WHITE IS AN ITE: THE BOOK OF MORMON'S MISAPPROPRIATION OF THE IROQUOIS GREAT LAW OF PEACE

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> *And now behold, it came to pass that the people of Nephi . . . became an exceeding fair and delightsome people. . . . [N]either were there Lamanites nor any manner of ites, but they were one, the children of Christ*
>
> *—4 Nephi 1:10, 17*[1]

The Book of Mormon's portrayal of a great peace that followed the climatic appearance of Jesus Christ in ancient America presents a conundrum. The people of Nephi reportedly became especially "white," a label that is described simultaneously as *not* an "ite." On the one hand, the narrator Mormon represented the "people of Nephi" as "fair and delightsome."[2] Yet, a few verses later he declared that there

1. Royal Skousen, ed., *The Book of Mormon: The Earliest Text* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2009), 643–44. A special thank you to Kerrie Sumner Murphy, Hemopereki Simon, Manuel Padro, Max Mueller, and Angelo Baca for responding constructively to draft forms of this essay, which synthesizes ideas presented more fully in Thomas W Murphy, *Unsettling Scripture: Iroquois and the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2026).

2. The term "fair," as used here, appears to be a synonym for the label "white"—especially given its pairing with "and delightsome," as in "white and delightsome"—a phrase used earlier in the original text to describe anticipated changes following Lamanite "knowledge of Christ" (2 Ne. 30:5–6). Skousen, *Earliest Text*, 148. Likewise, the term "people of Nephi" appears to be a synonym for the ethnonym "Nephite" commonly used throughout the text.

were no longer "any manner of ites." The paradox in this portrayal is that Nephites, even if they absorbed whitened Lamanites and renamed themselves the people of Nephi, remained rather literally (wh)ites. Put more bluntly, the label "white"—just like "Lamanite" and "Nephite"—remains an ite.

In his 2017 book, *Race and the Making of the Mormon People*, historian Max Perry Mueller confronts the same troubling passage from Fourth Nephi, noting that "Lamanites and Nephites unified to become one raceless (white) Christian people." Mueller recognizes an unseemly paradox: "whiteness is the racial category that is, ironically, empty of race." White is presented as "the original and universal racial category" as well as a mutable one: "within the Book of Mormon hermeneutic of restoration whiteness becomes an aspirational identity, which even those cursed with blackness can achieve."[3] In his 2024 book, *The Testimony of Two Nations*, Michael Austin, provost of Snow College, applauds the mutability of curses and races in the Book of Mormon. Austin asserts that in contrast to curses in biblical texts, "The curse in the Book of Mormon is reversible and tied clearly to continuing behavior." He suggests that despite "the overt racism in some of its passages concerning race and skin color, it [the Book of Mormon] injected something genuinely new in to the divine-curse-as-racial-etiology genre of scripture."[4]

3. Max P. Mueller, *Race and the Making of the Mormon People* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017), 42–43.

4. Michael Austin, *The Testimony of Two Nations: How the Book of Mormon Reads, and Rereads the Bible* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2024), 67. Narratives of racial mutability were neither novel nor unique in 1820s New York and New England. They can be found in the writings of Protestant missionaries, ceremonial magicians, novelists, proto-ethnographers, and Revolutionary War veterans. See Matthew W. Dougherty, *Lost Tribes Found: Israelite Indians and Religious Nationalisms in Early America* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2021), 176, n27; Thomas W Murphy, "Imagining Lamanites: Native Americans and the Book of Mormon" (PhD diss., University of Washington, 2003), 18–24, 75–76, https://www.academia.edu/10367006/; D. Michael Quinn, *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View, Revised and Enlarged* (Salt Lake

I seek to unsettle this applause by highlighting Indigenous readings of the Book of Mormon that expose its broader colonial implications. Is the narrator Mormon's suggestion of racial mutability actually something novel to be praised or might it be, instead, a rather common but disguised instrument of settler colonial erasure?

