In the late 1870s and 1880s, a vast national campaign sought to end the distinctive Latter-day Saint practice of plural marriage, and to extinguish the entire religion if need be. Though concerned about Mormon beliefs and political practices, southerners involved in this campaign were most alarmed at the invasion of Mormon missionaries and the prospect of their wives and daughters falling prey to polygamy.

Moving to defend their homes and their honor against this menace, southerners turned to legislation, religion, and vigilante violence. Southern Democrats joined with northern Republicans in urging the federal government to vanquish Mormonism's perceived threat to Christian marriage and the American republic. Anti-Mormonism thus became one of the earliest vehicles for reconciliation between the North and South after the Civil War and Reconstruction.