

THEMES IN AND COMPARISON OF SELECTED NEWSPAPER COVERAGE OF THE
MORMON CONFLICT IN MISSOURI, 1831-1839

Vicki Knasel Brown

Dr. Debra Mason, Thesis Supervisor

ABSTRACT

Shortly after Joseph Smith founded the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, the group left its New York roots in search of space to practice their faith in peace. They moved to Missouri in 1831, settling near Independence and Liberty. But conflict rose between the newcomers and those already settled in the area, leading to violence and death. This study examined how selected commercial and religious newspapers represented Mormons and the conflict that ultimately ended when Gov. Lilburn Boggs issued Executive Order #44, which forced the Mormons from the state. Textual analysis drew out five themes—theology, politics and patriotism, theocracy, legal processes and First Amendment rights, and war and conflict—while showing how the selected commercial newspapers portrayed Mormons, how the selected religious newspapers portrayed Mormons, how the selected newspapers portrayed the conflict, how coverage differed between general circulation and religious newspapers, and if and how coverage differed among the faith-based papers.