Overview

I offer an approach to answering this question that draws from critical Indigenous studies methodology to center Indigenous perspectives. I begin with an overview of recent Indigenous scholarship on whiteness and Mormon settler colonialism, including a discussion of how the recognition of my own settler positionality informs this analysis. I then step back in time to the mid-twentieth century to illustrate with a concrete example the harmful deployment of the Book of Mormon's great peace narrative in the formulation of a federal Indian policy of termination by Latter-day Saint politicians. This effort to deploy the power of the federal government to turn American Indians white sparked a backlash from Indigenous activists who defended their sovereignty, in part, by alleging that Joseph Smith misappropriated an oral version of the Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) Great Law of Peace[5] in his construction of the Book of Mormon. I then take this allegation seriously by reviewing circumstantial evidence from the early nineteenth century supporting a possible oral transmission of Haudenosaunee narratives followed by an examination of written sources that were also available

City: Signature Books, 1998), 153–55; Scott Michaelsen, *The Limits of Multiculturalism: Interrogating the Origins of American Anthropology* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 59–76; Thomas W Murphy, *Unsettling Scripture: Iroquois and the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2026).

5. Throughout this article, I refer to a "great peace" in the Book of Mormon, the Great Law of Peace (an oral narrative and wampum text), and the Great Peace (the political event heralded by the Great Law of Peace).

in the late 1820s prior to the dictation of the extant Book of Mormon. I then conclude with a juxtaposition of the narrator Mormon's portrayal of a great peace with that of the results of a similar Peacemaker in Iroquois accounts to reveal the settler colonial erasure of Indigenous sovereignty undergirding the racial politics of the Book of Mormon.

Throughout this essay, I feature Indigenous interpretations not simply for the historical claims that they make. More importantly, these narratives—regardless of whether or not they can be substantiated by the historical record—do very important cultural work. These narratives contest the silencing implicit in the assumed settler privilege of telling stories about Native origins by countering with stories of their own about how Mormons came to be. Intriguingly, Mormon narratives about how American Indians came to be and Indigenous etiologies of Book of Mormon origins share in the assumption that there is a kinship between their differing accounts of an ancient great peace. Indigenous stories embrace this kinship, not by erasing Mormon stories but by supplementing them with alternatives that feature living Indigenous neophytes rather than dead white Nephites.

Juxtaposing these related traditions by giving voice to unsettling Indigenous stories leads to the troubling realization that white, too, is an ite. The narrator Mormon's portrait of a seemingly raceless society looks a little too much like a settler colonial body politic that manufactures peace by erasing Indigenous cultures and identities. Hallmarks of settler colonialism embedded within Mormon's narrative include the production of alternative histories favoring settler perspectives alongside the elimination, displacement, and/or absorption of Indigenous peoples into a homogenous polity stripped of Indigenous sovereignty. The Book of Mormon functions in this respect as a settler colonial document that seeks to replace Indigenous stories of their own origins and histories with one that subordinates ancestors of Indigenous peoples within narratives of an origin outside of Turtle Island (North America). The false political narrative that one can be white (or pure) and raceless

has done considerable harm to Indigenous communities, particularly when Latter-day Saint politicians in the mid-twentieth century drew from these same teachings in the Book of Mormon to construct a settler colonial state policy of termination, directed toward eliminating Indigenous sovereignty in the United States.

Indigenous activists who led a counteroffensive opposing the termination policies advocated by Latter-day Saint politicians recognized and took strategic aim at the roots of termination in Book of Mormon theology. In defense of their imperiled sovereignty, Indigenous knowledge keepers identified this Book of Mormon story as an overly Christianized variant of a larger body of Haudenosaunee oral history of the arrival of a Peacemaker who helped found a confederacy uniting Mohawks, Oneidas, Onondagas, Cayugas, Senecas, and (later) Tuscaroras under a Great Law of Peace prior to the arrival of colonists from Europe.[6] They attributed the presence of the Great Peace and other allusions to Iroquois narratives in the Book of Mormon to an oral transmission of these stories to Joseph Smith prior to his dictation of the Book of Mormon. This etiology ought to be taken more seriously by scholars. In fact, I identify several Haudenosaunee individuals from the historical record who would have potentially had the opportunity to share these stories with Joseph Smith as well as some written sources he may have encountered. More importantly, I consider how we might read Third and Fourth Nephi differently when viewed within the larger body of Six Nations literature on the Great Law of Peace.

