



Changes in the West : Mormons and the ecological geography of nationalism
by Willard John McArthur

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in History
Montana State University

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Abstract:

Environmental historians have made fruitful endeavors in exploring the ways in which human communities modify the landscapes in which they live. However, nationalism is one area that has exhibited a tremendous influence on the course of modern history, yet has been little studied in its relationship to the environment. This thesis looks at the ways in which nationalism—a sense of connection to the larger nation—has influenced those modifications, and how those modifications have influenced and affected those making changes.

This thesis looks to the early Mormon migrants to the West as a case study on how nationalism has influenced environmental change. Using an interdisciplinary approach, this argument relies on the work of intellectual historians of nationalism, environmental historians, geographers, and ecologists/biologists. Using these studies as a framework, this thesis posits a method for identifying nationalized landscapes: recognizing circumscribed landscapes, simplified environments, and lands that are connected spatial and temporally to the larger nation identifies a nationalized landscape. In particular, this thesis looks at fish, trees, and riparian zones as areas of change. Using the identifying markers of circumscription, simplification, and connection has uncovered that Mormons did indeed make changes in the landscape that were influenced by nationalism. These changes made to the land, influenced by nationalism, created a redesigned nature, that in turn influenced human relationships. A feeling of nation-ness is one of the major influences in the way westerners have tried to redesign their environments.

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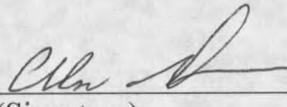
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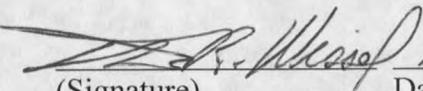
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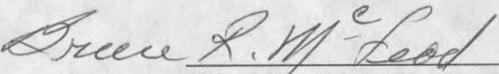
Approved for the Department of History and Philosophy

Dr. Thomas R. Wessel


(Signature) 11/29/99
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Approved for the College of Graduate Studies

Dr. Bruce R. McLeod


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ABBREVIATIONS

- BYU-S Brigham Young University-Special Collections. Harold B. Lee Library. Provo, Utah.
- CHC Roberts, B. H., ed. A Comprehensive History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. 6 vols. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1930; reprint, Orem, Utah: Sonos Publishing Inc., 1991.
- HC Smith, Joseph. History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Edited by Brigham H. Roberts. 2nd ed., rev. 7 Vols. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1980.
- Journey Quoted in Carol Cornwall Madsen. Journey to Zion: Voices From the Mormon Trail. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1997
- ID Journal of Discourses. George D. Watt and others eds., 26 vols. Liverpool: F. D. Richards, and others, 1854-1886.

ABSTRACT

Environmental historians have made fruitful endeavors in exploring the ways in which human communities modify the landscapes in which they live. However, nationalism is one area that has exhibited a tremendous influence on the course of modern history, yet has been little studied in its relationship to the environment. This thesis looks at the ways in which nationalism—a sense of connection to the larger nation-- has influenced those modifications, and how those modifications have influenced and affected those making changes.

This thesis looks to the early Mormon migrants to the West as a case study on how nationalism has influenced environmental change. Using an interdisciplinary approach, this argument relies on the work of intellectual historians of nationalism, environmental historians, geographers, and ecologists/biologists. Using these studies as a framework, this thesis posits a method for identifying nationalized landscapes: recognizing circumscribed landscapes, simplified environments, and lands that are connected spatial and temporally to the larger nation identifies a nationalized landscape. In particular, this thesis looks at fish, trees, and riparian zones as areas of change. Using the identifying markers of circumscription, simplification, and connection has uncovered that Mormons did indeed make changes in the landscape that were influenced by nationalism. These changes made to the land, influenced by nationalism, created a redesigned nature, that in turn influenced human relationships. A feeling of nation-ness is one of the major influences in the way westerners have tried to redesign their environments.

CHAPTER 1

A METHOD FOR STUDYING NATIONALIZED LANDSCAPES

Wallace Stegner, the great observer of western environments and Mormon culture, noted an unusual feature of the Great Basin landscape: “Wherever you go in the Mormon country . . . you see the characteristic marks of Mormon settlement.” Among the marks of Mormon settlement, he listed the “characteristic trees, long lines of them along ditches, along streets, as boundaries between fields and farms.” Perhaps, Stegner mused, Mormons planted these rows of Lombardy poplar to copy the “landscape of their first home.”¹ Was Stegner correct in assuming that Mormons planted trees in the West in an effort to copy the landscapes they had left behind in the eastern United States? Did a sense of connection to the home they left influence the way Mormons redesigned the ecology of the West?

This thesis seeks to answer these questions by studying the connection between the construction of nationalism and the changing of environments. This study explores the ways in which nationalism—a sense of connection to the larger nation-- has influenced the ecological changes the Mormons made in the West, and how those modifications influenced and affected the people making the changes. Combining the insights from environmental history with insights from the study of nationalism provides methods for

¹Wallace Stegner, Mormon Country (New York: Duell, Sloan, and Pearce, 1942; reprint, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1981), 21.

evaluating the influence of nationalism on environmental change.

Using the understandings of nationalism reveals that the Mormon sense of connection to the larger nation influenced the modifications they made to the land. It will show that those modifications have influenced and affected the Mormons. Studying three particular ecological transformations--altering fish populations, redesigning riparian zones, and changing tree populations--shows how these redesigned landscapes strengthened attachments to the larger nation. The argument is not that fish, river-trails, or trees are the most telling, or even the most important factors in the formation or cultivation of nationalism. The argument is simply this: by looking at trout, trails, and trees, we can see a strengthening connection to the East, a culture of connection that is so loaded with images and implications, not just for Mormons, but also for the whole of the American West, that it can and should be submitted to closer scrutiny.

Mormons and the United States

The Mormon church developed a problematic relationship with the eastern United States.² Since its official organization in Fayette, New York, on 6 April 1830, the Mormon church had been a church on the run.³ It became an all too familiar cycle: the Mormons would move into town and put down roots like they meant to stay until the

²The term "eastern" is used throughout this thesis to describe United States east of the Mississippi River.

³Throughout this thesis the terms "Mormon" and "LDS" are used as synonyms.

eminent chiliad, but soon the local citizenry would chafe at Mormon beliefs and practices, eventually driving them out in anger. In this manner Mormons moved from New York, Ohio, Missouri, and finally Illinois.

Anti-United States rhetoric became common as Mormons were frustrated by local, state, and federal inaction or outright complicity in mob actions. In Missouri, Governor Lillburn Boggs issued an order to drive the Mormons from the state or exterminate them.⁴ While in Illinois, Mormons sent emissaries to Washington with a list of losses and grievances, seeking redress from the federal government. They approached President Van Buren, who is reported to have said, "Your cause is just but I can do nothing for you."⁵ The audience of the Senate Judiciary Committee was equally unwilling to help.⁶ Finally, it was under the auspices of Illinois Governor Thomas Ford's promised protection that members of the state militia murdered the prophet-leader of Mormonism, Joseph Smith.⁷ In response to this treatment, Hosea Stout seemed to be speaking for the whole Mormon community when, upon hearing of the United States war with Mexico, commented, "I was glad to learn of war against the United States. I hoped the war might never end until the

⁴Wallace Stegner, The Gathering of Zion: The Story of the Mormon Trail (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964; reprint, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1992), 21; Daniel H. Ludlow, ed. Church History: Selections From the Encyclopedia of Mormonism (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1992), s. v. [*sub voce*—under the word] "Extermination Order," by Dale A. Whitman, Dallin H. Oaks and Marvin S. Hill, Carthage Conspiracy: The Trial of the Accused Assassins of Joseph Smith (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1979), 10.

⁵As quoted in Stegner, Zion, 76.

⁶Ludlow, s. v. "Church Historians," by Howard C. Searle.

⁷Stegner, Zion, 29, 39; Oaks and Hill, Carthage, 6-21.

