

“Let the Truth Heal”: The  
Making of *Nobody Knows:  
The Untold Story of Black  
Mormons*

*Note:* Gregory A. Prince, a member of *Dialogue*'s board of directors, conducted this interview with Darius Aidan Gray and Margaret Blair Young at the Prince home in Potomac, Maryland, on January 30, 2009.

*Greg:* How did you get started with your documentary, *Nobody Knows: The Untold Story of Black Mormons*?

*Margaret:* We didn't. Two young men got started with it. They had a good start, and then their lives took off and they went in different directions. I agreed to script it, and brought Richard Dutcher aboard, originally to direct, but eventually he became the executive producer instead.

*Greg:* Who were the two who started it, and why did they start it?

*Margaret:* Robert Foster and Wayne Lee, both African American young men. Rob is from North Carolina and a returned missionary. He was the first black student body president at BYU; and he understood that, if you joined the Church as a black person, the black community considers you an Uncle Tom. He wanted to do some bridge-building and explain things to his own circle and have it be, not a missionary tool, but something that would examine the significant issues. He has really wonderful ideals. And then Wayne was a filmmaker.

*Greg:* Also at BYU?

*Darius:* No, at the University of Utah. I was at his graduation; he graduated in film studies. They were young men with a great



*Darius A.  
Gray and  
Margaret  
Blair Young*

idea and some energy, and yet, as Margaret said, “Life happened.” Wayne was already married, and Rob became married. Both of them graduated; Rob went on to graduate school in Pennsylvania—in optometry, if I remember. Wayne tried to bring about his feature film career and wasn’t having the success he hoped for. Ultimately, because he had been in ROTC, one of the better ways of going right then was to be on active duty, and so he went that direction. He married and fathered many children. So both young men encountered life.

*Greg:* When Rob and Wayne ceased to work on the documentary, at what stage of production was it?

*Margaret:* Richard Dutcher had filmed all of the stuff with you, Martin Luther King III, those main interviews that we had done at Sunstone [Salt Lake Symposium], and with Darius. And at that point, I wrote a grant proposal. We needed Bob Nelson at the University of Utah to come on board and represent us. Bob became the assistant producer. With his help, we got the grant for \$10,000, which funded a whole lot of filming.

*Darius:* I had come on board simply as an interview subject, and that was as close as I wanted to be to it.

*Greg:* Was that before Margaret got involved?

*Darius:* No. She was in it from the beginning. I was just going

to be an interview subject; but with the departure of the two young men, Margaret picked up the ball. She wasn't going to let it drop, and I'm proud of her for that. She picked up the ball and was running with it.

*Margaret:* When Richard realized his other obligations wouldn't really allow him to direct, he stated his preference. He really wanted Darius to direct. He said, "That's your director. That's the one who is really capable."

*Greg:* So up until that time, Darius, you were an interviewee, but not an interviewer yet?

*Darius:* Correct. My background and my formal education were in broadcast journalism. I worked as a broadcast journalist. I worked doing documentaries for KSL, and I quite enjoyed that. So I had a background, but that was not my role initially in this project. Again, I was just going to be an interview subject. I really can't say why, but I was trying to be at arm's length from it. When everyone was doing their thing, when it was Rob and Wayne, and then Margaret, I was still trying to be distant.

So it was at that point—after Rob and Wayne left and Richard Dutcher became the executive producer, and then another director who worked briefly on the project left—that was when my role changed. I agreed to come in and to work with Margaret to help bring this about, just because of my background in it. But so much of this is Margaret's vision. I find it remarkable—and I'm not buttering her bread here—that because of her skills, well developed, in writing, being able to structure the story; what we had was what we used to call tins of film, the film canisters. We had tons of footage, but the story wasn't there. It was Margaret who developed the story, trying to give it the balance to be honest and faithful to these people, telling their stories, these Latter-day Saints and these scholars telling their stories; and then weaving it together to have a coherent sense. That is Margaret's skill.

*Greg:* Margaret, was there a script when the project began? How did you develop it?

*Margaret:* No. There wasn't a script until I saw the footage, until I actually had it in front of me. I transcribed all of the tapes, because we did this without money. As I transcribed, I had a sense of what we had and where we would use it. The story developed as I heard what was on the tapes.

*Greg:* That's exactly the way I did McKay. I did all the research first, and then said, "Okay, what's the story?"

*Margaret:* Yes.

*Greg:* If you do it that way, you get the right story.

*Margaret:* That's exactly right.

*Darius:* You don't go out with our agenda, "What it is I'm going to do."

*Greg:* Are you there with this film? Are you satisfied that what it is now is what it should be, and not just your overlay of what you may have thought previously? I guess another way of saying it is: Did it take on a life of its own, and did you let it do that?

*Darius:* My answer would be yes, in that there are scripted portions—the part that the narrator reads—which is a small portion of the film overall. But we didn't write the script until after the stories had been told. So the story led us, rather than our leading the story. In some ways for me, it has been very problematic, because it is not the way I have done documentaries before, when I was the shooter on everything, when I was the editor on everything. Or, when I was working at KSL, when I did a documentary with Ted Capener, and he scripted it. But to have to work with the footage that someone else has shot and work with the questions that someone else has posed to the interview subject, that was problematic. Lighting and technical things were very difficult for me. I tend to be very particular and could get upset at a lighting situation or sound.

I was very pleased with your interview, Greg. The lighting was good; the sound was good. Bob Rees<sup>1</sup> was very good. It was well done. But some of the other interviews, I just cringed at having to have to work with what someone else did.

