

ONE DEVOUT MORMON FAMILY'S STRUGGLE WITH RACISM

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No other aspect of Latter-day Saint teachings led to more discussion, ridicule, head-shaking, and even outrage in the twentieth century than the Church's position regarding Black African priesthood denial.¹ While most American mainstream religious denominations were tainted with irrational racist thinking at one time or another, the majority had shed themselves of racist thought by the 1960s, and some of these denominations even placed themselves at the forefront of the civil rights movement.² Other alternative Christian movements that arose in a

1. The inspiration for this study came from an address delivered by Dr. Gregory A. Prince entitled "Lowell Bennion, David O. McKay, Race, and Priesthood" at the symposium accompanying the 2014 Sterling M. McMurrin Lecture on Religion and Culture. The symposium was called "Faith and Reason, Conscience and Conflict: The Paths of Lowell Bennion, Sterling McMurrin, and Obert Tanner" and was held on April 12, 2014 at the Carolyn Tanner Irish Humanities Building on the campus of the University of Utah.

2. Northern Church opposition to segregation by the 1950s is well known. Less well known is opposition to segregation among Southern clergymen. Southern segregationist politicians in the South in the 1950s and 1960s tended to view their Southern white churches as their enemy. Southern Baptists and Southern Presbyterians went on record in favor of desegregation in the mid-1950s, as did the Methodists in a national vote. Billy Graham, the most famous Southern Baptist, shared his pulpit at a New York City crusade with Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., and he also endorsed what he called the "social revolution" Dr. King was leading in the South. Graham would not allow segregated seating at his crusades, even at those held in the South. See David L. Chappell, *A Stone of Hope: Prophetic Religion and the Death of Jim Crow* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 141–42.

similar fashion to Mormonism—denominations such as the Disciples of Christ (Campbellites), Seventh-day Adventists, Jehovah’s Witnesses, and even the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (known now as Community of Christ)—managed to avoid racism as a central teaching altogether. Key Mormon leaders, on the other hand, continued to entertain beliefs in white racial superiority and Black African moral and racial inferiority, which ideas had their origins as a defense of chattel slavery in seventeenth-century America.³ Numerous books and articles have been written on the topic of LDS Black priesthood denial in all of its various aspects, but this study concentrates on one aspect of the discussion—the so-called “one-drop” rule brought about by the imagined “curse of Cain” and his descendants—and how it adversely affected a single devout Mormon family in rural Utah. Americans in general subscribed to the notion that a single drop of Black African blood was enough to color an entire ocean of whiteness. The idea first developed in the American South, from there spread to the entire United States, has become a codified legal concept, and was accepted by both whites and Blacks alike. Also called the “one black ancestor rule,” the “traceable amount rule,” and by anthropologists the “rule of hypo-descent,” the “one-drop” rule posits that racially mixed persons are assigned the status of the subordinate group, even if they show none of the characteristics of the group to which they are assigned. Thus, to be considered Black in the United States, one only needs to have a known Black African ancestor, no matter how remote.⁴ Within the LDS Church, “one drop” of Black African blood denied a Mormon male of all rights to priesthood ordination and his family of access to the most important temple rituals, which are thought to be essential for

3. See David M. Goldenberg, *The Curse of Ham: Race and Slavery in Early Judaism, Christianity, and Islam* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2003), 142.

4. F. James Davis, *Who Is Black?: One Nation’s Definition* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995), 5.

exaltation in the afterlife. Belief in this doctrine led to a serious amount of grief, frustration, hardship, heartache, and even severe racial identity problems in an otherwise devout Mormon family in the small rural town of Fillmore, Utah.

By the early part of the twentieth century, Mormon racial doctrine in all of its aspects was solidified. Mormon racism was based on a lineage hierarchy, i.e., there were thought to be “chosen” or “royal” lineages and lineages that were inferior and “cursed.” Mormon leaders and scholars promoted the idea that because of their valiant and heroic efforts in a “war in heaven” during a premortal spiritual life, they had entered mortality as a chosen people to further God’s work on earth and to preserve, administer, and exalt the ordinances of the priesthood. They taught that they had entered mortality, or the “second estate,” through the lineage of Joseph’s son Ephraim, and were thus, along with the Jews, God’s chosen people.⁵ Blacks, on the other hand, were said to be inferior because of a divine curse that God had placed on the entire lineage of Adam’s son Cain—the so-called “mark of Cain.” Cain’s descendants inherited a cursed black skin, which survived the Great Flood through Egyptus, who was thought to be a descendant of the biblical Cain, and her husband, Noah’s son Ham. This couple’s son Canaan continued the

5. Armand L. Mauss, *All Abraham's Children: Changing Mormon Conceptions of Race and Lineage* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003), 24–30. In addition to Armand Mauss’s classic treatise on Mormonism and race, there are a host of excellent studies on the subject: Lester E. Bush, Jr., “Mormonism’s Negro Doctrine: An Historical Overview,” in *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 8, no. 1 (Spring 1973): 11–68; Newell G. Bringhurst, *Saints, Slaves, and Blacks: The Changing Place of Black People Within Mormonism* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1981); and Matthew L. Harris and Newell G. Bringhurst, eds., *The Mormon Church and Blacks: A Documentary History* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2015). Twentieth-century Mormon views on racial lineage are contained in two influential works by prominent LDS Church leaders: Joseph Fielding Smith, Jr., *The Way to Perfection* (Salt Lake City: Genealogical Society of Utah, 1931), and Bruce R. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1958).

