¹³ This new doctrine resulted in real violence, such as the brutal stabbing and murder of William Parrish, a murder which received an approval through silence when none of the conspirators for it were arrested.¹⁴ It was this doctrine of Blood Atonement

8 John Dehlin and Rebecca Bibliotheca, 'Mountain Meadows Massacre w/ Barbara Jones Brown', *Mormon Stories*, sec. 1:01:00, accessed 27 November 2023. At: <https://www.mormonstories.org/portfolio-items/mountain-meadows-massacre/>.

9 Richard E. Turley and Barbara Jones Brown, *Vengeance Is Mine: The Mountain Meadows Massacre and Its Aftermath* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2023), 220, <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780195397857.001.0001>.

10 For the most recent and up to date overview of the Mountain Meadows Massacre itself, see Turley and Brown, chapters 1–4.

11 Dehlin and Bibliotheca, 'Mountain Meadows Massacre', sec. 58:00; Turley and Brown, *Vengeance Is Mine*, 39–40, 52, 66, 95, 131.

12 Dehlin and Bibliotheca, 'Mountain Meadows Massacre', sec. 1:12:00.

13 John G. Turner, *Brigham Young: Pioneer Prophet* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), 258.

14 Patrick Q. Mason, *Mormonism and Violence*, Elements in Religion and Violence (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 55.

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that Lee associated with obedience to the LDS Church in his personal journals.¹⁵ This occurred within the greater context of the Mormon Reformation, a period of time in which Young intentionally increased the zeal of his followers and incited them to greater levels of fanaticism.¹⁶ This fanaticism is coupled with the rhetoric of Young at the time, which included liturgical innovations calling for the blood of the enemies of Mormon prophets,¹⁷ and giving sermons in which he related dreams of slitting the throats of apostates, expressing “rather than that apostates should flourish here, I will unsheath my bowie knife, and conquer or die.”¹⁸ Of note, although not likely directly influencing the attack on the Baker-Fancher party (while nevertheless not assisting the transit of people from Arkansas), is that Young particularly targeted Arkansas as a representative of anti-Mormon hatred, by identifying the murderer of LDS hero and pioneer Parley P. Pratt as hailing from the state, though in actuality the murderer was from San Francisco.¹⁹ Most substantially related to the MMM, was Young’s policy towards First Nations people in the area, who he would simultaneously condemn to the United States government, appealing to the combatting and curtailing of their “savagery” as a benefit of Mormon presence in the area, while simultaneously encouraging Native American groups to raid White caravans so as to minimise the likelihood of non-Mormon American excursions into Utah territory.²⁰ It is this policy that created the imaginary and connections in which Lee and his compatriots were able to formulate their plan. Thus, it is clear that an incredibly violent milieu, more so than the LDS Church had been prior to Young, had manifested under his tenure as President,²¹ and would have been no small contribution to the ability of the militiamen to commit their horrendous crime.

With Young being largely responsible for the contextual causation of the Massacre—although full attribution to him would be unfair, as the initial force of violence amongst the Latter-day Saints was brought from their oppressors and not vice-versa²²—the discourse naturally has drawn towards a question as to his immediate responsibility for the slaughter. Bagley has vigorously asserted that Young was not only aware of the plan for the massacre, but in fact sanctioned it,²³ going so far as to accuse Turley of contributing to a “cover-up” of the massacre.²⁴ It is often raised that attributing a direct order of the attack to Young is complicated by his recorded response to the militia, instructing them not to “interfere.”²⁵ This is in turn complicated, however, with Young’s ensuing vagueness in his further permission for the “Indians [to] do as they please,”²⁶ allowing for a less exonerating reading of the letter, and leaving open the possibility for Bagley’s hypothesis that Young composed the initial part of the letter to create a paper-trail alibi were he to be charged over the MMM.²⁷ It is both beyond the scope of and not immediately relevant to this article to determine whether Young directly instructed the massacre to be carried out. It is often impossible to strongly assert historical specifics, especially when these details are proposed to be hidden within layers of conspiracy. Certain evidence of either Young’s

15 Will Bagley, *Blood of the Prophets: Brigham Young and the Massacre at Mountain Meadows* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 2004), 51–52.

16 Turner, *Brigham Young*, chapter 9.

17 David John Buerger, ‘The Development of the Mormon Temple Endowment Ceremony’, *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 20, no. 4 (1987): 53–54.

18 Brigham Young, *Journal of Discourses*, vol. 1 (Liverpool: F. D. and S. W. Richards, 1854), 83.

19 Turley and Brown, *Vengeance Is Mine*, 45.

20 Dehlin and Bibliotheca, ‘Mountain Meadows Massacre’, sec. 39:10.

21 Mason, *Mormonism and Violence*, 38–58.

22 Mason, chapter 2.

23 Bagley, *Blood of the Prophets*, 379.

24 Dehlin and Bibliotheca, ‘Mountain Meadows Massacre’, sec. 1:40:00.

25 Ronald W. Walker, Richard E. Turley, and Glen M. Leonard, *Massacre at Mountain Meadows* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 184.

26 Bagley, *Blood of the Prophets*, 136–37.

27 Bagley, *Blood of the Prophets*, 137.

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innocence or guilt does not exist, and with the distance of time it is exceedingly difficult to indict Young as commanding the Massacre, though he certainly provided the context of violence and hostile rhetoric that enabled its violence. It is this facilitation of a context that allowed the violence to flourish that is pertinent, and is a responsibility that Young surely shoulders.

As for the belief that Lee was a close associate of Young's, and received the inspiration of this attack from there, Brown critiques the standard presentation of Lee's closeness to Young as being based on him being Young's spiritually adopted child, with Brown appealing to the fact that this practice was widely done as a religious ordinance, and not as a sign of intimacy.²⁸ Yet this seems to be a superficial dealing with the issue, as Young's adopted sons counted only thirty-eight, of whom Lee was one of the, if not the, first, and following his adoption Lee began to sign his name as "J. D. L. Young."²⁹ With the number of Latter-day Saints at the time, thirty-eight is not a large number, and even if this evidence cannot demonstrate that Young necessarily valued Lee in such an intimate way, it does reflect that Lee perceived Young so, and not on weak basis. Thus though Brown's point is valid in disregarding this explanation for the specific causation of the massacre, it once again adds a further dimension to the image of Young contributing to the context that enabled it, as it demonstrated Lee's strong identification with Young himself.