But all of that is also saying that it wasn't imposed upon by us. We were working with what the story was that came to us. So yes, you impose some of your eye-of-the-beholder on it; but basically, we can't impose what isn't there. Do you decide to take a slant going one direction only, or are you trying to give the whole of the picture? So I would say that our imposition has been to give it the whole of the picture.

*Margaret:* The truth is that it is not like a Helen Whitney piece, where you have several million dollars to work with, and you can

bring in the sound technicians and the lighting people. Shall we admit what we made this for?

*Darius:* Sure.

*Greg:* That was going to be my next question.

*Margaret:* We've done this with less than \$60,000.

*Greg:* Going all the way back to Rob?

*Margaret:* Yes.

*Greg:* Each of you put money in the pot. How did you raise the rest?

*Darius:* There was a grant of \$10,000 from the University of Utah's Documentary Studies program.

*Margaret:* And then fund-raisers.

*Darius:* Asking friends and supporters for funding, and piecing it together. It has been piecemeal.

*Margaret:* We had to stop periodically, when we ran out of money. As we had money, we would move forward.

*Darius:* I was at a little shopping center in Salt Lake City, close to my home. I had gone into the grocery store. I came out and was driving through the parking lot, and there was a fellow crossing in front of me. He looked at me as I waved him by, and he said, "Wait." He came to the window—a white guy. I didn't know him from anybody. "Aren't you Darius Gray?" "Yes." I was wondering what this was about. He started talking about the film. I can't remember if he had seen it or read about it. He said, "You're raising money for it?" "Yes." "I want to support it." "Thank you. There is a website." He said, "No," and he reached in his pocket and gave me a \$100 bill. I said, "Wait a minute. I need to get your particulars, because I want to give you a receipt." "No, that's not necessary." "How do you know I'm going to use it for the film?" "I trust you." But I made him write down his name and phone number so I could contact him. A hundred dollars from a guy you'd never met, just crossing in front of your car in the parking lot. That is also a measure of how this film was done. There were those who had \$50 or \$100, or larger amounts, who helped to make this a reality. It's a part of the story.

*Margaret:* Yes. Darius and I have both put in money from our private bank accounts. Right now, we have exactly \$514 in our New York account, but it is already spoken for to cover master rights for one of the songs. So we are out of money. But \$60,000 is

what you would usually pay to stage a college production. When Sterling Van Wagoner looked at it—he is with KBYU—he was very sweet. He said, “If KBYU can’t air this, I still want to help you get this on the air.” But as he was looking at it, he said, “Where did you get this footage? This is amazing.” Then I told him what we had done it for, and he said, “You are kidding me!”

So it is a patchwork of different people and different skill levels. Some of the interviews, when we have Mamarene and Tamu, sound like they are in a tunnel. They weren’t adequately miked. Some of the lighting—we would have loved to have everything be of the quality of Richard Dutcher’s filming. His are the best. He knew how to set up an interview and have the lighting work well. He came fully equipped.

We talk about it as a labor of love, but probably that is actually the operative word throughout the whole thing. Even as we are quoting Orson Hyde—I talked to Eric Samuelson, who did the voice of Orson Hyde. It’s such an appalling quote: “There were those who chose neither one side nor the other. They were forced to come into the accursed lineage of Cain, and hence the negro or African race.” I talked to Eric and said, “This is going to be hard for you to read.” He said, “But it’s true. Let’s tell the truth.” And he read the words into the microphone. This has been a passion for him as well. Eric is a dear friend; we have known each other since childhood. Everybody who came into this, with maybe one exception, set their personal agenda aside. Love is all the way through it, even in the hard sections. We have to have the hard sections for the love to be at its fullest.

*Darius:* So is it all that we might have wanted? Has it done all that we might hope that it would do or could do? The story is still to be told, and the effect is still to be known. Would we have done things differently if we had had more funding? Would Helen Whitney have done things differently if she had had final say on the last cut rather than WGBH? You always have those composite elements that make it difficult one way or another. We are proud of this piece, notwithstanding the “Gee, I wish we had gotten this interview,” or “I wish the lighting had been better there.”

We are proud of this piece. We are proud to be able to present these stories and to let people tell their own stories. Presenting a

piece of the American tapestry that has not been known, whether LDS or not, black or white, presenting a piece of that tapestry—it is our history. It is our story, not just historically, but the contemporary story. So yes, we are proud of it.

*Margaret:* A black woman, LDS convert, approached me after an early fund-raiser, which raised some money but probably would have raised more if the right balance had been there. The trailer we showed at that fund-raiser came across to her and others in the audience as too negative. She said, “Remember that we, as black Latter-day Saints, have to explain it to our families. This won’t help us.” That became the voice in my head, that we would retain the balance, but we *had* to honor the stories. This was not ex-Mormon blacks telling why they left the Church. It was the untold story of black Mormons.

*Darius:* The positive and the negative.

*Margaret:* So my touchstone concept was bridge-building. We wanted to build bridges from the black community to the white, from the white community to the black, and within families. We have people who have strong connections to other religions. Keith Hamilton’s grandfather was a very popular Baptist minister. Tamu’s uncle is a Pentecostal bishop of the Church of God in Christ. That is huge, like an Area Authority.

*Darius:* He covers several states.

*Margaret:* So our goal was not to have people say, “I want to join the Mormons now,” but to understand why a Tamu Smith would have chosen to leave that particular tradition and take up a new one, whether or not they agree or respect it. That became really, really important to me.

*Darius:* For those of us black Latter-day Saints who have been and are yet in the Church, we wanted to tell our story, both positive and negative, because that has been our experience. If it had been all positive, I think we might all have been translated by now; and if it had been all negative, we would be out of the Church. We didn’t want that co-opted and have someone else decide that there was no joy, there was nothing positive, there can only be the negative, and the Church needs to be damned and hanged and drawn and quartered. That’s not our story.

