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Mobocracy and the Rule of Law: American Press Reaction to the Murder of Joseph Smith

Paul D. Ellsworth

On the warm afternoon of 28 June 1844, a small group of saddened men plodded down the road from Carthage to Nauvoo, Illinois. The significant events of the last few days were winding down now to this silent procession which bore the bodies of two men back to the "holy city" which they had founded and governed. What had seemed impossible to many Mormons had happened—Joseph Smith, the Prophet, and his brother Hyrum were dead.

Stunned by news of the deaths, Latter-day Saints quietly mourned the loss of their beloved leaders. To them, the murders were the bitter climax to years of religious persecution.

Since 1844, this killing of the Mormon prophet has been the subject of extensive historical research by both Mormon and non-Mormon scholars; and yet, we still have had very little information regarding one important aspect of this whole phenomenon, that is, the reaction to the murder by the general public. While some historians have dealt with the response of Illinois newspapers to the incident, few, if any, have closely examined the reaction of the national press to the killing. In order to help fill this gap in Mormon studies, this article will examine the way in which the nation's press reacted to the slaying of Joseph Smith and his brother and will suggest some reasons for the attitude of most newspapers regarding this particular incident.

To understand the attitude the American press adopted toward the Smith killings, it may be helpful to review the events which preceded Joseph Smith's death. From its inception, the Mormon church had attracted opposition. In the fourteen years since Joseph Smith had organized The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, he had been accused of almost every possible crime; he had been arrested, tried, released, and arrested and tried again. His people had

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been driven from New York to Ohio, from Ohio to Missouri, from Missouri to Illinois, and in less than two years after the killing of the Prophet they would be fleeing from Illinois to the supposed safety of the Salt Lake Valley.

The particular circumstances which led to Joseph Smith's death began in early June of 1844 with the destruction of the *Nauvoo Expositor*, an anti-Joseph Smith newspaper published by defectors from the Church who considered Joseph a fallen prophet and were determined to expose the immoralities and atrocities they claimed he had committed. The paper's first issue was filled with accusations against the Prophet, claims which he and other Church leaders considered lies and slander. A meeting of the Nauvoo City Council was immediately called by Joseph Smith (who was also the mayor), the *Expositor* was declared a public nuisance, and the press ordered destroyed.

Word of the destruction enraged non-Mormon citizens of the surrounding Illinois towns, who felt that the Mormons had violated the *Expositor's* right of freedom of the press. Anti-Mormons, capitalizing on public sentiment, demanded the arrest of Joseph Smith and those involved in the incident. The governor of Illinois, Thomas Ford, soon dispatched state militia to arrest the Mormon prophet, and Ford himself hurried to the area in order to supervise personally the capture.

On 24 June 1844, Joseph Smith surrendered himself to Illinois State authorities on condition that he be protected from hostile citizens. Three days later, after he and his brother Hyrum had been incarcerated at Carthage, the county seat, a mob of disguised men rushed the jail, overpowered the guards, and shot and killed the two Smiths.¹

The murder of the Smiths at Carthage, Illinois, occurred as the nation at large was itself suffering from a wave of lawlessness and rioting; and in this tense atmosphere the mob actions at Carthage were denounced as another sign of nascent anarchy. To most Americans, the incident was not just an isolated case of religious bigotry; it was a not-so-isolated case of mob violence.

The three decades preceding the Civil War were, for America, shot through with episodes of violence. According to Richard Maxwell Brown, an important scholar of American violence, the period of the 1830s, 1840s, and 1850s may have been the era of the greatest

¹For a more detailed account of Joseph Smith's death see Donna Hill, *Joseph Smith: The First Mormon* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1977), pp. 387-418; see also Dallin H. Oaks and Marvin S. Hill, *Carthage Conspiracy: The Trial of the Accused Assassins of Joseph Smith* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975), pp. 6-23.

