

THE POSSESSIVE INVESTMENT IN RIGHTNESS: WHITE SUPREMACY AND THE MORMON MOVEMENT

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As members of the Church, we need to have the hard and uncomfortable conversation of racism. We need to keep having it to expel all the hot-air anger and have it until we're able to reach effective dialogue during which we are truly hearing one another, learning, and changing our generations-old myth-based paradigm—however subconscious it may be. —Alice Faulkner Burch¹

What role did anti-Black racism and white supremacy play in the growth of the Mormon movement and key institutions of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints? What is the connection between ongoing white supremacy and members' belief in prophetic inerrancy and the abiding "rightness" of the LDS Church? For those of us who have no conscious memory of the LDS Church's ban on priesthood ordination and full temple access for members of Black African descent or its end in 1978, it is tempting to imagine the ban as a reflection of the prejudices of a few influential past leaders, or a consequence of Mormonism's historic whiteness: a regretful and egregious but marginal error. But this is not so. As bell hooks powerfully articulated, the relationship between "center"

1. Alice Faulkner Burch, "Black Women in the LDS Church and the Role of the Genesis Group" (lecture, Mormon Women's History Initiative Team Annual Breakfast, Mormon History Association conference, Snowbird, Utah, June 11, 2016, <http://www.mormonwomenshistoryinitiative.org/mwhit-breakfast-2016.html>).

and “margin” is never arbitrary, and when we re-center our thinking around the so-called “margins,” we change the way we see the whole.²

When I use the words “racism” and “white supremacy,” I do so as they are used by scholars who work on race in the humanities, social sciences, and related applied scholarly fields. Racism is the system of ideas, beliefs, and practices that divides people and gives some people better life chances—opportunities to live a happy, healthy life—based on their skin color and ancestry. In the United States, racial classifications connected to skin color and ancestry were promulgated in laws and policies pertaining to chattel slavery and colonization and even after the legal abolition of slavery have continued to function in the service of inequality. White supremacy is the system of ideas, beliefs, and practices that give white people better life chances based on perceived skin color and ancestry.³ Racism and white supremacy are not simply individual character flaws or the result of personal ill intent. Investigating the role anti-Black racism and white supremacy played in the growth of the Mormon movement and key LDS institutions is not about impugning the character of individuals. It is about assessing how systems of inequality take shape through our social, economic, political, and religious interactions. Individuals are born into these systems, absorb them, learn to operate within them, and make choices over time that will build them or dismantle them. Within the last few years, many major American institutions have started reckoning with their historical entanglements with systems of white supremacy, including slavery. The

2. bell hooks, *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* (Boston: South End Press, [1985] 2000).

3. This formulation reflects a consensus view of racism as a social system and also more specifically the influence of geographer Ruth Wilson Gilmore, who defined racism as “the state-sanctioned and/or legal production and exploitation of group-differentiated vulnerabilities to premature death, in distinct yet densely interconnected political geographies” in her essay “Race and Globalization,” *Geographies of Global Change*, 2nd ed., edited by P. J. Taylor, R. L. Johnstone, and M. J. Watts (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), 261.

work of generations of dedicated LDS scholars and activists—Darius Gray, Lester Bush, Armand Mauss, Newell Bringhurst, Ronald Coleman, Tamu Smith, Zandra Vranes, Janan Graham-Russell, Darron Smith, Paul Reeve, LaShawn Williams, Fatimah Salleh, Max Mueller, Amy Tanner Thiriot, and many others—makes it possible for LDS people to do the same. This essay offers an examination of key moments when white supremacy coalesced within LDS institutions, an analysis of the deeper dynamics at work in these moments, the way these dynamics shaped racist systems of power within Mormon institutions and communities, and how these dynamics can be remediated and these systems dismantled.⁴



White supremacy in Mormonism took shape unevenly and over the course of many years. Positions held privately by various early Mormon leaders—from pro-slavery to gradualist emancipation—theological speculation, human conflict, personal ambition, and political pressures on Mormon settlements in border and frontier states all played a role in its formation. We can see these intersecting influences compete and resolve at key pressure nodes in Mormon history. A striking example of such a pressure node is the publication in the July 1833 *Evening and Morning Star* of W. W. Phelps's notice to "Free People of Color" who might join the Mormon movement or its settlements warning them that Missouri was a slaveholding state.⁵

4. One note about methodology seems important here: subaltern historiography is premised on the idea that the colonial archive and dominant historiography is structured to sustain the narratives of the powerful and that a different methodology is required to read the archive for insights that might disrupt the narratives of the powerful.

5. William W. Phelps, "Free People of Color," *Evening and Morning Star* 2, no. 14 (1833): 109.

So intense was the reaction of local white Missourians to this notice that two days later Phelps printed an “extra” broadside to clarify that he intended the article not just to “prevent . . . misunderstanding” but also to discourage Black conversion, a position at odds with the contemporaneous activity of Mormon missionaries. Mormonism’s white supremacy comes into being around this and other critical instances of reversal, disavowal, abandonment, and incoherence. Whenever predominantly white Mormon communities found themselves under pressure, they elected, as had W. W. Phelps in Independence, to choose their relationships with other whites in position of power over loyalty to or solidarity with Black people. If there was a logic in these decisions, it was that Mormonism had more to gain through collaboration with whites, even if that came at the expense of Black lives, Black equality, and white integrity.

Take, for example, the establishment of legalized Black “servitude” in Utah territory in 1852. Joseph Smith had supported gradual emancipation in his 1844 presidential campaign literature.⁶ Brigham Young appeared to follow him when, on January 5, 1852, he declared in a prepared speech to the territorial legislature, later published in the *Deseret News*: “No property can or should be recognized as existing in slaves.”⁷ Just two weeks later, though, Young declared himself a “firm believer in slavery” and urged passage of An Act in Relation to Service, which legalized a form of Black servitude in Utah that would persist

6. Matthew L. Harris and Newell G. Bringhurst, eds., *The Mormon Church and Blacks: A Documentary History* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2015), 29. See also Martin B. Hickman, “The Political Legacy of Joseph Smith,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 3, no. 3 (1968): 23; Richard D. Poll and Martin Hickman, “Joseph Smith’s Presidential Platform,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 3, no. 3 (1968): 19–23.

7. Newell G. Bringhurst, *Saints, Slaves, and Blacks: The Changing Place of Black People Within Mormonism* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1981), 335; W. Paul Reeve, *Religion of a Different Color Race and the Mormon Struggle for Whiteness* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 149.

until at least 1862, if not longer. After some debate, the measure passed unanimously in early February 1852.⁸

Historians Chris Rich, Nathaniel Ricks, Newell Bringhurst, and Matthew Harris have agreed that one significant factor in the passage of the Act was to protect the interests of slaveholders and proslavery men who held positions of power in early Utah by establishing what was, at least on paper, an ameliorated form of slavery to be called “servitude.” Orson Hyde stated as much in the *Millennial Star* on February 15, 1851:

We feel it to be our duty to define our position in relation to the subject of slavery. There are several in the Valley of the Salt Lake from the Southern States, who have their slaves with them. There is no law in Utah to authorize slavery, neither any to prohibit it. If the slave is disposed to leave his master, no power exists there, either legal or moral, that will prevent him. But if the slave choose to remain with his master, none are allowed to interfere between the master and the slave. All the slaves that are there appear to be perfectly contented and satisfied. When a man in the Southern states embraces our faith, and is the owner of slaves, the Church says to him, if your slaves wish to remain with you, and to go with you, put them not away; but if they choose to leave you, or are not satisfied to remain with you, it is for you to sell them, or let them go free, as your own conscience may direct you. The Church, on this point, assumes not the responsibility to direct. The laws of the land recognize slavery—we do not wish to oppose the laws of the country. If there is sin in selling a slave, let the individual who sells him bear that sin, and not the Church. Wisdom and prudence dictate to us this position, and we trust that our position will henceforth be understood.⁹

The number of slaves brought to Utah was not large—the 1850 census counted twenty-six and the 1860 census counted thirty, a number

8. Harris and Bringhurst, *The Mormon Church and Blacks*, 32–35; Reeve, *Religion of a Different Color*, 148–59; John Turner, *Brigham Young: Pioneer Prophet* (Cambridge: Harvard Belknap, 2012), 225–26.

