

The Making of a Mormon Myth: The 1844 Transfiguration of Brigham Young*

Richard S. Van Wagoner

The brethren testify that brother Brigham Young is brother Joseph's legal successor. You never heard me say so. I say that I am a good hand to keep the dogs and wolves out of the flock. —Brigham Young (1860)¹

MORMONISM, AMERICA'S UNIQUE RELIGIOUS MANIFESTATION, has a remarkable past. Nourished on the spectacular, the faith can count heroic martyrs, epic treks, and seemingly supernatural manifestations. Deep in the Mormon psyche is an attraction to prophetic posturing and swagger. In particular, Joseph Smith, Jr., and Brigham Young are icons who have come to dominate the Mormon world like mythical colossuses.

After Smith's untimely 1844 murder, Brigham Young and an ailing Sidney Rigdon, the only surviving member of the First Presidency, became entangled in an ecclesiastical dogfight for primacy. Young, a masterful strategist with a political adroitness and physical vitality lacking in Rigdon, easily won the mantle.² However, as time passed, the rather prosaic events surrounding this tussle for church leadership metamorphosed into a mythical marvel. The legend is now unsurpassed in Mormon lore, second only to Joseph Smith's own account of angelic ministrations and his "first vision."

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1. *Journal of Discourses*, 26 vols. (Liverpool: LDS Bookseller's Depot, 1855-86), 8:69 (3 June 1860); hereafter JD.

2. For five years Rigdon had been weakened by episodic bouts of malaria and depression. For a discussion of his health problems, see Richard S. Van Wagoner, *Sidney Rigdon: A Portrait of Religious Excess* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1994), 266-70, 279, 281-85.

While the veracity of angelic visitations, apparitions, and miracles is typically difficult to authenticate due to a lack of corroborative evidence, the averred "Transfiguration of Brigham Young" can be scrutinized in detail in newspaper accounts, diaries, official proclamations, retrospective observations, and other exemplification.

The official account of post-martyrdom Mormonism was written after the fact by members of the Quorum of the Twelve or their advocates. These men, under Brigham Young's direction, zealously projected their role in history in the most favorable light. Overshadowed by editorial censorship, hundreds of deletions, additions, and alterations were made when the *History of Joseph Smith*, as it was originally called, was serialized in the *Deseret News* in the late 1850s. Not only does this history place polygamy and Brigham Young's ecclesiastical significance in the rosy glow of political acceptability, it also does a monumental disservice to Sidney Rigdon and others who challenged the Twelve's ascent to power.

The Twelve's nineteenth-century propaganda mill was so adroit that few outside Brigham Young's inner circle were aware of the behind-the-scenes alterations seamlessly stitched into church history. Charles Wesley Wandell, an assistant church historian who later left the church, was aghast at these emendations. Commenting on the many changes made in the historical work as it was being serialized, Wandell noted in his diary:

I notice the interpolations because having been employed in the Historian's office at Nauvoo by Doctor Richards, and employed, too, in 1845, in compiling this very autobiography, I know that after Joseph's death his memoir was "doctored" to suit the new order of things, and this, too, by the direct order of Brigham Young to Doctor Richards and systematically by Richards.³

More than a dozen references to Brigham Young's involvement in transposing the written history may be found in the post-martyrdom record first published in book form in 1902 as *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*. For example, a 1 April 1845 citation records Young saying: "I commenced revising the History of Joseph Smith at Brother Richard's office: Elder Heber C. Kimball and George A. Smith were with me."⁴

That this revision, or censorship, of the official history came from

3. Inez Smith, "Biography of Charles Wesley Wandell," *Journal of History* 3 (Jan. 1910): 455-63.

4. Joseph Smith, *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, B. H. Roberts, ed., 7 vols. (Salt Lake City: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1902), 7:389; hereafter HC. For other references regarding revisions, see *ibid.*, 389-90, 408, 411, 414, 427-28, 514, 519, 520, 532, 533, 556.

Brigham Young is evidenced by an 11 July 1856 reference in Wilford Woodruff's diary. Apostle Woodruff, working in the church historian's office, questioned Young respecting a "p[ie]ce of History on Book E-1 page 1681-2 concerning Hyr[u]m leading this Church & tracing the [A]aronic Priesthood." Young advised: "[I]t was not essential to be inserted in the History & had better be omitted." Woodruff then queried him about "Joseph[s] words on South Carolina" (see D&C 87; 130:12-13) which had recently been published in the *Deseret News*. Young said he "wished it not published."⁵ Years later Charles W. Penrose, appointed to the First Presidency in 1911, admitted that after Joseph Smith's death some changes were made in the official record "for prudential reasons."⁶

Censorship has severely tarnished Sidney Rigdon's historical image. Contrary to the official Mormon view, for example, Rigdon did not travel to Pennsylvania prior to Joseph Smith's death in the summer of 1844 to escape the turmoil of Nauvoo or desert the church, as was retrospectively charged. He had not "apostatized and left Bro[ther] Joseph," as Brigham Young declared on 24 June 1868.⁷ Rather, Rigdon was dispatched to his home state by the prophet Joseph for at least three reasons. The first was political: U.S. presidential candidate Joseph Smith had declared Illinois residency and Rigdon, his vice presidential running mate, was required by law to establish residency elsewhere. Second, at an earlier time when Rigdon and Smith were living in Kirtland, Ohio, the prophet, as recorded by Book of Mormon witness David Whitmer, prophesied that "my servant Sydney must go sooner or later to Pittsburg."⁸ Thus the move to Pennsylvania was intended to fulfill revelation as well as political expediency. In addition, the prophet, fearing for Rigdon's life in the aftermath of the destruction of the *Nauvoo Expositor*, wanted his counselor to survive. Smith's personal diary entry for 22 June 1844 makes this clear: "I have sent Br. R[igdon] away," the prophet wrote, "[and] I want to send Hiram away to save him [too], to avenge my Blood."⁹

By official design, Rigdon was not in Illinois at the time of the infamous homicides at Carthage Jail. On 18 June, nine days before the martyrdom of the Smith brothers, the Rigdon family departed on the

5. Scott Kenney, ed., *Wilford Woodruff's Journal—Typescript*, 9 vols. (Midvale, Utah: Signature Books, 1983), 3:429.

6. Charles W. Penrose diary, 10 Jan. 1897, Utah Historical Society, Salt Lake City.

7. Young's false statement was made during Heber C. Kimball's funeral (see *Journal History*, 24 June 1868, archives, Historical Department, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah; hereafter LDS archives).

8. David Whitmer to Joseph Smith III, 9 Dec. 1886, cited in *Saints' Herald*, 5 Feb. 1887.

9. Joseph Smith diary, loose sheet under date, microfilm copy in Special Collections, Brigham Young University, Harold B. Lee Library, Provo, Utah; hereafter BYU Library. I am indebted to D. Michael Quinn for drawing this unpublished reference to my attention.

steamer *Osprey* for Pittsburgh. According to Rigdon's son Wickliffe, Joseph Smith and "many of the prominent members of the church came to the boat to bid them goodbye[e]." ¹⁰ Ebenezer Robinson, sent with Rigdon to establish a Mormon newspaper in Pittsburgh, recalled that prior to embarking, Smith took him aside and admonished him to stand by Rigdon "under all circumstances, and uphold his hands on all occasions, and never forsake him. . . for he is a good man and I love him better than I ever loved him in all my life, for my heart is entwined around his with chords [sic] that can never be broken." ¹¹

Arriving in Pittsburgh on 27 June, the Rigdons, unaware of Joseph's and Hyrum's deaths, visited family members the following day. Next they located a rental house on 1 July. Five days later Sidney received the first news of the tragic deaths from a *Nauvoo Neighbor* brought to town by Jedediah Grant on his way to Philadelphia. ¹² Rigdon told Grant he felt prepared to claim "the Prophetic mantle" and he would "now take his place, at the head of the church, in spite of men or devils, at the risk of his life." ¹³ Knowing Grant planned to leave the following day for Philadelphia, Rigdon requested him to relay word to any of the Twelve he might meet that it "was his wish and desire that they should come to Pittsburgh before going to Nauvoo, and hold a council." ¹⁴ Sidney also sent a letter to Brigham Young in care of *The Prophet*, a Mormon newspaper in the East, suggesting a date to conference in Pittsburgh.