None of the Haudenosaunee versions depict the Peacemaker as white, portray an ancient white civilization on Turtle Island, or imagine

6. In 1722, closely related Tuscaroras from the eastern seaboard would relocate and join these Five Nations to become the League of Six Nations. Today, traditional Haudenosaunee lands, dotted with several reservations, span like a longhouse across western New York and into parts of Pennsylvania, Ontario, and Quebec. In the nineteenth century, under political pressure from settlers, some Oneidas, Cayugas, and Senecas removed from their traditional lands to what are now Wisconsin, Kansas, and Oklahoma.

a white society as the ultimate goal of peacemaking endeavors. Some Indigenous variants identify the Peacemaker with Jesus, but they insist on his autochthonous origin on Turtle Island. Haudenosaunee narratives depict the league initiated by the Peacemaker as a shared matrilocal longhouse where each matrilineal nation maintains its own sovereignty and clan mothers manage the communal ownership of land. Only a couple of secondhand settler colonial versions of the Great Law of Peace from the twentieth century associate the Peacemaker or the Six Nations with whiteness.[7] These, much like the Book of Mormon, are settler accounts with questionable connections back to Indigenous communities.

Critical Indigenous Studies

I grew up in white settler Latter-day Saint communities of southern Idaho in the 1970s and '80s hearing stories of an Iroquois "princess" in our family tree. We were taught as children that our family had become "white and delightsome" through adoption of the Christian gospel as represented by the Book of Mormon. These stories propelled a scholarly interest in anthropology of the Book of Mormon and, eventually, critical Indigenous studies. As I learned to recognize my own implication within the structures of settler colonialism, I began to question the hidden presumptions in our genealogical narratives and Latter-day Saint scripture. I realized that as citizens of a settler state we were deploying stories of Indigenous ancestors in a manner that sought to legitimate our participation in the displacement of our Native neighbors. In living the Book of Mormon ideal of whiteness, we erased the stories of our Indigenous ancestors. Over the past decade, I have sought to recover those stories and found myself stunned and surprised by an unanticipated entanglement of Haudenosaunee narratives with those

7. See examples cited below. A broader and deeper analysis of these materials is available in Murphy, *Unsettling Scripture*.

in the Book of Mormon.[8] I have also found that our familial readings of the Book of Mormon privileging whiteness did not resonate in the same manner for many Indigenous readers of the sacred text. For these readers, whiteness was neither desirable nor beneficial. Even if imagined as raceless, absorption into a "white" settler colonial state included a loss of indigeneity and a forfeit of sovereignty.

The Pawnee Latter-day Saint Larry J. Echo Hawk, writing in 1975—decades before he served as a General Authority Seventy (2012–2018) in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints—objected to the expectation that Christianized Indigenous bodies must change. The Book of Mormon "says we will be white and delightsome people someday. I like the color I am. In fact, I don't know any Indian who wants to change."[9] In the 2008 film *In Laman's Terms* directed by the Diné and Hopi anthropologist Angelo Baca, Forrest Cuch (Ute), then director of the Utah Division of Indian Affairs, bluntly stated "certainly, certainly we are not going to turn white someday. Because there are a few of us who don't care to do that. Frankly, I am perfectly happy being the color of the

8. Murphy, "Imagining Lamanites"; Thomas W Murphy, "Decolonization on the Salish Sea: A Tribal Journey back to Mormon Studies," in *Decolonizing Mormonism: Approaching a Post-Colonial Zion*, edited by Gina Colvin and Joanna Brooks (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2018); Thomas W Murphy, "Grave Consequences: On Revelation and Repatriation," in *Blossom as the Cliffrose: Mormon Legacies and the Beckoning Wild*, edited by Karin Anderson and Danielle Beazer Dubrasky (Salt Lake City: Torrey House Press, 2021); Thomas W Murphy, Kerrie Sumner Murphy, and Jessyca Brigette Murphy, "An Indian Princess and a Mormon Sacagawea? Decolonizing Memories of our Grandmothers," *Journal of the Mormon Social Science Association* 1, no. 1 (2022): 93–121; Thomas W Murphy, "From Patriarchy to Matriachy: A Marital and Spiritual Journey," in *Revising Eternity: 27 Latter-day Saint Men Reflect on Modern Relationships*, edited by Holly Welker (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2022).