9. Orson Hyde, “Slavery Among the Saints,” *The Latter-day Saints’ Millennial Star* 13, Apr. 15, 1851, 63, available at <https://contentdm.lib.byu.edu/digital/collection/MStar/id/2093>.

largely regarded as an undercount. Newell Bringhurst estimated that twelve Mormon migrants to Utah brought “sixty to seventy” slaves, and that early Utah’s slaveholders held positions of influence: Charles C. Rich was in the Quorum of the Twelve; William Hooper became Utah’s representative to Congress; Abraham Smoot became mayor of Salt Lake City and Provo. Slaveholders’ investment—economic, political, and social—was noted and regarded by Young, who pledged not to contest it.¹⁰ In addition to consideration for the property interests of influential slaveholders, historians have identified other factors that made the Act something of a “practical compromise,” as Christopher Rich described it, that would help Utah avoid becoming embroiled in national controversy, limit large-scale slaveholding in the territory, and signal that white Mormons belonged in the mainstream of American society.¹¹ “Young was not simply negatively situating blacks within Mormon theology,” Paul Reeve explains, “he was attempting to situate whites more positively within American society.”¹²

But documentary evidence supports an even stronger reading of Brigham Young’s switch on slavery. Young’s own writing reveals that it was his goal as territorial governor and LDS Church president to use territorial laws and LDS Church policies to build a domain where white men would “rule.” I use this word deliberately, as did Brigham Young. It derives in Young’s usage from Genesis 4:7, wherein God tells Abel that he will “rule over” his brother Cain as a consequence of Cain’s faulty sacrificial offering. Young uses this language repeatedly in his private

10. See Bringhurst, *Saints, Slaves, and Blacks*; see also, Nathaniel R. Ricks, “A Peculiar Place for the Peculiar Institution: Slavery and Sovereignty in Early Territorial Utah” (master’s thesis, Brigham Young University, 2007); Christopher B. Rich, Jr., “The True Policy for Utah: Servitude, Slavery, and ‘An Act in Relation to Service,’” *Utah Historical Quarterly* 80, no. 1 (2012): 54–74; and Harris and Bringhurst, *The Mormon Church and Blacks*, 32–35.

11. Rich, “The True Policy for Utah,” 55.

12. Reeve, *Religion of a Different Color*, 155.

writings and public speeches in early 1852. His manuscript history entry (a record compiled by clerks from extant papers) for January 5, 1852 reads:

The negro . . . should serve the seed of Abraham; he should not be a *ruler*, nor vote for men to *rule* over me nor my brethren. The Constitution of Deseret is silent upon this, we meant it should be so. The seed of Canaan cannot hold any office, civil or ecclesiastical. . . . The decree of God that Canaan should be a servant of servants unto his brethren (i.e., Shem and Japhet [*sic*]) is in full force. The day will come when the seed of Canaan will be redeemed and have all the blessings their brethren enjoy. Any person that mingles his seed with the seed of Canaan forfeits the right to *rule* and all the blessings of the Priesthood of God; and unless his blood were spilled and that of his offspring he nor they could not be saved until the posterity of Canaan are redeemed.¹³

Days later, Eliza R. Snow, who was a spouse of Brigham Young, published “The New Year, 1852” on the front page of the *Deseret News* on January 10, 1852. The poem corroborates and provides another viewpoint on the goal of establishing theocracy in Utah by celebrating the territory’s situation outside of and in opposition to political currents in the United States, including its reform movements:

On, on
 Still moves the billowy tide of change, that in
 Its destination will o’erwhelm the mass
 Of the degen’rate governments of earth,
 And introduce Messiah’s peaceful reign.
 There is “a fearful looking for,” a vague
 Presentiment of something near at hand—
 A feeling of portentousness that steals
 Upon the hearts of multitudes, who see
 Disorder reigning through all ranks of life.

13. “History of Brigham Young,” entry dated Jan. 5, 1852, Church Historian’s Office Records Collection, LDS Church Archives (quoted in Ricks, “A Peculiar Place,” 114).

Reformers and reforms now in our own
 United States, clashing tornado-like,
 Are threat'ning dissolution all around.

Snow wrote disparagingly of anti-slavery reform, holding to Young's vision of African Americans as "cursed" to "servitude":

Slavery and anti-slavery! What a strife!
 "Japhet shall dwell within the tents of Shem,
 And Ham shall be his servant;" long ago
 The prophet said: 'Tis being now fulfill'd.
 The curse of the Almighty rests upon
 The colored race: In his own time, by his
 Own means, not yours, that curse will be remov'd.

Similarly, she dismissed the quest for suffrage:

And woman too aspires for something, and
 She knows not what; which if attain'd would prove,
 Her very wishes would not be her wish.
 Sun, moon, and stars, and vagrant comets too,
 Leaving their orbits, ranging side by side,
 Contending for prerogatives, as well
 Might seek to change the laws that govern them,
 As woman to transcend the sphere which God
 Thro' disobedience has assigned to her;
 And seek and claim equality with man.

Snow argued that political reform efforts were pointless because the only true government, the "perfect government," was priesthood:

Can ships at sea be guided without helm?
 Boats without oars? steam-engines without steam?
 The mason work without a trowel? Can
 The painter work without a brush, or the
 Shoe-maker without awls? The hatter work
 Without a block? The blacksmith without sledge
 Or anvil? *Just as well as men reform*
And regulate society without

The Holy Priesthood's pow'r. Who can describe
 The heav'nly order who have not the right,
 Like Abra'm, Moses, and Elijah, to
 Converse with God, and be instructed thro'
 The Urim and the Thummim as of old?
 Hearken, all ye inhabitants of earth!
All ye philanthropists who struggle to
Correct the evils of society!
You've neither rule or plummet.
Here are men
Cloth'd with the everlasting Priesthood: men
Full of the Holy Ghost, and autoriz'd
To 'stablish righteousness—to plant the seed
Of pure religion, and restore again
A perfect form of government to earth.

That form of government was not only to be established in the stakes of Zion, as later generations of Latter-day Saints would come to understand it, but on earth in the territory of Utah, a point she makes in the *Deseret News* by repeatedly declaiming at line-break points of poetic emphasis the word “here”:

If elsewhere men are so degenerate
 That women dare compete with them, and stand
 In bold comparison: let them come *here*;
 And here be taught the principles of life
 And exaltation.
 Let those fair champions of “female rights”
 Female conventionists, come *here*. Yes, in
 These mountain vales; chas'd from the world, of whom
 It “was not worthy” *here* are noble men
 Whom they'll be proud t' acknowledge to be far
 Their own superiors, and feel no need
 Of being Congressmen; for *here* the laws
 And Constitution our forefathers fram'd
 Are honor'd and respected. Virtue finds
 Protection 'neath the heav'n-wrought banner *here*.

'Tis *here* that vile, foul-hearted wretches learn
 That truth cannot be purchas'd—justice brib'd;
 And taught to fear the bullet's warm embrace,
 Thro' their fond love of life, from crime desist,
 And seek a refuge in the States, where weight
 Of purse is weight of character, that stamps
 The impress of respectability.
 "Knowledge is pow'r." Ye saints of Latter-day!
 You hold the keys of knowledge. 'Tis for you
 To act the most conspic'ous and the most
 Important parts connected with the scenes
 Of this New Year: To 'stablish on the earth
 The principles of Justice, Equity,—
 Of Righteousness and everlasting Peace.¹⁴

As Maureen Ursenbach Beecher wrote, "Eliza adopted ideas from whatever source she trusted—Joseph Smith's utterances would be received without question—and worked them meticulously into a neatly-packaged theology with the ends tucked in and the strings tied tight."¹⁵ In this poem, Eliza R. Snow endorses Brigham Young's vision of a theocratic Utah governed by white priesthood holders.

