NEAL A. MAXWELL INSTITUTE
FOR RELIGIOUS SCHOLARSHIP

BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY • PROVO, UTAH

Title Massacring the Truth

Author(s) Craig L. Foster

Reference *FARMS Review* 19/2 (2007): 137–76.

ISSN 1550-3194 (print), 2156-8049 (online)

Abstract Review of *September Dawn* (2007), produced by Christopher Cain; and *September Dawn* (2007), by Carole Whang Schutter.

Massacring the Truth

Craig L. Foster

Review of Christopher Cain (producer). *September Dawn* (a motion picture released by Black Diamond Pictures in 2007).

Review of Carole Whang Schutter. *September Dawn.* Self-published through AuthorHouse, 2007. 276 pp. $19.95.

In the classic Western movie *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*, Senator Ranse Stoddard tells the small-town newspaper reporter the true story of the shooting of Liberty Valance and his own rise to prominence. At the end of the movie, the journalist slowly tears up his notes. Stoddard asks if he's going to use the story. The reporter answers, "No, sir." He then explains that his late editor used to say, "This is the West! When the legend becomes a fact, print the legend."[1]

That statement appears to be the mantra of Christopher Cain with his new movie, *September Dawn*, which was released on 24 August 2007. Advertised as a "Romeo and Juliet relationship love story . . . set against the background of the controversial real-life massacre of 120 men, women and children traveling through Utah in the nineteenth century," the movie, as Cain says, "closely resembles the religious fanaticism the world is seeing today. People were killed in the name of

1. "The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance," summary of film found at http://www.orac.net.au/~mhumphry/libvalan.html (accessed 9 March 2007). The film, starring John Wayne, James Stewart, Vera Miles, and Lee Marvin, was released 11 April 1962.

God 150 years ago and they're still being killed in the name of God."[2] The official *September Dawn* Web site advertised the film in even more sensational terms:

> On September 11, 1857 in an unspoiled valley of the Utah Territory—and in the name of God—120 men, women and children were savagely murdered.
>
> Who ordered the massacre, and why, has been hidden in a cloak of secrecy and conspiracy.
>
> And the reputation of one of the nation's mightiest religious figures has been preserved and protected.
>
> Until now.[3]

The movie was created by Christopher Cain and his Aspen, Colorado, friend Carole Whang Schutter. According to Schutter, she approached Cain with the story she had been writing, and he told her it "[didn't] look like a screenplay."[4] The two began to work together on a screenplay, which included a fanciful Romeo and Juliet relationship, with the son of a Mormon bishop falling in love with the beautiful girl from the wagon train. "Then it felt like a movie to me," Christopher Cain said.[5]

But romance was not all Cain felt the movie needed. He wanted more controversy. "At the core of the controversy is the notion that the Mormon church, and church leader Brigham Young himself, sanctioned the killings."[6] In fact, Christopher Cain and others associated with the movie seem to have sought controversy through their

2. Murray Weissman & Associates (press release), "Christopher Cain's 'September Dawn,' Starring Jon Voight and Terence Stamp, About 1857 Mountain Meadows Massacre, Opens Wide on May 4," Los Angeles, 24 January 2007, http://uk.us.biz.yahoo.com/iw/070124/0207147.html (accessed 26 January 2007).

3. Murray Weissman & Associates press release, p. 5.

4. Stewart Oksenhorn, "Aspen screenwriter experiences miracle with 'September Dawn,'" *Aspen Times*, 24 August 2007, http://www.aspentimes.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20070824/AE/108240060/-1/rss01 (accessed 7 December 2007).

5. Sean P. Means, "A foggy 'Dawn,'" *Salt Lake Tribune*, 23 August 2007, news archive at http://www.sltrib.com (accessed 12 December 2007).

6. Oksenhorn, "Aspen screenwriter experiences miracle with 'September Dawn.'"

interviews and statements, beginning with some of the earliest articles about the movie.[7]

Recognizing potential for publicity, the director and producers of *September Dawn* even attempted to link Mitt Romney's presidential campaign to their movie. In March 2007 they held a special screening of the film and invited reporters to interview Jon Voight.[8] And while they kept insisting the movie had nothing to do with Romney's campaign, articles began to appear with titles like "Will New Anti-Mormon Movie Hurt Mitt?"[9] and "Mitt Romney campaign eyes Mormons' 9/11 movie."[10] In fact, according to a news article, "Promo spots for the flick include a nod to the presidential campaign with the suggestion that we're at a point in history 'when issues of Mormonism are in heightened areas of the news.'"[11] The Romney campaign expressed displeasure at the wording in the advertisement. "That statement alone 'obviously is directed at our campaign,'" an anonymous source complained.[12] Reporters happily took the bait and began hounding the Romney campaign for a statement.

Shortly before the movie premiered, Mitt Romney finally responded by telling the Associated Press, "That was a terrible, awful act carried out by members of my faith. There are bad people in any church and it's true of members of my church, too."[13] Even so, Romney said he had

7. John Anderson, "With Only God Left as a Witness," *New York Times*, 22 January 2006, http://www.nytimes.com/2006/01/22/movies/22ande.html?_r=1&oref=slogin (accessed 17 April 2006).

8. Means, "A foggy 'Dawn.'"

9. Nikki Finke, "Will New Anti-Mormon Movie Hurt Mitt?" *LA Weekly*, 29 March 2007, http://www.deadlinehollywooddaily.com/could-new-movie-impact-mitts-campaign (accessed 29 November 2007).

10. "Mitt Romney campaign eyes Mormons' 9/11 movie," *The Spoof*, 6 May 2007, http://www.thespoof.com/news/spoof.cfm?headline=s4i18379 (accessed 7 May 2007).

11. James Hirsen, "A Political Look at Hollywood," *The Left Coast Report*, 21 August 2007, an e-mail sent by "Hollywood Confidential," from newsmax@reply.newsmax.com.

12. Bill Zwecker, "Mitt's a bit miffed: Film about 1857 Mormon massacre due out Aug. 24 and likely to have negative impact on his campaign," *Chicago Sun-Times*, 16 August 2007, http://www.suntimes.com/entertainment/zwecker/512514,CST-FTR-zp16.article (accessed 16 August 2007).

13. Manya Brachear, "What was behind Sept. 11?" *Chicago Tribune*, 24 August 2007, http://newsblogs.chicagotribune.com/religion_theseeker/2007/08/sept-11-movie-r.html (accessed 26 August 2007).

no plans to watch the movie, to which Christopher Cain commented cynically that the film might help his candidacy because Romney "has somewhere in the area of 30% of the American public who say they won't vote for a Mormon. And perhaps this is an opportunity for him to deal with (that) 30% of the American public."[14]

On a recent segment of the *Hugh Hewitt Show*, Jon Voight commented:

> Let me say that the LDS Church just came out very recently, and perhaps because of the film, with a rather comprehensive statement that was by their managing director of family and Church history, the department there, and his name is Richard E. Turley. . . . Very, very strong statement that really parallels everything that we have in the film, right up to the door of Brigham Young. It doesn't pass that threshold, but it really does a very, I think, a very scholarly job of describing the events.[15]

In addition, a report of an interview with Scott Duthie, one of the movie's producers, suggested that *September Dawn* "forced the church's hand," noting that the church "published several articles on the massacre, painting an unflattering picture of past leaders who ordered the crime." "Actually, to their credit, that was great," Duthie said. "They itemized and took accountability for what happened."[16]

Both Voight and Duthie seemed to be unaware that Richard E. Turley, Ronald W. Walker, and Glen M. Leonard have been working for over six years on what promises to be the definitive work on the Mountain Meadows Massacre. The first volume of this work, which

14. Etan Vlessing, "Director says 'Dawn' would help Romney," *The Hollywood Reporter*, 25 August 2007, http://hollywoodreporter.com/hr/content_display/news/e3id4e927e2a226195fff0859186f5a0de3 (accessed 29 November 2007).

15. Hugh Hewitt Show Transcript, *Townhall.com*, 22 August 2007, http://www.hughhewitt.townhall.com/talkradio/transcripts/Transcript.aspx?ContentGuid=af9cb8fb-dd4e-4a56-99cl-ab75686fd459 (accessed 29 November 2007).

16. Martin J. Kidston, "Independent vision," *Helena Independent Record*, 26 August 2007, http://www.helenair.com/articles/2007/08/26/helena_life_top/c010826_01.txt (accessed 26 August 2007).

has been tentatively titled *Massacre at Mountain Meadows*, will be published in 2008 by Oxford University Press.

In the autumn of 2006 Cain and some of his associates attended a meeting of relatives of massacre victims, offering a special viewing of the film and interviewing relatives for a series of featurettes. These featurettes, later included on a DVD, include provocative sound bites, such as one calling the Mountain Meadows Massacre "a crime against humanity"[17] and another describing it as "one of the most important historical events in the history of America's westward expansion."[18] One descendant claimed that "the Mormons have covered this up. If they have their way, this would be forgotten."[19] Another said, "The Mormons have an agenda," and added that "too much has been covered up for so many years" and "the LDS Church will be held responsible for getting out the truth."[20] "Religious fanaticism and extremism is a dangerous thing," said another.[21]

Dean Cain, the director's son, has been an enthusiastic supporter of his father's film. As early as September 2005 he had announced, "It's hush-hush what's going on with the film. It's going to be very controversial."[22] Since that time, he has made other comments to the press emphasizing the controversial nature of the film. On an episode of the *Rachael Ray Show* that aired on 11 December 2006, he again indicated that it would be controversial.[23] In an article in the *National Ledger*, Dean Cain explained that his father "just wants people to see the movie and draw their own conclusions."[24] He stated further:

---

17. "Featurette," chap. 2, *September Dawn EPK* (electronic press kit), a Black Diamond Pictures and Alkemi Production DVD sent by a public relations firm and in the possession of the author. This quotation is from Cheri Baker Walker.

18. "Featurette," chap. 2. This quotation is from Scott Fancher.

19. "Featurette," chap. 12. This quotation is from Phil Bolinger.

20. "Featurette," chap. 12. These quotations are from Harley Fancher.

21. "Featurette," chap. 12. This quotation is from Scott Fancher.

22. Marilyn Beck and Stacy Jenel, "Dean Cain is Everywhere, Wayne Gretzky Has a New Gig," *National Ledger*, 27 September 2005, http://www.nationalledger.com/cgi-bin/artman/exec/view.cgi?archive=1&num=912 (accessed 6 December 2007).