curse, and his progeny were banned from receiving the priesthood and further condemned to be “servant of servants.” The inferior status of Blacks was determined to be based on their behavior during premortal life in the spirit world. Just as there were noble and great spirits in the premortal existence, there were less valiant, cowardly, and indifferent spirits—those who entered earthly life cursed with a “black covering emblematical of eternal darkness.”⁶ These less valiant and morally inferior individuals were barred from receiving the Mormon priesthood and could not participate in the most important sacred temple rituals. Individuals with any known Black African ancestry, no matter how remote, were subject to these restrictions—the so-called “one-drop” rule—even if there were no outward signs of Black African ancestry. Those of the chosen lineage were also warned to never intermarry with the “seed of Cain.” “If the white man who belongs to the chosen seed mixes his blood with the seed of Cain,” Brigham Young stated in an 1863 speech, “the penalty, under the law of God, is death on the spot. This will always be so.”⁷ This racial ideology was given a scriptural proof text with interpretations of various passages in the book of Abraham in the Pearl of Great Price, which was canonized in 1880. When the story of the Marshall family begins, there was thus in place a priesthood ban for those thought to have the “blood of Cain” based on First Presidency precedent, interpretations of Mormon scripture, and a culture supportive of Mormon attitudes toward Blacks and those thought to be Black.⁸

The saga of the Marshall family begins not in Fillmore, Utah, but rather in Crenshaw County, Alabama, a rural area in the Deep South located not far from the state capital of Montgomery, where seminal events of the civil rights movement—events such as the Montgomery Bus Boycott made famous by Rosa Parks, the Selma to Montgomery

6. Smith, *The Way to Perfection*, 103.

7. Quoted in Harris and Bringhurst, *The Mormon Church and Blacks*, 43.

8. *Ibid.*, 44–45.

marches, and the Bloody Sunday massacre—took place in the mid-twentieth century. There Dorcas Leanna Faulk (1872–1938) was born to Hannah Faulk (1836–1903), a “mulatto” woman who was given a “wide path” by many local citizens because she mixed magic potions, was thought to be capable of casting spells on people, and was believed to have supernatural powers related to witchcraft.⁹ Hannah herself was the product of a relationship between a young widow, Nancy Faulk (1802–1887), and an unknown Black man, most likely a slave.¹⁰ Dorcas’s father was Isham Bodiford (1834–1904), a prominent farmer and Civil War veteran who was known as a “busy boy” because of his many amorous adventures.¹¹ All of the available federal censuses recorded in

9. Dorcas was likely named after the woman in Acts 9:36–42 who was raised from the dead by the Apostle Peter.

10. In the antebellum South, liaisons between white women and Black men were grudgingly tolerated, especially if the white woman was of the poorer class. See Martha Hodes, *White Women, Black Men: Illicit Sex in the Nineteenth-Century South* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1997), 1–3.

11. For a discussion of Isham Bodiford’s Civil War activities, see Margaret M. Storey, *Loyalty and Loss: Alabama’s Unionists in the Civil War and Reconstruction* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2004), 69, and the Southern Claims Commission File Number 17530, Sworn Before George H. Patrick, Special Commissioner on Aug. 30, 1875. On Isham’s amorous adventures, see Chris Jarvis, “Isham Was a Busy Boy,” Oct. 4, 2010, <https://www.ancestry.ca/family-tree/tree/18478156/story/e793c3cb-a6a7-42a0-8fe2-c6ec917db572>. Information on Hannah Faulk is contained in Sue Faulk Todhunter, *Our Matriarch: Nancy Faulk* (Lacey’s Spring, Ala.: R. G. Todhunter, 2003), ii. Black women in the South were often leaders in and practitioners of African-derived forms of popular or folk religion, which evolved during and continued after emancipation. Focusing on magic and the supernatural, it involved healing and harming beliefs and practices. See Deborah Gray White, Mia Bay, and Waldo E. Martin, Jr., *Freedom on My Mind: A History of African Americans*, 2 vols. (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 2013), 2:383.

the state of Alabama list Dorcas as being “mulatto,” a term reserved for mixed-race persons assigned to Black status under the “one-drop” rule.¹²

Almost a decade after Dorcas’s birth, Mormonism arrived in Crenshaw County. Following the Civil War, religion became an even stronger force in the South than it had been before 1860, and it was dominated by evangelical churches with a strong emphasis on a literal interpretation of the Bible and informal and often enthusiastic worship. Strongest among the Protestant denominations were the Baptists and the Methodists—the two denominations accounted for nearly 90 percent of the official church membership in the region—but other groups were also active, including Campbellites, Seventh-day Adventists, Primitive Baptists, and both “Brighamite” and “Josephite” Mormons.¹³ The South was viewed as a prime area for proselyting following the Civil War, and a large number of LDS missionaries were sent there. Mormonism was, however, new to the Deep South in the late 1880s and early 1890s, but had already been active in Tennessee, northern Alabama, Virginia, and other southern areas, where it had been met with ridicule, expulsion, violence, whippings, tarring and feathering, and even death to a handful of missionaries and members by vigilante groups.¹⁴ The LDS Church thus faced a tough slog gaining converts in the South. This was especially true in southern urban cities, and Mormon missionaries, therefore, concentrated their efforts in backwoods, rural areas. As Joseph S. Geddes, the president of the Southern Alabama Conference of the Southern States Mission, wrote on April 6, 1895, “In the more

12. Interestingly enough, the 1910 and 1920 censuses in Fillmore, Utah list Dorcas’s race as being “white,” but the 1930 census records her as being “Negro.”

13. William Warren Rogers, Robert David Ward, Leah Rawls Atkins, and Wayne Flynt, *Alabama: The History of a Deep South State* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1994), 274.

14. Patrick Q. Mason, *The Mormon Menace: Violence and Anti-Mormonism in the Postbellum South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 133–43.

metropolitan cities we find the people are much more indifferent to our doctrines than elsewhere.”¹⁵

Mormon elders first appeared in Crenshaw County in the late 1880s, and as was the case elsewhere in the South, they were met with hostility and stiff resistance. Family stories tell of how Claiborn “Babe” White (1850–1911) and Isham Bodiford, both of whom were large and powerful men, prevented groups of men from whipping, tarring and feathering, and expelling missionaries from the county.¹⁶ Joining Mormonism was difficult and often meant social and familial isolation and ostracism, but by 1895 there was a thriving colony of Mormons in this rural part of the Deep South. Why people accepted the Mormon message is not clear from missionary reports and family records, but join they did. “Uncle Isham,” as he was known to the missionaries, was the chief benefactor of the local branch in Crenshaw County, and he provided food and lodging hundreds of times to the missionaries. Meetings were held on the “Bodiford Old Field,” either out-of-doors when weather permitted or in a large frame building on the property provided by Brother Bodiford. The Sunday School Movement had been sweeping the South for several decades among all Protestant denominations, and a Mormon Sunday School was organized on October 26, 1895 by Elders Joseph Geddes and Joseph West. It was given the name “The Bodiford Sunday School” in honor of Isham. President Geddes established his headquarters on the Bodiford property in LaPine, Alabama. Several large conferences with as many as two hundred attendees were held there in the 1890s and early 1900s. “The Lord is certainly stretching forth his mighty arm and gathering his people, Israel,” wrote an enthusiastic Elder Daniel H.