We see this explicit conjoining of Church and territory on February 5, 1852, the day after the passage of the Act in Relation to Service and the day the legislature established voting rights (white men only) in Cedar City and Fillmore. Young used the occasion to hold forth extemporaneously and at length on the status of whites, Blacks, and others in matters spiritual and temporal. Records from this day are the first contemporary document of a theologically rationalized ban on priest-

14. E. R. Snow, "The New Year 1852," *Deseret News*, Jan. 10, 1852, 1, <http://contentdm.lib.byu.edu/cdm/compoundobject/collection/desnews1/id/171508/rec/3>; Jill Mulvay Derr and Karen Lynn Davidson, eds., *Eliza R. Snow: The Complete Poetry* (Provo: BYU Press, 2009), 419–20.

15. Maureen Ursenbach Beecher, "The Eliza Enigma," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 11, no. 1 (1978): 40–43.

hood ordination for African Americans. Young declared that African Americans were descendants of Cain and thus bearers of a curse that prohibited them from holding the priesthood. Further, he stated that any who intermarried with African Americans would bear the same curse and that it would be a blessing to them to be killed. Finally, he outlined principles for establishing the “Church” as the “kingdom of God on the earth,” returning again and again to the ideal of white “rule” as he had in his January 5 journal entry:

I know that they cannot bear *rule* in the preisthood, for the curse on them was to remain upon them, until the resedue of the posterity of Michal and his wife receive the blessings. . . . Now then in the kingdom of God on the earth, a man who has has the Affrican blood in him cannot hold one jot nor tittle of preisthood; . . . In the kingdom of God on the earth the Affricans cannot hold one partical of power in Government. . . . The men bearing *rule*; not one of the children of old Cain, have one partical of right to bear *Rule* in Government affairs from first to last, they have no buisness there. this privilege was taken from them by there own transgressions, and I cannot help it; and should you or I bear *rule* we ought to do it with dignity and honour before God. . . . Therefore I will not consent for one moment to have an african dictate me or any Bren. with regard to Church or State Government. I may vary in my veiwes from others, and they may think I am foolish in the things I have spoken, and think that they know more than I do, but I know I know more than they do. If the Affricans cannot bear *rule* in the Church of God, what business have they to bear *rule* in the State and Government affairs of this Territory or any others? . . . If we suffer the Devil to *rule* over us we shall not accomplish any good. I want the Lord to *rule*, and be our Governor and and dictater, and we are the boys to execute. . . . Consequently I will not consent for a moment to have the Children of Cain *rule* me nor my Bren. No, it is not right. . . . No man can vote for me or my Bren. in this Territory who has not the privilege of acting in Church affairs.

Brigham Young’s white supremacy was posited primarily but not exclusively in relation to African Americans. In the same speech, Brigham

Young envisioned a day when people might emigrate to Utah from the “Islands,” or “Japan,” or “China.” They too, Young averred, would have no understanding of government and would have to be governed by white men.¹⁶ This speech suggests that the legalization of slavery and Young’s exclusion of Blacks from the priesthood were elements of a larger vision in which the kingdom of God on earth was to be established with whites avoiding intermixing with Blacks except to rule over them. The legal establishment of Black servitude in Utah territory managed to preserve the slaveholding interests of a few influential white Mormons while discouraging voluntary emigration to Utah territory by free Blacks, even as free Blacks were setting out to seek their fortunes in other western states. In December 1852, Young told the legislature that the Act “had nearly freed the territory of the colored population.”¹⁷ The 1860 census found fifty-nine African Americans in Utah, constituting .14 percent of the territorial population. In neighboring Nevada, the census found forty-five African Americans constituting .6 percent of the territorial population, and in California, 4,086 African Americans constituting 1.1 percent of the population.¹⁸

One of the consequences of “freeing the territory” was “freeing” the vast majority of white Mormon people from significant interaction with African Americans as neighbors, coworkers, friends, or coreligionists, and the limited extent of Black servitude also “freed” them from reengaging to any significant extent with the national controversy over slavery’s abolition. Outsiders who visited Salt Lake City were struck by white Mormons’ lack of engagement with the issue. B. H. Roberts’s

16. “Brigham Young Address to Legislature,” Feb. 4, 1852, Box 1, Folder 17, Historian’s Office Reports of Speeches, Church History Library, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah, <https://archive.org/details/CR100317B0001F0017>.

17. Bringhurst, *Saints, Slaves, and Blacks*, 335; Ricks, “A Peculiar Place,” 131.

18. “1860 Census: Population of the United States,” United States Census Bureau, <https://www.census.gov/library/publications/1864/dec/1860a.html>.

History of the Church provides a vivid commemoration of the lack of abolitionist sentiment in Utah, as noted by Horace Greeley at Salt Lake City banquet in his honor in 1859:

I have not heard tonight, and I think I never heard from the lips or journals of any of your people, one word in reprehension of that national crime and scandal, American chattel slavery, this obstinate silence, this seeming indifference on your part, reflects no credit on your faith and morals, and I trust they will not be persisted in.¹⁹

Greeley wondered at the “obstinate silence” and “seeming indifference” of white Mormons. But it was not that white Mormons were not interested in matters of race. Quietly, the legal and theological architects of “the Kingdom of God on Earth” had established it as a white supremacist space. Brigham Young used his conjoint role as LDS Church president, territorial governor, and empire builder to implement anti-Black racism as a means of consolidating relationships among the young territory’s key operatives and as a foundational step toward realizing a theocratic Mormon kingdom where white men “ruled.”

Another major instance of discontinuity and reversal in the service of white supremacy came during President John Taylor’s efforts to adjudicate the question of Black priesthood ordination in 1879. Two years after the death of Brigham Young, in May 1879, Taylor traveled to a conference of the Utah Valley Stake in Provo. Presiding over the stake was Abraham O. Smoot. After his conversion in Kentucky in 1833, Smoot proved to be a loyal, strong-tempered, battle-ready defender of the Mormon movement and had a long-standing relationship with Brigham Young.²⁰ Smoot was also a solid proponent of slavery. As a

19. B. H. Roberts, *A Comprehensive History of the Church*, vol. 4 (Salt Lake City: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1930), 533.

20. Smoot fought in 1838 alongside Porter Rockwell among the Danites and served as a Nauvoo policeman. He migrated with his wife Margaret to Utah in 1847 as the leader of two companies of fifty; subsequently, Smoot captained three additional companies in 1850, 1852, and 1856, and also served a number

missionary in Alabama in 1844, he refused to distribute political literature for Joseph Smith's 1844 presidential campaign that proposed a gradual emancipation plan. After his move to Utah, historian Amy Tanner Thiriot has confirmed, Smoot owned or hired three slaves. The 1851 census slave schedule held in draft form at the Church History Library shows Abraham and Margaret Smoot in possession of a slave named Lucy; the Great Salt Lake County 1860 census schedule of "Slave Inhabitants" shows "A. O. Smoot" as being in possession of two male slaves, both age forty, one of whom, Jerry, may have been procured for him by Brigham Young.²¹

of foreign missions. Brigham Young acknowledged his leadership by appointing him superintendent of one of the valley's first sugar factories and bishop of the Sugar House ward, which set Smoot on a path to become alderman from the Sugar House district of Salt Lake City, then mayor of Salt Lake City from 1857 to 1866. It was Smoot who, in July 1857, discovered with Porter Rockwell the advance of US Army troops toward Utah and turned around from Missouri to ride back to Utah and personally warn Brigham Young. In 1868, at the instruction of Brigham Young, Smoot moved to Provo, where he became the region's effective governor—simultaneously serving as Provo City mayor (1868–1881), Utah Valley stake president (1868–1881), and, as the first head of the Board of Trustees of Brigham Young University. Smoot played an elemental role in the creation and consolidation of key LDS institutions and in Utah's early theocracy. See C. Elliott Berlin, "Abraham Owen Smoot: Pioneer Mormon Leader" (master's thesis, Brigham Young University, 1955).

