

REVIEWS

Pomp, Circumstance, and Controversy

Richard E. Bennett, Susan Easton Black, and Donald Q. Cannon. *The Nauvoo Legion in Illinois: A History of the Mormon Militia, 1841–1846*. Norman, Okla.: The Arthur H. Clark Company, 2010. 436 pp. Acknowledgements, introduction, illustrations, tables, appendices, bibliography, index. Hardcover: \$39.95. ISBN: 978-0-87062-382-0

Reviewed by William P. MacKinnon

From its gorgeous dust jacket to its prosaic index, this valuable book provides narrative history, data compilations, and unexploited documents shedding light on one of the most unusual, controversial organizations of antebellum American military history, the short-lived Nauvoo Legion of Hancock County, Illinois. In the process, the authors add to our understanding of the violent forces that led to the 1844 assassinations of Joseph and Hyrum Smith as well as the subsequent westbound Mormon exodus from Nauvoo, then one of the largest cities in Illinois. Perhaps unwittingly, authors Richard E. Bennett, Susan Easton Black, and Donald Q. Cannon also illuminate a subject not directly addressed in their book—the Mormon military tradition that developed during the subsequent 160 years.

The authors tell the legion's story through eleven chapters bracketed by an admirable introduction and conclusion. While *The Nauvoo Legion in Illinois* is not a textbook, these three veteran professors of Brigham Young University's Department of Church History and Doctrine are masters of the classic pedagogical technique of telling students what they are going to hear, communicating the message, and then reviewing what has been said. This orderly approach to the book as a whole is mirrored in the design of the chapters, each of which opens with a series of key questions to be addressed and ends with a summary of the conclusions to be drawn from the intervening narrative. The result is a refreshing model of clarity, with little ambiguity about the authors' message. In a sense, the reader's challenge is to remain critically alert to the substantive "meat" in this historical sandwich while benefiting

from the appealing (even disarming) rhythm and flow of the book's three-part structure.

Reader alertness is indeed warranted, for *The Nauvoo Legion in Illinois* is not only the history of an interesting militia organization but is also an examination (and rebuttal) of some of the most volatile, corrosive accusations hurled at the Mormon Church during its formative, pre-Utah years. Perhaps the most important of these criticisms is an enduring claim running to the very character of both the legion and the Church whose members it protected—the notion that this militia was some sort of out-sized, rogue, un-American, all-Mormon private army answerable only to Joseph Smith, heavily populated by Danite vigilantes, and tasked with an aggressive mission of vengeance against non-Mormon tormentors in two states.

While many books with multiple authors emerge as uneven, lumpy monographs with an ambiguous “voice,” this volume works. It does so partly because of the richness of the authors' backgrounds, the long-term nature of their professional collaboration, and an up-front identification of the not-necessarily contiguous segments for which each of the three bears prime responsibility. Bennett, Black, and Cannon explain their collaboration nicely through a musical metaphor: “A single work by three authors rarely speaks with one voice. Our attempt is not to sing solo, but in three-part harmony. . . . Although we admit to variety in our interpretations of Smith and the Nauvoo Legion, we do not see discord. We believe that our differences enrich this work without creating disharmony or dissonance, and have sought to complement each other's strengths and interests” (18). The approach here, then, differs from that of the more homogenized narrative published in 2008 by another trio—Ronald W. Walker, Richard E. Turley Jr., and Glen M. Leonard: *Tragedy at Mountain Meadows* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).

To this book's first three chapters fall much of the conceptual heavy lifting to establish just what the Nauvoo Legion was and was not, its origins and mission, and the surrounding context of American society and its military tradition as both played out in Missouri and Illinois during the first fifteen years of the LDS Church's history. These chapters start by limning a portrait of the United States as a society racked by pervasive mob violence

against unpopular ethnic, racial, and religious minorities, including the Latter-day Saints of Missouri. There follows an account of the legion's establishment in 1841 driven primarily by the requirement of Mormon compliance with long-standing federal and state legal requirements that virtually all adult males enroll in a gubernatorially controlled militia and by Joseph Smith's resolve, after the searing Missouri expulsions of 1838–39, that an effective Mormon military capability was essential for self-defense in the face of feckless federal and state governments.