urban violence America has ever experienced.² Brown explains that “during this period, at least 35 major riots occurred in Baltimore, Philadelphia, New York, and Boston. Baltimore had twelve, Philadelphia eleven, New York eight, and Boston four.”³ For its leading role as a scene of urban violence, Baltimore gained the unpleasant title of “mob town.”⁴ Another important study of American violence concludes that in the period of the 1830s through the 1850s “‘mob violence not only increased markedly but also became a feature of American life—not urban life, or Southern life, or Western life—but American life.’”⁵

The objects of this violence were many. Mobs actively harassed Catholics, Mormons, abolitionists, Mexicans, immigrants, gamblers, and prostitutes. In his book *Frontier Violence*, Eugene Hollon attributes the upheaval to “the development of slums, the arrival of millions of Irish and German immigrants, competition for jobs, and poorly trained police forces.”⁶

When reporting mob activities, contemporary newspapers almost always denounced them as acts of lawlessness. For instance, on 12 March 1844, the *Louisville* (Kentucky) *Daily Journal* headed an article with the title “Lynch Law.” According to the article, a mob had hanged, without even the semblance of a trial, a negro accused of murder, and the *Journal* condemned this act, insisting “there is no sense in such proceedings. The law would have hung him, and they did nothing more. . . . Better, far better, to let the laws take their course.”⁷

Of the urban violence which occurred in 1844, the most pronounced and costly stemmed from clashes between Irish immigrants and members of the Native American Party. The Irish had come to the United States en masse during the first half of the nineteenth century to escape the devastating potato famines of Ireland. This

²Richard Maxwell Brown, *Strain of Violence: Historical Studies of American Violence and Vigilantism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975), p. 29.

³Ibid. Civil disturbances were not restricted to major cities. Brown goes on to quote John C. Scheinder’s findings that “at least seventy per cent of American cities with a population of twenty thousand or more by 1850 experienced some degree of major disorder in the 1830–1865 period.”

⁴W. Eugene Hollon, *Frontier Violence: Another Look* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974), p. 25. Hollon also points out that during this period the epithet of “mob town” was occasionally conferred upon other cities as well, including Cincinnati, St. Louis, Louisville, and Vicksburg.

⁵Leonard Richards, cited in Hollon, *Frontier Violence*, p. 25.

⁶Ibid., p. 24. According to Hollon, one reaction to the urban violence of the mid-1800s was the development of our modern urban police system.

⁷*Louisville* (Ky.) *Daily Journal*, 12 March 1844, p. 3. Although the word *lynching* has become synonymous with *hanging*, *lynching* was originally used to refer to any extra-legal actions. The term *lynch law* seems to have originated with a Virginia vigilante group in the 1780s led by a Colonel Charles Lynch; however, the evidence is not clear whether Lynch’s group ever went so far as to apply the death penalty. (See Hollon, *Frontier Violence*, pp. 16–17.)

massive migration gave rise to a strong nativist feeling among many Americans, who looked suspiciously upon the incoming foreigners. One of the most pervasive fears of the nativists was that the Irish would use their numbers to form a voting bloc which could control the government. Such fears were encouraged by various Protestant groups which passionately opposed the Irish for their Catholic beliefs.

Social tension and the potential for violence increased when the nativists formed a political party with the avowed purpose of excluding the Irish from politics and keeping them "in line." The party, known successively as the Native American Party and the Order of the Star Spangled Banner, eventually became the Know-Nothing Party due to its secrecy and its members' response of "I know nothing" to inquiry about the party's activities.⁸

In 1844, a presidential election year, the emotions of the "Natives" were at a pitch. Feelings erupted into violence, and press reports of clashes between the groups began to appear early in the year. The 27 April issue of the *Fort Wayne* (Indiana) *Sentinel*, for example, reprinted a *New York Herald* report of rioting in Brooklyn between the Native Americans and the Irish. A few days later *The Indiana State Sentinel* reported that on election night in St. Louis "a serious row occurred between a party of Natives and Foreigners."⁹ These skirmishes were subsequently overshadowed by rioting which broke out in Philadelphia again and again from May to July.