21. Jerry had been the property of David and Duritha Trail Lewis, fellow Kentucky-born converts to the Church. Jerry came to Utah in the company of migrants led by David Lewis in 1851. He remained with the family after David's death in 1855, and on November 2, the Third District Court in Salt Lake County recorded three individuals among the "property" of the deceased:

1 coloured man (35 years old) . . . \$700

1 " woman (16 years old) \$500

1 " girl (11 years old) \$300

On August 4, 1858 Duritha filed a record with the clerk of the Third Judicial District Court for the Utah Territory registering these same individuals as her property:

Duritha Lewis who being duly sworn, states on oath that she is the true and lawful owner of three persons of African blood, whose names and ages are as follows to wit; Jerry, Caroline, and Tampian, aged 38, 18, 14. That she said Duritha Lewis inherited them from her father Solomon Trail according to the laws of the state of Kentucky. That by virtue of such inheritance, she is entitled to the services of the said, Jerry, Caroline, and Tampian, during their lives, according to the [laws] of the said Territory. That she makes this affidavit that they may be registered as slaves according to the requirements, of the said [laws] of the said Territory, for life.

As a widower who had initially been remarried but left that household, Duritha Trail Lewis was in a vulnerable economic position. On January 3, 1860, Brigham Young wrote to Duritha Lewis to encourage her to sell Jerry:

Dear Sister Lewis:

I understand that you are frequently importuned to sell your negro man Jerry, but that he is industrious an faithful, and desires to remain in this territory: Under these circumstances I should certainly deem it most advisable for you to keep him, but should you at any time conclude otherwise and determine to sell him, ordinary kindness would require that you should sell him to some kind faithful member of the church, that he may have a fair opportunity for doing all the good he desires to do or is capable of doing. I have been told that he is about forty years old, if so, it is not presumable that you will, in case of sale, ask so high a price as you might expect for a younger person. If the price is sufficiently moderate, I may conclude to purchase him and set him at liberty.

Your brother in the gospel, Brigham Young.

Young's letter is revealing in many respects. First, in noting that Duritha was "frequently importuned" to sell Jerry in Salt Lake City, it suggests that demand for slaves was greater than supply in Utah Territory. Second, it documents that Brigham Young was personally involved in exchanges or trades of slaves: he prevailed upon Duritha Lewis to advise her on the desirability of sale, to set pricing expectations, and to encourage her to sell him to another church member. Although Young offered to "purchase him and set him at liberty," presumably at a cost discounted from his seven-hundred-dollar 1855 valuation, this sale never materialized. Instead, by June 1, 1860, Jerry (along with one other forty-year-old Black man) was in the possession of Abraham Smoot. Both were presumably freed in 1862, though Jerry moved with the Smoot household to Provo in 1868 (Amy Tanner Thiriot, personal correspondence with author, Nov. 10, 2017). See "David Lewis Company (1851)," *Mormon Pioneer*

Smoot was an extraordinarily effective businessman whose enterprises included farming and ranching collectives, the first woolen mills in Utah, lumber mills and lumber yards, and banks. He amassed a substantial fortune, which he used at the end of his life to build the Provo Tabernacle and to pay the considerable debts of Brigham Young University, making him its first underwriter. It is unlikely that his few slaves held from the 1850s through 1862 played a substantial role in the growth of these industries or Smoot's wealth. However, it is clear that they played a significant symbolic and ornamental role for Smoot who, as a native Kentuckian and pro-slavery advocate, likely viewed slaveholding as an appropriate and necessary status marker for a man of means. Black lives were, to Abraham Smoot, a fungible display of wealth.

After the Saturday morning session of the Utah Valley Stake conference, Smoot brought back to one of his four Provo homes President John Taylor, Taylor's secretary John Nuttall, Brigham Young Jr., and Zebedee Coltrin. Coltrin, who had joined the Church in 1831, attended the first School of the Prophets in 1833, and emigrated to Utah in 1847, lived in Spanish Fork and was a member of Smoot's stake. Taylor sought from both men their understanding of Joseph Smith's views on race in connection with a request from Elijah Abel to be sealed in the temple to his spouse. As notes taken by John Nuttall document, Taylor first interviewed Coltrin, who stated that in 1834 Joseph Smith told him "the negro has no right nor cannot hold the Priesthood" and that Abel had been ordained

Overland Travel, <https://history.lds.org/overlandtravel/companies/185/david-lewis-company>; "In the Matter of the Estate of David Lewis," Third District Court, Salt Lake County Probate Case Files, no. 39, Nov. 2, 1855, <http://images.archives.utah.gov/cdm/ref/collection/p17010coll30/id/590>; text of statement reprinted in "Duritha Trail Lewis," *Our Family Heritage* (blog), July 3, 2011, <http://ourfamilyheritage.blogspot.com/2011/07/duritha-trail-lewis.html>; letter reprinted in Margaret Blair Young and Darius Aidan Gray, *Bound for Canaan* (Provo: Zarahemla Books, 2013).

to the Seventy as symbolic compensation for labor on the temple but dropped when his “lineage” was subsequently discovered. Coltrin also testified that he had experienced a deep sense of revulsion while ordaining Abel at Kirtland. Smoot spoke next, indicating that he agreed with Coltrin’s statement and recounting that when he served a mission in the southern states in 1835–1836, Joseph Smith had instructed him to neither baptize nor ordain slaves.²² Having traded for and hired Black men, Smoot understood the legal and social distinctions between free and enslaved Black men, but he did not maintain these differences in the testimony he provided to President Taylor, advancing Joseph Smith’s instructions in regard to conversion of slaves—a sensitive issue given the long and complicated history in the United States of proselyting and religious instruction of slaves, compounded by rumors in border and southern states that Mormons might seek to foment slave revolt—as though they were to pertain to Black men at large.

Smoot and Coltrin did not provide reliable testimony. Elijah Abel himself held and provided Church leaders with documentary evidence of his ordination as an elder on March 3, 1836, a fact reaffirmed in his patriarchal blessing, given by Joseph Smith Sr. He also owned and provided evidence of his ordination to the Third Quorum of the Seventy in the Kirtland Temple on December 20, 1836, which was commemorated in two certificates affirming his membership in the quorum in the 1840s and 1850s. In fact, just a few months before the interview at Abraham Smoot’s house, on March 5, 1879, as historian Paul Reeve has discovered, Abel spoke and shared his recollections of Joseph Smith at a meeting of the Quorums of the Seventy at the Council House in

22. Lester E. Bush, Jr., “Mormonism’s Negro Doctrine: An Historical Overview,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 8, no. 1 (1973): 31–32; Calvin Robert Stephens, “The Life and Contributions of Zebedee Coltrin” (master’s thesis, Brigham Young University, 1974), 53 n. 55; Reeve, *Religion of a Different Color*, 196–97.

Salt Lake City.²³ In the face of Abel's open, ongoing, and uncontested participation in LDS leadership, Smoot and Coltrin's testimony was bold and controversial. Even more striking is the fact that both Coltrin and Smoot were contemporaneous, living witnesses to Elijah Abel's ordination to the Third Quorum of the Seventy on December 20, 1836 in Kirtland. It was, in fact, Zebedee Coltrin himself who had ordained Abel, as records show, along with six other new members of the Third Quorum of the Seventy—including Abraham Smoot, that very same day in that same place.²⁴

It appears that Smoot and Coltrin jointly agreed to arrange their recollections to support a position opposing Black ordination and temple participation. They did so even though they themselves had been primary witnesses to Abel's ordination: Coltrin performed it, and Smoot was certainly present at the occasion and may have witnessed the actual ceremony. Both men withheld this vital testimony from President Taylor. Both men instead purposefully provided testimony that obscured the ordination, obscured vital differences between slave and free, and attributed an anti-ordination stance to Joseph Smith himself. Abraham Smoot and Zebedee Coltrin together bore false witness to bar full participation by Black men in the priesthood and temple ceremonies.