Thanks to John C. Bennett's draftsmanship and effective lobbying in Springfield, the Mormons obtained a state-sanctioned city charter for Nauvoo that included authorization for the Nauvoo Legion as a municipal military force (similar to those operating in Philadelphia and elsewhere) that functioned as an integral unit of the Illinois state militia. With the passage of this legislation, Illinois's governor then responded to Mormon nominations by commissioning Joseph Smith as the Nauvoo Legion's lieutenant general, its uniformed commander, and John C. Bennett, assistant president of the LDS Church, as the legion's major general and second in command. With the explosive population growth of Nauvoo fueled by an influx of European converts, the legion's size soon expanded commensurately (and proportionally, the authors argue) to almost 3,000 men—not the 5,000 troops imagined by contemporary commentators and some historians. Nonetheless, it was a force ten times the size of the Hancock County militia regiment serving the region outside the city's limits. Notwithstanding the resulting non-Mormon apprehensions that arose in Missouri and neighboring Illinois towns such as Warsaw, Carthage, and Quincy, the authors believe that Joseph Smith stuck to a mission for the legion that was strictly defensive (rather than aggressive or vengeful) and subordinate to the civilian control of Illinois's chief executive.

After this foundational material, Chapters 4–6 present, with multiple supporting tables and five appendices, a plethora of data resourcefully gleaned from previously unexploited archival documents. This information and the authors' related analyses shed light on the legion's table of organization; the identity, birth/death dates, unit assignments, and ranks of its officers and non-coms; and similar information for hundreds (not thousands as the

dust jacket claims) of its private soldiers. It is this information, incomplete as it is, that most obviously distinguishes *The Nauvoo Legion in Illinois* from earlier studies. The book puts a face on what has heretofore been a largely anonymous military organization known only through a few of its more religiously prominent leaders. With such valuable scholarship, the authors approach the high standard set by Norma B. Ricketts's *The Mormon Battalion: U.S. Army of the West, 1846–1848* (Logan: Utah State University Press, 1996); Lieutenant Colonel Sherman L. Fleek's *History May Be Searched in Vain: A Military History of the Mormon Battalion* (Norman, Okla.: The Arthur H. Clark Company, 2008), and Roger B. Nielson's *Roll Call at Old Camp Floyd, Utah Territory: Soldiers of Johnston's Army at the Upper Camp, 8 July to 8 September 1858* (Springville, Utah: N.pub., 2006).

The remaining chapters deal with Joseph Smith's readiness and qualifications to lead the legion; the unit's training regimen (primarily drills and parades); internal divisiveness fueled by the disloyal behavior of John C. Bennett (excommunicated and militarily cashiered in 1842); neighbors' perceptions and fears of the legion's size, mission, leadership, and even appearance; an escalation of Joseph Smith's legal difficulties; his unconventional decision to run for U.S. president; and the beginnings of his tendency to use the legion for non-militia purposes unsanctioned by the governor. The latter behavior included the suppression of an offensive grog shop and, most significantly, the use of a legion detachment to remove Smith from the clutches of a Missouri sheriff and to destroy the *Nauvoo Expositor*, which Smith ordered as the city's military commander rather than as a Church or civilian leader.

The book then describes the murder of the Smith brothers at Carthage Jail on June 27, 1844, by disguised troops of another militia unit; the post-assassination ascension of Brigham Young from the military rank of assistant chaplain to lieutenant general; Governor Thomas Ford's 1845 retrieval of the legion's state-issued weapons; the legislature's repeal of the Nauvoo city charter and, with it, the legion's official standing as an arm of the Illinois militia; the legion's continuation as an unauthorized self-defense force in the face of neighboring raiders; and its valiant but futile rearguard action to protect the remnants of the Mormon popula-

tion remaining in Nauvoo after the mass westbound exodus of early 1846. It was a meteoric rise and fall for the Latter-day Saints in less than five years, with the Nauvoo Legion involved virtually every step of the way.

