Arizona’s Secret History: When Powerful Mormons Went Separate Ways

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In his 2004 book, *Turnaround*, Mitt Romney insists that despite emigrating to Mexico in 1884, “my great-grandfather [Miles Park Romney] never lost his love of country.” Romney, like other Mormons, sees his forebears as patriots despite persecution. The *New York Times* columnist David Brooks takes Romney’s ancestor veneration a notch further, arguing that Miles Romney’s experience of persecution—like that of all Mormons, as well as Jews—gave Mitt Romney “tenacious drive.”

Half-truth, meet your other half. To understand Mitt’s great-grandfather’s experiences and how they shaped Mitt, we need to look at Miles Romney’s milieu, something David Brooks hasn’t done. Was Miles Romney a patriot? Perhaps. To make that judgment without context, however, is to miss a more interesting story. That story concerns not just Miles Romney, but a whole bevy of Mormon politicos. Four families—the Romneys, the Udalls, the Flakes, and the Pearces, all prominent in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS)—have produced dynamos for both major parties. Their divergence, and perhaps their dynamism, can be tracked to the strange and bloody cauldron of frontier Arizona.

Let’s run down the list of politicians from those four families. George Romney was governor of Michigan and once ran for president. His son, Mitt, was governor of Massachusetts and is now running for president.

Levi Udall was the liberal chief justice of the Arizona Supreme Court. One of Levi’s sons, Morris, became a U.S. congressman and ran for president. Another son, Stewart, served as Secretary of Interior. Morris’s son Mark, in turn, is a U.S. senator from Colorado. Stewart’s son Tom is a U.S. senator from New Mexico.

Jeff Flake, a U.S. congressman, is the frontrunner for a U.S. Senate seat in Arizona. His uncle, Jake, who died in 2008, was speaker of the Arizona House and a powerful state senator.

For good measure, we can add Russell Pearce, former president of the Arizona Senate (until his recent recall) and author of Senate Bill 1070, the anti-immigrant measure that sparked national outrage by making Hispanics targets for racial profiling. Though Pearce is not from a powerful family, he is the great-grandson of James Pearce, founder of the Mormon town of Taylor, Arizona. Pearce’s brother, Lester, also served in the state legislature and is now a justice of the peace. (Full disclosure: in 2009, he rightly fined me for a speeding ticket.)

The Romneys, Udalls, Flakes, and Pearces gathered in Apache County, Arizona, in the 1870s, when Brigham Young sought to open a corridor to Mexico. Miles Romney (progenitor of George and Mitt) and David Udall (progenitor of Levi, Morris, Stewart, Tom, and Mark) settled in St. Johns. Udall became a bishop and Romney his “first counselor.” William Flake (progenitor of Jeff and Jake) settled nearby at a socialist colony called Sunset, but soon found it full of “queer

unsociable people.” When 38 converted families from the Deep South arrived in Sunset, Flake—himself a Southerner—decided to move his family and the newcomers a few dozen miles away to a place called Snowflake. The name commemorated both Flake and the fugitive LDS apostle who helped him choose a townsite, polygamist Erastus Snow. James Pearce settled downstream from Flake at a place called Taylor, named for the then LDS president and “chief revelator” (according to Mormon doctrine, God reveals truths and prophecies to LDS presidents as to prophets of old).

Though the socialist framework of the early colonies soon broke down, the colonists foresaw prosperity. They had arable land, good grass, good sheep, and sturdy Utah cows. Their small dams washed out repeatedly, but the church helped them rebuild. They also had a rail line after the Atlantic & Pacific pushed through Arizona. By 1884, Mormon settlers even had a newspaper, the *Orion Era*. Miles Romney served as editor. His son, Gaskell—Mitt’s grandfather—helped set type.

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A Theater of Conflict

If the path forward for Romney and his fellow colonists was not radiant, it was at least visible. Trouble, however, was ever afoot. New Mexican sheepherders—who had settled Apache County in the 1860s—contested the range,

sometimes violently. Often, they ran Mormon stock off free range. In one case, New Mexicans in St. Johns attacked a group of armed Mormons who had come to see a bullfight. After several men were hit, an LDS elder stepped into the middle of the battle, waving his hands and yelling “for God’s sake, quit firing!” A bullet to the head killed him instantly. A bullet hit Miles Romney’s house in the same fray.

In another altercation, a New Mexican gave a severe beating to one of Romney’s sons, whom he blamed for an earlier attack on his own son. In a separate incident, a man struck Miles Romney so hard on the head that he fell insensible and nearly died. In still another case, a Mormon man cut “underslopes”—cattle marks—into the ears of a New Mexican accused of horse theft. At about the same time, New Mexicans and Mormons squared off for a turf war to claim town lots. Because settlers claimed lots via possession and paltry improvement rather than purchase, conflicts abounded. Only with great exertions did calmer minds prevent war.

The way Arizona Mormons remember their history, they were victims. They endured persecution and prevailed. From another perspective, they were aggressors. According to Jesse Smith, president of the collection of LDS congregations known as the Eastern Arizona Stake of Zion, “the blood of Cain” ran in New Mexican veins. Mormons believed that God had “marked” Cain by giving him dark skin after he killed his brother Abel. Like other white Americans, they likewise believed that God had cursed Ham’s progeny—starting with Canaan—with dark skin and perpetual servitude after Ham sinned against his father, Noah. Being dark-skinned people, Smith reasoned, New Mexicans must have descended not solely from Europeans and “Lamanites” (the Book of Mormon’s term for American Indians) but also from the accursed peoples of Africa.