15. Joseph S. Geddes, *South Alabama Conference Manuscript History and Historical Reports*, Apr. 6, 1895, LR176782, folder L, Church History Library, Salt Lake City.

16. *Millard County Progress*, Dec. 23, 1938, 1.

Thomas on March 13, 1897.¹⁷ The branch thrived, and many baptisms were performed. Dorcas Leanna Faulk's baptism occurred on May 26, 1896. "Our mission is not to the Negroes," the missionaries were instructed by the legendary president of the Southern States Mission J. Golden Kimball (1853–1938). "We are not to visit nor preach to them. Those who seek for the Gospel we shall teach, but them only."¹⁸ Dorcas sought out the missionaries aided by her father Isham Bodiford, and she was rewarded with membership in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Hannah Faulk died in 1903, and Isham Bodiford passed away in 1904. Sometime after October 1904, Dorcas migrated to Utah with Josephine "Josie" Frances Bodiford (1864–1938), Isham's second wife, whom he married in 1896, and her children. Cousins of the Bodiford family, Elizabeth Bodiford Whitaker (1865–1932) and Sara Jane Bodiford White (1862–1945), had already moved to Utah and settled in the small town of Hatton, near present-day Kanosh, in eastern Millard County.¹⁹ Because of her heavy Southern accent, Dorcas became known as "Darkis" or "Darkus Folk." A photograph from the early twentieth century shows her as a woman of color; not long after arriving in Fillmore, she married a widower by the name of Jesse Millgate (1840–1922) on December 2, 1905. Even though a Utah law of 1888 prohibited mixed-race marriages, no one in Fillmore seemed to mind at the time. Jesse Millgate was born in

17. Daniel H. Thomas, *South Alabama Conference Manuscript History and Historical Reports*, Mar. 13, 1897, LR176782, folder 1, Church History Library, Salt Lake City.

18. Charles S. Cottam *Missionary Journal* (1891–1897), MS 21106, 33, Church History Library, Salt Lake City.

19. Sara Jane Bodiford married Claiborn White, who was also from Crenshaw County, Alabama, and together they moved to Mesa, Arizona. Their grandson Wilford "Whizzer" White (1928–2013) played football for Arizona State University and was halfback for a short time with the Chicago Bears. His son Danny White played for the Sun Devils and was the punter and longtime quarterback for the Dallas Cowboys of the NFL.

Lansdowne, Isle of Sheppey, England, converted to the LDS Church there, migrated to Utah in 1871, and settled in Fillmore in 1874. While still in England, Mr. Millgate married Mary Jane Morris Millgate (1843–1884), and together they raised a family of six girls. Jesse Millgate had already been a prominent member of the Fillmore community for several decades when he married Dorcas Faulk: he had been a brickmaker and mason for a number of years, owned a limestone kiln in Chalk Creek Canyon, learned to be a plasterer or “calsominer,” and for a number of years was the town sexton (sextons in early Utah prepared graves for burial and cared for the town cemeteries).²⁰ Jesse Millgate was praised for his industriousness in the community, had the reputation of being an upright citizen, and was known to be a faithful member of the LDS Church in Fillmore. Even though Mr. Millgate became a semi-invalid toward the end of his life because of his earlier strenuous physical work, he spent his final years weaving rugs, gardening, and raising his young family.²¹ Dorcas gave birth to two daughters, Gussie Millgate Marshall (1907–1990), Jessie Millgate Holley Thornton (1909–1996), and a son, Jeremiah “Jerry” Millgate (1910–1992). These were happy times for the Millgate family, and only ended when the family patriarch passed away on August 19, 1922.

The 1920s and 1930s were difficult years for Dorcas Faulk Millgate and her young family. She was a single mother raising three young children—the oldest being Gussie, who was only fifteen years old in 1922—on her own under trying circumstances. The family, nevertheless, was known for its hard work and for its faithfulness to the Church. When Dorcas passed away in late December 1938 from cancer, she was described by Nona Hatton Brown (1902–1982), the wife of the Millard Stake President Arthur C. Brown (1899–1992), as having been “a most

20. *Millard County Progress*, Aug. 25, 1922, and Edward Leo Lyman and Linda King Newell, *A History of Millard County* (Salt Lake City: Utah State Historical Society, 1999), 157.

21. *Millard County Progress*, Aug. 25, 1922, 1.

ambitious and hard working woman,” “honest and upright,” “a faithful tithing payer,” and a “most faithful member of her church” who was “always willing to do her share and more.”

Despite their faith and good works, the family lived a shunned existence because of their known racial heritage. Nona Brown further described Dorcas as “a quiet stranger in our midst” and her life as having known “toil and care” and “bitter loneliness.”²² Dorcas’s two daughters—Gussie and Jessie—married and raised families in Fillmore, although continuing rumors of the family’s mixed-race heritage made successful marriage difficult for them. The son, Jerry Millgate, fought in Europe during World War II and was wounded at the Battle of the Bulge, and though he spent some years in Fillmore, he spent much of his time living in Salt Lake City and the Los Angeles area.