If *The Nauvoo Legion in Illinois* has any flat spots, some of them run to editorial as well as authorial matters. For example, in a half-dozen instances, portions of key documents are quoted in one chapter and repeated in another, once with a slight change in text and different source cited. This somewhat distracting repetition is probably attributable to the book's multiple authorship, as is the book's occasional internal display of differences of opinion on more substantive matters such as whether the legion was a competent or ineffective fighting force (124, 178) and whether, in its membership, it was a Mormon organization (as the book's subtitle implies) or a more diverse militia. The authors cite nineteenth-century as well as modern assessments that perhaps as much as 10 percent of the legion's troops were non-Mormon (106–7) but make no attempt to analyze the accuracy of this important point.

Although this volume has twenty-six illustrations, the absence of a map depicting central and western Illinois and the Mississippi River will leave some readers unclear about the flow of action between Illinois, Iowa, and Missouri as well as between Nauvoo and such important Illinois places as the capital city of Springfield; Carthage, site of the Smiths' assassination; and Warsaw/Quincy, the towns so welcoming in 1839 yet hostile a few years later.

Of more concern to me is the editorial decision to virtually forego clarifying footnotes for the chapters' tables as well as for the five appendices, which alone constitute 30 percent (131 pages) of the book. As a result, most readers will be at sea in coping with a plethora of arcane legion terms, usages, titles, and ranks. Take, for example, the book's use of "brevet," an honorific for officers used by the U.S. Army for only three limited purposes, all of which were inapplicable to the legion's situation. Even more obscure is the title for the legion officer called a "herald and armor-bearer," a rank with a medieval, if not biblical, ring. Unaided, will readers recognize "ensigns"—today's lowest-ranking naval officers—as subalterns in the early U.S. Army as well as the Nauvoo Legion? Was a legion "major sergeant" an offi-

cer, and, if so, how did his rank and duties differ from those of the noncommissioned officer similarly dubbed “sergeant major”? (Both ranks appear unexplained in one of the book’s tables.) Since the Nauvoo Legion had no officer titled “general” (today’s four-star grade), what kind of leader bore that force’s rank of brevet general?

Although the authors have explicitly confined their examination of Mormon military matters to the time and locale indicated by this book’s title, I believe that they missed an opportunity in not footnoting the entry in Appendix D for Jefferson Hunt to identify him as the subsequent senior captain of the Mormon Battalion (and later a brigadier general of California militia) and that for Daniel Hamner (misspelled as Hammer) Wells to indicate that in Utah he would become the legion’s third lieutenant general and arguably the most important Mormon soldier of the nineteenth century. It is a bit like listing Abraham Lincoln as first a captain and then a private of Illinois volunteers in the Black Hawk War without noting his subsequent role as commander in chief.

Aside from these somewhat technical points, the omission of two other subjects warrants comment: the colorful, missing story of the three Generals Bennet/t; and the broad contextual significance of Joseph Smith’s rank as the legion’s lieutenant general. In my view, both matters bear on how one assesses Joseph Smith’s judgment when he was acting in his capacity as the Nauvoo Legion’s commander.