States were entirely destroyed, for they had driven us into the wilderness, and now were laughing at our calamities.”⁸ Likewise, Joseph Smith’s successor, Brigham Young, in a particularly tense moment, when the Mormons had been forced off their campsites at Winter Quarters by government order, “curse[d] the United States and its people with vigor.”⁹

The Mormons had had enough. They decided to leave the United States and head west, looking for a new home. Along the trail William Clayton penned these striking words: “We’ll Find the place which God for us prepared, Far away in the West, Where none shall come to hurt or make afraid; There the Saints will be blessed.”¹⁰

Taken at face value, these words cause Mormons to appear as one of the least likely groups of people to espouse nationalist feelings or to try to maintain any sense of connection with United States. Thomas Ford, the governor of Illinois when Joseph Smith was assassinated, wrote a letter to Brigham Young, offering him some very unpatriotic advice that might have seemed promising to the Mormons:

If you can get off by yourselves you may enjoy peace . . . I was informed by General Joseph Smith last summer that he contemplated a removal west; and . . . I think if he had lived he would have begun to move in the matter before this time. . . . Why would it not be a pretty operation for your people to go out there [to California], take possession of and conquer a portion of the vacant country, and establish an independent government of your own subject only to the laws of nations[?] . . . [I]f you once cross the line of the United States territories you would be in no danger of being

⁸As quoted in Stegner, Zion, 60.

⁹Stegner, Zion, 198.

¹⁰Hymns of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1948), 13; Stegner, Zion, 64-65.

interfered with.¹¹

Yet, the Mormons never showed much interest in taking Governor Ford's advice.

Once in the Salt Lake Valley, the Mormons fervently sought to become part of the United States. After drafting a constitution virtually identical to the U. S. Constitution, Mormon representatives made appeals to the United States Congress for statehood in 1850, 1856, 1862, 1872, and 1882. Finally, in 1890, after years of wrangling with the U.S. government, including an abortive military clash in 1857, the Mormons officially ended the practice of polygamy in order to overcome the last and largest hurdle to statehood. On January 4, 1896, President Grover Cleveland proclaimed Utah the forty-fifth state.¹²

A major factor in the Mormon's willingness to "return to the fold" lies in the way they left the United States, or rather, how they left without ever quite leaving the United States. All along their 1,400 mile journey and at the places where they stopped to colonize the West, the Mormons recreated, through redesigned landscapes,¹³ ties to the homeland they had left behind. These alterations were both ecological and nation-bound,

¹¹HC 7:396-398. Ford was using the term "California" to describe, as it was commonly used at the time, the area of land between the Rocky Mountains and the Pacific Ocean, south of Oregon.

¹²Ludlow, s. v. "Utah Statehood," by Edward Leo Lyman.

¹³I am following James Scott's preference for the term "redesign." Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition have Failed, Yale Agrarian Studies Series, ed, James C. Scott (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 360. Scott is borrowing the term from Chris Maser, The Redesigned Forest (San Pedro: R. and E. Miles, 1988). The term connotes biological changes in an environment that are conscious, such as cutting down trees to build a house, and to some degree planned according to a scheme.

and they eventually made their return to the fold not only possible, but also strongly desirable. Nationalism influenced the modifications Mormons made to the landscape, and those modifications, in turn, shaped and affected the Mormons.

An Interdisciplinary Approach

To understand environmental change in the West, it is necessary to become expert in a large number of fields of knowledge. Efforts to comprehend human relationships with our environments have been fertile ground for producing histories fed by interdisciplinary studies. Environmental history, ecology, geography, and other areas of study have all become essential components in our understanding of people's interaction with their environment. Adding some of the methodologies and findings from the field of nationalism will enrich this stew of studies informing our understanding of environmental history.

As historians cast about for causes of modern ecological maladies, a number of well-worn American institutions have gone under the knife. Historians such as Lynn White Jr. and Roderick Nash have identified the Judeo-Christian religious ethic, which places humans at the center of an environment designed for their use, as a virus that causes environmental misuse.¹⁴ Historians like Carolyn Merchant, Annette Kolodny, and

¹⁴Lynn White, Jr., "The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis," Science 155 (10 March, 1967): 1203-1207; Roderick Nash, Wilderness and the American Mind, 3rd ed., (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982), 7-22; Andrew Greeley, "Religion and Attitudes toward the Environment," Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion 32 (March, 1993): 19-28. See also Thomas Alexander, "Stewardship and Enterprise: The

Frieda Knobloch have argued that gender analysis is essential in correctly diagnosing maladaptive environmental change.¹⁵ Eugene Hargrove has identified Lockean property notions as a contagion that has prevented the healthy growth of an ecologically viable society.¹⁶ Alfred Crosby diagnosed the abused landscapes of the temperate zones of the world with a severe case of European imperialism. Europeans played a part in creating Neo-Europes: areas far away from Europe which were altered by "teams" of colonists and invading flora and fauna.¹⁷ Yet other historians in recent studies have identified the market forces of capitalism as the infecting agent, leading to environmental mismanagement.¹⁸

LDS Church and the Wasatch Oasis Environment," Western Historical Quarterly 25 (Autumn, 1994): 341-364; Jeanne Kay and Craig Brown, "Mormon Beliefs About the Land and Natural Resources, 1847-1877," Journal of Historical Geography 11 (July 1985): 253-267. As a counterpoint to these arguments see, J. Baird Callicott, "Genesis Revisited: Murian Musings on the Lynn White Jr. Debate," Environmental History Review 14 (Spring\Summer, 1990): 65-90.

¹⁵Carolyn Merchant, "Gender and Environmental History," Journal of American History 76 (March 1990): 1117-1121. Annette Kolodny, The Land Before Her: Fantasy and Experience of the American Frontier, 1630-1860 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1984). For an interpretation of the development of agriculture that is heavily influenced by the theory of Merchant and Kolodny see Frieda Knobloch, The Culture of Wilderness: Agriculture as Colonization in the American West, Publication of Studies in Rural Culture, ed. Jack Temple Kirby (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996).

¹⁶Eugene Hargrove, "Anglo-American Land-use Attitudes," Environmental Ethics, 2 (Summer 1980): 121-148.

¹⁷Alfred Crosby, Ecological Imperialism: The Biological Expansion of Europe, 900-1900 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 287.

¹⁸Donald Worster, Dust Bowl: The Southern Plains in the 1930s (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979); William Cronon, Nature's Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1991), 378; William G. Robbins, Colony and Empire: The Capitalist Transformation of the American West, Development

Probably the most influential explanation for the root cause of environmental spoilage is capitalism and market forces. As colonization spread the gospel of world capitalism, many of the world's environments were dramatically, and often detrimentally, changed. As William Cronon noted in his seminal Changes in the Land, European colonization in New England produced "fundamental reorganizations . . . in the region's plant and animal communities."¹⁹ Indeed, one way the colonists changed the land was by "Reducing the forest[, which] was an essential step toward reproducing that Old World mosaic in an American Environment."²⁰ What motivated these settlers to change the land in an attempt to mirror the Old World? Cronon attributed the ecological changes to the "colonists' more exclusive sense of property and their involvement in a capitalist economy."²¹ Although there has been ample evidence that in many places in America colonization carried with it ecological changes influenced by Lockean property notions and capitalist modes of production, there is a danger of oversimplifying the complex reasons that humans redesign their environments.²²

of Western Resources Series, ed. Hal K. Rothman (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1994), xii.

¹⁹William Cronon, Changes in the Land: Indians, Colonists, and the Ecology of New England (New York: Hill and Wang, 1983), vii.

²⁰Ibid., 126.

²¹Ibid, viii.

²²The glaring exception to this generalization is of course Richard White. For example see Land Use, Environment, and Social Change: The Shaping of Island County, Washington, with a forward by William Cronon (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1980; reprint, 1992), 155-160.

Certainly, Mormons were influenced by Christianity, gender, colonialism, capitalism, and notions of private property. This study does not deny these influences. However, nationalism was too large an influence to be passed over. To enrich our understanding of environmental change we need also to understand the role that a sense of nation-ness has played in the modifications that are made. If nationalism is a powerful enough force to motivate people to die, kill, torture, and rape in the cause of their country, then how has this feeling influenced treatment of the environment? Many scholars are beginning to scratch the surface of this problem by recognizing the role of visions of nation-ness in changes in the land. Joachim Wolschke-Buhlmahn has noted that Jens Jensen, a notable landscape architect of the early twentieth-century, used the landscapes that he redesigned to "express the spirit of America," in this case a racially purified America.²³ Conversely, Barbara Deutsch Lynch has recognized that landscapes can be used to construct countervailing notions of national identity. In looking at the fishing practices and garden making among Latinos in New York, Lynch has recognized the "political content of these symbols [fish and gardens]." These symbols are used by Latinos to redesign landscapes that express and reinforce a desire to "reconquer New York City's hostile environment," in resistance to the "physical manifestations of political and economic power."²⁴ Wolschke-Buhlmahn and Lynch have pointed us in a promising new

²³Joachim Wolschke-Buhlmahn, review of Jens Jensen: Maker of Natural Parks and Gardens, by Robert E. Grese, in Journal of Garden History 15 (1995): 54-55.