We are here. We have been here. And we are remaining in the Church because we have a testimony of it. Yes, we have had nega-

tive experiences, some more and others less; but we are remaining here because we find something positive. We wanted that side of the story told.

*Margaret:* So, with that goal, the task was then for me to bring Darius on as co-producer and co-director.

*Greg:* Did you have your script by then?

*Margaret:* No. I had a proto-script, as I was transcribing and as we were editing.

*Greg:* What was the game plan? Just cast a broad net?

*Margaret:* Yes. The interviews were done by this time.

*Greg:* But you hadn't done all the interviews.

*Margaret:* No. We had the Dutcher interviews, and we had the Bickerton footage.

*Greg:* Explain about the Bickerton footage.

*Margaret:* Darius and I weren't co-producers/co-directors at this time; Darius was an interview subject, but still very much involved with what we were doing. This was when Rob and Wayne and Richard Dutcher were in charge. Richard Bickerton contacted Rob Foster and said that, way back in 1968, BYU had asked him to film sort of a defense. It was in the midst of all the protests, and they wanted to say, "There is another side to this story. Black Latter-day Saints like this church, and BYU is a good place to be, so quit your protesting." So they hired Richard Bickerton, and he's a good filmmaker. He interviewed black Latter-day Saints, including Darius, and Alan Cherry and Paul Gill, and someone whom we don't know, because the film was not finished, so the names were never put on there. He found, I think, as many black Latter-day Saints as he could, which was five!

*Darius:* We were poised to take over the world!

*Margaret:* Sadly, there was a man named John Lamb, who played with Duke Ellington and who had his story in the *Improvement Era*. We tried to find him, and finally did. But he responded, "I think you're looking for another John Lamb." But I sent the picture to Paul Gill, and Paul said, "No this is him. This is the man who was in the Church and who had such an impact on me." But that is so much of the legacy: Whom have we held onto?

BYU had ordered the film made; and then when they saw it,

they said, "Destroy it immediately, and don't tell anybody that you have made it!"

*Greg:* Why?

*Darius:* Because Bickerton hadn't just done the "happy Negro" thing. He had also talked to blacks who were opposed to the Church, who were just expressing their views.

*Greg:* Non-Mormon blacks?

*Darius:* Non-Mormon blacks.

*Greg:* Did he get any Mormon blacks who were also opposed?

*Margaret:* No.

*Darius:* I think it was because there was an intent to balance, from his standpoint as a filmmaker, that it caused the feathers to be ruffled at BYU and the Church. So he was instructed to destroy the copy, but he asked if he could keep a black-and-white print of it, and that was granted. So we never saw the color version of it, because it was gone. What Bickerton did was approach Rob Foster and say, "I have something that might be of interest to you," and it was this black-and-white copy.

*Greg:* How did he know that Rob was doing this?

*Margaret:* This probably happened with you, too, on your McKay biography. All through the writing of our books, we just really feel that we are at a "truth and reconciliation" point, and there are stories that have to be told and are begging to be told, and periodically there is just a fist slamming through the veil and saying, "This one needs to be in there." That's what this was. We refer to it as manna from heaven. For ten years, I have been getting calls from Darius, or he from me, saying, "I've got more manna." We, honestly, just got used to it, and we still are. As of two days ago, we continue getting manna. This isn't finished. So that's what it was.

*Darius:* So where did Bickerton come from? He was manna. So we met and screened the film.

*Greg:* You must have been aware that there had been a film, because you were interviewed at one point.

*Darius:* Yes, but I never knew what happened to it. We met with Bickerton probably five years ago, and the interview was done in 1968. I had no idea what had happened to that footage. As I watched my portion, what struck me was that I was being very

guarded. That brings about some feelings—I didn't know whom to trust I didn't know whose agenda was what.

*Greg:* How long had you been in the Church by that time?

*Darius:* Four years. I didn't know whom to trust. I was up at the University of Utah, and Dr. Sterling McMurrin had me into his office and wanted to talk. I didn't know who he was and which way he was headed. So I found myself always hedging my bet in what I would say. I didn't know if someone was friend or foe. I met with John J. Stewart of Morningside Elementary School, who wrote the book, *Mormonism and the Negro* (1960; 2d ed., Bountiful, Utah: Horizon Publishers, 1978). He was so involved in writing letters to the editor of the *Salt Lake Tribune*. I felt that some folks had an agenda, and they wanted me to help them with their agenda, but I didn't know who they were and whether I should be involved or not. And that's the way it was with the Bickerton thing. So when I watched myself there, I realized that I was standing there, not knowing who this guy was and what he was going to do with this. So I was guarded.

*Greg:* When did that feeling start to wane, or do you still carry some of it?

*Darius:* There are a couple of answers to that. Yes, I still carry part of that, because I still don't know—and maybe none of us fully knows—if someone we meet and associate with is friend or foe. So I still carry part of that, but to a far lesser degree. And the reason for that is age. It's a whole lot different being in your seventh decade than being in your second or third decade, knowing who you are and being secure both in who you are and not really giving a damn about who someone else might be.

*Greg:* And knowing the limits of what they could do to you, anyway.

*Darius:* Yes, what are they going to do to me? Like the guy said, "They can kill you, but they ain't going to eat you."

*Margaret:* With the Bickerton stuff, we met in the Wilkinson Center. We had the large film, but didn't have a take-up reel.

*Greg:* This was 16 millimeter?

*Darius:* Yes, 16 millimeter black-and-white, with optical sound.