Yet the Twelve, with succession aspirations of their own, disregarded Rigdon's wishes. Wilford Woodruff wrote from Boston to Brigham Young on 16 July, urging quorum members in the East to meet in Massachusetts, and suggesting they exclude Rigdon. ¹⁵ The Twelve then had

10. J. Wickliffe Rigdon, "Life of Sidney Rigdon," 178-79, LDS archives.

11. *Latter Day Saint's Messenger and Advocate* (Pittsburgh), 6 Dec. 1844. Richard Savary, Benjamin Stafford, and Ebenezer Robinson constituted a committee of Rigdon followers to counter Quorum of the Twelve accusations that Smith and Rigdon were estranged when he went to Pittsburgh. They published a late 1844 notice in Pittsburgh which claimed that Rigdon "enjoyed Joseph's confidence to the fullest extent until the time of his decease." They asserted that Smith wished Rigdon "to stand next to himself in political as well as religious matters," and that is why he was selected as his vice-presidential running mate (*ibid.*).

12. Although at the time Rigdon was shocked to learn of the prophet's death, in a 25 May 1873 letter to Charles F. Woodard (after Sidney's mind was addled by a series of strokes) he stated: "The Lord notified us that the church of Jesus Christ of Latter day saints were a going to be d[e]stroyed and for us to leave we did so and the Smiths were killed a few days after we started" (Rigdon Collection, LDS archives).

13. Jedediah M. Grant, *A Collection of Facts Relative to the Course Taken by Elder Sidney Rigdon in the States of Ohio, Missouri, Illinois and Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia: Brown, Bicking and Guilbert, 1844), 44-45.

14. *Ibid.*, 17.

15. Woodruff to Young, 16 July 1844, in "Brigham Young Collection of Wilford Woodruff Correspondence, 1840-44," Brigham Young Collection, LDS archives.

Orson Hyde write to Rigdon, informing him that they "thought it safer for them to return" through Buffalo and Chicago, requesting him to "meet them in Nauvoo, where they would council together."¹⁶ Initially, Rigdon had not planned to return to Illinois. According to his account, however, he heard the spectral voice of Joseph Smith directing him, "You must not stay, you must go."¹⁷

Despite frequent kidnaping and assassination attempts, Joseph Smith established no firm policies regarding presidential succession in the event of his death. The resulting confusion threw the prophetic transition into turmoil. Smith simply had not expected to die at thirty-eight. Never given to full disclosure to any man or woman, the prophet's public and private statements between 1834-44 suggested at least eight different methods for succession, each pointing to different successors with some claims to validity.¹⁸

Consequently, Rigdon found the Saints in a leadership quandary when he arrived in Nauvoo on Saturday, 3 August. Apostles Parley P. Pratt, Willard Richards, and George A. Smith invited him to meet with them at 8:00 a.m. the following day at John Taylor's home. The men waited an hour. Pratt, sent to find Rigdon, found him engaged with a lawyer, and by then it was too late for him to meet with the apostles as he had a speaking engagement at worship services. Taking as his text the scriptural concept, "For my thoughts are not as your thoughts," President Rigdon related to the audience a vision he claimed to have received recently in Pittsburgh.

Declaring his manifestation a "continuation of the same vision that he and Joseph had in Kirtland. . . concerning the different glories or mansions in the 'Father's House,'" Rigdon testified that the prophet "had ascended to heaven, and that he stood on the right hand of the Son of God, and that he had seen him there, clothed with all the power, glory, might, majesty, and dominion of the celestial kingdoms." He added that Joseph still held "the keys of the kingdom. . . would continue to hold them to all eternity. . . and that no man could ever take his place, neither have power to build up the kingdom to any other creature or being but to Joseph Smith."¹⁹

16. Grant, *A Collection of Facts*, 17.

17. This quotation is from either the Willard Richards or William Clayton diary, both of which are presently unavailable to researchers. The citation was taken from Andrew F. Ehat, "Joseph Smith's Introduction of Temple Ordinances and the 1844 Mormon Succession Question," master's thesis, Brigham Young University, 1982, 197.

18. D. Michael Quinn, "The Mormon Succession Crisis of 1844," *BYU Studies* 16 (Winter 1976): 187-233.

19. Orson Hyde, *Speech of Elder Orson Hyde, Delivered before the High Priest's Quorum, in Nauvoo, April 27th, 1845, upon the Course and Conduct of Mr. Sidney Rigdon, and upon the*

Emphasizing his longtime role as “Spokesman to the Lord,” which had been pronounced by Smith in both revelation and a special blessing, Rigdon reported the Lord’s wish that “there must be a guardian appointed to build the Church up to Joseph.”²⁰ He then explained that “he was the identical man that the ancient prophets had sung about, wrote and rejoiced over; and that he was sent to do the identical work that had been the theme of all the prophets in every proceeding generation.”²¹ Declaring that the Lord’s ways are not our ways, he veered into his favorite topic, the prophecies of Armageddon. The time was near at hand, he warned, when the Saints “would see one hundred tons of metal per second thrown at the enemies of God,” and blood would flow as deep as “horses’ bridles.” With his usual aplomb and extravagant phraseology, Sidney trumpeted:

I am going to fight a real bloody battle with sword and with gun. . . . I will fight the battles of the Lord. I will also cross the Atlantic, encounter the queen’s forces, and overcome them—plant the American standard on English ground, and then march to the palace of her majesty, and demand a portion of her riches and dominions, which if she refuse, I will take the little madam by the nose and lead her out, and she shall have no power to help herself. If I do not do this, the Lord never spake by mortal.²²

During the afternoon meeting, while Charles C. Rich was speaking, Nauvoo Stake President William Marks, at Rigdon’s request, interrupted and gave public notice of a Thursday, 8 August, special assembly to choose a guardian of the church. Some suggested waiting until the full Quorum of the Twelve returned, but Rigdon said he was “some distance from his family” and wanted to “know if this people had any thing for him to do.” If not, then he wanted to be on his way “for there was a people 1000’s & 10,000’s who would receive him[,] that he wanted to visit other branches around [but Nauvoo] first.”²³ Many thought Rigdon was pushing his claims too fast. On Monday morning, 5 August, Parley P. Pratt, Willard Richards, John Taylor, George A. Smith, Amasa Lyman, and Bishop Newel K. Whitney called on Sidney to ask what his hurry was. He denied that he expected the people to choose a guardian on

Merits of His Claims to the Presidency of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Liverpool: James and Woodburn, 1845), 12.

20. *Ibid.*, 12. In a special blessing given to Rigdon on 13 December 1833, Joseph Smith designated him as “spokesman unto the Lord. . . all the days of his life” (Patriarchal Blessing Book 1, 12, in Richard L. Anderson, “The Mature Joseph Smith and Treasure Searching,” *BYU Studies* 24 [Fall 1984]: 529. See also D&C 100:9, 11).

21. *Journal History*, 4 Aug. 1844.

22. Hyde, *Speech*, 16.

23. *Journal History*, 4 Aug. 1844; Hyde, *Speech*, 40-41.

