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On the Mountain Meadows

I was very disappointed to see William Grigg's "Frontier Taliban" (*Reviews*, December 2002) in *Chronicles*. Mr. Grigg either is laughably ignorant of the history of the Mountain Meadows Massacre or is content to promote Will Bagley's agenda, put forth in his book, *Blood of the Prophets: Brigham Young and the Mountain Meadows Massacre*. Mr. Bagley is not quite the "independent researcher" that Mr. Grigg takes him to be, and, as an historian, his facts are often far from the truth.

Mr. Grigg would have us believe that the Mountain Meadows Massacre was the direct result of an order given by Brigham Young and that the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints has since been involved in a massive cover-up. These charges are demonstrably false.

Quoting Mr. Bagley, Mr. Grigg writes that "Mormon historians have habitually 'laid the blame on the victims and Indians, and that tradition is alive and well today.'" This is absurd. In 1874, 17 years after the massacre, John Taylor, senior apostle and future president of the church, wrote in a letter to the *Deseret News*: "That bloody tragedy has been the chief stock in trade . . . for penny-a-liners, the press, and pulpit, who have gloated in turns, and by chorus over the sickening details. Do you deny it? No. Do you excuse it? No. There is no excuse for such a relentless, diabolical, sanguinary deed. . . . The world is full of deeds of crime and darkness; and a question often arises, who is responsible therfor [*sic*]?" It is usual to blame the perpetrators. It does not seem fair to accuse nations, states and communities of deeds perpetrated by some of their citizens, *unless they uphold it* [*italics in original*]."

Numerous other church authorities denounced the massacre just as strongly. One historian outside the church, H.H. Bancroft, writes in his *History of Utah*, "The 'Mormons' denounce the Mountain Meadows Massacre and every act connected therewith as earnestly and honestly as any in the outside world. This is abundantly proved and may be accepted as a historical fact."

Mr. Bagley is hardly the first to try to discredit the LDS religion by implicating Brigham Young in this heinous affair.

According to Senate documents, Jacob Forney, the Indian agent in the territory, wrote: "I fear . . . that with certain parties here there is a greater anxiety to connect Brigham Young and other church dignitaries with every criminal offense than diligent endeavor to punish the actual perpetrators of crime." Mr. Grigg and Mr. Bagley want to show that the minions of Brigham Young were led to commit mass murder by their prophet. Their smoking gun, however, is a third-party journal entry stating that Young told the Indians to go ahead with the massacre. This is highly doubtful. The Paiute chiefs left Salt Lake City on September 2. The Fancher party didn't even arrive at Mountain Meadows until after the chiefs had left for Salt Lake. The Mountain Meadows Massacre started on September 7. Mountain Meadows is 250 miles from Salt Lake City. It is highly implausible that the Paiutes could have covered this great distance and arranged the massacre within this time frame.

For a link between Brigham Young and the white settlers, Grigg relies on the memoir of John D. Lee, who, in 1877, the year he was executed for his participation at the massacre, wrote that "some one in authority" had ordered it. By 1877, Brigham Young had long since learned of Lee's participation, had excommunicated him from the church, and a jury including some Mormons had convicted him of murder. If Lee was telling the truth, why did the settlers send a messenger to Brigham Young when the Indians started the hostilities on September 6? Why, according to the *Deseret News*, was Brigham Young's reply: "Go with all speed, spare no horse flesh. The emigrants must not be meddled with, if it takes all Iron county to prevent it. They must go free and unmolested"? In the years following the massacre, some participants sent letters of confession to Brigham Young. To one, he replied: "If you want a remedy, a rope around the neck taken with a jerk would be very salutary. There are courts of law and officers in the Territory. Appeal to them. . . . God will judge this matter and on that assurance I rest perfectly satisfied. If you are innocent, you may safely do the same, if you are guilty, better try the remedy."

Finally, Parley P. Pratt was not sealed to Eleanor McLean. He was trying to get

Mrs. McLean's children back from the husband whom she had left. He was acquitted by a non-Mormon jury of any wrongdoing and was subsequently killed by Mr. McLean. News of this had not reached Salt Lake City, and it was not a factor in the Mountain Meadows Massacre.

I wonder if Mr. Grigg knows that Mr. Bagley is a self-identified ex-Mormon who, at a conference for ex-Mormons, said: "I'd like to thank the church for providing so much publicity for my book." He's about as "independent" a researcher as Morris Dees is when he writes about *Chronicles*.

The most plausible explanation for the Mountain Meadows Massacre is found in B.H. Roberts' *A Comprehensive History of the Church Century One*. His conclusion was that some of the Fancher party had inflamed the Indians and the Mormons through their behavior on their journey through Utah. Some had claimed to be part of the mob that had killed Joseph Smith and said they would bring reinforcements back from California to finish the job of destroying the Mormons. When the Indians started the hostilities, the émigrés sent a party of three men to town to get help. There was a problem, and one of the émigrés was killed by a white settler. The other two returned. Knowing that the U.S. government was coming from the east and fearing that the Fancher party would continue to California and bring back others to avenge this death, the settlers mercilessly decided to kill all of them and then took an oath of secrecy. At first, the Indians were blamed, and Brigham Young accepted this explanation. But the truth slowly started to leak out, and investigations revealed what had really happened. Brigham Young wanted the U.S. government to investigate, but President Buchanan had issued a blanket pardon. While the Mormons were not eager to acknowledge that some of their own had participated in this heinous affair, they did not blame the victims nor attempt to exonerate the guilty.

