

Although Mormon religious beliefs were quite distinct, it was their practice of polygamy that raised the ire of Protestants and led to their systematic persecution. In response to considerable political pressure, Congress passed several anti-polygamy statutes, outlawing the practice. In 1896, the Mormons finally acquiesced and abandoned the practice. The following is an example of early federal anti-polygamy legislation.\*

An Act to punish and prevent the Practice of Polygamy in the Territories of the United States and other Places, and disapproving and annulling certain Acts of the Legislative Assembly of the Territory of Utah.

Be it enacted... That every person having a husband or wife living, who shall marry any other person, whether married or single, in a Territory of the United States, or other place over which the United States have exclusive jurisdiction, shall, except in the cases specified in the proviso to this section, be adjudged guilty of bigamy, and, upon conviction thereof, shall be punished by a fine not exceeding five hundred dollars, and by imprisonment for a term not exceeding five years: [certain cases excepted].

SEC. 2. And be it further enacted, That the following ordinance of the provisional government of the State of Deseret, so called, namely: "An ordinance incorporating the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints," passed February eight, in the year eighteen hundred and fifty-one, and adopted, reënacted, and made valid by the governor and legislative assembly of the Territory of Utah by an act passed January nineteen, in the year eighteen hundred and fifty-five, entitled "An act in relation to the compilation and revision of the laws and resolutions in force in Utah Territory, their publication, and distribution," and all other acts and parts of acts heretofore passed by the said legislative assembly of the Territory of Utah, which establish, support, maintain, shield, or countenance polygamy, be, and the same hereby are, disapproved and annulled: Provided, That this act shall be so limited and construed as not to affect or interfere with the right of property legally acquired under the ordinance heretofore mentioned with the right "to worship God according to the dictates of conscience," but only to annul all acts and laws which establish, maintain, protect, or countenance the practice of polygamy, evasively called spiritual marriage, however disguised by legal or ecclesiastical solemnities, sacraments, ceremonies, consecrations, or other contrivances.

SEC. 3. And be it further enacted, That it shall not be lawful for any corporation or association for religious or charitable purposes to acquire or hold real estate in any Territory of the United States during the existence of the territorial government of a greater value than fifty thousand dollars; and all real estate acquired or held by any such corporation or association contrary to the provisions of this act shall be forfeited and

\* William MacDonald, ed., *Select Statutes and Other Documents Illustrative of the History of the United States* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1922), pp. 43-45.

escheat to the United States: Provided, That existing vested rights in real estate shall not be impaired by the provisions of this section.

APPROVED, July 1, 1862.