Thursday, saying he wished just a "prayer meeting, and interchange of thought and feeling [to] warm up each other's hearts."²⁴

Later that evening five more members of the Twelve arrived in Nauvoo, bringing the number to nine. The next day a combined meeting of the Twelve, the Nauvoo High Council, and the High Priest's Quorum was held in the second story of the new Seventies Hall. Brigham Young, who had scheduled the meeting, called on Rigdon to make a statement to the church concerning his Pittsburgh revelation. Rigdon explained that the manifestation, while not an open vision, was presented to his mind. He was shown that the prophet sustained the same relationship to the church in death that he had in life. No man could be Joseph's successor, Rigdon said. The Kingdom must be "built up to Christ" through the dead prophet. Revelation was still required, and since Rigdon had been ordained as Smith's spokesman, he was to continue to speak for him on this side of the veil "until Joseph Smith himself shall descend as a mighty angel, lay his hand on [my] head & ordain [me] & say, 'Come up & act for me.'" Concluding, he appended, "I have discharged my duty, & done what God commanded me. . . . The people could please themselves whether they accepted [me] or not."²⁵ Young then responded that he wished to hear the voice of the entire church in conference before a decision was made. He wryly commented that "he did not care who led the Church of God if God said so even if it was old 'Ann Lee' but he must know that God said so."²⁶ Young added that he had "the keys and the means of knowing the mind of God on this subject."²⁷

By rights of his 1841 ordination as "Prophet, Seer, and Revelator," Rigdon was entitled to visionary experiences. Yet Wilford Woodruff called Sidney's disclosure "a kind of second [c]lass vision."²⁸ Young, inclined to sarcastic ridicule, called Sidney a fool to his face.²⁹ The "Lion of the Lord" did not suffer fools easily. Rigdon underestimated Young, who soon would become one of the most powerful Americans of his generation. Rigdon, when in good health, was without question Brigham's

24. HC, 7:226.

25. The original minutes of this 7 August 1844 meeting, presently controlled by the Quorum of the Twelve, are "not available for public scrutiny" (F. Michael Watson, secretary to the First Presidency, to Richard S. Van Wagoner, 14 June 1993). The account of the meeting in William Clayton's diary (in possession of the First Presidency) is also unavailable. I therefore cite Ehat, "Joseph Smith's Introduction," 197-98.

26. Ann Lee Stanley (1736-84) claimed to be the female incarnation of Jesus Christ and was leader of the United Society of Believers in Christ's Second Coming, the "Shaking Quakers."

27. Ehat, "Joseph Smith's Introduction," 198.

28. Kenney, *Wilford Woodruff's Journal*, 2:434.

29. Thomas Bullock's report of the special afternoon meeting of 8 August 1844, General Minutes Collection, LDS archives.

oratorical superior, but Young, never a passive observer, was more clever, ambitious, and politically astute. Not content to let the mantle of leadership pass him by, he simply wrestled it away from Rigdon.

Young, like Rigdon, stunned by the news of Joseph Smith's murder, seems not to have concluded immediately that the prophet's death placed the crown of leadership on the heads of the Twelve or on him. In fact, Young initially wondered if the prophet had taken the keys of authority with him. "I had no more idea of [the mantle] falling upon me than of the most unlikely thing in the world," he later told family members.³⁰

Equipped with a well-honed mind, however, Young became convinced en route to Nauvoo from Boston "by the visions of the Spirit," as he later told colleagues, that the Twelve constituted an interim church presidency from which a First Presidency eventually would arise.³¹ Yet Young told no one of his intuition on this matter for three years. "I knew then what I now know concerning the organization of the church," he retrospectively proclaimed, but "I revealed it to no living being, until the pioneers to this valley were returning to Winter Quarters. Br[other] Wilford Woodruff was the first man I ever spoke to about it."³²

By 8 August 1844, the stage was set for a Rigdon-versus-Young morality play, an ecclesiastical contest in which the winner could claim the primary position of Mormon power. Although these happenings

30. Manuscript minutes of Brigham Young sermon "on the occasion of a family meeting, held at his residence," 25 Dec. 1857, Brigham Young Collection.

31. Miscellaneous Minutes, 12 Feb. 1849, Brigham Young Collection.

32. Journal History, 7 Oct. 1860. Woodruff confirmed in his 12 Oct. 1847 diary: "I had A question put to me by President Young what my opinion was concerning one of the Twelve Apostles being appointed as the President of the Church with his two Counselors. I answered that A quorum like the Twelve who had been appointed by revelation & confirmed by revelation from time to time I thought it would require A revelation to change the order of that Quorum" (Kenney, *Wilford Woodruff's Journal*, 3:283).

Woodruff also recorded another of Brigham Young's references to this matter in his 28 July 1860 diary entry:

When I met with the Saints in Nauvoo at the first meeting after Joseph[']s death in defending the true organization against Sidney Rigdon I had it in my mind all the time that there would have to be a Presidency of three Appointed but I knew the people could not bear it at the time and on our return as the pioneers from the valley I Broached the subject first to Brother Woodruff and afterwords to the rest of the Quorum. They received it & finally sustained it (Ibid., 5:478).

While the official reorganization of the First Presidency may not have taken place until 1847, the manuscript minutes of 7 April 1845 general conference show that Brigham Young was unanimously voted on and sustained as "the President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles to this Church and nation, and all nations, and also as the President of the whole Church of Latter Day Saints."

constitute one of Mormonism's most pivotal shifts of leadership, considerable confusion surrounds the day's events. Much of the retrospective disarray arises from the fact that two public gatherings were held that day. Many commentators have either assumed that the alleged "transfiguration of Brigham Young" occurred in the afternoon meeting, or have combined both meetings into a single narrative.

Several sets of minutes of the afternoon meeting, each in the hand of a different scribe, make it clear they saw no mystical occurrence during that gathering. Furthermore, virtually all retrospective accounts mention that Young was "transfigured" when he began to speak after Rigdon had spoken. Rigdon only addressed the congregation in the morning session, he did not speak in the afternoon. While minutes of the morning gathering do exist, in stenographer Thomas Bullock's shorthand, they have never been transcribed. By order of the current LDS Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, they remain unavailable "for public scrutiny."³³ Nevertheless, several other accounts of the morning's events survive.

By 10:00 a.m., more than 5,000 Saints had gathered at the grove east of the temple in response to William Marks's announcement. As Rigdon began speaking, a strong headwind muted his voice, so he relocated to the leeward side and climbed on top of a wagon box. From that spot he addressed the Saints until 11:30 a.m. While some have painted Rigdon's discourse as uninspired, others, including Orson Hyde, a longtime Rigdon critic, said he presented "his claims with all the eloquence and power that he was master of."³⁴

Despite assurances that the convocation was nothing more than a prayer meeting, Rigdon labored to gain a show of support from the throng of LDS faithful. Hyde reported that Rigdon was just "about to ask an expression of the people by vote; when lo! to his grief and mortification, [Brigham Young] stepped upon the stand. . . and with a word stayed all the proceedings of Mr. Rigdon."³⁵ Young, recalling the event in 1860, stated: "[W]hen I went to meet Sidney Rigdon on the meeting ground I went alone, and was ready alone to face and drive the dogs from the flock."³⁶

Jacob Hamblin's recollection of the morning of 8 August indicates that Young's booming voice and stunning display of brinkmanship caused the audience to turn in their seats and face his commanding presence on the stand. "I will manage this voting for Elder Rigdon," he belted. "He does not preside here. This child [meaning himself] will

33. Watson to Van Wagoner.

34. Hyde, *Speech*, 13.

35. *Ibid.*

36. *Journal History*, 6 Oct. 1860.

manage this flock for a season."³⁷ Tactically, he then dismissed the meeting, allowing time for Rigdon's rhetoric to dissipate, and announced a special assembly for 2:00 p.m. Wilford Woodruff's diary records, under the same date, states: "The[re] was a meeting appointed at the grove for the Church to come together for Prayers. But in consequence of some excitement among the People and a dispositions by some spirits to try to divide the Church, it was thought best to attend to the business of the Church in the afternoon that was to be attended to on Tuesday."³⁸

The afternoon meeting was organized like a solemn assembly with various leaders appropriately ordering their quorums. After prayer, Brigham Young stood before the people. It was a momentous occasion. For the first and only time in Mormon history, church leadership was about to be determined by the will of the people. Brother Brigham, who possessed a mean-weather-eye for prevailing winds from the masses, catered to the majority who had grown accustomed to being told what to do. While Rigdon had been spouting wild Armageddon rhetoric during the previous week, Young perceived that the Saints "like children without a father, and sheep without a shepherd," mostly wanted comfort.³⁹ Lonely and bereaved, more than a third of the Mormon faithful were middle- and working-class British immigrants, converted by Young and his fellow apostles. These new arrivals, conditioned from their earliest years, were used to working under the direct guidance of a master's hand in their homeland. Young saw their dependency, their inability to provide for their own emotional and economic sustenance. They were accustomed to following directions from Joseph Smith and were scarcely familiar with Rigdon, who had been ill for years; being instructed what to do by Brigham Young was a relief.