²⁴Barbara Deutsch Lynch, "The Garden and the Sea: U.S. Latino Environmental Discourses and Mainstream Environmentalism," Social Problems 40 (February 1993): 108-109.

direction. The works on issues such as religion, gender, property notions, imperialism, and capitalism have already done much to inform our understandings of the environment; the works on nationalism have only yet to join the pantheon.

In order to understand nationalized landscapes—environments altered according to the influence of a feeling of connection to a larger nation—it is first necessary to build a foundation on ecology. Studies of environmental history necessarily rely on the work of ecologists, and this thesis is no exception. To understand the changes that have taken place, it is first important to decide what ecological conditions were like before the change took place. This is not an easy task considering two inexorable facts: First, environments, to one degree or another, are in a constant state of flux, even without the fumble-fingered manipulations of humans. Second, as in the case of the Mormons, Euro-Americans did not travel into a pristine wilderness. The environments of the Platte River Valley and the Great Basin were altered by the Native inhabitants. Until someone comes up with a better plan, it is necessary to approximate what is going on in nature at any given moment.

Necessary caveats aside, this study uses a handful of studies on the ecology of the Platte River Valley and the Great Basin—both prehistoric and just prior to the Mormon hegira. Donald Grayson, and the synthesis of pertinent studies by Elliot West and Dan Flores are useful for understanding the general ecology of the landscapes redesigned by Mormons.²⁵ The studies of other ecologists are also useful in identifying the trees of the

²⁵On the ecology of the Great Basin see Donald K. Grayson, The Desert's Past: A Natural Prehistory of the Great Basin (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1993). On the ecology of the trail, see Elliot West, who provides a solid synthesis of the available studies on the ecology of the lands that would become the river roads in The Way West: Essays on the Central Plains (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1995), 13-

Great Basin,²⁶ and understanding fish populations of the region.²⁷

The works of geographers are likewise useful for understanding environmental change. This requires being highly selective. There are many shortcomings to the geographic studies done in the 1960s and 1970s of the Mormons and their landscapes. Often, when these studies discussed redesigned landscapes, they focused on objects of second nature: looking at towns and villages and ignoring streams and forests.²⁸ Others, like Richard Jackson, focused little on changing environments, and more on changing

50. Dan Flores, "Zion in Eden: Phases of the Environmental History of Utah," in Environmental History Review 7 (Winter 1983): 325-344, this same essay is reprinted in "Agriculture, Mountain Ecology, and the Land Ethic: Phases of the Environmental History of Utah," in Working on the Range: Essays on the History of Western Land Management and the Environment, Contributions in Economics and Economic History No. 61, ed. John R. Wunder (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1985), 157-186.

²⁶Hui-Lin Li, Shade and Ornamental Trees: Their Origins and History (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1963; 1996); Elbert L. Little, The Audubon Society Field Guide to North American Trees, Western Region (New York: Albert A Knopf, 1980); S. L. Welsh and others, A Utah Flora, Great Basin Naturalist Memoirs, no. 9. (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 1987); United States Department of Agriculture, Trees: The Yearbook of Agriculture, 1949 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1949).

²⁷Robert J. Behnke, Native Trout of Western North America, American Fisheries Society Monograph 6 (Bethesda, Maryland: American Fisheries Society, 1992); William F. Sigler and John W. Sigler, Fishes of the Great Basin: A Natural History, Max C. Fleischmann Series in Great Basin History, ed. John F. Setter (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1987); Herbert T. Boschung, Jr. and others, National Audubon Society Field Guide to North American Fishes, Whales, and Dolphins (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1983).

²⁸A prime example of this is Richard Francaviglia, "The Mormon Landscape: Definition of an Image in the American," Proceedings of the Association of American Geographers 2 (1970): 59-61. Francaviglia relied on such things as barns and granaries, unpainted farm buildings, and crude "Mormon fences" to identify a Mormon landscape.

perceptions about those environments.²⁹ The search for a Mormon culture region limited the scope of other studies by forcing scholars to examine unique features and suspend the search for connections and continuity, or attempts at such, with other regions.³⁰

Geography does, however, have much to offer the study of altered landscapes. First, geographers have recognized the involvement of nationalism in the conception of environments. People have, in modern times, linked place with a sense of national identity.³¹ Yi-Fu Tuan, has similarly explored the "links between environment and world view."³² This understanding of the perceptions and attitudes toward the environment have helped solidify the foundation upon which environmental history is building.³³ It is important, however, to recognize the welding of the concept of a nationalist ideology of

²⁹Richard H. Jackson, "Mormon Perception and Settlement," Annals of the Association of American Geographers 68 (September 1978): 317-334.

³⁰D.W. Meinig, "The Mormon Culture Region: Strategies and Patterns in the Geography of the American West, 1847-1964," Annals of the Association of American Geographers 55 (June 1965): 191-221; Dean R. Louder and Lowell Bennion "Mapping Mormons Across the Modern West," in The Mormon Role in the Settlement of the West, Charles M. Redd Monographs in Western History No. 9, ed Richard H. Jackson (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 1978), 135-169; Lowell C. Bennion, "Mormon Country a Century Ago: A Geographer's View," in The Mormon People, Their Character and Traditions, Charles M. Redd Monographs in Western History No. 9, ed Thomas Alexander (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 1980), 1-26.

³¹David Hooson, ed., Geography and National Identity, The Institute of British Geographers Special Publications Series 29, eds. Felix Driver, Royal Holloway, and Neil Roberts (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994).

³²Yi-Fu Tuan, Topophilia: A Study of Environmental Perception, Attitudes, and Values (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1974).

³³On changing attitudes toward western environments see Roderick Nash, Wilderness; Anne Farrar Hyde, An American Vision: Far Western Landscape and National Culture, 1820-1920, American Social Experience Series 17 (New York: New York University Press, 1990).

place to the actual reshaping of the land, and not just the thinking about place.

Second, geographic studies have sought to understand the idea of place. According to Tuan, the idea of place is a “salve” used to soothe the “threatening awareness of being alone.”³⁴ Places can be created that give coherence to incoherent space. One method of creating places that provide coherence is to alter environments into a nationalized landscape that encourages a “sense of communal oneness.”³⁵ Kenneth Olwig has recognized the creation of place as a bond of unity. Olwig has argued that the creation of national parks in America are places where we “reinvent” nature in order to “preserve both nature and national values.”³⁶

Defining a Nationalized Landscape

The insights of those who have studied nationalism are also applicable to the study of environmental change. Intellectual and political historians, such as Benedict Anderson, E. J. Hobsbawm, Anthony Marx, and James C. Scott, have all provided thoughtful insights into how feelings of nationalism and nationalized social order operate in both theory and

³⁴Yi-Fu Tuan, “Place and Culture: Analeptic for Individuality and the World’s Indifference,” in Mapping American Culture, Wayne Franklin and Michael Steiner eds. (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1992), 39.

³⁵Ibid., 29.

³⁶Kenneth Olwig, “Reinventing Common Nature: Yosemite and Mount Rushmore—A meandering Tale of Double Meaning,” in Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature, ed. William Cronon (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1996), 383.

practice. This study draws out from their work some general principles of nationalism that are, in turn, applied to environmental history.