*Margaret:* I ran over to audiovisual to see if I could get a take-up reel, and they had no idea what that was. They finally gave

me what you would play on a tape recorder. Anyway, we finally managed to make it work. But the film hadn't been finished, and none of the names were there. We were going through it, and I identified Ben Lewis, a BYU vice president who had been my stake president, and Bob Thomas.<sup>2</sup> It was interesting to see them in this new context. I remembered them from 1968.

*Greg:* When you say it wasn't finished, were these just interviews, back-to-back, or had there been some editing done?

*Margaret:* There had been some editing done, but the names had not been put on. Unless you knew the people yourself, there was nothing to indicate who they were.

So I saw Bob Thomas, who was in my ward; I grew up with his kids. I was identifying everyone I knew. Darius knew most of the others, but there was one black LDS man we never identified. We didn't use any footage of him, because we couldn't identify him. He was handsome, really well spoken, but we don't know who he is.

Darius was a little surprised to see himself. He didn't realize that he would be in the movie. As I listened to Bob Rees's interview, he talked about Bob Thomas telling him that the Brethren did not want him to publish the Lester Bush article in *Dialogue*, and Bob Rees saying, "I'm sure they'll forgive me if I do this." Bob Thomas said, "Bob, they won't," and Bob Rees thought, "I could really have serious consequences for this." I grew up hearing Bob Thomas bear his testimony, and, as I mentioned, I grew up with his kids. It was interesting to have this new view of what also was going on during my childhood. I was aware of the protests against BYU, but I was a kid. I was aware of the priesthood restriction, and it did become personal to me, because I had a very racist seminary teacher, and I had what we could call an allergic reaction to it, and actually dropped out of seminary over the racism. So back there, at age fourteen, it was hitting me, even though I was in an all-white community.

*Darius:* Seeing this young man, Paul Gill, struggling was one of the things that impressed me with his interview from 1968. He had just been a member of the Church for a short period of time and was trying to rationalize, justify, understand the priesthood restriction and his role in this church. "Am I cursed?" he struggles to say. "Did I do something where God cursed me?" He was trying

to find himself in that footage. We wondered if he was alive. We got his name, but that was all we had.

*Margaret:* We learned his name because the person in the film said, “We have a young Negro named Paul Gill.” But that was all we had.

*Darius:* I think he was wearing some old army fatigues with “Gill” on the label.

*Greg:* You never knew him at that time?

*Darius:* No. From the footage and something that was said, I had the impression that he was in Seattle. So the question that we raised was, Is he still alive? Is he still in the Church? Can we find this guy? With the impression that he was in Seattle, I called my sister, who was living in Portland and Seattle. I asked, “Do you know this guy?” She said, “I know of a Gill family in Portland. They are up-and-comers with a business background.” I said, “Will you check and see if Paul Gill is one of their relatives?”

At the same time, I remembered meeting a fellow when I was doing a presentation for a Church audience in Seattle; and he seemed well connected and seemed to know everyone. If I could remember that guy’s name, I was sure he would be able to tell me if Paul Gill was there in Seattle. So I was going through my computer address book, not remembering the fellow’s name, but knowing that I would recognize it if I read it. I was just going through the names, one by one, and I came across the name of Paul Gill, the very guy we were looking for.

In the notes area I had made a comment, and seeing Paul’s name brought it all to mind. I had presented at a family history and genealogy conference in northern California, and there was this man in the audience who sat at the back of the chapel; and when we were doing the questions-and-answers portion, he was very actively engaged in asking questions. He was wearing this funny hat—Paul always wears a hat; it’s his trademark. Following the conference, he came up to me and introduced himself. We exchanged information, and it was after that that he sent me a manila envelope with a bunch of material in it, and it was this same Paul Gill. So I had him in my address book, and I didn’t even know it. I made a phone call, but he wasn’t in. I left a message, and then he returned the call.

*Margaret:* And, oh, he was excited!

*Greg:* Was he still active?

*Margaret:* Still active, with two sons on missions. Bruce and I just took the third son to Genesis<sup>3</sup> in January. He had just returned from the Rochester New York mission, and is now at Utah Valley University, waiting to go to BYU. Paul has eleven kids. We flew him out to Utah to interview, so we have the 2007 interview juxtaposed with the 1968 interview.

Back in 1968 we have him saying, “Am I cursed? Was it something wrong I did in the preexistence?” In 2007, he says, “It didn’t take but a moment for me to come across some of the things that were written—I won’t mention any names—by the prolific writers.” And then he talks about the word “neutral.” He says, “That is an ugly word. I didn’t really understand what it meant. Nobody should have used the word ‘neutral.’ It means you don’t take a side.” He has some kids who didn’t stay in the Church, but the Gills are a Latter-day Saint family. And now, he is ready to talk about some of the issues he dealt with, coming up. And he’s also trying to get a group like Genesis set up in Indiana, called Bethesda. It’s pretty stop-and-start. One of his things was to observe Genesis. He was our speaker the month we flew him out—April 2007—and it was a wonderful Genesis meeting. We had the footage from the Bickerton film. We had Darius Gray in his twenties; and when we put him on screen, the Genesis people broke into catcalls!

*Darius:* Life has not been kind!

*Margaret:* They mostly just commented on how seriously tempted Darius must have been, with those kinds of looks. And then we showed Paul Gill, who was our speaker, and Alan Cherry. Alan was also there at the meeting, and he said, “We’re the preemies. We are the ones who came in before the priesthood revelation, and there weren’t many of us. But it’s quite something to be here with two other preemies.”

*Darius:* I did the Paul Gill interview.

*Margaret:* We had hired a young man who we thought would be the director; we were not planning on directing it ourselves. We had hoped that this young man might be able to do it; but the truth is that he wanted to be an actor; and so when acting jobs came up, they would take priority. Darius and I finally realized

that he had a family to support, and we were only able to supply him work as we had money coming in. It was not fair to him, and we couldn't just quit when he had an acting job.