Joseph Smith’s nomination of John C. Bennett to be his major general and second in command (as well as mayor of Nauvoo and assistant president of the LDS Church) is covered at length in the book. What is touched upon but not discussed in any depth is Smith’s appointment of the eccentric James Arlington Bennet (misspelled as Bennett)¹ of Brooklyn, New York, to be a legion “major general” and the unit’s inspector general. Totally absent is any reference to Smith’s selection of Bennet to be his presidential running mate in 1844 and his appointment of yet another Bennett, this one James Gordon, the controversial publisher-editor of the *New York Herald*, to be a legion “brigadier general.” Immediately after John C. Bennett’s 1842 court-martial and dismissal, Lieutenant General Smith ordered both New York-based generals to present themselves in Nauvoo to fill the resulting leadership

vacuum atop the legion, a summons to which neither Bennet nor Bennett responded. In view of their character flaws, quirks, and erratic behavior, Joseph Smith's willingness to commission the three Bennet/ts in senior leadership positions raises questions about the top-heavy character of the legion's officer structure, the seriousness of the unit as a fighting force, and the quality of Smith's decision-making in selecting his closest subordinates.²

Aside from the legion's plethora of general officers, brevet appointments, and padded sinecures—an array that a West Point grandson of Brigham Young later dubbed “fantastic” (111 note 34)—the starkest illustration of the unit's top-heaviness lies with Joseph Smith's own rank. Notwithstanding the fact that Illinois's Governor Thomas Carlin sanctioned Smith's nomination by his troops to be a lieutenant general, the simple fact is that theretofore no officer in the American regular army and militia force had held that rank in the history of the republic with the sole exception of George Washington. So sacrosanct was Washington's memory and his service as a lieutenant general that even the proposal to promote Major General Winfield Scott, the U.S. Army's general in chief, after the Mexican War met with fierce (at times vicious) resistance in Congress. As a result, Congress elevated Scott only to brevet lieutenant general, a rank purposely lower than Washington's. The lieutenant general's title accepted by Joseph Smith did not appear in the U.S. Army after George Washington's death until Ulysses S. Grant's promotion from major general in 1864. Smith's use of the title in 1841 opened him to perceptions of overreaching and resulted in widespread criticism that damaged not only his own image but that of the militia he led.

For readers prone to conclude that the presence of multiple major generals in the legion would indicate the need for a lieutenant general to command them, I would point out that during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries a major general commanded all other major generals in the U.S. Army with only four exceptions—Lieutenant Generals Washington, Grant, William T. Sherman, and Philip H. Sheridan. For others who might feel that Smith was, in effect, bound by protocol to accept the title once nominated by his troops, it should be noted that, during the Mexican War, Jefferson Davis declined a brigadier's commission in the Mississippi Volunteers as unmerited as did fellow West Pointer

and Utah War veteran John W. Phelps on multiple occasions when he was tendered substantive or brevet promotions as a captain, brigadier general, and major general. The authors' brief comment, "In this era, the rank of lieutenant general, whether in the militia or in the Regular Army, was rarely used and was considered a special honor" (140), is an observation so understated that it misses, if not obscures, the significance of Smith's decision to accept, and use with insistence, such an exalted title.

In concluding Chapter 11, the authors finish their account of the legion's disintegration in 1846 with a cryptic comment designed both to recognize and preclude quibbling about the parameters of their study: "That the Nauvoo Legion would again serve to meet the needs of the Mormons in Utah Territory is another story, to be told at another time, and in another place" (261). If Bennett, Black, and Cannon take on such an assignment, I hope that they will examine the extent to which Governor Brigham Young benefited from or ignored the lessons that should have emerged from General Smith's uneven military experiences in Illinois. For example, when Young declared martial law on September 15, 1857, and was indicted for treason three months later, one wonders if he recalled that one of the factors involved in Joseph Smith's final incarceration at Carthage was a treason indictment flowing from his unauthorized proclamation of martial law in Nauvoo. By the same token it would be fascinating to know whether General Smith's cavalier incorporation of two Mormon militia companies from Iowa into his Illinois unit influenced Governor Young's enthusiasm for sending Utah's Nauvoo Legion into extra-jurisdictional adventures in the territories of Oregon, Nebraska, and New Mexico during 1857-58. Finally, one wonders if Brigham Young was emboldened to set aside his gubernatorial and militia responsibilities for an unauthorized five-week trek into Oregon during April-May 1857 by Joseph Smith's unauthorized absence from his legion duties while in hiding for three months during the summer of 1842 (193).