23. "It's a Bird! It's a Plane! It's . . . Dean Cain!" *The Rachael Ray Show*, http://www.rachaelrayshow.com/show/view/63 (accessed 9 April 2007).

24. Marilyn Beck and Stacy Jenel Smith, "Dean, Christopher Cain in Mormon Film Controversy," *National Ledger*, 4 April 2007, http://www.nationalledger.com/artman/

> I think that some people will be very offended, by the film and by the slaughter. I think some people will protest it. I think people will think that it's untrue. I think that some people will think that it demonizes Mormons and the Mormon religion. . . . Some people will say, hey, it's great, someone's finally telling the truth. People will have to find out more about it.[25]

Christopher Cain likewise insisted that the film was about religious fanaticism. "I'm not attacking the Mormon Church. This was an incident that happened in history. It's an incident that happens today by radicals."[26]

Cain's protestations notwithstanding, both the book and movie versions of *September Dawn* appear to have a darker intent than to simply comment on contemporary religious fanaticism and terrorism. With that in mind, I will look at both the movie and the book, focusing on the book and the featurette DVD. I revised some parts of this essay after viewing the film version. I have also added new information because the movie contradicted the novelized version released a few months in advance. My not viewing the movie before the national opening, however, was certainly not due to a lack of effort on my part. I called the public relations firm handling the film at least six times, and during five of those phone calls I asked if it would be possible to go to a screening or have a "screener" or DVD sent to me so I could review the film. I was continually but very cordially put off. On my last phone call, I was told there would be no more showings and that the producer had "asked for no screeners to be sent out." When I said that seemed odd, the representative repeated twice that she didn't "understand their logic."[27] I didn't either until I saw the actual movie.

---

publish/printer_12532.shtml (accessed 4 April 2007).

25. "Featurette," chap. 10.

26. "Featurette," chap. 10.

27. Telephone conversation with Lindajo Loftus of Murray Weissman & Associates, 31 July 2007. Murray Weissman & Associates is an independent marketing and public relations firm located in North Hollywood, California. The firm has, according to its Web site at http://www.publicity4all.com/bios.html, represented hundreds of motion picture and television projects, including *Chicago*, *Chocolat*, *Dances with Wolves*, *Empire of the Sun*, *Enchanted April*, *The English Patient*, *Farewell My Concubine*, *Field of Dreams*, *Good Will Hunting*, *GoodFellas*, *Mighty Aphrodite*, *The Piano*, *Pulp Fiction*, and *Shakespeare in Love*.

Who Made *September Dawn*?

Christopher Cain was born Bruce Claibourne Doggett in 1943 in Sioux Falls, South Dakota.[28] Like many other people in the entertainment industry, Bruce Doggett changed his name, Christopher C. Cain being his choice. Cain grew up on the Doggett family farm, north of Hartford, South Dakota. His parents, Douglas and Jeanette Holt Doggett, as well as his grandparents, were active in the community and church. Douglas, like his father, served for a number of years on the administrative board of the Hartford United Methodist Church, and he also served as a choir director, Sunday school teacher, and lay speaker for a number of years.[29]

Christopher Cain graduated from Hartford High School in 1961 and attended Dakota Wesleyan University in Mitchell, South Dakota, where he graduated in 1965.[30] Soon he made his way to Hollywood, "hoping to break into music, but instead found himself singing backup on TV commercials." After switching to acting and appearing in a number of television shows, he turned to directing. After writing and directing several family films in the 1970s, Cain directed *The Stone Boy* in 1983. The film, described by one film critic as "powerfully done," made many of the critics' "top ten" lists for the year, and Cain's career appeared to be on the fast track.[31]

"Known for his visual style as well as his keen portrayals of human interaction,"[32] Cain next directed *That Was Then . . . This Is*

28. Sioux Valley Genealogical Society, "Index to Births, 1880–1990, of Sioux Falls, South Dakota" (Salt Lake City: Filmed by the Genealogical Society of Utah, 1991), Family History Library film 1738664; and http://www.superiorpics.com/christopher_cain (accessed 11 February 2007).

29. Sue Boy, *Hartford, S. D., Centennial, 1881–1981* ([Freeman, SD: Pine Hill Press], 1981), 104.

30. "Young Alumnus/Alumna of the Year," Dakota Wesleyan University, http://www.dwu.edu/alumni/previous/young_year.htm (accessed 13 February 2007).

31. "Christopher Cain," http://www.hollywood.com/celebrity/Christopher_Cain/188994 (accessed 2 June 2006). Reviews of this film are found at http://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/stone_boy/?critic=columns (accessed 8 November 2007). According to Box Office Mojo, found at http://boxofficemojo.com/movies/?id=stoneboy.htm (accessed 15 February 2007), the domestic total gross for the film was $261,033.

32. "Christopher Cain: Director, Actor, Producer, Scriptwriter," http://www.allocine.co.uk/personne/fichepersonne_gen_cpersonne=19090.html (accessed 31 January 2007).

Now (1985), which received mixed reviews.[33] *Where the River Runs Black* (1986), while not a box office success, won praises for its artistic accomplishments.[34] Cain gained enough respect in Hollywood to be asked to direct a Western with several of the popular young stars of the 1980s.

Young Guns (1988) was Cain's most profitable directorial turn, grossing $45,661,556[35] and starring such actors as Emilio Estevez, Kiefer Sutherland, Lou Diamond Phillips, and Charlie Sheen, as well as iconoclast Terence Stamp.[36] Popular among the viewing audiences, the film received mixed reviews from critics. As one wrote, "*Young Guns* supposedly takes place in the old west, but it actually takes place in front of the cameras. . . . *Young Guns* doesn't have a good reason to exist besides an excuse for these hot young Turks to look good onscreen."[37] Hal Hinson bemoaned the fact that "'Young Guns' plays out less as a movie than as a sort of fraternity frolic."[38] Christopher Cain's directing also came under scrutiny. Gregory Dorr described the film as a "pimped-up smudge of pop history" that "plays like lukewarm late-'80s kitsch."[39]

33. Please see the reviews found at http://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/that_was_thenthis_is_now (accessed 8 November 2007). According to Box Office Mojo, http://www.boxofficemojo.com/movies/?id=thatwasthenthisisnow.htm (accessed 28 March 2007), the domestic total gross for the movie was $8,630,068.

34. Roger Ebert, "Where The River Runs Black," 19 September 1986, http://rogerebert.suntimes.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/19860919/REVIEWS/609190304/1023 (accessed 28 March 2007). According to Box Office Mojo, http://boxofficemojo.com/movies/?id=wheretheriverrunsblack.htm (accessed 15 February 2007), the domestic total gross for the movie was $676,166.

35. Box Office Mojo, http://boxofficemojo.com/movies/?id=youngguns.htm (accessed 15 February 2007).

36. Box Office Mojo, http://boxofficemojo.com/movies/?id=youngguns.htm (accessed 15 February 2007).

37. Jeremiah Kipp, "Young Guns," http://filmcritic.com/misc/emporium.nsf/84dbbfa4d710144986256c290016f76e/738f6a5e3320729d88256d0c005ce8a8?OpenDocument (accessed 26 January 2007).

38. Hal Hinson, "Young Guns," *Washington Post*, 16 August 1988, http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/style/longterm/movies/videos/younggunsrhinson_a0c8d5.htm (accessed 26 January 2007).

39. Gregory P. Dorr, "Young Guns: Special Edition," *The DVD Journal*, http://www.dvdjournal.com/quickreviews/y/youngguns.q.shtml (accessed 22 February 2007).

In spite of the critical views, *Young Guns* was popular with the viewing audiences, and Christopher Cain was at the height of his career. Oddly enough, when *Young Guns II* was made the next year and released in 1990, Cain did not direct it.[40] Instead, he directed *Wheels of Terror*, a made-for-TV movie that has the dubious distinction of being ranked among the three hundred worst movies.[41] Jason MacIsaac wrote that Cain's "resume doesn't contain many things that will make you swoon, but his career was semi-respectable until of late. Now he's got things like *The Amazing Panda Adventure* (1995) and *Gone Fishin'* (1997) under his belt. Yeah, ouch."[42] Billed as a buddy movie, *Gone Fishin'*, which starred veteran actors Joe Pesci and Danny Glover, has been described as "the *Ishtar* of the 90s."[43] Between 1997 and the making of *September Dawn*, Cain directed four pictures, two of which were for television. He directed three episodes of USA Network's *The Magnificent Seven* in 1998 and 1999 and the made-for-TV movie *A Father's Choice* in 2000.[44] Although two other theatrical films were advertised and appear to have had some filming completed, they were never released.[45]

The Cain-Schutter Connection

The person who introduced Cain to the idea of making a film about the Mountain Meadows Massacre—and who wrote the screenplay with him—was his friend Carole Whang Schutter. She and her

40. "Young Guns II," http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0100994/fullcredits#cast (accessed 29 March 2007). The director was Geoff Murphy.

41. "The Worst 300 Movies Part 3," *Epinions.com*, 3 August 2004, http://www.epinions.com/content_4034699396 (accessed 8 November 2006).

42. Jason MacIsaac, "Wheels of Terror Review," Jabootu's Bad Movie Dimension, 15 October 1999, http://www.jabootu.com/wot.htm (accessed 8 November 2006).

43. Tom Keogh, "Gone Fishin': Reviews: Amazon.co.uk Review," http://www.amazon.co.uk/Fishin-Christopher-Glover-Rosanna-Arquette/dp/B00004CVX8 (accessed 11 February 2007). Chris Hicks of the *Deseret News* in a telephone interview on 30 March 2007 called *Gone Fishin'* an "absolutely terrible film."

44. "Christopher Cain," *Internet Movie Database (IMDb)*, http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0128883/ (accessed 4 April 2007).

45. There is no evidence *Tender Touch of Evil* (1999) and *PC and the Web* (2001) were ever released.

second husband, Monte H. Goldman (who died in 1995), had been prominent socialites in Aspen, Colorado, where Cain also lived.

