



“THE WOODRUFF MANIFESTO (1890)”

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle had an affinity for the American frontier. This could be caused by any number of things. Victorian England had a great concern for people who weren't “like them.” Essentially, Americans seemed like them, but were they? The great adventure is what happens to men and women who should be good people but are for some reason devolve into something less than human. Who or what can protect them? Is there a catalyst which can set things back on the right track?

We pick up the story of the Mormons as they are settling in the desert area of the American southwest. Their culture is a combination of success through hard work and adherence to a common set of rules and values. As is often the case, human weaknesses set in and those in power fought to remain in power and to expand it. The story may have exaggerated Mormon men committing murder to kidnap women, but they generally have seemed to have degenerated into conduct more barbaric than righteous. Of these, the best-known is polygamy.

Polygamy was first instituted in the 1830s by Joseph Smith and formally approved in 1852 by the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. Smith was said to have had either 48, 46, or 38 wives depending on who you read. Their theology embraced a continuation of relationships after death, so when you add in the women who “married” him after he died, the larger number of wives may be accurate. Brigham Young is said to have had 53 wives with 56 children born of 17 of those women. Critics of polygamy in the early LDS Church have documented several cases where deception and coercion were used to induce marriage, for example citing the case of Joseph Smith, who warned some potential spouses of eternal damnation if they did not consent to be his wife.

Additionally, you may be married to a woman or “sealed” with her; the latter denotes a continuation of the relationship after death. The practice of polygamy, under whatever name you use, is consistent with male-dominated societies of other times and places. Specifically, you find it in Abrahamic and Islamic cultures for much the same reasons:

- If a woman does not bear children, it must be her fault; not caused by a man’s inability. Therefore, additional women are brought in and by magic get pregnant, proving the cultural point.
- The number of children you have increases your wealth, your status, and your political connections through marriage.

This gave the appearance of an armed government on the edge of, if not inside the boundaries of, the United States and its territories. Also, it became a part of the larger national dialog on slavery.

The Utah War, more theater than policy, was fought 1857-58; it was also known as the Utah Expedition, or Buchanan’s Blunder. It was an outgrowth of concerns growing from pre-Civil War problems in Kansas. *The New York Herald* reported it was a good war: “Killed, none; wounded, none; fooled, everybody.”

In 1862, President Lincoln signed the Morrill Anti-Bigamy Act which banned plural marriage and limited church and nonprofit ownership in any territory of the United States to \$50,000. The act targeted the Mormon Church ownership in the Utah territory. The measure had no funds allocated for enforcement, and President Lincoln chose not to enforce this law; instead Lincoln gave Brigham Young tacit permission to ignore the Morrill Act in exchange for not becoming involved with the Civil War. General Patrick Edward Connor, commanding officer of the federal forces garrisoned at Fort Douglas, Utah, beginning in 1862 was explicitly instructed not to confront the Mormons over this or any other issue. Having signed the Morrill Act, Abraham Lincoln reportedly compared the Mormon Church to a log he had encountered as a farmer that was “too hard to split, too wet to burn, and too heavy to move, so we plow around it. That’s what I intend to do with the Mormons. You go back and tell Brigham Young that if he will let me alone, I will let him alone.”

Nevertheless, Congress continuously cut the Utah territory into smaller parts. What became Nevada was taken from it one piece at a time, and it became a state before Utah.

The Edmunds Act of 1862 began to implement the Morrill Act. It “put teeth” in the 1862 law and attempted to eliminate the Mormon Church as a power in Utah by vesting the political machinery of the territory in federal non-Mormon appointive officers. Specifically, the Edmunds Act provided heavy penalties for the practice of polygamy: it defined cohabitation with a polygamous wife as a misdemeanor punishable by a fine not to exceed \$300, by imprisonment not to exceed six months, or both; it declared all persons guilty of polygamy or cohabitation incompetent for jury service; and it disfranchised and declared ineligible for public office all persons guilty of polygamy or unlawful cohabitation. All elective offices were declared vacant; persons professing belief in polygamy or cohabitation as a religious principle, whether or not proved guilty of their practice, were ineligible to vote and to hold public office. In the first year of its existence it had excluded some 12,000 men and women from registration and voting.

The Morrill Act was contested in the courts, reaching the Supreme Court, which ruled, “Laws are made for the government of actions and while they cannot interfere with mere religious belief and opinion, they may with practices.”

Thus, it was in 1890, when the Mormon Church was faced with being wiped out or renouncing polygamy, that the Woodruff Manifesto - named for the leader of the church - was adopted by the church leadership. This is the official declaration renouncing the practice of polygamy. For the record, many interpreted the practice being outlawed inside the US and her territories.

An interesting fact: Mitt Romney’s great-grandfather had five wives, and at least one of his great-great-grandfathers had 12. Polygamy was not just a historical footnote but a prominent element in the family tree of the former Massachusetts governor. Romney's great-grandfather, Miles Park Romney, married his fifth wife in 1897. That was more than six years after LDS church leaders banned polygamy and more than three decades after a federal law barred the practice.

## THEY TRADED IN THEIR WIVES FOR STATEHOOD.

So, what about historical coincidences with the canonical story?

William Clayton, founder Joseph Smith’s scribe, recorded many marriages of Smith’s including one in 1843 to Lucy Walker.

In 1878, married LDS Church member John D. Miles traveled to England and proposed to Caroline Owens, assuring her that he was not polygamous. She returned to Utah and participated in a wedding, only to find out after the ceremony that Miles was already married. She ran away, but Miles hunted her down and raped her. She eventually escaped and filed a lawsuit against Miles that reached the Supreme Court and became a significant case in polygamy case law.

**United States Supreme Court**  
**MILES v. U S(1880)**  
**Argued: Decided: October 1, 1880**

In bringing this short summary to a close, let us revisit the opening paragraph for a moment. Were Americans, and other people from Britain but not living there, subject to reversion of social principles? What can prevail to save the day? Is there someone who can intervene and set things back on the right course? Perhaps, the Scottish doctor, Arthur Conan Doyle, can help us.