

Hell in the Promised Land: Environment and the Mountain Meadow Massacre¹

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The Massacre:

In Mid-September 1857, a wagon train of 120 men, women, and children headed to California were killed by Mormon Militiamen in southwestern Utah. The Militiamen spared none except several small children.

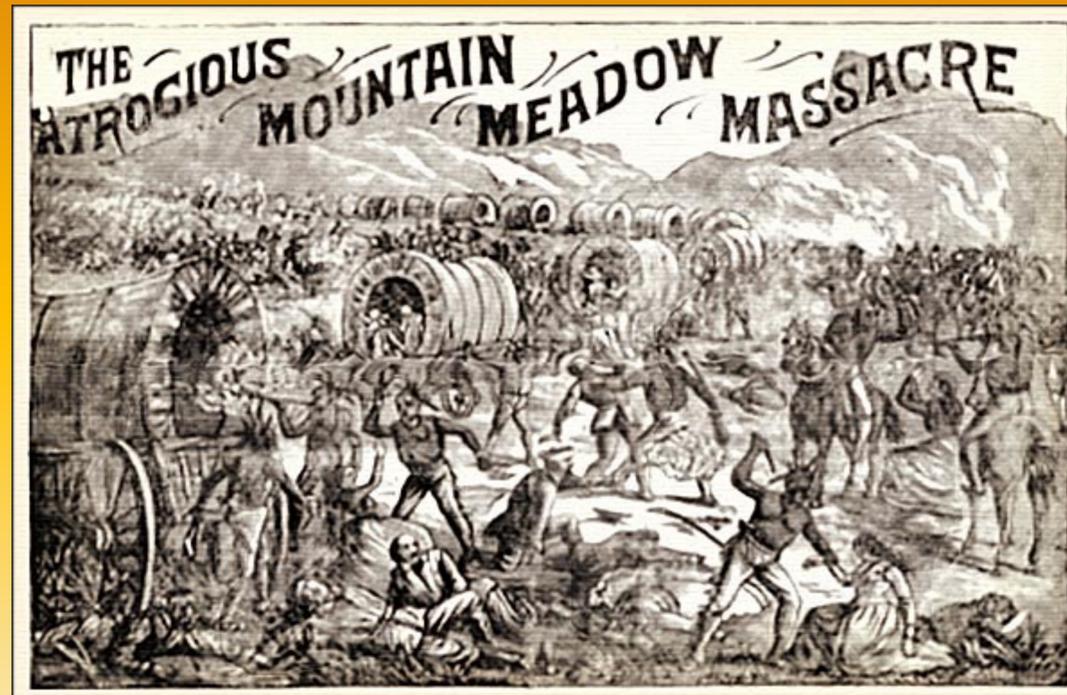
Thesis:

The discussion on Mountain Meadows has been focused on cultural and social causes, while the environment sits as a backdrop. Amidst these social tensions, drought and erratic weather helped push the violence at Mountain Meadows in motion.

Methods:

I took an interdisciplinary approach drawing upon:

- Secondary Historic Literature
- PDSI Reconstructions (Tree Ring Data)
- Desert Ecology
- Rangeland Studies



Drought:

From 1855 to 1857, southwestern Utah experienced drought conditions that ravished crops, dried up water sources, and caused Utahans to be protective over resources.

Natural Disaster in Iron County:

In Cedar City, Utah where the Iron County militia was based, drought and erratic weather hit inhabitants hard in the 1850s. The drought caused resource scarcity and floods wiped out mining operations.

Hooved Locusts:

The Baker-Fancher Party drove almost a thousand head of cattle with them through Utah. The cattle grazed and trampled their way across the landscape, depleting the fodder for Mormon cattle and busting up desert soils.

PDSI Reconstructions