On 7 May 1844, the streets of Philadelphia became the scene of intense rioting between the Native Americans and Irish. Reportedly, before the groups could be brought under control, fourteen persons were killed, thirty-nine wounded, and thirty-eight buildings burned to the ground.¹⁰ Accounts of the strife dominated the American press with such headlines as "The Philadelphia Riots" and "The Philadelphia Mob" being common in newspapers throughout the country.¹¹

⁸Hollon, *Frontier Violence*, pp. 29-30.

⁹*Indiana State Sentinel* (Indianapolis), 2 May 1844, p. 4. For other accounts of rioting between the "Natives" and the Irish see the *Southern Patriot* (Charleston, S.C.), 9 April 1844, p. 4; *Louisville Daily Journal*, 11 April 1844, p. 3; and *Daily Picayune* (New Orleans), 15 June 1844, p. 2.

¹⁰*Louisville Daily Journal*, 15 May 1844, p. 3. For further accounts of the May rioting in Philadelphia see *Delaware Gazette* (Wilmington), 10 May 1844, p. 3; *Louisville Daily Journal*, 14 May 1844, p. 3; *Daily Herald* (Newbury Port, Mass.), 14 May 1844, p. 2; *Norwich* (Conn.) *Courier*, 15 May 1844, p. 2; *Rutland* (Vt.) *Herald*, 16 May 1844, p. 2; *Fort Wayne* (Ind.) *Sentinel*, 18 May 1844, p. 2; and *Arkansas State Gazette* (Little Rock), 5 June 1844, p. 1.

¹¹*Delaware Gazette*, 17 May 1844, p. 2; *Hawk-Eye* (Burlington, Iowa), 30 May 1844, p. 3. It is important to realize that American newspapers of the early and middle 1800s functioned without national news services such as the Associated Press and United Press International. Subsequently, newspapers of the nineteenth century followed the custom of borrowing newsworthy articles from other newspapers. In this manner, a particular article may have appeared in various newspapers throughout the country.

After several days, the fighting stopped; but what appeared to be an end to the conflict turned out to be only a lull in the battle. In early July, fighting again broke out, this time bloodier than before.

Shocked by the reports of bloodshed and rioting in Philadelphia, the incensed press severely condemned the lawless mob actions which had caused the violence. Newspapers north and south could perceive no justification for the hostile scenes that were reported from Philadelphia. When reports of the July riots reached Portland, Maine, the *Portland Transcript* sadly announced that "Philadelphia has again been a scene of blood and slaughter." The report continued:

Mobocracy has again run riot. It commenced on the 6th by an attack on a Catholic Church; the [*sic*] excitement continued through the 7th and 8th. A large number of lives were lost and many were wounded. It is said to be worse than the first riot which covered that city with infamy.¹²

Some accounts of the July violence placed the casualties as high as "one hundred killed, and the same number wounded!"¹³ Such reports stirred the American public. A New York paper wrote that the air was filled with excitement and inquiry regarding the riots at Philadelphia.¹⁴ Indeed, updates on the rioting appeared in the press almost every day throughout the month of July.

In Macon, Georgia, the *American Democrat* expressed a feeling of disgust for the mob actions: "Philadelphia has been again disgraced by the occurrence of the most desperate and bloody riots upon record in this country."¹⁵ The *Louisville Daily Journal* called the riots "disgraceful to the character of the country"¹⁶ and later branded the incident as "one of the greatest and most unprovoked outrages that ever occurred in any community, civilized or barbarian."¹⁷

This condemnation clearly grew from the fact that the mob violence defied law and order. Americans seemed to have reached the

¹²*Portland (Maine) Transcript*, 13 July 1844, p. 111. More articles on the July riots in Philadelphia may be found in the *Daily Times* (Hartford, Conn.), 9 July 1844, p. 2; *Delaware Gazette*, 12 July 1844, p. 3; *Louisville Daily Journal*, 12 July 1844, p. 3; and in almost any of the nation's newspapers during the month of July.

¹³*Louisville Daily Journal*, 13 July 1844, p. 3. This report is exaggerated but exemplifies the excitement generated by the Philadelphia violence.

¹⁴*Long Island Democrat*, 16 July 1844, p. 3.