How do we understand what happened at the home of Abraham Smoot that day? How do we understand the dynamics that led both Coltrin and Smoot to arrange their testimonies to align and to obscure important facts in order to advance Black exclusion? It would be perfectly human for Abraham Smoot to allow his own views on the status of African Americans, views that had been fully supported by President Brigham Young, who helped broker Smoot's purchase of one of his slaves to influence him. He would have felt justified in doing so not only by the personal support of Brigham Young, but by the culture of theocratic

23. Reeve, *Religion of a Different Color*, 196–97.

24. Stephens, "The Life and Contributions of Zebedee Coltrin," 53–55.

expediency in which he had risen to power and by the near-complete absence of a culture of white abolitionism or emancipation in Utah in the 1850s, 1860s, and 1870s. He would have felt completely assured, in the majority, and in the right advancing his interest in Black exclusion. Zebedee Coltrin never owned slaves. In fact, after settling in Spanish Fork in 1852 and surviving three subsequent years of failed crops, his family had survived on pigweed and the food carried to them by a Black woman held in slavery by the Redd family—likely Marina Redd. Poverty had been a persistent feature of Coltrin’s post-emigration life. When Brigham Young instructed Abraham Smoot to organize the united order in Spanish Fork in 1873, Zebedee Coltrin was among those who joined, and even though he was not among those Smoot put forward as its slate of officers on May 2, 1874, Coltrin vocally encouraged his fellow high priests in Spanish Fork to deed their property to the order—as he had in all likelihood done himself. Smoot presided over the united order and held the deeds to land, including the land on which Zebedee Coltrin’s home stood.²⁵ Had he wanted to enlist Coltrin’s loyalties, to arrange their joint recollections to support Black exclusion, had he wanted to steer the meeting—held at his own home, with his own testimony to close—Smoot was certainly in a position to do so. And it would have been in his best economic and social interests for Coltrin to comply. In fact, to resist the implicit and explicit pressure of the situation, Coltrin would have to have been a man of exceptional clarity, resolve, and independence. The very nature of the testimony he provided that day does not suggest this was the case.

Additional insights are provided from the surviving text of Coltrin’s recollections, as documented in Nuttall’s journal. Coltrin recalled that he had always opposed the ordination of Black men, and that upon return from the Zion’s Camp expedition in 1834, he had put the question directly to Joseph Smith: “When we got home to Kirtland, we both

25. *Ibid.*, 77–78 and 86–88.

went into Bro Joseph's office together . . . and [Brother Green] reported to Bro Joseph that I had said that the Negro could not hold the priesthood—Bro Joseph kind of dropt his head and rested it on his hand for a minute. And said Bro Zebedee is right, for the Spirit of the Lord saith the Negro had no right nor cannot hold the Priesthood.”²⁶ As recollected by Coltrin, the story is arranged to feature Coltrin's primary connection with Joseph Smith, to highlight his own advance discernment of prophetic revelation, and to ascribe to Joseph Smith an affirmation of Bro Zebedee's “rightness.” Relationship, discernment, and rightness have been among the most powerful forms of social capital in Mormonism, and Coltrin arranged his recollections to claim all three for himself. His memory of Smith having “dropt his head” also suggests a micropolitics of fealty. Coltrin also claimed to have heard Smith announce in public that “no person having the least particle of Negro blood can hold the priesthood.”²⁷ The word “particle” can be traced to various speeches of Brigham Young on the question of Black ordination. Coltrin demonstrated his own fealty to Young by putting his words in the mouth of Joseph Smith in the presence of Young's son Brigham Young Jr. and his successor John Taylor. Coltrin, who despite his ordination to Patriarch to the Church in 1873, had—due in part to his financial and geographical marginalization in Spanish Fork—become a minor player in the affairs of the Church, enjoyed something of a personal renaissance after this interview, as he was invited by John Taylor to accompany him to temple dedications in his official capacity as patriarch in years following. Relationship, discernment, rightness, and loyalty or fealty shaped this pivotal moment in LDS history. The joint witness provided by Smoot and Coltrin, the consensus of two white men, was believed over documentation provided by a single Black man, Elijah Abel. Especially after

26. *Ibid.*, 55.

27. *Ibid.*, 55.

the death of Elijah Abel in 1884, the Smoot-Coltrin consensus came to serve as a basis for LDS Church policy.

Another instance of testimony reversal in the service of white supremacy came in 1908 under the leadership of President Joseph F. Smith. Smith had been present at critical meetings in 1879 to testify that Elijah Abel had been ordained to the priesthood by the Prophet Joseph Smith. He would continue to maintain this memory for the next sixteen years, going on record again in 1895 at a meeting of Church leaders convened by President Wilford Woodruff to consider Jane Manning James's request for temple endowment.²⁸ Over the next decade, Paul Reeve observes, as Church leaders received several questions pertaining to marriage and temple access for members who were Black, or even white members who had been previously married to Black spouses, the Church's position consolidated into one of exclusion. In 1901, Joseph F. Smith became LDS Church president. By 1907, the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve had agreed that no member of Black African descent could receive priesthood or be admitted to the temple.²⁹

Joseph F. Smith played a pivotal role in this stark and decisive reversal. On April 4, 1908, President Smith at general conference in Salt Lake City requested an organizational overhaul of the Church's priesthood organization, citing a specific concern that the "lesser" quorums of the priesthood should do more to engage young men and "make them interested in the work of the Lord."³⁰ Less than two weeks later, on April 16, 1908, Jane Manning James died in Salt Lake City, a death reported on the front page of the *Deseret Evening News* just hours later. At her funeral a few days later, LDS Church President Joseph F. Smith spoke, recalling his memories of her, as he had known her from the

28. Reeve, *Religion of a Different Color*, 202.

29. *Ibid.*, 207.

30. William G. Hartley, "The Priesthood Reform Movement, 1908–1922," *BYU Studies* 13, no. 2 (1973): 3.

time he was a five-year-old boy in Nauvoo, Illinois. On April 18, 1908, the LDS Church publication the *Liahona*, which was distributed to all LDS missions, published an article on “The Negro and the Priesthood” providing extensive rationale for the ban, citing the Pearl of Great Price and the Old Testament, arguing that Black people were the descendants of Cain and Ham, linking priesthood denial to that lineage as well as to a pre-earthly sorting out of spirits.³¹ In June 1908, the First Presidency established the General Priesthood Committee on Outlines, a standing committee that until 1922 conducted an overhaul and systematic reorganization of the priesthood and with an explicit goal of bringing in “a great many young men who are now neglecting the work.”³² First meetings of this group were held on June 5, 16, and 23, and they used the “middle months of 1908” to work out “problems” in the institutionalization of priesthood.³³

On August 26, 1908, at a meeting of the Council of the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve, President Joseph F. Smith responded to a letter from the recently returned president of the Church’s South Africa mission about whether missionaries should teach and baptize individuals of Black African descent. Smith instructed the council that Elijah Abel had been ordained to the priesthood but stated for the first time on record that this ordination “was declared null and void by the Prophet himself.”³⁴ He also cited as a precedent the denial of endowment and sealing privileges to Abel and James by Presidents Young, Taylor, and (mistakenly) Woodruff and argued for a “position without any reserve” that Black LDS people were not to be ordained, endowed, or sealed because they bore the “curse” of “Cainan” imposed by “the

31. Harris and Bringhurst, *The Mormon Church and Blacks*, 58.

32. Hartley, “The Priesthood Reform Movement,” 4.

33. *Ibid.*

34. Reeve, *Religion of a Different Color*, 209–10; Hartley, “The Priesthood Reform Movement,” 4–5.

decree of the Almighty.” In October 1908, “The Committee’s proposals were introduced and approved at October General Conference, then at special priesthood conventions in November.”³⁵

Why did Joseph F. Smith change his earlier testimony so dramatically, as to nullify the entire history of Black ordination? First, Smith belonged to a select cohort of LDS Church leaders who had been since 1852 affirming their relationships to one another through actions and decisions that upheld white interests over Black lives and white testimonies over Black testimonies. This “headquarters culture” was forged in and through white solidarity and white supremacy, and prophetic leadership in Mormonism had taken shape as the ability to command this consensus. Second, as his actions on polygamy show, Smith understood the necessity of winning acceptance to the mainstream. Reeve writes: “Their decisions regarding race, priesthood, and temples at the turn of the century are best viewed as efforts by Mormon leaders to facilitate Mormonism’s transition from charges of racial contamination to exemplars of white purity.”³⁶ Third, Smith was directly engaged in a project to consolidate and secure LDS institutions, especially the priesthood. It is at this point that “headquarters culture” is conveyed into priesthood organization Church-wide. It would have required an exceptional commitment to racial equality to advance Black ordination at this pivotal moment when the focus was on making priesthood association attractive to participation and commitment from young white Mormon men. It is critical to see Smith’s 1908 statements as part of the Priesthood Reformation and to recognize that Black exclusion was elemental to the formation of the modern LDS priesthood orders. Finally, it seems clear that President Smith found in the death of Jane Manning James freedom from accountability—from the discomfort

35. Ibid.

36. Reeve, *Religion of a Different Color*, 204.

of bearing false witness in the presence of someone who knew it was false—to the last living witness to the reality of Abel's ordination.

