Joseph Smith's Monogamy:

Exploring a Counter-narrative Regarding Plural Marriage

Was Joseph Smith, the founding prophet of various Mormon sects, a monogamist? Such an idea is incredible to virtually every person familiar with the practice of plural marriage in the Mormon religion.

The prevailing narrative regarding this topic takes for granted that Joseph was the originator of the plural marriage doctrine in Mormonism. Truly, there is a significant amount of evidence to bolster this view. One could easily cite accusations made during Joseph's life as well as those that followed after his martyrdom to build a significant case that he was a polygamist.

However, there are compelling counter arguments to be considered. Accepting that Joseph was a polygamist requires a person to wrestle with significant inconsistencies with that narrative, such as Joseph's numerous and consistent denials, the lack of offspring from polygamous unions during his life, a lack of reliable contemporary evidence, contradictory testimony from his accusers, and modified historical records. Joseph's conduct in investigating, identifying, disciplining, and condemning the adulterous relationships in Nauvoo makes more sense if his polygamy denials are accepted as truthful. His two-year-long quest using the Nauvoo High Council to ferret out sexual promiscuity, discipline those involved, and correct their misbehavior makes more sense if he was not a secret polygamist.

No matter what a person ultimately decides about plural marriage, it requires many assumptions. There isn't ever likely to be enough compelling evidence to definitively prove whether Joseph was or wasn't a polygamist. However, by the end of this paper, the reader may be better equipped to make an informed assumption.

The Problem of Paternity -- Joseph Smith

> "I had not been married scarcely five minutes, and made one proclamation of the Gospel, before it was reported that I had seven wives."
> —*Joseph Smith (LDS History of the Church 6:411*, 26 May 1844*)*

Verifiable children fathered by Joseph Smith are linked to one woman, Emma Smith, Joseph's first and potentially only wife. There have been many claims to the contrary but no claim has ever been validated by DNA. Joseph is alleged to have had more than 30 wives over a period of 11 years[1]. As such, it seems unlikely that not a single descendant could be proven from one of these other unions. Joseph conceived 9 children with Emma. His first alleged plural

[1] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Joseph_Smith%27s_wives

wife was Fanny Alger, who bore 9 children with another man. She, like Joseph, was clearly capable of producing offspring. Yet their alleged union, in the prime of their reproductive years, produced no offspring. The question "why" needs to be answered, or at least considered.

In 1879, Joseph F. Smith conceded the point that there were no children from these unions:

> When asked on November 1, 1879, "Why did Joseph Smith the Prophet have no [polygamous] children?" Joseph F. Smith responded: "Because it would have been against him and the law of the state against bigamy. The children would have been proven to be his or the mothers would have been condemned for illicit intercourse, polygamous marriages not being considered legitimate marriages."[2]

Admittedly, not everyone can or has been DNA tested. Some potential candidates died as infants and cannot be tested. However, every known test has come back negative or inconclusive. One recent effort disproved Joseph's paternity for 5 potential descendants.[3]

Consider also that the common justification in Mormon theology is that plural marriage is to "raise up seed" according to Jacob 2 (which most observers interpret as a reference to increasing the birth rate).[4] In that construct it's hard to imagine Joseph failing in such a significant way. The lack of children from other women makes more sense if Joseph was a monogamist.

If it's true that Joseph only had children with Emma, it offers a stark contrast with the brand of plural marriage practiced by Brigham Young. Young's polygamy resulted in marriages to 56 women. He fathered 57 children from 16 of those wives.[5] Once again, the question of why there was such a significant disparity needs to be answered, or at least considered. As it stands, the only verifiable offspring of Joseph Smith came from his legal wife, Emma.

The Problem of Paternity -- Brigham, Heber, et al

> As we have lately been credibly informed, that an Elder of the Church of Jesus Christ, of Latter-day Saints, by the name of Hiram Brown, has been preaching Polygamy, and other false and corrupt doctrines, in the county of Lapeer, state of Michigan. This is to notify him and the Church in general, that he has been cut off from the church, for his iniquity; and he is further notified to appear at the Special Conference, on the 6th of April next, to make answer to these charges.
> *—Joseph Smith & Hyrum Smith, Times and Seasons 5 [February 1, 1844]: 423*

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[2] Brian C. Hales, *Joseph Smith's Polygamy: Volume 3* p 375
[3] http://www.deseretnews.com/article/700150651/DNA-solves-a-Joseph-Smith-mystery.html?pg=all
[4] e.g. http://en.fairmormon.org/Mormonism_and_polygamy/Purpose_of_plural_marriage
[5] http://historytogo.utah.gov/utah_chapters/pioneers_and_cowboys/thewivesofbrighamyoung.html

The lack of children attributed to Joseph is damaging to the argument that Joseph was a polygamist. Similarly damaging is the lack of children born to most of the people who claim to have practiced polygamy during Joseph Smith's lifetime. According to an analysis by George D. Smith, there were a total of 42 alleged plural marriage unions involving 25 men (excluding Joseph Smith's alleged activity) while Joseph was alive.[6] There were 5 such unions in 1842, 21 in 1843, and 14 more before Joseph's death in June 1844.

One would expect that during this time there would have been a rash of children born from these unions. However, an analysis by Gary Bergera states that there were only four children potentially born from polygamous relationships prior to Joseph's death:[7]

- Lucina Cahoon (about 1843)
- Adelmon/Adelbert Kimball (1842)
- Adelbert Daniel Clayton (2/18/1844)
- George Noble (2/2/1844)

Further investigation of these births reveals that the actual number of children is even smaller. In the case of Lucina Cahoon, there is scant evidence that this child ever existed. The only evidence is a record from a descendant of Reynolds Cahoon, the alleged father, in a family history published in 1960.[8] The only information provided is the name of the child, a birthdate of "about 1843, probably Nauvoo". Given the uncertainty of the birth date or even location, and the source being nearly 120 years after the fact, this birth is questionable at best. A discerning observer would not likely rely on this as proof of a child born from a polygamous union during Joseph's lifetime.

The data for the next child, Adelmon or Adelbert Kimball, is conflicted, but Adelmon was born about Oct 1842 and died Apr 1843. He was born to Sarah Peak, the first alleged plural wife to Heber C Kimball. Before Sarah married Heber, she was married to William Noon. William and Sarah moved to Nauvoo from England in 1841, but for unknown reasons, William abandoned his family and returned to England. William and Sarah are shown in various sources to have had three children. Their final child was named Adelmon, born in 1842, and died Apr 1843.[9]

In other sources Sarah Peak is shown to have given birth to a child named Adelbert with her new husband, Heber C Kimball. This child is also shown to have been born in Oct 1842 and died in Apr 1843. However, it's not possible for Sarah to have delivered two children who were born and died at the same time and fathered by two different men. The conclusion, then, is that

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[6] *Nauvoo Roots of Mormon Polygamy, 1841-46: A Preliminary Demographic Report*, p 30
[7] *Identifying the Earliest Mormon Polygamists, 1841-44, p. 50*
[8] https://archive.org/stream/reynoldscahoonhi00shur#page/84/mode/2up/search/lucina
[9] http://familypedia.wikia.com/wiki/Sarah_Peak_(1811-1873)

it's the same child (as some family histories show).[10] Adelmon was either the son of William Noon and later claimed by Kimball to be his; or, Adelmon was Kimball's son but was easily explained as the last child conceived with William Noon before William abandoned his family. Regardless, in the theory that Joseph Smith was a monogamist, this child would not have raised eyebrows in Nauvoo as he would have easily been attributed to William Noon. As such, this child is not valid proof that plural marriage was being practiced with Joseph's consent.

The third child, Adelbert Daniel Clayton, is a somewhat similar story to that of Adelbert Kimball. The fact they share a first name seems an interesting coincidence. The birth of the Clayton child is supported by some historical evidence. There is an entry in William Clayton's journal on Feb 18, 1844 referencing the birth of a child to Margaret Moon, Clayton's first plural wife.[11] Little Adelbert passed away six months later. While this is a compelling case of a child born from plural marriage before the death of Joseph, there are problems with Clayton's journal that call into question the validity of the narrative surrounding his relationship with Margaret Moon. These problems are discussed in greater detail later in this paper. Regardless, a reasonable observer could conclude that this child was indeed born from a polygamous relationship during Joseph's lifetime.

The final child, George Noble, was born just a few months before Joseph died. There is, however, very little information to analyze the parents' relationship. The mother, Sarah Noble, died in 1847 while attempting to trek west. George was born across the river from Nauvoo in Montrose, IA. He is shown in multiple histories as being the first child born from a polygamous marriage.[12] Given the evidence of the other three child-candidates, that distinction may very well be true. However, even if true, there is no evidence that Joseph was aware of this child's birth. The geographic distance from Nauvoo and the relative chaos that enveloped Joseph's life in his final months could have been enough to prevent his knowledge of this child.

It would be reasonable to conclude there were most likely two children born into polygamy during Joseph's lifetime. Whether Joseph was aware of the circumstances of these births and approved is debatable. More importantly, it's puzzling that over the course of 3 years (1842-1844) there were 25 men working to father children with 40 different women and only 2 children could be mustered. As an example of this anomaly, consider the case of Brigham Young. Young sired 57 children throughout his life but was unable to produce a polygamous child until a year after Joseph died despite allegedly entering polygamy in 1842 and having 4 polygamous wives at the time of Joseph's death in June 1844. By contrast, Brigham's legal wife, Mary Ann Angell, bore him a child in 1842 and 1844. If it's true that these men were practicing plural marriage at Joseph's behest, there should have been many births during this time period.

George Reynolds, a secretary to the First Presidency, hypothesized about the low birth rate as follows:

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[10] http://www.watsonclan.com/getperson.php?personID=I8516&tree=watson
[11] http://www.boap.org/LDS/Early-Saints/clayton-diaries
[12] Andrew Jenson, *The Historical Record 6* [May 1887]: 239

> "The facts that you refer to are almost as great a mystery to us as they are to you; but the reason generally assigned by the [plural] wives themselves is, that owing to the peculiar circumstances by which they were surrounded, they were so nervous and in such constant fear that they did not conceive."[13]

Reynolds does not dispute the lack of children. Instead he asserts that conception was simply prevented by fear. However, it seems implausible that nearly all 40 women would be so distressed over a period of 3 years that conceiving was virtually impossible. As Bergara points out, during this same period of time before Joseph's death, there were 14 children born by the legal wives of the alleged polygamists.[14]

Consider also that this same group of polygamous men would produce 14 births from their polygamous wives (from 1845-1846) very shortly *after* Joseph died.[15] If fear was enough to prevent conception while Joseph was alive, it seems unlikely that the persecution and violence that followed his death would lead to the collective reduction of fear sufficient to allow conception.

It seems more likely that those who practiced polygamy during Joseph's lifetime either abstained from sexual intercourse or took other steps to avoid conception. The stunning lack of polygamous children during Joseph's lifetime and subsequent explosion of polygamous children after his death make more sense in a setting where some were secretly practicing plural marriage without Joseph's consent.

Vast Majority of Evidence Is Contradictory and Not Contemporary

> "What a thing it is for a man to be accused of committing adultery, and having seven wives, when I can only find one. I am the same man, and as innocent as I was fourteen years ago; and I can prove them all perjurers."
> —*Joseph Smith (LDS History of the Church 6:411,* May 26, 1844*)*

It's true there is a great deal of evidence tying Joseph Smith to the practice of polygamy. He had accusers during his life and after. The most convincing of his accusers are those of his followers -- principally among the group that followed Brigham Young after Joseph's death. This main body -- referred to herein as the LDS to distinguish them from the various other Mormon groups -- undertook a concerted effort to prove that plural marriage was a legitimate practice that originated with Joseph Smith. But much of their evidence comes 30 or more years after Joseph died. A first wave came at a time when the LDS church was trying to defend against other groups' claims of being the valid branch of Mormonism, particularly the RLDS church led

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[13] *First Presidency Letterpress Copybooks*, Letter to H. Neidig June 7 1892.
[14] *Identifying the Earliest Mormon Polygamists, 1841-44, p. 50*
[15] *ibid*, p 52-743

by Joseph's son, Joseph Smith III.[16] Joseph III was attempting to prove that his father was not a polygamist. In response, the LDS church set out to prove that he was. The validity of each sect hinged on this question.

There was another wave of evidence when the LDS church sought to sway the outcome of a lawsuit, known as the Temple Lot case, in the 1890s.[17] In this lawsuit, the RLDS church sued a group known commonly as Hedrickites, who owned the temple lot site in Missouri. While both groups vehemently rejected the validity of plural marriage, the Hedrickites enlisted the LDS church to prove plural marriage was indeed taught and practiced by Joseph Smith. In doing so they hoped to disprove the RLDS claim that they most closely resembled the religion that Joseph introduced. It may seem counterintuitive, but all the Hedrickites had to prove was that the RLDS didn't most resemble the religion established by Joseph. This would preserve the Hedrickites' ownership of the temple lot despite the fact that they too considered plural marriage to be an innovation that did not originate with Joseph.

The evidence that comes from these two waves is in some ways compelling but it isn't without its shortcomings. One must ask whether 30-50 year old reminiscences are reliable. Were the testimonies and affidavits swayed by then-current thinking more than the reality of past events? Was pressure applied by church leaders to provide a certain kind of testimony? Is there evidence they would be willing to bend the truth in order to support a desired narrative?