If not Young's order then, what was the proximate cause for this horrific slaughter? Common theories well into the current era have held the murder of Parley P. Pratt as being of high significance. Due to the complex and secretive archival approach of the LDS Church, much substantial primary literature has been only recently available, and in light of this Brown and Turley's recent work has shown the Pratt connection to be a weaker explanation, with the most consistently presented motive amongst perpetrators was "eliminating witnesses old enough to 'tell tales,'" especially since there had been anxiety that the Baker-Fancher party had witnessed non-First Nations members of the attacking party, namely Lee and his militiamen.³⁰

Cultural Impact

The MMM, from the moment of its occurrence, carried great impact, both locally and nationally. Noting that Young had ceased devising plans inciting First Nations peoples to raid White wagon trains, Brown stipulates that this distinct change in strategy may have emerged from Young's revulsion at the MMM's violence.³¹ Once the broader media had discovered the massacre, already within the first month following the massacre,³² it became a focal issue that both fed genuine concern with Latter-day Saint theocracy as well as the anti-Mormon bigotry that had come to define broader American attitudes towards the Latter-day Saints. The following drawing depicting newspaper editors as valiantly attacking the Mormon enterprise (which is flanked by the two locations the public imagination most intimately associated with Mormonism: Salt Lake and Mountain Meadows, showing the strong public association created between the MMM and Mormonism) is a strong encapsulation of media attitudes towards the Mormon Church at the time.³³

28 Dehlin and Bibliotheca, 'Mountain Meadows Massacre', sec. 1:29:00.

29 Bagley, *Blood of the Prophets*, 19.

30 Dehlin and Bibliotheca, 'Mountain Meadows Massacre', sec. 54:00; Turley and Brown, *Vengeance Is Mine*, 62.

31 Dehlin and Bibliotheca, 'Mountain Meadows Massacre', sec. 1:10:00.

32 Janiece Johnson, *Convicting the Mormons: The Mountain Meadows Massacre in American Culture* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2023), 1, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/usyd/detail.action?docID=30474063>.

33 Johnson, 16.

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The multivalence of systemic oppression and injustice that compose America at this point in history (and at many other points) is a complex yet essential feature of exploring how general anti-Mormon bigotry reinforced and edified racist power structures and sentiments, even in a context such as the MMM, in which such racist power structures were utilised by LDS Church members and leaders to severely disempower, disenfranchise, and commit horrendous acts of violence against First Nations people. Yet this multivalent structure also provides a framework for national obsession surrounding the event, and the complex process of American identity formation through problematic formulations of racial identity.

Waite's popular "expose" of Mormonism, *The Mormon Prophet and His Harem*, explicitly connects her specific condemnations of Brigham Young to the entirety of Mormondom with the phrase *ex uno disce omnes*,³⁴ an aphorism justifying the idea that a singular person can provide definition for the rest. Further, early protests in California born from outrage over the MMM did not call for justice of the perpetrators, but mass targeting of the entire Mormon community.³⁵ Thus the attitude at this time of media attention was not solely a concern for crimes and injustices within the Mormon fold, but an endeavour to condemn Mormonism through these crimes. This morbid fascination, as well as the simultaneously justified and problematic desire for punitive justice, was no doubt exacerbated by the punishment of only one of the transgressors, John D. Lee, who had been promised a plea deal, however as no names he mentioned were prosecutable, instead became a fall-man and was executed by the United States government.³⁶

Johnson has, in her thorough discourse analysis of popular media constructions of the MMM, identified four tropes of Mormonism that were constructed and reinforced in popular coverage: "savagery, repudiated civilization, relinquished manhood, and despotic theocracy."³⁷ These tropes, underlined with racist presuppositions and frameworks,³⁸ not only were general trajectories of focus for scandal, but also were seen as violations of the burgeoning American identity, making the Mormon a spurious evolutionary mishap along the path of manifesting manifest destiny. Taking the discourse of "civilisation as text," the MMM as a discourse of "narratives of Mormon savagery, contested Whiteness and exceptionalism... demonstrated the American boundaries of civilization, with the Mormons clearly positioned beyond those limits."³⁹

As part of the delegitimisation of Mormons within the White American project, Mormons were associated as being an amalgamation of each prominent racial minority within the White American imaginary.⁴⁰ Once rumours — accurately based in actual events of the MMM — had spread of Mormons dressing as First Nations people, these were weaponised as confirmation of the "racial regression" that the Mormons were undergoing as a result of their transgressive non-American lifestyle.⁴¹ Though the act of impersonating First Nations people to instigate tensions and scapegoat blame for Latter-day Saint committed crime onto First Nations communities was itself an instance of egregious violence and discrimination towards the Paiute people, symptomatic of the broader discrimination against First Nations people throughout the Americas, it was still deployed to not only reinforce bigotry against First

34 C. V. Waite, *The Mormon Prophet and His Harem; or, an Authentic History of Brigham Young, His Numerous Wives and Children* (Cambridge, MA: Riverside Press, 1866), 71.

35 Johnson, *Convicting the Mormons*, 2.

36 Dehlin and Bibliotheca, 'Mountain Meadows Massacre', sec. 1:32:00.

37 Johnson, *Convicting the Mormons*, 3.

38 For a thorough and authoritative exploration of the racial undergirding of anti-Mormon bigotry, see W. Paul Reeve, *Religion of a Different Color: Race and the Mormon Struggle for Whiteness* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

39 Johnson, *Convicting the Mormons*, 136.

40 Reeve, *Religion of a Different Color*, Introduction.

41 Reeve, 76.

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Nations people (by using them as a standard for racial inferiority) but also to racialise Mormons and thus discriminate against them as well. Alongside polygamy, the MMM thus became a key instrument in the racialisation and discrimination against Mormons in America.⁴²

After this burst of interest contemporary with the event, the massacre was relegated to hushed local lore until the seminal work of Juanita Brooks⁴³—the most significant name in the scholarship of the Mountain Meadows Massacre and to whom the recent volume on the massacre, *Vengeance is Mine*,⁴⁴ is dedicated. Seeking to historically interrogate what was seen as a local hushed open secret, a topic to be forgotten about,⁴⁵ Brooks lived a life of marginalisation, though not excommunication, within the LDS Church for her eventual publishing of *The Mountain Meadows Massacre*,⁴⁶ which provided a clearly documented and evidenced account of the event, placing clear responsibility upon John D. Lee's Mormon militia-men. In the ensuing years since then, several books have been published, with the aforementioned vociferous, although not unfounded, attack on Brigham Young in Bagley's *Blood of the Prophets*,⁴⁷ and its counterpart, more favourable yet still critical, Walker, Turley, and Leonard's *Massacre at Mountain Meadows*.⁴⁸ These volumes, published in the first decade of the 2000s, has been followed by sustained interest to the current day, with recent works, including *Convicting the Mormons*,⁴⁹ and *Vengeance is Mine*,⁵⁰ focusing upon the surrounding discourse and aftermath of the massacre, rather than the massacre itself, proving both the wealth of content on the issue and the sustained interest in scholarship of it. This recent wave of scholarship is also likely stimulated by the release of substantial documents surrounding the massacre that even Brooks had desired to see but could not access.⁵¹

This post-Brooks interest has bled into popular discourse, perhaps most significantly with the amateur analysis in Jon Krakauer's book, *Under the Banner of Heaven*,⁵² later adapted into a popular television miniseries by Hulu. Less successful yet still indicative of public interest is Christopher Cain's Western *September Dawn*.⁵³ As several commentators have mentioned, these works are a continuation of the historic trends both driven by and inciting of anti-Mormon bigotry,⁵⁴ and show both the captivating nature that the Mountain Meadows Massacre has towards broader North America, as well

42 Dehlin and Bibliotheca, 'Mountain Meadows Massacre', sec. 1:24:00.

43 Dehlin and Bibliotheca, sec. 1:48:00.

44 Turley and Brown, *Vengeance Is Mine*.

45 Bagley, *Blood of the Prophets*, 348–573.

46 Juanita Brooks, *The Mountain Meadows Massacre* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 2012), Foreword.

47 Bagley, *Blood of the Prophets*.

48 Walker, Turley, and Leonard, *Massacre at Mountain Meadows*.

49 Johnson, *Convicting the Mormons*.

50 Turley and Brown, *Vengeance Is Mine*.

51 Dehlin and Bibliotheca, 'Mountain Meadows Massacre', sec. 1:36:20–1:39:00; many of these documents are now publicly available, for two comprehensive collections, see Richard E. Turley, Andrew Jenson, and David Hyrum Morris, eds., *Mountain Meadows Massacre: The Andrew Jenson and David H. Morris Collections*, BYU Studies Series (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 2009); Richard E. Turley, Janiece L. Johnson, and LaJean Purcell Carruth, eds., *Mountain Meadows Massacre: Collected Legal Papers* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 2017).