Across these instances we see what historians have concluded about the formation of whiteness as a valued category of identification and belonging. As Noel Ignatiev, Karen Brodtkin, and many others have observed, if their skin color allowed and if their conduct did not contest white supremacy, minority groups in the United States, even new immigrants like Irish and Jews who were the objects of deep prejudice, could “become” white and enjoy at least some measure of its privileges.³⁷ Thus developed what George Lipsitz has called a “possessive investment in whiteness.” He explains:

Whiteness has a cash value: it accounts for advantages that come to individuals through profits made from housing secured in discriminatory markets, through the unequal educations allocated to children of different races, through insider networks that channel employment opportunities to the relatives and friends of those who have profited most from present and past racial discrimination, and especially through intergenerational transfers of inherited wealth that pass on the spoils of discrimination to succeeding generations. . . . White supremacy is usually less a matter of direct, referential, and snarling contempt than a system for protecting the privileges of whites by denying communities of color opportunities for asset accumulation and upward mobility.³⁸

Nineteenth-century Mormons, as historian Paul Reeve has convincingly shown, were on the “wrong side of white”: repeatedly racialized and marginalized in popular opinion, the press, and by political and legal institutions.³⁹ At nodes of political and economic pressure, to secure the

37. Noel Ignatiev, *How the Irish Became White* (New York: Verso, 1995); Karen Brodtkin, *How Jews Became White Folks and What That Says About Race in America* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1998).

38. George Lipsitz, *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness: How White People Profit from Identity Politics* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2006), vii.

39. Reeve, *Religion of a Different Color*, 138.

welfare and advancement of the majority-white institutional Church, Mormon leaders staked out positions that although doctrinally incoherent, contradictory, and perverse nonetheless signaled Mormonism's alignment with broader systems of white supremacy.

More than that, what emerges across these three instances of reversal and discontinuity is active and intentional privileging of white relationships, loyalty, solidarity, and "rule" over Black lives and Black testimonies at the expense of theology, integrity, and ethics but to the benefit of institutional growth and dominion. This is the definition of white supremacy. White supremacy guided the formation of key LDS institutions—the theocratic territory of Utah, the modern correlated orders of the priesthood, even Brigham Young University, whose founding trustee and major funder bore false witness and influenced others to do the same in order to block Black Mormons from full access to priesthood and temple rites. The fact that each of these decisive moments takes shape around a reversal, a break, a contradiction underscores that these were not simply unintentional or unconscious concessions to dominant power structures. These were intentional decisions to advance white over black.

To manage the theological incoherence of an anti-Black stance on ordination and temple ordinances, the Mormon movement developed not only a *possessive investment in whiteness* but a *possessive investment in rightness*—a commitment to prophetic infallibility or "unstrayability" that was implicitly cultivated in public statements by Church leaders and fully subscribed to by the post-correlation LDS Church. At key points, as LDS institutional hierarchies consolidated, Church leaders formed camps to support one another in unity around contested points of doctrine and to silence dissent among the leadership. Thus, we find, in 1931, Joseph Fielding Smith bearing witness in his book *The Way to Perfection* that the policy against Black ordination came not from the white supremacy of Brigham Young, not from collusion between Young's friend and legacy caretaker Abraham Smoot and Zebedee Coltrin, not

from surrender by Joseph F. Smith, not from Mormonism's human history, but from time immemorial, from God himself.

Official Declaration 2 in 1978 removed the policy that was a product of Mormonism's possessive investment in whiteness and its possessive investment in rightness but it did not change those investments. To this day, whiteness retains a privileged position in Mormonism, and white supremacy is maintained by a deeply ingrained discipline among white LDS people of defending prophetic inerrancy or opting to maintain silence rather than voice objection to racism and white supremacy in LDS Church settings, including Sunday meetings. This has created a context of non-dialogism wherein radical white supremacists who are LDS feel comfortable going public while Mormon anti-racists, feminists, LGBTQ advocates and allies, and heterodox Mormons harbor a deeply internalized fear that opening their mouths to express opinions or to reject the racism and sexism of LDS Church policies and institutions past or present will lead to informal shunning or excommunication. This fear supports the perseverance of pervasive systematic white supremacy. Professor Darron T. Smith, a scholar of race in LDS life, has observed that LDS people live this every day in 1) suppression of conflict in order to "avoid" the discomfort of confronting privilege and discrimination (and the growth that comes with it), 2) underrepresentation of people of color in leadership, and 3) evasion of direct talk on race.⁴⁰

I would add that white privilege is maintained in LDS circles when white LDS people put responsibility on Black LDS people for doing the labor to address racism, when white LDS people correct people of color who present information, experience, or perspective in forums ranging from Sunday meetings to Facebook, when white LDS people maintain

40. Darron T. Smith, "Unpacking Whiteness in Zion: Some Personal Reflections and General Observations," in *Black and Mormon*, edited by Newell G. Bringhurst and Darron T. Smith (Urbana: University of Illinois, 2004), 148–66. See also Darron Smith, "The Persistence of Racialized Discourse in Mormonism," *Sunstone* 126 (March 2003): 31–33.

literal interpretations of Old Testament, Book of Mormon, and Pearl of Great Price scriptures on skin color and “racial identities,” and when white LDS people engage in uninformed and unnuanced celebration of LDS historical figures who openly espoused racist sentiments, held slaves, or opposed Black emancipation.

The possessive investment in rightness that was developed to shore up Mormonism’s possessive investment in whiteness also served to manage its contradictory positions on issues like polygamy. It furnished the terms by which LDS Church leaders managed a series of accommodations that secured Mormonism’s survival and white Mormons’ access to the privileges of white American citizenship. It also utterly shaped twentieth- and twenty-first-century Mormonism. First, it has served as a tool for managing and transitioning from the incoherence and instability of early Mormon belief and practice to its modern institutional correlation. Second, it has helped Mormonism manage ongoing contradictions in its scripture, prophetic statements, and actions. Third, it has helped Mormonism maintain its internal differentiation, its coherence, its “optimum tension” (as Armand Mauss put it) with the white mainstream, while yet accessing white mainstream advantages.⁴¹ But this has come at an expense. The possessive investment in whiteness and the possessive investment in rightness have put Mormons on the wrong side of many human struggles for dignity, autonomy, sovereignty, and well-being. They have allied the Mormon people with power structures that allocate life chances by race and made most Mormon people ignorant to the

41. On optimum tension, see Armand L. Mauss, *The Angel and the Beehive: The Mormon Struggle with Assimilation* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 7–11. On the value of folk belief in inerrancy to retrenchment, see especially Mauss’s “The Mormon Struggle with Assimilation and Identity: Trends and Developments Since Midcentury,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 27, no. 1 (1994): 129–49. See also John G. Turner, “‘All the Truth Does Not Always Need to be Told’: The LDS Church, Mormon History, and Religious Authority,” in *Out of Obscurity: Mormonism since 1945*, edited by Patrick Q. Mason and John G. Turner (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 318–40.

experiences of people of color. The possessive investment in rightness has stood in the way of engagement, conflict, and searching that lead to continuing revelation. It has put the LDS Church in the impossible position of defending the purity and literal veracity of our faith's entire nineteenth-century record, and it has cut off from communion with the Church those who could not do the same. Most importantly, the possessive investment in whiteness and the possessive investment in rightness have corroded the theological integrity of Mormonism as a Christian-identified faith.