“If we do not settle these places,” continued Smith, “someone else will … The Mexicans will come in here and get fat without the blessings of God.” Apostle Wilford Woodruff seconded Smith’s instruction, telling settlers to avoid interactions with “Jews, Mexicans, and Gentiles” by claiming “all the desireable places as fast as the brethren come … I do not intend to let daylight, dark night or grass grow under my feet to stop me trying to do my duty . . . bringing the House of Israel into the Kingdom of God.” Miles Romney echoed these sentiments in letters to the *Deseret News* of Salt Lake. There he displayed his own prejudice, writing that “but few years will elapse before a large and prosperous city will take the place of the ugly, ungainly God-forsaken Mexican town [St. Johns] that now almost gives a man who has any taste for the observance of any rule of architecture the ‘horrors.'” When New Mexicans and Jews proved bent on contesting Mormon claims, Romney journeyed to Salt Lake City to request more colonists. He succeeded. The church sent 200 more families to Apache County, giving Mormons a numerical majority and helping them take control of county government in 1886.

Fig. 2. William Flake here appears in prison garb during his six-month sentence at the Yuma Territorial Prison for illegal cohabitation (polygamy). Photograph courtesy of the Yuma Territorial Prison State Historic Park, Yuma, Arizona.

Mormons, then, had their own Manifest Destiny. In earlier decades, they had imagined their vast domain—"Deseret," which stretched north to Idaho, west to the Pacific, and south to Arizona—as a separate nation altogether. By the early 1880s, their ambitions had diminished. By then, they imagined only a religious domain, a kingdom of righteousness. No longer did they imagine a counter-nation, a nation of God amid godlessness, but they still sought social and economic separation.

In Apache County, Mormons continued toward that goal, instructing the faithful to avoid mixing with "gentiles" (non-Mormons) or allowing their daughters to work for them. In 1884, however, they met a new threat: the Aztec Land and Cattle Company, a giant operation created by powerful investors from New York and New England, including two former Massachusetts governors. The Aztec commanded a million acres, imported 32,000 cows, and hired Texas cowboys to run them. Like New Mexicans, the cowboys drove Mormon sheepherders off the range. They jumped Mormon claims. They stole Mormon stock. They pistol whipped Mormon men and threatened to kill them.

From the cowboys' perspective, this was a justifiable defense of the Aztec's range. Having bought railroad land, Aztec had the right to make additional claims within a 10-mile-wide strip of federal "lieu" land where Mormons were settled. (Because settlers had already claimed a few tracts within the 40-mile-wide strip that Congress promised to the railroad in 1872, Congress held back an additional strip, the lieu land, from which the railroad could select parcels as compensation for those taken.) When Mormons arrived, they had assumed that the railroad would not be extended through Arizona and the land rights would fall to them. They continued to believe the land was theirs after

the railroad did go through, reasoning that the Aztec—though it had bought the railroad's land—could make no claim to specific tracts in the lieu lands until Congress authorized a survey. Realizing that Mormons had taken parcels with good water and grass, however, the Aztec sought to evict them. Settlers, contended the Aztec, had no right to take up homesteads until the Aztec had made its selections.

Mormons and Aztec managers—together with New Mexicans and Texas cowboys—were participants in a broader dynamic. Throughout the West, corporations struggled against smallholders for control of resources and land. Smallholders also struggled against other smallholders. Sometimes, indeed, smallholders teamed up with corporations to dispossess other smallholders, much as Texas cowboys teamed up with the Aztec to dispossess Mormons. From another perspective, however, the battle between the Aztec and Mormons was a battle between powerful corporations. Until the Edmunds-Tucker Act of 1887 dissolved the church as a corporation, the church functioned much like a holding company. Mormons worked on behalf of other Mormons. They worked, moreover, on behalf of a church that sought resources and land for its own ends.

Fig. 3. Commodore Perry Owens was a practiced gunman, as this photograph suggests. With support from Mormons in the western part of Apache County, Owens was elected sheriff in 1886. Along with deputies, spies, and vigilantes, he drove out or killed at least two dozen Apache County men, and probably many more. Photograph courtesy of the Arizona Historical Society, Tucson, Arizona.

Elsewhere in the rural West evolved a similar dynamic. In Kansas and New Mexico, local factions assassinated the political leaders of competing factions. Often the battle was simply over where to locate a county seat. In Texas, factions composed of extended kin prosecuted outright

war—euphemistically called feuds—against enemies. Battles sometimes pitted former Unionists against former Confederates, though the underlying contest often involved access to range and to water. The most famous of the range wars occurred in Johnson County, Wyoming, in 1892, when a cabal of powerful ranchers hired several dozen Texans to attack smallholders accused of rustling. After assassinating one of the smallholders' leaders, the assassins found themselves under the guns of a posse. Only the Army's intervention saved them from slaughter.

The West's peculiar pattern of conflict shaped Mormons every bit as much as it shaped others. That is not to say that those caught up in it fully understood it. To Mormons, cowboys were not mere players in a vast Western drama; they were criminals. Such judgment was not altogether wrong.

Fig. 4.Jesse N. Smith was the president of the Eastern Arizona Stake who lined up Mormons in the western part of Apache County to vote for Commodore Perry Owens in 1886. Photograph courtesy of the Special Collections Department, J. Willard Marriott Library, University of Utah, Salt Lake City, Utah.

Whereas Mormons were zealous in faith, cowboys were merely zealous; they transformed company policy into persecution. Two cowboys in particular plagued the Mormon settlers of Snowflake, Taylor, and nearby towns: John Payne and Andy Cooper. After Payne, at the behest of the Aztec, threatened to kill James Pearce and demanded that he and his fellow Mormons abandon their homes, Pearce went to Jesse Smith and asked permission to murder his nemesis. Smith told him to stay his hand. Payne and other "outlaws," predicted Smith, would soon be out of the way.