The historical record shows that, as a group, the LDS polygamists were prone to embellishing or even inventing historical events. For example, the stories of a jealous Emma Smith throwing a pregnant Eliza Snow down the stairs of the Nauvoo Mansion house -- causing her to miscarry Joseph's unborn child -- has since been shown false even by LDS scholars.[18] Notably, Eliza never claimed it was true but never denounced it either. The story of seagulls eating crickets that were ravaging Utah crops in 1848 and memorialized by a statue on Temple Square appears to have been exaggerated.[19]

The story of Brigham Young transfiguring into Joseph Smith at the succession crisis appears likewise to have been greatly embellished over time.[20] So much so that Orson Hyde left multiple detailed accounts of the event despite the fact that he was not present in Nauvoo at the time and therefore could not have witnessed it.[21] Despite being a member of the Twelve Apostles, Hyde was willing to claim ownership to a story not his own in order to support a desired narrative. The infamous John D Lee also left a detailed account despite not being present in Nauvoo at the time.[22]

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[16] *Joseph Smith III: Pragmatic Prophet*, p 218
[17] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Temple_Lot_Case
[18] *Emma Smith, Eliza R. Snow, and the Reported Incident on the Stairs*
[19] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Miracle_of_the_gulls
[20] *The Making of a Mormon Myth: The 1844 Transfiguration of Brigham Young*
[21] Id., p 17
[22] Id.

In a somewhat awkward turn of events, when the US Government imposed heavy criminal penalties for engaging in plural marriage, many of the LDS felt obligated to hide the fact that they were still polygamists. Under oath or not, it was common to deny participating in plural marriage despite secretly continuing the practice.[23] The LDS institution itself publicly renounced plural marriage in 1890, but secretly continued the practice for 14 years.[24] Such measures should not be surprising given the political climate of the time but it does demonstrate a pattern of untruthfulness.

In some respects, the pattern continues for the LDS institution even today. The late Boyd K. Packer's lament that not all truths are faith-promoting or useful (and should therefore be suppressed) is likely an inherited viewpoint reflecting the traditions of church leaders who came before him.[25] Because of this, Mormon history is in some respects anti-historic because it ignores and denies some truth when it contradicts tradition or fails to uphold a desired position. This tendency clouds the historical record of plural marriage.

This pattern is indicative of a culture where speaking untruthfully to defend a narrative was not only justified, but expected. This tendency is, believe it or not, normal human behavior. Individuals and groups are prone to confirmation bias and even false memories. Human beings tend to remember past events in ways that conform to current thinking.[26] Rather than viewing the embellishments of the LDS polygamists as something nefarious, perhaps one would more wisely view it as an unfortunate consequence of the human condition. However, it does call into question the evidence presented after Joseph's death.

Recognizing that they were willing to invent, embellish, and falsely deny in order to protect a desired narrative demonstrates their desperation in difficult times. Knowing this makes it easier to doubt the validity of evidence from the late 1800s tying Joseph Smith to polygamy. It also highlights the importance of focusing on contemporary evidence of Joseph's involvement.

Even so, analyzing contemporary evidence presents further questions of credibility. Many of the same key witnesses from the LDS church who claim Joseph taught them personally to practice polygamy are the same people who signed affidavits in Nauvoo stating there was no such practice. Wilford Woodruff and John Taylor both signed an affidavit in 1842 stating "we know of no other rule or system of marriage than the one published from the Book of Doctrine and Covenants".[27]

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[23] http://bycommonconsent.com/2010/03/05/correlation-an-uncorrelated-history-part-2-manifestoes/
[24] http://bycommonconsent.com/2004/05/10/the-lingering-legacy-of-post-manifesto-polygamy/
[25] "There is a temptation for the writer or the teacher of Church history to want to tell everything, whether it is worthy or faith promoting or not. Some things that are true are not very useful." Boyd K. Packer. To their credit, the LDS church in recent years has taken a more open and honest approach to its history.
[26] *Time Magazine* discusses this phenomenon here.
[27] *Times and Seasons* 3 [October 1, 1842]: 939–940

The “system of marriage” being referred to is the original Section 101 of the Doctrine & Covenants which was removed by the LDS church in 1876 because it forbids polygamy.[28] For a church openly practicing polygamy, having a canonized statement that precludes any marriage formula but monogamy is problematic, to say the least. Hence, the subsequent removal by Brigham Young. That section read, in part: “as this church of Christ has been reproached with the crime of fornication, and polygamy: we declare that we believe, that one man should have one wife; and one woman, but one husband, except in case of death, when either is at liberty to marry again.” This section first appeared in the 1835 D&C, nine years before Joseph’s death. We are left to wrestle with the contradiction between the canonized law of marriage that existed while Joseph Smith was alive and the subsequent change made by his successor.

In the Temple Lot Case, Woodruff claimed to have been taught about plural marriage in 1841 and 1842, yet he signed the above affidavit in Oct 1842 claiming to “know of no other rule or system of marriage”.[29] In the ruling for this case, Judge John Phillips stated:

> It is charged by the Respondents, as an echo of the Utah Church, that Joseph Smith, "the Martyr," secretly taught and practiced polygamy; and the Utah contingent furnishes the evidence, and two of the women, to prove this fact. It perhaps would be uncharitable to say of these women that **they have borne false testimony** as to their connection with Joseph Smith; but, in view of all the evidence and circumstances surrounding the alleged intercourse, it is difficult to escape the conclusion that at most they were but sports in "nest hiding". In view of the contention of the Salt Lake party, that polygamy obtained at Nauvoo as early as 1841, **it must be a little embarrassing to President Woodruff** of that organization when he is confronted, as he was in the evidence in this case, with a published card in the church organ [paper] at Nauvoo in October, 1843, certifying that he knew of no other rule or system of marriage than the one published in the Book of Doctrine and Covenants, and that the "secret wife system," charged against the church, was a creature of invention by one Dr. Bennett, and that they knew of no such society. That certificate was signed by the leading members of the church, including John Taylor, the former President of the Utah Church. And a similar certificate was published by the Ladies' Relief Society of the same place, signed by Emma Smith, wife of Joseph Smith, and Phoebe Woodruff, wife of the present President Woodruff. **No such marriage ever occurred under the rules of the church, and no offspring came from the imputed illicit intercourse**, although Joseph Smith was in the full vigor of young manhood, and his wife, Emma, was giving birth to healthy children in regular order, and was enciente [pregnant] at the time of Joseph's death.[30]

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[28] The original Section 101 can be read here: *Joseph Smith Papers Project*.
[29] *Abstract of Evidence Temple Lot Case U.S.C.C.,* p 302
[30] *Decision of John F. Philips, Judge in Temple Lot Case*, p 42 (emphasis added)

The judge was apparently persuaded that the various contradictions called into question the validity of President Woodruff's testimony as well as the testimonies of other witnesses tying Joseph to the practice of plural marriage. In the mind of the Judge, Joseph was proven to be a monogamist.

In the case of John Taylor, he and the other apostles were accused of carrying on spiritual wifery in secret by Sidney Rigdon less than four months after Joseph's death:

> It is a fact, so well known, that the **Twelve and their adherents have endeavored to carry on this spiritual wife business in secret**... and have gone to the most shameful and desperate lengths, to keep it from the public.... How often have these men and their accomplices stood up before the congregation, and called God and all the holy Angels to witness, that **there was no such doctrine taught in the church**; and it has now come to light, by testimony which cannot be gainsaid, that at the time they thus dared heaven and insulted the world, they were living in the practice of these enormities; and there were multitudes of their followers in the congregation at the time who knew it.[31]

Taylor, the editor of the Times and Seasons, responded unequivocally, stating:

> The law of the land and the rules of the church **do not allow one man to have more than one wife alive at once**, but if any man's wife die, he has a right to marry another, and to be sealed to both for eternity; to the living and the dead! there is no law of God or man against it! This is all the spiritual wife system that ever was tolerated in the church, and they know it.[32]

In addition to this denial, Taylor would once again deny plural marriage was occurring six years after Joseph's death. During a public debate in France in 1850, Taylor was asked whether Joseph practiced the "spiritual wifery" he was accused of by John Bennett. Taylor described in detail how well acquainted he was with Joseph in both public and private and then testified "before God, angels, and men, that [Joseph] was a good, honourable, virtuous man". Taylor then read the original Section 101 from the D&C stating that was the law to the church.[33]

Despite such ardent denial of plural marriage, Taylor later claimed to have taken his first plural wife in 1843.[34] Mormon scholar D Michael Quinn alleges that by the time of his statement in France, Taylor "had married twelve polygamous wives who had already borne him eight children".[35] The incongruent testimonies leave little room for honest reconciliation. Was John

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[31] Sidney Rigdon, *Messenger and Advocate* 1 [October 15, 1844]: 14 (emphasis added)
[32] *Times and Seasons* 5 [November 15, 1844]: 715; emphasis added
[33] Richard S. Van Wagoner and Steven C. Walker, *A Book of Mormons* [Salt Lake City, Utah: Signature Books, 1982], 354
[34] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Latter_Day_Saint_practitioners_of_plural_marriage
[35] http://www.mormonismi.net/kirjoitukset/quinn_moniavioisuus.shtml

Taylor hiding the truth about plural marriage in 1842 at the behest of Joseph Smith? What about in 1850 when Joseph was long dead? It is possible instead that Taylor's later testimonies overstated or misrepresented the practice of plural marriage in Nauvoo. At the very least, Taylor shows that his words on this topic should not be accepted at face value without investigation. We are left to decide when he was being truthful and when he was not.

Eliza Snow presents a similar conundrum. She is alleged to have married Joseph in June 1842 yet in October of that year she signed the Relief Society statement referred to above by Judge Phillips in his ruling, denying polygamy was a practice of the church.

The Relief Society later put out a more detailed document titled "*A Voice of Innocence from Nauvoo*" that offered an even stronger denial of plural marriage.[36] It was penned by WW Phelps at the request of Joseph Smith.[37] The document was presented to a general meeting of the church at which Joseph presided in March 1844, only three months before he was killed:

> A vast assembly of Saints met at the Temple of the Lord at nine o'clock a. m., by a special appointment of **President Joseph Smith**, for the purpose of advancing the progress of the Temple, &c. The Patriarch, **Hyrum Smith**, was present; also of the Twelve Apostles **Brigham Young, Heber C. Kimball, Parley P. Pratt, Orson Pratt, Willard Richards, Wilford Woodruff, John Taylor, and George A. Smith**; also the temple committee and about **eight thousand Saints**….[later in the meeting] an article was also read by W. W. Phelps, entitled, "A Voice of innocence from Nauvoo," and all the assembly said "Amen" twice.[38]

The meeting then adjourned until after lunch. The first speaker after reconvening, perhaps ironically, was Brigham Young, a man who allegedly took his first plural wife in 1842. The undeniable conclusion -- if one embraces the idea that Joseph practiced plural marriage -- was that the Nauvoo church leaders, Joseph included, were at this time engaged in general conspiracy to cover up polygamy. Such an idea is widely accepted by many people familiar with this topic. For those who believe Joseph was a prophet of God, it is oddly not difficult for them to accept that he blatantly lied about his participation in plural marriage. However, the possibility that Joseph was telling the truth and that Brigham Young and others were subsequently untruthful proves to be difficult to accept. Is either possibility any more or less offensive?

The Relief Society document presented to the church by Joseph was soon presented to the Relief Society members at their final meetings before a 20-year hiatus. These meetings were so well attended that several sessions were held to accommodate all who wished to attend.[39]

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[36] *Joseph Smith Papers Project*

[37] Phelps would later claim to be in-the-know regarding plural marriage since the early 1830s, a claim refuted by LDS Scholars at FAIR Mormon

[38] LDS *History of the Church* 6:236, p 241, emphasis added

[39] *Joseph Smith Papers Project*

Joseph and Hyrum were dead soon after this document was published and the Relief Society was then disbanded. John Taylor would later explain the “reason why the Relief Society did not continue from the first organization was that Emma Smith the Pres taught the Sisters that the principle of Celestial Marriage as taught and practiced by Joseph Smith was not of God”.[40] Taylor fails to mention that Joseph was the one who had this document read at the aforementioned public meeting before it was read to the Relief Society by Emma and that Taylor himself was among the throng of people who declared "amen" twice after it was read. It raises the question of whether his actions in Nauvoo were more credible than his subsequent actions. Once again we are left to determine which of Taylor’s testimonies is more truthful.

Joseph is believed widely to have involved dozens of people in a scheme to hide his plural marriage efforts. Since the majority of the evidence supporting that theory comes so long after the fact and from a group of people who changed their stories, it is unreasonable to rely on their testimonies. Joseph, on the other hand, and most of his associates while he lived, unequivocally condemned plural marriage. One must decide whether Joseph’s words -- which never varied on the topic of plural marriage -- are more believable than the words of people whose stories changed over time. Most of the evidence against Joseph is not contemporary and was given by people who contradicted their own testimonies.

Proof of Collusion to Frame Joseph Smith

> “I preached in the grove and pronounced a curse upon all adulterers and fornicators, and unvirtuous persons and those who have made use of my name to carry on their iniquitous designs.”
> —*Joseph Smith* (Sermon at the Grove; Apr 10, 1842)

Such contemporary evidence as there is tying Joseph to the practice of plural marriage, the challenge with sorting it out is this: there were schemes in place to frame Joseph Smith for polygamy. The historical record shows contemporary and reliable evidence of this.