52 Jon Krakauer, *Under the Banner of Heaven: A Story of Violent Faith* (New York, NY: Doubleday, 2003).

53 *September Dawn* (Black Diamond Pictures, 2007).

54 McKay Coppins, 'Under the Banner of Hulu', *The Atlantic*, 15 June (2022). At: <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2022/06/under-the-banner-of-heaven-hulu-mormonism/661279/>. For an extensive study on the marginalisation of Mormons through popular culture, including Krakauer's work, see Terryl L. Givens, *The Viper on the Hearth: Mormons, Myths, and the Construction of Heresy* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2013).

as the longevity of its allure as a source of anti-Mormon sentiment. Not all media has been as historically problematic, with more balanced popular explorations having also arisen, such as Judith Freeman's historical fiction *Red Water*.⁵⁵ Thus the MMM has captured the public interest and imagination from its moment of occurrence up until the present day, and so therefore continues to be relevant to the culture not only of Utah, but at the very least the entire United States of America.

History of the Mountain Meadows Massacre Site

The first monument built at the site of the massacre to acknowledge the space, an initial work towards sacralisation, was constructed by soldiers in the United States Army in 1859. A conical collection of granite stones, this monument bore a large cross, upon which was inscribed Deuteronomy 32:35: "vengeance is mine: I will repay, saith the Lord." This rendition is interestingly not the way the Deuteronomy passage is translated in the King James Version, where it is rendered "to me *belongeth* vengeance." Instead, this specific formulation is found in the King James Version's Romans 12:19, where Paul is quoting the text from Deuteronomy in order to assuage the Christian desire for revenge by evoking the role of God as deliverer of vengeance. Thus the passage was not written to invoke the redemptive and punitive rhetoric of the Deuteronomistic school of thought, but instead Paul's calls for pacificism in the face of adversity and oppression.⁵⁶ Regardless, this sentiment did not meet Brigham Young well, as Wilford Woodruff, at that time the official historian of the LDS Church, but later its Prophet-President,⁵⁷ records in his journal: Young, upon witnessing the 1859 shrine, with its Biblical text, castigated the sign by quipping "it should be vengeance is mine and I have taken a little," and ordered the shrine be torn down.⁵⁸ This establishes an initial alternating patten between sacralisation and profanation. In the language Kenneth Foote developed in discussing responses to sites of tragedy, the initial construction of the monument is a "designation," an early sanctification—potentially even preceding any acts of pilgrimage—of a site distinguishing it from its surrounds, followed by Brigham Young's "obliteration," a complete destruction of any form of distinction for the site.⁵⁹ The 1864 restoration of the monument—and its subsequent defacing—would perpetuate this cycle of designation and obliteration,⁶⁰ a cycle that would continue until the aforementioned obscurity the site attained by the time of Juanita Brooks, its final obliteration state before the current fully developed and designated sacral space it is today.

Recent history, beginning around the 1990s, has found heightened interest in preserving the memorial sites with formal monuments, as well as higher cooperation from LDS leadership. A large drive behind this resurgent interest was the 1988 founding of the Mountain Meadows Association, incorporated to promote awareness and heritage protection of the MMM site.⁶¹ The first major development produced was a 1990 monument bearing the following inscription:

55 Judith Freeman, *Red Water* (New York, NY: Anchor Books, 2003).

56 This innocent presentation has been challenged in Olson, 'Evolution of History', 148–49, however its reliance on personal reflections by the builders of the monument with no actual expressed or communicated aggression towards the Latter-day Saints makes the point weak.

57 The position of Church Historian is a formal ecclesiastical position within the LDS Church, whose main responsibility is in the archiving and recording of Church activities.

58 Wilford Woodruff, *Wilford Woodruff's Journal: 1833–1898 Typescript*, ed. S. G. Kenney (Midvale, UT: Signature Books, 1984), 577.

59 Lutz Kaelber, 'Place and Pilgrimage, Real and Imagined', in *On the Road to Being There*, ed. William H. Swatos (Amsterdam: Brill, 2006), 282–83, https://doi.org/10.1163/9789047409823_013.

60 Olson, 'Evolution of History', 151.

61 Olson, 'Evolution of History', 155.

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In the valley below between September 7 and 11, 1857, a company of more than 120 Arkansas emigrants led by Capt. John T. Baker and Capt. Alexander Fancher was attacked while *en route* to California. This event is known in history as the Mountain Meadows Massacre.⁶²

This sign is notoriously evasive of attributing blame, deploying the passive voice to accommodate what Brown identifies as the social tension at the time in acknowledging the massacre and the Mormon-ness of its culprits.⁶³ A later 1999 monument, assembled under the funding and enthusiasm of the then LDS Prophet-President Gordon B. Hinckley, was constructed with more explicit mention of the massacre's culprits, however also routinely appealed to the event being a mystery in its motives and an unexplainable act from the Mormon participants,⁶⁴ thereby minimising the culpability of the broader LDS community and context. This 1999 monument also triggered the creation of two new organisations dedicated to the heritagisation of the MMM site.⁶⁵

2007, the 150th anniversary of the MMM, found a greater expressed sense of responsibility for the crime by LDS leadership, with Henry B. Eyring—at the time considered a prophetic apostle of the LDS church within its governing Quorum of the Twelve Apostles body—not only declaring that “the responsibility for the massacre lies with local leaders of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in the regions near Mountain Meadows,” but also absolving the blame placed at the Paiute people of the region, who he said “have unjustly borne for too long the principal blame for what occurred during the massacre,” and “would not have participated without the direction and stimulus provided by local Church leaders and members.”⁶⁶ It is in 2011, when the LDS Church purchased the surrounding land of the area to prevent residential constructions near it—thus designating the land fully as a sanctified, “set-aside” site—as well as successfully petitioning the United States Federal Government for National Historic Landmark status—a key step in establishing validity in heritagisation discourse—that the first monument constructed directly by descendants of the massacre victims was constructed. It displays a keen desire to present alternate narratives of the site, with it directly placing the blame of the attack on Mormon militiamen, and elides mention of the Paiute people altogether.⁶⁷

This troubled history of oscillating support for memorialisation of the site has resulted in different approaches in accessing and creating the space as a continuing place of significance. Evoking Kaelber's notion of “traumascape,” which “offer particular opportunities for cyber-tourism when the original sites of atrocity are difficult to reach, have been substantially altered, or no longer exist, and sensory inputs exist online that may not be available on site,”⁶⁸ the proliferation of online material on the Mountain Meadows Massacre, most particularly the Mountain Meadows Association website,⁶⁹ provide what Kaelber elsewhere coins “dark pilgrimages in cyberspace.”⁷⁰ This pilgrimage aspect will be

62 ‘1990 Mountain Meadows Monument’, Mountain Meadows Association, 2014, <https://www.mtn-meadows-assoc.com/Monuments/1990Monument/1990Monument.htm>.

