


## Chapter 260– Buchanan’s Pardon Of “Treasonous” Mormons Seen As Capitulation

 <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Brigham Young</i></p> <p style="font-size: small; text-align: center;">Enl. acc'd to Act of Congress, 1864, by Savage &amp; Otis in the Clerk's Office of the U.S. District of Utah</p>	<p><b>Dates:</b> February-April 1858</p>	<p><b>Sections:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• U.S. Troops Arriving In Salt Lake City Are Greeted Peacefully By Brigham Young</li> <li>• Buchanan Shocks The Nation By Pardoning The Mormon’s “Treason”</li> </ul>
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Date: November 1857 – April 12, 1858

### U.S. Troops Arriving In Salt Lake City Are Greeted Peacefully By Brigham Young



Albert Sidney Johnston (1803-1862)

Colonel Johnston and his 1,500 U.S. troopers finally meet up with Governor Cummings and Captain Van Vliet in November near the site of Ft. Bridger, where they set up winter quarters and begin to plot their strategy to overcome whatever resistance the Mormons appear to have in store for them.

While there, however, a new figure enters the picture, who will alter the course of events. He is 46 year old Thomas L. Kane, the lawyer son of a U.S District judge, who becomes an outspoken abolitionist, and proponent of the Mormon cause.

While never a member of the church, Kane embraces the Mormon’s quest to secure a safe home to practice their religion, as early as 1846. He then uses his father’s Washington connections on their behalf, first to organize the “Mormon Brigade” as a show of their loyalty and support for the Mexican War, and later to help persuade President Millard Fillmore to select Brigham Young as Utah’s Territorial Governor in 1851.

When Kane learns of Buchanan’s planned invasion, he embarks on a 3,000 mile trip from the east coast to Utah to seek a peaceful end to the conflict.

In February 1858 he arrives in Salt Lake City to meet with Young, and then shuttles back to see Cummings at Ft. Bridger. His efforts pay off when the amiable Cummings agrees to meet in the capital -- unaccompanied by the federal troops.

In advance of this potential confrontation, Young phoned up fortifications in the city to appear ready for combat.

However, he quickly takes the measure of Cummings, and decides it is better to deal with a new governor he can easily maneuver than face the wrath of Colonel Johnston's army. With this calculation in mind, Young hands Cummings the reins of government on April 12, without a fight and with a feigned promise of future cooperation.

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Date: April 6, 1858

### **Buchanan Shocks The Nation By Pardoning The Mormon's "Treason"**

As the peaceful hand-over of power is taking place in Utah, Washington is preparing to read early reports from Buchanan's war with the Mormons. Instead on April 6, the public is shocked to hear the President's proclamation titled "Rebellion in the Utah Territory."

It begins boldly by indicting the Mormons for "insubordination" against the United States.

*The Territory of Utah was settled by certain emigrants...who have for several years past manifested a spirit of insubordination to the Constitution and laws of the United States. The great mass of those settlers, acting under the influence of leaders to whom they seem to have surrendered their judgment, refuse to be controlled by any other authority. They have been often advised to obedience, and these friendly counsels have been answered with defiance.*

Given these violation, the President says that his duty demanded the use of military force against the rebels.

*After carefully considering this state of affairs and maturely weighing the obligation I was under to see the laws faithfully executed, it seemed to me right and proper that I should make such use of the military force at my disposal as might be necessary to protect the Federal officers in going into the Territory of Utah and in performing their duties after arriving there. I accordingly ordered a detachment of the Army to march for the city of Salt Lake,*

In response he says the Mormons organized their own forces and attacked a US wagon train.

*But in the meantime the hatred of that misguided people for the just and legal authority of the Government had become so intense that they resolved to measure their military strength with that of the Union. They have organized an armed force far from contemptible in point of numbers and trained it... While the troops of the United States were on their march a train of baggage wagons, which happened to be unprotected, was attacked and destroyed by a portion of the Mormon forces and the provisions and stores with which the train was laden were wantonly burnt*

These acts of "treason" must and will be met by harsh punishment.

