



Review of *At Sword's Point, Part 1: A Documentary History of the Utah War to 1858; At Sword's Point, Part 2: A Documentary History of the Utah War, 1858-1859*, edited by William P. MacKinnon.

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wins but instead how different peoples are made vulnerable by each new adjustment.

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William P. MacKinnon, ed. *At Sword's Point, Part 1: A Documentary History of the Utah War to 1858*. Vol. 10 of the series *Kingdom in the West: The Mormons and the American Frontier*, edited by Will Bagley. Norman, OK: Arthur H. Clark Company, 2008.

William P. MacKinnon, ed. *At Sword's Point, Part 2: A Documentary History of the Utah War, 1858–1859*. Vol. 11 of the series *Kingdom in the West: The Mormons and the American Frontier*, edited by Will Bagley. Norman, OK: Arthur H. Clark Company, 2016.

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IN TWO HEFTY AND WIDE-RANGING VOLUMES that represent the culmination of some sixty years of dedicated and careful labor, William P. MacKinnon delivers the most thorough investigation into the complex history of the Utah War to date. Readers will have to wade through more than eleven hundred pages of documents and editorial commentary—as well as more than fifty pages of bibliographic data—to realize the benefits of MacKinnon's sleuthing, but anyone who takes the time to carefully sort through the unexpected turns and intrigue of MacKinnon's presentation will ultimately be rewarded with a deeper

understanding of a significant federal-territorial conflict that arose in a tumultuous time in the nation's history.

In 1850 Congress created Utah Territory out of land it acquired from Mexico in the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, a place already peopled by American Indians and Mormons. But westward expansion and the creation of new territories brought still greater challenges to a nation teetering out of balance on the slavery issue. *At Sword's Point* highlights the role and impact of Utah within these national and even international contexts. Over the seven years following the Compromise of 1850, MacKinnon states, "corrosive incidents, deteriorating relations, and grossly differing philosophies of governance—one secular, conventional, and republican while the other was authoritarian, millennial, and theocratic"—created enough discord between Utah Territory and the federal government that it led to an armed confrontation in the late summer of 1857. Two months into his presidency, James Buchanan, without Congressional consent, ordered twenty-five hundred US Army troops to Utah to install a new governor to replace Mormon leader Brigham Young (10:44). Religion played a significant role to be sure, but in antebellum America Mormons were not the only territorial population anxious to trade their territorial status for statehood so they were no longer subservient to the federal government's authority. Utah Territory certainly had its unique issues among other western territories; the territorial population's desire for self-government was not one of them. Nevertheless, as MacKinnon points out, "when Buchanan made his initial decisions about Utah in the spring of 1857, he faced a serious problem of territorial control and gubernatorial insubordination. It was a situation fully warranting Buchanan's decision to replace Brigham Young, but not yet one constituting rebellion" (11:603). In the end, President Buchanan changed "the government in Utah and was intervening there with an unprecedented exercise of force" (10:137). *At Sword's Point* is composed of a large selection of sometimes eclectic documents that tell this "story of what the Utah War was, how it came about, how the two sides prosecuted the war, and its results" (10:35).

MacKinnon's study of the Utah War offers many contributions. First and foremost, he solidly presents in a readable form hundreds of previously unpublished, inaccessible, and largely unknown sources. These fantastic and fascinating documents unveil, among other topics and matters, the workings of the Buchanan administration and the global implications of the Utah conflict, while also providing a multitude of perspectives, including women's voices. In surrounding the primary sources with editorial commentary, *At Sword's Point* makes a historiographical contribution in bringing the Utah War out of a solely Mormon history context and placing it alongside contemporary western, national, and international issues and events. Second, MacKinnon masterfully untangles many of the rumors and myths about the Utah War. In particular, these books bust the myth that this was a bloodless confrontation. Part 1 in particular contains documents and commentary that highlight the violence in Utah Territory and how it differed from brutality elsewhere in the West (10:298–325). MacKinnon also clearly explains how Brigham Young first heard of the coming of the army, a tale shrouded in Mormon lore that indicates the news interrupted a peaceful July 24th Pioneer Day celebration (10:223–29).

However, MacKinnon does not address all of the rumors and myths of the Utah War. For instance, a variety of documents wildly speculate about the strength of a Mormon-Indian military alliance, but the commentary and documents are largely silent on the actual martial relationship of Mormons and American Indians during the Utah War. There is a general lack of nuance in the presentation of the Mormon-Indian relationship, especially in the first volume. "In all of this material," MacKinnon editorializes when referring to a collection of Mormon communications, "Young signaled not only his unwillingness to restrain the territory's tribes, but that he stood ready to unleash than [them] to bring about a bloody halt to transcontinental emigration" (10:322). MacKinnon here suggests that Brigham Young had some kind of immense power to control the actions of Great Basin Native peoples. He did not. Neither volume provides sources from the Native perspective, though some do exist, even if many of those sources are filtered through white

scribes. Nevertheless, perhaps acknowledging the lack of Native agency in the study, *At Sword's Point* does ultimately make an important call for others “to consider the actions of the region’s American Indians. For their own advantage, some of the tribes were prone to play ‘Americats’ against Mormons and vice versa. Other bands simply tried to protect their endangered rights, cultures, and traditional hunting territories by even-handedly distancing themselves from the blandishments of both sides. These differing behaviors by the members of more than a dozen tribes impacted by the Utah War were interpreted in multiple ways by Anglos lacking even a rudimentary grasp of tribal languages and cultures involved” (11:158). Indeed, understanding Native realities in the Utah War would prove to be a fruitful research topic for an enterprising scholar in the future.

