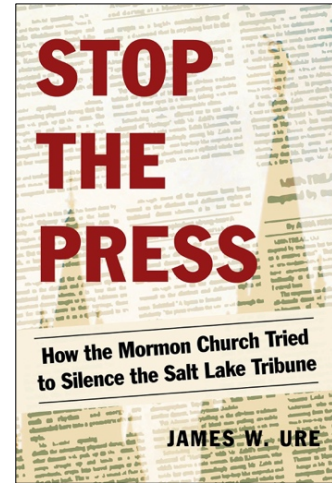


James W. Ure, **Stop the Press: How the Mormon Church Tried to Silence the Salt Lake Tribune**, Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2018, 294 pp., \$18 (paperback).

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What are the risks of mingling church and state? James W. Ure's ***Stop the Press: How the Mormon Church Tried to Silence the Salt Lake Tribune*** addresses this conundrum head on by holding a microscope over the interwoven histories of the state of Utah, the Mormon Church, and the *Salt Lake Tribune*.

While at times Ure can seem hypercritical of the Mormon Church, with some critiques seemingly subjective and exaggerated, he is upfront about his relationship with the religion and this book should be read bearing that in mind. Ure self-identifies by stating, "Mormonism is my tribe. Like Jews, once a Mormon, always a Mormon" (p. 243).



The purpose of this book is to serve as a catalyst for an awakening and reformation within the Mormon Church, specifically regarding transparency and diversity among its General Authorities, the leadership within the church. A secondary objective is to provide a well-documented historical account of the Mormon Church and its ever-present tension with the *Salt Lake Tribune* to illustrate how a centuries-long battle came to a head in 2000 with the near demise of the Pulitzer Prize-winning newspaper at the hands of Mormon leadership. Finally, this book attempts to raise awareness of the Mormon Church's vast influence throughout Utah, gripping politics, business, and media, and the subsequent dangers of a marriage between church and state.

Stop the Press is primarily historical in nature, although it concludes by connecting past to present in an examination of how a centuries-long power struggle between the Mormon Church and the *Salt Lake Tribune* eventually resulted in the near death of the newspaper. Ure concludes by looking ahead at what he sees as the most likely path forward for both the church and the *Tribune*. Anyone with an interest in the history of Mormonism, or religion in general, would find this book of interest, as well as individuals interested in media ownership and the evolving media landscape, particularly at the local level.

A primary critique of *Stop the Press* is the plethora of names scattered throughout the book without adequate identifiers, making it challenging to keep track of individuals as topics and time periods are woven together. Without very careful attention to the minutia, it would be easy to lose the plot. That being said, Ure's attention to detail is one of his strengths as well, providing a thorough documentation of all events and individuals he reports on. He includes details such as the exact number of wives and children of prominent Mormon leaders and vividly paints the scene of key events included in the book, allowing the reader to imagine being present at Joseph Smith's, the founder of Mormonism, escape from prison and subsequent death despite a 175-year time difference.

There are some parallels between *Stop the Press* and *Educated: A Memoir* (Westover, 2018), which recounts Westover's memories growing up in a survivalist Mormon family in Idaho that refused public education and modern medicine, stockpiled weapons and food, and professed that the federal government was the enemy. *Stop the Press* details former leader of the Mormon Church Brigham Young's staunch distaste for the federal government and the constant tension between the two entities over the past two centuries: "He [Young] blasted the government from the pulpit and warned the people to prepare to repulse the invaders" (p. 68). While Ure provides a factual, historical account of the religion, Westover offers a glance into her personal experiences in the church, allowing the two books to complement one another and provide a multidimensional perspective into Mormonism.

Ure is an eloquent writer with a penchant for poignant word choice and poetic sentences, such as, "Historically, the *Tribune* had been a large and prickly burr under the saddle of Mormonism" (p. 13), and "The church leaders managed to dance away from attempts to either prosecute or muzzle them" (p. 90), making this book a pleasure to read.

Stop the Press starts out by positioning the three main players that reign throughout the book—the Mormon Church, the *Desert News*, and the *Salt Lake Tribune*. The Mormon Church was founded in 1830 by Joseph Smith after he claims to have discovered golden plates that were revealed to him by an angel. Smith translated the characters engraved on the plates into what eventually became the *Book of Mormon*. The *Desert News* was founded in 1850 by the Mormon Church to represent conservative Mormon beliefs and report relevant news to active Mormons. The *Salt Lake Tribune* was founded in 1871 by dissident Mormons to serve as a watchdog of the Mormon Church and a mainstream, secular news source for the residents of Utah.

Shortly after Mormonism's founding, Smith was killed and Young succeeded him as leader of the nascent religion. To escape feuds with neighboring communities in Mormonism's home base of Missouri, Young decided to move his tribe westward, and eventually settled in what is present-day Salt Lake City, Utah. Once in Salt Lake, the Mormons found themselves in an enviable position along the Oregon Trail, able to sell necessities at gauging prices. Through the rumor mill, one group of travelers, the Fancher party, were identified as perpetrators of the murders of some prominent Mormons. Mormon leaders conspired with the Paiute Native American tribe to stage an attack on the Fancher party in what eventually became known as the 1857 Mountain Meadows massacre. About 120 men, women, and children were brutally shot and bludgeoned to death. The Mormon Church worked to distance themselves from the massacre and used John D. Lee as a scapegoat to preserve the reputation of Young and other Mormon leaders.

In 2000, almost 150 years after the bloodshed, human remains were unintentionally unearthed at the site of the Mountain Meadows massacre, and the *Salt Lake Tribune* decided to run a three-piece editorial resurfacing the massacre in the public eye, which was unappreciated by the Mormon Church, to say the least. Shortly after the exposé was published, the *Salt Lake Tribune* changed hands a number of times, and what initially was a temporary sale of the newspaper in order for its owners to avoid taxes became a ploy by the Mormon Church to purchase the *Tribune* with the goal of shutting it down.

In 1952, the *Desert News* and *Salt Lake Tribune* signed a joint operating agreement (JOA) that allowed both papers to merge printing, circulation, and advertising departments so they both could cut costs

and increase profits in the economically challenging postwar era. Based on circulation, the JOA articulated that the *Tribune* received 58% of the profits and the *News* received 42%. After the *Tribune* reopened the Mountain Meadows massacre wound in 2000, the amicable relationship between the two papers was over, and the *News* (which is essentially synonymous with the Mormon Church) was determined to silence their competitor. As the *Tribune* was changing hands in the early 2000s, the *News* negotiated a drastic change in the JOA's profit structure, decreasing the Tribune's share of profits from 58% to 30% and effectively hurtling it toward bankruptcy. In 2016, local billionaire Paul Huntsman purchased the *Tribune*, a move that was greeted by Utah residents with a sigh of relief as Huntsman renegotiated the JOA and pumped the emaciated paper with finances and resources to revive it.

Ure concludes by predicting the future of the *Tribune* and the Mormon Church. He states that the former will continue to cover the Mountain Meadows massacre as mass graves were recently discovered, and he discusses the changes being made to the editorial strategy and newsroom operations, including an emphasis on its digital presence and personalized online content. The latter he tamely yet optimistically predicts will slowly evolve its doctrine and *Book of Mormon* to evade critics, yet will continue to suffer from self-inflicted wounds caused by outdated policies.

Reference

Westover, T. (2018). *Educated: A memoir*. New York, NY: Random House.