63 Dehlin and Bibliotheca, ‘Mountain Meadows Massacre’, sec. 1:10:00.

64 Olson, ‘Evolution of History’, 158–60.

65 Olson, ‘Evolution of History’, 159.

66 Henry B. Eyring, ‘150th Anniversary of Mountain Meadows Massacre’, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints—Newsroom, 11 September 2007, <http://newsroom.churchofjesuschrist.org/article/150th-anniversary-of-mountain-meadows-massacre>.

67 Olson, ‘Evolution of History’, 161–62.

68 Lutz Kaelber, ‘A Memorial as Virtual Traumascape: Darkest Tourism in 3D and Cyber-Space to the Gas Chambers of Auschwitz’, *E-Review of Tourism Research* 5, no. 2 (2007): 25.

69 ‘Mountain Meadows Association’, Mountain Meadows Association, 2014, <http://www.mtn-meadows-assoc.com/>.

70 Kaelber, ‘Place and Pilgrimage, Real and Imagined’, 289.

touched upon later, for now discussion will build on Kaelber's taxonomy of three general types of digital tourism: "tourism online, online tourism, and virtual tourism."⁷¹ The first is simply a website that intends to supplement and assist physical visits to the site, with directions, travel information, etc. The second, in which the Mountain Meadows Association website primarily falls into, is where the primary journey is performed online: though tethered to the physical site, for a variety of potential reasons the engagement occurs on the website, often through shared personal experiences and reflections. This results in an experience that "combine[s] the pilgrim gaze with a 'virtual gaze.'"⁷² The active engagement with the Mountain Meadows Association website seen in its guestbook's many notes of appreciation of and being emotionally moved by the contents of the website, show that this website is not simply a chimaerical manifestation from the MMM site, but a substantial form of interaction with it.⁷³ This engagement extends to a section of the site named "Flowers," which provides the facility to search for a victim of the MMM and leave flowers and a note, both virtual.⁷⁴ This is a move away from the "online tourism" category and a fledgling technologically simple attempt at the third category, "virtual tourism," which is contrasted against online tourism in that it is no longer rooted in the physical site, but recreates it in some form digitally. The digital space should not be neglected when studying the MMM site's presence and modalities of interaction.

Hamrin-Dahl explores the multivalent aspects of intersecting domains found in pilgrimage sites, drawing a plurality of meanings from the binary of "'this-worldliness' and 'other-worldliness.'"⁷⁵ This view of places of pilgrimage as locations with spatial overlap between differing planes is reflected in the Sanskrit term *tīrtha*, which translates to "ford" and also carries the meaning of a place of pilgrimage.⁷⁶ The ford metaphor—a place of liminal transition from one domain to another, with a ford providing passage across a river from one bank to another—translates to the notion of pilgrimage with the place of pilgrimage providing the passage from the world of *samsāra* to the liberated domain. While this specific salvific intent of transitional and overlapping space is not relevant to the MMM site, the view of a place of pilgrimage—this pilgrimage aspect of the site will be explored below—as a convergence point between two realities is relevant. The site functions as the entry of American civilisation into Mormondom, and Mormondom into America, a clash of domains that is both horrific in its genesis and complex in its continuing reflection of the evolving nature of this interaction between "America" and Mormonism. From beyond the initial encounter, the Arkansas caravan through theocratic Utah, this *tīrtha* like nature was solidified in the creation of the initial monument by the physical embodiment of the United States of America: its military. This aspect of the "other" entering into the Mormon domain is amplified by the United States Army men's placing of a cross at the monument,⁷⁷ a Christian symbol not retained within Mormonism and actively avoided, with its affirmation constructed as an iconographic boundary line separating broader Christendom from the Mormon Church.⁷⁸ Within this recent shift, the position of the memorial site as being a *tīrtha* between

71 Kaelber, 'Memorial as Virtual Traumascape', 27–28.

72 Kaelber, 'Place and Pilgrimage, Real and Imagined', 289.

73 'View Prior Comments', Mountain Meadows Association, 2014, http://www.mtn-meadows-assoc.com/Comments_Our_Guests_Have_Made/View_Comments.htm.

74 'Flowers', Mountain Meadows Association, 2014, <http://www.mtn-meadows-assoc.com/flowers.htm>.

75 Tina Hamrin-Dahl, 'This-Worldly and Other-Worldly: A Holocaust Pilgrimage', *Scripta Instituti Donneriani Aboensis* 22 (1 January 2010): 153–55, <https://doi.org/10.30674/scripta.67365>.

76 Monier Monier-Williams, *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary: Etymologically and Philologically Arranged with Special Reference to Cognate Indo-European Languages* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1899), 449.

77 Olson, 'Evolution of History', 148.

78 For an exploration of the history of the LDS taboo against cross iconography, as well as a theological engagement with the topic from the perspective of a believing Latter-day Saint, see John Hilton, *Considering the Cross: How Calvary Connects Us with Christ* (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 2021).

broader America and Mormonism continued to function, but now is oriented in the new ways that this relationship is engaged with by the LDS Church. In an unfolding process that could be said to have begun with Mormonism's abandonment of polygamy, the LDS Church has sought to align itself with the values and identity of hegemonic White America.⁷⁹ Thus the anger of Young and its ensuing desecration have given way instead to LDS Prophet-President Gordon B. Hinckley attending and financially supporting the construction of a 1999 monument at the massacre site—this ford connecting Mormondom and America has gone from a passage way that was intended to be sealed to a welcome connection between Utah and its surrounding world.

Pilgrimage to the Mountain Meadows Massacre Site

“Dark tourism” is a popular and contested category in contemporary tourism studies, and has a variety of working definitions that are all subject to debate, yet bear a family resemblance to a notion of “travel done to ‘macabre’ locations.”⁸⁰ Cassie Pedersen notes, building upon Sarah Hodgkinson and Chris Keil, that scholars have struggled to find within a solely tourism based model a compelling account for the motivation of visitors to sites of “dark tourism.”⁸¹ That further methodological input is required to make sense of dark tourism is not surprising, as several scholars have noted that pilgrimage itself may be the original form of dark tourism,⁸² thus evidencing its roots in a domain beyond the strictly “touristic.” If not the primordial source of dark tourism, it still is nevertheless the case at least that pilgrimages “to places associated with death have occurred as long as people have been able to travel.”⁸³ This connection is not one that has gone unnoticed and undeveloped in the academic sphere, with the boundaries between the two concepts regularly negotiated, and the fruit from conflating their respective methodological apparatus explored.⁸⁴ Dark tourism is thus noted to both be difficult to explore solely as tourism, and also as being deeply interconnected with pilgrimage; pilgrimage therefore will be used as a methodological framework to supplement and flesh out an understanding of the dark tourism to the Mountain Meadows Massacre site. Such use of the concept is not an academic novelty: “pilgrimage” has found popular use amongst Jewish visitors of Auschwitz to describe their visits to the site,⁸⁵ thereby showing a phenomenological connection for the undertakers of dark tourism to pilgrimage beyond the aforementioned academic links.