*Fellow-citizens of Utah, this is rebellion against the Government to which you owe allegiance; it is levying war against the United States, and involves you in the guilt of treason. Persistence in it will bring you to condign punishment,.. If you have calculated upon the forbearance of the United States...you have fallen into a grave mistake... Utah is bounded on every side by States and*

*Territories whose people are true to the Union. It is absurd to believe that they will or can permit you to erect in their very midst a government of your own, not only independent of the authority which they all acknowledge, but hostile to them and their interests.*

At this point logic tells his audience that he is about to call for a declaration of war against the Mormons. But instead Buchanan amazes his audience by issuing a blanket pardon to all for crimes committed!

*But being anxious to save the effusion of blood and to avoid the indiscriminate punishment of a whole people for crimes of which it is not probable that all are equally guilty, I offer now a free and full pardon to all who will submit themselves to the just authority of the Federal Government. If you refuse to accept it, let the consequences fall upon your own heads. But I conjure you to pause deliberately and reflect well before you reject this tender of peace and good will.*

The effect of this proclamation is two-fold.

Instead of a military thrashing and likely imprisonment, Brigham Young, with help from Thomas Kane, is left surrendering his Governor's title, but not his power over the future of Utah.

In turn, Buchanan adds to the growing perception that he is inept and unbalanced as a leader -- between his overly aggressive attempts to solve the Kansas crisis by ramming the Lecompton Constitution through Congress and his now feckless retreat from justified military action in Utah.

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### Sidebar: Subsequent Events In Mormon Utah



Brigham Young (1801-1877)

Having sidestepped the threat of a military take-over of Salt Lake City, Brigham Young picks up right where he left off as the de facto dictator of the Utah Territory. His initial actions are calculated to show Governor Cummings who is really in charge.

He addresses his followers after learning that Buchanan is sending “peace commissioners” to the capital to formalize the transfer of power and sign the pardon -- saying that the Mormons “have done nothing to be pardoned for,” and then informing Cummings that while U.S. troops will be allowed in “our country,” they must not quarter near his city.

*Now let us say to you peace commissioners, we are willing those troops should come into our country, but not to stay in our city. They may pass through, if needs be, but they must not quarter less than forty miles from us.*

To punctuate this message, Young orders all Mormons to abandon the capital and shut it down prior to the appearance of the Washington delegation. Upon arriving on June 26, 1858, it encounters a “dead city,” the bulk of the population having relocated to Lake Utah. The message to Buchanan and to Cummings is clear: they may have won the so-called Mormon War, but Young has won the peace.

This pattern continues to play out over time until Young’s death in 1877, after a thirty year tenure as Second President of the church. Unlike Joseph Smith his role is much less clerical in nature, and much more that of the community organizer, business leader and politician.

In his final two decades, he watches his dominion flourish. Its population expands rapidly, reflecting the Mormon’s high rates of marriage and child bearing. Its intense work ethic pays off in a vibrant economy, consistent with the eventual state motto (“Industry”) and the iconic symbol, the “Mormon beehive.” The Civil War finds Utah adopting a “neutral status” and using the depletion of nearby U.S. troops to expand Mormon control over the territory.

Commercial opportunities are amplified after May 1869, when the east and west lines of the Union Pacific’s trans-continental railway are joined at Promontory Point, Utah. In 1875, Brigham Young University is founded, joining the University of Utah (1850) in support of higher education.

Still admission to the Union is withheld, given off and on controversies related to polygamy and the “influence” of the church in government affairs. It finally arrives on January 4, 1896, when Utah becomes the 45<sup>th</sup> star in the Union.

Young himself manages to maneuver through several personal controversies, including arrests on October 3, 1871 for “lascivious cohabitation” (i.e. polygamy) and on January 3, 1872 in connection with the Mountain Meadows Massacre. He is quickly freed, however, in both instances.

Brigham Young dies at seventy-six years of age on August 29, 1877 in Salt Lake City, presumably of peritonitis associated with a burst appendix.