Adding to Mormon troubles was a political faction—comprised of Jewish

merchants, ranchers, and New Mexican sheepherders ("jackals, vultures, and vampires" cursed one Mormon settler)—that worked tirelessly against the polygamous newcomers. The Saints, it seemed, sought to take over the county; politics was a way to block them. The faction's mouthpiece was the St. Johns *Herald*. In addition to assailing Mormons for being "un-American"—particularly after they flew the American flag at half-mast on July 4, 1885, to protest U.S. anti-bigamy laws—the *Herald* called on readers to lynch Mormon leaders. It singled out David Udall and Miles Romney in particular, calling the latter "a mass of putrid pus and rotten goose pimples; a skunk, with the face of a baboon, the character of a louse, the breath of a buzzard and the record of a perjurer and common drunkard."

Mountain Meadows and Its Legacy

Not all anti-Mormon feeling came unbidden. What brought matters in Apache County to a boil were new revelations about the Mountain Meadows Massacre of 1857, when Mormons had slaughtered the Fancher-Baker party, a group of some 120 men, women and children en route from Arkansas to California.

When the U.S. government finally gathered enough evidence to bring charges, it uncovered a story of fanaticism, hysteria, and premeditation. When President James Buchanan had sent troops to impose federal rule over Utah some eighteen years earlier, Brigham Young had prepared for war. The Fancher-Baker party was making its way through Utah at precisely the wrong moment. Rumors spread that members of the party had called Mormon women whores; that they had poisoned a well; that they had participated in the murder of LDS apostle Parley Pratt, or perhaps even Joseph Smith himself.

Upon receiving instructions from Brigham Young to close emigrant routes, the militia in Cedar City planned an assault. Dressed as Indians—and with Paiute allies in tow—some fifty to sixty Mormons laid siege to the emigrants as they passed through a grassy pass called Mountain Meadows. For several days, the emigrants held out, causing Mormons to resort to a ploy. If the emigrants surrendered, promised Mormons, they would be granted safe passage to Cedar City. The emigrants agreed. Instead of safe passage, the attackers separated men from women, marched them into the open, and murdered them. If any escaped, reasoned leaders, avengers would kill Mormons. The attackers spared only children under eight, who were deemed too young to have sinned.

Though whisperings of the massacre sparked outrage, Mormons stymied any investigation. Brigham Young, indeed, made it clear that he wanted Mormon jurors—should there be a trial—to exonerate the accused. As governor of Utah Territory, it was his duty to investigate the crime. He did the reverse: he helped cover it up.

The wheels of justice, however, made slow revolutions. In 1875, when the government initiated prosecutions, some of those spared from the massacre—they were now in their 20s—testified to what they had witnessed (still other

survivors mysteriously disappeared). The trial, writes historian Will Bagley, created “a public fascination unequaled until the Lindbergh kidnapping case and exceeded only by the O.J. Simpson trial of the 1990s.” In Arizona—where Mormons were beginning to colonize—the trials stirred anger.

Though Miles Romney had no familial ties to the killers, other colonists did. James Pearce, then 18, had been among them. According to some records, he was struck ill on the day of the massacre and stayed in camp. Other records tell a different story. When young Pearce had tried to save one of the victims, his own father, Harrison Pearce, shot James in the face. He carried the scar the rest of his life. In Mormon councils prior to—and after—the massacre, Harrison Pearce had been among the most zealous for mass murder.

Another of the killers, Samuel Dennis White, was father to William Flake’s first bride, Lucy Hannah White. Flake himself probably passed through the carnage immediately after the massacre, when he and other Mormons heeded Brigham Young’s call to return from outposts in California. It is also possible that Flake, a hale and hardy frontiersman of 18, had come earlier to prepare the way for his fellow Californians, allowing him to participate in the slaughter. All we know is that in 1857, when he met his wife, he was a “soldier” posted in Cedar City. The only man convicted, however—the scapegoat, who was said to have given the orders—was John Doyle Lee, whose granddaughter married David Udall’s son, Levi. In 1877, Lee faced a firing squad. No further prosecutions ensued.

What did ensue were attacks on polygamy, particularly in Arizona. Within a few years of the trials, the federal government made Mormons swear oaths to the laws of the U.S.—including those banning polygamy—and barred them from voting or holding office if they refused. The government also prosecuted polygamists directly. It charged Miles Romney with both illegal cohabitation (he had five wives and thirty children in his long life) and with filing false documents to gain a homestead. David Udall, who had but two wives, was arrested for having falsely born witness to Romney’s claim. William Flake—who also had two wives—was likewise caught up in the purge. In 1884, a U.S. marshal escorted him to trial for polygamy.

Convictions soon followed. Udall was sent to a federal prison in Detroit. Unable to pay bail, meanwhile, Romney and Flake had sought loans. Flake had borrowed $2000 to pay for both Romney and himself. When Romney fled to Mexico, he left Flake to pay the debt. In Chihuahua, Romney helped establish refuges for polygamists.

Fig. 5. Tom Tucker (left) and Jeff “Billy” Wilson—cowboys who worked for the Aztec Land & Cattle Company—were sucked into the vortex of 1886-87, when the People’s Party took control of Apache County. In 1888, one of Commodore Perry Owens’s deputies arrested Wilson, the Aztec cook, and turned him and two others over to a lynch mob. Tucker, who had been among those who sought to drive out Mormons, was shot in the chest in a Yavapai County range war in 1887. Among those who fired on him was James Tewksbury, who, two years earlier, had served as a spy for William Flake and the Apache County Stock Growers Association. Tucker survived and later converted to Mormonism. Photograph courtesy of the Arizona Historical Society, Tucson, Arizona.