Fully confident, tossing off platitudes and pronouncements, Young's afternoon address on 8 August was a remarkable assertion of the Twelve's right to govern as well as his personal claim to be shepherd of the Mormon flock. "For the first time since [I] became a member of the church," Young began, "the Twelve Apostles of the Lamb, chosen by revelation, in this last dispensation of the gospel for the winding up scene, present themselves before the saints, to stand in their lot according to appointment."⁴⁰ After explaining "matters so satisfactorily that every saint

37. Cited in James A. Little, *Jacob Hamblin* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1909), 20-21.

38. Kenney, *Wilford Woodruff's Journal*, 2:434-35.

39. *Journal History*, 8 Aug. 1844. This state of normlessness, of not knowing how to act in new or confusing situations, is called *anomie* by social scientists (see William Kornblum, *Sociology in a Changing World*, 3rd ed. [Fort Worth: Harcourt Brace College Publishers, 1994], 257).

40. *Times and Seasons* 5 (2 Sept. 1844): 637. While my narration generally follows the 8 August 1844 *Journal History* account, which for the most part fleshes out Thomas Bullock's 8 August p.m. minutes (General Minutes Collection), other important references are Wilford

could see that Elijah's mantle had truly fallen upon the 'Twelve,'" wrote a reporter in the 2 September 1844 *Times and Seasons*, Young, ever the strategist, then asked, "I now want to ask each of you to tell me if you want to choose a guardian, a Prophet, evangelist or sumthing els[e] as your head to lead you. All that are in favor of it make it manifest by raising the right hand." No one did.⁴¹

Assuming the authoritarian Mormon father role he filled so well, Young then responded, "I know your feelings—do you want me to tell your feelings?" Responding to murmurs and assenting nods of the compliant flock he continued:

[H]ere [is] the 12 an independ[en]t body—who have the Keys of the K[ingdom] to all the whole world so help me God[, and] the[y] are, as the 1st pres[idenc]y of the church. . . . [Y]ou can[']t call a Prophet you can[']t take El[der] Rig[don] or Amas[a] Lyman they must be ord[aine]d by the 12. . . . God will have nothing to do with you—you can['] put any one at the head of the 12.⁴²

Young went on: "Perhaps some think that our beloved brother Rigdon would not be honored, would not be looked to as a friend, but if he does right, and remains faithful, he will not act against our counsel, nor we against his, but act together, and we shall be as one."⁴³ "Do you want a spokesman?" Young then asked. "Do you want the church properly organized, or do you want a spokesman to be chief cook and bottle washer?"

Discussing Rigdon's calling as spokesman to the prophet, Young agreed, "Very well, he was," but he added, "If he wants now to be a spokesman to the Prophet he must go to the other side of the veil for the Prophet is there, but Elder Rigdon is here. Why will Elder Rigdon be a fool? Who knows anything of the [fullness of the] priesthood, or of the organization of the kingdom of God [i.e., the Council of Fifty]? I am plain."⁴⁴ As the meeting progressed, the sentiment which had so recently changed in favor of the Twelve became palpable. When Amasa Lyman took the stand to speak, he placed himself in Young's amen corner.

Shaken by the effect of Young's words upon the audience, the usually loquacious Rigdon declined to speak when afforded rebuttal oppor-

Woodruff's diary account (Kenney, *Wilford Woodruff's Journal*, 2:434-40); Brigham Young diary entry for 8 August 1844; William Clayton diary entry for 8 August 1844, in George D. Smith, ed., *An Intimate Chronicle: The Journals of William Clayton* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books in Association with Smith Research Associates, 1991), 142; and HC, 7:231-42.

41. 8 Aug. 1844 p.m. minutes in unknown scribe's hand (General Minutes Collection).

42. *Ibid.*

43. *Journal History*, 8 Aug. 1844.

44. *Ibid.*

tunities. Considering Rigdon's rhetorical proclivities, his decision seems tantamount to conceding defeat. His face buried in his hands, the infirm Rigdon requested an old Missouri nemesis, W. W. Phelps, to champion his cause. The cagey editor, realizing that Rigdon's cause was lost, delivered an ardent affirmation of the Twelve's position.

After Parley P. Pratt addressed the crowd, Young again took the stand. Attesting that if men "abide our Council they will go right into the K[ingdom]. . . we have all the signs [and] the tokens to give to the Porter [and] he will let us in the qu[ay]," Young proposed a vote. "Do you want Bro. Rig[don] to stand forward as you[r] leader[,] your guide[,] your spokesman[?]"⁴⁵ Rigdon interrupted then, saying he "wanted him to bring up the other question first." So Young asked,

people[?] [H]ere [are] the A[postles], the Bible, the Book of Mormon, the doc[trine] [and] cov[enants] is here [and] here (head & heart) it is written on the tablet of my heart. . . . [I]f the Ch[urch] want the 12 to walk in to their call[in]g[,] if this is your mind[,] signify it by the uplifted hand.

The vote, according to Young, was unanimous, which he announced "supersedes the other question."⁴⁶

Young then announced that "Rig[don] is. . . one with us—we want such men as Bro[ther] R[igdon] he has been sent away to build a K[ingdom] let him keep the instruct[i]o[n] [and] calling[,] let him raise up a k[ingdom] in Pittsburg [and] we will lift up his hand. I guess we[']ll have a printing office [and] gathering there." Wishing to support Rigdon in his calling as counselor, Young continued, "I feel to bring up Bro[ther] Rig[don] we are of one mind. . . will this con[gregation] uphold him in the place. . . [and] let him be one with us [and] we with him."⁴⁷ The voting was unanimous.

The leadership claim of the Twelve was beyond their February 1835 apostolic ordination, the March 1835 revelation giving them authority equal to the First Presidency, and the July 1837 revelation that the Twelve shared the keys of the kingdom with the First Presidency. Their assertion to "stand in their lot according to appointment," as Brigham had declared on 8 August, was based entirely on Joseph Smith's commission to them and others of the "keys of the kingdom" during a spring 1844 meeting of the Council of Fifty, the organization Young referred to on

45. 8 Aug. 1844 p.m. minutes in Thomas Bullock's handwriting.

46. *Ibid.* William C. Staines Journal, cited in HC, 7:236, reported there were "a few dissenting voices." "History of William Adams, Wrote by himself January 1894," 15, adds that "out of that vast multitude about twenty voted for Rigdon to be Gardian" (Special Collections, BYU Library).

47. 8 Aug. 1844 p.m. minutes in Thomas Bullock's handwriting.