Anderson defined the nation as “an imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign.”³⁷ The community is *imagined* in that “the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, . . . yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion.” Quoting Ernest Gellner, Anderson notes that nationalism is not some nascent force—waiting to be awakened by the nation—but nationalism “*invents* nations where they do not exist.”³⁸ The nation is limited in that it never dreams of being “coterminous with mankind,” sovereign in that it yearns to be free, a community in that it is conceived as “a deep, horizontal comradeship.”³⁹

For Anderson, these imagined communities are solidified through the introduction and dispersion of print capitalism and the creation of national vernaculars.⁴⁰ In focusing on these two factors, however, Anderson overlooks how powerfully ecological reconstruction can help create feelings of nation-ness based on his definition. Like Anderson’s imagined communities Mormons created, by redesigning the landscape, ties with the rest of the United States that were *limited* in that they excluded Native Americans, *sovereign* in that they determined to live free, and a *community* in that they

³⁷Benedict Anderson, Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism (New York: Verso, 1983; reprint , 1991), 6.

³⁸As quoted in *Ibid.*, 6. Italics in original.

³⁹*Ibid.*, 7.

⁴⁰*Ibid.*, 37-46.

still felt strong ties to the United States.

For Hobsbawm, nationalism was born out of loyalty to certain states that was shifted to a constructed, non-state nationalism. Loyalty was shifted away from the country, toward a “particular version of that country: to an ideological construct.”⁴¹ Naturally, there would be instances where “identification with one nationality alienated others who refused to be assimilated to or eliminated by it.”⁴² Like Anderson, Hobsbawm recognizes the power of a written, national language, administered through mass education, to foster loyalty to the nation-state.⁴³ Hobsbawm ties the desire of states to foster feelings of nation-ness with the interests of a national economy.⁴⁴ He determines that in the interest of economics and nation building, expansion became important.⁴⁵ But expansion creates problems with natural heterogeneity. Economic power is maintained by creating an imagined community that ties the expansion zone with the metropole.

Ecological reconstructions, like common vernaculars, have tended to mitigate the decentralizing forces unleashed by the natural heterogeneity of such a vast expanse of land and water as the United States. Building on the philosophy of John Dewey that “the locality is the only universal,” regionalists such as David Wrobel and Michael Steiner have overlooked these mitigating factors, arguing that “the uprooting, leveling nature of

⁴¹E. J. Hobsbawm, Nations and Nationalism Since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality, 2nd Ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 93.

⁴²Ibid., 93.

⁴³Ibid., 93-96.

⁴⁴Ibid., 28-30.

⁴⁵Ibid., 32-33.

American experience evokes a counter desire for stability and more intimate places of identity. . . . The sheer immensity of the United States engenders the need for subnational places of belonging, and regional loyalty often emerges as a conscious response to . . . the nation-state."⁴⁶ Dewey, Wrobel, Steiner, and even the perceptive Yi-Fu Tuan have all relied upon logic to come to the conclusion that our loyalties are naturally local; however, nationalism is, by its very nature, illogical and unnatural: it creates an imagined community where no real community existed. Thus, in this case, region becomes less powerful an identity as nation when loyalties are fostered that cut across region--creating an imagined community that binds heterogeneous regions together. Through ecological construction, ties to the new region are attenuated by physical reminders of ties to the migrants place of origin. Thus, Mormons might easily have maintained loyalty to their new homeland in the Great Basin, but instead they made ecological connections that cut across more localized notions of place (and time), and drew in more extensive notions of place (and time) that spread loyalties across the country.

For Anderson and Hobsbawm, part of creating a cohesive nation rests not only on creating cohesion, but also on the exclusion of others.⁴⁷ According to Anthony Marx, the construction of race is of *central* importance to the creation of a nation. As states have

⁴⁶Michael C. Steiner and David M. Wrobel, "Many Wests: Discovering a Dynamic Western Regionalism," in Many Wests: Place, Culture, and Regional Identity, eds. Michael C. Steiner and David M. Wrobel (New York: University Press of Kansas, 1997), 7. Steiner and Wrobel also appear to be drawing from Yi-Fu Tuan who contented that, "The modern state is too large, its boundaries too arbitrary, its area too heterogeneous to command the kind of affection that arises out of experience and intimate knowledge." Topophilia, 100.

⁴⁷Anderson, 7; Hobsbawm, 63-67.

sought for the stability, legitimacy, and power that foster economic growth, they have functioned under the principle of “selective exclusion,” whereby they could effectively construct definitions of race to further their goals.⁴⁸ Thus, race constructing becomes essential to the formation of nationalist feelings. Therefore, ecological changes that are influenced by feelings of nationalism are designed to draw boundaries of exclusion and inclusion. Nationalized landscapes circumscribe space in an effort to exclude the unfamiliar others.

Finally, James C. Scott, a political scientist, has recognized the efforts of states to redesign landscapes in an attempt to create a semblance of national cohesion. This unity gives the state tremendous advantage; both the power and the resources of the state increase when they know where their citizens live, have a standard of counting their goods, and can identify individuals. Therefore, states have attempted, when able, to take “exceptionally complex, illegible, and local social practices . . . and create a standard grid whereby it could be centrally recorded and monitored. The organization of the natural world [is] . . . no exception,” to the modifications made by the state.⁴⁹ As states try to “get a handle on its subjects and their environment,” they simplify landscapes which, if successful, serve the cause of creating a sense of connection to the larger nation.⁵⁰ Thus, nationalism acts to create the familiar out of the unfamiliar.

⁴⁸Anthony W. Marx, Making Race and Nation: A Comparison of the United States, South Africa, and Brazil (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 2-4.

⁴⁹Scott, State, 2.

⁵⁰The central premise of Scott’s book is that efforts to simplify and control social and environmental orders have often been abysmal failures.

A Nationalist Approach to Environmental History

Synthesizing the insights on nationalism from Anderson, Hobsbawm, Marx, and Scott with the insights of environmental history mentioned above, yields a generalized rubric with four general criteria that identify ecological change influenced by nationalism: simplified space, circumscribed space, spatial connections, and temporal connections. Applied to the American West, these ideas can help us understand with greater clarity the attempts to redesign western landscapes.

First, nationalized landscapes are created by simplifying the landscape. People simplify environments to allow them to focus on the familiar. This simplified space serves the power of the state by making the landscape legible. Simplified, legible landscapes appear easier to manage—they have served to mitigate naturally decentralizing forces.

To redesign a simplified landscape, it is not necessary to change every biological entity. The redesigned landscape is built with objects that act as encoded symbols. The landscape can then influence ideas because it is encoded with special meaning. For example, poplars signified a special tie to the land. A person looking at the poplar is then culturally encouraged to feel that the tree is speaking to her--telling her that she has a special tie to this land and nation.

One way that the Mormons simplified the landscape was through the planting of shade trees. Once in the Great Basin Mormons planted tremendous quantities of shade trees. Rarely mentioning these trees in connection with erosion control or windbreaks, Mormons instead made frequent mention of the aesthetic value of their shade trees in the

creation of a visible landscape. In many ways, the simplification of landscapes in the Great Basin mirrored the simplifications that Europeans had made in New England. Mormons used trees as part of an effort to replace the unusual environments with a landscape design with which they were more experienced and knowledgeable, and at the same time, connecting themselves to the rest of the United States.

Planting shade trees in the valleys simplified the landscape by visually collapsing the ecological zones that existed when Mormons arrived in the Salt Lake Valley. Rather than clearing the valleys below of timber which virtually did not exist, they brought shade trees down into the valleys, to intersperse among fields and villages. Thus, Mormons simplified the landscape into a familiar pattern, a pattern that connected them to the larger United States. Much the same as had been done in New England, they tried to change the land into a pattern of farmland, cropland, village, and wilderness.

The tunnel vision acquired in the process of simplifying the environment ignores and obscures the real complexity going on around it. This complexity applies both to the environment and to the native inhabitants of the land. What James Scott has said of social order is true of environmental order: "Designed or planned [environmental] . . . order is necessarily schematic; it always ignores essential features of any real, functioning [environmental] . . . order."⁵¹ Attempts to nationalize landscapes have always obscured the real complexity of nature. Likewise, these attempts pretend that local knowledge of the land—James Scott terms it *mētis*—does not exist, and also works to obscure resistance

⁵¹Scott, State, 6. I have substituted the word state for the word environmental.

offered by those with the *mētis*.⁵² This is especially applicable to simplified landscapes.