Past Meets Present

“In no other section of the country,” averred Miles Romney’s biographer in 1948, “was the anti-Mormon hatred more pronounced than in Apache County, Arizona, and certainly no Latter-Day Saints since the days of Missouri and Nauvoo have been the objects of greater indignities and persecution for righteousness sake.” From the Mormon point of view, they suffered, survived, and remained patriots. The *Herald’s* charge that Mormons were “un-American,” however, was not far off the mark.

On the one hand, Mormon colonists jubilantly celebrated each Fourth of July. Independence, they reckoned, was part of God’s plan. Without kings and state churches to block the way, true Christianity—Mormon Christianity—could be restored. On the other hand, Mormons thundered against Americans. Apostle Woodruff—who as LDS president would guide his people toward moderation and reform—told his Arizona flock in the 1880s that “Zion will rise and Babylon will fall … The Lord will sweep the wicked from the face of the earth. There is not a crime that could be named but what this nation is guilty of.” Another Arizona leader urged the flock to redouble its missionary efforts among Indians, who would become allies in the coming war against persecutors. Brigham

Young himself had said Indians would be “the battle-ax of the Lord.” Erastus Snow—apostle, polygamist, and fugitive hiding in Arizona—told Mormons that “peace has departed forever from this land.” Civil War veterans, he preached, had “abandoned themselves to the lowest acts and walks of life.” Americans conceived during the Civil War, he added, “have this disposition born in them and they delight in blood.”

Fig. 6. This poster advertises the 1950s re-release of Paramount Pictures’ To the Last Man, a film based on a novel of the same title by Zane Grey. The vignettes epitomize the cultural meanings that viewers associated with Arizona. Courtesy of Paramount Studios, Hollywood, California and the Ohio Historical Society, Columbus, Ohio.

To Arizona colonists, both Woodruff and Snow—fugitive polygamists who moved from town to town to stay away from the marshals—were the holiest of men. Their words carried weight. If Mormons “never lost their love of country,” then, they came very close. Though Mormons saw themselves as sacred defenders of the Constitution—and especially the First Amendment, insofar as they believed that it sanctioned polygamy—they simultaneously prophesied that the U.S. would disintegrate in civil war.

Throughout the twentieth century, many right-wing Mormons remained convinced that the Constitution was under siege. Joseph Smith himself once prophesied that the Constitution would one day hang by a thread, only to be saved by Mormons. The Mormon leader who carried that torch into the modern era was W. Cleon Skousen, the Salt Lake police chief and prolific author who viewed President Eisenhower as a communist and who believed Social Security—and the whole welfare state apparatus—to be unconstitutional. Communists, claimed Skousen, were attacking the nation from within and without. A one-world-order

was in the making, claimed Skousen, and it was the duty of Mormons to stop it.

Skousen's teachings soon worked their way into LDS congregations, causing rank-and-file Mormons to believe they were endorsed by the church. The church did little to disabuse them of the notion. Two church presidents—David O. McKay and Ezra Taft Benson—befriended Skousen and admired his teachings. Benson, indeed, suggested that no liberal could be a good Mormon. Not until 1979, after McKay died, did church officials notify bishops that they should cease to schedule meetings of Skousen's John Birch-like organization, the Freeman Society, in LDS churches.

Skousen's righteous anger—one might call it "Skousenoia"—continues to animate Mormon pundits like Glenn Beck as well as politicians like Russell Pearce. Though not as outspoken about Skousen as his brother, Lester, Pearce admits that Skousen influenced him. Skousen himself, interestingly, was the great-grandson of another polygamous Mormon who colonized northeastern Arizona, James Niels Skousen, who, after serving a short term for unlawful cohabitation, avoided subsequent prosecution by sending one of his wives and her children to Mexico.

Despite their parallel family histories, Skousen's righteous anger does not animate Mitt Romney, else he would garner more Tea Party votes. Nor does it animate the Udalls (or at least the line descended from David Udall's first wife, who became the family's liberals). The trajectory of the Romneys and Udalls—no less than that of Skousen—can be traced partly to their forebears.

The Udall Way

In 1885, President Grover Cleveland, eager to win Mormon votes, gave David Udall a pardon. Once back in Apache County, Udall—who had urged his flock to "carefully avoid acts of violence"—took steps to resolve tensions with his Jewish and New Mexican neighbors, including adjudicating fair claims to the waters of the Little Colorado River. Moreover, he vehemently opposed lynching, sympathized with Mexicans who felt displaced, and made friends with one of the New Mexican leaders, Don Lorenzo Hubbell. Udall also seems to have endorsed the political party created in St. Johns in 1886 to bring rapprochement between Mormons and their enemies.

It's difficult to say for certain that Udall's pacific gestures shaped the politics of his descendants, but they may well have done so. His son, Levi, and his grandsons, Morris and Stewart, remained loyal to the Democratic Party into the Civil Rights era and beyond. It was Levi Udall who wrote the majority opinion for the Arizona Supreme Court when, in 1948, it belatedly guaranteed American Indians the right to vote even if they lived on reservations. Morris and Stewart, while attending the University of Arizona a year earlier, invited a black student to dine with them, thus integrating the university cafeteria and defusing racial tensions. Morris, indeed, petitioned the Army to integrate its forces even before Harry Truman ordered it to do so. Tom and Mark have

followed their fathers' examples.

Fig. 7. In downtown Snowflake, Arizona, one will find this larger-than-life statue depicting William and Lucy Flake (the latter holding an infant). Not shown in the photo is the figure of Apostle Erastus Snow. On a frieze behind the three-dimensional figures appear Jesse Smith (who became president of the Eastern Arizona Stake), Ira Hinckley (Snow's traveling companion and grandfather to a modern LDS president), and church historian L. John Nuttall. Photograph courtesy of the author.