¹⁵*American Democrat* (Macon, Ga.), 17 July 1844, p. 2. Southern newspapers, being farther away from the scenes of news events such as the Philadelphia riots and the murder of Joseph Smith, tended to print such news anywhere from two weeks to a month later than in the northeastern and central states.

¹⁶*Louisville Daily Journal*, 12 July 1844, p. 3.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, 15 July 1844, p. 2.

point at which their concern for the supremacy of the law overshadowed other issues. The 19 July *Kenebec Journal* (Augusta, Maine) articulated the national fear of mob rule which underscored the denunciations of the Philadelphia violence:

The Philadelphia riots . . . have been grosser outrages and have required the shedding of more blood to appease their ferocity, than any civil broils which have before happened in this country, and this fact, together with the partial triumph of the mob . . . gives a fearful apprehension of what may be to come hereafter. . . . The supremacy of the constitution and the established laws is the only safeguard of a republic from anarchy.¹⁸

A declaration from the *Delaware Gazette* shows what extremes this emphatic regard for the rule of law achieved. The *Gazette* declared, "*The supremacy of the laws should be acknowledged, if every violator must be put to death.*"¹⁹

Such fanatical commitment to legal order was an expected reaction to this nineteenth-century urban violence. Lynching and rioting were threatening the American form of government, and they could not be tolerated. In this atmosphere of alarm and fear, accounts of the Carthage violence appeared.

In the context of a growing national fear of lawlessness, it is interesting to note that one of the major complaints anti-Mormons made to the American public was that the law was powerless in Nauvoo.²⁰ They claimed that the Nauvoo City Charter granted by the Illinois State Legislature gave Joseph Smith near-dictatorial powers with which he constantly defied the laws of the land. Significantly, the charge which brought the Prophet to Carthage, the place of his death, was that of riot.²¹

¹⁸*Kenebec Journal* (Augusta, Maine), 19 July 1844, p. 3.

¹⁹*Delaware Gazette*, 12 July 1844, p. 3.

²⁰Violence and Mormonism had been made bedfellows in the American press even before the Carthage incident. The press quickly reported any occurrence of "lynch law" at Nauvoo. In April of 1844 articles appearing in a number of papers described an incident of Mormon mob law. One of these articles, printed in New Orleans's *Daily Picayune* of 27 April, was entitled "Lynching at Nauvoo." It read:

The following shows what a law-abiding people Joe Smith's minions are. A negro was recently found with some stolen goods at Nauvoo, and, to make him divulge the names of those who committed the theft, he was taken by the Mormons to the woods and lynched. They did not succeed, however, in their object.

(*Daily Picayune*, 27 April 1844, p. 4.) In this case the word *lynched* means that the black man was beaten in an attempt to make him divulge the names of the thieves. Variations of this article appear in the *Louisville Daily Journal*, 19 April 1844, p. 3; *Lee County Democrat* (Fort Madison, Iowa), 20 April 1844, p. 2; *Cincinnati Weekly Herald and Philanthropist*, 24 April 1844, p. 2; *Delaware Gazette*, 26 April 1844, p. 3; the *Sun* (Baltimore), 26 April 1844, p. 2; and *Hartford (Tenn.) Daily Courant*, 27 April 1844, p. 2.

²¹After Joseph Smith arrived in Carthage, he posted bail on the riot charge and was set free; however, he was quickly charged with treason, arrested, and placed in the Carthage jail. He was awaiting action upon the treason charge at the time of his death.

After some legal and extra-legal maneuvering, in which the riot charge was dismissed, Joseph was imprisoned in the county jail on a second charge, this time of treason; and, on 27 June 1844, while under the protection of the State of Illinois, he and his brother Hyrum were murdered by a mob.

The first accounts of the Carthage killings apparently originated from anti-Mormon sources and placed the Mormons themselves in the role of aggressors. Allegedly, the Mormons had attempted to rescue the Prophet from jail and in the resulting confusion he and his brother were killed. Basing their appraisal of the situation on these erroneous reports, newspapers presumed the Smiths' deaths to be the "just outcome" of Mormon violence.