Whether or not the trio from BYU has finished its work on the Nauvoo Legion with the story of that unit's foundational Illinois period, Bennett, Black, and Cannon have done nothing but whet our appetite for more of their scholarship while bringing honor to themselves. If Joseph Smith's (and their) exotic heralds

and armor-bearers did not survive the daunting trek across the plains, deserts, and mountains from Illinois to Utah, much of the rest of the legion did. This remnant rose again to drill, parade, and occasionally fight, but this time in a quite different way against an eclectic mix of Lamanites and federal troops.

Notes

1. In the interests of full disclosure, I have made this same mistake in print repeatedly until corrected by Gene A. Sessions of Weber State University's history faculty.

2. For a summary description of the checkered backgrounds and careers of the three Generals Bennet/t, see MacKinnon, "Epilogue to the Utah War: Impact and Legacy," *Journal of Mormon History* 29, no. 2 (Fall 2003): 213–14 note 61; Andrew F. Smith, *The Sainly Scoundrel: The Life and Times of Dr. John Cook Bennett* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997), 65, 68–72, 108–9, 115, 126.

Harrell's Mettle

Jack Harrell. *A Sense of Order and Other Stories*. Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2010. 220 pp. Foreword by Robert Bird. Hardback: \$26.95. ISBN 978-1-56085-209-4

Reviewed by Karen Rosenbaum

How do you read a collection of short stories by one author? Do you curl up with the book the same way you would with a novel, reading one story after another until your leg falls asleep or your stomach growls for food or the phone rings? Do you read one story, then close the book to think about it, perhaps reopening the book to reread parts or the whole? Do you expect the stories to be connected by characters or theme or tone and therefore search for universal elements? Do you come to each story afresh, hungry for wonder and new insights?

The way you answer those questions will probably determine how you react to Jack Harrell's *A Sense of Order and Other Stories*, winner of the Association for Mormon Letters' short fiction award for 2010.

With the exception of two Adam and Eve pieces, the sixteen

stories in this collection are not linked, so don't settle in for one long read. Harrell's tales are better explored one by one, with time for appreciation and contemplation between them. Although there are some common themes, there is not a clear "sense of order"—but there isn't a sense of chaos either. Despite the frequent appearance of mystical elements, the stories make sense—even when, as in the final piece, "Calling and Election," the reader can't, with certainty, distinguish between reality and illusion. Harrell's characters are usually estranged from both others and themselves; all are aware of the confusion in their world. What distinguishes them is the way they react to this confusion.

This pattern is probably most easily seen in the six shortest stories. Each of the main characters is profoundly depressed. One's solution is suicide, another's is sleep; a third's is defiance. The three more imaginative depressed characters daydream—although their dreams offer neither escape nor resolution. In the most compassionate of the short-shorts—"Who Would Not?"—a morbidly obese woman sitting on her front porch sees two "bright and blond teenage girls in vivid dresses" (113) and reflects on their giddiness and the burden of her own body and life. Harrell quietly uses both the woman's point of view and an omniscient narrator to tell us, "She glimpses the fountain of the girls' health and color, but she overlooks a truth too simple to see: theirs is a mystery as deep as her own" (114).

In the longer stories, Harrell's characters mature, both despite and because of obstacles, despair, and turmoil. These human beings range in age from a high school senior who attends a heavy metal concert with Jesus to a presumably aged but quirky and independent Mormon prophet who longs to buy a garden hose and an Almond Joy in a Wal-Mart. Harrell's mostly male protagonists include an actuary, a college teacher, a seminary teacher, an electronics repairman, and a forklift operator who makes and sells wishing wells. Four stories feature Mormon characters; three of these and four others feature supernatural elements—visitations, voices, revelations. Sometimes, but not always, the otherworldly might—or might not—be explained by physical phenomena—a brain tumor, a stroke.