8 August saying "if you let the 12 rem[ai]n the keys of the K[ingdom] are in them. . . we have an organ[izatio]n that you have not seen."⁴⁸

Orson Hyde commented on this 26 March 1844 empowerment, commonly called Joseph Smith's "last charge," in an 1869 address:

In one particular place, in the presence of about sixty men, [Joseph Smith] said, "My work is about done; I am going to step aside awhile. I am going to rest from my labors; for I have borne the [burden] and heat of the day, and now I am going to step aside and rest a little. And I roll the [burden] off my shoulders on the shoulders of the Twelve Apostles. 'Now,' said he, 'round up your shoulders and bear off this kingdom.' Has he ever said this to any one else? I do not know; I do not care. It is enough for me to know that he said it to the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles."⁴⁹

Wilford Woodruff's account of this meeting quotes the prophet as saying: "I tell you the burden of this kingdom now rests upon your shoulders; you have got to bear it off in all the world, and if you don't do it you will be damned."⁵⁰ The most explicit statement on the charge, however, came from Benjamin F. Johnson, the youngest council member. He wrote that the prophet

Stood before that association of his Select Friends including all the Twelve and with great Feeling & Animation he graphically Reviewed his Life of Pers[e]cution Labor & Sacr[ifice] For the church & Kingdom of God—Both-of-Which—he d[e]clared were now organized upon the earth. The burden of which had become too great for him longer to carry. That he was weary & Tired with the weight he So long had bourn and he then Said with great Veh[e]mence "And in the name of. . . the Lord I now Shake from my Shoulders the Responsibilities of bearing off the Kingdom of God to all the world—and-here-& now I place that Responsibility with all the Keys Powrs & privilege pertaining there too upon the Shoulders of you the Twelve Apostles in Connection with this Council."⁵¹

The kingdom the prophet directed the Twelve to carry on their shoulders, however, was the political theocracy, the Kingdom of God, a shadow organization separate from the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. It was this organization, best known as the Council of Fifty, not the Quorum of the Twelve, that the prophet intended to help relieve

48. Ibid.

49. JD 13 (6 Oct. 1869): 180.

50. "Wilford Woodruff's Testimony On Priesthood and Presidency," delivered on 23 Feb. 1892, in *Liahona: The Elders' Journal* 7 (16 Apr. 1910): 682.

51. Dean R. Zimmerman, *I Knew the Prophets, An Analysis of the Letter of Benjamin F. Johnson to George F. Gibbs, Reporting Doctrinal Views of Joseph Smith and Brigham Young* (Bountiful, Utah: Horizon, 1976) 35.

the responsibilities of administering the temporal and secular affairs of the church.

While the Mormon vote on 8 August 1844 called for stability and ecclesiastical continuity, some have interpreted the assembly's actions as affirming Young's role as Joseph Smith's prophetic successor. That this was not intended is clarified in an epistle from the Twelve published in the 15 August 1844 *Times and Seasons*. The circular announced: "You are now without a prophet present with you in the flesh to guide you. . . . Let no man presume for a moment that [Joseph Smith's] place will be filled by another; for, remember he stands in his own place, and always will."⁵² The 2 September *Times and Seasons* also editorialized: "Great excitement prevails throughout the world to know 'who shall be the successor of Joseph Smith.'" The paper then admonished, "be patient, *be patient* a little, till the proper time comes, and we will tell you all. 'Great wheels move slow.' At present, we can say that a special conference of the church was held in Nauvoo on the 8th ult., and it was carried *without a dissenting voice*, that the 'Twelve' should preside over the whole church, and when any alteration in the presidency shall be required, seasonable notice will be given."⁵³

While no known contemporary record supports a supernatural occurrence on either the morning or afternoon of 8 August, over the years some have extemporized a surrealistic view of the day. In LDS phraseology, the alleged transcendental morning experience is known as the "Transfiguration of Brigham Young" or the "Mantle of the Prophet Incident."⁵⁴ "When Brigham Young arose and addressed the people," wrote future apostle George Q. Cannon two decades later:

If Joseph had risen from the dead and again spoken in their hearing, the effect could not have been more startling than it was to many present at that meeting, it was the voice of Joseph himself; and not only was it the voice of Joseph which was heard, but it seemed in the eyes of the people as if it were the very person of Joseph which stood before them. A more wonderful and miraculous event than was wrought that day in the presence of that congregation, we never heard of. The Lord gave His people a testimony that left no room for doubt as to who was the man chosen to lead them. They both saw and heard with their natural eyes and ears, and the words which were uttered came, accompanied by the convincing power of God, to their hearts,

52. *Times and Seasons* 5 (15 Aug. 1844): 618.

53. *Ibid.* 5 (2 Sept. 1844): 632.

54. This latter terminology likely evolved from a figurative or allegorical description such as the one in an anonymous letter published in the 15 October 1844 *Times and Seasons* (5:675). "Who can[']t see," began the communication, "that the mantle of the prophet has fallen on Pres. Young and the Twelve? The same spirit," continued the letter, "which inspired our beloved bro. Joseph Smith, now inspires Pres. Young."

and they were filled with the Spirit and with great joy. There had been gloom, and in some hearts, probably, doubt and uncertainty, but now it was plain to all that here was the man upon whom the Lord had bestowed the necessary authority to act in their midst in Joseph's stead. On that occasion Brigham Young seemed to be transformed, and a change such as that we read of in the scriptures as happening to the Prophet Elisha, when Elijah was translated in his presence, seemed to have taken place with him. The mantle of the Prophet Joseph had been left for Brigham. . . . The people said one to another: "The spirit of Joseph rests on Brigham": they knew that he was the man chosen to lead them and they honored him accordingly.⁵⁵

D. Michael Quinn, foremost authority on the Mormon succession crisis of 1844, has discovered several early references which he cites as supporting a transfiguration incident. A 15 November 1844 letter from Henry and Catharine Brooke wrote that Young "favours Br Joseph, both in person, & manner of speaking more than any person ever you saw, looks like another."⁵⁶ Five days later Arza Hinckley referred to "Brigham Young on [w]hom the mantle of the prophet Joseph has fal[li]en."⁵⁷ The May 1845 diary of William Burton (who died in 1851) noted that "[Joseph and Hyrum Smith's] places were filled by others much better than I once supposed they could have been." Burton wrote, "The spirit of Joseph appeared to rest upon Brigham."⁵⁸ Yet none of these references describe an explicit transfiguration, a physical metamorphosis of Brigham Young into the form and voice of Joseph Smith. The use of the phrase "spirit of Joseph" is merely elocutionary. Brigham Young, himself, used this same rhetorical form of expression during a 19 July 1857 address to the gathered Saints in Salt Lake City. Referring to the possibility of his own death, Young informed his listeners that "the spirit of Joseph which fell upon me is ready to fall upon somebody else when I am removed."⁵⁹

The earliest detailed accounts of a purported transfiguration did not begin to surface until long after the Saints were settled in the Great Basin. The fact that no account was included in "Joseph Smith's History," completed in August 1856, or in *The Autobiography of Parley P. Pratt*, completed before his 1857 death, suggests that the myth was not fully

55. Kate B. Carter, comp., *Heart Throbs of the West* (Salt Lake City: Daughters of Utah Pioneers, 1943), 4:420; see also Andrew Jenson, *The Historical Record*, Book 1:789-91, and JD 23 (29 Oct. 1882): 358.

56. Henry and Catharine Brooke to Leonard and Mary Pickel, 15 Nov. 1844, Leonard Pickel papers, Beinecke Library, Yale University, cited in D. Michael Quinn, *The Mormon Hierarchy: Origins of Power* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1994), 167.

57. Azra Hinckley diary, 20 Nov. 1844, Special Collections, BYU Library.

58. William Burton diary, May 1845, LDS archives.

59. "Remarks by President Brigham Young, made in the Bowery, Great Salt Lake City, 19 July 1857," in JD 13 (19 July 1857): 57-58.

developed by this period. The first public reference to a “transfiguration” may have been a 19 July 1857 statement by Albert Carrington before a huge gathering of Saints that “he could not tell [Brigham Young] from Joseph Smith” when Young “was speaking in the stand in Nauvoo” during the 8 August 1844 convocation. “Somebody came along and passed a finger over his eyes,” Brigham Young declared, “and he could not see any one but Joseph speaking, until I got through addressing the congregation.”⁶⁰ Yet Young himself, while addressing the assembled Saints on the afternoon of 8 August 1844, confirmed that no chimerical experience had occurred that day. “For the first in the kingdom of God in the 19th century,” he remarked, we are “without a Prophet at our head.” Henceforth, he added, we are “called to walk by faith, *not by sight*.”⁶¹

Retrospective retellings of a “transfiguration,” in a variety of forms, can be found in dozens of sources, yet no two seem to agree on precise details.⁶² Elizabeth Haven Barlow, a cousin of Brigham Young, for example, wrote that her mother told her that “thousands in that assembly” saw Young “take on the form of Joseph Smith and heard his voice change to that of the Prophet’s.”⁶³ Eliza Ann Perry Benson reminisced that the