There are, of course, other explanations for Udall liberalism. Most Mormons were Democrats in the 1880s; perhaps the Udalls merely remained constant while others veered right. Perhaps, too, the Udalls took seriously their mission to convert New Mexicans. Several St. Johns Mormons had learned Spanish, in part so they could proselytize. Joseph Smith had prophesied that Mormons would someday convert the Western hemisphere. To fulfill that prophecy required Mormons in eastern Apache County to come to terms with racial antagonism. Mormons in the western part of the county, by contrast, separated themselves from New Mexicans almost entirely (William Flake, indeed, had required New Mexican farm hands to vacate Snowflake when Mormons took possession; he replaced them with impoverished converts). Neither prophecy nor pragmatism pushed them toward rapprochement.

Whatever its source, the Udall trajectory is best exhibited in Stewart Udall's final book, *The Forgotten Founders: Rethinking the History of the Old West* (2002). In that book, Udall, who died in 2010, derided the idea of the "Wild West," a West "won" by gunfighters, prospectors, and Army troops. In place of that mythic West, Udall spoke of a West created by God-fearing folk with roots in the soil. Violence, claimed Udall, did not win the West; it retarded development. Even the Indian wars, claimed Udall, were really just massacres. To call them "wars" is to give them legitimacy. They were not just brutal but unnecessary. What enabled Americans—as well as Mexicans and Indians—to build up the West was hard work and a strong sense of community. In particular, Udall

praised the hard work and sense of community of his progenitor, David Udall, and those who settled in Apache County.

Stewart Udall's own history shows those same virtues. He is arguably among the most important secretaries of Interior of the twentieth century, in large part because he sought to preserve federal lands for a national community, not just exploit them for private interests. History taught Stewart and his brother, Morris—who championed environmentalist causes and worked tirelessly to protect Arizona's scenic treasures—to love not only moderation but also to love the land that their ancestors settled. "Like the eagle that selects the highest tree in which to build her nest," Apostle Snow had told Arizona settlers, "so have the Saints come to the highest mountains in which to make their homes." To the Udalls, those mountains became sacred.

Fig. 8. David K. Udall and his first wife, Eliza Stewart Udall, and their children, photograph circa 1890. Courtesy of the University of Arizona Libraries, Special Collections, Tucson, Arizona.

Stewart Udall's ideas about how the West was built ("won" is too sanguine) and how to protect it, however, have not filtered into the Arizona legislature, where conservative Mormons and their allies want states to control federal lands and open them to commercial uses. Conservatives, moreover—with Russell Pearce at the helm—have voted repeatedly against gun control. In recent years, Arizona has minimized licensing and registration requirements, allowed individuals to carry guns into bars, and—at the direction of Pearce, who was then Senate president—endorsed the right of legislators to carry arms in the capitol building.

Members of the Flake family have sung for the same choir. Jake Flake—who boasted of his ranching background—championed conservative causes in the legislature for decades. Jeff Flake, similarly, as a U.S. congressman defends gun rights, voted for the Iraq War, and brags that he got his politics from his grandfather, James Madison Flake, who "was a genuine cowboy." Though he made a name for himself as a maverick in Congress by touting the normalization of

relations with Cuba, he agrees with Russell Pearce on immigration. Having once supported a guest worker policy, he now supports sealing the border and mass deportations. To understand that sensibility, we might review how and why the path of William Flake departed from that of David Udall—and for that matter, Miles Romney—in the 1880s.

A Battle among Mormons

Unlike Romney, William Flake did not flee to Mexico in 1884. Summer Howard—who had served as a prosecutor in the Mountain Meadows case—convicted Flake and sentenced him to a short term in the Yuma Territorial Prison. In his journal, Flake prophesied that Howard would soon be "under the sod." Six months later, Flake returned to his wives in Snowflake—he remained married to both—where a band played "Dixie" to greet him. He also returned to freighting throughout central Arizona, desperate to pay the money he owed creditors for land purchases, for his bail, and for the bail of Miles Romney. Rather than seeking rapprochement with old enemies, he resorted to force.

With Flake's approval, a group of Mormons and their political allies met at Winslow in 1886 to form the "People's Party," a name meant to evoke not the party of socialistic Populists (who formed their own People's Party in 1891) but rather to evoke the all-Mormon party that had dominated Utah politics. The name also evoked the "People's Party" that had created the San Francisco vigilance committees of the 1850s. Apache County's People's Party put forth a bounty hunter employed by Flake—a man named Commodore Perry Owens—for sheriff. Owens's supporters promised he would drive out malicious cowboys, arrest New Mexican "criminals," and bring corrupt county officials (Jews and New Mexicans) to justice.

Although Mormons who, like Flake and Pearce, resided in the western part of the county, endorsed Owens, those in the eastern half (where the Udalls resided) took a different tack. The "Winslow Convention," lamented John Milner, new editor of the *Orion Era*, had been "captured by Anti-Mexicans." To combat intolerance, Milner joined forces with New Mexicans and cowboy "criminals" (including Ebin Stanley, brother-in-law to Ike Clanton, whose brother Billy was gunned down at the OK Corral in Tombstone in 1881) to create the Equal Rights Party.

Milner's party drew up a platform that denounced race prejudice, soft-pedaled the crime issue, and nominated Don Lorenzo Hubbell—son of a New Mexican mother, proprietor of the famous Hubbell Trading Post, and in earlier years a bitter enemy to Mormons—for sheriff. Hubbell, in turn, told New Mexicans that People's Party supporters—if victorious—planned to set up vigilante committees to lynch them. He was not far wrong. A mysterious group of "cattlemen"—likely members of the Apache County Stock Growers Association, an organization that included William and James Flake and several other Mormons and non-Mormons—had purchased the St. Johns *Herald* and used it to promote vigilantism. Rather than lynch Mormons, the *Herald's*new editor inveighed that "good" men must lynch thieves.