Carole Schutter stated that while her husband and his brother were very wealthy, they did not know Jesus. "I once had everything money could buy but nothing is of more value to me than the love that the Lord Jesus Christ gave to me."[46] She further explained, "I look to God to guide me in all things. I've surrendered everything to Him and meditate daily upon God's wonderful promises. I stand upon those promises no matter what the devil brings against me. The battle isn't mine, but the Lord's."[47] The *Honolulu Star-Bulletin* announced:

> There've been some major changes in the life of Carole Whang Schutter. The ex-wife of attorney David Schutter and widow of millionaire playboy Monte Goldman, who shot and killed himself, Carole has become a born-again Christian. She's just written a book called "Miracles Happen," sub-titled, "A Prayer Guide for Desperate People." Her message is simple—no matter how bad things are, there's always hope.[48]

She has also written a number of essays about finding God,[49] in addition to her 1999 book, *Miracles Happen*. This book discusses the importance of faith, prayer, and miracles. She has had her faith tried and strengthened by difficult experiences that included sons with drug and legal problems and being defrauded out of almost $120,000.[50]

46. "Testimony of Carol [*sic*] Schutter," http://www.bibleprophecyrevealed.us/2001/carolschutter.html (accessed 8 November 2007).

47. "Testimony of Carol Schutter."

48. Dave Donnelly, "Hawaii," *Honolulu Star-Bulletin*, 1 July 1999, http://starbulletin.com/1999/07/01/features/donnelly.html (accessed 24 January 2006).

49. "Run to Him," http://www.miracleshappen.com (accessed 24 January 2006); "What Is Your Season?" http://www.sermonillustrator.org/minisermons/folder1/WHAT%20IS%20YOUR%20SEASON.htm (accessed 26 January 2007); "Testimony of Carol Schutter."

50. "Schutter lands in county jail," *Aspen Daily News*, 11 January 2005, http://www.aspendailynews.com/print_9972 (accessed 15 June 2006); "Schutter awaits arraignment in Jefferson County Jail," *Aspen Daily News*, 4 December 2006, http://www.aspendailynews.com/print_17157 (accessed 9 February 2007); and Joel Stonington, "Socialite sued in fraud case," *Aspen Times*, 29 August 2006, http://www.aspentimes.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20060829/NEWS/108290030&se (accessed 26 January 2007).

Of *September Dawn*, Schutter said, "It's an extremely controversial movie. It takes place in the first act of religious terrorism in the United States."[51] She claimed she "got the idea for the movie when she was driving between Buena Vista and Salida through country that looks very much like site [*sic*] of the Mountain Meadows massacre. She didn't know it at the time." Instead, she explained, "I got this crazy idea to write a story about a pioneer woman going in a wagon train to the California gold rush, and the train gets attacked by Mormons dressed as Indians. The idea wouldn't leave me. I believe it was from God."[52]

Schutter began doing research. "I came across the Mountain Meadows massacre and I was blown away," she said. "I thought, 'Holy cow—this isn't made up in my mind. This is real.' I got really into it. I cried and cried when I read about the story."[53] She insists she had never heard of the massacre before she began researching it. "Why would it just explode in my mind all of a sudden?" she asked.[54]

With evangelical zeal, Carole Schutter wrote a script about the massacre. She claims that her screenplay becoming a movie is nothing short of miraculous:

> I found the nature of terrorism especially intriguing and relevant today. Creating likeable characters that take part in unimaginably atrocious acts is a chilling reminder that terrorists can be anyone who chooses to blindly follow fanatical, charismatic leaders. I believe we should examine the leaders we follow that we might not be misled.
>
> Our fight is not against certain religions or "flesh and blood," as the Bible says, but "against principalities and powers of darkness" which are prejudice, hate, ignorance, and fear

51. Pete Fowler, "Local pens screenplay about massacre," *Aspen Times*, 9 July 2007, as quoted at http://www.aspentimes.com/article/20070709/AE/70709002 (accessed 31 July 2007).

52. Fowler, "Local pens screenplay about massacre."

53. Fowler, "Local pens screenplay about massacre."

54. Fowler, "Local pens screenplay about massacre." The article states that Schutter "thinks it's very odd that the Mountain Meadows massacre fell on the same day of the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, but she said people can draw their own conclusions. 'It is strange that it's the same day, isn't it?'"

> perpetuated by leaders who history will surely judge by their deeds.[55]

While appreciative of the help Christopher Cain gave her in turning her script into what she describes as "a stirring, evocative movie that will force people to think about the nature of terrorism,"[56] she is grateful also for divine aid:

> Most of all, I am grateful to the Lord Jesus Christ who took one of the "foolish things of the world to confound the wise." In a world where only 1.1% of all screenwriters ever get a movie made, Jesus gave me a miracle. He turned me into a screenwriter and fulfilled a lifelong dream of being an author. Thank you, Jesus. What He did for me, He can and will do for you, if you never give up, and simply believe.[57]

The movie, billed as "a romance played out against a drama of a mass murder that continues to engender controversy almost 150 years after the fact,"[58] includes a combination of real and fictional characters. The synopsis of the film, as provided by Murray Weissman & Associates, the public relations firm representing the movie, is interesting in what it does and does not say:

> Captain Alexander Fancher (Shaun Johnston) is leading his third wagon train overland to California in the spring of 1857. For Fancher, an Arkansas militiaman, it would be his last trip, as this time he is bringing his family with him to settle down on the rich Gold Coast of California.
>
> Mormon Bishop Jacob Samuelson's (Jon Voight) family compound just outside Cedar City, Utah is home to his many wives and children, particularly his beloved oldest son, Jonathan (Trent Ford), and adored second son, Micah (Taylor Handley).

55. "About Me: Carole Whang Schutter," http://www.carolewhangschutter.com/about.html (accessed 25 July 2007).

56. "About Me: Carole Whang Schutter."

57. "About Me: Carole Whang Schutter."

58. John Anderson, "With Only God Left as a Witness."

Run out of Missouri a decade earlier, victims themselves of massive persecution, including the murder of their Prophet Joseph Smith (Dean Cain), the Mormons are now on edge when "Gentiles"—a term used by the Mormons for anyone not of their faith—cross into their territory. Rumors are circulating that President Buchanan is sending US Army troops to displace Territorial Governor Brigham Young (Terence Stamp) from his post. Young, in turn, has declared martial law, warning his church members to be prepared to turn back interlopers by any means.

When the Fancher wagon train stops in Mountain Meadows in early September, they are first met by Mormon deacon John D. Lee (Jon Gries) and his Danites (a group of extreme LDS vigilantes). Urged by Lee to leave the encampment, Fancher stands fast and continues to plead for compassion, as his teams need to refresh and rest.

Bishop Samuelson intervenes and allows the wagon train to stay in the valley for two weeks. The Bishop commands Lee to offer help to the settlers, while at the same time instructing his son Jonathan to spy on them, hoping to ascertain their true intent. In the meantime, the Bishop makes his way to the Elders in Cedar City and asks for divine guidance.

Jonathan is only too happy to accommodate his father's wishes, for he was captivated the first day by the angelic smile of a beautiful young girl on the wagon train. The minister's daughter, Emily (Tamara Hope) and her family are traveling with the wagon train on their way to a new life. Generous in spirit and kind in nature, Emily helps the settlers by caring for the younger children on the train. . . .

By the time the Bishop returns to the encampment, Jonathan and Emily have declared their love and commitment to each other. Still, Bishop Samuelson has other plans. The Church declares the wagon train to be enemy combatants who must be killed. Against Church teachings, as the Bishop incites his followers to prepare for the blood atonement of

those killed earlier in Missouri, Jonathan urgently and frantically tries to quell the fury.

Unable to make his father see reason, Jonathan and Emily have one last moment where they can share their commitment and Jonathan's pledge to move with her to California. The two young lovers share tokens of their promise and privately bond themselves to each other.

Planning to slip away at dawn to join the wagon train, Jonathan is instead ambushed by his father, locked up in chains and is anxiously close to being killed himself. . . .

Jacob first persuades the local Paiute Indians to attack the wagon train, accompanied by some of his own men disguised as Indians. The settlers are able to repulse the onslaught and, after losing many of his own men, the Indian chief withdraws, realizing that he has been duped by the Bishop.

As the settlers help their own wounded and wait for the next onslaught, John D. Lee comes to them under a flag of truce. Telling them that he will lead them to safety if they will follow him and leave their wagons and possessions behind, he instead leads them into a brutal ambush.

When Jonathan can at last escape and make his way to the encampment site, he encounters a scene more vicious than any from Dante's *Inferno*. Horrified at the sight, a distraught Jonathan begins the torturous search for Emily among the bodies. What he finds will put him squarely in the crosshairs between love and death—and test the will of God against the will of man.[59]

Theater or History?

Christopher Cain insists that the film was not meant to attack Mormons. "I'm comfortable that historically this movie is as accurate as you would want a theatrical movie to be," he said.[60] Cain's state-

59. Murray Weissman & Associates press release, pp. 5–6.

60. "September Dawn: The Making of . . ." YouTube.com, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OKy6mVq_ANA (accessed 31 July 2007).

ment might not be too comforting given Hollywood's record of portraying the past. Hollywood is known for "skewing historical events to fit audience profiles and lift profit margins."[61] For example, no mention was made in *Saving Private Ryan* of British and other Allied troops who also landed in Normandy on D-Day, and British submariners were replaced by Americans in the movie *U-571*.[62] A British historian called these Hollywood distortions "shameless and totally irresponsible—a grotesque distortion of history."[63]

Film portrayals of the American West are also far from real. Hollywood's West is filled with outlaws, gunfights on Main Street, Indian battles, and violence. But this is what the viewing audience has been taught to expect and enjoy. As one historian noted, "We are surrounded in the United States by a mythology of our own creation that frontier violence forged the essential American character."[64] While there certainly was a culture of honor, which included violent acts, these incidents were not the norm. With Hollywood, however, when it comes to "image versus reality, image usually wins." It is difficult for those writing about historical events to "compete with the media's power to form popular views of reality through visual impact. Granted, no one really expects films to be historically accurate."[65]

Unfortunately, Hollywood not only skews history for profit but also distorts it for even darker reasons. Some supposedly accurate movies replace "an accepted, well-supported version of an historical event with a 'new improved' version that exists less because of its accuracy than because of its advocates' biases."[66] While biases are often political in

61. Cahal Milmo, "1066 and all that: how Hollywood is giving Britain a false sense of history," *The Independent*, 5 April 2007, http://news.independent.co.uk/uk/this_britain/article54671.ece (accessed 5 April 2007).

62. "Historians: Hollywood distorts facts," AlJazeera.net, 3 September 2004, http://english.aljazeera.net/English/archive/archive?ArchiveId=5529 (accessed 5 April 2007).

63. "Historians: Hollywood distorts facts."

64. Michael A. Bellesiles, "Guns Don't Kill, Movies Kill: The Media's Promotion of Frontier Violence," *Western Historical Quarterly* 31/3 (2000): 285.