Beginning to see that white supremacy was not just an egregious theological error but part of the building of Mormon institutions and communities, it is easier to make sense of other

facts and instances that seem at first startling and radically discontinuous with the faith professions of the Mormon people:

Robert Dockery Covington, the leader of the Cotton Mission organized by Brigham Young in 1857 to establish a cotton industry in southern Utah and an LDS bishop, recounted to fellow settlers (according to a contemporaneous record) stories of his physical and sexual abuse (including rape) of African American men, women, and children. His statue stands today in downtown Washington, Utah, and the name of Dixie College in St. George commemorates the area's ties to the American South.⁴²

In 1863, Brigham Young preached at the Salt Lake Tabernacle that intermarriage between Blacks and whites was forbidden by God on penalty of blood atonement—death. Declaring himself opposed to both slavery as practiced in the South and its abolition, Young declared: “The Southerners make the negroes and the Northerners worship them.”⁴³

42. Brian Maffly, “Utah’s Dixie was Steeped in Slave Culture, Historians Say,” *Salt Lake Tribune*, Dec. 10, 2012, <http://archive.sltrib.com/article.php?id=55424505&itype=cmsid>.

43. Harris and Bringhurst, *The Mormon Church and Blacks*, 43.

In December 1866, Thomas Coleman, an African American man, was found murdered in Salt Lake City—stabbed and his throat cut, a method of killing resembling “penalties” affixed in early Mormon temple rituals. An anti-miscegenation warning was inscribed on a sheet of paper and “attached” to his corpse, as reported by the *Salt Lake Daily Telegraph* of December 12.⁴⁴

On August 25, 1883, Sam Joe Harvey, an African American man, was arrested for allegedly shooting a police officer, then turned over to a Salt Lake City mob that hanged him and dragged his corpse down State Street.

On June 18, 1925 in Price, Utah, a crowd estimated at one thousand, including families with children carrying picnic baskets, gathered to see Robert Marshall, an African American miner who was Mormon, hung. The event is now regarded by some historians as the last lynching of a Black man in the American West.⁴⁵

In the 1940s and 1950s, LDS Church leaders including J. Reuben Clark advocated for the racial segregation of blood banks at hospitals so that white LDS people would not have their blood “mixed” through transfusions from Black donors and lose eligibility for priesthood, a practice that held in some areas in Utah through the 1970s.⁴⁶

In the 1940s and 1950s, George Albert Smith, J. Reuben Clark, and Mark E. Petersen encouraged local LDS leaders to join and support ordinances

44. Image sourced from Connell O’Donovan, “‘I Would Confine Them to Their Own Species’: LDS Historical Rhetoric and Praxis Regarding Marriage Between Whites and Blacks,” Mar. 28, 2009, <http://www.connellodonovan.com/images/coleman.jpg>.

45. Tammy Walquist, “Utah Lynching May Have Been Last,” *Deseret Morning News*, June 19, 2005, <https://www.deseretnews.com/article/600142549/Utah-lynching-may-have-been-last.html>; James Brooke, “Memories of Lynching Divide a Town,” *New York Times*, Apr. 4, 1998, <http://www.nytimes.com/1998/04/04/us/memories-of-lynching-divide-a-town.html>.

46. Harris and Bringhurst, *The Mormon Church and Blacks*, 68.

and organizations that would prevent Black citizens from moving into white neighborhoods in Utah and California.⁴⁷

In the 1940s and 1950s, after abandoning the instruction to teach only Brazilians of European descent, Church leaders in Brazil developed “circulars” directing missionaries to screen potential converts for Black African lineage by scrutinizing phenotypic features—hair, skin, features—at the door when tracting and to avoid teaching potential converts of African descent. The missionary lessons as delivered in Brazil also included a special “dialogue” scripted to detect African lineage and to teach converts that “Negroes” were not eligible for priesthood. Converts of African descent who persisted had their baptismal certificates marked with a “B” for Black, “C” for Cain, “N” for Negro, or similar, a practice that persisted into the 1970s.⁴⁸

In the 1950s, high-ranking LDS Church leaders Mark E. Petersen and Bruce R. McConkie delivered remarks and published as authoritative “doctrine” anti-Black speculative theology supporting segregation, opposing interracial marriage, and claiming that African Americans were cursed by God and that white supremacy was God’s will. Their words were, in Petersen’s case, circulated in typescript among BYU religion faculty through the 1960s, and in McConkie’s case remained in print with only minor revisions in the book *Mormon Doctrine* until 2010.⁴⁹

Brigham Young University sought to discourage applications and enrollments from Black students in the 1960s. Harold B. Lee wrote to Brigham Young University’s Ernest Wilkinson that he would hold him

47. *Ibid.*, 171.

48. *Ibid.*, 103.

49. Bruce R. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1958); Mark E. Petersen, “Race Problems—As They Affect the Church” (address delivered at Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah, Aug. 27, 1954, available at <https://archive.org/details/RaceProblemsAsTheyAffectTheChurchMarkEPetersen>); see also Harris and Bringhurst, *The Mormon Church and Blacks*, 68–69.

“responsible” if a “granddaughter of mine should ever go to BYU and become engaged to a colored boy there.”⁵⁰

At the LDS Church’s April 1965 general conference, apostle Ezra Taft Benson (who became LDS Church president in 1987) encouraged members worldwide to oppose the civil rights movement: “President David O. McKay has called communism the greatest threat to the Church, and it is certainly the greatest mortal threat this country has ever faced. What are you doing to fight it? . . . I [have] warned how the communists were using the Civil Rights movement to promote revolution and eventual take-over of this country. When are we going to wake up? What do you know about the dangerous Civil Rights Agitation in Mississippi?”⁵¹

During the 1990s and 2000s, as research by Dr. Darron T. Smith has shown, Brigham Young University disciplined and expelled Black students for alleged violations of the university Honor Code at disproportionately high rates.⁵²

White supremacist LDS people have used LDS scriptures and statements from General Authorities as support for contemporary “alt-right” white supremacy. In May 2017, Mormons who identified with the “alt-right” convened a #TrueBlueMormon conference featuring bloggers such as Ayla Stewart, who blogs and appears on social media as “Wife With A Purpose,” and in June 2017 LDS alt-right bloggers organized to attack and demean via Twitter Black LDS anti-racism advocates. In August

50. Darron T. Smith, *When Race, Religion, and Sport Collide: Black Athletes at BYU and Beyond* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman and Littlefield, 2016), 90–91.

51. As quoted in Harris and Bringhurst, *The Mormon Church and Blacks*, 78–79. Note that Harris and Bringhurst refer to the unaltered version of Benson’s address as recorded in David O. McKay Scrapbook #79, David O. McKay Papers, Special Collections, Marriott Library, University of Utah. The latter half of the quoted passage, beginning with “I [have] warned,” was not printed in the official conference report (see Official Report of the 135th Annual Conference of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Apr. 5, 1965 [Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, semiannual], 125).

52. Smith, *When Race, Religion, and Sport Collide*, see especially 101–16.

2017, Ayla Stewart was invited and scheduled to speak at the “Unite the Right” rally in Charlottesville, Virginia.⁵³

This is not a comprehensive list.

Systems as pervasive as white supremacy do not just transform quietly: they must be recognized, investigated, understood, and intentionally abandoned or dismantled. The global growth of the LDS Church and generational turnover in its leadership have certainly created conditions that are more favorable to change. But given the critical role of the possessive investment in whiteness in the formation of key LDS institutions and the continuing power of its cultural sequel, the possessive investment in rightness, this change must be intentional. Recent Mormon history provides three models for intentional change in Mormonism.

Movement from the Top

The first model would involve change effected “vertically” through statements and institutional changes made by LDS Church leaders. In the matter of racism, we see the following:

In 2006, President Hinckley personally apologized First African Methodist Episcopal Church of Los Angeles leader Cecil Murray and spoke out against racism in general conference.⁵⁴

In 2012, after BYU professor Randy Bott offered racist justifications for the priesthood ban to *The Washington Post*, the Mormon Newsroom issued a statement indicating that such justifications did not represent “official doctrine.”⁵⁵

53. Mary Ann, “Wife with a Purpose: Mormonism’s Alt Right Representative,” *Wheat and Tares* (blog), Aug. 15, 2017, <https://wheatandtares.org/2017/08/15/wife-with-a-purpose-mormonisms-alt-right-representative>.

54. Margaret Blair Young, “Pastor to Pastor: President Hinckley’s Apology for Racism in the Church,” *Patheos* (blog), Sept. 17, 2012, <http://www.patheos.com/mormon/pastor-to-pastor-margaret-blair-young-09-18-2012>.