But in the meantime, he did a senior project where he decided he would do the Jane Manning James story. We used documentary funds to pay the actors, and I arranged to use authentic cabins in Pioneer Village in Provo. So that footage belonged to us. We used it in two places: to tell Jane's story, and in B-roll stuff that was mostly narrative.

Then, we requested archival footage from the Church. We kind of knew what was out there. We knew times when the Church had filmed different things involving blacks. I had a recording, though not good quality, of President Kimball in South Africa talking about the priesthood revelation. I was willing to use that cassette recording but I hoped we could find something better. When I went to the archives and told them what I wanted, they gave me this whole DVD of the Kimball years—which included those words he spoke in South Africa, beautifully recorded. So we had that, and a lot of other archival stuff that we then would need to talk to Public Affairs about. We actually did not negotiate with the archivists; we negotiated with Public Affairs.

*Darius:* Yes. The project was and is an independent project, and yet we weren't trying to hide anything from the Church. There was an interview that had been conducted with Pastor Cecil ("Chip") Murray. Pastor Murray, from the African Methodist Episcopal Church in Los Angeles, is as well known in the AME Church as President Hinckley is known in the LDS Church. So here is this noted, respected, senior member of the faith being interviewed for our film. In the course of the interview, Pastor Murray says that President Hinckley apologized for the role that the Church had played in discrimination and for the Church's role in slavery. That was obviously of note—that President Hinckley would apologize. So an email was sent to Elder Dallin Oaks, saying, "We have footage in this interview saying this," and asking if the Church would like to respond. But there was no response at that time.

So here we are, fast-forward, seventeen months later. All of a sudden the light has come on, because some of the folks in Public

Affairs have seen portions of the film. Again, we weren't trying to hide the pea. The thing that grabbed their attention was that President Hinckley supposedly apologized for *anything*. "What would this church have to apologize for?" So here we are, having been given the footage by archives, access to this material with the expectation that it would be used.

But at this point, months later, the Church, through its representatives in Public Affairs, was saying, "We don't believe President Hinckley would have said that."

So to make a long, long story short, we had Marvin Perkins in California talk to Cecil Murray using open-ended probes—not trying to direct it—say, "You did an interview. You met with President Hinckley. What was that about? Was there anything significant that came from that?" Pastor Murray repeated the story. I had asked Marvin to take quick notes immediately after that meeting and forward those notes to me from that meeting. So Murray repeated and verified that the interview had taken place and that during it President Hinckley had made the comments that Pastor Murray had earlier said he said. I related that to Public Affairs so they could relate that information to those of the Brethren who were ill at ease. Then the question that we posed was, "Have you asked President Hinckley? If you're saying that it wasn't said, ask the other person who was a part of the conversation. The conversation was between Pastor Chip Murray and President Gordon Hinckley. Murray is remembering it; have you asked President Hinckley?" But they were reluctant to ask him. They didn't want to go that route. They did everything except to buy bread on Sunday to keep from asking President Hinckley, who obviously was still alive at the time, though he died while we were still in some phase of negotiation.

*Margaret:* The way we got Pastor Murray was that, when he met with President Hinckley in Salt Lake, they had also brought him to BYU and asked me if I could help host him. He has a presence that fills the room. It was the kind of thing where, when I walked into the room to meet him, I immediately teared up. The love that he has—I'm sure you've had that experience, where you just sense the emanation of love from somebody. I fell in love with him, just sweet, platonic love at first sight. We connected.

We had the lunch, and then he took me aside and said, "Mar-

garet, could you take me to the kitchen so I can thank the people who prepared this?" So I took him back for him to thank them. He pronounced blessings on people's heads, and then they had to lead him away. He hadn't pronounced a blessing on my head, but he had given me contact information.

I was having serious problems with a son. I felt like I could talk to Pastor Murray about it, and I sort of poured my heart out in an email. And then I said, "You didn't give me a blessing. You blessed everybody else, but they took you away so quickly that I didn't get mine." He wrote the sweetest email and blessed me in the email.

He said, "To your oldest son, dear daughter, if you find a quiet moment with him, and gain his permission to speak while he listens, promising to then listen while he speaks, committing not to interrupt—My dear son, I want to take this opportunity to ask your forgiveness. Forgive me for whatever things I have done or failed to do that caused you such anger and anguish of spirit."

So I did as Pastor Murray had instructed, and reported back to him. And it resulted in wonderful things with my son. Pastor Murray became somebody whom I just loved. His emails would call me "Queen Margaret" and one was "Yo, Sister Margaret!" That was how I knew Pastor Murray, and so I was able to suggest that he be an interview subject. In my own email, I also have Pastor Murray's account of the apology. This is the text, dated in my emails as having been received on April 7, 2006:

Margaret, dear daughter:

President Hinckley is a true messenger of our Lord.

The Church had endorsed a teaching that the curse of Canaan was the curse afflicting black people in America.

In the Air Force I first encountered this teaching when stationed for one year at Thule, Greenland, and being in the same military facility lodging with two Mormons. They reminded me of this teaching constantly.

Two years ago, I was invited to Salt Lake City by the LDS Church, and President Hinckley took his personal time to sit with our small group that was touring the many ministries and apologized to me in front of the group. He had heard via Keith Atkinson (serving now in Chile) that I had communicated to Keith this understanding, and was aware that the Church had changed its position in 1978.

That was amazing!!

Now the Church pushes Blacks to learn their lineage via the Church.<sup>4</sup>

That will open eyes and doors that will open new avenues of life.

Thank you for sharing with me.

Thank you for endorsing my ministry.

Thank you for being my friend.