65. Bellesiles, "Guns Don't Kill, Movies Kill," 284.

66. "The Ethics of Changing History: Of Crockett, the Titanic and 'One Small Step,'" *Ethics Scoreboard*, 10 October 2006, http://www.ethicsscoreboard.com/list/history.html (accessed 26 January 2007).

nature, they can also be religious. "Ever since Hollywood's self-imposed censorship code began to fade in the '60s, religion and the religous [*sic*] have been portrayed in negative stereotypical terms."[67] This is particularly true with Christianity; various denominations have come under attack in Hollywood movies. Some films depict other religions in a positive light while portraying Christianity negatively.[68] Regarding such negative stereotyping, one writer argued that an analysis of Hollywood films with religious themes or characters reveals that in the last four decades Hollywood has portrayed Christians as sexually rigid, talking to God, disturbed, hypocritical, fanatical, psychotic, dishonest, obsessed, dumb, manipulative, phony, neurotic, mentally unbalanced, unscrupulous, destructive, foulmouthed, and fraudulent; and their roles have ranged from slick hucksters, fake spiritualists, Bible pushers, Adam and Eve as pawns in a game between God and Satan, Catholic schoolboys run amok, miracle fabricators, and deranged preachers to outlaws, devil-worshipping cultists, Bible-quoting Nazis, and murder suspects (including an unbalanced nun accused of killing her newborn infant). Few, if any, positive portrayals of Christians were found in Hollywood films released in the last four decades.[69]

"Trapped by the Mormons"

Latter-day Saints have long been the victims of negative stereotyping in Hollywood movies. From the earliest days of motion pictures,

67. Chris Hicks, "Nobody knows less about religion than filmmakers," *Deseret News*, 23 April 1999, http://www.desnews.com/cgi-bin/cqcgi_state/@state.env?CQ_SESSION_KEY=VXOETMGGQXNC&CQ_CUR_DOCUMENT=90&CQ_TEXT_MAIN=YES (accessed 11 December 2007).

68. An excellent example of a blatantly biased film is Ridley Scott's *Kingdom of Heaven* (2005). According to "Hollywood's Crusade Against History," *Christian Action For Reformation & Revival Magazine*, http://www.christianaction.org.za/articles_ca/2005-2-hollywoodcrusadeagainsth.htm (accessed 6 December 2007), the movie "distorts history beyond all recognition." It purposefully distorts known events and historical aspects by depicting the Christians doing some of the things the Muslims actually did, such as collecting tribute taxes that allow Christians and Jews, or dhimmis as they are known, to practice their religion in Muslim-controlled countries. The film reflects Scott's dislike for religion, Christianity in particular.

69. John W. Cones, *What's Really Going On in Hollywood* (Los Angeles: Rivas Canyon Press, 1997), http://www.homevideo.net/FIRM/whats.htm#3 (accessed 12 April 2006).

films depicting supposed Mormon fanaticism have appeared.[70] One of the better-known movies from the silent era was *A Mormon Maid* (1916), which used a familiar plot device found in earlier and later anti-Mormon films—"an innocent non-Mormon family with an attractive daughter caught up in the machinations of the polygamous Elders."[71]

Since the 1960s, Mormons have for the most part been portrayed as "simply caricatures designed for easy jokes and general disdain."[72] While this approach has continued, there has also been another technique to portray the Saints as violent and dangerous. There have been several films focusing on this theme, and one of the more egregious was a made-for-TV movie entitled *The Avenging Angel* (1995), with Tom Berenger starring as a professional Mormon bodyguard out to stop a plot by other Mormons to assassinate Brigham Young.[73] The movie had the usual negative stereotype of the Saints as fanatics living in a strange, foreboding place and following strange religious practices, such as polygamy.

September Dawn certainly fits this format by portraying Mormonism in exaggerated, stereotypical imagery. For example, the Saints

70. Richard Alan Nelson, "A History of Latter-day Saint Screen Portrayals in the Anti-Mormon Film Era, 1905–1936" (master's thesis, Brigham Young University, 1975), 28. According to Nelson, pp. 21–22, 95, some of the earliest films included *Mormonens Offer* (A Victim of the Mormons, 1911), *Mormonbyens Blomst* (The Flower of the Mormon City, 1911), *The Mormons* (1912), *The Mountain Meadows Massacre* (1912), *The Danites* (1912), *A Study in Scarlet* (1914), and *A Mormon Maid* (1916).

71. Nelson, "History of Latter-day Saint Screen Portrayals," 103. Among the other films using this plot line are *Mormonbyens Blomst* (1911), *The Mormons* (1912), *A Study in Scarlet* (1914), *Trapped by the Mormons* (1922), and *Married to a Mormon* (1922).

72. Chris Hicks, "Films portray Mormons in an ugly light," *Deseret Morning News*, 18 May 2007, http://deseretnews.com/dn/print/1,1442,660221510,00.html (accessed 10 July 2007). Hicks asked, "Why does it always seem to be open season on the LDS Church?" in another essay, "TV portrayal of Mormons mean, callous," *Deseret Morning News*, 6 May 2005. Near the end of his essay he asked, "Why would a mainstream TV show openly ridicule a sacred symbol of *any* religion?" Even Mormon-made films have caused controversy between Latter-day Saints and Evangelicals over whether Mormons and their films are really Christian. "Latter-day Complaints: Mormons and evangelicals fret over movies, politics, and each other," *Christianity Today*, 1 July 2006, http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/article_print.html?id=38401 (accessed 18 April 2007).

73. "The Avenging Angel (1995)," http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0112423 (accessed 8 August 2007).

are pictured as fanatical and violent individuals who repress women, believe in strange doctrines and rituals, and worship a false Christ. Not surprisingly, the Mountain Meadows Massacre is portrayed as a plot of pure evil planned at the top and executed to destroy good and innocence.[74]

Violence in Nineteenth-Century America

Although Carole Schutter claims to have spent four years researching the subject before writing the screenplay,[75] the movie contains glaring historical inaccuracies, claiming, for example, that Brigham Young "transported 16,000 people to the Rocky Mountains . . . in one wagon train."[76] In fact, according to the *Mormon Pioneer Resource Study*, it took from 1847 to the middle of 1851 before 16,000 people had immigrated to Utah.[77] Again, Jonathan Samuelson was supposed to have seen Brigham Young preach in the Salt Lake Temple,[78] but the temple was not finished until 1893, almost sixteen years after Young died. Schutter and the other creators of *September Dawn* also described the First Presidency as "the level immediately below the office of the Prophet,"[79] but the prophet is actually a part of the First Presidency. She also had Joseph Smith and other Latter-day Saint leaders practicing plural marriage while they were still in Kirtland, Ohio,[80] but plural marriage on a large scale was not practiced until about 1843, when the Latter-day Saints were centered in Nauvoo, Illinois. Schutter

74. For various studies on Mormons and film, see *BYU Studies* 46/2 (2007), a special issue devoted to this subject.

75. "Most controversial movie since Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ*?" RNS Press Release, Religion News Service, 1 August 2007, http://www.religionnews.com/press02/PR073107B.html (accessed 6 August 2007).

76. Carole Whang Schutter, *September Dawn* (Bloomington, IN: AuthorHouse, 2007), 136. Most of the quotations and references are from Schutter's novelized version of the screenplay, *September Dawn*. AuthorHouse is a self-publishing company (www.authorhouse.com [accessed 26 November 2007]).

77. *Mormon Pioneer Historic Resource Study*, National Park Service (2003), http://www.nps.gov/history/history/online_books/mopi/hrsab.htm (accessed 18 August 2007).

78. Schutter, *September Dawn*, 133.

79. Schutter, *September Dawn*, 37.

80. Schutter, *September Dawn*, 75

also described Missouri's "Mormon War" as starting when Latter-day Saints "attacked state troops" in October 1838.[81] She did not, however, mention that state militia served on both sides of the skirmish nor that the reason the Latter-day Saints approached Samuel W. Bogart's militia camp was that he and his men had kidnapped two Latter-day Saint men who the Saints feared were going to be executed. The supposed "attack" was a rescue mission, and gunfire occurred on both sides, with several Latter-day Saints being wounded and three being killed.[82]

Perhaps more troubling is Schutter's failure to mention what has come to be called the Haun's Mill Massacre, in which state militia attacked a Latter-day Saint settlement and killed nineteen men, including a ten-year-old boy who begged for his life.[83] Moreover, the events in Missouri and Illinois were portrayed as if they were completely the fault of the Latter-day Saints. "Mob brutality exploded and found its way from Independence to Far West, Missouri. . . . Joseph [Smith] ultimately betrayed his own people by inciting them to violence in a frenzy of self-righteous fury with his demands of complete subjection to god and his commands."[84]

The creators of *September Dawn* portrayed the Latter-day Saints as aggressors deserving mob reciprocation. In fact, descriptions and images of beatings, castrations, and murders permeate the film—for example, dark images of Danites, "often dressed as Indians," bursting into houses, dragging "sinners out of their beds, slitting their throats from ear to ear," and exacting other types of severe punishment.[85] Even more insidious than the murders, as portrayed by the movie, "the Mormons had an unusual form of punishment for men accused of sexual sins—castration."[86]

81. Schutter, *September Dawn*, 86.

82. For an in-depth discussion of the Mormon-related conflicts in Missouri, see Stephen C. LeSueur, *The 1838 Mormon War in Missouri* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1990).

83. For more information on the Haun's Mill Massacre, see Alma R. Blair, "The Haun's Mill Massacre," *BYU Studies* 13/1 (1972): 62–67.

84. Schutter, *September Dawn*, 86.

85. Schutter, *September Dawn*, 106.

86. Schutter, *September Dawn*, 107.

There were, of course, examples of extralegal punishment for sexual and other serious crimes in territorial Utah. For example, in 1846 Daniel Barnum and Peletiah Brown were whipped for "carnal communication" with some young women. But the legal punishment was death.[87] In 1856 one of the more controversial incidents took place when Thomas Lewis of Manti was taken by a group of men on his way to the territorial penitentiary for some unspecified sexual crime, probably fornication, and castrated.[88] Another man named John Beal was castrated in 1858 for adultery.[89]

Most cases of extralegal punishment, however, were retribution for seductions and rapes. The precedent-setting case was that of Howard Egan, who in 1851 killed James Monroe. Monroe had had an affair with Egan's first wife, Tamson. Monroe wisely chose to get out of town before Egan returned home from a journey to California. Egan, however, followed Monroe and caught him close to the Utah border, where he shot and killed him.[90]

Egan was later brought to trial, where he was defended by George A. Smith. During the closing arguments, Smith argued, "In this territory it is a principle of mountain common law, that no man can seduce the wife of another without endangering his own life." He then continued, "The principle, the only one, that beats and throbs through the heart of the entire inhabitants of this territory, is simply this: The man who seduces his neighbor's wife must die, and her nearest relative must kill

87. Juanita Brooks, ed., *On the Mormon Frontier: The Diary of Hosea Stout, 1844–1861* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press and Utah Historical Society, 1964), 1:190–91.