The second feature of a nationalized landscape is circumscribed space. In this manner, nationalized landscapes are ecologically designed, imagined communities that are artificially bounded. These landscapes are carefully circumscribed into space that both include the defining entity, such as the Mormons, and exclude others, such as Native Americans. Ecology can be designed to selectively exclude--giving stability, legitimacy, and power.

One way the Mormons circumscribed the landscape was by planting non-native fish, imported from the eastern United States. By planting non-native fish Mormons created environments that kept Indians away from the landscape of Mormon settlement. Many Mormons, like most of their contemporaries, favored the policy of keeping the Indians on carefully bounded reservations, usually placed at a convenient location away from white settlements. The introduction of nonnative fishes altered the ecology of waterways, and eliminated traditional sources of food, such as cutthroat trout and waterfowl. Planted fish also made the Indians specialized technologies developed to harvest unique breeds of western fish more problematic, and their specialized knowledge less valuable. These circumscribed landscapes acted to block the involvement of native

⁵²*Mētis* derives from classical Greek and denotes useful knowledge acquired through practical experience. Scott, *State*, 6, 309-314. For an elaboration on this theme see Richard White, *The Organic Machine: The Remaking of the Columbia River* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1995), where he demonstrates that people come to know the environment of the Columbia River through work.

tribes in a discourse about the land.⁵³ Likewise, the ecological transformations wrought by the Mormons compounded the difficulties of Native Americans in becoming involved in a discourse over such issues as land ownership, hunting and fishing rights, resource management, and a host of other ecological issues.

Spatial connections that tie heterogeneous regions into an imagined community are the third criterion for nationalized landscapes. For example, Mormons created ties through landscape that were spatial by planting millions of fish imported from New England and the upper Mid-West. These implanted fish were used to fashion a connection that bound together distant and disparate lands with a cord of familiarity.⁵⁴ The transplanted fish become a visible, tangible reminder that the new western space was home, just like the old eastern landscape was home. Colony and metropole become conflated through a common landscape. These reformations go beyond simply recreating the familiar, however, when they are consciously associated with a tie to the larger nation. The Mormons planted familiar fish, but they also stressed the connection that those fish gave them to the rest of the United States.

Lastly, nationalized landscapes create temporal connections. As Yi-Fu Tuan has noted, "objects anchor time."⁵⁵ One way the Mormon's used the landscape to create a

⁵³Cf. Alice Brittin, "Close Encounters of a Third World Kind: Rigoberta Menchu and Elisabeth Burgos's *Mo llamo Rigoberta Menchu*," Latin American Perspectives, 87, vol. 22, no. 4 (Fall 1995), 101.

⁵⁴Andrew Jenson, Church Chronology, Excerpts, 2nd ed. (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1914), under heading June 1896.

⁵⁵Yi-Fu Tuan, Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1977), 187.

temporal tie to the nation's past was through the erection of Liberty Poles. The Liberty Pole had become an important symbol of growing nationhood during the revolutionary period. People had used these poles to draw each other together in a spirit of unity against the British.⁵⁶ The second company of Mormon Pioneers on the trail planted Liberty Poles, the most famous being near the Elkhorn Ferry on the Platte River.⁵⁷ This area became known as Liberty Pole camp, and became the major staging area for leaving Winter Quarters and beginning the trek to the West.

The illusion of temporal connection to the larger nation works forward in time as well, by visually connecting space to a future scheme or sense of national destiny, such as a millennial vision of a perfected landscape that prepares the earth for a coming messiah. Not only did the Mormons alter the landscape to cement ties to the past of the larger United States, but they also redesigned landscapes to connect themselves to the future destiny of the United States. Mormons used the new landscape of the trail they helped build through the Platte River Valley to tie themselves to the future destiny of the U.S.: a destiny in which the Mormons envisioned Utah as the new head of the country, rather than Washington.

By circumscribing and simplifying space, and by creating connections to the larger United States, both spatial and temporal, the Mormons created a series of highly

⁵⁶David Hackett Fischer, Paul Revere's Ride (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 72, 156, 206, 207. Liberty Poles had were also used during the Whiskey Rebellion, see Gary B. Nash and others, The American People: Creating a Nation and Society, Volume 1: to 1877, Brief 2nd Edition (New York: Harper Collins, 1996), 168.

⁵⁷Sarah Rich, "Reminiscences of Sarah DeArmon Pea Rich," Journey, 375; Joseph Hovey, Autobiography (1812-1847), BYU-S, 40.

nationalized landscapes. They began making changes in the landscape from the very beginning of their sojourn in the American West that strengthened their connection to the larger United States. Chapter 2 explores the modifications made in the environments of the Platte River Valley, the area they traveled through on their way to the Great Basin. Chapters 3 and 4 discuss the specific alterations in the landscape of the West: the planting of fish and trees. Finally, Chapter 5 will describe some of the unintended repercussions of designing nationalized landscapes, and how these difficulties continue into the present.

CHAPTER 2

TRAIL

The trail that Mormons forged as they migrated west carried them through landscapes that they had little real experience with. This chapter will examine how Mormons envisioned the trail, and the actual types of environment where the trail comprised. It will show what Native Americans were there and how they used the trail. Lastly, it will explore how the trail was redesigned by the Mormons, and how those redesigns were influenced by feelings of connection to the larger United States.

Conceptualizing the Trail

As the Mormons readied themselves to make the trek west, they worked feverishly to complete the temple they had begun building at Nauvoo. Once completed, thousands were ushered through the temple doors to receive the ultimate rites had among the LDS. But the temple also became the base of operations where the Mormon leadership planned the impending migration. Heber C. Kimball recorded in his journal on 11 December 1845 that among the items used to decorate the walls of the Nauvoo Temple: "There are also a number of maps. A large map of the world hangs on the north side wall, and three maps of the United States . . . hangs [*sic*] on the west partition. On the south wall hangs

another large map of the United States.” Nearly three weeks later Kimball noted that he and Brigham Young had examined these “maps with reference to selecting a location for the Saints west of the Rocky Mountains and reading the various works which have been written by travelers.” Hooks had been put up to hang “looking-glasses, portraits, and Maps.”¹

These maps helped the Mormons envision the space they were about to redesign, and how that space was to be altered. In the words of Thongchai Winichakul, “A map anticipated spatial reality, not vice versa. In other words, a map was a model for, rather than a model of, what it purported to represent.”² These maps helped the Mormon people envision a nationalized landscape that was carefully circumscribed and simplified, and that created ties to the eastern U.S., ties both spatial and temporal.

Among the maps used by the LDS people, three maps are important to the Mormon conceptualization of the Platte River Valley.³ The 1823 map of the Long

¹Heber C. Kimball Journal, 11 December 1845, 31 December 1845, 5 December 1845, LDS Church Archives, as quoted in Lewis Clark Christian, “Mormon Foreknowledge of the West,” BYU Studies 21 (Fall 1981): 413.

²Thongchai Winichakul, “Siam Mapped: History of the Geo-body of Siam” (Ph.D. Thesis, University of Sydney, 1988) as quoted in Benedict Anderson, Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism (New York: Verso, 1983; reprint, 1991), 173.

³All three of these maps are conveniently compiled in William Clayton, The Latter-day Saints’ Emigrants’ Guide (St. Louis: Republican Steam Power Press, Chambers & Knapp, 1848; reprint, Stanley B. Kimball ed., Gerald, MO: Patrice Press, 1983), 93-99; The Long map can also be found in Leroy R. Hafen and Harlin M. Fuller eds., The Journal of Captain John R. Bell: Official Journalist for the Stephen H. Long Expedition to the Rocky Mountains, 1820 (Glendale, CA: The Arthur H. Clark Company, 1957), overleaf; The Fremont-Preuss map can be found in Donald Jackson and Mary Lee Spence eds., The Expeditions of John Charles Fremont: Map Portfolio (Urbana: University of Illinois Press,

expedition was considered the best map available of the Platte Valley, until Fremont's map was made available in 1846.⁴ The Fremont-Preuss map of 1843 was definitely used by the Mormons. Stephen Douglas sent a copy of this map from Washington D.C. to Joseph Smith. This map was carried with the vanguard company, and consulted along the journey west.⁵ As the Latter-day Saints were making their final preparations for the Journey west, Brigham Young ordered from St. Louis a copy of Mitchell's 1846 map of Texas, Oregon, and California. The pioneers also carried west with them the Mitchell map.⁶

This list of maps is by no means exhaustive, but it does represent some common features that are indicative of the Mormon conceptualization of the river environments. All three maps supported a vision of the landscape that made the Platte River valley a carefully circumscribed space, with Indians placed outside of this space. On the Long map, the principal feature between Council Bluffs and the Rocky Mountain is the Platte River and its tributaries. To the north of the Platte (on the south-side of the Loup River)

1970), map 2.

