



# American Massacre: The Tragedy at Mountain Meadows, September 1857

*Sally Denton*

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In September 1857, a wagon train passing through Utah laden with gold was attacked. Approximately 140 people were slaughtered; only 17 children under the age of eight were spared. This incident in an open field called Mountain Meadows has ever since been the focus of passionate debate: Is it possible that official Mormon dignitaries were responsible for the massacre? In her riveting book, Sally Denton makes a fiercely convincing argument that they were.

The author—herself of Mormon descent—first traces the extraordinary emergence of the Mormons and the little-known nineteenth-century intrigues and tensions between their leaders and the U.S. government, fueled by the Mormons' zealotry and exclusionary practices. We see how by 1857 they were unique as a religious group in ruling an entire American territory, Utah, and commanding their own exclusive government and army.

Denton makes clear that in the immediate aftermath of the massacre, the church began placing the blame on a discredited Mormon, John D. Lee, and on various Native Americans. She cites contemporaneous records and newly discovered documents to support her argument that, in fact, the Mormon leader, Brigham Young, bore significant responsibility—that Young, impelled by the church's financial crises, facing increasingly intense scrutiny and condemnation by the federal government, incited the crime by both word and deed.

Finally, Denton explains how the rapidly expanding and enormously rich Mormon church of today still struggles to absolve itself of responsibility for what may well be an act of religious fanaticism unparalleled in the annals of American history. **American Massacre** is totally absorbing in its narrative as it brings to life a tragic moment in our history.

## **American Massacre: The Tragedy at Mountain Meadows, September 1857 Details**

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## **From Reader Review American Massacre: The Tragedy at Mountain Meadows, September 1857 for online ebook**

### **Ned says**

#### **I was following orders**

The famous refrain used by cruel despots to justify their crimes must have been repeated ad nauseam throughout history. "ACTING UNDER ORDERS from the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The horrid deeds then committed were done as a duty which we believed we owed to God and our Church." - J.D. Lee.

It so important to keep the memory of atrocities like this alive. I am indebted to the author for disabusing me of my ignorance, having never heard the sordid tale of the Mountain Meadows massacre. May the names of Brigham Young and Thomas Kane, among the others involved, forever live in ignominy.

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### **John says**

Whoa. This author does not like Mormons. It started on page 4 and continued. Did not like the book.

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### **Susan says**

American Massacre is a standalone book that tells the tale of a tragedy back in the mid-1800s. I got this book to read because history fascinates me and I had never heard of this incident. Beware though, the author doesn't really get into the details of the massacre until the second half of the book. The first half of the book is all about the Mormon religion. It is clear that the author is biased against that church. I'm not a Mormon, nor do I know a lot about them, but she definitely seems to have done her research.

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### **Denise Spicer says**

This horrible event in American history, although it received a lot of media attention, was more or less covered up at the time. The author explores all sides of the situation in detail (243 pages) with Notes, Bibliography, and Index and gives us lots of information about this scandalous massacre.

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### **Andrew Degruccio says**

A piece of American history I had learned little of. Recommended reading for all history buffs. This crime ranks high among all American tragedies.

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### **Karen says**

I had read about this massacre (Under the Banner of Heaven) before, but read about it again for a book club. This history is very carefully documented and is fascinating. It is also another look into people doing terrible thing to people (like the Nazis) in the name of religion or "under orders". This massacre was unbelievable!

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### **Jim Dempsey says**

#### **Most gruesome event in North American history**

I am a distant relative of Alexander Fancher and found this book to be fascinating. Read about the massacre years ago but didn't know about my relation to Rancher until recently. I can't imagine committing these acts under any circumstance. I know I can kill under certain circumstances but not under these. Fascinating book and understand the confusion that exists today.

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### **Sarah says**

I date the emergence of my morbidity to the Bloody Pond of Shiloh, a Civil War national park in West Tennessee. Use your imagination about that one. Morbidity definitely comes from my dad, who lent me this book about a very awful and senseless murder of whole families in Utah in 1857.

