

# Significance of Pioneer Day

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At a family reunion once I was wearing a shirt that simply said "Nauvoo." One of my cousins asked me what the significance of Nauvoo was. I responded with a commentary about the persecution of the Mormons in Illinois.



Later I realized this answer was not complete enough and realized after much thought that the incidents that occurred there involved broader principles regarding religious freedom. After studying the history of the expulsion of the people of Nauvoo, I came to understand this incident represented the only time in American history where U.S. citizens were forced to leave the country because of their religion.

These citizens lost their property rights, the right to bear arms and the right to vote. They were completely disenfranchised as a people and forced to live somewhere outside the U.S. Yet they never rebelled or formed a rival confederacy.

The Mormons received no protection. Their entry into the Salt Lake Valley in July of 1847 is commemorated by the celebration of Pioneer Day on July 24.

The fact that these pioneers were mostly Mormons should not cause others to ignore this holiday. Pioneer Day isn't about Mormons, but religious freedom, which is also partly celebrated on Independence Day.

The early state legislators realized this and chose to set this day aside as a state holiday beneficial to all.

All should honor these pioneer men and women as people who had the courage to live and fight for their beliefs. We should all learn to incorporate that spirit of freedom into our own lives.

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