⁴Although there is no definitive proof that the Mormon pioneers used this map, its popularity makes it safe to presume that they were familiar with this map. Clayton, LDS Guide, 93.

⁵George D. Smith ed., An Intimate Chronicle: The Journals of William Clayton (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1995), 317, 318; Clayton, LDS Guide, 93; Levi Jackman, "Autobiography of Levi Jackman," Journey, 337. Benjamin Johnson, who was among the first to follow the vanguard company west, felt that it was an affront to Brigham Young's prophetic abilities to suggest that it was anyone but that "Modern Moses[,] guided alone by revelation, [which] had led us to the Salt Lake Valley." Benjamin F. Johnson, Letter to George S. Gibbs, 1903, Church Archives, cited in E. Dale LeBaron, "Benjamin Franklin Johnson: Colonizer, Public Servant, and Church Leader" (M.A. thesis, Brigham Young University, 1967), 343.

⁶Clayton, LDS Guide, 99.

is inscribed, "Pawnee Villages." On the south of the Platte is marked, "Oto & Missouri Vill[ages]." The only other mention of Indians on the Long map is this interesting remark, placed on the south of the river as it nears the Rockies: "The Great Desert is frequented by roving bands of Indians who have no fixed places of residence but roam from place to place in quest of game." The Fremont map thoroughly erased all vestiges of Indian life. This map is unusual in that its only principal features are those of the Platte Valley, its tributaries, and three mountain ranges: the Wind Rivers, Sweetwaters, and Laramies (Black Hills). The Mitchell map likewise makes the Platte the principal feature between the Council Bluffs on the Missouri and the Rockies. The "Cheyennes" and the "Ogallallahs" are both placed parallel to, but well away from, the Platte. The "Pawnees," who were largely perceived of as friendly, are inscribed closer to the river, but not crossing its boundaries.⁷

"Empty Trails:" The Great Illusion

The roving, homeless bands of Indians on the Long map or the disappeared natives of the Fremont map were actually an illusion. At the time the Mormons headed onto the plains, there were more Indians than in the recent history of the area. The Mormons took part in what Elliot West has termed "the story of two invasions." Not only were migrants dragging increasing numbers of heavy wagons and cattle across the prairie, but there were

⁷By 1861, the new Mitchell map moved the Pawnees even further north of the River. See S. Augustus Mitchell, Mitchell's New General Atlas (Philadelphia: S.A. Mitchell, 1864), 43.

growing numbers of Indians moving out onto the Plains. The Cheyenne and Lakota both chased grander opportunities from the northern plains out into the Platte River valley. More new-comers meant that, in spite of devastating epidemics, there were actually more Indians on the central plains.⁸

The illusion was created by a seasonal pattern of resource use that these Indians had developed. In the spring Indian pastoralists fattened their horses on the grasses growing along the rivers. There were buffalo and grama grasses, which also grew on the high plains, as well as a "mix of low shrubs and different kinds of forbs. There were also "midgrasses" and "tallgrasses," such as little bluestem, big bluestem, side-oats grama, and others. These plants were common on the lower plains of Kansas and Nebraska, but to the west, on the higher plains, they were found "almost entirely along streams, where they were protected from the harshest weather and were supported by moister soil and a shallow water table." The river valleys were "protected corridors where these dominant eastern grasses extruded much farther westward than they normally could."⁹

In the early spring, Indians' horses along the river valleys, weak from the hardships of the winter, gained strength on these early sprouting grasses. By the late spring and early summer Indians moved their animals out onto the highlands between the streams. Between these streams was shortgrass country where there grew mainly buffalo grass and blue grama. These grasses gained the height of their nutritional content by mid-summer.

⁸Elliott West, The Way of the West: Essays on the Central Plains (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1995), 15-17.

⁹Ibid., 21.

It was on the high plains that the Indians turned the ground into a gigantic pasture. There they would congregate until the fall when they would begin to move back down onto the stream valleys. Then, in the winter, when the central plains become “one of the harshest and most dangerous environments in the United States,” the Indians and their animals would stay in the shelter of the river valleys.¹⁰

At the time that migrants headed west along the overland trails, the Indians were furthest removed from the river valleys. When the Indians returned to the river valleys for the winter, the westering migrants had stopped using the trail, if they could at all avoid it. In this manner, the river valleys were subjected to a “kind of shuttle system of land use.”¹¹

“The Highway of Our Future Journey.” Redesigning the Trail

In his study of the central plains, Elliott West focused on the unintended consequences of the use and abuse of the riparian zones. Equally intriguing, though, are the intended consequences, the purposeful change of landscapes. The Mormons came, not just to use the trails, but literally to redesign the landscapes of the river valleys. If there was any doubt from the beginning that there would be any attempts to redesign the landscape, it quickly dissipates when we look at the inventory of Heber Kimball’s outfit as he took part in the vanguard company, the Camp of Israel. His layout included, five horses, seven mules, six oxen, two cows, one crosscut saw, six axes, one scythe, three

¹⁰Ibid., 20-26.

¹¹Ibid., 27.

hoes, five log chains, one spade, one crowbar, one keg of powder, two plows, one side of harness leather, one whip saw, six pairs of double harness, and seventy-one pounds of seed (presumably for a garden and/or orchards). And, for feed for the teams and the planting of crops, he included corn, buckwheat, oats, and rapeseed.¹² Mormons like Kimball came prepared to redesign the land. They brought with them both the tools to change the landscape, and plant life to change biotic communities.

The trail leading west offered a strange new world to these Mormon migrants. Most of the early followers of Mormonism were from New England, a place radically different than their homeland.¹³ Crossing the 98th meridian, they entered a different climate, another flora and fauna, revealing curious new creatures and plants. They saw prairie dogs, lizards, antelope, and horned toads roaming the plains, and grayling in the steadily clearing water. "They killed rattlesnakes and raided eagle's nests in the bluffs, [and] dug wolf pups out of dens in the slopes." New plants like Indian soap weed, tall sage brush, bunch grass, yucca, and prickly pear sprung from the dry earth. Heavy timber gave way to millions of acres of buffalo grass in a land full of clear, dry air.¹⁴ Even with

¹²Howard Egan, Pioneering the West, 1846 to 1878 (Richmond, UT: Howard R. Egan Estate, 1917) as quoted in Wallace Stegner, The Gathering of Zion: The Story of the Mormon Trail (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964; reprint, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1992), 120; cf. Henry William Bigler, Autobiography (1815-1846), "Henry Bigler's Journal Book A," typescript, BYU-S, 15-16; Aroet Lucious Hale, Journal (1828-1856), "Journal of Aroet Lucious Hale," typescript, BYU-S, 15-16.

¹³Stegner, Zion, 17; Wilford Woodruff, The Discourses of Wilford Woodruff, Homer G. Durham ed. (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1990), 319; George Washington Hill, "Incidents in the Life of George Washington Hill (1878)," Journey, 355.

¹⁴Stegner, Zion, 129, 135, 146.

the considerable body of knowledge that these early Mormon migrants brought with them, they still were frequently awed and amazed by the “newness” of the landscape.

Certainly, there were dramatic unintended changes to the river valleys. It is easy to imagine the changes wrought upon this new landscape, simply by listing the sheer number of migrants and their animals. While it remains impossible to know the exact number of Latter-day Saints migrating to Utah, the estimates, based on the latest research, stand between 60,000 and 70,000 people migrating there between 1846 and 1869.¹⁵ The large numbers represents an incredible amount of damage to the landscape just from feet, hooves, and wheels. And, this trampling of the trail was often spread out hundreds of yards wide. The image of a single file wagon train was not the norm. Migrants often traveled from two wagons abreast up to five companies wide.¹⁶ Furthermore, the Mormons brought large numbers of animals with them. The second company of Mormons, approximately 2,000 in number, took with them horses, mules, oxen, milk cows, heifers, calves and sheep numbered at 5,000 head.¹⁷ The animals of the migrants west chewed up the native grasses, and when there were not grasses or shrubs to be

¹⁵Susan Easton Black, “How Many Pioneers Died on the Migration West?” The Ensign, 28 (July 1998), 41, 43 n. 5. This estimate has been revised down from earlier estimates of 80,000 used by earlier historians. Will Bagley uses the figure of 70,000 in Will Bagley, ed., The Pioneer Camp of the Saints: The 1846 and 1847 Mormon Trail Journals of Thomas Bullock (Spokane, WA: The Arthur H. Clark Company, 1997), 22.