The eldest daughter, Gussie, married a man named Frank Marshall, though he spent most of the time working away from Fillmore and the family, and to this couple four children were born: Frank Marshall Jr., who was known as “Junior” to most people in Fillmore; Eldon DeRoy; Joyce; and Jesse Ross. Because Dorcas had been known to be a person of color and Gussie herself exhibited some characteristics coded as Black at the time—much more so than her younger sister Jessie Thornton—problems arose for the family when the boys reached priesthood age. They were denied priesthood ordination by the local Church authorities, in keeping with LDS Church policy, and instead were seated in a row behind the deacons when the sacrament was passed during the church service. Local authorities thought this would make the boys feel they were part of the service, even though they could not actively participate. Since they did not look any different from the other boys their age and had no contact whatsoever with Black people or Black culture, they could not understand why they too could not be ordained to the priesthood and have full participation in church activities. The local LDS Church

22. *Ibid.*, Dec. 23, 1938, 1.

officials could do nothing to help Gussie Marshall with her predicament due to Church policies, so she consulted with Elder Marion G. Romney (1897–1988), who was at the time an assistant to the Council of the Twelve Apostles and was attending the Millard Stake conference on June 4, 1944 on behalf of the Church Welfare Department. Elder Romney, who had been a lawyer and would become one of the longest-serving General Authorities in the history of the LDS Church, had only been called as a member of the third-tier council of the Church in 1941. During this meeting in Fillmore, Gussie Marshall explained her problem and apparently admitted to Elder Romney that there had been a Black progenitor in the family, but the color line had “run out” since none of her children exhibited signs of Black African heritage.

Upon returning to Salt Lake City, Elder Romney consulted with two members of the Quorum of the Twelve: Elder Joseph F. Merrill (1868–1952), who had a PhD in the physical sciences from Johns Hopkins University and who, according to Gordon B. Hinckley, had a “compassionate heart” beneath a “brusque exterior,” and Elder Albert E. Bowen (1875–1953), a former lawyer with a law degree from the University of Chicago.²³ In keeping with long-standing Church policy, these three men determined that the Marshall boys were ineligible for priesthood ordination because of their slight African lineage. In a letter sent to Gussie Marshall dated June 16, 1944, Elder Romney wrote that his “heart is touched with the tragic problems you face,” but male members of the Church “who have a trace of negro blood in their veins, though they themselves show apparently no signs of it, may not receive the priesthood.” He went on to write that this answer would “continue to stand as it does until another ruling is made.” He further stated that life has trials that cannot always be understood, but someday a merciful God will make known the reasons for all our sorrows. He concluded by saying he hoped the Lord “will give you wisdom sufficient for your

23. Gordon B. Hinckley, “Church Mourns Passing of Elder Joseph F. Merrill,” *Improvement Era* 55, no. 3 (March 1952): 147.

needs that you may be able to keep your boys true and faithful to the standards and principles of the Gospel, even though they cannot now understand why they are not permitted to hold the priesthood.”²⁴ Gussie must have been heartbroken at the news of this decision, but she was a strong woman and remained active and steadfast in her belief in the LDS Church in spite of this major setback. She counseled her children to remain faithful to the Mormon Church because she was confident the family would someday enjoy the fullness of the Gospel, and her boys would receive the blessing of priesthood ordination.²⁵ Her oldest son Frank Marshall Jr. (1931–2017), however, became angry and estranged from the Church because of his priesthood denial and spent most of his adult life living near Pensacola, Florida, where he was a member of the Harold Assembly of God.

As the Marshall children grew older, it became apparent that they possessed considerable talents and abilities, and because of this they were liked and respected by nearly everyone in the community. This was especially true in the field of athletics. Frank Marshall Jr. was a good baseball player, a boxer, and a talented football player, being for a time the quarterback on the Dixie Junior College team in St. George, Utah. The youngest son, Jesse Ross, was a star track runner, a decent football player, and a good student as well. Joyce, the lone daughter, had a sparkling personality. She was elected cheerleader in high school multiple years, was selected as a rodeo queen attendant, played the

24. Marion G. Romney to Gussie Marshall, June 16, 1944, Church History Library, Salt Lake City. The papers of Marion G. Romney are currently closed to the public, and the author wishes to thank the Restricted Access Committee at the Church History Library for providing a copy of the correspondence for this study.

25. Interview with Lamar Melville in Salt Lake City on September 22, 2018. Mr. Melville, who was for many years a city judge in Wendover, Utah, was a neighbor of the Marshall family in Fillmore. He was a close personal friend, went to church and school with, and participated in team sports with Eldon Marshall. Gussie Marshall was at one time his Sunday School teacher.

clarinet well, and was well-liked by everyone. Some in Fillmore even doubted the racial lineage rumors about the Marshall family because Joyce was so pretty, vivacious, talented, and had blond hair.²⁶ When she attended college at Utah State University, she became a cheerleader and a member of the school's marching band, although she withdrew from school when other girls shunned her upon hearing rumors of the family's Black lineage. Exceeding them all in physical talent, however, was the middle child Eldon DeRoy Marshall (1933–2001). Eldon excelled in track, especially the sprints, was a starter on the basketball squad, a star pitcher and center fielder in baseball, and, above all, an outstanding football player. In his senior year, Eldon led Millard High School to its first of many Class B state championships, and he was selected first team all-state halfback. He was even given his own honor assembly on February 8, 1951. On this occasion Hack Miller, sports editor for the *Deseret News*, presented him with the first Thom McAn bronze football shoe trophy “in recognition of his selection as the most outstanding high school football player during the 1950 football season.”²⁷ At the same honor assembly, Otto Wiesley presented Eldon with an award as the most outstanding junior American Legion baseball player during the 1950 summer season. Eldon was awarded a football scholarship to the University of Utah and played on the team during the 1951, 1952, and 1956 seasons, although he never achieved the same stardom in college that he did at Millard High School.

In spite of the children's achievements, life was almost always a struggle for the Marshall family. Being a single mother with four children to raise, Gussie had to make ends meet as best she could. Good jobs were scarce in rural Fillmore, and Gussie could only find employment in the most menial and low-paying jobs, such as doing maid work in local motels and working in local restaurants. Money was scarce in the

26. Interview with Bishop Jerrold Warner in Fillmore, Utah, July 11, 2014.

27. *Millard County Progress*, Feb. 2, 1951, 1.