Rev. Cecil L. "Chip" Murray

So we've got several records, and Pastor Murray has never denied that that interview and apology happened, and to various sources.

*Darius:* So here we are, asking, "Have you asked President Hinckley about this?" and no one wanted to do it. So basically they said, "We may not be able to give you permission to use any of this material." So Margaret and I talked—and I'm sure we had our share of prayers—and drafted a letter that basically said, "Thank you very much, but we won't withdraw that. We've talked to Pastor Murray twice, and Margaret has the email. So if you are going to withhold those materials, we will then find what is available in public domain, and we will proceed with this film."

I think it took two days, and there was another phone call. "May we meet?" We met in my home: Margaret, myself, and two representatives from the Church.

*Greg:* From where?

*Margaret:* Public Affairs.

*Darius:* They had asked for a copy of the film, to show it to the Brethren. We had declined that. We said, "We will be happy to show it, but we will go with it, and not have it done in a vacuum without comment and dialogue."

*Darius:* We also had shown it to whomever they wished at a screening there in the Joseph Smith Memorial Building. There was a full house of Public Affairs folks there. We weren't hiding the pea from anyone, but we weren't going to do it in a vacuum, and to have them make a determination one way or another without at least our being able to argue if there was a question. So they had seen it, and we said, "We are going to proceed, even if we have to go with material from the public domain."

We tried to find an accommodation. We weren't willing to take Pastor Murray's words out, but we tried to see what else we might do.

*Margaret:* The reason we had Pastor Murray with the Mormon

connection was not just the apology. The first AME in Los Angeles was founded by a former slave of Mormon pioneers, Bidley Smith Mason. So there was that link, and that was actually what had initiated the apology. President Hinckley had been given the summary of who Pastor Murray was and that his church was founded by a slave of Mormon pioneers, so he knew all of that.

*Greg:* Had the slave been LDS?

*Margaret:* We have no record of her ever having been LDS.

*Greg:* But owned by Mormons?

*Margaret:* Right. When the Public Affairs people said, “We have no memory of any apology,” we said, “Do you remember a conversation about the founding of the first AME by Bidley Smith Mason?” “Yes, we remember that.” So we went back to the interview. I had the transcriptions with me, and I said, “What if we add this portion where we talk about who Bidley Smith Mason was?” Anyway, we reached an accommodation where we would add the material that would make it clear that this was not an over-the-pulpit “I, representing the Church, wish to make a formal apology,” but that this was “senior pastor to senior pastor” talking about the founding of the first AME, with that history leading into President Hinckley giving an apology.

*Darius:* It allowed a context in which the apology was for the Church’s role in slavery, and not dealing with the priesthood issue. That was the fear. But it was for the Church’s role in slavery, which it cannot deny, since Brigham Young went to the territorial legislature in 1852 and Utah became a slave territory. But the apology was also for the Church’s role in discrimination, broadly speaking. So by making additions, rather than subtracting the fact that there had been an apology, the accommodation was made. Then, they could feel, appropriately, that, “No, President Hinckley did not, and was not apologizing for the priesthood restriction.” That was the fear, that there was any linkage there, that the Church would have to admit or suggest that there had been any wrongdoing.

*Margaret:* We spent the next day with our editor, Jim Hughes, trying to fit in the whole Bidley Smith Mason story. Finally, we said, “No, it’s not going to fit. It takes us off track.” So we just plugged in the picture of Bidley Smith Mason, and put in a little

extra footage of Pastor Murray saying that President Hinckley said, “I have learned something of the beginnings of your church and the founding of your church,” and then we just type, “Biddy Smith Mason, founder of the first AME Church, former slave of Mormon pioneers.” That’s the accommodation ground, just adding that little bit. And they were fine with it. We had permission, then, to use the footage of President Hinckley giving that remarkable statement in April general conference of 2006.

*Greg:* So did they hold back anything?

*Margaret:* Nothing. We have everything that we asked for.

*Greg:* Was that the only time that the Church tried to lean on the content?

*Darius:* Yes.

*Margaret:* Darius is pretty strong-willed, and I come a close second. We understood what we had. We were never treated condescendingly.

*Darius:* These representatives from Public Affairs, I consider friends. One of them, I consider far more than a friend. They treated us gently, and they were on an errand. They understood our position, but they were on an errand. And they did treat us as well as they could.

*Greg:* Did the people who sent them on the errand view you with respect, or fear?

*Darius:* Probably both. You have to say probably, because you don’t know. Again, we had offered to show the film to any of the senior Brethren at their request. We asked, “Who are these individuals who are asking the questions and expressing the concern?” Of course, that information was withheld. So we don’t know who the individuals were. Ultimately, there were some requests from good brethren among the leadership of the Church, and we have done three or so screenings for various General Authorities. The film has always met with very positive comments and heartfelt emotion.

One time a member of the Seventy wanted to see the film, and so we had a screening with him and some other General Authorities—

*Margaret:* And the secretary brought popcorn!

*Darius:* I said in advance, “Okay, we’ll bring the film, but who is providing the popcorn?” When we showed up, she had the pop-

corn! So here we are in the office, and I intentionally sat in the rear, because I wanted to gauge the head bobs. I kept watching, and they were being moved.

*Greg:* All of them?

*Darius:* Yes.

*Margaret:* The General Authority who had invited us certainly knew the story. With other General Authorities and Public Affairs people, the big comment afterwards was, “I learned things I didn’t know.”

*Darius:* I think it moved those brethren to a point where they had not been before.

*Greg:* And not just emotionally.

*Darius:* No—who blacks were, the history, some of which they did not know. As Margaret says, so often we hear, “I didn’t know that.” Whether it’s from a General Authority or a lay member of the Church, it provides information that previously was unknown.

