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# Review: The Mormon Rebellion: America's First Civil War 1857–1858 by David L. Bigler and Will Bagley

Gene Deerman

*Eastern Illinois University*, [medeerman@eiu.edu](mailto:medeerman@eiu.edu)

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outside of China, especially in the West, and their subsequent appropriation by mass media such as cinema and video games, impacts Boretz's analysis. Do European students of the Chinese martial arts such as Jean-Claude van Damme, or American auteurs who use Chinese martial arts motifs such as Quentin Tarantino (director of the *Kill Bill* films) and the Wachowskis (directors of the *Matrix* trilogy), necessarily participate in the same spiritual economy of *yin* and *yang* that Boretz describes in the lives of his Chinese and Taiwanese informants? Is the transformation of the "personal model" by its subordination to the "bureaucratic model," and its concomitant production of male identity, quite the same in all of these cases, notwithstanding the presence of Chinese martial arts in each? That these and other questions related not only to religious studies, but also to issues of gender and performance, are raised by Boretz's work commends it to anyone who is interested in understanding Chinese culture, Chinese popular religion, the fascination with Chinese martial arts in the West, and new religious movements such as Falun Dafa (a.k.a. Falun Gong) that incorporate elements of Chinese martial arts practice and spirituality.

Jeffrey L. Richey, Berea College

*The Mormon Rebellion: America's First Civil War 1857–1858*. By David L. Bigler and Will Bagley. Oklahoma University Press, 2011. 392 pages. \$34.95 cloth.

Massacre, martial law, and secession, aren't terms we usually associate with Mormons, but David L. Bigler and Will Bagley's account, *The Mormon Rebellion*, reintroduces into the historical record these events from Mormon history. Using primary documents only recently made available, Bigler and Bagley relate the events leading up to this little-known episode, including the massacre of a group of pioneer families traveling west, a declaration of martial law across the entire territory, and the out-and-out secession of Utah from the United States (this, before the South's secession and the outbreak of America's Civil War). Theirs is the story of these acts of violence and of the people—Mormon, Gentile, and Indian—involved.

Brigham Young (1801–1877) is at the center of the story. As the recognized leader of Mormons and as the federally appointed governor of the territory of Utah, Young occupied a position of power both cultural and legal. Mormons of the day not only respected and loved Young, they feared him as well. Extensive use of primary sources shows that Mormons from the church leadership down to the ordinary members held this mix of strong feelings for their leader. For example, Young's "Great Reformation" was a revivalist call to repent and atone for sins

that brought fear and violence into Mormon lives, yet did not discredit him. Young introduced two new doctrines, “blood atonement” and “catechism,” that led to church leaders cruelly bullying followers, and some even committed suicide “in atonement” for sins confessed. Young used the fervor aroused by the Great Reformation to establish “the armed forces of God’s kingdom” in his pursuit of a religious theocracy.

From the first chapter, readers will be asking, “Why did Brigham Young go so far?” Bigler and Bagley document several factors, with religious zeal and distance from federal power emerging as primary. Religious zeal inured Young to the suffering and even death of some of his followers. For example, the documents explored here show that Young knowingly allowed two companies of pushcart immigrants (people joining the Mormon settlements lacking wagons and oxen who literally pushed handcarts to get their belongings to Utah) to leave the Missouri River too late to reach Utah safely and too meagerly supplied to last the winter. He replied harshly to criticisms of this action by saying that God would smite anyone who questioned his judgment. In the end, two hundred people died after he refused to allow an eastbound wagon train to leave supplies for the pushcart train struggling to reach Salt Lake.

Young may also have truly believed what he preached: that death purifies. He repeatedly called on Mormons to make extraordinary sacrifices in pursuit of his theocratic dream. These sacrifices included strenuous cross-country missionary expeditions to enlist Indians in the Mormon cause. (Under Young’s leadership, Mormons worked to convince area Indians that the federal government was a shared enemy.)

Distance from federal power also played a role in allowing Young such political latitude. Federal appointees who should have had authority in Utah—from the Indian Affairs agents to federal judges—were run out of Utah, leaving Young the sole authority on all matters, political and domestic. Additionally, troops and other authorities had to wait long periods for communications from Washington, D.C., making it difficult to respond effectively to Young’s actions.

Bigler and Bagley carefully corroborate events across multiple documents, thus deepening the credibility of their claims. Personal accounts, news accounts, reports made by Young’s followers and by agents of President James Buchanan (in office 1857–1861) are all part of the story. Occasionally, passages offer an ambiguous point of view that may leave readers unsure of whether Bigler and Bagley agree with their historical informant or are simply conveying what that person may have thought. However, the account is absolutely engrossing and through vivid quotations and the authors’ thorough knowledge of regional geography, readers clearly see the significance of military movements, the Mormon’s efforts to block westward travel, and the vast territory at stake.

Gene Deerman, Eastern Illinois University