The split between the factions was deep and bitter. The *Herald*—in full-throated support of the People's Party—railed against "Sister Juan y Baca Milner" and his "mongrel" coalition (the Bacas were a powerful New Mexican family who supported Equal Rights). "If Sister Milner should lay eggs and the Equalites act as incubator," wrote Barry Matthews, the *Herald's* pro-Mormon editor, "will some student of natural history tell us what name to give the birds. Judging from the smell of the nest we should say they would be buzzards or winged skunks." Thanks to overwhelming Mormon support in the western part of the county, Commodore Owens prevailed by 91 votes out of 909 cast.

With the help of spies, deputies, and vigilantes, both Mormon and gentile, Owens made good on the promises of those who backed him. James Pearce's cowboy persecutor, John Payne, was the first to die. Among those who fired on him in the so-called "Pleasant Valley War" was James Tewksbury, who had served as a spy for William Flake and his fellow Snowflake Mormons. Stake President Jesse Smith's earlier prediction that Payne would soon be out of the way proved correct. A few weeks later, in one of the most famous gunfights in Arizona history, Commodore Perry Owens killed—or murdered, depending on how one reads the event—the other arch nemesis of Snowflake Mormons, Andy Cooper, along with his 15-year old brother and another cowboy. One of Owens's deputies subsequently killed Ike Clanton, who had escaped Wyatt Earp's wrath in Tombstone in 1881. In 1888, another of Owens's deputies handed over three more cowboys—probably all innocent—to a lynch mob.

Supporters of the People's Party viewed the killings as providential. "God heard our prayers," wrote Lucy Flake, one of William Flake's wives. "Our enemies 'fell into the pits they had digged for us' as the Lord promised they would." She estimated that Commodore Owens had killed eight to ten outlaws. Another Mormon put the figure at thirty-eight, adding that Owens had frightened many more out of the county. "The Lord said if the Saints do right He will fight our battles," wrote a Mormon settler on New Years Day 1888. "It is said," he added, "that New York, Boston & other places would be destroyed in the near future." In 1918, when Owens died, Mormons baptized him posthumously, recalling that he had been "providentially sent."

Apache County, meanwhile, quieted down. At the behest of a new church president, Mormons abandoned polygamy in 1890. Fifteen years later, the Forest Service began to regulate the range. Rustling dissipated. Lynching disappeared. And the Flakes and Pearces? Like the majority of Arizona's Mormons, many of them drifted to the right, becoming hardline Republicans.

One cannot simply reduce their conservatism to their 1880s experience. In a sense, they simply followed the trajectory of most Mormons. In the early twentieth century, the church repudiated socialism, worked closely with Mormon business leaders, and urged lay Mormons to be patriots. The course toward conservatism was part of the church's quest to become mainstream. The gales of the 1880s, however, surely pushed Arizona Mormons—at least some Arizona Mormons—farther and faster to the right. In some respects, those gales continue

to blow.

Out of the fires of frontier Arizona came Mormons liberal and Mormons conservative. Obviously the Arizona experience did not wholly determine their politics, but it made an impression. It became a testing ground, a latter-day Massachusetts Bay, a religious colony that gave issue to powerful (even militant) ideologies and voices, be they anti-communist or environmentalist, anti-immigrant or pro-civil rights.

The Path of Arizona

It is ironic to hear Jeff Flake brag of his cowboy ancestry, given that his forebears' greatest persecutors in the 1880s were Texas cowboys. Until the latter arrived, recalled one settler, neither Mormons nor non-Mormons carried guns. Few Mormons, moreover, felt drawn to the cattle trade. They strove to be a farming people, even in Arizona's dry climate. When an Apache County cowboy from Massachusetts witnessed Mormons gathering stock in 1886, he wrote his sister that Mormons "knew about as much as some of you folks about what a round up is." The Flakes, however, were something of an exception among colonists, given that their progenitor—William Flake—preferred herding and loved to race horses. In ensuing decades, however, other Mormons took up ranching simply because it paid. When drought drove the Aztec out of the cattle business, indeed, Mormons leased land from their erstwhile nemesis and ran their own small herds. Mormon towns even advertised rodeos, explaining that rodeo "has always been an important form of entertainment" in the region.

It wasn't just Mormons who fancied themselves cowboys. With the railroad and then the automobile, thousands upon thousands of tourists and sun-seekers arrived in Arizona. They saw in Arizona a romanticized Wild West presented by writers like Zane Grey, the bestselling novelist in the world in the 1910s and 1920s. Grey, who owned a hunting retreat in east-central Arizona, made the state's bloody past into fodder for a long string of novels. Though Mormons deplored Grey and he—at least initially—deplored them (his first bestseller portrayed Mormon men as evil polygamists), they bought into the romance that he helped create. Good men, in Grey's telling, defeated bad ones with fists, guns, or both. Civility didn't work. That was precisely the lesson that Mormons like William Flake had learned in the 1880s, when they had countenanced violence to "clean up" the county.

Countless writers and movie-makers followed Grey's lead. Arizona meanwhile attracted millions of newcomers. Most came after World War II, when the U.S. sought to become the world's policeman. Though acting out pop culture fantasies proved problematic—cowboying offered few jobs—Arizonans chose leaders who were tough guys. Barry Goldwater was one. Then it was John McCain who, some say, "never met a war he didn't like." And Joe Arpaio, Maricopa County sheriff, with his dedication to making prisons as miserable as possible. And the Flakes. And the Pearce brothers, Lester and Russell (Arpaio's sweltering tent prisons, brags Russell Pearce, were his idea). Arizonans—with Mormon support—brought

Commodore Perry Owens into the twenty-first century.