79 For a gradual incremental view on how this transition of being the racial other into full Whiteness occurred, see Reeve, *Religion of a Different Color*.

80 For an overview of the debates surrounding the different aspects of ‘dark tourism,’ see Viorel Mionel, ‘Dark Tourism and Thanatourism: Distinct Tourism Typologies or Simple Analytical Tools?’, *Tourism: An International Interdisciplinary Journal* 67, no. 4 (20 December 2019): 424–29.

81 Cassie Pedersen, ‘Screening Tourist Encounters: Penal Spectatorship and the Visual Cultures of Auschwitz’, in *The Palgrave Handbook of Prison Tourism*, ed. Jacqueline Z. Wilson et al., Palgrave Studies in Prisons and Penology (London, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 132, https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-56135-0_7; Sarah Hodgkinson, ‘The Concentration Camp as a Site of “Dark Tourism.”’, *Témoigner: L’Entre Histoire et Mémoire*, no. 116 (2013): 23; Chris Keil, ‘Sightseeing in the Mansions of the Dead’, *Social and Cultural Geography* 6, no. 4 (2005): 483.

82 Mionel, ‘Dark Tourism and Thanatourism’, 424, 435; Philip R. Stone, ‘Dark Tourism and Significant Other Death: Towards a Model of Mortality Mediation’, *Annals of Tourism Research* 39, no. 3 (1 July 2012): 1567, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.annals.2012.04.007>.

83 Stone, ‘Dark Tourism and Significant Other Death’, 1567.

84 For a short exploration of the overlap and equivalence between the two, see Noga Collins-Kreiner, ‘Dark Tourism as/ is Pilgrimage’, *Current Issues in Tourism* 19, no. 12 (14 October 2016): 1185–89, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13683500.2015.1078299>.

85 Gillian McCann, ‘The Pilgrimage to Auschwitz: Making Meaning in Late Modernity’, in *The Future of Humanity Revisioning the Human in the Posthuman Age*, ed. Pavlina Radia, Sarah Fiona Winters, and Laurie Kruk (London, UK: Rowman & Littlefield, 2019), 72.

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Though there has been reasonable debate surrounding the lack of clarity on how “dark” a location must be to qualify for “dark tourism,” with no clear resolution found, the Mountain Meadows Massacre site clearly works within what Viorel Mionel identifies as the “darkest” possible tourist site: a site of death, the form of tourism being thanatourism.⁸⁶ The plaques placed at the Mountain Meadows Massacre site, detailing numbers and details of the murders, bear witness to the explicitly thanatological dimension of the pilgrimage⁸⁷—it is not simply that horrific deaths happened to occur at a site that is treated as a pilgrimage site, but that the deaths themselves are central to the pilgrimage.

The thanatouristic dimension has been further explored and theorised by Philip Stone through his notion of “Dark Tourism as Memento Mori,” wherein he situates dark tourism, which he too interconnects with pilgrimage,⁸⁸ as being a means of encountering death in a contemporary social context where mortality is sequestered away from general vision.⁸⁹ Thus the pilgrimage experience surrounding thanatouristic destinations is not simply a means of reckoning with the suffering and mortality of others, but also a means of negotiating with the personal reality of mortality. Though this is no doubt a dimension of appeal for prospective pilgrims to the Mountain Meadows Massacre site, the *memento mori* aspect is particularly borne out by analogy to “religious deconstruction,” a markedly post-modern movement amongst several religious communities. This religious deconstruction, a rethinking of traditional narratives and truth claims within a religious community, has been compared to death by adherents of a “deconstructed” variety of their faith.⁹⁰ Within the LDS context, especially within Utah, the issues that trigger such deconstructive trajectories among Latter-day Saints are often sterilised and hidden away analogically to the way the reality of death is in Stone’s analysis. However the physical reality of the site provides a reminder of an explicit and tragic failure on behalf of the LDS Church and its leadership—once again, though he did not necessarily order the attack, Young’s violent rhetoric and other explicit violent orders unassailably enabled it—and thus the site functions to negotiate this reality to adherents who wish to experience meditation on the fallibility of their faith and the complexity of their faith narratives. The popularity of this topic amongst Latter-day Saints in deconstructive movements can be seen by the immense interest found in Mormon podcasts within that sphere, including *Faith Matters*,⁹¹ spearheaded by the “postmodern Mormon” intellectual Terryl Givens, *Mormon Book Reviews*,⁹² a queer evangelical podcast that focuses on engagement with academic Mormon Studies, and *Mormon Stories*,⁹³ whose host was originally a progressive member of the LDS Church, but has since distanced himself as a practitioner following his excommunication. This extensive coverage and interest, which is not matched by orthodox LDS podcasts and media, reflects the vested interest that deconstructionist perspectives have in the massacre, functioning as an catalyst for the deconstruction process. This catalytic nature is confirmed not only in online commentators listing visiting the site as being a direct challenge to their traditional notions and beliefs surrounding

86 Mionel, ‘Dark Tourism and Thanatourism’, 426.

87 ‘1990 Mountain Meadows Monument’.

88 Stone, ‘Dark Tourism and Significant Other Death’, 1567.

89 Philip Stone, ‘Death, Dying and Dark Tourism in Contemporary Society: A Theoretical and Empirical Analysis’ (Ph.D., Lancashire, UK, University of Central Lancashire, 2010), <https://www.uclan.ac.uk/research/index.php>; Stone, ‘Dark Tourism and Significant Other Death’.

90 Seth J. Gillihan, ‘Effective Strategies for Dealing with Pitfalls in Religious Deconstruction’, *Think Act Be* (blog), 22 October 2021, <https://sethgillihan.com/effective-strategies-for-dealing-with-pitfalls-in-religious-deconstruction/>.

91 Aubrey Chaves and Tim Chaves, ‘Reckoning with Mountain Meadows—Richard Turley and Barbara Jones Brown’, *Faith Matters* (MP3), accessed 29 November 2023, <https://faithmatters.org/reckoning-with-mountain-meadows-richard-turley-and-barbara-jones-brown/>.

92 *Mountain Meadows The Aftermath w/Richard Turley & Barbara Jones Brown*, Mormon Book Reviews, 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=19nXUOz4KSw>.