In 1842, Francis Higbee wrote a letter to his father, Elias Higbee. Elias was a stalwart Mormon who died in Nauvoo. His name is found on the aforementioned 1842 affidavit denying polygamy. His sons, Francis and Chauncey, appear to have been less stalwart. They were alleged to have been involved with John Bennett and his efforts to convince unsuspecting women to engage in extramarital sex. Chauncey in particular was accused by several women who claimed he propositioned them.[41] The two brothers were at times reconciled with Joseph, who was often disposed to accept the repentant sinner. During one such period of reconciliation, Francis wrote his father a letter that was published in the *Times and Seasons* telling of an existing scheme against Joseph. He wrote the following:

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[40] Newell and Avery, *Mormon Enigma*, p 174
[41] For a summary, see Chapter 12 of *Joseph Smith Fought Polygamy*

> "I have been solicited both by letter, and in person, to **come out with such a lingo as Bennett**, and others have done and attempted in days gone by. My assistance has loudly been called for in such a s[c]heme or adventure and in one instance since I left home I have had what some might consider (were they disposed to be dishonest) a **great offer or proposition made me**, if I would assist in the management, and bringing into existence, a newly modeled concern against the church; that is a corrected and revised story fresh from the mint. But God forbid, as long as he gives me health, and strength, and vigor of mind, I scorn the idea.[42]

It's unclear whether Francis was referring to John Bennett as the one who offered him compensation or another person. Regardless, the conclusion is that there was an element within the church that was intent on defaming Joseph Smith. The possibility remains that Francis, ironically, may have eventually done exactly what his letter claims he would never do by participating in a scheme to "come out with such a lingo as Bennett" when he participated in the *Nauvoo Expositor*.[43]

Joseph and Hyrum addressed the accusations of these conspirators directly. In the case of John Bennett, Joseph initially responded subtly by merely notifying the church that Dr Bennett was no longer in good standing with the church.[44] Bennett, perhaps recognizing an opportunity to turn the tables on Joseph, proceeded to publish various allegations of misconduct, portraying himself as the man of virtue and Joseph as the villain. Joseph then responded more aggressively, publishing details of Bennett's exploits along with an affidavit signed by Bennett denying Joseph ever taught "to hold illicit intercourse with women".

In this particular case there is more than just the word of John C Bennett and the word of Joseph Smith, Jr. In a subsequent battle of affidavits to prove the other a liar, Joseph clearly had the upper hand. He gathered more than 20 affidavits and letters showing he was not engaged in or teaching spiritual wifery as was Bennett.[45] Joseph subsequently called for a special conference at which 380 elders volunteered to canvas the country with a tract that included the affidavits denying Bennett's accusations.[46] While some historians tie Bennett's actions to his having been taught the doctrine of plural marriage by Joseph, which Bennett then twisted, the contemporary evidence does not support that conclusion. It instead shows Joseph an innocent man intent on defending himself against false accusations. How else to explain Joseph's aggressive responses to Bennett?

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[42] *Times and Seasons* 4 [Dec 15, 1842]; emphasis added
[43] Digital Reproduction: https://archive.org/details/NauvooExpositor1844
[44] For a summary of Joseph's battle against John Bennett see *Plural Marriage* by Denver Snuffer, p 14-21.
[45] The affidavits can be read here.
[46] LDS *History of the Church* 5:131–132

Joseph even took the extraordinary step of swearing out an affidavit for defamation against lawyer Chauncey Higbee and attempted to sue Higbee in court for accusing him of plural marriage.[47] A man secretly engaging in polygamy seems unlikely to want to go under oath and risk exposure. These extraordinary measures make more sense if Joseph was telling the truth in his repeated denials.

Joseph and his brother Hyrum also put the High Council of the church at Nauvoo to work in trying to identify not only the perpetrators but also their victims. Various people were called before the Council to face charges of improper conduct and to explain how they came to believe such conduct was permissible. Invariably, the story emerged that Bennett and others like him used Joseph's name to lend credibility to their immoral practices. It's reasonable to wonder whether Joseph was secretly behind it all. But his aggressive attempts to deny it and discipline those involved proves a difficult burden to overcome in alleging he was involved. Once again the contemporary evidence suggests Joseph was innocent and that some within the church were intent on framing him to justify their immorality.[48]

After the Bennett ordeal, rumors of sexual impropriety were a regular concern for the church. It was only a few years later that another councilor in the First Presidency accused Joseph of impropriety when William Law and several others published the one and only edition of the *Nauvoo Expositor*.

Joseph claimed this action was part of a greater context, one in which a group of men conspired to end his life and Hyrum's:

> "I have been informed by two gentleman that a conspiracy is got up in this place for the purpose of taking the life of President Joseph Smith his family and all the Smith family; the heads of the Church."[49]

Law accused Joseph of propositioning his wife.[50] Joseph again responded by denying the allegations. At the time Law published the *Expositor*, he also announced the formation of another church of which he was the president. Joseph's denial and reaction is recorded in comments made before the Nauvoo City Council on June 8, 1844.[51]

From the record, it's easy to sense frustration and even anger from both Joseph and Hyrum. Their comments are in direct opposition to the claims made by William Law, et al. What

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[47] A summary of this lawsuit can be read here.
[48] For details of Joseph's efforts using the High Council see Dinger, John S. *The Nauvoo City and High Council Minutes*
[49] *Words of Joseph Smith*, Andrew Ehat, p 336, Mar 1844. At this time Joseph & Hyrum were considered the heads of the church.
[50] Despite this serious accusation, Law and his wife refused to appear before a grand jury to attest to the validity of their claims. See *Abstract of Evidence Temple Lot Case U.S.C.C.*, p 472
[51] Dinger, John S. *The Nauvoo City and High Council Minutes*. If the reader has an eye for early American handwriting, the original proceedings of that day can be read here (beginning on p 11).

we are left to wrestle with is this: Joseph and Hyrum either engaged in blatant character assassination (if you believe the narrative that they lied about practicing polygamy) or they exposed the purveyors of the Expositor as conspirators and liars themselves. It is off-putting to believe anyone a liar or to accept the reality of a "conspiracy" but unfortunately the facts leave little room for other possibilities.

Reading the minutes from that day shows us from Joseph and Hyrum's perspectives what motivated William Law, Wilson Law, Robert Foster, and the others. They are alleged, particularly William Law, to have abused power for monetary gain and to have used their influence to enrich themselves at the expense of the poor. When hindered by Joseph and Hyrum, an enraged Law is said to have sought revenge by seeking to remove the obstacles to his profiteering (Joseph and Hyrum). The reader must decide how far he thinks Joseph and Hyrum capable of carrying their efforts to hide the truth. The two brothers either maligned and reviled a group of innocent men who were merely disgusted at the prospect of plural marriage and the attempted cover up, or Joseph and Hyrum did nothing more than defend themselves against a calculated attempt to defame them and wrest control of the church for monetary gain.

Judging from the contemporary evidence, it is no easier to think of Joseph as a lie-at-all-costs secret polygamist (as Law claimed) as it is to think of William Law as coveting an opportunity to use power for gain (as Joseph claimed). If Joseph was telling the truth about Law, what better way for Law to place himself at the head than to resurrect old but still-potent accusations? It is no less reasonable to believe Joseph and Hyrum innocent victims of conspiracy as it is to believe them the conspirators. A reasonable and objective person could draw a conclusion to either side.

Regardless, the proof of efforts in place to frame Joseph Smith is compelling enough to doubt the contemporary evidence claiming he was a polygamist. A reasonable and open-minded observer could conclude that some of those efforts were successful enough to stain the legacy of an innocent man.

Revisionist History by the LDS Church

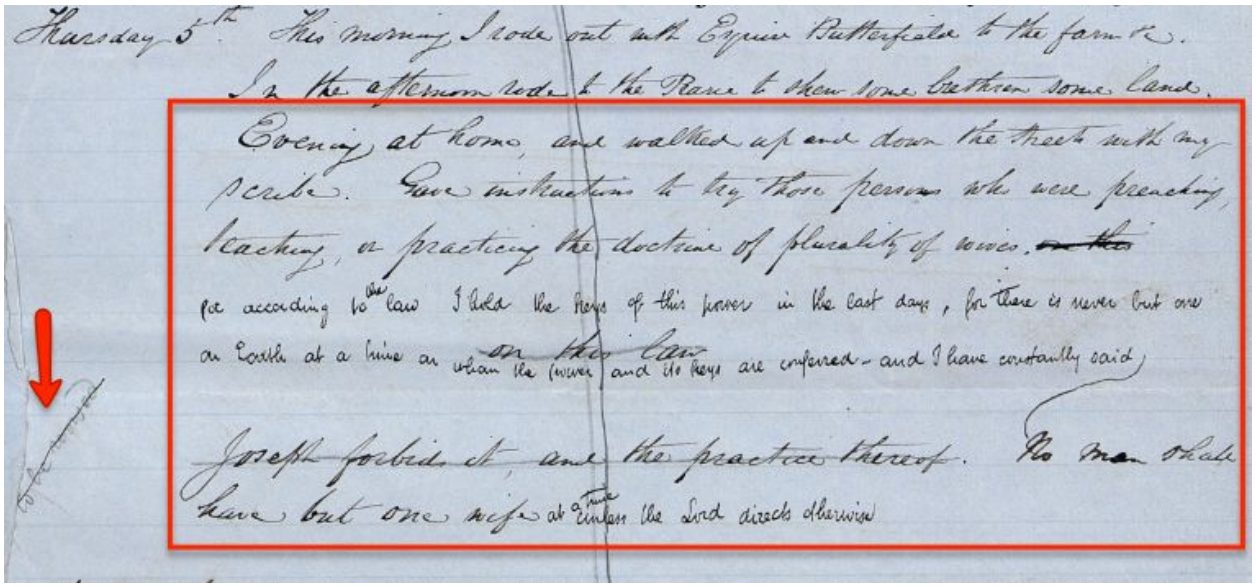
> "Gave inst[r]uction to try those who were preaching teaching or practicing the doctrine of plurality of wives. on this Law. Joseph forbids it. and the practice ther[e]of— No man shall have but one wife."
> *—Joseph Smith, Journal 5 Oct 1843*

Unsavory schemes from the 1840s can account for some of what is widely believed today regarding polygamy. However, it was what happened after Joseph's death that most solidified those beliefs. When Joseph died, the History of the Church had only been compiled up to Aug 1838.[52] In the ensuing chaos caused by his death, many of the church documents ended

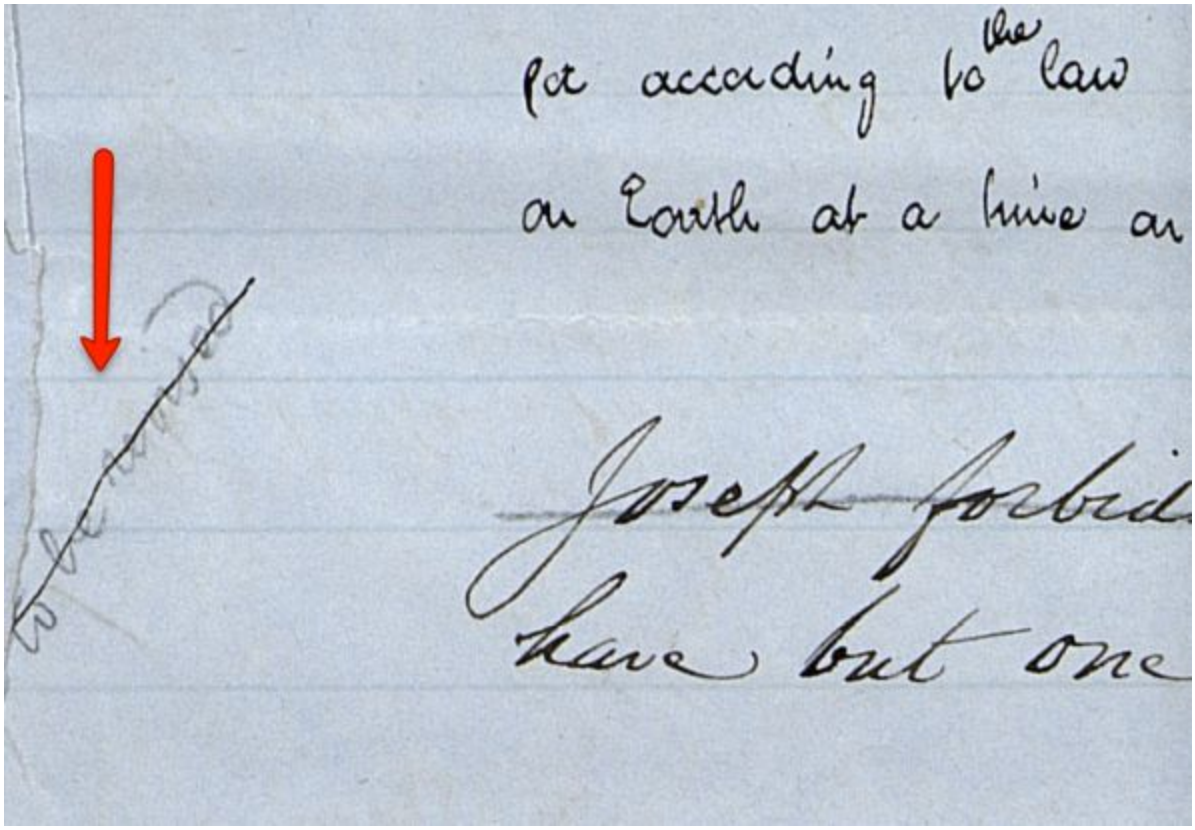
[52] Joseph Smith Papers

up going west with Brigham Young. But life in the untamed west took its toll and the effort to compile church history was touch and go for several years. Willard Richards and Thomas Bullock made it to Feb 1843 in the history but Richards fell ill and died in 1854. George A. Smith was appointed historian that same year and the work began again.