60. *Ibid.*

61. HC, 7:232; italics mine.

62. Anson Call, Salt Lake City School of the Prophets minutes, 26 Aug. 1871, LDS archives; Caroline Barnes Crosby, “Retrospective Memoirs Written in 1851,” LDS archives; Homer Duncan Journal, LDS archives; Zadok Knapp Judd, “Reminiscence Written at Age Seventy-five,” Utah Historical Society; Catharine Thomas Leishman Autobiography, LDS archives; George Morris Autobiography, Special Collections, BYU Library; John Riggs Murdock, in J. M. Tanner, *A Biographical Sketch of John Riggs Murdock* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1909), 71; Zera Pulsipher, in Terry and Nora Lund, comps., *The Pulsipher Family History Book* (Salt Lake City: n.p., 1953), 10-24; William Lampard Watkins Autobiography, LDS archives; Samuel Amos Woolley Autobiography, LDS archives; Eliza Westover, “2 July 1916 Letter to Her Son,” LDS archives; Emily Smith Hoyt, “Reminiscences and Diaries (1851-1893),” LDS archives; Robert Taylor Burton, “Statement of 28 July 1905,” LDS archives; Jacob Hamblin, in Pearson H. Corbett, *Jacob Hamblin—The Peacemaker* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1952), 22; “Wilford Woodruff’s “Testimony on Priesthood And Presidency—Delivered on 23 February 1892,” in *Liahona—The Elders’ Journal* 7 (16 Apr. 1910): 683; “Wilford Woodruff Statement,” in *Deseret News*, 15 Mar. 1892; *Journal History*, 9 Oct. 1867; Benjamin F. Johnson, in Zimmerman, 17; Robert T. Taylor, in Janet Burton Seegmiller, *The Life Story of Robert Taylor Burton* (Salt Lake City: Robert Taylor Burton Family Organization, 1988), 49; William C. Staines, in *The Contributor* 12 (1891): 315; William Van Orden Carbine, in Kate B. Carter, comp., *Our Pioneer Heritage* (Salt Lake City: Daughters of Utah Pioneers, 1963), 6:203; Albert Clements, *ibid.*, 12:219; William L. Watkins, *ibid.*, 19:390-91; Talitha Cheney Autobiography, *ibid.*, 15:118-19; Ezra T. Benson, in John Henry Evans and Minnie Egan Anderson, *Ezra T. Benson—Pioneer, Statesman, Saint* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1947), 88-89; and “Typescript Account of Testimony of Bishop George Romney,” by Mary R. Ross, LDS archives.

63. “Autobiography of Six Pioneer Women,” in Kate B. Carter, ed., *Our Pioneer Heritage* (Salt Lake City: Daughters of Utah Pioneers, 1976), 19:327.

Saints arose "from their seats enmass" exclaiming "Joseph has come! He is here!"⁶⁴ While Eliza Ann Haven Westover, writing in 1918, remembered that "hundreds witnessed the [transfiguration], but not all that were there had that privilege."⁶⁵

John D. Lee, writing of 8 August 1844 events in his autobiography, said:

Sidney Rigdon was the first who appeared upon the stand. He had been considered rather in the back-ground for sometime previous to the death of the Prophet. He made but a weak claim. . . . Just then Brigham Young arose and roared like a young lion, imitating the style and voice of the Joseph, the Prophet. Many of the brethren declared that they saw the mantle of Joseph fall upon him. I myself, at the time, imagined that I saw and heard a strong resemblance to the Prophet in him, and felt that he was the man to lead us until Joseph's legal successor should grow up to manhood, when he should surrender the Presidency to the man who held the birthright.⁶⁶

Claim to the contrary, Lee could not have witnessed this. His personal diary makes it clear that he did not return to Nauvoo until 20 August, nearly two weeks later.⁶⁷

Apostle Orson Hyde, prone to exaggerate, particularly when attempting to undermine the succession claims of his archenemy Sidney Rigdon,⁶⁸ did not arrive in Nauvoo until 13 August.⁶⁹ Yet he left two elaborate personal reminiscences of a "transfiguration" he could not possibly have witnessed either. When Young began to speak that morning, Quorum of the Twelve president Hyde recalled in 1869, "his words went through me like electricity." This is my testimony, Hyde added for special emphasis, "it was not only the voice of Joseph Smith but there were the features, the gestures and even the stature of Joseph before us in the person of Brigham."⁷⁰

64. Donald Benson Alder and Elsie L. Alder, comp., *The Benson Family—The Ancestry and Descendants of Ezra T. Benson* (Salt Lake City: Ezra T. Benson Genealogical Society, Inc., 1979), 151.

65. Eliza Westover to her son Lewis, July 2 1916, LDS Archives.

66. John D. Lee, *Mormonism Unveiled; including the Remarkable Life and Confessions of the Late Mormon Bishop, John D. Lee* (St. Louis: Scammell and Company, 1881), 155.

67. Cited in Juanita Brooks, *John Doyle Lee: Zealot—Pioneer Builder—Scapegoat* (Glendale, California: Arthur H. Clark, 1961), 62.

68. Although Rigdon was Hyde's mentor in both the Reformed Baptist Movement and Mormonism, he never forgave Rigdon for opposing his return to the church after his defection during the Missouri difficulties. Additional problems between the two also arose when Hyde's wife, Nancy, served as the go-between in Joseph Smith's attempted seduction of Rigdon's daughter Nancy. See Van Wagoner, *Sidney Rigdon*, 266, 282, 294-95, 320, 324, 354.

69. See Wilford Woodruff diary under date in Kenney, *Wilford Woodruff's Journal*, 2:441.

70. JD 13 (6 Oct. 1869): 181.

Eight years later Hyde declared in general conference that as soon as Young opened his mouth

I heard the voice of Joseph through him, and it was as familiar to me as the voice of my wife, the voice of my child, or the voice of my father. And not only the voice of Joseph did I distinctly and unmistakably hear, but I saw the very gestures of his person, the very features of his countenance, and if I mistake not, the very size of his person appeared on the stand. And it went through me with the thrill of conviction that Brigham was the man to lead this people. And from that day to the present there has not been a query or a doubt upon my mind with regard to the divinity of his appointment; I know that he was the man selected of God to fill the position he now holds.⁷¹

Wilford Woodruff, the foremost chronicler of early Mormon history, also left several first-hand accounts of a "transfiguration incident." His 8 August 1844 diary, however, makes it clear that he did not attend the morning meeting when both Young and Rigdon addressed the crowd. "The Twelve spent their time in the fore part of the day at the office," he wrote, and "in the afternoon met at the grove."⁷² Although Woodruff's recounting of the day consists of one of the longest, single-entry accounts in his voluminous diary, nearly 2,200 words, he makes no mention of anything miraculous.

One year later, in a letter to church members in Great Britain, Woodruff reported that during the 8 August 1844 special conference

we met in a special conference, all the quorums, authorities, and members of the Church, that could assemble in Nauvoo. They were addressed by elder Brigham Young, the president of the quorum of the twelve. It was evident to the Saints that the mantle of Joseph had fallen upon him, the road that he pointed out could be seen so plainly, that none need err therein; the spirit of wisdom and counsel attended all his teachings, he struck upon a chord, with which all hearts beat in unison.⁷³

Yet by 1872 Woodruff, like many other Nauvoo Mormons, had began

71. *Ibid.* 19 (5 Apr. 1877): 58. In 1860 Hyde also embellished his recall of the 1847 organization of the First Presidency. He said that he heard the voice of God declare: "Let my servant Brigham step forth and receive the full power of the presiding Priesthood in my Church and kingdom" (JD 8 [7 Oct. 1860]: 234). Yet when President Wilford Woodruff was asked during an 1894 meeting of the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve if he observed any of the special manifestations described by Hyde in connection with the 1847 organization, he said he did "not remember any particular manifestations at the time of the organization of the Presidency" (Abraham H. Cannon journal, 30 Aug. 1894, Special Collections, BYU Library).