93 Dehlin and Bibliotheca, ‘Mountain Meadows Massacre’.

the LDS Church,⁹⁴ but also in Barbara Jones Brown's, currently a leading scholar on the massacre, description of learning of the massacre as being "punched in the gut," and violating and complicating her prior understanding of LDS settlers of Utah as being almost mythically benevolent beings.⁹⁵

While no doubt a significant aspect, there are several narrative modalities which are expressed by visitors of this site beyond the narrative of deconstructive *memento mori*, a plurality of narrative dimensions that can also be seen with Auschwitz, the archetypal example of thanatourism.⁹⁶ I have previously written proposing the relevance of Hayden White's historiographical approaches to the study of pilgrimage,⁹⁷ and find that it both provides a system of interpretation for these varieties of pilgrimage, as well as engages well with this article's notion of heritagisation as remembrance, as remembrance and history are both at their essence attempts to conserve and reconstruct the past. A full description of this White's methodology is beyond the scope of this article; the specific aspect being drawn on here is *emplotment*, the various forms of narrative that pilgrims experience during their pilgrimage. The relevance of White is increased by the Mountain Meadows Massacre site being not only a site pertinent to historical concerns (few memorialised sites are purely "ahistorical"), but one of such strongly conflicting narratives and experiences.

The *atonement emplotment*, in which the structure of the pilgrimage is oriented towards a process of absolution, is the most visible and explicit form of pilgrimage to the MMM site. With the state of Utah being indelibly marked by relationship with the LDS Church, including a large majority of people in the state being LDS Church members, the responsibility of the majority of people towards the site has resulted in large gestures of atonement, which have been primarily expressed as part of the cultivation of the site: the site cultivation is not solely intended to take care of the site, but also to provide education, activism, and reconciliation.⁹⁸ This is not only in the intent of establishing the pilgrimage, but also in its performance, an example being the various rocks with apologies by Latter-day Saints for the massacre upon them written as part of the *atonement* pilgrimage.⁹⁹ This *atonement emplotment* of pilgrimage to the MMM site parallels that of the acknowledgement and reconciliation projects led by German youth around sites of the Holocaust,¹⁰⁰ both becoming a "ritualized incorporation of national guilt in the re-presentation of the past."¹⁰¹ The digital domain has also been deployed in the process of expressing desire for atonement in response to the MMM site, with Barbara Brown having established an email to which Latter-day Saints are able to send their written apologies to descendants of the Baker-Fancher party.¹⁰²

The *educational emplotment*, which is a structure oriented towards conveying knowledge or understanding, can be seen in the culture of historical re-enactment of the Baker-Fancher party by

94 sunshinestarburt17, 'Visited the Site of the Mountain Meadows Massacre Yesterday. Reading the Memorials Was Crazy Because It Totally Contradicts What I Was Taught in Seminary during High School. i've Decided to Now Research and Learn What Actually Happened.', Reddit Post, *R/Exmormon*, 8 June 2020, www.reddit.com/r/exmormon/comments/gz1hps/visited_the_site_of_the_mountain_meadows_massacre/.

95 Dehlin and Bibliotheca, 'Mountain Meadows Massacre', sec. 9:20–13:00.

96 Jonathan Huener, 'Antifascist Pilgrimage and Rehabilitation at Auschwitz: The Political Tourism of Aktion Sühnezeichen und Sozialistische Jugend', *German Studies Review* 24, no. 3 (2001): 513, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1433413>.

97 Tilak Sinha-Gröger, "'Meta-Topography'—A Methodology Translating White's Historiographical Model of Narrative Construction for the Study of Pilgrimage', *Unpublished Research Paper*, 2023.

98 Dehlin and Bibliotheca, 'Mountain Meadows Massacre', sec. 1:06:00.

99 Dehlin and Bibliotheca, 'Mountain Meadows Massacre', sec. 30:40.

100 Huener, 'Antifascist Pilgrimage and Rehabilitation at Auschwitz', 518.

101 Mary Fullbrook, *German National Identity after the Holocaust* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 1999), 36.

102 MMMreconciliation@gmail.com; Dehlin and Bibliotheca, 'Mountain Meadows Massacre', sec. 1:54:00.

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descendants,¹⁰³ a demonstration of the principle Kaelber has identified: “for those who are not victims or witnesses extreme collective trauma can neither be relived nor be vicariously experienced but only encountered in its mediated and imagined forms.”¹⁰⁴ Thus the pilgrimage functions as method of conveying an understanding of the trauma intergenerationally. This *educational* tenor is seen further in pilgrimages undergone to specifically address and inform about the violence committed by the Mormon Church, embodying Stone’s “Dark Tourism as Moral Instruction,”¹⁰⁵ and echoing the activism of the Sozialistische Jugend to Auschwitz intended to unveil the guilt of Nazi Germany.¹⁰⁶ Much like this Sozialistische Jugend work, this activist informed pilgrimage is intended not only for simple education of the general public as to the horrors of the site, but as ownership through education, that by learning about and acknowledging the violence committed by the Church, its members bear the responsibility for its reparation. Visits to the websites dedicated to the MMM site are also largely instances of this *educational* structure, and are a further fascinating example, following the email atonements earlier mentioned, of the digital pilgrimages emerging in the contemporary world, a world that Kaelber labels as “post-Fordist” in light of its novel and radical shifts towards the mechanisms of knowledge transportation, akin in magnitude to the shifts that the mass production of auto-mobiles brought.¹⁰⁷

The deployment of White here is not solely as an analysis of the contours that the pilgrimage takes, but also the centrality of contested history, and thus debates of historiography, which centre around the site. The site and its monuments being a direct embodiment of contested history, the several types of historical narrative that can be constructed deeply impact the message that is being conveyed through the *educational* *plotment’s* pilgrimage pedagogy. These different proposals all carry differing constructions of power; as White notes, all historical narratives exist to promote their select power structures.¹⁰⁸ There are many stories that may be told (not all of them justifiable through history as an academic discipline, but all of them histories that have been presented regarding the site by various invested parties). Is the site a lesson in historical extremism for the LDS Church? If so, its kerygma is a reformist one, warning a continuing LDS tradition the evils it is capable of—while also reinforcing the notion of a “moderate” Mormonism, championing the idea of a healthy and stable Mormonism that is not liable to the same critiques. Is the site instead, however, an instance of an inherently violent and malevolent Mormonism? If so, the Mormon Church is an irredeemable force on earth that requires corrective attention. Perhaps the evil is not Mormonism, but American racism? This then creates a further condemnation of American structures of racism pertinent to contemporary endeavours in curtailing it. Perhaps it is not the perennial American evil of racism, but an instance of the inherent violent effect the irrationality of religion offers? Then the New Atheism indictment of religion is established in the heart of Mormon soil. Perhaps it is not as one sided a violent attack as the academic consensus indicates it to be, and instead a tool in the hands of critics of the Mormon Church? Then the site becomes an opportunity for apologetics defending the dignity of the LDS Church.¹⁰⁹ Many more narratives can be constructed, and may be further combined in a vast tapestry of narrative permutations.

103 Dehlin and Bibliotheca, ‘Mountain Meadows Massacre’sec. 19:50.

104 Kaelber, ‘Memorial as Virtual Traumascape’, 30.

105 Stone, ‘Dark Tourism and Significant Other Death’, 1580–81.

106 Huener, ‘Antifascist Pilgrimage and Rehabilitation at Auschwitz’, 518.

107 Kaelber, ‘Place and Pilgrimage, Real and Imagined’, 279.

108 Herman Paul, *Hayden White: The Historical Imagination*, Key Contemporary Thinkers (Malden, MA: Polity, 2011), 56.

109 For a variety of comments embodying these various moods, the archive of guest responses found here provide a fascinating and direct source, ‘View Prior Comments’; the following two works both demonstrate the two opposite extremes of a championing of moderate Mormonism, and a condemnation of the irrational danger of religion, respectively, Chaves and Chaves, ‘Reckoning with Mountain Meadows—Richard Turley and Barbara Jones Brown’; Krakauer, *Under the Banner of Heaven*.