By this time, plural marriage was becoming entrenched into LDS lifestyle. Two years prior, Section 132 had been published. The historians were tasked with compiling the church history. Part of that involved bolstering the accepted narrative that Joseph secretly taught and practiced polygamy. In some cases, church historians appear to have taken liberties with the record in order to avoid apparent contradictions. To wit, consider the following document from the Joseph Smith Papers project (a transcription of the relevant text appears below the images).[53]


Thursday 5th This morning I rode out with Esquire Butterfield to the farm &c.
In the afternoon rode to the Farm to shew some brethren some land.
Evening at home, and walked up and down the streets with my scribe. Gave instructions to try those persons who were preaching, teaching, or practicing the doctrine of plurality of wives. ~~on this~~
for according to the law I hold the keys of this power in the last days, for there is never but one on Earth at a time on whom the power and the keys are conferred - and I have constantly said
Joseph forbid it, and the practice thereof. No man shall have but one wife at a time unless the Lord directs otherwise

[53] The image can be seen here.



It appears one scribe copied a section from Joseph's journal recorded on Oct 5 1843 but left extra space, curiously, around the part where Joseph unequivocally forbids the practice of plural marriage. In the left margin the words "to be revised" appear in a different scribe's handwriting. The "to be revised" handwriting appears to match the handwriting of the revisions made. The revisions change the meaning of Joseph's words completely. The definitive words "Joseph forbids it and the practice thereof" are crossed out and replaced with verbiage similar to what's found in D&C 132. Based on the timeline of this compilation, the page above would have been edited sometime between 1853-1855 after George A. Smith took over duties for the deceased Willard Richards.

One could claim that the original journal entry was simply an example of the contradictory public and private teachings of Joseph. However, this entry was not a public moment. This was a record made in Joseph's private journal by his scribe after the two walked up and down the street having this conversation. The original entry reads as follows:

> Evening at home and walked up and down the street with my scribe. gave inst[r]uction to try those who were preaching teaching or practicing the doctrin of plurality of wives. on this Law. Joseph forbids it. and the practice ther[e]of— No man shall have but one wife.

The edited version was changed to say (modifications in red):

> Evening at home and walked up and down the street with my scribe. gave inst[r]uction to try those who were preaching teaching or practicing the doctrin of plurality of wives. ~~on this law~~ for according to the law i hold the keys of this power in the last days, for there is never but one on earth at a time on whom the power? and the keys are conferred - and I have continually said ~~Joseph forbids it. and the practice ther[e]of~~ No man shall have but one wife at a time unless the Lord directs otherwise.

The original entry is definitive with no exceptions provided and matches perfectly with what Joseph consistently taught: polygamy was not something to be practiced. If Joseph was secretly practicing polygamy, why would he continue this charade in a private conversation with his scribe? Why would he unequivocally forbid it? Why would he demand those practicing it be tried in a church court?

In order to reconcile this with the prevailing narrative that Joseph was lying requires a person to ascribe significant duplicity to a man shown now to have denied and forbidden polygamy publicly and privately. Conversely, this document shows yet another example of a willingness on the part of the LDS church to modify historical records to fit a preconceived narrative. And once again, contemporary evidence is found to show Joseph perfectly consistent in his views condemning plural marriage.

On April 1, 1845, Brigham Young recorded the following: "I commenced revising the History of Joseph Smith at Brother Richard's office: Elder Heber C. Kimball and George A. Smith were with me." By this time Joseph had been dead for ten months. One must wonder what revisions Brigham Young was making to Joseph's history.

The extent to which the early LDS church went in making revisions is only now beginning to be understood as more and more historical documents are released for the first time. Consider this perspective:

> "The official History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints was published in book form under the direction of the First Presidency in 1902. The introductory assurance that 'no historical or doctrinal statement has been changed' is demonstrably wrong. Overshadowed by editorial censorship, **hundreds of deletions, additions, and alterations**, these seven volumes are not always reliable. …The nineteenth-century propaganda mill was so adroit that few outside Brigham Young's inner circle were aware of the behind-the-scenes alterations so seamlessly stitched into church history. Charles Wesley Wandell, an assistant church historian, was aghast at these emendations. Commenting on the many changes made in the historical work as it was being serialized in the Deseret News, 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." The Quorum of the Twelve, under Brigham Young's leadership, began altering the historical record shortly after Smith's death. Contrary to the introduction's claim, Smith did not author the History of the Church. At the time of his 1844 death, the narrative had been written up to 5 August 1838.'"[54]

It would appear that every effort was made by Brigham Young and those who followed him west to preserve a narrative. That they did so is beyond questioning. It's impossible for us today to decipher their motives for doing so. Regardless, the original history supports the notion that Joseph Smith was not a polygamist.

Section 132: Questioned Origins

> "Did you ever see any document of that kind, purporting to be a revelation, to authorize polygamy? No; I never did. Did Joseph Smith ever teach you the principles of polygamy, as being revealed to him, or as a correct and righteous principle? He never did."
> *—1879 Interview with Emma Smith, RLDS History of the Church 3:352–358*

One thing William Law's *Nauvoo Expositor* did do effectively was cite an alleged revelation from Joseph that justified the practice of polygamy. That revelation is today known as Section 132 of the *Doctrine & Covenants*.[55] This section comprises an alleged revelation to Joseph Smith that institutionalizes the practice of plural marriage as a law from God. It was not released publicly until 1852, eight years after Joseph's death and after Brigham Young led thousands of Mormons in a westward exodus.

At the time William Law made his accusations in the *Expositor* regarding this alleged revelation, Joseph and Hyrum did not deny the existence of a revelation but flatly denied that it permitted plural wives. In the City Council minutes of June 8, 1844 Joseph and Hyrum give us a glimpse into the revelation according to them:

> "[Hyrum] referred to the revelation [he] read to the [Nauvoo Stake] High council — that it was in answer to a question concerning things which **transpired in former days & had no reference to the present time** — that W[illia]m Law[,] when sick[,] [confessed and] said ^he had been guilty of adultery &^ he was not fit to live or die, had sinned against his own soul….

[54] Richard S. Van Wagoner, *Sidney Rigdon: A Portrait of Religious Excess*, Signature Books (Salt Lake City, 1994), p. 322.
[55] https://www.lds.org/scriptures/dc-testament/dc/132

> [The mayor said]...They make [it] a criminality of for a man to have a wife on the earth while he has one in heaven — according to the keys of the holy priesthood, and [the mayor] read the statement of W[illia]m Law in the Expositor, **where the truth of God was transformed into a lie**. [He] read [the] statements of Austin Cowles — & said he had never had any private conversation with Austin Cowles on these subjects, that he preached on the stand from the bible showing **the order in ancient days[,] having nothing to do with the present time**...
>
> C[ouncillor] H[yrum] Smith — spoke to show the falsehood of Austin Cowles in relation to the revelation referred to — that **it referred to former days [and] not the present time** as stated by Cowles. [The] Mayor said he had never preached the revelation in private as he had in public — had not taught it to the highest anointed in the Church ^in private^ which many confirmed. [The mayor said][,] on enquiring [of God regarding] the passage in [the Bible that in] the resurrection they neither marry &c[:] I received for [an] answer, Men in this life must be married in view of Eternity, [and that] was the [full] amount of the [content of the] revelation, otherwise [in the resurrection] they must remain as angels only in heaven, and [the mayor] spoke at considerable length in explanation of the[se] principles[.][56]

Interestingly enough, William Law, whom Hyrum refers to above as an adulterer, would later state the revelation he was allegedly shown was “much shorter” than the one that later become known as D&C 132.[57] It raises the possibility that the current Section 132 was modified or added to at some point. The question again becomes whether one believes Joseph and Hyrum capable of such deceit as to blatantly lie about the true contents of the revelation. In their own words, the revelation forbade the practice of polygamy, whereas the version released eight years after Joseph’s death by Brigham Young, says the opposite.

It’s said that William Clayton recorded the original revelation before Emma allegedly burned it, a charge Emma flatly denies.[58] In fact, Emma died having denied multiple times that Joseph was ever involved in polygamy. She also claimed that Section 132 was not genuine. In the Temple Lot case, Joseph Kingsbury claimed that he too made a copy of the revelation in 1843, shortly after the revelation was received and before Emma allegedly burned the original.[59] Immediately upon completing the copy, Kingsbury claims to have handed the original back to Newel K Whitney who then returned it to an anxiously awaiting Hyrum Smith. Whitney retained the copy made by Kingsbury. It is that copy from which the current Section 132 supposedly comes.

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[56] *The Nauvoo City and High Council Minutes*, John S. Dinger; p 6992 Kindle edition (emphasis added)
[57] Law’s statement is available here.
[58] *Journal of Discourses* 6:281
[59] The LDS Church recently released images of the Kingsbury copy here.

Kingsbury is an important figure to consider. He was Whitney's store clerk in 1843. Thirty-one years old at the time, he was a widower, having married Whitney's daughter Caroline, who died in 1842. Kingsbury was called to testify at the Temple Lot case. Upon taking the stand, he "refused to take the ordinary oath to 'tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth'".[60] He would later clarify regarding his testimony:

> "I do not swear to that; I affirm to it. To my mind there is a difference between swearing to anything and affirming to it...I generally affirm, and I suppose it is because my understanding is that a man cannot be convicted of perjury on an affirmation, and he can when he is sworn."[61]

He also stated that some statements he made were based on presumptions, saying "I presume that he did" when asked if Joseph taught polygamy. When asked directly whether he would "swear" that Joseph taught to have multiple wives, Kingsbury reiterated, "I am affirming". It is a curious position to take in a court of law and allows for little confidence in Kingsbury's testimony. Whether it was due to his poor recollection of events or his fear of being convicted of lying in court, his testimony should be viewed with prejudice. By extension, so should the document he "affirmed" to have recorded (Section 132).

Even assuming his affirmation was the truth, Kingsbury was adamant that he knew nothing about the polygamy revelation other than "what Bishop Whitney told me".[62] In other words, Kingsbury had no direct knowledge that what he was asked to copy legitimately came from Joseph Smith. Furthermore, Kingsbury states that he was not a secretary to Whitney, Joseph, or anyone else. He was merely the store clerk filling in for a unique request from his boss. Once the revelation was completed, Kingsbury says he never saw it again. Yet nearly 50 years later he "affirmed" that it was the same as what is now known as Section 132.

In contrast to this testimony, let us consider the testimony of James Whitehead, the personal secretary to Joseph Smith at the time of his death. Whitehead seemed puzzled that Kingsbury and Clayton would have anything to do with copying a revelation on plural marriage. Regarding Kingsbury he stated: "he did not have anything to do whatever with the duties of secretary to the prophet Joseph Smith". Regarding Clayton he said: "he was there helping with the books...attended the outside business" whereas Whitehead was the "private secretary of the prophet; had his private papers and did that kind of work". Whitehead further explained that Clayton had been playing a larger role but lost some responsibilities because "there was some money disappeared and [Clayton] was blamed for it".[63] It does seem a strange circumstance that the most sensitive revelation Joseph would ever give (assuming Section 132 is genuine)

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[60] *Abstract of Evidence Temple Lot Case U.S.C.C.,* p 333
[61] *Ibid*, p 339
[62] *Ibid*, p 336
[63] *Ibid*, p 475. A search for items on the Joseph Smith Papers website written by William Clayton seems to validate Whitehead's statement. There are several promissory notes, receipts, and bonds in Clayton's handwriting along with one letter dictated by Joseph Smith. No revelations were recorded by Clayton.

would originally be recorded by his financial clerk (Clayton), a man who did not record a single other revelation. The other person to make a copy of this very sensitive document would be an obscure store clerk (Kingsbury). If Whitehead's testimony is accurate, it's difficult to fathom why Joseph would trust this sensitive document to Clayton and especially Kingsbury.

It's likewise curious that Kingsbury would again be the sole scribe to record an alleged 1842 revelation to Newel K Whitney.[64] This revelation detailed the ceremony to be used in order to marry Joseph to Whitney's daughter. The revelation explicitly states "I give you S[arah] A[nn] Whitney my Daughter to Joseph Smith to be his wife". There are two copies of it in what appear to be identical handwriting. No explanation is given as to why there are two copies. According to the church registry, both are in the handwriting of Joseph Kingsbury. It is worth noting that this revelation was not published until 1979.[65] The first recorded reference made to it does not appear until 1885, more than 40 years after it was allegedly recorded.[66] The sole living witness to the veracity of this document at the time it is first made reference to is Joseph Kingsbury and it came at a time when the LDS church was anxiously attempting to prove the validity of plural marriage as a fundamental tenet of the Mormon faith.