88. Elizabeth Lewis Jones to Brigham Young, 2 November 1856; Elizabeth Lewis Jones to Brigham Young, 8 November 1856; and Elizabeth Lewis Jones to Brigham Young, 9 November 1856, Brigham Young Papers, Bx 69, fd 7, Family and Church History Department Archives, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (hereafter Church Archives). Brigham Young responded by stating he had been told that Thomas Lewis was "wilful wicked and ungovernable." Brigham Young to Elizabeth Jones, 13 November 1856, Brigham Young Papers, Bx 69, fd 7, Church Archives.

89. Brooks, *On the Mormon Frontier*, 2:663.

90. Kenneth L. Cannon II, "'Mountain Common Law': The Extralegal Punishment of Seducers in Early Utah," *Utah Historical Quarterly* 51/4 (1983): 310–11. For other examples of extralegal punishment in territorial Utah, see Craig L. Foster, "The Butler Murder of 1869: A Look at Extralegal Punishment in Utah," *Mormon Historical Studies* 2/2 (2001): 105–14.

him!"[91] Egan was acquitted, and during the following decades, several husbands and fathers who killed seducers or rapists used Smith's argument as the basis for their actions. Obviously, extralegal punishment of this nature would certainly not be condoned today. It was not, however, limited to Utah. Nor was extralegal punishment of this nature a strictly local means for enforcing local mores—it was common across the United States and its territories and was much more accepted in the nineteenth century than in the present.

Some examples may help give a better picture of the culture at that time. In 1886 in Walla Walla, Washington, a man tried to rape a young girl but was stopped. While he was never brought to trial, a group of men later abducted him and tried him for rape. He was not seen again until his corpse was found hanging from a tree.[92] In 1850s Morgan County, Missouri, a resident poisoned a spring used by the schoolchildren, several of whom died from the poisoning. His neighbors chased him, brought him back, and hanged him at the schoolhouse.[93]

Extreme violence over real or imagined attacks against a person and his honor was not uncommon. This was particularly true in the South, where tradition emphasized the need to preserve one's honor, especially in regard to female members of a man's family. Southern states were also the site of intense anti-Mormon activity, particularly in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, when there were over three hundred instances of anti-Mormon violence,[94] including meetings being broken up by mobs, property destroyed, beatings, whippings, tar and featherings, shootings, and murders.[95] Such activities were not only accepted but even encouraged. In 1886 the *Alabama*

91. *Deseret Evening News*, 15 November 1851, as quoted in Cannon, "Mountain Common Law," 312.

92. The *Washington Statesman* account of the lynching is published in "Walla Walla in the 1860s: Violence," *Western Places: A Chronicle of Western Settlement* 2 (October 1993): 33.

93. Gerard Schultz, *Early History of the Northern Ozarks* (Jefferson City, MO: Midland Printing, 1937), 144–45.

94. Patrick Q. Mason, "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry Mob: Violence Against Religious Outsiders in the U. S. South, 1865–1900" (PhD diss., University of Notre Dame, 2005), 280.

95. Mason, "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry Mob," 281.

Baptist published an editorial insisting that "it is Mormonism itself that is to be hated, to be feared, to be crushed."[96]

No part of the country was free of extralegal violence, usually in the form of vigilantism. Such states as Indiana, Illinois, and Iowa had strong vigilante groups, but even stronger ones were found in such western states as California, Texas, and Montana. In addition, the Missouri-Arkansas border country, where most of the members of the Baker and Fancher wagon train came from, witnessed extreme vigilantism between 1884 and 1892.

Interestingly, extralegal violence in Utah "was rare compared to that found in other frontier communities."[97] For example, "within six months of arriving in California in 1849, one in every five of the 89,000 gold seekers was dead, an astonishing statistic."[98] And it has been estimated that there were 4,200 murders in California between 1849 and 1855.[99] "The city of Marysville reportedly had seventeen murders in a single week, prompting the formation of a vigilance committee."[100]

Danites

Tales of Danite intimidation and violence notwithstanding, Utah never reached the level of violence of the mining and frontier communities in surrounding states and territories. There were certainly forms of vigilante justice in Utah, but not to the extent of its neighbors. Nor was vigilantism perpetrated by Danites (mispronounced with a long *a* in *September Dawn*), who were "a defensive paramilitary organization" created to assist the Saints during the religious violence leading up to the so-called Mormon War in northwestern Missouri in

96. Mason, "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry Mob," 127. According to Mason, the editorial appeared in the *Alabama Baptist*, 22 April 1886.

97. "The Legal History of Utah," *Utah History Encyclopedia*, http://www.media.utah.edu/UHE/l/LEGALHISTORY.html (accessed 2 May 2007).

98. David T. Courtwright, "Violence in America," *American Heritage* 47 (September 1996): 40. Certainly not all of the deaths were from violence. Disease, mining accidents, and other factors were also causes of death. Even so, a high percentage of deaths resulted from violence.

99. Courtwright, "Violence in America," 44.

100. Courtwright, "Violence in America," 44.

1838. The head of the two known units that composed the Danites was Sampson Avard, who, unbeknownst to Joseph Smith and other Latter-day Saint church leaders, altered the original defensive purposes of the Danites by using "initiation rites and secret oaths of loyalty and encouraged subversive activities."[101]

While Joseph Smith was aware of the Danites, he was not aware of their more violent and destructive operations. Nevertheless, Danite tales had been created, and stories of their atrocities were plentiful throughout the nineteenth century. Anti-Mormon fiction writers created fanciful accounts of rampaging Danites committing murder in the name of God. "By 1900 at least fifty-six anti-Mormon novels alone had been published in English, incorporating one or more aspects of the Danite myth, beginning with the false assumption that there was a functioning Danite organization in Utah."[102]

September Dawn relies upon the old anti-Mormon stereotypes of Danites. In visual imagery reminiscent of the Ring-wraiths from the *Lord of the Rings* movies, Danites appear throughout the movie wreaking havoc. We are told, for instance, that John D. Lee was a Danite and was "aware of the lengths the church went to in order to keep their people in line and strengthen the position of the men in power."[103]

There is no doubt that, as early as 1847, Brigham Young did appoint "a few 'rough-rider' type minute men" who "were on call for Indian uprisings and immigrant problems."[104] But "there were never '70 Destroying Angels' appointed by Brigham Young"[105] to roam the territory and terrorize people, nor was there even one organized band of Danites. But the imagery of Brigham Young's "Destroying Angels"

101. Arnold K. Garr, et al., eds., *Encyclopedia of Latter-day Saint History* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2000), 275. For further reading on the origins and activities of the Danites, see Leland H. Gentry, "The Danite Band of 1838," *BYU Studies* 14/4 (1974): 421–50.

102. Rebecca Foster Cornwall and Leonard J. Arrington, "Perpetuation of a Myth: Mormon Danites in Five Western Novels, 1840–90," *BYU Studies* 23/2 (1983): 149.

103. Schutter, *September Dawn*, 102–3, 148.

104. Lynn M. Hilton and Hope A. Hilton, "Danites," *Utah History Encyclopedia*, http://www.media.utah.edu/UHE/d/DANITES.html (accessed 13 April 2007).

105. Hilton and Hilton, "Danites."

was appealing to readers and, later, filmgoers and apparently continues to capture the imagination.

Misrepresentation of Temple Ceremonies

September Dawn also portrays Mormonism as a non-Christian cult with strange doctrines and rituals by focusing on presumed eccentricities, particularly the temple ceremony. These portrayals are filled with sensationalism, stereotypes, and innuendo. In both the movie and the book, Jonathan Samuelson is taken to the Latter-day Saint temple in Cedar City, where he is forced to endure rituals.[106] The most obvious problem with this scenario is that there never has been a temple in Cedar City. In 1857 there was no Latter-day Saint temple anywhere, only the Endowment House in Salt Lake City. The creators cannot claim ignorance on this matter because Schutter, according to Sandra Tanner of Utah Lighthouse Ministry, phoned her and "asked about the temple ritual."[107] During this conversation Tanner explained that Salt Lake City would be where the endowment ceremony would have taken place.

A temple placed in the wrong setting is not the only misleading scene related to the temple. Another scene depicts Jacob Samuelson in a temple meeting working a group of men into a rage, with all of them "screaming and chanting with frenzied fury, 'Blood atonement! Blood atonement!'" Even Sandra Tanner felt this was "a little over the top."[108] But, as she explained several times, she only had some casual telephone conversations with Carole Schutter, she never read the screenplay, and she didn't see film clips until the movie was completed and she and others were invited to a private screening.[109]

Where did Carole Schutter and Christopher Cain come up with these ideas? They drew upon Increase Van Dusen's temple exposés as the primary source for this part of the movie. What they either did not know or chose to ignore was that Van Dusen suffered from mental

106. Schutter, *September Dawn*, 112–16.
107. Telephone interview between Craig L. Foster and Sandra Tanner (15 August 2007).
108. Telephone interview between Foster and Tanner.
109. Telephone interview between Foster and Tanner.

and emotional problems. Even after publishing several tracts exposing the temple ceremony, he was still affiliated with James J. Strang and his group (who had broken off from the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints). This affiliation continued until personal conflicts between Strang and Van Dusen over the latter's 1849 publication of a tract containing his own revelations caused Van Dusen's banishment from the Strangites.[110]

September Dawn also contains numerous references to oaths of vengeance supposedly taken by Latter-day Saints. For example, at the very beginning Jonathan Samuelson is pictured as knowing it was "his duty to expose the defiantly anti-American oaths taken by members."[111] During the scenes of the temple ceremony, the participants spoke in unison as they made their final vows:

> We promise to never question the commands of the authorities in the church and promise instant obedience. We swear everlasting enmity to the United States government and promise to disregard its laws as far as possible. We vow to exert every effort to avenge the death of our Prophet Joseph Smith and his brother Hyrum on the Gentile race and on this American nation. We vow to teach our children and our children's children to foster this spirit of revenge. The penalty for anyone who breaks or reveals this oath is excruciating torture. They shall have . . . their throats cut from ear to ear; and their hearts and tongues will be cut out. In the world to come, they will inherit eternal damnation. There will be no chance of salvation for them.[112]

Typically, Schutter has relied on a few well-used nineteenth-century anti-Mormon sources rather than plumbing the many primary documents relating to this topic. While there are reports that the Saints sometimes prayed for the Lord to execute vengeance on their enemies

110. Craig L. Foster, "From Temple Mormon to Anti-Mormon: The Ambivalent Odyssey of Increase Van Dusen," *Dialogue* 27/3 (1994): 283–84.