In Pennsylvania, for instance, the 10 July 1844 *Hollidaysburg Register* declared, "It is unnecessary to say that this blood-thirsty attempt, on the part of the Mormons, was the signal for certain and sure vengeance [*sic*]." ²² A letter in Philadelphia's *North American* alluded to the alleged rescue attempt and concluded that the Smiths were not killed in cold blood. ²³

Eventually, however, the facts surrounding the killing became known, and the press (which was now receiving reports of the Philadelphia riots as well) expressed great shock at the news. Cries of "murder" came from the country's newspapers, and condemnation of the Carthage mob actions began as the serious implications of the incident started to sink in.

While the events in Pennsylvania and Illinois clearly differed in nature—at Philadelphia, a riot between two mobs, and at Carthage, the murder of two men by a mob—there seemed to be no question in the minds of newspapermen that the two were related. It may be impossible to determine just how much the lawless spirit of the times contributed to the murder of Joseph and Hyrum Smith, but most editors clearly saw the Carthage slayings as a symptom of a national illness. The combined reporting of the Philadelphia riots and the Carthage murders provided the press with strong evidence that the dread disease of mob law was sweeping the country.

Many articles linked the two incidents and jointly condemned them in print. On 10 July 1844, the New Bedford, Massachusetts, *Morning Register* combined a report of the Carthage and Philadelphia violence under the heading,

²²*Hollidaysburg (Pa.) Register*, 10 July 1844, p. 2.

²³*North American & Daily Advertiser* (Philadelphia), 12 July 1844, p. 2.

DREADFUL RIOT AND MURDERS!
THE PROPHET JOE SMITH KILLED!
MORE RIOTS IN THE CITY OF PENN!

Later Fayetteville's *North Carolinian* announced that civil war "with all its horrors is upon us! It breaks upon us simultaneously from the east, and from the west. Native Americanism in Philadelphia, and Mormonism in Illinois!"²⁴

Condemning the Carthage violence, the *New-Hampshire Sentinel* noted: "We seriously fear the death of the Smiths will prove to have been a cold-blooded MURDER; *Lynch Law*; the people the 'real sovereigns,' as in . . . Philadelphia, acting in masses without law, and against law."²⁵ In New York City the *Working Man's Advocate* declared, "We must deplore the renewed outrages in Philadelphia, and Illinois."²⁶ Similarly, the *New York Daily Tribune* printed an article lamenting the deaths of Joseph and Hyrum, concluding: "Altogether it is a sad and melancholy business, and will leave a dark spot, side by side with the records of the Philadelphia riots, in the history of these times."²⁷

The Philadelphia riots and the Carthage murders, then, each touched a spot already sensitive in the American psyche, and close reading of the reports of the Smiths' killing shows just how severely the mob was condemned for its flouting of governmental authority.

New York City's *Evening Post* felt that the killing of Joseph Smith was "as cowardly and atrocious a murder as was ever committed."²⁸ In Paris, Kentucky, the *Western Citizen* echoed similar sentiments, claiming the slaying to be "a cold-blooded, deliberate murder."²⁹ The *Charleston* (South Carolina) *Mercury* printed: "It seems certain by the most recent and authentic accounts, that the Mormon leaders were wilfully and unresistingly murdered in prison. This is horrible."³⁰

Reprimanding the murderers, the *Weekly Ohio State Journal* declared, "There can be no excuse for the conduct of the mob."³¹ Gettysburg's *Republican Compiler* believed that the act would "consign

²⁴*North Carolinian* (Fayetteville), 13 July 1844, p. 3. Since the Native Americans were blamed for the violence in Philadelphia and the Mormons were originally blamed for the violence which ended in Joseph and Hyrum's deaths, the two groups are here linked as initiators in the civil upheaval.

²⁵*New-Hampshire Sentinel* (Keene), 17 July 1844, p. 3.

²⁶*Working Man's Advocate* (New York), 13 July 1844, p. 1.

²⁷*New York Daily Tribune*, 18 July 1844, p. 2. This article appeared in numerous newspapers throughout the country and originated in the 3 July *St. Louis Republican*.

²⁸*Evening Post* (New York), 13 July 1844, p. 2.