Kingsbury is found at the heart of the only two recorded revelations that endorse plural marriage -- an odd achievement for him considering the sensitivity of such a topic and that he was not part of Joseph's inner circle. His fear of perjuring himself provides us with reason to suspect his truthfulness. As such, his central role with Section 132 and the alleged 1842 revelation brings with it questions of its validity.

If genuine, the 1842 revelation to Newel Whitney would raise serious questions about the validity of the current LDS marriage ceremony which was published by Orson Pratt in *The Seer*, a LDS church publication from 1853.[67] The Pratt document describes a ceremony that is completely different in wording and procedure than the alleged 1842 revelation. It begs the question: why would God reveal a marriage ordinance in 1842 that He would replace entirely by 1853? Accepting this document as proof that Joseph was a polygamist requires a believing Mormon to accept that the divinely instituted marriage ceremony changed drastically once Joseph died despite his teaching that ordinances should never be changed.[68] Another reasonable conclusion would be that the alleged 1842 revelation is not contemporary or genuine. The possibility that this document was recorded long after the fact as a reminiscence or manufactured in order to preserve a narrative ought to be considered.

Returning to Section 132, the sole living witnesses to these events after the year 1850 were William Clayton and Joseph Kingsbury. At the time of the Temple Lot trial, Clayton was

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[64] The original was recently published by the LDS church here. A transcription can be read here.
[65] Collier, *Unpublished Revelations of the Prophets & Presidents of the Church*, p 95
[66] https://archive.org/stream/contributor0604eng#page/130/mode/2up
[67] https://archive.org/stream/OrsonPratt/TheSeer#page/n29/mode/2up, p 31
[68] Joseph Smith stated: "Ordinances instituted in the heavens before the foundation of the world, in the priesthood, for the salvation of men, are not to be altered or changed." *TPJS,* p 308.

long dead and there was no other firsthand witness living who could deny or substantiate the events surrounding those two documents. And yet, in a court of law, Kingsbury was unwilling to do more than “affirm” and “presume” for fear of committing perjury.

As stated earlier, Joseph admits there was a revelation on marriage. The contents of the revelation are disputed, not the reality of it. Whitehead offers further commentary on what he says the revelation was originally about:

> “Newel K Whitney...showed me a revelation on the question of **sealing**. The revelation that Whitney showed me was on the matter of sealing, that was before [the exodus] to Salt Lake City [but] after the death of Joseph Smith. I went up to Winter Quarters to settle my account with the church...while I was there I stayed all night with Bishop Whitney and he showed me this revelation; that was in the spring of 1848. [The revelation] purported to have been given in 1842 or 1843...I have never seen it since that time...I never saw it in print. I saw what they claimed was it...
>
> But the one published in the book of Doctrine & Covenants by the Utah church **was not the one that Bishop Whitney showed me** at Winter Quarters...It was entirely changed. It was so **changed that it sanctioned polygamy**, and that change was made by the Brighamites. For there was no such thing in it when I read it...as published by them it sanctions and imposes polygamy on the church but there was no such thing in the revelation that Whitney showed me...
>
> It was entirely changed but there were some points of similarity in it…When I read [Section 132] I considered that they had gotten that revelation from Bishop Whitney and had changed it and had added to it...[The original revelation] left a very strong impression on my mind for that was the first time I had seen that revelation on **sealing**.[69]

Whitehead makes an astonishing claim regarding the origins of Section 132. If his story is true, there was a revelation from Joseph Smith in Newel Whitney’s possession but that revelation differed markedly from the one that was eventually published by the LDS church.[70] Whitehead’s description of the revelation Whitney showed him bears some resemblance to what Joseph and Hyrum claimed regarding the revelation before the Nauvoo City Council. Whitehead remembers the revelation to be about “sealing” and marrying one man and one wife “for time and all eternity”. Joseph, as shown above, says the revelation showed that “men in this life must be married in view of eternity” and that polygamy was forbidden. If true, it suggests Whitney may not have known about plural marriage during Joseph’s life and was therefore truthful when he signed an affidavit in 1842 claiming that polygamy was not being practiced.

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[69] *Abstract of Evidence Temple Lot Case U.S.C.C.,* p 475-477, emphasis added

[70] One intriguing analysis of writing style determined Brigham Young to be the most likely author of Section 132 rather than Joseph Smith. See *A Bibliography On Joseph Smith*, Enid Debarthe.

In the Temple Lot case, Woodruff testified thusly regarding the purported revelation:

> I do not know where the original of the revelation called the polygamous revelation is. I do not know that I ever saw it. I do not believe I ever did see it.
>
> **I never saw a copy of it or the original** during the lifetime of Joseph Smith. I do not think I saw the one that came here to Utah and purported to be a copy of the original.
>
> **I do not know whether the church** of which I am the President **has the purported copy or not**. The church papers are in the possession of various parties - the historian of the church has them more or less. The original manuscripts or copies of the original manuscripts are in various places.
>
> I don't hold the originals of the revelations that were promulgated through Brigham Young nor John Taylor. Brigham Young and John Taylor were the main presidents of the church. **You may say the only ones** since the death of Joseph Smith.[71]

Woodruff then goes on to say it was "probable" that he was present at the 1852 General Conference where the revelation was read to the church but he does not "recollect that fact". In this particular lawsuit, the Utah-based LDS church was seeking to prove that Joseph was indeed a polygamist. The existence of a revelation from Joseph, even a copy of the original, would undoubtedly have helped their case. But oddly, President Woodruff does not know where the revelation is or even if it still exists. Nor can he remember being present when it was presented to the church in a general conference. In another surprising move, he discounts the importance of his position in the church compared to his predecessors. Brigham Young had similarly declared himself less than his predecessor.[72]

The current LDS narrative that insists church leaders aren't capable of leading the church astray yields a Mormon populace prone to discounting Joseph.[73] They often look at his supposed plural marriage attempts as the efforts of a dedicated, albeit ignorant, man doing his

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[71] *Abstract of Evidence Temple Lot Case U.S.C.C.,* p 308, emphasis added

[72] After putting forth the motion for himself to be sustained as 'Prophet, Seer, and Revelator,' Brigham Young remarked: "I will say that I never dictated the latter part of that sentence. I will make the remark, because those words in that connection always made feel as though I am called more than I am deserving of. I am Brigham Young, an Apostle of Joseph Smith, and also of Jesus Christ. If I have been profitable to these people, I am glad of it. The brethren call me so; and if it be so, I am glad." (*The Complete Discourses of Brigham Young*, Vol. 3, p. 1347.)

[73] In Oct 2014 Elder M. Russell Ballard repeated this claim to the church: "We will not and cannot lead you astray."

best to fulfill a mandate that he did not understand how to fulfill.[74] Or so the reasoning goes. It continues that Brigham Young, free from the constraints of US law, instituted the practice properly in Utah by marrying 56 women. He fathered 57 children from 16 of those wives.[75] Confirmation bias may be to blame for a group that believes Joseph Smith -- the man vouched for in LDS scripture (see D&C 43:1-7) and who provided a steady stream of new scripture and prophetic fruits -- is the one who misunderstood and misapplied the doctrine of sealings. Meanwhile the man who followed after Joseph (Brigham Young) -- who denied having direct divine interaction and was uncomfortable being called a prophet, seer, and revelator -- is the one who understood and applied it correctly.[76] In that contrast it becomes easier to consider that Joseph Smith was possibly not practicing plural marriage but instead instituted something he never fully explained (sealings) that was later molded into the practice of plural marriage seen in the early LDS church.

Section 132 as it appears today presents a difficult contradiction to the Book of Mormon, translated by Joseph Smith, which in particular comes down very hard on polygamy. It shows that while Nephi was alive, the people were living “after the manner of happiness” but “under the reign of the second king, [they] began to grow hard in their hearts, and indulge themselves somewhat in wicked practices, such as like unto David of old desiring many wives and concubines, and also Solomon, his son.”

That’s an interesting pattern, one perhaps we see again in the lives of the early Mormons. It is possible that Nephi, like Joseph Smith, practiced something the people generally didn’t know about or understand (sealings) that was subsequently altered into an “abomination” in the form of plural marriage after his death. If Section 132 is not genuine, it would reconcile why Jacob 1:15 says it was a “wicked practice” for David and Solomon to have had multiple wives whereas Section 132:39 says the only error committed by David was “in the case of Uriah and his wife”. The oft-cited “exception” in Jacob 2:30 perhaps isn’t an exception after all.[77]

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[74] *Plural Marriage in Kirtland and Nauvoo*. In this essay published by the LDS Church, the unnamed author(s) purport “Although the Lord commanded the adoption—and later the cessation—of plural marriage in the latter days, He did not give exact instructions on how to obey the commandment.”

[75] State of Utah Historical Bio of Brigham Young

[76] Brigham said of himself: “I have flattered myself...when I have lived to be as old as was Moses when the Lord appeared to him, that perhaps I then may hold communion with the Lord, as did Moses. I am not now in that position...Have I yet lived to the state of perfection that I can commune in person with the Father and the Son at my will and pleasure? No.” (*Journal of Discourses* v. 7, no. 37, p. 243, 1859). Brigham would later say: “Perhaps, when I am eighty years of age, I may be able to talk with some Being of a higher sphere than this. Moses saw the glory of God at that age, and held converse with better beings than he had formerly conversed with. I hope and trust that by the time I am that age I shall also be counted worthy to enjoy the same privilege." (*Journal of Discourses* v. 10 no. 4, p. 23, 1862). For Brigham’s reluctance at being called a prophet, seer, and revelator, see *The Complete Discourses of Brigham Young*, Vol. 3, p. 1347.

[77] An analysis of Jacob 2 can be read here where a more congruous interpretation of verse 30 is offered.

The fact remains that Joseph never practiced what Brigham Young did. There also lacks a righteous scriptural example that fits what Brigham practiced.[78] There are, however, wicked scriptural examples that fit the type of polygamy practiced by Brigham Young.[79] It would be easy to conclude from the existing evidence that Young, Taylor, Woodruff and others were guilty of knowingly ascribing false behavior to Joseph Smith after his death. Such a prospect is difficult to accept for most believing LDS Mormons. However, regardless of what the reader decides about this topic, she will have to accept that either Joseph Smith or the leaders who came after him went to great lengths to establish a lie as truth.

The Meaning of Words: "Sealing" vs "Marriage"

> *"I have been chained. I have rattled chains before in a dungeon for the truth's sake. I am innocent of all these charges, and you can bear witness of my innocence, for you know me yourselves."*
> *—Joseph Smith (Words of Joseph Smith*, p 376, May 1844*)*

Such as there is, the contemporary proof that Joseph was a polygamist is much thinner than is often presented. The contemporary proof that exists could be discounted heavily by the possibility that Joseph was doing something not well-known or understood (sealings) and there was apparently an active element within the church doing something else (spiritual wifery/polygamy) and claiming to do so with Joseph's approval. The mix of confusion about what Joseph was really doing and schemes to frame him for something he wasn't doing could possibly prove a toxic waste to Joseph's true legacy.[80]

Lorenzo Snow, testifying in the Temple Lot case, stated:

> [In 1843] I had a private interview with Joseph Smith. In that private interview was the time when he told me he had taken my sister [Eliza R Snow] as a wife. He did **not say she was taken as a wife** and married to him, he said she was sealed to him, **sealed to him for eternity**. I was not acquainted with the practice of sealing at that time. I had never heard of it before. I never saw the ceremony of sealing performed in the days of Joseph Smith. **I never knew anything about the**

[78] The closest examples would be Abraham's two wives and Jacob's 4 wives, compared to Brigham's 56 wives. It's also notable that Abraham entered polygamy at the behest of his wife rather than by God's command (Gen 16:2) and later ended his polygamous marriage, this time, at Sarah and God's behest (Gen 21:9-13). Jacob was tricked into marrying Leah rather than Rachel (Gen 29:25) and then convinced by his father-in-law to also marry Rachel a week later (Gen 29:26-28). Jacob later, like his grandfather, expanded the practice at the behest of his wives (Gen 30:3,9), not by God's command. Nowhere do Abraham or Jacob claim it was God's commandment to take other wives. Their stories bear little resemblance to the brand of polygamy practiced by Brigham Young.
[79] Jacob 1:15; Mosiah 11:14; Ether 10:5
[80] For a possible explanation of the nature of sealings in Nauvoo, see *Plural Marriage* by Denver Snuffer.

> **practice of sealing during the days of Joseph Smith**. He didn't tell me anything about it at the time I had this conversation with him.[81]

Snow appears to conflate the idea of sealing with marriage initially but then admits the ceremony was not actually a marriage. He also admits he never knew of or saw anything relating to "sealing" while Joseph lived. Perhaps his poor understanding of what Joseph was really doing was shared by others who later turned the practice of sealing into polygamy. Considering Snow was part of the LDS polygamists, the distinction he draws is significant.