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### **SHUiZMZ says**

What an interesting account of a horrible American tragedy and yet another reason why I despise organized religion of any sort. People are such idiots.

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### **Laurie says**

Wow! Who knew the Mormon church had such a dark history? Brigham Young was definitely not a good man. The poor members of the Fancher wagon train!

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### **Kathie says**

I appreciate that the author did a lot of research to write this book. The information on the history of the founding of the Mormon Church and its founding fathers was interesting, as was the history leading up to the Massacre. The book was very detailed to the point of boredom. I skipped quite a bit of the second half of the book.

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### Susan says

Very well researched and written. I have read some about Mountain Meadows, but now I want to find as much information as I can. Sets up the background atmosphere, the players, and held my interest the entire time. I seldom give 5 stars but I devoured this book. FYI, if you are Mormon, you should be aware the book is not flattering toward the early church. I have an early Mormon pioneer in my family tree, who was in the area at the exact time these events were happening and now I'm wondering if I will ever be able to find out the extent of his knowledge (if any).

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### Clint says

To be honest - if I didn't hate to put down a book once started so badly, I probably would have quit reading within the first 100 pages. While towards the end of the book, Sally Denton's depiction of events began like true historical non-fiction, the vast majority of her writing was very obviously tainted by a strong distaste for Mormonism. I'm not a Mormon, and while I live in Utah, am neither a defender of accuser of the religion. Ms. Denton, very obviously sways strongly in one direction. Much of her information is tainted by a venom rarely experienced in books packaged as a study of fact.

For a much better, and more balanced book on this horrible event in US and Utah history - I'd recommend Juanita Brooks' "The Mountain Meadows Massacre".

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### Sarah says

It's hard to tell what is fact and what is anger based bias from Denton. I am a firm believer in knowing what happened in history, no matter how unpleasant or gruesome, but Denton fails to leave her personal hatred from Mormon's behind when reporting on the Mountain Meadows Massacre. I am on the hunt for a non biased and honest report of what happened. Still, this book brings to light a past that is well hidden from history.

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### Katherine Addison says

This is the 3rd book I've read about the Mountain Meadows Massacre, and the first one by a non-Mormon. In September 1857, not quite a year after the handcart disaster kicked into high gear, a wagon train of non-Mormons was massacred at Mountain Meadows, men, women, and all children over 8. Children under 8 were allowed to survive, and adopted into Mormon households, both under the assumption that they were too young to remember and under a Mormon theory about the innocence of small children. The Mormon books I've read basically sum up the wagon train as "nobody knows who they were because when they died there was nobody left to identify them"; Denton goes hunting. She can't find information about everyone, but she certainly provides biographical information that makes a mockery of the official story at the time, that these immigrants had been rude and offensive, had said they were the people who murdered Joseph Smith, that they poisoned the bodies of dead cattle, thus killing Indians (and maybe, as the story ballooned, killing Mormons, too). Denton goes one farther than the Mormon historians, who agree that the poisoning story was nonsense, and says the *whole thing* was nonsense, that the men leading this train had come through Utah before and knew what they were doing. The hostility in their encounters with the Mormons came from the

Mormon side.

Denton also follows what happened to the surviving children as best she can, interviewing living relatives and finding family stories. She is less interested in the Mormons playing pin-the-blame-on-the-donkey, although she agrees that John Doyle Lee was betrayed and scapegoated by his surrogate father Brigham Young; although he was *one* of the men responsible for the massacre, he was not the *only* man responsible, and Brigham Young, the master of plausible deniability and the innocent air of "Who, me?", knew what was going on and did not lift a finger to stop it. Rather like Henry II, he may never have said outright that he wanted the wagon train massacred, but the people around him were adept at interpreting "will no one rid me of this turbulent priest" to "I want him dead."

(I am not a fan of Brigham Young.)

Denton is fascinating as a parallax view of what was going on in Utah in 1857, a much more skeptical eye than even Juanita Brooks. The massacre at Mountain Meadows is never going to make sense, but I think she makes as much sense out of it as can be made.

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