These two volumes also include a variety of new insights on the spread and impact of the conflict. One interesting and little-known aspect of the Utah War is the army’s Joseph C. Ives expedition to determine if the Colorado River could be navigated upstream as an invasion route into southern Utah (11:113–41). The example of this military reconnaissance demonstrates that the Utah War created a multitude of opportunities for the federal government to build its general knowledge of the West. MacKinnon includes a variety of these heretofore neglected military aspects of the Utah War, including the daring and arduous trip of Captain Randolph Marcy to New Mexico to purchase needed supplies and animals for survival and mobility. One of Marcy’s letters sheds light on an important aspect of the conflict: rhetoric versus reality. Marcy perhaps said it best when he wrote to his brother, “I do not believe the Mormons dare attack us, and, if they do, I believe we can whip them. . . . The Mormons boast a great deal of what they intend to do, but they do not execute their boasts” (11:64). So much of the history of the Utah War is informed by rhetoric, especially that of Brigham Young. The Mormon leader and territorial governor and superintendent of Indian affairs is often painted as an all-encompassing mastermind who whipped his followers into a frenzy with his speeches and controlled every aspect of Utah Territory. That idea is hyperbolic.

Documents presented throughout these two books show the nuance, unevenness, and complexities of Brigham Young, who was, at more times than one might suspect, ineffective and unaware (see, for example, 10:350 and 11:509).

The venerated Thomas L. Kane, who served an important role as unofficial mediator between Washington and Utah, is a major figure in both volumes. Other historians have devoted many words to Kane in narrative form, but the portrayal of Kane here through documents provides an important reminder of the power of primary sources. Kane's letters, notes, and memoranda show some of his true feelings about the conflict and James Buchanan: "As a private individual I consider Mr. Buchanan an honorable good citizen, but in his public capacity his conduct has proved him both injudicious and hasty. . . . His action respecting the affairs of Utah shows that he can act in blind conformity to the prejudices of others" (11:222). In addition, MacKinnon introduces Sam Houston into this history. The Texas Senator helped "Mormonism on the floor of the U.S. Senate" (11:36). This reviewer wished more congressional voices were included in these two volumes but understands the limitations of the bound book for such a complex history.

The reaction to President Buchanan's "Proclamation tendering general amnesty to the people of Utah for all seditions and treasons of the past" is also fascinating as revealed in the documents and commentary as rendered by MacKinnon (11:413). Soldiers and other Americans had varied opinions on the president's pardon; one of the more intriguing responses came from Elizabeth Church Craig from Athens, Georgia. Craig wrote to the president and chastised him for not taking a harsher stance toward the Mormons and Brigham Young in particular. "If I were the Government," Craig proclaimed, "Brigham should pay the penalty of traitor before I would listen to terms" (11:417). Still others expressed gratitude "that Congress had not allowed Buchanan to 'bayonet "them" Mormons'" (11:418). In the end, MacKinnon shows that diplomacy won the day. From new territorial governor Alfred Cumming's conciliatory speech to the Mormons upon his arrival in Salt Lake City to the June 1858 arrival of the president's peace commissioners, the federal

government accomplished its mission of restoring federal authority to the territory and ensuring Mormon acceptance of the pardon (11:522–34). By the time the army subsequently arrived in the summer of 1858, the balance of power had shifted to the federal government.

Detailed documentary work such as *At Sword's Point* is the bedrock—and therefore a sturdy foundation—for future studies of the Utah War. In the preface to part 1, series editor Will Bagley astutely notes that MacKinnon has provided “enough new source material to keep historians busy reinterpreting the conflict for a generation” (10:15). MacKinnon himself calls for future scholars to understand and integrate the Utah War into larger contexts, themes, and events in the decade that led to the American Civil War: “A complete, accurate understanding of this extraordinary territorial-federal conflict still beckons those interested in the history of Mormon Utah, the American West, and even international relations in a wide range of unlikely places” (11:650). It is doubtful that another scholar has or will come to know the magnitude of the Utah War sources as exhaustively as MacKinnon, but he has provided a warm welcome to use and build on his life’s work. The plethora of documents presented in both volumes of *At Sword's Point* create an essential resource for antebellum federal-territorial relations, Utah history, Mormon history, and the nation’s acceleration toward disunion. Let us hope that historians continue to build on MacKinnon’s foundational work and better situate the Utah War in American historiography.

Brent M. Rogers earned a PhD in history from the University of Nebraska–Lincoln in 2013. He is currently an associate managing historian for The Joseph Smith Papers and is the author of *Unpopular Sovereignty: Mormons and the Federal Management of Early Utah Territory* (University of Nebraska Press, 2017).