Another example is found in the words of Samuel W. Richards during the Temple Lot case. Richards, the nephew of apostle Willard Richards, was asked what he knew about "the system of plural marriage" in Nauvoo. He stated "I did not hear anything or see anything direct from Joseph Smith himself while I was there in Nauvoo but others who were his clerks and secretaries and such like -- I had communication from them while I was living there on that subject". He then specifically named his uncle Willard, who was one of Joseph's secretaries, as having been the one who taught him about plural marriage. He further clarified:

> I heard Joseph Smith teach the Quorum of Twelve (perhaps not a full quorum) the principles of **sealing**. I never heard him teach it publicly, nor to any considerable number of people. He called it the order of celestial marriage, sealing a man to his wife for eternity. I **never heard** the principle of sealing taught that **a man could be sealed to another man's wife** for eternity; I never heard him teach that another man's wife could be sealed to him for eternity. I **never heard him teach** either publicly or privately **that a man could live with two women in this life as his wives** at the same time; never heard him teach that.[82]

Samuel Richards gives us another witness that what Joseph was teaching related to "sealing" and was never taught by him in the context of plural wives.[83] We also learn that others, such as Willard Richards, were privately expanding Joseph's teachings into plural marriage. Like Snow, Samuel Richards was a polygamist in the LDS church so the distinction he makes is significant.

Samuel Richards' account is matched by James Whitehead, Joseph's private secretary at the time of his martyrdom.

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[81] *Abstract of Evidence Temple Lot Case U.S.C.C.,* p 317, emphasis added

[82] Hales, http://mormonpolygamydocuments.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/JSP_Book_39b.pdf p 43

[83] Coincidentally, LDS polygamy scholar Brian Hales relies on a similar statement by Samuel Richards to prove the exact opposite -- that Joseph did teach polygamy in private. Hales quotes Richards as saying: "I heard him [Joseph Smith] teach it [plural marriage] privately to quite a number at different times." Hales inserts the words "plural marriage" into the quote whereas Richards is clear in the above testimony that he only heard Joseph teach about "sealings" and that he never heard Joseph speak about plural marriage. This isn't necessarily a sign of intentionally dishonest scholarship on the part of Hales but it does at least show a scholarly prejudice toward a particular narrative that only serves to cloud this issue further.

> "I heard about the order of the church on the question of **sealing**...in the early part of the year 1843...or the latter part of 1842. That was the ordinance of sealing as they called it, of husband and wife. They would be married according to the ordinances of the laws of God, not only for time but for eternity as well. That applied only to husband and wife, and a man could not have but **one wife**, they were **not allowed to have more than one wife**, but could have one wife and could be sealed to her for this life, as well as for the life to come."[84]

Joseph's efforts to teach the idea of sealing appears to have been clouded by others who simultaneously sought to establish plural marriage as an extension of sealings. The distinction shown by the words of Lorenzo Snow, Samuel Richards, and James Whitehead are congruent with what Joseph spoke before the Nauvoo City Council only weeks before his death, saying that polygamy was not to be practiced and that "men in this life must be married in view of eternity".

If polygamy was a divergence from what Joseph really taught and practiced, it wouldn't be the only instance. Another clear example of divergence was same-sex sealing. Soon after Joseph's death, Brigham Young expanded the sealing practice to include sealing living men to other living men.[85] There is no evidence of this practice while Joseph was alive.[86] However, it quickly became a common practice after Joseph's death before being abandoned altogether by the LDS church in 1894.[87] Given Brigham's willingness to expand the sealing doctrine so quickly and so dramatically it raises the question of whether plural marriage itself was an innovation. This pattern of divergence that began at the death of Joseph presents significant problems for the commonly accepted polygamy narrative.

Another suspicious trend is the rapid increase in plural marriages after Joseph died in June 1844. In the six months of 1844 following Joseph's death, Brigham Young increased his plural wives from 4 to 14. Heber C Kimball increased from 1 to 10. In the church at large, there were 56 new plural marriages in 1845. And in 1846, there were an astonishing 255.[88]

One must wonder why Brigham Young would so dramatically and so quickly increase the pace of his own and others' polygamous unions compared to what was allegedly done during Joseph's lifetime. In a setting where Joseph was indeed a monogamist who disciplined polygamists and a small group of men was surreptitiously practicing unsanctioned plural marriage until it could be done more openly, these facts make more sense.

The disparity between what Joseph practiced and the divergent behavior that followed after him raises the possibility that Joseph was doing something other than plural marriage. It

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[84] *Abstract of Evidence Temple Lot Case U.S.C.C.,* p 475, emphasis added.
[85] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Law_of_adoption_(Mormonism)
[86] *The Law of Adoption: One Phase of the Development of the Mormon Concept of Salvation*, p 8
[87] *Id,.* p 311
[88] *Nauvoo Roots of Mormon Polygamy, 1841-46: A Preliminary Demographic Report*, p 32

raises the possibility that even the women who participated in these sealings didn't fully understand what was occurring and later became convinced they were "married" to Joseph rather than "sealed" to him. These sealings, whether marriages or not, were later used to justify Brigham's practice of plural marriage.

Once settled in Utah, Brigham Young led an isolated community, controlled by a hierarchy upon which LDS members were dependent for food, title to real property, access to water, lumber and livestock, and which organized the only government controlling the community for nearly a decade.[89] Brigham's "Mormon Reformation" of the 1850s implied potential blood atonement for apostasy.[90] In his zeal to preach as he felt called to do, open dissent became unthinkable. It should not be surprising that such an environment could produce a people unable or unwilling to question the innovation of plural marriage despite Joseph's consistent efforts to rid the church of it during his lifetime.

The difficulty in unraveling the topic of plural marriage is that so many witnesses require us to decide when they were speaking truthfully and when they were not. Or in other cases, when they knew what they were talking about and when they did not. They uniformly tell the story differently, in versions that are mutually exclusive from one another. In contrast to that conundrum, we have the statements of Joseph Smith, Emma Smith, and Hyrum Smith who are on record in multiple instances denying plural marriage. They never changed their stories. Words matter a great deal. Based on existing evidence, a reasonable observer could determine that the practice of sealing morphed into polygamy despite Joseph's efforts to prevent it.

William Clayton's Journal: Contemporary or Not?

> "Do the Mormons believe in having more wives than one? No, not at the same time. But they believe, that if their companion dies, they have a right to marry again."
> —*Joseph Smith,* The Elders' Journal 1 [November 1837]: 28

Any conversation about contemporary evidence that Joseph Smith was a polygamist would be incomplete without addressing William Clayton's journals. William Clayton served as one of Joseph's scribes in the Nauvoo era. Clayton's journals are often pointed to as a contemporary source affirming the practice of plural marriage. Unfortunately his journals don't always paint a consistent picture. The transcripts of his journal that are published are generally a mixture of contemporary entries and affidavits from the 1870s.[91] As an example, the reader can see the disparity between these two entries that are often presented together:

9 March 1843, Thursday Nauvoo 1 Thursday 9.

[89] *The Consolidation of Church and State: Brigham Young's Telestial Kingdom*
[90] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Blood_atonement
[91] Portions of Clayton's journals and affidavits can be read here.

> At prest. Josephs office. Walked out in the P.M. he told me it was lawful for me to send for Sarah & said he would furnish me money.
>
> *Affidavit [from 1874], p. 225* During this period the Prophet Joseph frequently visited my house in my company, and became well acquainted with my wife Ruth, to whom I had been married five years. On day in the month of February, 1843, date not remembered, 22 the Prophet invited me to walk with him. During our walk, he said he had learned that there was a sister back in England, to whom I was very much attached. I replied there was, but nothing further than an attachment such as a brother and sister in the Church might rightfully entertain for each other. He then said, “Why don't you send for her?" I replied, “In the first place, I have no authority to send for her, and if I had, I have not the means to pay expenses." To this he answered, “I give you authority to send for her, and I will furnish you with means," which he did. This was the first time the Prophet Joseph talked with me on the subject of plural marriage. He informed me that the doctrine and principle was right in the sight of our Heavenly Father, and that it was a doctrine which pertained to celestial order and glory. After giving me lengthy instructions and information concerning the doctrine of celestial or plural marriage, he concluded his remarks by the words, ”It is your privilege to have all the wives you want." 23 After this introduction, our conversations on the subject of plural marriage were very frequent, and he appeared to take particular pains to inform and instruct me in respect to the principle. He also informed me that he had other wives living besides his first wife Emma, and in particular gave me to understand that Eliza R. Snow, Louisa Beman, Desdemona W. Fullmer and others were his lawful wives in the sight of Heaven.

The first and much shorter account, from the journal, is a contemporary account. It doesn’t match fully with the second source, an affidavit a full 31 years after the fact. The contemporary source fails to mention the context of Joseph saying Clayton could send for Sarah. Clayton was already married at this point. It’s unclear what he told Joseph to which Joseph allegedly says it’s lawful to send for her. In the contemporary source there is nothing about plural marriage mentioned. Any number of possibilities could exist. It is possible Clayton said he wanted to help Sarah unite with the Saints but there was perhaps a parent or fiance who objected.

Setting this particular entry aside, the fact is, Clayton’s journals are a difficult puzzle to put together. For one, the original journals are in possession of the LDS church and are unavailable for inspection. Only a few scholars have ever been granted access to them. From their note-taking we have what has today been published which amounts to less than 25% of William Clayton’s journal entries.[92] Most of the entries that are available are incomplete and

[92] *Dialogue, Editing William Clayton*, James B. Allen, p 132

lacking surrounding entries with context. Put simply: we don't really know what Clayton recorded because these records are not made available.

There are also notable inconsistencies in Clayton's record keeping. What is commonly referred to as "Journal 2" covers the most important period with regard to plural marriage (27 November 1842 to 30 January 1846). Journal 2 is actually three separate notebooks. The first notebook goes until April 27, 1843, which is coincidentally the first date that Clayton makes an entry that may reference plural marriage. The record then switches to a second notebook wherein there are several explicit entries about plural marriage. This continues until Sep 24, 1844 (three months after Joseph's murder) at which point Clayton switches back to the first notebook.[93]

LDS scholar James B. Allen observes the odd and inconsistent organization of the journals as follows:

> "The journals are a bit difficult to follow, for the entries are not always strictly chronological. Apparently Clayton began writing in one journal, moved to another for some reason, and then moved back to the original. As a result, the researcher must move back and forth between volumes. Sometimes there are two entries for the same day. It is not clear why."[94]

These details may seem unimportant, but consider that the last entry of the first notebook before the aforementioned gap reads as follows:

> "27 April 1843, Thursday. At the Temple A.M. went to prests. who rode with me to bro. H.C, Kimballs where sister Margt. Moon was sealed up by the priesthood, by the president--and M to me. ... evening told Mother in law concerning the priesthood."[95]

Most scholars allege that this entry indicates Joseph Smith performed a plural marriage between William Clayton and Margaret Moon on this date. However, Joseph's name is never used. "President" could refer to another church leader such as Brigham Young who was president of the Twelve. Young was in Nauvoo at this time.[96] Oddly, this is the final entry in this notebook while Joseph Smith was alive and the only entry that seems to indicate plural marriage, albeit not explicitly. We must assume "M to me" means "married to me" and we are left to wonder what Clayton wrote in the ellipses indicating omitted text.

Clayton begins notebook 2 with a duplicate entry for the same day:

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[93] *William Clayton, An Intimate Chronicle: The Diaries of William Clayton*, George Smith, p lv, note 124.
[94] *William Clayton and the Records of Church History*, Allen
[95] *Book of Abraham Project, William Clayton Diaries*
[96] *History of Brigham Young*, p 183

> "At the Temple A.M. at 10 at bro Kimballs was M to M.M. ... evening told Mother in law about the priesthood"[97]

As with the previous entry, we're left to sort out the abbreviations and wonder what information was omitted using the ellipses. From this point forward, using notebook 2, Clayton makes several entries that explicitly tie himself and Joseph Smith to polygamous activities. On May 2, 1843 Clayton would record: "Talked with Jane Charnock. She loves me and would sooner unite to me than R." It's worth considering why the most crucial entries that implicate Joseph are part of a separate record that later reverts back to the original record. It is possible that portion of Clayton's original journal was removed and subsequently rewritten in another notebook. If true, notebook 2 could no longer be considered a contemporary source. The possibility of such deceit hinges on the credibility of William Clayton.