55. Jason Horowitz, “The Genesis of a Church’s Stand on Race,” *The Washington Post*, Feb. 28, 2012, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/the-genesis->

In 2013, the LDS Church published a new Gospel Topics essay entitled “Race and the Priesthood” that offered a correct and fuller version of the histories behind the ban and the revelation.⁵⁶

In 2017, the Mormon Newsroom issued clear and strong denunciations of the violence in Charlottesville, racism, and white supremacy.

In 2018, the LDS Church hosted “Be One” commemorations of the fortieth anniversary of Official Declaration 2, centering around the testimonies and experiences of Black LDS people and featuring as well remarks by LDS Church President Russell M. Nelson and apostle Dallin H. Oaks modeling a more welcoming, reflective approach to race relations within the Church.

In June 2017, *Salt Lake Tribune* religion reporter Peggy Fletcher Stack published a list compiled by Black LDS Church members of additional changes the LDS Church could make to effect “movement from the top”:

Cast a Black Adam and Eve (or an interracial couple) in the film shown to faithful members in LDS temples.

Use more African American faces in Church art and manuals and display more artwork depicting Christ as he would appear: as a Middle Eastern Jewish man.

Pick more Blacks for highly visible leadership positions—if not an apostle, at least in the First Quorum of the Seventy (members of which are General Authorities) or in the general auxiliary presidencies.

Repudiate and apologize for the faith’s past priesthood and temple ban on Blacks, which the Church lifted in 1978.

Show the documentary film *Nobody Knows: The Untold Story of Black Mormons* to every all-male priesthood quorum, women’s Relief Society class, and Young Men and Young Women groups.

of-a-churchs-stand-on-race/2012/02/22/gIQAQZZXyfR_story.html; Mormon Newsroom, “Race and the Church: All Are Alike Unto God,” Feb. 29, 2012, <http://www.mormonnewsroom.org/article/race-church>.

56. “Race and the Priesthood,” Gospel Topics, <https://www.lds.org/topics/race-and-the-priesthood?lang=eng>.

Quote from the Church's Gospel Topics essay "Race and the Priesthood" regularly at LDS general conference and translate it into all the languages that the Church uses to communicate with its global membership.

Direct that the essay be read from the pulpit in every Mormon congregation and mission in the world.

Have the Book of Mormon scripture found in 2 Nephi 26:33—"all are alike unto God"—be a yearlong Young Women or Primary theme and make it part of the curriculum to talk about the sin of racism.

Bring more Blacks to LDS Church-owned Brigham Young University as students and faculty, while providing sensitivity training for all students about racial issues and interactions with people of color.

Teach children about heroic Black Mormon lives, such as LDS pioneers Jane Manning James and Elijah Abel.

Expand the LDS hymnbook to include more diverse songs and styles.

Enlist more people of color in the Mormon Tabernacle Choir.

Invite the choir from the Genesis Group—a longtime Utah-based support organization for Black Mormons and their families—to sing at general conference.

Use the Genesis Group to assist in improving relationships with the African American community.

Give the Genesis Group greater authority to exist in all states and to visit wards and assist lay bishoprics in how to avoid and overcome racism in their congregations.

Create a Church-sponsored Mormon and Black website akin to the one found at mormonandgay.org.

Treat the members of the Genesis Group's presidency as an auxiliary, seating them on the stand with other high-ranking authorities during general conference—and invite at least one of them to speak during the sessions.

Provide training on racial issues for newly-called mission presidents.

Include a mandatory class at missionary training centers that teach the “Race and the Priesthood” essay so missionaries are better prepared when they go out to preach.

Other steps to address past wrongs committed by LDS people could plausibly follow the model of the Church’s response after 2007 to the Mountain Meadows Massacre, which included collaborative efforts with descendants of massacre victims and local Paiute tribes blamed for the massacre, an explicit statement of responsibility and regret, and a physical memorialization of the wrongs at the massacre site, later designated a National Historic Landmark.⁵⁷ It is possible to imagine similar efforts including reparations to descendants of slaves owned and traded by LDS Church leaders and an incorporation of materials directly exploring the racist human origins of the ban and calling members to take responsibility for divesting from justifications for it in Church curricula and in general conference talks. It is also possible to imagine a rigorous, scholarship-supported conversation about LDS Church–owned institutional commemorations of individuals like Abraham Smoot who owned slaves and decisively and intentionally obscured truth to maintain the supremacy of white over black in Mormonism and exclude generations of Black people from what LDS people would understand as the blessings of temple rite participation, including ritual “sealings” that would have secured Black family relationships in the eternities. LDS Church–owned institutions like BYU could enter the national conversation about their history of institutionalized racism, privilege, accountability, responsibility, and restitution that can serve as a powerful learning experience for the thousands of future LDS Church leaders guided by trained historians who are committed Latter-day Saints. This might start by considering the way the institution honors men who were slaveholders or promoted racist views. For example, Brigham Young University has a building named after Smoot (the administration building) and Joseph F. Smith (the College of Family, Home, and Social Sciences), who also obscured truth to secure Black priesthood exclusion, as well as other LDS Church leaders like J.

57. See Peggy Fletcher Stack, “Mountain Meadows Now a National Historic Landmark,” *Salt Lake Tribune*, July 5, 2011, <http://archive.sltrib.com/article.php?id=52107971&itype=CMSID>.

Reuben Clark (law school), Harold B. Lee (library), David O. McKay (School of Education) and George Albert Smith (fieldhouse) who are on record as advocates of anti-Black racial segregation, along with Ezra Taft Benson (chemistry building) and Ernest Wilkinson (student center), who opposed the civil rights movement and sought to evade responsibility for institutional segregation. It would also place Brigham Young University among leading educational institutions who have elected to undertake productive scrutiny of their institutions' formative historical intersections with slavery and white supremacy.

Movement from the Margins

The second model involves efforts by LDS scholars, activists, and non-LDS groups and individuals to organize small, specifically dedicated advocacy efforts to persuade LDS Church leaders to pursue theological and institutional change. Past examples include spiritual and political efforts in the 1960s and 1970s by Genesis Group founder Ruffin Bridgforth, Darius Gray, and Eugene Orr; scholarship in the 1960s and 1970s by Armand Mauss and Lester Bush; subsequent writing by Gray, Margaret Young, Newell Bringhurst, Darron T. Smith, Janan Graham-Russell, and others; and ongoing advocacy and education efforts by Tamu Smith, Zandra Vranes, and many others. It is possible to imagine a stronger role for direct activism on the model of Ordain Women to pursue specific institutional changes around race, but this has not been the chosen approach.

Movement from the Middle

Third, there is the possibility of movement from the middle, wherein rank-and-file Mormons organize to change not just the thinking of the people at the "top" but work directly with other rank-and-file Mormons to improve understanding and change conduct. Social media facilitates an unprecedented level of this "horizontal" communication among Mormons, and recent years have seen groups like Feminist Mormon

Housewives and Mormons Building Bridges (a grassroots network focused on promoting love and acceptance for LGBTQI+ people) work diligently and effectively through online content, public gatherings, and retreats to support changemakers. Can grassroots organized “movement from the middle” work to change perspectives and conduct among LDS Church members? It seems important to consider that a key factor in driving Mormon LGBTQ+ ally “movements from the middle” has been the Mormon emphasis on family togetherness. Some—but not all—of the strongest voices in these movements emerged because a child, sibling, or other loved one came out as LGBTQ+. Because they refused to choose between their family and their faith, LDS LGBTQ+ allies organized to set the faith community right at the grassroots, persisting despite daunting theological and political initiatives from LDS Church leadership, such as the November 2015 ban on baptism of the children of LGBTQ+ families. It may be that white Mormons will move into action only when they feel that dismantling white supremacy is as critical to their own spiritual wholeness as losing a family member.

Mormons will have to choose to acknowledge the pivotal and pervasive role of white supremacy in the founding of LDS institutions and the growth of the Mormon movement. White LDS people will have to choose to see the possessive investment in whiteness and the possessive investment in rightness as a harm to spiritual wholeness and as corrosive to the faith—individual, collective, and institutional. Among the many fruits of this work may be a faith that is more resilient when confronted with its own enormous and inevitable humanness, a faith that need not be protected from its own history—a faith capable of surviving its failures and recognizing, renouncing, and repairing its wrongs.