Marshall household, as evidenced by Gussie's frequent appearance on the delinquent property tax rolls published in the local newspaper every year. Even though the family raised a large garden and owned a small farm, existence was difficult for the family most of the time. Most of the citizens of Fillmore were kind to the family, and Gussie was respected for her hard work. The family was active in their local ward, and they were well-respected there. The family participated in church activities and programs in the ward such as musical programs and plays, they went on excursions and trips, Gussie was once made Primary secretary, and the children were always active in the various church youth groups, though the boys were denied priesthood ordination. Stake President Roy Olpin (1909–2002), the local undertaker, even once organized a group of local citizens to improve the housing situation for the Marshall family, although a small minority in town complained about the assistance. There was always, however, the ever-present rumor among the people of Fillmore of racial impurity in the Marshall family line, and this was a very serious problem, resulting in racial identity problems for the entire family. An out-of-town girl visiting her cousin in Fillmore dated Frank "Junior" Marshall, and when she returned, she was told by her mother to never again date that "nigger."²⁸ Eldon Marshall later complained that none of the local girls in high school would date him, and one of his female classmates confirmed that she had refused his offer of a date because she feared "falling in love" when "nothing could ever result from the relationship."²⁹ The whole lineage question would come to a head in 1957 when Joyce Marshall and her fiancé Paul Anderson decided they wanted their marriage to be solemnized in the Salt Lake Temple.

Eldon Marshall enrolled at the University of Utah in the fall of 1951 on a football scholarship, and at the same time took courses and

28. Interview with a former classmate of the Marshalls who wishes to remain anonymous in Salt Lake City, June 29, 2014.

29. Interview with a former classmate of the Marshalls who wishes to remain anonymous in Fillmore, Utah, July 11, 2014.

attended services at the LDS Institute of Religion, which had been established and was directed by Dr. Lowell L. Bennion (1908–1996). Bennion was a noted scholar—having done graduate work in Europe at universities in Erlangen, Vienna, and Strasbourg—humanitarian, and friend of students at the university, and the two men encountered one another in a very emotional way. Following Sunday School one day, Eldon went to Bennion and with tears in his eyes explained how he was asked to pass the sacrament but had to decline since he did not hold the priesthood. When asked why not, Eldon explained how it was believed in his hometown of Fillmore that his grandmother had come from the South and was believed to possess a Black African bloodline. Bennion was flabbergasted at hearing this since Eldon had blue eyes and blond hair. Bennion did not believe in the LDS Church's teachings regarding race and its priesthood ban. He thought the racial policies had first been enunciated at a time when no one questioned their authenticity, and then a dubious theological structure, based on false premises, had been constructed to bolster them. He also categorically rejected the notion that alleged behavior in a premortal life led to a curse in earthly existence. Bennion made his views known to a few insiders, including President David O. McKay, but later felt he had not been vocal enough condemning the teachings and had “compromised my integrity in not standing up and shouting it from the housetops.”³⁰ Bennion was also aware that such ideas caused serious problems to individual and family lives, as was the case with Eldon Marshall and his family.

Lowell Bennion and Eldon Marshall developed a close personal relationship after the emotional encounter. Eldon was often invited to the Bennion home for dinner, and he played football on the back lawn with the Bennion children. Eventually this close contact ceased when

30. Mary Lythgoe Bradford, *Lowell L. Bennion: Teacher, Counselor, Humanitarian* (Salt Lake City: Dialogue Foundation, 1995), 93–94. See also Gregory A. Prince and Wm. Robert Wright, *David O. McKay and the Rise of Modern Mormonism* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2005), 79.

Eldon was injured during the 1952 football season and dropped out of school. He then enlisted in the US Army for two years and, upon returning, worked in Salt Lake City at the ZCMI men's department and at Kennecott Copper Corporation. One day, the same student Dr. Bennion had known years earlier appeared in his office with another perplexing problem. Eldon's younger sister Joyce, whom Bennion had met years earlier, wanted to be married in the Salt Lake Temple, but she was unable to get temple clearance from her local ecclesiastical authorities. Eldon, in the meantime, had spoken with apostles Mark E. Petersen (1900–1981) and Joseph Fielding Smith, both of whom he had come to know while working at the ZCMI men's department, where most General Authorities bought their suits, and they had taken the matter up with the Quorum of the Twelve. The bride and groom were interviewed extensively by members of the Twelve, but matters were not proceeding well because of Marion G. Romney's previous discussions and correspondence with Gussie Marshall concerning priesthood ordination for her sons. Elder Romney, who was now a member of the Quorum of the Twelve, discussed the letter he had sent to Gussie Marshall in 1944 with the other members of the Twelve, and this stalled movement toward allowing the temple marriage to proceed. Two racial hard-liners, Elders Smith and Petersen were, interestingly enough, not the main obstacle in the way because they both believed that the rumors of Black ancestry in the Marshall family were false, but rather it was Marion G. Romney who blocked the wedding. With the wedding scheduled for Friday, June 14, 1957, Eldon telephoned Lowell Bennion on Tuesday, June 11 and told him he had given up hope for a positive outcome. But the ever-optimistic Bennion replied, "Let me see what I can do."³¹

Beginning in 1935, just after he became the founding director of the Institute of Religion at the University of Utah, Bennion developed a close personal relationship with David O. McKay (1873–1970), who in

31. Bradford, *Lowell L. Bennion*, 165.

1951 became the president of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Paul H. Dunn in a 1995 interview with Gregory Prince told how “Lowell was as close in the 50s to David O. McKay as any outsider ever was.”³² Bennion telephoned his friend Hugh B. Brown (1883–1975), who like Bennion rejected the LDS Church’s racial ideology and actively sought to abolish the priesthood ban, and he set up an appointment for the institute director to meet with President McKay on Wednesday morning, June 12, 1957. Bennion explained the Marshall wedding situation to President McKay and appealed to his sense of justice, mercy, and fairness by stating, “President McKay, in my experience the gospel builds life. Here I see it tearing it apart, tearing it down.”³³ President McKay responded to Bennion’s plea for help, and although it was almost too late to do anything, he said, “Leave it to me.”³⁴

Just one day before the scheduled wedding was to take place, David O. McKay next contacted a number of people familiar with the Marshall family. Since Elder Romney already knew there was Black lineage in the family, he would have been the likely candidate to halt the wedding, but he preferred not to be the one standing in the way of eternal bliss. “I should be perfectly happy,” Romney told President McKay, “to approve your decision.”³⁵ McKay next spoke with Arthur C. Brown, the former president of the Millard Stake, and when asked about the possibility of “colored blood” in the Marshall family, he replied, “there has always been an understanding that it was there.” When asked if he had known the grandmother “Darkus” Faulk Millgate, President Brown, who had offered the closing prayer at her funeral in 1938, stated, “She certainly looked

32. Prince, “Lowell Bennion, David O. McKay, Race, and the Priesthood.”

33. Bradford, *Lowell L. Bennion*, 165.

34. *Ibid.*, 166.