In this same notebook Clayton would paint Joseph and Emma as suffering near constant turmoil due to Emma's severe jealousy. Clayton suggests at one point that Emma was to blame for Joseph surrendering to the authorities at Carthage. After Joseph's death, Clayton's record portrays Emma as unstable and concerned only with her financial well-being. On Aug 15, 1844 he records: "[Emma] raged very hard and used many severe threats." Two days later Clayton records that Emma implicated him as having stolen from her.[98]

Clayton's account seems to echo Brigham Young's view of Emma. At one point Young called Emma "one of the damnedest liars I know of on this earth" and then proceeded to tell a story of Emma trying to kill Joseph by poisoning his coffee. He then stated "twice she undertook to kill [Joseph]".[99] Compare these unpleasant scenes with statements such as these:

> "I [Joseph] took dinner in the north room, and was remarking to Brother [W.W.] Phelps what a **kind, provident wife I had**,—that when I wanted a little bread and milk, she would load the table with so many good things, it would destroy my appetite." --Joseph Smith[100]

> "Joseph's wife is not very well, the report you heard about her being turned out of doors is false; there **never could a man use a wife better than he has her**! I presume you hear a great deal that is not true; but what I have written you is correct." --Almira Covey, first cousin to Joseph Smith, July 1844[101]

> "As to the report of Gen. [Joseph] Smith's spiritual wives—if I understand the name of spiritual wife—it is all false. I have been lodging at Smith's house some time and if there was any thing of the kind I must have seen something of it going

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[97] *Book of Abraham Project,* William Clayton Diaries.
[98] *Ibid*
[99] *Utah Historical Quarterly*, vol. 48, Winter 1980, 82
[100] *LDS History of the Church* 6:165–166, Jan 1844, emphasis added
[101] *The Saints' Herald* [September 25, 1934], 1229, emphasis added

on. I have seen a note in the Warsaw Signal stating difficulties between Joseph Smith and his wife, not long since. I was at his house when this thing was said to have taken place. I saw Mrs. Smith start to St. Louis, and when she returned home, and they **had every appearance of love and friendship**. I will say to you the statement is all false and without grounds. This I will certify on oath. --JEREMIAH SMITH, Sen[102]

"Q.—Were you [Joseph and Emma] **in the habit of quarreling? A.—No.** There was no necessity for any quarreling. He knew that I wished for nothing but what was right; and, as he wished for nothing else, we did not disagree." --Emma Smith to Joseph Smith III[103]

"What unspeakable delight, and what transports of joy swelled my bosom, when I took by the hand ... my beloved Emma— she that was my wife, even the wife of my youth, and the choice of my heart ... again she is here, even in the seventh trouble— **undaunted, firm, and unwavering— unchangeable, affectionate Emma.**" --Joseph Smith[104]

It has been charged by certain ones advocating plural marriage that [Emma] was a thorn in [Joseph's] side, opposing his policies, and leading him an ill life. This is absolutely not true. I was old enough at the time to know what was going on around me, and was closely associated with both my parents. The sleeping room I shared with my brothers was never more than a door away from where Father and Mother slept. Because of the great love and concern Mother had for her children she never wanted us far from her, in order that she might be on hand to take care of us herself in case of necessity. So, I am sure that if there ever were angry words between my parents I should have known it, and I can truthfully state that **nothing of the kind ever occurred**. Father was a kindly man, and emphatically a home-loving one, whose wife and children were very dear to him and who was, in turn, loved and respected by them. --Joseph Smith III[105]

It has been reported by those who pretended to be friends of father, that mother was quarrelsome and was antagonistic to my father, and frequently made trouble for him. I have this to say now, that tracing my memory back through the period of time in which my father was permitted to stay with his family, that **I never heard any quarreling or harsh language** between them under any circumstances, and that even disagreements between them were **not conducted**

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[102] *Nauvoo Neighbor*, May 1, 1844, emphasis added
[103] *The Saints' Herald*, vol. 26, pp. 289, 290, emphasis added.
[104] *LDS Church History*, Volume 1, page 120. Aug 16, 1842, emphasis added
[105] Mary Smith Anderson, *The Memoirs of President Joseph Smith III* (1832–1914), 35, emphasis added

> **in a noisy or angry manner**, that mother's language was quiet and temperate, and so was father's. --Joseph Smith III[106]

Joseph's personal secretary for the final two years of his life, James Whitehead, also paints a very different picture about Joseph and Emma than does William Clayton:

> "I had a good opportunity of knowing if any such a thing [plural marriage] had been taught by the prophet or anyone else because I was there in his office and **with him continually**...I was well acquainted with his family and with his wife Emma and I never saw anything or heard of any such a thing being taught there in Nauvoo...When I lived at Nauvoo, I resided maybe three hundred yards from where Joseph Smith's house was. I saw him there frequently, perhaps not every day but almost every day...**Joseph Smith had one wife and her name was Emma**; I do not know of any other woman who claimed to be the wife of the prophet, there at Nauvoo, nor at any other place."[107]

Whitehead claims he would have known if something such as plural marriage was being taught or practiced, as close as he was to Joseph and Emma. He offers an unreserved statement that Emma was Joseph's one and only wife.

It is difficult to reconcile these opposing views of Emma Smith. By and large, those who went west with Brigham Young were prone to malign the "elect lady"[108] whereas those not aligned with Brigham Young tended to paint a very different picture. Joseph's own words reveal a tender and affectionate marriage rather than one filled with bickering and attempted murders. Once again, we are left to sort out fact from fiction. If Joseph's words and the words of those close to him are to be believed, we must call into question the account left behind by William Clayton and consider his journal judiciously. In light of efforts by the LDS church to invent and embellish in order to protect their narrative, a revision of crucial entries in Clayton's journal seems plausible. Since his journals are not available for inspection we are left to sort out the discrepancies with the small portion that is available.

In considering whether Clayton would have sought to modify his original journal to establish a particular narrative, consider this entry from Feb 1840:

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[106] *Journal of History 3* [July 1910]: 337–338, emphasis added

[107] *Abstract of Evidence Temple Lot Case U.S.C.C.,* p 473, emphasis added. A potentially contradicting testimony is recorded by RLDS apostle WW Blair in his journal nearly two decades prior to the Temple Lot testimony. On 17 June 1874, Blair records that Whitehead "Says J did te- p- and pr- too. That E- knows it too that She put hnd of Wives in Jos hnd W. Says Alex H. Smith asked him when sleeping with him at his house in Atlon, if J- did p & tea. p, and he, W. told him he did." The cryptic entry isn't conclusive as written and could have any number of meanings. However, it's possible Whitehead believed at one time that Joseph was a polygamist. Whether Whitehead became convinced otherwise by the time of the Temple Lot testimony or perjured himself, we are left to decide.

[108] see D&C 25:3

> "Sarah [Crooks] appeared rather tempted to get married...I don't want Sarah to be married. I was much [ ] tempted on her account and felt to pray that the Lord would **preserve me from impure affections**. She gave me an orange. I certainly feel my love towards her to increase but shall strive against it. **I feel too much to covet her** and afraid lest her troubles should cause her to get married. The Lord keep me pure and preserve me from doing wrong."[109]

This is the same Sarah referred to previously, whom Clayton claims Joseph advised him to send for and even offered money to cover the cost. In Feb 1840, Clayton had not been approached about plural marriage, yet it's evident from this entry that the married father of two struggled to maintain his affection solely for his wife. As any man subject to the human condition, Clayton should be pitied for his struggle. His hope was to avoid "doing wrong" and for that he should be commended. But it does show that his desire to be with more than one woman preceded his claim of being taught plural marriage by more than 3 years. In Clayton's telling of events, rather than being rebuked by Joseph, he is instead told to "have all the wives you want".

Perhaps Clayton saw the brand of polygamy Brigham embraced as a way to justify these adulterous inclinations rather than fight against them. Regardless, the contemporary evidence provided by Clayton is not definitive and not unimpeachable. It's worth noting again that there is no direct reference to Joseph Smith and polygamy during Joseph's lifetime except in Notebook 2. One wonders whether Clayton was originally convinced of polygamy by Brigham Young or some other person in the movement and later reproduced that section of his journal to reflect that it instead came from Joseph Smith. In so doing, he would help preserve a crucial link from the Utah LDS church to the church Joseph Smith established and also justify his marriages to nine different women.

One entry in Clayton's journal suggests Brigham Young was indeed the person who taught William Clayton about plural marriage. Clayton recorded the following about a meeting where he and Brigham were both present:

> "Er B. Young called me on one side & said he wants to give me some instructions on the priesthood the first opportunity. He said the prophet had told him to do so & to give me a favor which I have long desired."[110]

Assumptions & The Scholarly Bias

[109] *William Clayton, An Intimate Chronicle: The Diaries of William Clayton*, George Smith, p 29; emphasis added
[110] *Book of Abraham Project,* William Clayton Diaries

"This new holy prophet [William Law] has gone to Carthage and swore that I had told him that I was guilty of adultery. This spiritual wifeism! Why, a man dares not speak or wink, for fear of being accused of this."
—Joseph Smith (Words of Joseph Smith, p 376-376, May 1844)

Since the witnesses that emerge from the LDS church in the second half of the 19th century prove themselves to be unreliable, it heightens the importance of focusing on contemporary evidence on the topic of plural marriage. What evidence is there that existed while Joseph Smith was still living that establishes he was a polygamist?

Renowned LDS scholar Brian C Hales (author of *Joseph Smith's Polygamy*[111]) is one of the foremost researchers in the field of early Mormon polygamy. Hales commented on an article he wrote defending the idea that Joseph was a polygamist. In his comment, Hales lists a "comprehensive list of contemporaneous documents" supporting the notion that Joseph was a polygamist:[112]

1. D&C 132
2. William Clayton's Journal
3. Purported 1842 letter from Joseph Smith to Nancy Rigdon
4. Purported 1842 revelation to Newel K Whitney regarding plural marriage ceremonies
5. John C Bennett
6. Oliver Olney
7. William Law and the Expositor contingent
8. 1844 Joseph Jackson letters

Hales makes no mention as to the reliability of these witnesses, however, a close examination of each source exposes issues with treating them as contemporary and reliable.

The first item on his list, Section 132 of the D&C, was covered previously. Treating it as a contemporary source requires the reader to rely exclusively on non-contemporary testimonies of it. The revelation in Section 132 did not appear in any form publicly until 1852. William Clayton's journal does make mention of a revelation, but as mentioned, Joseph Smith flatly contradicts Clayton as to the contents of the revelation. According to James Whitehead, Section 132 was modified from a different revelation after Joseph's death. It also contradicts the LDS canon given through Joseph Smith (the Book of Mormon and the original Section 101 of the Doctrine & Covenants). As such, a reasonable observer could conclude that Section 132 is a) not contemporary and b) not genuine.

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[111] http://josephsmithspolygamy.org/
[112] Hales, *A Response to Denver Snuffer*. See comment 16493.

William Clayton's journal was also discussed previously in this paper. His journal presents several issues that call into question its validity and completeness as a reliable contemporary source. Less than one-fourth of his journal has been published or even made available for research. His inconsistent use of different notebooks calls into question whether his journals are actually contemporary or were later emended.

The purported letter from Joseph Smith to Nancy Rigdon has been quasi-canonized by being included in the LDS *History of the Church*, but it's not a reliable source.[113] The letter is no longer extant and even when it was, it was an unsigned letter alleged by John Bennett to have been in Willard Richards' handwriting and dictated by Joseph. Sidney Rigdon, Nancy's father, stated: "that Mr. [Joseph] Smith denied to me the authorship of that letter".[114] Sidney also stated that Nancy denied to him that the letter came from Joseph. Nancy was implicated by Stephen Markham to have been involved romantically with Bennett and that the letter was an attempt to bolster Bennett's accusations against Joseph.[115] It seems ironic that Hales would rely on an allegation from John Bennett to convince the world that Joseph was a polygamist. It's especially ironic considering that Joseph explicitly denied sending the letter. But Hales is correct that the letter was contemporaneous.

The next item on Hales' list (a purported 1842 revelation[116] to Newel K Whitney detailing the words to be used in order to marry Joseph to Whitney's daughter) was discussed previously. The revelation is written in the handwriting of Joseph Kingsbury, a man who was rather obscure in Joseph Smith's Nauvoo era but who factors heavily in post-Joseph plural marriage. As discussed previously, this document was first referenced in 1885, more than 40 years after it was allegedly recorded and at a time when the LDS church was desperately trying to prove plural marriage originated with Joseph Smith. That fact alone calls into question whether it should be considered contemporary. Add to that the credibility issues with Kingsbury and a reasonable observer could easily conclude it is not a reliable piece of evidence.

This alleged revelation, if legitimate, would require us to add Newel K Whitney to the list of those who changed their stories about plural marriage. A mere three months after this occurred, Whitney joined several other church leaders in signing an affidavit that he knew "of no other rule or system of marriage [monogamy] than the one published from the Book of Doctrine and Covenants"[117]. We are left to decide whether this revelation is genuine -- in which case Newel K Whitney was untruthful when he signed the affidavit -- or whether the revelation is not genuine. Whitney died in 1850 so we don't have the benefit of examining his recollection of it after the church moved west and publicly embraced polygamy. However, as shown from the Whitehead testimony previously, there is evidence that Whitney knew nothing of plural marriage. If true, this alleged revelation would have even less credibility.

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[113] http://mormonpolygamydocuments.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/JS0070.doc
[114] *Wasp*, September 3, 1842
[115] *Wasp* [Extra]; 27 July 1842
[116] The original was recently published by the LDS church here. A transcription can be read here.
[117] *Times and Seasons* 3 [October 1, 1842]: 939–940

Hales' next witness is John Bennett. He too was discussed in greater detail previously in this paper. It bears repeating that Bennett is universally regarded as a scoundrel.[118] There are multiple witnesses throughout his life detailing his various indiscretions. Hales, a member of the LDS faith, is correct to list him as a contemporary source, but putting stock in Bennett's allegations seems unwise and ironic given his reputation and that Joseph Smith spent years and considerable effort discrediting and countering Bennett's accusations. One wonders what Joseph Smith would say today upon learning the words of John Bennett are used by Mormon faithful to prove him a polygamist.

Next, Hales cites the testimony of Oliver Olney, which is puzzling. Hales cites to a transcript of excerpts from Olney's journal from the year 1842.[119] In Olney's difficult-to-decipher musings about events in 1842 Nauvoo, he alleges first that some members of the Twelve are engaging in illicit behavior with women. He later references rumors of plural wives and at one point charges Joseph Smith with being "passionately fond of women". However, Olney makes no mention of direct evidence from his own interactions.