111. Schutter, *September Dawn*, xiii.

112. Schutter, *September Dawn*, 115–16.

(in a spirit reminiscent of Psalm 83:13–17 and Revelation 16:4–7), there is no evidence that they took an oath to seek vengeance themselves.[113]

Plural Marriage

The way plural marriage is depicted in *September Dawn* is merely a rehash of stereotypes used since the days of the nineteenth-century penny tracts and tell-all novels "exposing" Mormon polygamy. There are numerous references to polygamy in the movie (and the book) that play up sexual stereotyping. For instance, in a scene in the movie, Jacob Samuelson, as the bishop, walks along a row of Mormon men prepared to attack the wagon train and anoints the forehead of each man, repeating how they would be honored "with a polygamous kingdom in the last days."

The book also employs the stereotype of the misery of the lesser wives:

> Bands of impoverished polygamists roamed the countryside with their many wives, some of them girls barely in their teens, married to men in their sixties. Starving and dressed in rags, they tagged after their "Father," as they called their husbands, carrying their naked babies on their hip. The famine of 1856, caused by the locusts, had left some families so poor even the older children ran around unclothed. It was not uncommon to see the younger wives of wealthy Mormons walking barefoot to church. As younger wives, they were nothing more than servants to the first wife and whoever the "Father's" current favorite wives were.[114]

The book thus creates the impression that all Latter-day Saint women wanted to escape plural marriage but were too frightened to try.[115]

113. See http://www.fairwiki.org/Oath_of_vengeance (accessed 25 October 2007).

114. Schutter, *September Dawn*, 4–5.

115. Schutter, *September Dawn*, 138–39. Women's fear of being punished for running away from polygamy is reinforced in *September Dawn* by the blood atoning of Jonathan Samuelson's own mother, who ran away from an unnamed apostle after she was forced to become his plural wife. Her blood-atoning is described on pages 101–3.

Clichés related to polygamy abound in *September Dawn*. The Mormon apostle who stole Jonathan Samuelson's mother away from Jacob Samuelson, her rightful husband, is described as "a fat old man with piggish eyes."[116] In explaining Brigham Young's having at least twenty-seven wives, Jonathan states matter-of-factly, "Women feel honored to marry him."[117] Again, when Jacob Samuelson and John D. Lee go to report the massacre to Brigham Young, they arrive at the Beehive House. "Next to it was the magnificent, sprawling Lion's House, which housed Brigham's harem."[118] Note that *harem* is used to describe Brigham Young's large family. Since the mid-1800s, anti-Mormon writers have compared Mormons to Muslims, particularly using imagery of captivity, sensuality, and sexuality, which have long played an important part in the Western world's perception of Islam and its adherents.[119] Muslims have been viewed as "irredeemably lustful and therefore immoral. This negative image was in the eighteenth century complemented by another, again largely imagined, dimension of the Middle East as an exotic area with romantic longing, harems, Turkish baths and eunuchs. Middle Easterners were seen as inherently licentious."[120]

Anti-Mormon literature often described Brigham Young as one who "glories in his shame, so as to make every friend of modesty and morality blush for him, and sigh over his evil example."[121] Mormon leaders were characterized as "conspicuously obscene, profane and

116. Schutter, *September Dawn*, 56.

117. Schutter, *September Dawn*, 142. The book goes on to include how Jonathan Samuelson, having grown up with polygamy, "had automatically accepted the practice. He wondered why this Mormon mandate suddenly seemed distasteful to him. *Perhaps the Gentiles have the right idea*, he thought, immediately feeling disloyal."

118. Schutter, *September Dawn*, 231. Of course, what Schutter calls the "Lion's House" was and still is called the Lion House.

119. Craig L. Foster, *Penny Tracts and Polemics: A Critical Analysis of Anti-Mormon Pamphleteering in Great Britain, 1837–1860* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford, 2002), 165.

120. Sabine Schmidtke, "Review of *Sexual Encounters in the Middle East: The British, the French and the Arabs,* by Derek Hopwood," *Die Welt des Islams*, n.s., 41/1 (2001): 121.

121. Dawson Burns, *Mormonism, Explained and Exposed* (London: Houlston and Stoneman, 1853), 26.

immoral"[122] and as "lecherous old scamps,"[123] and the women were described as "panderers to . . . lust."[124] Such movies as *Trapped by the Mormons* and *A Mormon Maid* employed this imagery; *September Dawn* does the same, showing John D. Lee and Brigham Young arguing about a woman Lee loves but whom Young insists on marrying as a plural wife.

Joseph Smith is portrayed in even worse terms. He is said to have justified his infidelities with teenage girls "by announcing he had a revelation from God that the Heavenly Father had not only sanctioned, but encouraged, polygamy."[125] Of course, Joseph Smith's plural marriages with teenagers are mentioned with appropriate shock and disgust. Carole Schutter and the other creators of *September Dawn* have fallen into the same trap that even some historians fall into—projecting their values onto people of another era.

While Americans today react with disgust at the thought of older men marrying teenage women, it was much more common in earlier centuries. Peter Laslett, the prominent social historian, has noted, for example, that in eighteenth-century Belgrade, Serbia, girls as young as eleven and twelve were not only marrying but also having children. Furthermore, 87 percent of all women between the ages of fifteen and nineteen were married, and one-third of fifteen-year-old girls and over half of all sixteen-year-old girls were married.[126]

On the American side, it was common in newer regions of settlement and farming in both the United States and Canada for women to marry at a young age. Both brides and grooms were very young in

122. Albert King Morris, *A Word of Warning to Young Women: The Unseen Hand of Mormonism* (Pittsburgh: The National Order of Anti-Polygamy Crusaders, ca. 1920), 4. He also urged young women not to desert their home for "a place in one of the Mormon harems" and to "forsake not the sacredness of [their] true womanhood."

123. William Jarman, *British Female Slaves*, 2. This is an undated anti-Mormon tract identified as no. 13 (in the author's possession).

124. John Benjamin Franklin, *The Mysteries and Crimes of Mormonism; or, A Voice from the Utah Pandemonium* (London: C. Elliott, 1855?), 3.

125. Schutter, *September Dawn*, 73.

126. Peter Laslett, "Age at Menarche in Europe since the Eighteenth Century," in *Marriage and Fertility: Studies in Interdisciplinary History*, ed. Robert I. Rotberg and Theodore K. Rabb (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1980), 291, 293.

colonial America.[127] For example, in seventeenth-century Chesapeake Bay and environs, it was common for women to marry at age sixteen or younger. Marriages at a young age continued with the American push West, and while the marriageable age for both women and men has risen over the years in the United States and other parts of the Western world, there are still some ethnic and social groups that continue to accept and even encourage marriages between young couples.[128]

The Reality and the Illusion

The regrettable reality is that after a week's siege, on the morning of 7 September 1857, Mormon militia talked members of the Baker and Fancher wagon train into laying down their weapons and trusting in the protection of the militia. Then on 11 September the militia and a group of Paiute Indians killed at least 120 unarmed men, women, and children. This event provides the supposed reason for making *September Dawn*—to tell the story of a tragedy that took place almost 150 years ago. Unfortunately, rather than provide a straightforward account of one of the worst massacres in American history, the makers of the movie created a convoluted love story full of inaccurate information. So eager were Carole Schutter and Christopher Cain to portray this sad event with clichéd stereotypes that they garbled the entire story, introducing many factual mistakes in the process.

From the outset, both minor and major historical inaccuracies mar the film. Mountain Meadows, for example, is represented as a valley with tall trees alongside a wide river. But in reality there were very few trees, at best just some scrub oak. Moreover, the source of water was the small Magotsu Creek, located in a gully. Another problem is the depiction of travel time when riding on a horse or in a wagon. In one scene, Jacob Samuelson departs in a one-horse carriage to visit

127. Michael Gordon, ed., *The American Family in Social-Historical Perspective*, 3rd ed. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1983), 16; and David Hackett Fischer, *Albion's Seed: Four British Folkways in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 674–75.

128. For a lengthier discussion on marriage ages and marriage customs in comparison to Mormons, see Craig L. Foster, "Doing Violence to Historical Integrity," *FARMS Review* 16/1 (2004): 149–74.

Brigham Young, telling his son he will be gone "two days, maybe more."[129] But Salt Lake City is more than 250 miles north of Cedar City, and riding hard and changing horses at every settlement up and back would have taken at least five or six days (and even then the rider could have spent only a few hours in Salt Lake City). Furthermore, the movie depicts Jonathan riding back and forth between Cedar City and Mountain Meadows as if it is a twenty- or thirty-minute horseback ride rather than approximately forty-five miles.

The chronology and time frame of events have also been changed. The wagon train arrived at the valley probably sometime around midday or early evening on Saturday, 5 September. The emigrants had a peaceful Sunday at the meadow and were attacked shortly before dawn on Monday, 7 September. The book and movie have the wagon train reaching the meadow at the end of August and resting there a week before they were attacked.[130]

Schutter and Cain needed the added time to have a relationship develop between Jonathan and Emily, the "Romeo and Juliet" of the movie. The likelihood of a romance springing up between the two is improbable to say the least, even if they did have that extra week at the meadow. Even Sandra Tanner told Carole Schutter that the idea of a love-at-first-sight romance was "improbable" and suggested that the storyline have the two originally meeting in Arkansas. One family could join the church and move to Utah, where the couple could renew their romance when the wagon train passed through.[131] This idea did not appeal to Schutter. Instead, she had the wagon train arrive at Mountain Meadows a week early in an attempt to make a far-fetched scenario seem plausible.