35. Telephone conversation between David O. McKay and Marion G. Romney, June 13, 1957, David O. McKay Collection 668, box 39, University of Utah Special Collections.

like there was negro blood there.”³⁶ In spite of this positive testimony as to Black ancestry in the family, President McKay, who personally favored racial segregation and opposed race-mixing, next telephoned Bennion and asked him if he noticed any indication of Black ancestry in Eldon Marshall. The institute director replied, “No, he said he had talked with a geneticist and he had said that there was no evidence. But there is no evidence of color in the family.”³⁷ A few years earlier in connection with questions of race in the South African Mission, President McKay had established the policy that if racial origins were based only on rumor, the person in question should be given the benefit of doubt and allowed priesthood ordination. Since there was some question in his mind in this case after speaking with Bennion, President McKay decided to allow the wedding to take place, being of the opinion that if he erred on the side of mercy, a loving God would forgive him of the error.³⁸ He next spoke with Paul Anderson, the anxious groom, and told him, “I do not see how you can make it, but I think we shall let you go through the Temple.”³⁹ Later that evening, President McKay spoke with Roy Olpin, the Fillmore Stake president, and authorized him and Bishop Lloyd Mitchell (1918–2008) to issue the temple recommend for Joyce Marshall since there was no “absolute proof” of Black ancestry in the family. Upon learning of President McKay’s decision to allow the wedding to take place, President Olpin

36. Telephone conversation between David O. McKay and Arthur C. Brown, June 13, 1957, David O. McKay Collection 668, box 39, University of Utah Special Collections.

37. Telephone conversation between David O. McKay and Lowell L. Bennion, June 13, 1957, David O. McKay Collection 668, box 39, University of Utah Special Collections.

38. Prince and Wright, *David O. McKay*, 77–79.

39. Telephone conversation between David O. McKay and Paul Anderson, June 13, 1957, David O. McKay Collection 668, box 39, University of Utah Special Collections.

declared, “We haven’t better people than the Marshall family in the ward.”⁴⁰ President Olpin also authorized the granting of a temple recommend to Gussie Marshall so she could attend the wedding sealing.

The Anderson/Marshall wedding was a whirlwind affair: Joyce Marshall’s temple recommend was only signed on the evening of June 13, the couple got up very early the next morning to travel to the Salt Lake Temple, and after the sealing ceremony, the entourage drove all the way back to Fillmore—a distance of about 150 miles on windy roads through all the towns between Fillmore and Salt Lake City—for the reception hosted by Gussie Marshall. “Popular Young Couple United in Marriage” read the headline in the local newspaper. The reception was well attended—“the gift room was filled to capacity with gifts”—and it was a joyous occasion for all concerned.⁴¹ The dream of a temple marriage reached fruition for the young couple, and Gussie’s lifelong desire to go through the temple to receive her endowment was fulfilled.

Most everyone in town was thrilled at the proceedings since Paul and Joyce were well-liked and respected, but not everyone was pleased. Since the earliest beginnings of Mormonism, there has existed a sense of exclusiveness in the organization, and there were a few in Fillmore who felt that perhaps President McKay had overstepped his bounds in allowing the marriage to take place in the temple—doing so allowed people to enter the holy edifice who were, in some minds, not entitled to do so. Linda King Newell, the co-author of both the definitive work on Emma Smith and an excellent history of Millard County, recalls how news of the wedding spread like wildfire throughout the community and the surrounding area. Although only a high school student at the time, she remembers going to Kelly’s Store, where the bridal registry was kept, and overhearing the clerk and a customer discussing the wedding and

40. Telephone conversation between David O. McKay and Roy Olpin, June 13, 1957, David O. McKay Collection 668, box 39, University of Utah Special Collections.

41. *Millard County Progress*, June 21, 1957.

saying, “Can you believe what David O. McKay allowed to happen?”⁴² In 1957, there were still many residents in east Millard County who had known Dorcas Faulk Millgate personally, and thus rumors of Black ancestry in the Marshall family persisted.

Other radical changes took place in the Fillmore Third Ward following the Anderson/Marshall wedding. On Sunday, June 23, 1957, Jesse Ross Marshall and his cousin Leonard Royal Thornton were ordained and sustained as priests in the Aaronic Priesthood, and the younger Jay Ralph Thornton was ordained to the office of teacher.⁴³ A week later Eldon Marshall, who was working in Salt Lake City at the time, was ordained to the office of priest.⁴⁴ A few months later Eldon was ordained an elder in the Melchizedek Priesthood by Lowell Bennion. Later he was called to serve as a missionary in the Northern States Mission headquartered in Chicago, Illinois, where he labored in Illinois, Wisconsin, and Nebraska from 1957 to 1959. Eldon’s missionary testimonial took place on October 27, 1957, and the featured speakers were Lloyd P. George (1920–1996), who would later become Fillmore Stake president and still later a General Authority, and Lowell Bennion, who drove all the way from Salt Lake City to Fillmore to participate in the missionary farewell. David O. McKay’s decision to allow the temple wedding for the Marshall family and priesthood ordination for the worthy males thus bore immediate fruits, and it had long-term positive results as well. Eldon would later serve a mission in Kentucky with his wife, his brother Ross would spend many years as a seminary teacher and school principal in various locations in the Intermountain West, their cousin Jay Thornton would serve a mission in the Gulf States Mission and spend twenty years working for the LDS Church as an accountant, and Paul and Joyce Anderson would occupy a host of leadership positions in the Church in Utah and California and preside over the Australia Melbourne Mission from 1995

42. Interview with Linda King Newell in Salt Lake City, Aug. 6, 2014.

43. *Millard County Progress*, June 28, 1957, 3.