—Kevin Rudd
Los Angeles, CA

Mr. Grigg Replies:

In dealing with commentators and analysts who expose Islamic terrorism, the Council on American-Islamic Relations has accused them of pursuing an "Islamophobic agenda." For several years, CAIR

used this tactic to marginalize those who warned about the threat from radical Islam—a threat which proved all too real. While Mormonism obviously poses no similar threat today, the Mormon Church and its apologists are using tactics similar to CAIR's in dealing with Will Bagley's exposé of the terrorist atrocity called the Mountain Meadows Massacre.

Mr. Rudd is wrong to refer to Mr. Bagley as a "self-identified ex-Mormon"; the author readily describes himself as a Mormon, albeit an inactive one. And, as disappointing as it may be to defenders of Mormonism who cling desperately to what Bagley calls the "myth of persecuted innocence," there is no evidence that Bagley is connected to some vast anti-Mormon conspiracy.

In Rudd's depiction, Brigham Young was shocked and revolted by the massacre, which he had frantically tried to prevent. That characterization is difficult to square with Young's actions on visiting the massacre site two years later. In the interval, a crude memorial to the victims had been constructed, marked with a cross bearing the scriptural admonition: "Vengeance is mine, saith the Lord; I will repay." As recorded by Mormon apostle (and future president) Wilford Woodruff, who was present, Young took offense at the inscription, snorting contemptuously: "I should say, 'Justice is mine, and I have taken some.'" He then ordered his subordinates to tear down the cross and desecrate the cairn containing the victims' remains. This was hardly the act of someone whose gentle soul was rent with anguish over the death of 120 innocent people.

In my review, I took note of John D. Lee's excommunication. This occurred in 1870, 13 years after the massacre, long after Lee's role was known by Brigham Young. The timing of Lee's excommunication suggests that it was inspired by expedience rather than principle. And, as I noted, Mormon leaders posthumously restored Lee's membership and "priesthood blessings" in 1961. In Mormon theology, this could not be done for someone guilty of "shedding innocent blood," which is regarded as an unforgivable sin. By rehabilitating Lee, Mormon leaders tacitly—but unmistakably—recognized that he had taken the fall for "those in authority," as his descendants had long insisted.

Rudd maintains that charges of a Mormon cover-up are "demonstrably false." How, then, does he account for the curiously selective absence of key documents—journals, minutes of meetings, and criti-

cal correspondence—that could illuminate the truth of what happened in September 1857? Richard Turley, an historian employed by the Mormon Church, has admitted the cover-up, acknowledging that "some documents of importance were sequestered . . . and kept from researchers."

It is not necessary to believe that Brigham Young personally ordered the massacre to hold him responsible for it. Bancroft's *History of Utah*, which Mr. Rudd apparently considers reliable, relates Young's threat to Army Captain Van Vliet that, if Washington insisted on installing a new territorial governor in Utah, "I shall not hold the Indians by the wrist any longer. . . . If the issue comes, you may tell the government to stop all emigration across the continent, for the Indians will kill all who attempt it." That threat was made on September 9, 1857—two days before the slaughter at Mountain Meadows.

Bagley makes a compelling case that the murder of Parley P. Pratt was known in Utah before September 1857. The case that Pratt had "married" Eleanor McLean is circumstantial but quite plausible. Rudd insists that Pratt had angered Eleanor's lawful husband, Hector, by "trying to get Mrs. McLean's children back" from him, but doesn't explain why the couple was estranged and why Pratt considered the McLeans' domestic affairs any of his business.

According to Bancroft (whom, again, Rudd considers reliable), while the McLeans were living in San Francisco, Hector McLean ordered Pratt to cease his missionary visits. Pratt heedlessly persisted in his efforts to convert McLean's wife, and, at one point, Hector reportedly found intimate letters from the Mormon apostle in his wife's possession. Bancroft states that it was "alleged by anti-Mormon writers, and tacitly admitted by the saints, that [Pratt] was sealed to Hector McLean's wife." At the very least, Pratt's conduct—alienating the affections of Hector McLean's legal wife and defying Hector's authority over his own household—was arrogant and morally suspect.

The murder of Pratt—like those of Joseph and Hyrum Smith before him—was a crime. The theocratic doctrines of mid-19th-century Mormonism turned those crimes into a rationale for terrorism and mass murder. If the Mormon Church ever candidly confronts these tragic facts, it will be because of the principled, persistent work of honest historians such as Will Bagley.