So with the various screenings, I would say yes, it has moved people, to have an appreciation and an understanding that prior to its viewing they did not have.

*Greg:* Do you see them wince at certain points?

*Darius:* Yes.

*Margaret:* Yes.

*Darius:* Absolutely.

*Margaret:* In fact, we can predict it.

*Greg:* I watched when you screened it here, and the whole room jumped.

*Margaret:* We anticipate a little bit of a gasp when Armand Mauss is telling the story of the kid he grew up with, Richard. The B-roll has the picture of a group of black and white children, and Armand is saying, “All of us were given the priesthood except this one boy, and we couldn’t understand why that would be. Then, the bishop explained that they had done their genealogy and found out that he had a distant black relative.”

Our editor made this choice to do the shift of expectations. You’re focused on this kid who is clearly African American, and then Armand says, “We had a hard time understanding this, since he had blond hair and blue eyes.” And then the camera shifts to

that one blond kid, and we get an immediate gasp from the audience.

*Darius:* So I think it has moved people, including General Authorities. Again, what is the purpose of the story if it doesn't bring about some good? We are storytellers and we are allowing people to tell their own story, but what's the purpose of hearing their story if it doesn't bring about some good?

*Greg:* To move them to where they need to be, you've got to dislodge them from where they were. There is a little bit of tugging that is necessary.

*Margaret:* I've loved the film format to do that. There are a lot of people who need to have this understanding. We've got to get to a new place in the Church. The folklore is still with us.

We know that books can be intimidating, and the fact that our books are Mormon fiction<sup>5</sup> is going to put off some people, even though by the time we are in the third novel, we are out of fiction and we are doing what you did, in that when we have people talk, we have usually pulled it from something that they really did say. But in a film, you just sit down. It's there for you to take in. A lot of our good friends haven't read the books, but the movie takes seventy-two minutes to watch. And if you do the movie and special features, by the time you get through special features—because we hit the Brazil thing, and Nigeria, and all seven of the 1847 black priesthood holders—by the time you get through the three hours and twelve minutes, you really will have an understanding of the history of all of this. But also, we made a decision to have that last few minutes be black Latter-day Saints—and you've heard their stories and their struggles—say why they are still in this church. That is our final bridge, and that's probably that woman's voice which is still in my head: "We have to explain our Mormonism to our families, and this isn't helping."

*Greg:* What do you want this film to accomplish? You've hinted a little bit here and there.

*Darius:* One of the Brethren asked that very question. I said, "We want it to help heal." He was surprised at that answer. He thought it would be something else. We want to help facilitate the healing that needs to take place in this body of Christ, the Church. We want to facilitate the healing that needs to take place between the black and white communities in the Church.

*Greg:* But those are different sores, aren't they?

*Darius:* No. It's the same story. When we have screened the film to non-LDS audiences, black and white, but let's focus on the black, it has met with great approval, because blacks recognize that story. It is a reflection of the larger American story, where "those people" have been denied. We are "those people," whether we are Mormons, or Methodists who then had to become AME because in the Methodist Church they wouldn't allow us to pray at the same time whites were praying. It is the same story, and it is the same healing, whether it is in the Church or outside the Church. It is a healing between blacks and whites.

*Greg:* What I am trying to say is that the aggressor has a different sore than the victim. Granted, both need to be healed. How do you address that?

*Darius:* My answer would be that we present the truth—the reality of these lives—and let that truth heal. There are few surprises, I would contend, for blacks, whether members or non-members, when they hear some of the painful stories of other blacks. It's what we have known. We have lived it. It is our existence—not that we're suffering every single moment—but we realize and recognize that, and yet we can embrace the story because it is our existence.

For those who were the inflictors of pain, they wince. They are surprised by some of the stories, but still they are hearing the truth of it, not told in an angry way. There is no edge in that film. Yes, there are hard stories and truths that might be difficult for some, but there is no one with a sharpened axe. There is no one trying to chop down anyone or to make whites or blacks feel less than who they are, a son and daughter of God, and a brother or sister to whomever it is they are looking at. So, whether you are the aggressor or the victim, however the story hits you, if it causes you to wince or to affirm that which you know, it lets you know that we are in one family and we are speaking truth.

*Margaret:* And we are not going to heal everybody. We have certainly had people immediately say, "You're far too critical of the Church." I have a letter on file that reiterates the idea that blacks were cursed and also that Jews were cursed because they crucified Jesus.

*Greg:* But if you're not getting objections from both ends of the bell curve, it means you haven't done your job right.

*Margaret:* We would love for Church leaders to be able to see this film, especially if they have any of African lineage in their wards or stakes, and have a recognition moment of: "I have hurt you, and my church has hurt you." It shouldn't just be, "That was too bad." And it definitely shouldn't be, "Let's cover it up really quickly." It should actually be the shedding of tears, and full recognition and embrace of "How could I have done that to you?" Ultimately, it should lead us to the Atonement. We will all be healed in the same way—through the Atonement—and that's where I go. That has to be how we deal with it, and it has to conquer the fear.

*Greg:* So this is your hope for the documentary. Was it the hope of Rob and Wayne when they started it?

*Darius:* No. I think their hope was to inform, to do an information piece.

*Margaret:* Sometimes, taking Darius back in the memory of things was really painful. When we were writing the books, sometimes we would disagree. I remember one time storming out of his house when we were disagreeing about how we were going to portray him finding out about the priesthood restriction. I had letters from the missionaries who had taught him that had a slightly different version from Darius's. When I was trying to incorporate what they had said were their memories, it became quite volatile. There was a point—it wasn't over that one—it could have just been over word choice, because we are both strong willed—where I think both of us said or thought, "To hell with it! I don't want to do this anymore." I think the words Darius used were, "I feel like I'm in a hostile environment."