44. *Millard County Progress*, July 5, 1957, 3.

to 1998. President McKay's decision to bypass rumor and hate in favor of "building lives rather than tearing them apart" proved to be the wise and correct decision as Lowell Bennion insisted it would.

Jesse Ross Marshall (1936–1997) had an outstanding academic career. He completed two years of general education at the College of Southern Utah in Cedar City, acquired a bachelor's degree in education with a major in zoology from Brigham Young University, achieved a master's degree in educational administration from BYU, and was awarded an education specialist certificate from the University of Utah. He joined the Church Education System and taught seminary in Moreland, Idaho, and was the seminary principal as well. He later moved to Missoula, Montana and became an institute instructor at the University of Montana, while simultaneously acting as coordinator of early morning seminaries in northern Montana. From 1969 to 1982 Ross was employed as a high school principal in Sunburst, Montana; North Summit High School in Coalville, Utah; and North Sevier High School in Salina, Utah. At the same time, he served in a number of leadership positions in the LDS Church, including bishop of the Wanship Ward in Summit County, Utah.⁴⁵ Although members of his family never complained about rumors of Black African blood, it bothered them a lot, and Ross developed a seething resentment toward the people of Fillmore. It became such an obsession that he eventually wrote a book cataloging injustices imposed upon the Marshall family by many of the people of Fillmore with their constant flow of gossip concerning Black African lineage. Eventually the obsession became so overwhelming that Ross contacted Elder Marion D. Hanks (1921–2011), whom he had met while employed in the seminary system and who was a member of the First Quorum of the Seventy. Elder Hanks arranged a meeting between Ross Marshall and the First Presidency, including President Spencer W. Kimball (1895–1985). The meeting took place in the Church Office Building on April 13, 1977 and was a rather lengthy affair in which [Ross

45. "Death: Jesse Ross Marshall," *Deseret News*, Apr. 24, 1997, <https://www.deseretnews.com/article/556615/Death--Jesse-Ross-Marshall.html>.

vented his numerous complaints against some of the people of Fillmore for their rumormongering, and it concluded with President Kimball and the other members of the First Presidency giving Ross Marshall a blessing through the laying on of hands.⁴⁶

Overcome by the anguish expressed by Jesse Ross Marshall, President Kimball, accompanied by his personal secretary D. Arthur Haycock (1916–1994) and the second counselor in the First Presidency, Marion G. Romney, made the decision to drive to Fillmore in order to participate in the Fillmore Utah Stake conference on April 17, 1977 “to endeavor to resolve a problem of a Brother Ross Marshall that has been troubling him for a number of years.”⁴⁷ Quarterly stake conference was usually well-attended, but when word was announced that the prophet of the Lord would be attending the meeting, “an overflow crowd was waiting in the Stake House to welcome him.”⁴⁸ Ross Marshall was the first speaker, and he told how he had lived his life with the rumor of Black African lineage that had supposedly been cleared up by President David O. McKay in 1957. He told of how he had hatred in his heart for the people of Fillmore, had written a four hundred–page book in which he chastised those who had spread rumors, and stated that he would destroy the book before its publication. He asked the people of Fillmore to forgive him “that this great burden be lifted from him.”⁴⁹ President Kimball followed as the second speaker. He said that a few people had been persecuting the Marshall family over Black African heritage, and “after this day not a word will ever be heard or spoken concerning this matter. And if it is shall be squelched immediately.” He went on to say the matter should be “buried forever,” and “if anyone ever hears this matter

46. Spencer W. Kimball journal entry for Wednesday, Apr. 13, 1977. The journal entry was provided to the author by Edward L. Kimball, President Kimball’s son.

47. Spencer W. Kimball journal entry for Sunday, Apr. 17, 1977.

48. *Millard County Progress*, Apr. 27, 1977, 1.

49. Fillmore, Utah Stake Record, recorded by Max L. Day and signed by President Lloyd P. George, Sunday, Apr. 17, 1977.

discussed they should be told it is not true.”⁵⁰ President Romney then cautioned everyone present to “always speak the truth” and “be careful to comply with the instructions of the President of the Church,” and he bore his testimony that President Kimball “is a living mouthpiece [*sic*] of the Lord.”⁵¹ Stake president Lloyd P. George concluded by stating, “we have heard the word of the Lord. And we vow that we will take heed to the council [*sic*], and we will kill this rumor that has gone forth from this area.”⁵² Those attending the conference left with the feeling that they would be endangering their eternal salvation and even their current Church membership if these rumors persisted, and there was a definite and perceptible decline in rumors concerning the matter following President Kimball’s visit and chastisement. Most people in Fillmore, Utah are reluctant to discuss the matter even some forty years later.⁵³

In spite of President Kimball’s unscheduled visit to the Fillmore Stake conference in 1977 and his call for a halt to rumors of Black African ancestry in the Marshall family, problems did not end there. Many in Fillmore resented the fact that Ross Marshall had brought so much unwanted attention to their community through a chastising visit by the prophet of the Lord and his counselor, and he was very unpopular in the town after that. Additionally, there was the problem of racial identity in the family. The Marshall family worldview was deeply influenced in a negative way by the rumor of “tainted” blood in the family.⁵⁴ All of the Marshall children—who identified with white

50. Ibid.

51. Ibid.

52. Ibid.

53. In conducting many interviews with people who attended the Fillmore Stake conference, the author could only find a limited number willing to discuss the proceedings, and nearly all prefer to remain anonymous.