72. HC, 2:435.

73. "To the [Church] Officers and Members," in *Latter-day Saints' Millennial Star*, Feb. 1845.

to describe Brigham Young's 8 August 1844 manly defeat of Sidney Rigdon as something more arcane than a mere strategic conquest. "Every man and every woman in that assembly, which perhaps might number thousands," he declared, "could bear the same testimony. I was there, the Twelve were there, and a good many others, and all can bear the same testimony." Continuing with his expansive explanation of that long ago day, he asked the audience:

Why was the appearance of Joseph Smith given to Brigham Young? Because here was Sidney Rigdon and other men rising up and claiming to be the leaders of the Church, and men stood, as it were on a pivot, not knowing which way to turn. But just as quick as Brigham rose in that assembly, his face was that of Joseph Smith—the mantle of Joseph had fallen upon him, the power of God that was upon Joseph Smith was upon him, he had the voice of Joseph, and it was the voice of the shepherd. There was not a person in that assembly, Rigdon, himself, not excepted, but was satisfied in his own mind that Brigham was the proper leader of the people, for he [Rigdon] would not have his name presented, by his own consent, after that sermon was delivered. There was a reason for this in the mind of God; it convinced the people. They saw and heard for themselves, and it was by the power of God.⁷⁴

Twenty years later, while again discussing the 1844 war of words between Young and Rigdon, Woodruff was cited as saying:

I do not know if there was any one present here tonight but myself who was there at that [8 August 1844] conference. There are but few living who were present on that occasion. . . and when Brigham arose and commenced speaking, as has been said, if my eyes had not been so I could see, if I had not seen him with my own eyes, there is no one that could have convinced me that it was not Joseph Smith speaking. It was with the voice and face of Joseph Smith; and many can testify to this who was acquainted with the two men.⁷⁵

While all transfiguration anecdotes, like the Lee, Hyde, and Woodruff narratives, are belated recountings, a George Laub diary reference was thought by many, until recently, to have been written in 1846. "Now when President Young arose to address the congregation," Laub's account begins, "his voice was the voice of Bro. Joseph and his face appeared as Josephs face & Should I not have seen his face but herd his voice I should have declared that it was Joseph." This small tan-colored leather diary, which has misled many scholars, has now been determined

74. JD 15 (8 Apr. 1872): 81.

75. *Deseret News*, 12 Mar. 1892.

to be a copy of the original by Laub himself, with additions.⁷⁶ The original diary, which also exists, contains no reference to a transfiguration of Brigham Young.

When 8 August 1844 is stripped of emotional overlay, there is not a shred of irrefutable contemporary evidence to support the occurrence of a mystical event either in the morning or afternoon gatherings of that day. A more likely scenario was that the force of Young's commanding presence, his well-timed arrival at the morning meeting, and perhaps a

76. The tan-colored copy, incorrectly thought to be the original diary, was published in its entirety by Eugene England, ed., "George Laub's Nauvoo Journal," *BYU Studies* 18 (Winter 1977): 151-78. Whereas the original maroon-colored diary is written in a variety of inks, as one would expect in a multi-year diary, the copy is written in only two inks (copy, 1-43, a dark ink; 44-139, a lighter ink). Extensive family genealogy is also included on the inside covers of the original diary. Not so with the copy. The lighter ink used in the copy is also evident after p. 195 in the original. This reflects Laub's first entry in Deseret (Utah). Whereas he did not arrive in Utah territory until 25 August 1852 (original, 266), the copy was likely made after this date. The 25 August entry is a retrospective one, for he notes on 1 March 1857, "this day I commenced my daily Jurnal." Laub's insertion in the original (139, not 140 as England noted) "here ends the transfer of the first," is in the same light ink as the copy, leaving no doubt as to which is the original.

Laub's treatment of Rigdon is considerably more negative in the copied diary, as well as more positive regarding Brigham Young, reflecting a retrospective change of heart. For example, when Joseph Smith accused Rigdon of conspiring to turn him over to Missouri officials in October 1843, Laub's original diary reports Rigdon as saying:

If president Smith will have me no longer for his Spokesman I will give him the parting hand of friendship and he wept upon which President Smith arose up [im]mediatly and gave him the Parting hand. . . . But the People having mercy upon him after Hyrum Smith plead for mercy for him and the voice of the people was in his favour (original, 155).

Furthermore, the copy has been modified to read much like the similar revisions made by the Quorum of the Twelve historians to disparage Rigdon:

Joseph told us he did not want [Rigdon] for his counciler any further, that if the people put him there they might. But he said I will Shake him off. He Shook him Self and Shook hands on them words with Rigdon. . . . But the mercy pleading for Rigdon by Bro Hyrum Smith the patriarch Softened the hearts of the people, so they put him in again by their Voice. But Joseph never acknowledged him any further. Yet Rigdon was weeping & pleading. But Joseph Said he cursed god in the Missouri troubles (England, 159).

The most important alteration made by Laub in his copied diary was the addition of two paragraphs which do not appear in the original. This insertion led England and others to believe the entry was the "earliest account of the 1844 'transfiguration' of Brigham Young when he was given the Prophet's 'mantle' of authority" (England, 151).

Additional evidence supporting the authenticity of the original diary is that at the exact spot where the "transfiguration" insertion is made in the copy, a + mark is made in the light-colored ink of the copied diary. The original diary at this point reads:

Now after the Death of Jos & Hyrum[,] Rigdon came from Pittsburgh. (Because Jos. had sent him there to get him out of his way as Rigdon Desired to goe) to dame the presidency of the church

bit of theatrical mimicry⁷⁷ swayed the crowd, rather than a metaphysical transfiguration of his physical body. Mormon bishop George Miller, present at the gathering, later recalled that nothing supernatural had occurred on that day. Young made a “long and loud harangue,” Miller later wrote, for which I “could not see any point in the course of his remarks than to overturn Sidney Rigdon’s pretensions.”⁷⁸

Rigdon himself, in a 6 December 1870 letter to Brigham Young, accused his former sparring partner of duplicity in encouraging transfiguration anecdotes to propagate:

O vain man. . . .Did you suppose that your hypocritical and lying preten[s]e that the spirit of Joseph Smith had [e]ntered into you, was going to prevail

to lead the church[.] But as the lord would have his servant Brigham Young the President of the Twelve to come just in time to tell the people who was the fals sheperd or who was the good shepard and Rigdon soon quaked and trembled and these things which he declared the day before to be revelations was then think [so’s] and gess [so’s] and hoap so and his words fell to the ground because they was Lies from the beginning to the End (original, 115).

The copied diary at this point has been profoundly altered by Laub to reflect the retrospective image of the “transfiguration” that began to evolve in Utah folklore in the late 1850s:

Now after the death of Br. Joseph & Hyrum[,] Rigdon having A mission appointed him by Joseph to Pittsburg before his death. Now after his death Sidney came in all the hast[e] in him to Nauvoo from Pittsburg to claime the presidency of the church, him not knowing that Joseph Sent him out of the way to get r[i]d of him. Now when he returned to Nauvoo he called all the people to gether to choos them a guardian, as He Expressed himself. Now, Said he, the church is 14 years old and it was the duty of the church to choose a guardien & preached there for Two days on the subject of guardinism & the Lords ways was not as mans ways. But as the heavens are hier than the earth So are the Lords ways above mans ways, etc. Just about the time that the vote was to be taken for him to be president & guardien, But as the Lord would have the Twelve to come home & I felt to praise God to See Bro Brigham Young walk upon the stand then. Thes positive Revelations of Rigdon’s ware only guess So & he thinks So & hoap so, while the lord had told him how to proseed before according to his [own] mouth & afterwards only Suposed them so.

Now when President Young arose to address the congregation his Voice was the Voice of Bro. Joseph and his face appeared as Joseph’s face, & Should I not have seen his face but herd his Voice I Should have declared that it was Joseph. Now he arose and commenced Speaking, Saying I would rather have m[oj]urned forty days then to come here, & if Rigdon was the Legal heir to lead the Church why did he not Stop to Pittsburg till we came and accompanied him as I had wrote to him. But he was afraid that he could not kerry out his designes & conspericy underhanded, etc., Emediately Rigdon’s followers armed them with the wepons of death & with the Brandy Jug So that they might have their Spirits of their calling (England, 166).