In 2011, Russell Pearce endorsed a bill to make the Colt revolver Arizona's official state gun. "Anytime you see a Western movie," explained state Sen. Ron Gould, "the revolver in John Wayne's hand is a Colt single action…. This is a historic firearm and it fits well with the story of Arizona." Gould and his supporters ignore—or don't know—that Arizona's story also involves a reaction against guns. Indeed there was a reaction against Commodore Perry Owens.

In 1888, Owens had lost his bid for re-election. "Our Territory has had enough of desperadoes as 'peace' officers, who parade about with abbreviated cannon strapped to their hips," announced yet another new editor of the St. Johns *Herald*. "The trouble with the desperado-class of officers is that they shoot whom they please, and are acquitted on the plea that their victim 'had it in for 'em,' and the shooting was in self-defense." The legislature, meanwhile—along with many towns—passed gun control laws and forbade officers to carry weapons while drinking.

Arizona did more than that. Between 1907 and 1915, it banned prizefighting, gambling, and capital punishment; reformed prisons to promote rehabilitation rather than vengeance; and extended the vote to women. Though Arizona Progressives displayed a racist streak—they imposed a literacy test to screen out non-white voters—they rejected the state's Wild West image.

Few Arizonans remember their Progressive past, when politicians and voters strove to make the state "civilized." What they choose to remember—what popular culture has told them to remember—is the Wild West. Mormons, too—especially those who came of age when Westerns dominated fiction and television—sailed with pop culture winds. Whereas once Arizona's Mormons were bitter enemies to Texas cowboys, with their gunfights, their gambling, and their whiskey, modern Mormon legislators—along with evangelicals like Gould—often oppose gun control. They espouse not only the Skousen doctrine of a Constitution under siege, but also the myth of the swaggering cowboy—the myth that gun-toting tough guys "won" the West—the myth that Stewart Udall sought to banish.

The Romney Way

If the Mormon experience in 1880s Arizona led Udalls leftward and led Flakes and Pearces rightward, the impact on the Romneys is more difficult to decipher. That may be in part because their ancestor, Miles Park Romney, fled to Mexico—then a refuge for polygamists—shortly before Apache County Mormons divided, with some choosing conciliation and others choosing vengeance. According to Mitt, his great-grandparents led "a life of toil and sacrifice, of complete devotion to a cause. They were persecuted for their religious beliefs but they went forward undaunted." Even in Mexico, Miles Romney "had an abiding loyalty to America and a deep interest in [U.S.] politics." None of that stopped Miles Romney from being "orator of the day" in Casas Grandes, Chihuahua, on March 21, 1886, when the local *jefe* raised the Mexican flag "and

the entire [Mormon] congregation rent the air with three cheers for the Mexican colors." Romney himself delivered a patriotic oration on Benito Juarez, the former president of Mexico.

Miles Romney's grandson, George—who was born in Mexico—immigrated to the U.S. with his father, Gaskell, and the rest of his family when Mexican revolutionaries drove out Mormons in the 1910s. George Romney's experiences put him on a path different from that of the Flakes and Skousens on the one hand and the Udalls on the other. As governor of Michigan (where he had been CEO of American Motors), he was a moderate Republican who assailed the LDS church for excluding blacks from the priesthood. He also instituted a state income tax. In 1964, he ran against Barry Goldwater in the Republican presidential primary, then refused to endorse Goldwater (another politician shaped by Arizona's frontier fires) after he won the nomination. With his support for civil rights, George resembled the Udalls, yet, like all good Republicans, he opposed "big government."

Mormon history explains George and Mitt Romney as much as it explains Udalls, Flakes, Skousens, and Pearces. That explanation owes less to the Arizona experience in itself than to the constant flight and mixed loyalties. Nineteenth-century Mormons loved the Constitution yet sought to separate themselves from Americans. From New York to Ohio to Missouri to Illinois to Utah to Arizona and California, to Mexico, even to Canada, nineteenth-century Mormons experienced one hegira after another. Add to that the perennial hegira of Mormon missionaries—young men (and sometimes women) who serve two-year stints throughout the world—and one begins to see a pattern.

Perpetual hegira did not necessarily give Mormons "tenacious drive," as David Brooks suggests, but—in the long run—it gave them the ability to change skins, to fit in, to be liked and to be likable, even (despite Skousenoia) to be moderate. Perpetual hegira tested their loyalties. They were loyal to Deseret, to the U.S., to Canada, to Mexico, to plural wives and plural families, and above all to their church. Having so many loyalties meant disloyalty, too. One cannot be all things to all institutions. With so many loyalties, one must learn to be—to use an appropriate pun—catholic.

Perpetual hegira finally led Mormons into the mainstream. In the late nineteenth century, the church abandoned polygamy and blood atonement (the idea that some sinners so offended God that only violent death could redeem them). Leaders sought stability rather than flight. In the early twentieth century, church leaders went further: they told lay Mormons that loyalty to country was part of being a good Mormon. Though they had sidestepped the Civil War, church leaders encouraged Mormon youths to volunteer for service in World War I. In the 1930s, pollsters found that the majority of Americans viewed Mormonism positively. The church had left behind the fiery preachings of nineteenth-century prophets like Brigham Young and Erastus Snow, who made Skousen look like a mere epigone. In 1979, indeed, the church even separated itself from Skousen himself, assuring Mormons that his doctrines were not theirs. Perhaps

one of the last battles in the war between the Skousenoia of old and the new moderation occurred when Mormon voters in Arizona recalled Russell Pearce from the state Senate in November 2011, and replaced him with a moderate Republican.