²⁹*Western Citizen* (Paris, Ky.), 12 July 1844, p. 3.

³⁰*Charleston* (S.C.) *Mercury*, 15 July 1844, p. 3.

³¹*Weekly Ohio State Journal* (Columbus), 9 July 1844, p. 1.

the perpetrators, if discovered, to merited infamy and disgrace.”³² At least one report which was distributed throughout the country went so far as to demand public condemnation of the “outrage.” This article, printed in Philadelphia’s *Public Ledger* of 17 July, boldly asserted that “all men, from one end of the Union to the other, must condemn, most emphatically, the outbreak at Carthage.”³³

While it may be argued that this condemnation grew out of sympathy for the Mormons, or out of respect and liking for Joseph Smith, the nation’s press generally found little to like about Joseph or his followers. The *Albany* (New York) *Evening Journal*, for instance, after denouncing the actions of the Carthage mob, went on to label Joseph Smith a “low, coarse, vicious vagabond.”³⁴ Similarly, the *Hampshire Gazette* of Northhampton, Massachusetts, felt little sorrow over the passing of Joseph Smith, but it did mourn the manner of his death.

We do not lament that this beastly imposter,—Joe Smith—is disposed of. We have no doubt that he has committed crimes, worthy of a hundred deaths; but we deplore *the manner and circumstances* of his death, as eminently wicked, disgraceful, and dangerous in their tendencies.³⁵

Such an attitude toward the Mormon prophet suggests that more was involved than the death of a man or even a murder. Indeed, the *Pittsburgh Catholic* (a paper which might have been expected to oppose Joseph Smith on religious grounds) stated, “The enormity of this transaction cannot be palliated by the atrocities committed by Smith, and his arch-imposters.”³⁶ What made this murder such an “enormity” was the “manner and circumstances” of the killing. Like the riots in Philadelphia, the mob actions at Carthage were “dangerous in their tendencies.”

Admittedly, not all newspapers enthusiastically denounced the Carthage outbreak. As might be expected, some local Illinois papers quickly came to the defense of their neighbors.³⁷ The *Belleville* (Illinois) *Advocate* headlined a report of the killing “LET HIM THAT IS WITHOUT SIN CAST THE FIRST STONE.”³⁸ Another Illinois paper

³²*Republican Compiler* (Gettysburg), 22 July 1844, p. 1.

³³*Public Ledger and Daily Transcript* (Philadelphia), 17 July 1844, p. 1.

³⁴*Albany* (N.Y.) *Evening Journal*, 10 July 1844, p. 2.

³⁵*Hampshire Gazette* (Northhampton, Mass.), 16 July 1844, p. 3.

³⁶*Pittsburgh Catholic*, 13 July 1844, p. 8.

³⁷Some Illinois papers seemed to feel that it was unfair for those who did not understand the situation to condemn Joseph Smith’s killers so severely. Most of the defenses that were printed attempted to show that the atrocities committed by Joseph Smith and an inability of the law to reach him justified the actions taken by the mob.

³⁸*Belleville* (Ill.) *Advocate*, 8 August 1844, p. 1.

sympathized with the mob, claiming that "the people were driven to desperation at the thought of having again this monster at large in the community."³⁹ But the most vocal defender of the Carthage slayings was the *Warsaw Signal*.

The *Signal*, a vigorous anti-Mormon publication, was edited by Thomas Sharp, who was later tried and acquitted for his part in the Prophet's murder,⁴⁰ even though evidence strongly suggested he played a major role in exciting the mob which stormed the Carthage jail. After the murder, his paper came faithfully to the defense of the mob, citing Lockean revolutionary theory (the people's right to take the law into their own hands) to justify the "execution" of the Smiths. In the prelude to his defense of the incident, Mr. Sharp indicates how widespread condemnation of the killing was:

The summary execution, of two of the Mormon leaders, Joseph and Hiram Smith, at Carthage, on the 27th of June, has excited a deep interest abroad as well as at home; and has brought upon us the severest censure of nearly the whole newspaper press, as far as we have yet heard. From the almost unanimous expression, of the papers that have reached us, we doubt not, that the same indignant cry of "cold blooded murder," will be echoed from one extreme of our wide spread Union to the other.⁴¹

Even Thomas Sharp, trying to justify the slaying, knew that for the most part the country would accept no justification.