9. Larry Echo Hawk, "Someone's Concerned About Me," *Ensign*, Dec. 1975, https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/ensign/1975/12/meet-father-lehis-children/larry-echohawk-someones-concerned-about-me?lang=eng/.

earth." Diné actress and writer Monika Crowfoot's mother learned as a participant in the Indian Student Placement Program run by the LDS Church "that Mormon Jesus would turn her cursed brown skin white if she was a righteous Mormon." In a 2020 blog for *Exponent II*, Crowfoot described a childhood "hoping to turn white. But through the years the language changed and it became: 'Oops! We're sorry, did you think it meant literally? No, silly. It was *metaphorical*, duh.'"[10] Can whiteness, whether taken literally or metaphorically, actually function as a raceless category for Indigenous peoples in a settler colonial society?

Māori scholar Gina Colvin, writing in *Dialogue* in 2017, recognized that the concept of a universal "gospel culture" silences Indigenous identities by its mere "impossibility." Colvin illustrated the problem with this and several similar examples: "An existential violence is inflicted upon Māori, and therefore upon the body of Christ . . . when Māori women are asked to surrender their mana to white, male US church authorities, US curriculum, and systems that cause Māori people to culturally disappear." "The gospel culture," Colvin continues, "will not make Māori white, nor will it teach them to be proud of the color of their skin." This "injunction to live a gospel culture" is not deployed equally within the global church; rather, it "is more often than not directed at the Other."[11] Who, one might note, is expected to become something different, something white?

Māori scholar Hemopereki Simon has issued a formidable challenge to research paradigms in Mormon studies. In a series of articles appearing in academic journals such as *New Sociology*, *Journal for*

10. Monika Crowfoot, "My Apology for My Complicity," *Exponent II* (blog), July 5, 2020, https://www.the-exponent.com/guest-post-my-apology-for-my-complicity/. In 1981 the LDS Church did change the phrase "white and delightsome" in 2 Nephi 30:6 to "pure and delightsome." See Douglas Campbell, "'White' or 'Pure': Five Vignettes," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 29, no. 4 (Winter 1996): 119–35; Murphy, "Imagining Lamanites," 92–94.

11. Gina Colvin, "There's No Such Thing as a Gospel Culture," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 50, no. 4 (Winter 2017): 57–61.

Cultural and Religious Theory, *Anthropological Forum*, *Culture & Religion*, and *Genealogy*, Simon has "described the need for an intervention in Mormon Studies as an academic discipline."[12] Simon represents the role of Indigenous researchers to be that of "change agents for our communities. We are the key to explaining our point of view to the religious and scholars of religion." Simon invites intercultural dialogue with settler scholars. He encourages them to pay more attention to the "relationship of Mormonism and other restorative traditions to settler colonialism." He questions "the position of whiteness within Mormon culture," prescriptions of Lamanite identities onto Indigenous peoples, and the "destruction of Indigenous cultural heritage" in pursuit of validation for historical claims of the Book of Mormon.[13]

Simon's intervention contributes to a growing body of literature adopting decolonizing methodologies and seeking to bridge the cultural chasms between critical Indigenous and Mormon studies. *Dialogue* has played an important role in these efforts with the publication of special issues in 1985 and 2021 that included pathbreaking articles by the Ute author Lacee A. Harris, Taos Pueblo scholar P. Jane Hafen, Diné writer Monika Brown Crowfoot, and several more Indigenous people challenging derogatory portrayals of Lamanites, American Indians, and

12. Hemopereki Simon, "Hoea Te Waka ki Uta: Critical Kaupapa Māori Research and Mormon Studies Moving Forward," *New Sociology: Journal of Critical Praxis* 3, no. 1 (2022): 1; Hemopereki Simon, "Mormonism and the White Possessive: Moving Critical Indigenous Studies Theory into the Religious Realm," *Journal for Cultural and Religious Theory* 21, no. 3 (2022): 331–62; Hemopereki Simon, "A Kauapapa Māori Intervention on Apology for LDS Church's Racism, Zombie Concepts, and Moving Forward," *Anthropological Forum* 33, no. 2 (2023): 118–45; Hemopereki Simon, "Rolling Our Eyes Toward God: An Intervention Arising from Mormon Missionary YouTube Activity and the Cultural (Mis)Appropriation of Haka," *Culture & Religion* 23, no. 1 (2023): 46–80; Hemopereki Simon, "Genealogical Violence: Mormon (Mis) Appropriation of Māori Cultural Memory through Falsification of Whakapapa," *Genealogy* 8, no. 12 (2024).