Several other points are also overplayed. After Jacob and practically all of the community leaders in southern Utah make their short trip to Salt Lake City, they meet with Brigham Young and various Indian chiefs to plan the wagon train's destruction. In the course of their plotting, Brigham Young declares in a rather melodramatic

129. Schutter, *September Dawn*, 23.
130. Schutter, *September Dawn*, 1.
131. Telephone interview between Foster and Tanner.

voice, "I am the voice of god, and anyone who doesn't like it will be hewn down."[132] "Enthralled, the assembly shouted, 'Amen!'"[133] But contrary to Cain and Schutter's assurances that everything their "Brigham Young" utters is what the real Brigham Young said, there is no source for Young having actually spoken those words. However, Christopher Cain went as far as to say, "I didn't write any of his dialogue," claiming it was all found in Brigham Young's depositions.[134] But I read Brigham Young's deposition for John D. Lee's second trial without finding any hint of the above statement.[135] (Nor was Sandra Tanner able to find it.)[136]

That is not the only instance in which Brigham Young is misquoted. A little later Young proclaims, "Now I will loose the Indians upon them! And if any miserable scoundrels come here to our Zion, cut their throats!"[137] In a blatant act of misrepresentation, the creators of *September Dawn* combined two different quotations, both taken out of context. In his 16 August 1857 speech, Brigham Young complained that the emigrants had "shot at every Indian they saw," angering the Indians to the point where Young felt he could not "keep them peacable [*sic*]." He then announced that if an army came to Utah, he would "not hold the Indians still while the emigrants shoot them, as they have hitherto done, but [he would] say to them, go and do as you please."[138]

The other part of the quotation had nothing to do with loosing the Indians. Brigham Young was speaking about the persecution the Saints had experienced and about evil men coming to Utah to take advantage of the Mormons:

---

132. Schutter, *September Dawn*, 39.

133. Schutter, *September Dawn*, 39.

134. Anderson, "With Only God Left as a Witness."

135. "Deposition of Brigham Young, July 30, 1875 (for second trial of John D. Lee)," Mountain Meadows Association, http://www.mtn-meadows-assoc.com/bydep.htm (accessed 21 August 2007).

136. Response to a 28 November 2004 letter to the editor, http://www.utlm.org/onlineresources/letters_to_the_editor/2004/2004november.htm (accessed 21 August 2007).

137. Schutter, *September Dawn*, 42.

138. Brigham Young, speech in the old tabernacle on 16 August 1857. I thank Melvin Bashore for providing these quotations.

> We have the proof on hand, that instead of the laws being honored, they have been violated in every instance of persecution against this people; instead of the laws being made honorable, they have been trampled under the feet of lawyers, judges, sheriffs, governors, legislators, and nearly all the officers of the government; such persons are the most guilty of breaking the laws.
>
> To diverge a little, in regard to those who have persecuted this people and driven them to the mountains, I intend to meet them on their own grounds. It was asked this morning how we could obtain redress for our wrongs; I will tell you how it could be done, we could take the same law they have taken, viz., mobocracy, and if any miserable scoundrels come here, cut their throats. (All the people said, Amen.)[139]

While the portrayal of events leading up to the actual attack against the wagon train is inaccurate, that is nothing compared to the ineptitude with which the wagon train members and the massacre itself are handled. Christopher Cain claimed that while there is "some fiction" in the movie, the creators of the film are "fairly accurate in terms of the real story."[140] Cain ends up trivializing the members of the Baker and Fancher wagon train, their fortitude in the face of a horrific attack, and, ultimately, their senseless murders.

Similarly, the first victim in the movie is Nancy Dunlap, whom Cain and Schutter depict as a pants-wearing, gun-toting woman who earns the wrath of the Mormons. Her "bloody body" is discovered the night before the actual attack, and they quickly see that "a part of her scalp had been brutally cut away."[141] Thus forewarned, Captain Fancher orders that the wagons be circled tight and the number of outriders doubled.[142]

---

139. Brigham Young, "The Kingdom of God," *Journal of Discourses*, 2:311.

140. Paula K. Parker, "A Conversation with September Dawn's Christopher Cain," BuddyHollywood.com, 15 August 2007, http://www.buddyhollywood.com (accessed 21 August 2007).

141. Schutter, *September Dawn*, 164–65.

142. Schutter, *September Dawn*, 166–67.

What an insult to the courage and tenacity of the actual wagon train members. In actuality, the attack Monday morning was a complete surprise. The wagons and tents were spread out haphazardly by family groupings near the creek, and the emigrants were unprotected and in a very vulnerable position. Impressively, even in the face of a surprise attack, they were able not only to defend themselves and force the attackers back but also to move the wagons into a circle and start digging a wagon fort by piling up dirt embankments under and between the wagons.[143] To have them prepared the night before takes away from their herculean accomplishments during what was no doubt the frenzied hysteria of the first attack.

John D. Lee estimated that seven men were killed and three wounded in the initial attack.[144] More men probably died because the pickets and herders were most likely killed before they could make it back to the safety of the camp. Schutter, however, depicts a veritable bloodbath of both sexes and all ages with more women being killed than men.[145]

Adding to the absurdity of this recounting of the massacre is the scene portraying numerous Mormons attacking the wagon train on the day of the first attack. The historical data shows that Lee and perhaps one or two other Mormon men were the only settlers at the meadow during the first attack. But even more ludicrous is how the film portrays the Mormon men darkening their faces to look like Indians but then making a full-on assault on the wagon train still wearing "white men" clothing, including their hats (a few of which looked like the old beaver-skinned top hats similar to what Abraham Lincoln wore). How gullible do the makers of *September Dawn* think the wagon train emigrants were? If the emigrants had seen men wearing that type of clothing at the beginning of the week attacking and shooting at them, would they have been so receptive and gullible on that fateful Friday?

143. Juanita Brooks, *The Mountain Meadows Massacre* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1962), 70.

144. Brooks, *Mountain Meadows Massacre*, 70.

145. Schutter, *September Dawn*, 186–88. Among the women mentioned being killed were Nancy Dunlap (killed the night before), Armilda Tackitt, Manerva Beller Baker, and Sarah Baker Mitchell.

In the book, Schutter further demonstrates a lack of knowledge regarding the actual emigrants. Several examples from the book will suffice. Twenty-two-year-old Amilda Tackitt was killed by an Indian. "Out of nowhere, twenty-five-year-old Charles Stallcup appeared. Just the day before, he had confided to Emily that he planned to ask Amilda to marry him before they reached California."[146] That certainly would have been interesting since both were already married—and not to each other. Furthermore, Amilda appears to have survived death; she later surfaces alive and well under her actual name of Armilda. "Alexander's heart went out to all the young mothers, like twenty-two-year-old Armilda Tackitt, who sobbed as she placed William Henry, nineteen months, and Emberson Milum, four years, in the wagon."[147]

Another wagon train member who should be dead isn't. Saladia Ann Brown Huff is described as carrying a dead baby and "screaming as she attacked a Mormon guard" who has entered the wagon fort. "Her four-year-old daughter, Nancy, was crying and clinging to Saladia's skirts, while Saladia's husband, Peter, stood next to her, trying to explain to the guard that the baby was already dead."[148] Since Peter Huff died on the plains before the wagon train reached Salt Lake City,[149] his being at the meadow was quite miraculous but certainly not impossible for writers intent on demonizing a religion.

In the film, Cain has all of the men, women, and children happily coming out of the protection of their wagon fort when John D. Lee and others ride up with their white flag to talk them into surrendering. But walking out in the open when the whereabouts of the Indians was unknown would have been foolish, and the real emigrants did no such thing. Cain nevertheless includes this scene in the movie. The movie and book also include a rape scene—played out in detail in the book—even though Juanita Brooks, among other reputable historians, has concluded that "the whole suggestion of rape in this incident seems to

146. Schutter, *September Dawn*, 186.
147. Schutter, *September Dawn*, 210.
148. Schutter, *September Dawn*, 211.
149. "A Survivor of the Mountain Meadow Massacre," *Fort Smith Weekly New Era*, 24 February 1875.

be another example of how repeated suggestion and whisperings may grow into more and more impossible tales, which are then passed on as fact."[150]

Cain, Schutter, Voight, and others involved with *September Dawn* have repeatedly claimed to have nothing against the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. "I don't have an agenda with the Mormon Church," Cain said.[151] "I made a movie about Mormons attacking a wagon train; not me attacking Mormons."[152] Schutter begins her book by stating, "Throughout the ages, religious radicals have justified horrific deeds by piously announcing that their crimes against humanity were done in the name of God."[153] She then explains that the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has "a bloody past"[154] but has "reinvented itself from its brutal beginnings by becoming as blandly non-threatening as the pictures of their founder, Joseph Smith."[155] Although her attitude toward Mormonism is quite clear, Schutter makes it even more overt by including the following scripture on the page preceding the author's note: "For we wrestle not against flesh and blood but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of the world, against spiritual wickedness in high places" (Ephesians 6:12).[156]

Schutter, as do some other conservative Christians, sees herself as involved in spiritual warfare against the powers of darkness. "The 'spiritual warfare' movement, born in the 1970s and 1980s in Californian Evangelical and Pentecostal circles, gained international prominence in 1986 when the best selling novel *This Present Darkness* by Frank Peretti was published. By 1991, one and a half million copies of the novel had

150. Brooks, *Mountain Meadows Massacre*, 105–6.

151. Chris Lee, "Fanatics and a forgotten massacre," *Los Angeles Times*, 19 August 2007, http://www.latimes.com/entertainment/news/movies/la-ca-september19aug19,1,5904349,p (accessed 20 August 2007).

152. Parker, "A Conversation with September Dawn's Christopher Cain."

153. Schutter, *September Dawn*, ix.

154. Schutter, *September Dawn*, x.

155. Schutter, *September Dawn*, xii.

156. Schutter, *September Dawn*, vii.

been sold."[157] Numerous Evangelicals were soon engaged in battling the forces of evil. For Schutter, as well as others, that spiritual warfare involves attacking the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.[158] (Not surprisingly, some anti-Mormon groups quickly recognized the polemical value of the movie. In fact, according to a posting on the Internet titled "'September Dawn' as a deconversion tool," an issue of *The Cross* [*Christians Reaching Out to Sincere Saints*], "the bi-monthly newsletter issued by the Arizona-based anti-Mormon organization called Concerned Christians," wrote that *September Dawn* would be a good thing for the ministry; and Bob Betts, the author of the review, expected "a flurry of calls and e-mails from people, wanting more information." Betts also suggested readers "pray for all those who will watch September Dawn.")[159]

Public Reaction to *September Dawn*

Fortunately, the movie's anti-Mormon sentiments have not gone unrecognized.[160] Several movie reviewers have commented on the anti-Mormon tone of the movie. *Slant Magazine* stated that the movie "quickly feels less like an attempt at historical truth-telling than like shameless anti-Mormon propaganda."[161] Weber State University pro-

157. Frank Peretti, *This Present Darkness* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 1986), as quoted in Massimo Introvigne, "Strange Bedfellows or Future Enemies?: Is the split between the secular anti cult and the religious counter cult movement bound to grow into open antagonism?" *Dialogcentret* (October 1993), http://www.dci.dk/?artikel=200 (accessed 22 August 2007). Introvigne wrote in his essay that "even a cursory look at the Christian counter cult literature would show that the single most targeted group is the Mormon Church."