For these characters, the external conflicts reflect the internal conflicts. There is what can be called good and evil in the

characters, although there is rarely a clear division between them. At least three of Harrell's characters seem to speak for Satan: the unnamed man with cold, small eyes in "The Trestle," Lucifer in "The Lone and Weary World," and Brother Lucy in "Calling and Election." Each tempts the protagonist to actions that would result in his ultimate destruction, but the satanic character is either clever or confused enough himself to mask the outcome until it is too late. Brother Lucy recalls the devil in the book of Job. In a paper at the Association for Mormon Literature meeting in February of 2009, Harrell argued: "Goodness in fictional characters is deep, rich, and complex; while evil is shallow, paltry, and simple."¹ Yet the three satanic characters do not seem "shallow, paltry, and simple"—Brother Lucy especially seems multi-faceted.

"Calling and Election," in particular, may remind a reader of Nathaniel Hawthorne's tale "Young Goodman Brown." Harrell's protagonist is seminary teacher Jerry Sangood. Though he isn't without goodness (the literal meaning of his surname), he may have an unhealthy craving to have his calling and election made sure; on the other hand, he seems to want no more than what many other devout Mormons have coveted. The seminary director also has an allegorical name—Brother Severe—but he, like the other two seminary teachers, all confess to Jerry his part in their own salvations.

Goodness in Harrell's stories may seem much more than "deep, rich, and complex"; it may make life intolerable. The college teacher Morgan, who has developed "Godsight" in the story of that name, can hardly bear the pain he sees in the lives of those around him, including the woman who lies about him so that she can chair their department.

Harrell does a better job with his male characters than his female ones. Most of his women are nice enough people, but limited in sensitivity and understanding. One of the strongest women is Andie, the librarian in "Jerome and the Ends of the Universe," my own favorite of the stories. Yet Andie's climactic scene, in which she explains a kind of revelation she has had about her relationship with her ex-husband, wasn't persuasive to me. Even here, though, the dialogue works; in fact, the dialogue is convincing in all the stories.

Some of the stories are set in southern Illinois, where Harrell

lived until he was nineteen; others take place in southern Idaho, where Harrell now lives and teaches English at BYU–Idaho. The first Adam and Eve story, “The Lone and Dreary World,” takes place in the wilderness into which Adam and Eve were ejected from the Garden of Eden. (From the description of the mountainous landscape, a reader assumes the setting is far from Missouri—but perhaps not far from Idaho.)

Harrell (or an editor?) has not chosen one of the most compelling stories for the title. Perhaps he wanted to avoid the repetition of “story” (*A Prophet’s Story and Other Stories*), perhaps he wanted to avoid the repetition of “and” (*Jerome and the Ends of the Universe and Other Stories*; *Calling and Election and Other Stories*). But how about the first story in the collection, the one about a non-Mormon teenager who accompanies Jesus to a Megadeth concert in Idaho Falls? *Tregan’s Mettle and Other Stories* would have been a splendid title for this startling and original collection.

Note

1. Jack Harrell, Presidential Address, Association for Mormon Letters annual meeting, February 2009, <http://www.jackharrell.net/mormon-conflict-paper.html>.

On Vital Questions

Robert L. Millet, ed. *By What Authority? The Vital Question of Religious Authority in Christianity*. Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 2010. x + 200 pp. Paper: \$35. ISBN 13: 978-0-88146-201-2

Reviewed by Joseph M. Spencer

Opening his short contribution to this collection of essays, Roger Olson, professor of theology at Baylor University, writes: “One can hardly do justice to the subject of religious authority in a brief reflection essay” (180). Indeed. And while eleven brief reflection essays *might* be able to do justice to what Robert Millet, as the volume’s editor, describes as “a, if not *the*, crucial question among re-