¹⁶Smith, Clayton, 300, 311. Sarah Rich, “Reminiscences of Sarah DeArmon Pea Rich,” Journey, 376.

¹⁷Stegner, Zion, 174.

found, they cut down cottonwood trees as browse for their animals.¹⁸

Ecological change along the trail was often quite dramatic. Robert Utley describes in vivid detail the changes brought about on the landscape and upon Native life-ways, by pioneers using the trails to travel across the Great Plains:

Their campfires consumed entire stands of timber at favored camping places. Their stock ripped bare the valley grasses and ate their way up the benches. Most threatening [to the Native Americans], their rifles felled buffalo, deer, and antelope by the thousands to supply meat for hungry travelers. 'Since the white man has made a road across our land,' complained the Shoshoni chief Washakie as early as 1855, 'and has killed our game, we are hungry, and there is nothing for us to eat. Our women and children cry for food and we have no food to give them.'¹⁹

The ecological changes wrought along the trail were often so dramatic that their effects can still be seen today. The wagons sometimes made permanent scars along the landscape. Just a few miles west of Guernsey, Wyoming, travelers today stop to take pictures of wagon ruts, embedded several feet into the soft sandstone.²⁰

Numerous migrants, both Mormon and non-Mormon, caused these changes. There are three reasons, however, that the Mormons did the most extensive redesigning of the landscape surrounding the trails. First, Mormons used the trail as much or more than any other single migrant group. Only the "gold-rushers" going to California posted similar

¹⁸Levi Jackman, "Autobiography of Levi Jackman," *Journey*, 337.

¹⁹Robert M. Utley, *The Indian Frontier of the American West, 1846 - 1890* (University of New Mexico Press: Albuquerque, 1984), 47.

²⁰It should be noted that Guernsey lies at a point where the Mormon trail had rejoined the Oregon trail.

numbers of travelers along the trail.²¹ In addition, the 60,000 to 70,000 migrants mentioned earlier does little to represent the impact of people and animals on the landscape, because significant numbers of people and animals traveled in both directions on the trail. From the very first year of migration, many saints returned to Winter Quarters to be with family and friends as they made the journey, as well as groups or missionaries heading back to the land of potential converts. Also, church leaders in Salt Lake began sending out wagon loads of supplies to meet wagon trains as they made the arduous trek across Wyoming.

Second, for a significant portion of the journey, Mormons created a new trail. Near the Loup Fork, the Platte River branches into the North and South Platte. The Oregon trail followed the south side of the North Platte. Mormons chose however, to traverse the north side of the river.²² Eventually, 150,000 migrants of all stripes would use the two branches of the trail.²³

Third, ironically, the Mormon's fastidiousness and concern for their fellow migrants following them caused the most widespread changes. They did not just follow a trail; they saw a sacred opportunity to build a "road for thousands of saints to follow."²⁴

²¹See J.S. Holliday, The World Rushed In: The California Gold Rush Experience, (Simon & Schuster: New York, 1981), 354, 396.

²²Stegner, Zion, 122.

²³Ibid., 142.

²⁴The north side of the Platte had been used before, such as by returning Astorians, and by members of Stephen H. Long's expedition, but these passages had left "mere scratches on the prairie." Bagley, Bullock, 22; Stegner, Zion, 127, 131. Thomas Bullock could barely contain his wonder, when over the course of just two days in April, he

“It should be understood,” Wilford Woodruff noted as he was helping break trail in May of 1847, “that we are piloting A road for the House of Israel to travel in for many years to come. Therefore it requires greater care.” Woodruff clarified the prevailing vision for the role of this trail stating, “we thought it best to keep on the north side of the [Platte] river & brave the difficulties of Burning Prairies & make A road that should stand as a permanant rout for the saints independant of the old emigration rout.”²⁵ At times, concern for those who would follow took precedence in decision making over more immediate concerns. Levi Jackman noted that the vanguard company, of which he was a member, had decided not to cross over to the south side of the Platte, but instead to “continue on the north side because it would be better for our brethren who would follow.”²⁶

This was no helter-skelter dash for the riches of the West that accompanied many of the mining rushes, but the trail was carefully planned out as a permanent route, for many to follow. Before the Mormons left Nauvoo, many of them gathered at a conference at the Nauvoo temple. There, many LDS people entered into a covenant to “spend the last cent,” to enable all of their people to journey to the Zion that they would attempt to build in the West.²⁷ Therefore, Mormons simplified the landscape of the trail to create a

mentioned three times that they were blazing a “new road.” Bagley, Bullock, 133, 135, 136.

²⁵As quoted in Bagley, Bullock, 21-22.

²⁶Levi Jackman, “Autobiography of Levi Jackman,” Journey, 341.

²⁷Bagley, Bullock, 73. B. H. Roberts, A Comprehensive History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1930; reprint, Orem, UT: Sonos Publishing Inc., 1991), 2:538.

more durable highway.

Simplifying a space for a highway gave coherence to the trail. The environment of the trail was one none of the initial pioneers had experience with. The Mormons recreated the familiar, the known, the predictable in the river valleys. They built bridges across creeks and rivers.²⁸ They dug down the steepest pitches, grading hills, "Fix[ing]" ravines.²⁹ They leveled the approaches to fords and made them passable.³⁰ They put road gangs to work throwing rocks off rough stretches of the road³¹ They cut down nearby trees to make rafts to ferry the wagons across³² They built and operated ferries, aiding both Mormon and non-Mormon along the trail.³³ For the last stretch of the trail, as the entered the Wasatch range, they "cut and grubbed the abominable willows" in the canyon bottoms.³⁴ They even built entire towns like Garden Grove and Mt. Pisgah in Iowa where

²⁸William Farrington Cahoon, *Autobiography (1813-1878)*, in Stella Shurtleff and Brent Farrington Cahoon eds., *Reynolds Cahoon and His Stalwart Sons* (Salt Lake City, Utah: Paragon Press, 1960), 90; Lorenzo Dow Young, "Diary of Lorenzo Dow Young," *Utah Historical Quarterly* 14 (1946): 139-141; Smith, *Clayton*, 355; Stegner, *Zion*, 11, 55, 84.

²⁹Bagley, *Bullock*, 127; Smith, *Clayton*, 340; Stegner, *Zion*, 145.

³⁰Bagley, *Bullock*, 128-129, 135; Smith, *Clayton*, 305; Stegner, *Zion*, 11, 55, 145.

³¹"Diary of Lorenzo Dow Young," 167; Stegner, *Zion*, 11, 145. Sometimes the pioneers rolled rocks off of hills and canyons simply for amusement as in, Bagley, *Bullock*, 228; Smith, *Clayton*, 358.

³²Levi Jackman, "Autobiography of Levi Jackman," *Journey*, 345, 346; George Washington Hill, "Incidents in the Life of George Washington Hill (1878)," *Journey*, 361; Smith, *Clayton*, 342; Stegner, *Zion*, 11.

³³Stegner, *Zion*, 11, 84, 148.

³⁴Smith, *Clayton*, 355, 360-61; Bagley, *Bullock*, 231; Stegner, *Zion*, 12.

they left log cabins, fenced fields, rowed gardens and orchards, and wells to act as waiting and supply stations.³⁵ The Mormons who came behind followed the “tracks the pioneers had made through the illimitable prairie.”³⁶

At the same time that these migrants were dramatically simplifying the landscape, they were also creating a carefully circumscribed spaces. One way the Mormons created a circumscribed space was by traveling in tight groups, which stayed as close to the river valleys as possible. Almost to the reverse of those companies traveling on the south side of the river, whose companies broke into smaller and smaller units as the stresses and strains of life on the trail wore on, the Mormons tended to stay in much larger groups, and usually remained in these large groups until the end of their journey.³⁷ George Washington Hill believed that the purpose of staying in these large group was for “protections against Indians that swarmed in thousands over the plains.”³⁸ This fear of Indians was strong enough that it overcame other antipathies. Joel Johnson, who was among a group heading east along the trail in 1857, recorded that his company agreed to the wishes of a group of apostates to join his company, for they were “afraid of the

³⁵Stegner, Zion, 54-55.