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The drastically different narratives that can be communicated through the structure of the pilgrimage, and their respective effects, demonstrate the necessity of care when developing the site and facilitating its pilgrimages. The complex factors in creating this conscious maintenance of ethical narratives, as well as recommendations as to how this may be done, will occupy the final part of this article.

Conclusion

Adopting White's discussion of history entails not only his taxonomy of the process of historical construction, but also his endeavour in establishing the moral responsibility for the narratives that are created by those who craft history.¹¹⁰ It is with this vision in mind that this article concludes with several recommendations for what could be done with the MMM site and its respective pilgrimage, so that the narrative that the pilgrimage embodies is one that empowers important voices, and can challenge the many social and historical issues that intersect in the MMM and are continuing to be pertinent to the United States of America.

The primary recommendation that underlines the other proposals is an increase in funding from government bodies towards the maintenance and facilitation of the MMM site. The site currently is almost entirely funded by the LDS Church itself,¹¹¹ and though anxiety around this may be attempted to be quelled by the explicit affirmation of LDS guilt in the more contemporary plaques and rhetoric from the LDS Church, as evidenced by the shocked experience of a Reddit user posting on an ex-Mormon forum about the challenging and informing nature of the site, the same post also evidences the valid reason for concern, in that the user notes that this information heavily contradicts what had been taught to them throughout their education in the LDS Church.¹¹² Brown's own quick comment that her historical work on the MMM "would have never made it through the correlation department,"¹¹³ referring to the LDS Church body that edits and assesses works that are intended for official LDS Church use, leads to further concern as to the level of commitment the LDS Church has to properly promoting the narrative of the MMM to a large audience beyond those visiting the MMM site. This furthers the recurring accusation that the LDS Church is driven in its strong active support of the site so as to control the site, and prevent its narrative from being widely expressed beyond it, as well as controlling the way the narrative is told at the MMM site.¹¹⁴ Though Brown in her response to this critique appeals to Eyring's crying at the reading of the 2007 LDS Church apology at the MMM site,¹¹⁵ this is not a particularly compelling defence of the LDS Church's sincerity in light of the evidence of its insincerity, and is even less compelling in light of Eyring's strong reputation amongst cultural commentators of Mormonism as a severely lachrymose speaker, tears that are suspected to be born from a desire for rhetorical effect.¹¹⁶ One online forum discussing Eyring having one poster note that in his

110 Paul, *Hayden White*, 39.

111 Dehlin and Bibliotheca, 'Mountain Meadows Massacre', sec. 1:52:00.

112 sunshinestarbust17, 'Visited the Site of the Mountain Meadows Massacre Yesterday. Reading the Memorials Was Crazy Because It Totally Contradicts What I Was Taught in Seminary during High School. i've Decided to Now Research and Learn What Actually Happened.'

113 Dehlin and Bibliotheca, 'Mountain Meadows Massacre', sec. 1:44:00.

114 Dehlin and Bibliotheca, sec. 1:46:00.

115 Dehlin and Bibliotheca, sec. 26:40.

116 Radio Free Mormon, 'The Crying Game Part 2', MP3, *Radio Free Mormon*, accessed 29 November 2023, https://content.blubbry.com/mormondiscussions/059_RFM_CryingGamePart2.mp3; *Henry B Eyring Masterclass in Emotional Expressions, Thoughts on Things and Stuff*, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dcdqj37fbWo>.

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experience Eyring “usually bursts into tears within 10 seconds of standing at the pulpit.”¹¹⁷ Furthermore, even if one were to accept that current attitudes from the LDS Church were favourable towards maintaining justice in their account of the MMM, this is not necessarily always the case, as can be seen in the original response of Brigham Young to the MMM monument, to the fear of retribution amongst early MMM whistleblowers,¹¹⁸ and finally to the social ostracisation that Juanita Brooks experienced. LDS Church favourability in maintaining the site is thus too contingent on social trends to be a comfortable foundation for the heritage maintenance of the site.

Perhaps most troubling however, and admitted by Brown, is the continuing tendency towards victim blaming found in the LDS Church, not only in the aforementioned Sunday school contexts, but even in official LDS publications on the MMM, which continue to evoke discredited narratives of the Arkansas party’s aggravating local Latter-day Saints.¹¹⁹ In Foote’s earlier mentioned schema of “designation” and “obliteration,” the final category in his tripartite taxonomy is profanation through “rectification,” the process by which a site is maintained while removing aspects deemed as problematic to the maintainers.¹²⁰ This final category provides a structure by which maintenance of the site by LDS Church authorities can be seen as a means of profaning what had made it initially a sacralised space (a place set aside as a reminder of horrific violence committed by Mormons), and whitewashing the location’s narrative.

These issues result from a discomfort that is inherent to the whole project of LDS Church stewardship of the site: how can the community responsible, even by their own admission, for the crime, become the primary caretakers of a site honouring the victims of the crime? This is a vast issue, with even histories that have been generally well received outside of LDS circles, such as the authoritative accounts of the events composed by Brooks and Brown, being both written not only by Latter-day Saints, but descendants of perpetrators of the MMM.¹²¹ While some may raise the example of Germany’s culture of memorialisation and national atonement for crimes of the Second World War, particularly surrounding the Holocaust, this example is not analogous simply because though Germany had undergone a strict process of de-Nazification,¹²² the LDS Church continues to venerate Brigham Young, who at the least was responsible for the MMM in that his rhetoric played an essential role in enabling it, as a divinely appointed prophet of God.

Though substantial progress has been made in reparation between the LDS Church and the descendants of the Baker-Fancher party, the aforementioned problematic behaviour of the LDS Church, as well as it only being recently that Brown notes her being identified as a “Mormon spy” when she attended an Arkansas commemoration of the MMM,¹²³ do not paint a sufficiently encouraging view of the relationship of the LDS Church with the descendants of the Baker-Fancher party to be the primary benefactor of the site. This is strongly evidenced by the 2011 MMM site plaque, the first constructed solely by descendants of the Baker-Fancher party, which places sole responsibility on the Mormons,

117 pied piper, ‘What’s Henry B Eyring Like?’, 10 March 2014, <https://www.exmormon.org/phorum/read.php?2,1199510>.

118 Dehlin and Bibliotheca, ‘Mountain Meadows Massacre’, sec. 1:22:00.

119 ‘Mountain Meadows Massacre’, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, accessed 29 November 2023, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/eng/history/topics/mountain-meadows-massacre>; Dehlin and Bibliotheca, ‘Mountain Meadows Massacre’, sec. 1:18:00; Bagley, *Blood of the Prophets*, xvii.

120 Kaelber, ‘Place and Pilgrimage, Real and Imagined’, 282–83.

121 Dehlin and Bibliotheca, ‘Mountain Meadows Massacre’, sec. 24:00.

122 For a thorough exploration of this process from the ‘ground level,’ including an extensive record setting survey of the entire nation in attempting to iron out Nazi sympathies, see Mikkel Dack, *Everyday Denazification in Postwar Germany: The Fragebogen and Political Screening during the Allied Occupation* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2023).