158. Thus the comment near the end of *September Dawn* (p. 252) about finding "the real Jesus."

159. Justin, "'September Dawn' as a deconversion tool," *Mormon Wasp*, http://www.mormonwasp.wordpress.com/2007/06/21/september-dawn-as-a-deconversion-tool (accessed 12 July 2007).

160. Online posts about the movie have appeared at numerous Web sites, including exmormon.org and mormontruth.blogspot.com. Well-known anti-Mormon John L. Smith also discussed the movie in an article titled "New Film About Mountain Meadows," *The Newsletter* 3/28 (2006): 1. Some anti-Mormon groups immediately saw the polemical value of the film.

161. Nick Schager, "September Dawn," *Slant Magazine*, 20 April 2007, http://www.slantmagazine.com/film/film_review.asp?ID=2925 (accessed 7 May 2007).

fessor and Mountain Meadows Massacre expert Gene A. Sessions was quoted in a *Boston Globe* review saying, "This is a bit of salacious trash, designed to sensationalize a terribly tragic event and horrible atrocity as well as to exploit current anti-Mormon and anti-religious sentiment that seems to be sweeping through popular culture."[162] Scott Renshaw of the *Charleston City Paper* described the movie as "unintentionally hilarious and borderline offensive." "It does everything but gasp and insist there are horns under the Mormons' hats."[163] He described the portrayal of Mormon leaders "cackling in cartoonish villainy and twirling moustaches—er, beards"[164] and concluded by calling the film a "historical tar-and-feathering" in which Cain had portrayed Mormons as "homesteading Nazis," adding an interesting observation echoed by other reviewers: "By treating the Mormons with such laughable contempt, he actually made me feel sorry for them."[165]

Other newspapers were similarly harsh in their criticism of what they perceived to be blatant anti-Mormonism. The *Clarion-Ledger* declared, "Though largely based on historic fact, *September Dawn* is so ham-handed as to feel like blatant propaganda,"[166] while well-known film critic Roger Ebert described the movie as "unbelievably ugly and an insult to Mormons."[167] The *Idaho Statesman* accused Christopher Cain of doing "a hatchet job on an entire religion" and said that his movie was "devoid of objectivity."[168] Another reviewer insisted that

162. Michael Paulson, "Religious violence stirs a western," *The Boston Globe*, 19 August 2007, http://www.boston.com/ae/movies/articles/2007/08/19/religious_violence_stirs_a_western (accessed 5 December 2007).

163. Scott Renshaw, "Mountain Muddle: The inept *September Dawn* gets a good hate on for Mormons," *Charleston City Paper*, 22 August 2007, http://www.charlestoncitypaper.com/gyrobase/Content?oid=oid%3A31846 (accessed 5 December 2007).

164. Renshaw, "Mountain Muddle."

165. Renshaw, "Mountain Muddle."

166. Robert W. Butler, "Movie Review: September Dawn is blatant propaganda against the Mormons," *The Kansas City Star*, 24 August 2007, http://www.projo.com/movie_reviews/lb_September_Dawn_08-24-07_L96QEF4.11cf7b6.html (accessed 6 December 2007).

167. "September Dawn," *Winston-Salem Journal*, 23 August 2007, http://www.journalnow.com (accessed 23 August 2007).

168. "September Dawn: Bias blurs fact and fiction in this tale," *Idaho Statesman*, 24 August 2007, http://www.idahostatesman.com/130/v-print/story/140812.html (accessed 24 August 2007).

"the jarring MTV-style filmmaking is so distracting and the 'messaging' so unsubtle that after two long hours you find yourself leaving the theatre with a massive headache, wondering when you started to hate Mormons."[169] The trade newspaper *Variety* commented on how "the pic is ultimately less interested in understanding its Mormon characters than in demonizing them,"[170] and the *Kansas City Star* described the movie as a "stridently anti-Mormon and cliché-heavy melodrama,"[171] while the Minneapolis-St. Paul *Star Tribune* complained that "the film feels less like historical drama than a venomous religious tract printed on celluloid."[172]

A powerful review expressing the disgust that many people felt for the anti-Mormonism in the film was published by a Christian-oriented Web site whose reviewers are theologians, authors of Christian-oriented literature, and commentators on Christian pop culture. In a review entitled "September Dawn: A Nasty Trip Down History Lane," the reviewer wrote, "*September Dawn* is, simply put, one of the most shockingly poor and mean-spirited films of the year—despite the fact the filmmakers' intentions are pretty noble."[173] He then continued by expressing frustration at the lack of depth in the movie's characters and the "black-and-white anti-Mormon vision" of *September Dawn*. "I'm afraid I can't recommend *September Dawn* for much of anyone at all, as much as I wanted to like the film going in."[174]

169. Brett Register, "September Dawn," *Orlando Weekly*, 23 August 2007, http://www.orlandoweekly.com/film/review.asp?rid=12972 (accessed 27 August 2007).

170. Justin Chang, "September Dawn," *Variety*, 21 August 2007, http://www.variety.com (accessed 22 August 2007).

171. As cited by Jacob Gordon, "'September Dawn' Opens to Negative Reviews," *TheCelebrityCafe.com*, 25 August 2007, http://www.thecelebritycafe.com/features/11535.html (accessed 26 August 2007).

172. Colin Covert, "September Dawn casts long shadows," *Star-Tribune*, 23 August 2007, http://www.startribune.com/1553/v-print/story/1378721.html (accessed 24 August 2007).

173. Greg Wright, "September Dawn: A Nasty Trip Down History Lane," *Past the Popcorn: Films, and the Artists Who Make Them*, http://past-the-popcorn.gospelcom.net/index.php/2007/september-dawn (accessed 24 August 2007). The reviewer is the managing editor of the Web site and is "Writer in Residence at Puget Sound Christian College in Everett, Washington." He is also an editor at HollywoodJesus.com and is a member of Faith and Film Critics Circle.

174. Wright, "September Dawn: A Nasty Trip Down History Lane." Not all religiously oriented movie reviews, however, expressed disappointment with the film. Harry Forbes,

Particularly strongly worded reviews appeared on Collider.com and in the *Detroit News*, respectively:

> The point of the picture appears to be the blunt mockery of the Mormon culture, but surely "Dawn" would be far more controversial if it didn't try so hard to be raw and unpleasant. Cain has turned the Mormons into baby-eatin' Nazis to suit his argument, parading around these black-clad, chin-bearded, testicle-slicing gunslingers without any thoughtful consideration. To Cain, the Mormons were hulking, borderline insane fundamental gorillas who flung excrement at anyone daring to besmirch the name of Joseph Smith . . . and led around . . . by a Zod-like deity in Brigham Young.[175]

> Director Christopher Cain . . . paints a damning, one-sided portrait of Latter-day Saints in this irresponsible, ham-fisted morality tale that plays off our cultural ignorance of the Mormon religion. If you think polygamy is a bit wacky, wait until you learn Mormons are bloodthirsty, murderous psychos! What's worse, Cain shamelessly evokes Sept. 11 by playing up the fact the massacre occurred on Sept. 11, 1857. He stops short of calling Osama Bin Laden a Mormon sympathizer, but maybe that'll be on the DVD.[176]

The references to Muslims were in reaction to the claim that *September Dawn* is supposed to be a commentary on modern fanaticism and terrorism. Some reviewers suggested that Hollywood attacks Mormonism because it is afraid to criticize radical Islamic jihadists. Michael Medved agreed and explained that while Mormons were

---

in "September Dawn," *Catholic Online*, 24 August 2007, http://www.catholic.org (accessed 24 August 2007), was generally complimentary of the movie. He ended with, "Whatever the truth, the film can at least be viewed, in generalized terms, as a warning against religious fanaticism of any stripe, a theme with great resonance in today's world."

175. Brian Orndorf, "September Dawn," *Collider.com: Latest Entertainment Stories*, 23 August 2007, http://www.collider.com/entertainment/reviews/article.asp?aid=5265&tcid=1 (accessed 24 August 2007).

176. "September Dawn," *Detroit News*, 24 August 2007, http://www.detnews.com (accessed 24 August 2007).

compared to Muslims with all of the implications of fanaticism and violence, "Mormons won't respond with any comparable rage [like the deadly riots in 2006 over a dozen Danish cartoons making fun of Islam], no matter how badly *September Dawn* tarnishes the memory of their faith's founders. . . . The measured response to public smears of Mormonism in effect rebuts the *September Dawn* suggestion that the church represents a relevant example of violent fanaticism."[177]

Like reviewers, moviegoers reacted negatively to *September Dawn*. With 857 screens nationwide, the first day's gross was $182,000. By Sunday evening, the total gross intake was $601,857.[178] Subsequent figures bore out the film's poor reception.

As for Carole Whang Schutter, in her zealousness to portray the Latter-day Saints in a negative way, she has employed several anti-religious stereotypes as well as Victorian pornographic imagery (in the rape scene, for example). She has portrayed the Saints as fanatics who are blindly obedient, who look on outsiders with suspicion and intolerance, and who belittle those not of their faith. Nevertheless, Schutter claims to have felt called by God to research and write *September Dawn*;[179] she also claims her journey has been "a miracle."[180]

Cain and Schutter set out to make a controversial movie attacking the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and used the Mountain Meadows Massacre as a backdrop. Unfortunately, contrary to their noble statements about honoring the victims of the massacre, the members of the fateful wagon train were nothing more than mere stage props and pawns in this poorly executed anti-Mormon melodrama. Rather than memorializing the victims, the film ultimately dishonors their memory.

---

177. Michael Medved, "Hollywood's terrorists: Mormon, not Muslim," *USA Today*, 13 August 2007, http://www.usatoday.com/printedition/news/20070813/opledereligion81.art.htm (accessed 6 December 2007).

178. "Daily Box Office, for Friday, August 24, 2007," http://boxofficemojo.com/daily/chart/?sortdate=2007-08-24&p=.htm (accessed 6 December 2007).

179. Fowler, "Local pens screenplay about massacre."

180. Oksenhorn, "Aspen screenwriter experiences miracle with 'September Dawn.'"