³⁶George Washington Hill, “Incidents in the Life of George Washington Hill (1878),” Journey, 362.

³⁷See J. S. Holliday, The World Rushed; Sarah Rich, “Reminiscences of Sarah DeArmon Pea Rich,” Journey, 377.

³⁸George Washington Hill, “Incidents in the Life of George Washington Hill (1878),” Journey, 362.

Indians and stopped for us to come up."³⁹ This fear also meant that young Mosiah Hancock was not the only child scolded for straying to far from the company.⁴⁰ Many cautionary tales developed, usually ending in death or other tragedy, about those who wandered to far from the trail.⁴¹ To be sure, the large groups that the Mormons traveled in were influenced by a strong communal spirit, but their cohesion was also influenced by their fear, and their desire to keep Indians away from the trail.

On all of the overland trails the problems with Indians stemmed more from the migrants own "anxieties about what *could* happen to them than from what actually *did* happen."⁴² In a study of 103 women's overland trail diaries Lillian Schissel noted that only 7 percent of the writers recorded attacks by Indians.⁴³ The real killers on the plains were cholera and accidents.⁴⁴ The common perception could have just as easily followed

³⁹Joel Hills Johnson, *Autobiography (1802-1868)*, typescript, BYU-S, 17.

⁴⁰Mosiah Hancock *Autobiography (1834-1865)*, typescript, BYU-S, 38-39.

⁴¹Sylvia Barlow, "Biography of Harriet Hales," in Kenneth Glyn Hales ed. and compiler, *Windows: A Mormon Family* (Tucson, AZ: Skyline Printing, 1985), 40-41; Sarah Alexander, "A Little Story of the Experiences of Sara Alexander When Crossing the Plains in 1859," *Journey*, 535-536; Emma James, from Laleta Dixon, "History of My Ancestor, William James of the Willey [sic] Handcart Co., 1856," *Journey*, 626.

⁴²Glenda Riley, "The Specter of a Savage: Rumors and Alarmism on the Overland Trail," *Western Historical Quarterly* 15 (October 1984): 427; Emphasis in the original.

⁴³Lillian Schissel, *Women's Diaries of the Westward Journey*, Studies in the Life of Women Series, supervising ed. Gerda Lerner, with a preface by Carl N. Degler (New York: Schocken Books, 1982; expanded, 1992), 154.

⁴⁴J. S. Holliday, *The World Rushed*, 115; Jonathan Crosby, *Autobiography (1807-1852)*, typescript and holograph, Utah State Historical Society, Salt Lake City, Utah, 29-30; Warren Foote, "Journal of Warren Foote (1850)," *Journey*, 419; Mary Maughan, "Autobiography of Mary Ann Weston Maughan," *Journey*, 423-430.

the reaction of Levi Jackman, who thought the Pawnees that they met “seemed very friendly.”⁴⁵ The perception of fear and danger acted as a way to verbalize the need for closeness.

For the trail to be a viable artery, it would have to safely contain all the migrants within a carefully circumscribed area. The Mormons did everything they could to stay close to the river, and avoid what they thought of as the territory of the Indians. At night, when they stopped to camp, they kept cattle and horses close and guarded.⁴⁶ Their camps were most often right next to the river or a stream⁴⁷ Even in death the Mormons did not stray to far from the comfortable confines of the river valleys.⁴⁸ These action sought to place danger and the unknown, in the persona of Indians, excluded and away from the trail.

At the same time that the Mormons were creating a simplified, circumscribed space that spatially connected them to the East, they were also creating temporal ties to the nation’s past that made the area of the trail not only a place set apart, but also an American place. One way the Mormon’s used the landscape to create a temporal tie to the nation’s past was through the erection of Liberty Poles. The Liberty Pole had become an important symbol of growing nationhood during the revolutionary period. People had

⁴⁵Levi Jackman, “Autobiography of Levi Jackman,” *Journey*, 337.

⁴⁶William Farrington Cahoon, *Autobiography*, 90; Levi Jackman, “Autobiography of Levi Jackman,” *Journey*, 338.

⁴⁷Levi Jackman, “Autobiography of Levi Jackman,” *Journey*, 341.

⁴⁸William Farrington Cahoon, *Autobiography*, 90; Nancy Tracy, “Life History of Nancy Naomi Alexander Tracy Written by Herself,” *Journey*, 410-411.

used these poles to draw each other together in a spirit of unity against the British.⁴⁹ The second company of Mormon Pioneers reached back into the past of the United States and pulled forth a Liberty Pole, which they planted near the Elkhorn Ferry.⁵⁰ This area became known as Liberty Pole camp, and became the major staging area for leaving Winter Quarters and beginning the trek to the West.

To be sure, not every Mormon swelled with pride when gazing upon this Liberty Pole. Still feeling the effects of mob violence and governmental indifference, many Latter-day Saints resented the connection to the U.S. Robert Gardner, Jr., believed that the call to muster 500 Mormon men to go help fight the war with Mexico was a trap, and seeing the Liberty Pole “in the middle of an Indian country these things made me feel like asking O liberty, and freedom, where hast thou [thou] fled for this demand was made a trap.”⁵¹ Gardner resented the placement of such a symbol: to him it still clearly represented a tie to the U.S.

⁴⁹David Hackett Fischer, Paul Revere's Ride (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 72, 156, 206, 207. Liberty Poles had were also used during the Whiskey Rebellion, see Gary B. Nash and others, The American People: Creating a Nation and Society, Volume 1: to 1877, Brief 2nd Edition (New York: Harper Collins, 1996), 168.

⁵⁰Sarah Rich, “Reminiscences of Sarah DeArmon Pea Rich,” Journey, 375; Joseph Hovey, Autobiography (1812-1847), typescript, BYU-S, 40.

⁵¹Robert Gardner, “Journal and Diary of Robert Gardner, Jr.,” Journey, 269. On the Mormon Battalion see Norma Baldwin Ricketts, The Mormon Battalion: U.S. Army of the West, 1846-1848, with a forward by David L Bigler (Logan, UT: Utah State University Press, 1996).

Nationalism: A Curious Reversal

“THE STANDARDS OF ZION”

[Sung to the tune of the Star Spangled Banner]

O, Saints, have you seen, o'er yon mountain's proud height, The day star of promise so brilliantly beaming? Its rays shall illumine the world with its light, And the ensign of Zion, exultingly streaming, All nations invite to walk in its light, And join to maintain the proud standard of right-- The Standard of Zion, O long may it wave O'er the land of the free and the home of the brave!

Our motto is peace, and the triumph of right; And we joyfully hail the Millennia dawning, When man can emerge from a long dreary night And bask in the sunbeams of Zion's bright morning. The white flag so rare, still floating in air, Proclaims 'mid the mountains that peace is still there. Let the Standard of Zion eternally wave O'er the land of the free and the home of the brave.

Though earth and its treasures should melt in the fire-- The planets be riven with the trumpets' loud thunder, The sunlight of Heaven wax dim and expire, And the veil of eternity parted asunder, Yet firm and unshaken the truth shall remain, And the heirs of the Priesthood forever shall reign, And the Standard of Zion eternally wave O'er the land of the free and the home of the brave.

Parley P. Pratt⁵²

Ambivalence, and even outright hatred, did not preclude the Mormons from feeling a deep sense of connection to the United States. One way they resolved this paradox was to claim loyalty to the Constitution, but dissatisfaction with the government. In 1857 the Scylla and Caribides of this dilemma became frighteningly real when the federal government sent troops to Utah to quash a supposed rebellion. At this time the Mormon

⁵²Parley P. Pratt ed., Autobiography of Parley P. Pratt (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1985), 395. This song was recorded after the date January 1, 1856, and was most likely written in 1855.