123 Dehlin and Bibliotheca, ‘Mountain Meadows Massacre’, sec. 19:50.

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demonstrating a desire to create new, separate narratives around the site. It is likely not coincidental that the plaque constructed without LDS Church input is where this desire to construct new narratives is expressed.

This is therefore clearly site that requires a broader set of funding than that from the LDS Church, and this funding would not be out of the sphere of public interest. This has already been recognised in the site's recognition as a National Historic Landmark, a designation which "means the United States has recognized that this site is among the most important in U.S. history."¹²⁴ That the MMM site has been recognised as a heritage site to such a formally recognised standard is, though born from a horrific event, not surprising, as "almost all the places assimilated today to dark tourism have to do with heritage and culture."¹²⁵ This cultural significance is not restricted solely to the immediate surrounds of the site. As has been noted, the MMM intersects with several dimensions of broader American history;¹²⁶ the MMM is not only relevant to the study of Utah and Arkansas, but is an encapsulation of the birth of modern North America, as well as a case study in the horrors of violence and rhetoric. As has been discussed, it directly involves questions of religious and national identity, marginalisation of those beyond the pale of normalised American identity, and egregious violence against First Nations people, amongst other things. Thus, government initiatives and funding not only would be beneficial in disrupting the LDS Church monopoly in developing the MMM site, but also would be of great benefit to the education and awareness of all Americans to formative factors in their culture. This could involve the establishing of a university scholarship centred around the study of the MMM site. In a broader reach, there could be promotion of the MMM in school syllabi, especially regarding topics of racial history, oppression of First Nations peoples, religious freedom and bigotry, national identity formation, state identity formation, and models of government. The Mountain Meadows Monument Foundation has provided an initial success in this regard, with its incorporation of the massacre in the Arkansas history textbook currently in use in the state.¹²⁷

These initiatives could manifest in something as simple as a visitor's centre, which would provide information about the site, including histories of the MMM written from outside the LDS fold, and a history of the site and its monuments itself. Opportunities for Latter-day Saints to express atonement could also be facilitated, a more developed version of the email address Brown established to which apologies by Latter-day Saints could be sent, perhaps in the form of handwritten letters. Alongside this would go well a freshly constructed website for the MMM site, as the current websites are either archaic,¹²⁸ or lacking in depth,¹²⁹ and are also designed to promote the associations intended to promote the site, rather than directly the site itself. These websites would include similar information as the in-person visitor centre, however would also provide digital experiences of "virtual tourism," including the afore-discussed examples, such as virtually placing flowers on graves

The information found in this visitor's centre and on the website should also serve as a deconstruction of historic and existing anti-Mormon bigotry, the continuing significance of which

124 'National Historic Landmark', Mountain Meadows Monument Foundation, 2023, <https://mmmf.org/national-historic-landmark/>.

125 Mionel, 'Dark Tourism and Thanatourism', 434.

126 Sarah Barringer Gordon and Jan Shipps, 'Fatal Convergence in the Kingdom of God: The Mountain Meadows Massacre in American History', *Journal of the Early Republic* 37, no. 2 (2017): 307–47, <https://doi.org/10.1353/jer.2017.0026> provides an investigation into points of convergence of the Mountain Meadows Massacre with broader American history beyond what has been touched upon in this paper.

127 'Education Efforts', Mountain Meadows Monument Foundation, 2023, <https://mmmf.org/education-efforts/>.

128 'Mountain Meadows Association'.

129 'Mountain Meadows Monument Foundation', Mountain Meadows Monument Foundation, 2023, <https://mmmf.org/national-historic-landmark/>.

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having been noted in the aforementioned critiques of *Under the Banner of Heaven*. By providing a broad insight into the nature of the events and the current willingness of the LDS community—that is at least a section of the LDS community—to acknowledge the severity of the event, as well as condemn it, a new level of understanding can be forged surrounding the historically marginalised and racialised Mormon community. Furthermore, the ways in which Mormons both enabled and also were oppressed by racism should be explored, as well the general racialisation and discrimination experienced purely for not coalescing to an image of the normative American. All of this would paint an important and relevant picture of the historic ways in which bigoted thinking can alienate communities. Avoiding the problematic possibility of overly sympathising with the currently hegemonic—in Utah—LDS Church’s own history of discrimination, instead the violence that the alienation Mormonism has faced can result in would be emphasised in such narratives, thereby fully attributing the responsibility of the massacre on the Mormon Church, while also challenging extant anti-Mormon bigotry.

Beyond refining the pilgrimage site and providing better education about it, is a broader enabling of the pilgrimage itself. This could be done in a general way through a form of an awareness campaign for the significance of the site, which could include improving ease of access as discussed. Not only the general public, but incorporating a visit to this site in local schools would create a constant cultural presence for this substantial place of heritage. Similar forms of orchestrated pilgrimages have been successfully implemented in Auschwitz to help the process of reconciliation by drawing attention to both the horrific crimes of the location and the culpability of its perpetrators.¹³⁰ While this type of structured and consciously created pilgrimage and memorialisation may be charged as insincere, it is relevant to re-invoke Kaelber’s insight that “for those who are not victims or witnesses extreme collective trauma can neither be relived nor be vicariously experienced but only encountered in its mediated and imagined forms.”¹³¹ it is only through such mediated and imagined forms that an authentic experience of the thanatological domain in a site of such great crisis as the MMM site can be attained.

Finally, there is the question of further development of land. An essential step would be the funding of further monuments built without the influence of the LDS Church, enabling the voices that wish to speak independent of Mormonism the same opportunity to do so as has been accorded to those voices that wished to speak in cooperation with Mormonism. As most parties involved are eager to undergo the process of sacralisation through creation of monuments, it may not be inappropriate to construct nearby the designated location of the MMM site a museum of Mormonism and violence. While the focus of this museum would best be left determined by the various MMM site advocacy groups, there has been a lack of emphasis on the suffering that the Paiute people and other First Nations communities in the area underwent because of being blamed for events such as the MMM, as well as general suffering from the brutality of colonialisation. A museum documenting the complex and horrific relationship that the Paiute people had with settlers in the area, explicating the violence and oppression experienced by these communities, would help address the lack of attention this aspect of the MMM story has received, and would integrate well into contemporary drives towards intersectional social justice.

These are initial suggestions, and there are no illusions as to the immense amount of further detail and work that would be required to implement any of them. They have simply been offered as a prospective bird’s eye view of what could be done to best the MMM site as a site of significant heritage to America. The LDS experience is one that carries immense insight and potential for reflection and education, and the MMM site is an established ford to enter into that world. By taking advantage of this crossing, healing, learning, and reparation all become closer within reach for all parties involved. Implementation of plans like these not only provide substantial educational contributions to America,

130 Huener, ‘Antifascist Pilgrimage and Rehabilitation at Auschwitz’, 514.

131 Kaelber, ‘Memorial as Virtual Traumascape’, 30.

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but perhaps more importantly, provide a deeper level of justice for the families of the victims of this horrendous massacre.

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