

The Mormon Menace: Violence and Anti-Mormonism in the Postbellum South. By Patrick Q. Mason. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011. xii, 252 pp. \$29.95, ISBN 978-0-19-974002-4.)

Half a century ago in this journal (then titled the *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*), David Brion Davis published a classic study on the “counter-subversive” attacks against Catholics and Mormons that were instigated, typically, by antebellum Protestants (“Some Themes of Counter-subversion: An Analysis of Anti-Masonic, Anti-Catholic, and Anti-Mormon Literature,” Sept. 1960, pp. 205–24). While the American tradition of anti-Catholicism has continued to generate significant scholarly attention, studies of anti-Mormonism have all but disappeared. Thus the publication of Patrick Q. Mason’s engaging analysis not only adds to our knowledge of the subject but also extends it into a region and a period left largely unaddressed by other scholars.

After a brief discussion of the murder of the Mormon apostle Parley P. Pratt in Arkansas in 1857, Mason begins his study in earnest with

two noteworthy episodes of anti-Mormon violence in the South: the 1879 murder of the Georgia missionary Joseph Standing and the 1884 Cane Creek massacre in Tennessee, during which two missionaries and two converts were killed by vigilantes. These events set the stage for Mason to discuss the rationales behind such violence and to explain why such deadly aggression continued in the South despite its decline in other parts of the country. Locating this hostility within the southern ideology of honor, Mason argues that this ideology literally engendered “a powerful means of social control in which both southern law and custom asserted that the family, particularly the wife and her sexuality, was the exclusive preserve of the male head of the household” (p. 5). Obviously, this placed the Mormon practice of polygamy in conflict with southern domesticity, but Mason does not attempt to dismiss anti-Mormon violence simply by drawing this dichotomy. Rather, he illustrates how conflict influenced both the identity of postbellum southerners still struggling to make sense of their place in the American narrative, and the “oppositional identity” that Latter-Day Saints developed in response to their persecution by “diabolical” southern mobs (p. 170). While the willingness of missionaries to suffer verbal and physical abuse—even martyrdom—in defense of the faith provided the Church of Latter-Day Saints an assurance of its theological claims, the scale of violence that “distinguished the South from all other regions of the country” actually helped southerners reunite with other Americans in an appropriately patriotic cause to protect the home against the “depredations” of polygamy (*ibid.*).

Although Mason considers anti-Catholicism and anti-Semitism in the postbellum South in his final chapter, this comparison comes rather late in his analysis and implies that these other examples of opposition to religious outsiders were of a different sort than anti-Mormonism. In fact, while the motivations could be quite different—the lynchings of Italian Catholics in postbellum Louisiana, for example, were driven by racial rather than religious concerns—the comparable use of violence to secure the social order against a presumed subversive threat suggests more

similarities than differences. This minor quibble aside, *The Mormon Menace* is an important book that should appeal to a broad spectrum of scholars.

Rodger M. Payne
University of North Carolina
Asheville, North Carolina

doi:10.1093/jahist/jar358