77. Orson Hyde, in 1869 comments, raised the issue of Brigham Young sounding like Joseph Smith on 8 August 1844 by noting that “President Young is a complete mimic, and can mimic anybody,” although he added, “I would like to see the man who can mimic another in stature who was about *four or five inches higher than himself*” (JD 13 [6 Oct. 1869]: 181), emphasis in original.

78. *Correspondence of Bishop George Miller with the Northern Islander from His Acquaintance with Mormonism up to Near the Close of His Life, 1855* (Burlington, Wisc.: W. Watson, 1916), 20-21.

with God and man. You knew you lied when you made that preten[s]e. Your ignorance was such that you did not know that there were those living who knew that there never was[,] is[,] nor will be[,] such a metamorphosis on this earth as you wickedly, heaven enduringly pretended had taken place with you.⁷⁹

Apostles Brigham Young, Heber C. Kimball, Willard Richards, and Wilford Woodruff, all of whom made 8 August 1844 entries in their diaries, make no reference to an epiphany. Such an event, had it truly transpired, would have stood at the apogee of Mormon history, a physical metamorphosis unsurpassed except for the transfiguration and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Yet neither the *Times and Seasons* nor the *Nauvoo Neighbor*, local newspapers owned by the church, mention such a wonder. Neither do the 1844 and 1845 accounts of Jedediah Grant and Orson Hyde, specifically written to refute Sidney Rigdon's robust challenge to the Quorum of Twelve's succession claims.

The most damning evidence to claims of a transfiguration is the fact that on 8 August 1844 the congregation sustained a committee rather than an individual to run the church. They confirmed the collective Quorum of the Twelve as their presiding authority. Furthermore, Young's ascent to the presidency was no ceremonial stroll, as could be expected if something as phenomenal as a transfiguration occurred. His emergence as the dominant, uncontested Mormon guiding force was not complete until late 1847, after the pioneer trek west. Even then there was substantial opposition to Brigham setting himself apart from his brethren. Orson Hyde, who would succeed Young as quorum president, later said: "Did it require argument to prove that brother Brigham Young held the position of Joseph, the martyred Prophet? Did it require proof that Joseph was there in the person of Brigham, speaking with an angel's voice? It required no argument; with those who feared God and loved truth, it required none."⁸⁰

This observation was not accurate, however. Considerable opposition to Brigham Young establishing a First Presidency is evident in original, unaltered accounts. Particularly outspoken were Wilford Woodruff, Orson Pratt, and to a lesser degree John Taylor, Parley P. Pratt, George A. Smith, and Amasa Lyman. The number of meetings on the topic is ample proof of contention. Woodruff told Young on 12 October 1847 that he felt it "would require [a] revelation to change the order of that Quorum."⁸¹ Six weeks later Woodruff, again objecting to Young's formation of a First

79. An undated copy is in the Stephen Post Collection, box 1, folder 1, LDS archives; and also is listed as Section 61 in Copying Book A. The mailed letter to Young is in the Brigham Young Collection (box 42, fd. 2, reel 73).

80. JD 13 (6 Oct. 1869): 181.

81. Kenney, *Wilford Woodruff's Journal*, 3:283.

Presidency, said that if three were taken out of the Twelve it seemed like "severing the body in 2." Furthermore, if the Quorum of the Twelve surrendered its power "unto [three]," he added, "I sho[ul]d be totally opposed to it." Pratt's viewpoint was that the "head of the church consists of the Apostleship united together."⁸² The matter was not resolved until a lengthy, emotion-filled meeting of the quorum on 5 December 1847.⁸³

The paramount dilemma with retrospective transfiguration recountings is why so many otherwise honorable, pious people recalled experiencing something they probably did not. A rational and likely explanation for this faulty group memory is that a "contagious" thought can spread through the populace to create a "collective mind." This phenomenon is what social scientists call *contagion theory* or *scenario fulfillment*, whereby one sees what one expects, especially belatedly. Memory is more than direct recollection. It springs from tales harbored in the common fund which may then effect a re-shaping of a community's sense of itself. Joseph Smith had truly ushered in an age of miracles and wonder. Every streaking meteor in the heavens seemed to portend marvels for the Mormon masses.

Brigham Young, although not as charismatic as Joseph Smith, was certainly more pragmatic. However, Mormonism was founded on prophetic allure, and viewed in the vague afterlight of the Utah period, the fact that Brigham Young had simply bested Sidney Rigdon in Nauvoo, toe to toe, man to man, was not enchanting enough to nurture and sustain the cohesive post-martyrdom Mormon psyche. A mystical stamp of God's approval or faith-promoting myth was necessary. Young had to be set apart from the masses, even from the Twelve itself, by a wondrous miracle. Nineteenth-century Latter-day Saints in a rather classic example of spontaneous collective behavior⁸⁴ began to interpret as miraculous what in 1844 had simply been a turf battle and a changing of the guard.

82. 5 Dec. 1847, Miscellaneous Minutes, Brigham Young Collection, ms. 1234 box 47, fd. 4.

83. "Minutes of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles," under date, LDS archives. Although neither Wilford Woodruff's diary nor the official minutes mention anything unusual about the 5 December meeting, Brigham Young and Orson Hyde would later claim a supernatural occurrence on this day also. Young in April 1860 told the quorum: "At O. Hyde's the power came upon us, a shock that alarmed the neighborhood" ("Minutes of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, 4 April 1860," LDS archives). Hyde expanded on that at the October conference by affirming that the apostles organized the First Presidency because the voice of God declared: "Let my servant Brigham step forth and receive the full power of the presiding Priesthood in my Church and kingdom" (JD 8:223-24).

84. For a treatment of collective behavior and mass publics, see Kornblum, *Sociology*, 243-71. Another example of controversial Mormon collective behavior in the 1840s and early 1850s was the group denial of polygamy, which many were secretly practicing but adamantly denying until 1852.

What is clear is that this pious folklore, by the force of iteration and reiteration, thrives in present-day Mormondom.

Fables can be useful to a culture. Who can deny that Santa Claus makes Christmas more memorable to the child in us all? And what a wonderful tale of George Washington and the cherry tree did Mason Locke Weems weave out of whole cloth not "to give information about George Washington but to suggest virtuous conduct to young Americans."⁸⁵ In religious matters, however, folk tales equated with reality can ultimately destroy conviction when unmasked. Latter-day Saints who base their faith on such irresolute stories as Elder Paul H. Dunn's allegories⁸⁶ or the "Transfiguration of Brigham Young," when faced with evidence that their belief system seems to rest on sources that are dubious at best or duplicitous at worst, may conclude as Elder Brigham H. Roberts once warned "that since these things are myth and our Church has permitted them to be perpetuated. . . might not the other fundamentals to the actual story of the Church, the things in which it had its origin, might they not all be lies and nothing but lies." Answering his own compelling question Roberts responded, "I find my own heart strengthened in the truth by getting rid of the untruth, the spectacular, the bizarre, as soon as I learn that it is based upon worthless testimony."⁸⁷ That advice, like a spectral voice of reason from the past, remains as sound today as it did six decades ago.

85. A. B. Hart, *American Historical Review* 15 (1910): 242, cited in Robin W. Winks, ed., *The Historian as Detective* (New York: Harper and Row, 1968), 183.

86. Elder Dunn, who based his career on relating faith-promoting allegories about his own exaggerated personal accomplishments, is now a general authority emeritus. See Lynn Packer, "Paul H. Dunn: Fields of Dreams," *Sunstone* 15 (Sept. 1991): 35-44; "Elder Dunn Apologizes For Inaccuracies," *Sunstone* 15 (Nov. 1991): 60.

87. Truman G. Madsen, *Defender of the Faith: The B. H. Roberts Story* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1980), 363.