

motivation, an assessment that would support Brooks' overarching thesis without a need to go beyond the evidence. Because Brooks' message is relevant and forceful, getting the history right matters so that the meaning does not get dismissed in the muddle.

Brooks' ultimate goal is to know how to dismantle systems of inequality within Mormonism. A frank confrontation with the power of whiteness in Mormon history is one facet of Brooks' hoped for dismantling. Her call to action is thus grounded in a rejection of racial innocence and proposes instead a racial reckoning—one that *Mormonism and White Supremacy* demonstrates is long overdue.

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Mormonism and White Supremacy as White Mormon Scholarship

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Joanna Brooks' *Mormonism and White Supremacy* is certain to engage readers who have opinions about (white) Mormon theology, (white) Mormon culture, (white) Mormon people or white American, anti-black supremacy as a concept and sociohistorical practice. This is because of the unconscious ways that her use of "Mormon" is often conflated with "White" despite the growth of Mormon congregations internationally since the 1970s. This type of oversight is similarly rooted in the same unknowing "racial innocence," the concept that holds white people immune from taking responsibility for practicing racism. Brooks associates this with the continued unconscious actions of white

supremacy within the institutional Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. For readers inside Mormonism and outside of whiteness, this work will read very similarly to other white Mormon scholarship. This should not be a deterrent to readers who may find themselves fatigued to read another racially innocent Mormon history review.

Before expanding on the shortcomings in Brooks' approach in this book—I do want to state support for the obvious: Brooks is one of the first, if not the only, white woman scholars to toss her hat (or bonnet?) in the ring to discuss racism, white supremacy, and Mormonism—as a ripe opportunity, on purpose, and with intention. While the intentions may not be fully prepared to disrupt the systemic white supremacy so much as encourage more reflection on the system's existence, the words of her work must be acknowledged for their positioning within the genre.

Its most helpful presentation of information, that simultaneously is certain to foster distress in some progressive Mormon feminist readers, is the outlining of Eliza R. Snow's damaging words that upheld white supremacist patriarchy as a weapon against Black people. Snow is an active demonstration of internalized sexism (adopting ideas from "whatever source she trusted," namely Joseph Smith, p. 36) and externalized racism acting to protect her white feminist position just above that of Black members of her shared faith. In her treatment, Brooks opens up a crack in the foundation of modern white Mormon feminists who revere Snow's words and works. While certainly disheartening for a hero's pedestal to wobble, this is an excellent point to engage, deconstruct, and begin the work of repair for all Mormon women and any person committed to the deep exercise of feminist consciousness-raising—and to do so *knowingly* versus innocently.

In its historical narrative, the book repeats most of the well-known information of historical white Mormon racism in previous scholarship. For readers who are new to white Mormon scholarship on white Mormon racism, they may be encouraged when Brooks states her goal in this book is to, "move the conversation yet another step by exploring how the predominantly white venues and denominations

through which we have pursued the sacred and hope to pursue mercy and justice have themselves contributed—if unknowingly—to white supremacy” (p. 3). The use of the word “unknowingly” is a key that will clue the reader in to the unfortunate “more of the same” narratives of many white Mormon scholars who refuse to name the Church as a racist institution on its own. This is the concept of racial innocence in action that at once implicates and then absolves the Church from its participation in and perpetuation of white supremacy. White Mormonism, then, is as much a victim of “the times” as the Black people on the receiving end of Mormonism’s brand of white supremacy. This is a significant wound to readers—white and of color—who want to see a more critically racially conscious, and thus hopeful, lens from which to engage the Church.

Brooks’ use of “unknowing” racial innocence asserts the minoritized experience of early Latter-day Saints is an explanation that excused early Mormonism from doing what is right (choosing to betray whiteness and steadily pursue efforts to maintain itself as an inclusive, multicultural church) and letting the consequence follow (continue to be ostracized, penalized and marginalized by American whiteness). Brooks sets for herself a limit. She does not “wish to impugn the character of individuals” (p. 16), namely, the church leaders who built an international religious organization by impugning the character of Black communities. Racial innocence is what protects Mormonism in its victimizations while it is actively victimizing by seeking reprieve on the occupied lands of peoples indigenous to this country.

This limit poses some problems in the analysis and contributes to the perpetuation of the problem she is encouraging us to engage. In one passage, she notes the problem of infallibility as a condition for leadership and its followers:

Infallibility kills: it kills the bodies of those marked expendable, it kills relationships with those who dissent, and it kills the souls who suffocate on their own ignorance and privilege. It kills courage, it kills hope, it kills faith, and it kills the kind of historical memory that helps

a religious community understand itself and find its next steps toward holiness. (p. 111)

However, Brooks' commitment not to impugn the character of Church leadership in her review of their words and their works contributes to the belief in their infallibility that must be deconstructed. This is an example of the struggle every Mormon must *knowingly* engage. While it is not done so by the white historians and scholars credited in Brooks' work, it can be seen in the public writing, activism, ongoing media advocacy and education efforts of Black members, named and unnamed in her book, but who, unfortunately, are not seen as scholars of their lived Mormon experiences or their published works to date. While painful, it too, is another area for committed Mormons to knowingly engage for change.

The book primarily focuses on church leaders and on the choices they made in pursuing, versus dismantling, white supremacy, not only in their failures but also "successes." It is important to note that the successes she directly names, the BeOne Priesthood Celebration event and the Legacy of Black Pioneers (aka Black LDS Legacy) conference that preceded it months prior and continues annually, are actually the results of grassroots efforts of Black community members. The work that went into creating both the Legacy Conference and the Priesthood restoration events were not agitations of direct action. Brooks recommends the activist behaviors of Ordain Women, the feminist direct action from the 2010s that petitioned the church to extend priesthood ordination to women, as one model for transformation. But these methods do not transfer seamlessly to Black communities. Instead, they can be regressive and damaging. The brief suggestion is evidence of the same privileges and challenges of internalized sexism, coupled with aggrieved entitlement, endemic to many efforts of white feminists who feel that Black communities' experiences of racist oppression are similar to white women's experiences of sexism. To suggest Ordain Women's approach as beneficial to Black Mormons today, is shortsighted.

Finally, Brooks offers recommendations for the institutional church itself to change from the top by using suggestions from Black people at the margins. This is burdensome on marginalized people, though well-intentioned as it clearly values the suggestions given. However, the institutional church is not the only organization or group that needs to change. Brooks acknowledges that in order for liberal Mormon organizations to confront racism in the church, they have to see their investment in white-identity politics as “corrosive to the tradition.” A clear call to action requires a reckoning; White privileged and white proximal groups actively benefit from the Mormon white supremacy of “not being Black” and as such must stop comparing their present-day oppression experiences to pre-1978 priesthood and temple practices denial. It perpetuates white racial innocence and prohibits them from seeing their active racism against Black communities within the Church’s feminist and LGBTQIA+ movements. Thus, change must come from the top and especially from the middle because the middle is what works hardest to stay higher than the bottom and away from the margins.

I appreciate Brooks’ work in *Mormonism and White Supremacy* for the continued talking points it presents its readers to *knowingly* engage in critical race consciousness raising, even when it is a byproduct of the book’s shortcomings more than by design of the book. May those with eyes to see and ears to hear, who do justice and love mercy, put their shoulders to the wheel.

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