54. The American Psychological Association does not recognize racial identity as a disorder in its *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual* (DSM-5), but many believe it should be included. See Davis, *Who is Black?*, 150–56 for a discussion of how

Mormon culture and had no connection whatever with Black people or Black culture—suffered serious racial identity problems because they were assigned to an inferior “cursed” lineage through the application of the hypodescent or “one-drop” rule. Frank Marshall Jr. became deeply embittered toward the LDS Church and found spiritual comfort in the Assembly of God denomination, Eldon Marshall expressed deep sadness to Lowell Bennion about not being allowed priesthood ordination and even consulted a genetics expert as a college student in order to be sure of his racial identity, and Joyce Marshall Anderson suffered traumatic ostracism as a college student and was always haunted by rumors of Black ancestry that followed her everywhere she lived.⁵⁵ One immediate family member confirmed that rumors of Black ancestry in the family were a problem “like you would never know” and were a source of heartache, trauma, and tragedy for everyone concerned.⁵⁶ It was Jesse Ross Marshall, however, who suffered most deeply and tragically from racial identity problems. He became a “marginal man” due in large part to his racial identity angst: he failed to find peace within himself even after a prophet’s blessing and intervention, his marriage floundered and ended in divorce, and he died by suicide in 1997.⁵⁷

racial identity caused serious psychological problems for the singer and actress Lena Horne. There have been a host of studies on problems created by racial identity. See, for example, Margarita Azmitia, “Reflections on the Cultural Lenses of Identity Development,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Identity Development*, edited by Kate C. McLean and Moin Syed (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 286–96, and Frank C. Worrell, “Culture as Race/Ethnicity,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Identity Development*, 249–68.

55. Interview with Joyce Anderson’s sister-in-law Madge Warner in Fillmore, Utah, Dec. 7, 2015.

56. Telephone interview with an immediate family member who prefers to remain anonymous in Salt Lake City, June 7, 2014.

57. Many have told the author of Ross Marshall’s suicide. Most recently a friend and neighbor of the family, who has known the family for more than eight decades, confirmed this in an interview in Fillmore, Utah, July 24, 2017.

President Spencer W. Kimball, who had been greatly concerned about the LDS Church's racial policies and the priesthood and temple bans for many years before his visit to Fillmore in 1977, began in the spring of 1978 an earnest attempt to come to grips with changing these long-standing policies. After weeks of intense fasting, pleading, and prayer aimed at lifting the priesthood and temple restrictions on Black members of African descent, President Kimball at last on Thursday, June 1, 1978 received firm confirmation to reverse Church policies that had been in place since 1852. This "most dramatic moment of the Kimball administration" and "highlight of Church history in the twentieth century" has been canonized in the Doctrine and Covenants under the title "Official Declaration 2."⁵⁸ Although the revelation on the priesthood had immediate and far-reaching repercussions for the LDS Church, it was, nevertheless, an incomplete measure in that it failed to address the broader question of Mormon racist ideology that had been so important to every Church leader since the administration of Brigham Young. The LDS Church continued to publish books containing racist ideas by influential authors such as Joseph Fielding Smith and his son-in-law Bruce R. McConkie (1915–1985), and professors of religion at Brigham Young University still taught discredited racist myths in their classrooms. The official position was at first to allow "[t]he 1978 official declaration to speak for itself."⁵⁹ Racial prejudice remained a continuing problem within Mormonism, however, and on April 2006 at a priesthood session of general conference, President Gordon B. Hinckley (1910–2008) said, "I remind you that no man who makes disparaging remarks concerning those of another race can consider himself a true disciple of Christ. Nor can he consider himself to be in harmony with the teachings of

58. Edward L. Kimball, "Spencer W. Kimball and the Revelation on Priesthood," *BYU Studies* 47, no. 2 (2008): 5, and Edward L. Kimball, *Lengthen Your Stride: The Presidency of Spencer W. Kimball, Working Draft* (Salt Lake City: Benchmark Books, 2010), 309.

59. Harris and Bringhurst, *The Mormon Church and Blacks*, 131.

the Church of Christ. . . . Brethren, there is no basis for racial hatred among the priesthood of the Church.”⁶⁰ That same year apostle Jeffrey R. Holland referred to past racist ideas within Mormonism as “folklore” in an interview with Helen Whitney for the PBS production entitled *The Mormons*. It was not, however, until Randy Bott, a professor of religion at BYU, expressed ideas that Black people were under the “curse of Cain,” had been less valiant in a premortal life, and had not been ready to receive the priesthood in response to questions from a *Washington Post* reporter in 2012—the year Mitt Romney was seeking the presidency of the United States—that the LDS Church officially renounced earlier racist thinking on the part of Church leaders.⁶¹ On December 6, 2013, the Church issued the Gospel Topics essay “Race and the Priesthood” on its official website LDS.org, in which it was declared that the Church “disavows the theories advanced in the past that black skin is a sign of divine dishonor or curse, or that it reflects unrighteous actions in a premortal life; that mixed-race marriages are a sin; or that blacks or people of any other race or ethnicity are inferior to anyone else.”⁶²

The LDS Church had finally formally abandoned its problematic past racist positions, but it was, sadly enough, not done in a more formal setting such as a declaration by the president of the Church in general conference or a First Presidency manifesto, and it was about seventy years too late to help the Marshall family, seriously burdened as it was by policies based on racial mythology.⁶³

60. *Ibid.*, 133.

61. *Ibid.*, 139. For a complete discussion of the Randy Bott incident, see Matthew L. Harris, “Mormonism’s Problematic Racial Past and the Evolution of the Divine-Curse Doctrine,” *The John Whitmer Historical Association Journal* 33, no. 1 (Spring/Summer 2013): 90–114.

62. “Race and the Priesthood,” Gospel Topics, Dec. 2013, <https://www.lds.org/topics/race-and-the-priesthood?lang=eng>.

63. That racism still exists in LDS congregations can be inferred by a statement published recently in the *Church News*: “White supremacist attitudes are morally wrong and sinful, and we condemn them. Church members who promote or pursue a ‘white culture’ or white supremacy agenda are not in harmony with the teachings of the Church” (“Statement on Racism,” *Church News*, Aug. 19, 2017, 2).