After Iraq

As soon as the long-anticipated war with Iraq has been brought to a temporary close, the United States will be able to get on with the post-September 11 agenda declared by President Bush: the eradication of evil. Even a minimal definition of *evil* would include the acts of terrorism inflicted every day by Islamic extremists against the West and its allies. No war against Islamic terrorism will accomplish much, however, if it is not accompanied by an honest evaluation of the reasons why Muslims around the world look upon the United States as the enemy.

Part of this hatred may be inevitable: the hatred of the have-nots for the haves, of the defeated for the victors. But some of the antipathy expressed not just by terrorists but by traditional Muslims stems from what they perceive as American arrogance. Not content with boasting of our superior firepower and greater wealth, our leaders and pundits, whenever they speak on the subject, claim that people in traditional societies envy our freedom and our way of life; that Muslims, in particular, hate us because of our moral and cultural superiority and not because of anything we have ever done wrong. Such rhetoric is as insulting as it is false. Like other Western countries, the United States is undergoing a moral crisis whose dimensions are measured by the rates of divorce, abortion, drug use, television watching, and suicide.

It is time for Americans to turn the volume down on our self-glorification and to consider what lies within our power. If we really want to succeed, not just in killing terrorists but in reducing the level of hatred in the Muslim world, we shall have to deal with one of the primary causes of that hatred: the festering conflict between Israel and the Palestinians. Only the United States, with her great wealth and preponderant military forces, has the necessary authority to bring peace to the Middle East, and if, as is likely, the second Gulf War is quickly and successfully prosecuted, the next president—either George W. Bush (reelected against whatever token opposition the Democrats finally put up) or someone who promises to put Americans back to work and to save their pensions—had better return to

the most important piece of unfinished business left behind by George Bush I and Bill Clinton. This is what The Rockefeller Institute team was told by Shai Feldman, director of the prestigious Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies at Tel Aviv University, when we visited at the end of February.

It is not the task of a foreign government (much less a magazine) to dictate the terms of a settlement. Israel is a sovereign state, possessed of the right of all sovereign states, which is to protect her own interests. However, Israel's excessive dependence on U.S. support (of which the billions spent in foreign aid may be the smallest part) has given our government enormous power, which we have not always used wisely. Before entering, once again, into the perilous waters of the peace process, any U.S. administration should keep in mind a few essential points.

First, Israel is here to stay, and it is entirely unreasonable to demand that any Israeli government sacrifice her security interests. So long as the Palestinians continue to practice terrorism against women and children, no Israeli government will be able to negotiate. Israel might never have existed were it not for the terrorist activities of people like Menachem Begin and Itzhak Shamir, but (as the hawkish Efraim Inbar of the Begin-Sadat Center explained to us), Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion's decision to shoot Israeli terrorists proved the legitimacy of the Israeli state. Now, it is the Palestinians' turn. Until they find a substitute for the thoroughly discredited Yasser Arafat, however, negotiations will be impossible. The same may be said of Ariel Sharon. Although some Israelis continue to hope that Sharon, as an extreme hawk, will have the necessary credibility to make concessions, his record of brutality and deliberately provocative style may make his removal a *sine qua non* of the peace process.

The model for an agreement should not be the Versailles Treaty, which ended World War I and started World War II, but the practical negotiations that enabled Anwar Sadat and Menachem Begin to come to an agreement. On that occasion, Begin's decision to withdraw

Jewish settlements from the Sinai was the key to the treaty's success, and any future agreement will require an Israeli withdrawal from some, but by no means all, of the West Bank settlements. Virtually everyone in Israel acknowledges that a Palestinian state, in some form, is the only possible guarantee of Israel's security. The alternative is to sit back and wait for the high Palestinian birthrate to accomplish what three wars and numberless uprisings have failed to achieve.

A second prerequisite for peace is that the parties must eschew utopian and religious dreams. The Palestinian exiles, who still brandish the keys to their old houses and are deliberately kept in a state of despair, are the most unyielding obstacle to peace. They must simultaneously be offered cause for hope—opportunities for citizenship, education, a normal life somewhere in the Arab world—and told plainly that they will never return to occupy Israel. On the other hand, American evangelicals, with their newfangled millennialist theories that justify the infinite expansion of Israel, must be firmly excluded from all political influence, both over Israel and over U.S. foreign policy.

For their part, Israelis had better understand that American support is neither unqualified nor unlimited. The day will come, and it may come all too soon, when ordinary American voters, tired of apparently endless carnage, will force their government to abandon Israel just as it abandoned other allies, such as the Diems of South Vietnam, Marcos in the Philippines, the Somozas in Nicaragua, and the shah of Iran. Israel's destiny should be in the hands of Israelis and not in those of American politicians and religious eccentrics.

Peace will not come with a bang to the Middle East, for, in Yeats' words, "peace comes dropping slow." It will require the painful efforts of men who have learned not to trust one another but know that, if they fail to proceed cautiously, it may mean the destruction of Israelis and Palestinians alike and a *jihad* against the United States of which September 11, 2001, was only a foretaste.