The *Albany Evening Journal* succinctly stated the nation's response to the *Signal's* defense of the mob actions: "Imposter and profligate tho' he [Joseph] be, trial and conviction should preceded [*sic*] sentence and execution."⁴² Illinois newspapers had to admit that the mobsters "in thus endeavoring to rectify the aggressions committed upon our laws by their victim . . . have broken every command of duty, honor, and justice."⁴³

As the riots between the Irish and "Natives" had shamed Philadelphia, so now did the murders shame Carthage and Illinois. One paper declared that the conduct of the Carthage mobsters was "a disgrace to their town and to the State,"⁴⁴ while another claimed that

³⁹*St. Clair Banner* (Belleville, Ill.), 2 July 1844, p. 1.

⁴⁰For particulars on Thomas Sharp's part in the killing and his later trial and acquittal, see Oaks and Hill, *Carthage Conspiracy*.

⁴¹*Warsaw (Ill.) Signal*, 10 July 1844, p. 2.

⁴²*Albany Evening Journal*, 9 July 1844, p. 2.

⁴³*Illinois State Gazette* (Shawneetown), 8 August 1844, p. 3.

⁴⁴*Morning Courier* (Louisville), 8 July 1844, p. 3.

"the persecutors of Mormonism in Illinois [had committed an act] . . . that would disgrace even savage life."⁴⁵

Indeed, the "disgrace of such an incident" was acknowledged not only as a blot on Illinois in particular but on the nation at large. As the *Pittsfield* (Massachusetts) *Sun* sadly commented,

Whatever may be thought of Mormonism, every friend of order and of justice must condemn this outrage. The law may be too weak to reach the offenders—for we live in the midst of lawless aggression—but these scenes reflect upon the country disgrace of a deeper dye than all the monstrosities and absurdities that even Rumor, with her power of exaggeration, has coupled with Nauvoo.⁴⁶

Such lamentations were followed by assertions that acts of lawlessness such as the Carthage violence endangered the country's freedom. Prefacing an account of the Smiths' murder, for instance, the *Morning Register* of New Bedford, Massachusetts, wrote:

Scenes of anarchy, and confusion and bloodshed are being enacted in our country, which may well cause every friend of order and the country's laws and institutions, to ask, what are we coming to? The spirit of lawlessness and violence which predominate in some sections of the land must be put down—must be subdued, or we may bid farewell to freedom of opinion and of speech.⁴⁷

An article entitled "The Progress of Mob Law" in the *Pittsburgh Morning Post* declared:

The murder of Joe Smith and his brother Hiram, is another fearful evidence of the rapid progress that mob law is making in our country,

⁴⁵*Rochester* (N.Y.) *Republican*, 23 July 1844, p. 4.

⁴⁶*Pittsfield* (Mass.) *Sun*, 11 July 1844, p. 3. Americans were aware that reports of such violence as the Carthage murders and the Philadelphia riots would spread abroad, and they were not happy with the picture painted of the United States. On 23 August, Boston's *Daily Evening Transcript* printed English comment on the violence under title "What They Say Of Us." The article, with the Boston editor's introduction, follows and shows that condemnation of these events extended past national boundaries:

Americans always exhibit great sensitiveness as to the opinions entertained of them abroad. The late riots in this country have afforded a fertile theme for European comment, and some of their remarks are not at all flattering or calculated to increase our national pride. The following which we copy from the *Liverpool Mercury* of August 3d, though brief is very expressive:

"*American Riots.* The scenes which have taken place in Pennsylvania and Illinois would have disgraced a nation of savages. We question whether even amongst the aboriginal natives of the continent of America, distinguished as they have been for wild and pitiless ferocity, and utter disregard of human suffering, any record can be found more sanguinary than the riots at Philadelphia, or the massacre of the Mormon leader and his brother, in the prison at Carthage. For the particulars of these events, so shocking to humanity, so disgraceful to America, and so discouraging to the friends of democratic institutions we must refer to our compendium."