After being excommunicated in 1842, Olney published an anti-Mormon pamphlet in which he accused Joseph of printing a document called *The Peace Maker*, a pro-polygamy tract that had been published in 1842 by Udney Jacob.[120] Jacob's document was printed at the printing office in Nauvoo at a time when Joseph was in hiding to avoid extradition to Missouri. However, on the cover of Jacob's pamphlet was written, "J Smith, Printer" because Joseph was indeed the owner of the press. The obvious implication is that Joseph approved of the pamphlet. However, upon learning of it, Joseph responded unequivocally:

> There was a book printed at my office, a short time since, written by Udney H. Jacobs, on marriage, without my knowledge; and had I been apprised of it, I should not have printed it; not that I am opposed to any man enjoying his privileges; but I do not wish my name associated with the authors, in such an unmeaning rigamarole of nonsense, folly, and trash.
> JOSEPH SMITH.[121]

Olney references second and third-hand accounts of the aforementioned letter and indecent proposal to Nancy Rigdon. It's puzzling why Hales would consider Olney a contemporary source since Olney never claims to have any firsthand knowledge of Joseph's behavior.

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[118] Andrew Smith in his book,*The Saintly Scoundrel: The Life and Times of Dr. John Cook Bennett*, says of Bennett "[his] ability to abruptly shift positions on people and faiths would dazzle even the most formidable propagandist".
[119] http://mormonpolygamydocuments.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/JSP_Book_49.pdf p 45
[120] Olney's pamphlet can be seen here. Jacob's document can be read here.
[121] *Times and Seasons* 4 [December 1,1842]: 32

The next witness, William Law, was also previously discussed in greater detail in this paper. According to Joseph Smith, Law was motivated in his betrayal by a desire for money and power. Law is another witness that ought to be considered judiciously rather than assuming he was telling the truth. However, Hales is correct that Law is a contemporary source.

Joseph Jackson is likewise a very difficult witness to believe. According to Jackson, Joseph offered to "pay [him] well" to murder former Missouri Governor Lilburn Boggs. An attempt on Gov. Boggs' life had previously been made in 1842. Joseph was immediately sought in connection with it. He was forced into hiding and had to avoid several -- and sometimes violent -- extradition efforts. In that environment, is it plausible that Joseph would seek the life of Boggs as Jackson claimed? Jackson was accused by Hyrum in front of the Nauvoo City Council of "bogus" (counterfeiting) and attempting to kidnap Hyrum's daughter in order to force her to marry him.[122] We are again left to weigh an accusation from a violent and dishonest man (Joseph Jackson) against the words of Joseph and Hyrum Smith. Hales is correct that this is a contemporary allegation. But as with John Bennett and William Law, Hales again puts greater stock in a man of dubious character over Joseph Smith.

In the final analysis, the contemporary evidence against Joseph Smith amounts to the following:

- Allegations from three hostile and dubious witnesses (Bennett, Law, Jackson). These men were enemies to Joseph Smith. He spent considerable effort trying to prove their claims false.
- A letter to Nancy Rigdon that no longer exists, was unsigned, and written in another man's handwriting and that Nancy herself denied was from Joseph.
- One allegation from a person who never claimed firsthand knowledge (Oliver Olney).
- An alleged 1842 revelation to NK Whitney that is not referenced in any record until 40 years after Joseph's death.
- An alleged revelation (Section 132) that Joseph explicitly contradicts.
- A journal that is inconsistent and possibly not contemporary at all (William Clayton)

Every single item on this list was refuted and denied directly or indirectly by Joseph Smith. Hales provides us with an important discovery: there is remarkably little reliable contemporary evidence that Joseph Smith was a polygamist. It demonstrates the most common form of scholarship on this topic; that is, highly assumptive and over reliant on questionable sources. Hales is by no stretch the only scholar to fall into this trap. The vast majority of scholars seem to lack the willingness or ability to consider the fundamental assumptions of the origins of

[122] Dinger, John S. *The Nauvoo City and High Council Minutes* [Kindle Locations 6986-6987] Kindle Edition

Mormon polygamy. As cited previously in this paper, in a court of law, Joseph was deemed not to have practiced polygamy.[123] Yet in the court of scholarly opinion, Joseph is definitively guilty.

A Theory & A Conclusion

> "Some have reported that we not only dedicated our property, but likewise our families to the Lord, and Satan taking advantage of this has transfigured it into lasciviousness, a community of wives, which things are an abomination in the sight of God...if any person, has represented anything otherwise than what we now write they have willfully misrepresented us."
> *—Joseph Smith, 1838 Letter from Liberty Jail*

An exhaustive study of all counter evidence would easily yield at least one book and is beyond the scope of this effort. There is, however, other compelling counter evidence that supports the idea of Joseph Smith as a monogamist. For example, a study of the Cochranites -- a group of polygamists from Maine, some of whom converted to Mormonism in the early 1830s -- makes a rather believable explanation of how the church got exposed to polygamy: it was imported via conversion.[124] Over half the Quorum of the Twelve attended a conference in Saco Maine with Cochranite converts in 1836.[125] It is possible some of the Twelve were converted to the legitimacy of that practice while preaching among these sincere believers in plural marriage.

Some church leaders would claim after Joseph's death that the principle of polygamy was revealed to them from God before it was given through Joseph. Brigham Young stated:

> "While we were in England, (in 1839 and 40), I think the Lord manifested to me by vision and his Spirit things [concerning polygamy] that I did not then understand. I never opened my mouth to anyone concerning them, until I returned to Nauvoo; Joseph had never mentioned this; there had never been a thought of it in the Church that I ever knew anything about at that time, but I had this for myself, and I kept it to myself."[126]

Lorenzo Snow would likewise reminisce:

> "There is no man that lives that had a more perfect knowledge of the principle of plural marriage, it's holiness and divinity, than what I had. It was revealed to me before the Prophet Joseph Smith explained it to me. I had been on a mission to England between two and three years, and before I left England I was perfectly satisfied in regard to something connected to plural marriage.[127]

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[123] http://restorationbookstore.org/blog/TLCtestimonies.pdf p 42-43
[124] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jacob_Cochran
[125] *Joseph Smith Fought Polygamy*, Chapter 3
[126] *The Messenger*, Vol 1 p 29
[127] *Deseret Semi-weekly News*, June 6, 1899

Young and Snow served part of their missions at the same time in England. Convinced as they were that polygamy was from God, it's plausible that Young and Snow began practicing polygamy while in England and later used Joseph's death as a way to formalize it in the church. That could explain why Young was accused of adultery while preaching in England.[128] Did he embrace it and practice it secretly, believing it was from God despite Joseph's vigorous condemnation of the practice?

This theory is bolstered by something William Smith, Joseph's brother, would claim in a letter to his nephew, Joseph Smith III:

> I called on your father and took breakfast with him. While seated at the table a conversation was had participated in by your mother [Emma]...In relating her report she said, that some complaint had been made to her by females whom she had visited, that **John Taylor, Willard Richards, and Brigham Young had been teaching some doctrines** among the Saints privately that was going to ruin the Church, unless there was a stop put to it, as it was contrary to the law and rules governing the Church. Your father remarked that he would attend to the matter as soon as he got through with his troubles with the Laws and Fosters. But mark you their conversation took place only a few days previous to your father's death. What that private teaching might have been, that those persons whom your mother named, were circulating in a clandestine manner, (since there has been so much said about a doctrine called the plural wife doctrine on this subject), I leave the reader to judge.[129]

This theory about Brigham and a small cabal of Nauvoo insiders secretly practicing polygamy behind Joseph's back may seem tenuous -- and it is, admittedly, without definitive proof -- but it provides a plausible theory using a similar standard of evidence that is used to prove Joseph was a secret polygamist. In other words, a reasonable observer could just as easily conclude from the body of evidence that polygamy originated with Brigham Young, not Joseph Smith. Reaching this conclusion doesn't mean that Brigham was necessarily evil or malicious anymore than it would mean Joseph was evil or malicious if he in fact did orchestrate a cover up of polygamy. As demonstrated by his own words, Brigham believed plural marriage was from God long before he says Joseph taught it to him. Believing as he did, he could have seen Joseph's teachings on sealing as a natural extension of his own beliefs regarding plural marriage.

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[128] *Joseph Smith Fought Polygamy*, Chapter 4

[129] *The Saints' Herald* 26 [April 15, 1879]: 117. William Smith is considered by many scholars to have been unstable and erratic and therefore not trustworthy. Others claim that he too practiced plural marriage after Joseph's death. William denied that allegation as a smear tactic. The reader is left to determine who is trustworthy and who isn't.

Brigham could have viewed himself as holding a divine mandate to secretly institute the practice despite opposition from Joseph Smith. He likewise could have viewed Joseph's untimely death as an act of God to facilitate the formal introduction of polygamy. Among a people who clearly viewed the ends as justifying nearly any means, Brigham could have determined that altering the historical record was justified and even necessary in order to convince others of the validity of plural marriage. Such deceit may seem hard to imagine or accept in today's society, but it is painfully obvious from the historical record that it was possible in 1800s Mormondom.

Whether this theory is correct or not isn't likely to ever be proven. What is clear is that a reasonable person could use the overall body of evidence and come to either conclusion regarding Joseph Smith and plural marriage.

There are two polygamy narratives offered. The one offered by Joseph Smith is one of adamant and consistent denial. The lack of offspring from polygamous marriages during his life, his repeated denials, the lack of compelling contemporary proof, and a pattern of deceit by his accusers provide a formidable mountain of evidence that suggests Joseph was a monogamist. The narrative offered by those who succeeded him is one of adamant acceptance -- a narrative bolstered by multiple witnesses of varying credibility. The truth is, there's no way to know what really happened from the evidence before us. History is open to as many interpretations as there are people to read it. The reader must decide which narrative is more plausible. But perhaps there is more to Joseph's lament (given in a public sermon a mere two months before his death) than we realize: "You don't know me, you never knew my heart".[130]

A Postscript: Why this does and does not matter

> "[John Bennett] reached out his hand to Br. Joseph and said, will you forgive me, weeping at the time; he said Br. Joseph, I am guilty, I acknowledge it, and I beg of you not to expose me, for it will ruin me; Joseph replied, Doctor! why are you using my name to carry on your hellish wickedness? Have I ever taught you that fornication and adultery was right, or polygamy or any such practices? He said you never did."
> *—Hyrum Smith, Affidavit May 1842, Times and Seasons 3 [August 1, 1842]*

It's argued by some that this topic is irrelevant, and to an extent that's true. After all, if God commands a person to engage in polygamy, in theory, that person would be wise to follow God's command. That person would be even wiser if he knew with absolute certainty it was a command from God and not a deception. In Mormon theology, there are spirits and angels that go about deceiving.[131] Some of them have glory.[132]

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[130] *Words of Joseph Smith*, Andrew Ehat, p 355. Address given April 1844.
[131] D&C 50
[132] 2 Ne 9:9

But in a larger context, this topic is actually quite important to several groups. Most active LDS Mormons accept a doctrine that church leaders are incapable of leading them astray. A study of church history and the scriptures easily disproves this notion.[133] Likewise, if the church leaders from Brigham Young to Lorenzo Snow embraced a false standard of marriage, then they clearly did lead the church astray. If true, this doesn't impugn their character as much as prove their humanity. Even good and well-meaning church leaders can lead others into error. The information in this paper could help active LDS Mormons set aside idolatry of men and replace it with the worship of God alone.[134] It would also minimize a tendency for LDS members to discount and ignore what was revealed through Joseph Smith in favor of "modern revelation".

In the case of so-called Fundamentalist Mormon sects, there are tens of thousands of people who not only believe polygamy is a true principle but that exaltation can only be achieved by practicing it in this life. If that's actually a false doctrine then there is a high likelihood that those practicing plural marriage are engaging in abomination and damning themselves rather than saving themselves. They aren't likely engaging in plural marriage because God told them to. They are doing so under a potentially false premise that Joseph taught it and practiced it.

Perhaps the largest group of people to whom this topic is relevant is comprised of those who have rejected Mormonism entirely because they reject Joseph Smith as a fraud. A major narrative underpinning that movement is the belief that Joseph was a pedophilic sex-addict whose main drive in perpetrating his fraudulent religion was to sleep with as many women as possible. Given that the worldwide LDS activity rate is approximately 30%, one could argue that there are over 10 million members dissatisfied enough with the LDS religion that they no longer self-identify or actively participate.[135] How many of those 10 million people are disaffected because of a polygamous lifestyle potentially attributed to Joseph Smith falsely? If an ex-Mormon decides from reading this evidence that his decision to reject Joseph Smith was in part based on a false assumption, perhaps he'd reconsider and find cause to embrace once again the restoration of the gospel.

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[133] The LDS essay on blacks and the priesthood is one example from church history that disproves this notion. 2 Ne 4:34 is one scriptural warning against this notion. Adrian Larsen offers a well-researched blog post of this topic here.

[134] 2 Ne 28:14-25 details a prophecy by Nephi that in the last days the "humble followers of Christ" would be led astray in "many instances" and be convinced "all is well" when all is not well.

[135] http://www.cumorah.com/index.php?target=church_growth_articles&story_id=21