

Joseph's campaign for president and the "Conspirators"

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January 1844-March 1844

Background: Joseph is 38, mayor and leader of thousands.

1844 was an election year. There were two political parties - the democratic and the whig parties. There were several people from each party with their hats in the arena for the candidate nomination. Joseph was concerned about his vote because whoever he voted for the saints would vote for as well. Illinois was slated to be the biggest swing state. Joseph decides in December of 1844 to write to the 7 candidates for nomination and asks what each would do to get the saints their lands back in Jackson County Missouri. Joseph doesn't hear back from all 7. The ones who write him back said it was a huge decision that couldn't be made during campaigns but promised to consider it if elected. This did not satisfy Joseph, he gathered men in his store to discuss it. They knew that no one was going to do anything for them. Some started to say that they wouldn't vote because it didn't matter. They decided they needed to vote but not for anyone. They agreed to throw away their vote on a black horse candidate. Willard Richards suggested Joseph Smith as that candidate. The Reform party was formed and that was the ticket Joseph ran on. Sidney Rigdon was selected as his vice president. John Taylor was in charge of all publishing in Nauvoo at this time. John wrote Joseph's platform. First: he would get back lands for the LDS in Jackson county. Second: he would put down mobs, there is never a time when mobs should be allowed to rule. Third: he was an expansionist, it was a time of Manifest Destiny and people wanted it to go from sea to sea, Joseph said he would take in the entire Northern Hemisphere and make it the US during his first term, the second term would take in all of the Southern Hemisphere because it was all Zion. Fourth: he would prevent the war on slavery, would be to have the Federal government would buy the slaves from slaveholders for land. The slaves would be given a choice of staying in the US or to be returned to Africa. Fifth: he was going to change the jail system. Jail should be a place of learning. If incarcerated you should be given a chance to improve yourself so you could contribute to society. Sixth: he would change the money system of the US (money at the time was different from bank to bank and state to state), and he wanted it to be backed by a Federal Reserve System where there was metal backing all of the paper money. Many of these have been incorporated into the political system today.

Joseph didn't seriously campaign, he never left Nauvoo, he never gave speeches, but he became a viable candidate. He was the first candidate to die while running for office. How did this happen? Go back to New Testament. Lord's prayer - the Kingdom of Heaven is coming to earth. Entrance into the kingdom is baptism. The kingdom of heaven has two arms. There is a revelation that Joseph receives that's not in the D&C, July 1844?- called the Political revelation which illustrates the political reign of the Kingdom of God on earth. In March of 1844- the council of fifty was organized. Entrance into the political arm of the kingdom did not require baptism, Brigham Young was called as president of the quorum of fifty. Brigham asks if he can call people to serve political missions. Joseph says no to calling them, but that volunteers can be taken to do so. 350 men stepped forward to serve these political missions, including all twelve of the quorum of the twelve. Joseph said there were two who he needed to keep in Nauvoo- Willard Richards and John Taylor. Most of the strong members of the church were serving these political missions at the death of Joseph Smith. The reason John and Willard stayed were: Willard was Joseph's personal secretary and John was the publisher who published Times and Seasons. The political missionaries fanned out throughout the US. Joseph starts getting letters from the political missionaries with success stories based on Joseph's platform. Joseph realizes that he's popular! This is a big deal for someone who has been persecuted as much as Joseph. Joseph suddenly gets worried that he's going to win. Most people in Nauvoo are thrilled, but some are not, particularly William Law- member of the first presidency. Joseph has had an occasion to call William to repentance so that didn't make him too happy. William starts holding meetings in his house with select people, those who are trying to save the church from the General Authorities- they take upon themselves the name "Conspirators". They have noticed the change in Joseph Smith, and they don't like it. They decide they don't have to do much, the

people in Carthage will take care of it. They decide that they can kill Joseph. They are members who are on the books of the church as being in good standing. Sister Law wants Joseph dead but she doesn't like the meetings at her house every night and finally ends the meetings until she can get a house boy. William is very careful and finds Robert Scott- an orphan from Canada. No siblings, no means of support, this is ideal for him as a job. Robert needs a buddy, his friend is named Dennison Harris - son of Emer Harris, nephew of Martin Harris. Emer's first son was Joseph Mormon Harris, great member of the church. Dennison would help Robert with his chores. One night they were there and heard a chant "Death to the prophet Joseph, death to the prophet Joseph." They go to Dennison's dad and Emer becomes very angry with his son, and says it is the road to apostasy. They go to see Joseph, and tell him the story. Joseph knew there were troubles for him in the city, but not that it was his first counselor. Joseph calls Dennison and Robert to be "spies for the house of Israel". He told them to join with the men and bring the names of the conspirators to Joseph, but gave them one caution- do not sign anything saying you will give your blood to see my blood shed. Robert says he is angry towards Joseph because his parents would still be alive back in Canada, and Dennison proclaimed his love for his Martin Harris. Other conspirators were the leader of the Nauvoo Legion, Joseph's doctor was among the group, and the group continued to grow. Finally at one of the meetings William Law presents an affidavit that he needs everyone to sign that said that all who sign it would be willing to give their blood to see Joseph's blood shed. They refuse to sign it, they are hustled down to a root cellar, a knife is placed to Dennison's throat and asked "does your father know where you are tonight?" He says, yes and he is late and his father is coming to get him. The conspirators realize they cannot kill the boys and bury them in the basement, but that they will throw them in the river and it will be a drowning accident. What the conspirators didn't know was that the banks of the river was where the lovers would go in the evenings. In the chaos the young men are able to escape and go directly to Joseph's house, tell him all that has happened. Joseph was very touched by their willingness to not sign the paper. He asks them to recount the story to John Taylor. John records it along with the list of Conspirators and Joseph asks him to publish it before the cock crows as an extra and on every doorstep in Hancock County. The two young boys lives are in grave danger. Joseph tells them that they needed to leave Nauvoo and go to Iowa. He said there was a day that wagons would roll and that the saints would be going to the Rockie Mountains. But he promised that if they didn't tell about their participation for twenty years then their lives would be safe. Twenty years to the day Dennison bears testimony in fast and testimony meeting and tells him story. Dennison's descendant is Dallin H. Oaks.

The conspirators are fairly ticked now. They decide to publish their own newspaper to stop Joseph. "The Nauvoo Expositor" to counteract all that is going on with the political missionaries.