⁴⁷*Morning Register* (New Bedford, Mass.), 10 July 1844, p. 1.

and will create alarming forebodings for the permanency of the internal safety of the country, if the strong arm of the civil authorities is not raised to protect citizens of every shade of opinion. That provision of the constitution which purports to grant permission to all to worship God according to the dictates of their own consciences is becoming a dead letter; the religious freedom of which we boast will soon be trampled under the feet of the mob, whose brutal passions can only be appeased by the destruction of property and the spilling of blood.⁴⁸

As these news reports indicate, the Carthage mob actions were seen as part of a national trend of lawlessness. However relieved some Americans may have been by the end of Joseph Smith, sacrificing the rule of law and the principle of social order was too high a price to pay for the death of one man.

In a time of violence and threatened anarchy, both Mormons and Americans faced an uncertain future. Nationally, the murder of Joseph and Hyrum was seen as another manifestation of mob rule and condemned because of its fearful implications. To Americans, the Carthage mob represented a loss of security and order. Occurring when it did, amid the national civil upheaval of the mid-1800s, the killing of the Prophet and his brother added fuel to the already blazing issue of mob violence.

The press could not overlook the slaying, regardless of its feelings about Joseph Smith and his doctrines. Principles of social order were more important than religious persuasions; law and due process were, in the American mind, more important than likes or dislikes. No mob, anti-Catholic or anti-Mormon, could be justified.

⁴⁸*Pittsburgh Morning Post*, 8 July 1844, p. 2. The fear of mob rule is apparent in much of the treatment of the murders of Joseph and Hyrum Smith. A few of the articles which linked condemnation of the murders with concern for mob rule are found in the following: *Cincinnati Gazette*, 8 July 1844, p. 2; ["Affairs in Philadelphia—The Morals of Pennsylvania and Illinois"]; *Indiana State Sentinel*, 11 July 1844, p. 2; the *Sun* (Baltimore), 12 July 1844, p. 2 [also an excellent article entitled "The Illinois Outrage"]; *North American and Daily Advertiser* (Philadelphia), 12 July 1844, p. 1; *Weekly American Eagle* (Memphis, Tenn.), 12 July 1844, p. 2; *National Intelligencer* (Washington, D.C.), 13 July 1844, p. 3; *Lee County Democrat*, 13 July 1844, p. 2; *North Carolinian*, 13 July 1844, p. 3; *Pittsburgh Morning Post*, 13 July 1844, p. 2 [entitled "Mobism"]; *Boston Post*, 16 July 1844, p. 2; *Rochester Republican*, 16 July 1844, p. 4; *Charleston Mercury*, 16 July 1844, p. 2; *New-Hampshire Sentinel*, 17 July 1844, p. 3; *Fayetteville (N.C.) Observer*, 17 July 1844, p. 3; *Knoxville (Tenn.) Register*, 17 July 1844, p. 2; *Public Ledger* (Philadelphia), 18 July 1844, p. 2; *Daily Argus* (Portland, Maine), 19 July 1844, p. 2 [article linking Philadelphia and Nauvoo violence, entitled "The Mob Spirit"]; *Rhode Island Country Journal and Independent Inquirer* (Providence), 19 July 1844, p. 1; *Springfield Republican* (Mass.), 20 July 1844, p. 1; *Daily Ohio State Journal* (Columbus), 23 July 1844, p. 1; *Kanawha Republican* (Charleston, Va.), 23 July 1844, p. 2; *Tioga Eagle* (Wellsborough, Pa.), 24 July 1844, p. 2; *Winnebago Observer* (Georgetown, S.C.), 27 July 1844, p. 4; *National Intelligencer* (Washington, D.C.), 30 July 1844, p. 3; *American Democrat* (Macon, Ga.), 7 August 1844, p. 1; *Richmond (Ind.) Palladium*, 9 August 1844, p. 3; *Evening Post* (New York), 14 August 1844, p. 1; and the *Kenebec Journal* (Augusta, Maine), 23 August 1844, p. 4 [excellent article portraying the general fear of mob law].