Had Gaskell Romney stayed in Arizona, Mitt Romney might well have been the moderate who ran against Pearce. If the Flakes tell us something about Mormon conservatism and the Udalls tell us something about Mormon liberalism, Mitt Romney tells us something about the greater Mormon shift from isolationism to acceptance (and the craving for acceptance). It is Mitt Romney who, in many ways, epitomizes modern Mormons: likable, mainstream (except when pushed right by Tea Partiers), ambitious, and moderately conservative.

With all that said, however, Mitt and his fellow Romneys still have a blot on their past. According to Osmer Flake, Miles Romney never did pay back the $1000 in bail that he owed William Flake. Mitt Romney may epitomize modern Mormonism, but he and his still owe some money.

Further Reading

Much of the evidence for this article came from the research I conducted while writing *Hell on the Range: A Story of Honor, Conscience, and the American West* (New Haven, Conn., 2010). For a fuller treatment of 1880s conflict in Apache and Yavapai counties, Arizona—as well as the legacy of that conflict in history and in literature—readers should consult my book. Also worth reading is Rita Ackerman, *OK Corral Postscript: The Death of Ike Clanton* (Honolulu, 2006).

Readers interested in early Mormon experiences in east-central Arizona will find two small gems: Charles S. Peterson, *Take Up Your Mission: Mormon Colonizing along the Little Colorado River, 1870-1900* (Tucson, 1973); and George S. Tanner and J. Morris Richards,*Colonization on the Little Colorado: The Joseph City Region* (Flagstaff, Ariz., 1977).

Because the LDS church directed its pioneers to keep journals and records, the primary sources on Mormon settlement are rich. Several university libraries in Utah and Arizona hold extensive collections of Mormon journals and records from 1880s Arizona. Among the most helpful to me were Joseph Fish, “History of Eastern Arizona Stake of Zion; Early Settlement of Apache County, [and] Stake Clerk’s Records & Journal, 1878-1912,” held by Arizona State Library and Public Records. Also helpful were three journals held by Brigham Young University’s Harold B. Lee Library: Lucy Hannah White Flake, “Autobiography and Diary of Lucy Hannah White Flake”; Allen Frost, “Diary of Allen Frost”; and Jesse Nathaniel Smith, “Journal,” in the Jesse N. Smith Papers.

Valuable and fascinating published memoirs and biographies by or about Arizona’s Mormon pioneers include Roberta Flake Clayton, ed., *To the Last Frontier: The Autobiography of Lucy Hannah White Flake* (reprinted 1976); Osmer Flake, *William Jordan Flake: Pioneer, Colonizer*; Eugene Flake, *James Madison Flake, November 8, 1859 – February 4, 1946: Pioneer, Leader, Missionary*

(Bountiful, Utah, 1970), 93; and Joseph West Smith, *Journal of Joseph West Smith: The Life Story of an Arizona Pioneer, 1859-1944*.

Both Miles Romney and David Udall also left journals. Though neither is available in manuscript, substantial excerpts from David Udall's journal have been published. See David King Udall, *Arizona Pioneer Mormon: David King Udall: His Story and His Family, 1851-1938* (Tucson, 1959). Like his newspaper, the *Orion Era*, Miles Romney's journal has disappeared. Even his descendant and biographer, Thomas Cottam Romney, complained that he could not gain access to the journals to write a biography. He did, however, draw on his progenitor's prolific letters to the *Deseret News*. See *Life Story of Miles P. Romney* (Independence, Mo., 1948). For a better understanding of Miles Park Romney and plural marriage, one might consult Jennifer Moulton Hansen, ed., *Letters of Catharine Cottam Romney, Plural Wife* (Champaign, Ill., 1992).

The most thorough treatment of the Mountain Meadows Massacre is Will Bagley, *Blood of the Prophets: Brigham Young and the Massacre at Mountain Meadows* (Norman, Okla., 2002). Also valuable are Juanita Brooks, *The Mountain Meadows Massacre* (Norman, 1962), and Ronald W. Walker, Richard E. Turley, Jr., and Glen M. Leonard, *Massacre at Mountain Meadows* (New York, 2008).

Good studies of the twentieth-century Mormon trajectory toward moderation, reform, and acceptance are Thomas G. Alexander, *Mormonism in Transition: A History of the Latter-Day Saints, 1890-1930* (Urbana and Chicago, 1986; reprint, 1996); and Michael D. Quinn, "The Mormon Church and the Spanish-American War: An End to Selective Pacifism," *Pacific Historical Review* 43:3 (Fall 1974), 342-366.

On the Aztec Land & Cattle Company, we have two fine books: Robert Carlock, *The Hashknife: The Early Days of the Aztec Land and Cattle Company, Limited* (Tucson, 1994); and Jim Bob Tinsley, *The Hash Knife Brand* (Gainesville, Fla., 1993).

To understand how big corporations and investors sought to dominate not just east-central Arizona, but much of the West, one must read William G. Robbins, *Colony and Empire: The Capitalist Transformation of the American West* (Lawrence, Kan.,1994). I recommend reading Robbins's book in conjunction with books that take a more considered view of Western violence, including Richard Maxwell Brown, *Strains of Violence: Historical Studies of American Violence and Vigilantism* (New York, 1975); Richard Maxwell Brown, *No Duty to Retreat: Violence and Values in American Society* (New York City, 1992); and William D. Carrigan, *The Making of a Lynching Culture: Violence and Vigilantism in Central Texas, 1836-1916* (Urbana, Ill., 2004).

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