I called Bruce [my husband] once and said, "That's it! We can't do this. It's just not going to work. I'll finish writing the books, and that's it." Bruce said, "I have a testimony of a few things, and one is that you are supposed to do this with Darius. It would look very bad for a white Latter-day Saint woman and a black Latter-day Saint man to say, 'Sorry, we couldn't get along well enough to finish this project.' So you figure out what you need to do, and mend this. You are supposed to be working with him." I said, "Okay. Watch the kids. I'll drive up to Darius's house."

Now, I am directionally challenged. I don't get anywhere with-

out getting lost. It's a joke. When we took the cast of *I Am Jane*<sup>6</sup> to Chicago and I kept getting lost, Keith Hamilton finally said, "We are going to have one rule from now on: Margaret doesn't drive. If you see Margaret in a car, you pull her over and put someone else in the driver's seat." So I went to Darius's house, and he wasn't there. I knew where he was; I just knew he was at Green Flake's gravestone. I drove there, without any hitch, drove there, and pulled up. You tell the rest.

*Darius:* We were very angry with each other. We had both vowed, "No, I'm not going to work with him/her anymore." I was out doing some running around, driving here and there. I had this prayer; it was just me in the car, and I'm talking my prayer out to God. "God, I'm sick of this woman." But it was like I was still being twisted by the Spirit. So I basically challenged God. I was on 20th East, between 70th South and 90th South. I said, "Okay, if I'm supposed to work with this woman, I'm going to turn here on Creek Road and go down to the Union Cemetery, where Green and Martha Flake are buried. If Margaret is there, or if she shows up in a few minutes, then I'll work with her. But otherwise, God, to hell with this woman! Her and her horse, the one she rode in on."

So I went to the cemetery and parked the car. She wasn't there. I thought, "Okay, Lord." I was out sitting on the little bench that they had there. "I'm going to give you five minutes, and then I'm good. I won't have to work with this woman anymore." And who the hell shows up?

*Margaret:* I remember just walking over to where he was sitting, and he said, "You don't have to say it. I already know." So we are absolutely committed to our mission.

*Darius:* For that confluence of events to take place, God had to start her out an hour ahead of time to drive from Provo, and then not to find me at home and to be led, spiritually, to "I know where he is. He is over at Green Flake's grave." Why in the heck would she think I was over at the cemetery? But that's where she was spiritually led. And she had to have a head start, with God maneuvering this at least an hour ahead of time, with her conversation with Bruce. I'm out doing whatever I'm doing, madder than a hornet, and I can't get it out of my mind. Then, to challenge God

in that prayer. “Okay, I’m going to turn left here, and go down Creek Road. Blah, blah, blah.”

*Margaret:* Some of our working together has been my letting myself be initiated into the pain of what his life was—the pain and the joy. I have never met his mother, but I feel that she is a part of my life. He gave me music to listen to that he had listened to as a child.

*Darius:* The gospel songs.

*Margaret:* So, back to the conflict over how we would portray the night Darius learned about the priesthood restriction. I didn’t insist, “No, the missionaries said it was this way, so this is the way we are going to do it. This is the white way.” Which it was. It was imposing a particular paradigm over his memory. But opening up to the experience and to the gifts of Darius’s family and culture brought me an enormous endowment, beyond the stories we were telling. It was the whole culture of his parents, his sister whom I love and who is a dear friend, the music, those stories of his uncle who chose to pass as white. It opened black literature to me. Those are the books I am now drawn to. All of that is a whole world. And that—to me—to create a lesson out of that—if we can quit deciding that we are going to tell it our way, and impose our particular structure over the story, and quit presiding at the meeting but have it be fully participatory, where everybody is telling their story, and we sometimes weep with them, that we were a part of that—if we can get there, then we can start talking about Zion.

### Notes

1. Robert A. Rees is a poet, essayist, commentator on Mormon studies, and a former editor of *Dialogue*.

2. Robert K. Thomas was a longtime member of BYU’s English Department and served in its administration, including as the university’s academic vice president.

3. The LDS Genesis Group was organized under the direction of Joseph Fielding Smith in 1971 to support Latter-day Saints of African descent. It was originally headed by Ruffin Bridgeforth, Darius Gray, and Eugene Orr.

4. The Freedman Bank genealogical record project was spearheaded by Marie Taylor and Darius Gray. Over a period of eleven years, inmates at the Utah State Penitentiary extracted and digitized names from the Freedman Bank records to make them computer-accessible.

5. Margaret Blair Young and Darius A. Gray co-authored the STANDING ON THE PROMISES trilogy, published by Bookcraft in Salt Lake City: *One More River to Cross* (2000), *Bound for Canaan* (2002), and *The Last Mile of the Way* (2003).

6. Margaret Young's *I Am Jane* has been performed at various venues throughout the nation since she wrote it in 2002. It tells the story of Jane Manning James, perhaps the most famous black Mormon pioneer.

# Nobody Knows

## The Untold Story Of Black Mormons

*"All are alike unto God, black and white; male and female..."*  
(Book of Mormon)



They came west with the Mormons, enslaved and freeborn.  
They could not enter the temples they had helped build.  
The Church they loved called them cursed. Now, the  
Church invites them to be Mormon pioneers once again,  
with a new Zion in sight. HOW WILL THEY ANSWER?

*Cover of the DVD of Nobody Knows: The Untold Story of Black Mormons. Family group: Descendants of Edward ("Ned") and Susan Leggroan and their children, who joined the Church in Salt Lake City. Seated woman: Jane Manning James. Couple: Amanda Leggroan Chambers and Samuel Chambers.*