13. Simon, "Hoea Te Waka ki Uta," 1–2, 6–7.

Native Americans in Latter-day Saint discourse. Two anthologies from the University of Utah Press, *Decolonizing Mormonism: Approaching a Postcolonial Zion* and *Essays on American Indian and Mormon History*, bring together Indigenous and settler editors and authors in a series of essays that resist hegemony by centering Indigenous perspectives on Mormonism and the Book of Mormon.[14] Dakota historian Elise Boxer's *Mormon Settler Colonialism: Inventing the Lamanite* is the first book-length monograph to examine the Book of Mormon through the lens of settler colonialism and to interrogate cultural genocide in the separation of Indigenous children from their families in a Church-sponsored foster program.[15] This essay builds upon and responds to this growing body of postcolonial scholarship.

Viewed through a lens of critical Indigenous studies, the expression of Mormon's version of the Iroquois Great Peace as raceless whiteness exemplifies what Hemopereki Simon calls a "religious environment" that "reproduces the hidden racial ontology" that operates as a "discourse of silencing." These silencing strategies function by "mediating ignorance about the structuring force of colonization."[16] Kanaka ʻŌiwi scholar Hōkūlani K. Aikau describes the persistence of whiteness, whether metaphorical or literal, within Mormonism "as a privileged state of being and the sign of salvation" that is "part and parcel of a settler colonial project intent on territorial expropriation of native land."[17] Diné scholar Moroni Benally concurs, observing that the Book of Mormon often functions as "a tool of erasure for Indigenous

14. Gina Colvin and Joanna Brooks, eds., *Decolonizing Mormonism: Approaching a Postcolonial Zion* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2018); P. Jane Hafen and Brenden W. Rensink, eds., *Essays on American Indian & Mormon History* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2019).

15. Elise Boxer, *Mormon Settler Colonialism: Inventing the Lamanite* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2025).

16. Simon, "Mormonism and the White Possessive," 350.

17. Hokulani K. Aikau, *A Chosen People, a Promised Land: Mormonism and Race in Hawai'i* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012), 41–43.

people's rightful claim to land, politics, economies, and power." "This erasure," Benally emphasizes, "is one facet of settler colonialism."[18] In her essay "The Book of Mormon as Mormon Settler Colonialism," Boxer also explains that gathering Indigenous peoples into a singular nation of either Lamanites or a settler nation without ites "denies and ignores tribal diversity and sovereignty."[19] Anthropologist Patrick Wolfe describes settler colonialism as a persistent invasive structure that "strives for the dissolution of native societies" through, among other strategies, "renaming" and "religious conversion." Proclaiming that there are no longer any ites but whites is, rather frankly, a settler colonial "elimination of the native."[20] Furthermore, framing whiteness as a utopian Christian racelessness obscures the settler colonial violence that gave rise to white possession of Turtle Island and made it possible for Joseph Smith to disturb what he perceived to be Indigenous graves in the pursuit of a golden treasure containing a new Christian gospel in an American setting.[21]

18. Moroni Benally, "Decolonizing the Blossoming: Indigenous People's Faith in a Colonizing Church," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 50, no. 4 (Winter 2017): 73.

19. Elise Boxer, "The Book of Mormon as Mormon Settler Colonialism," in *Essays on American Indian & Mormon History*, edited by P. Jane Hafen and Brenden W. Rensink (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2019), 17.

20. Patrick Wolfe, "Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native," *Journal of Genocide Research* 8, no. 4 (2006): 388.

21. Thomas W Murphy, "Laban's Ghost: On Writing and Transgression," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 30, no. 3 (1997): 105–26; Thomas W Murphy and Angelo Baca, "Rejecting Racism in Any Form: Latter-day Saint Rhetoric, Religion, and Repatriation," *Open Theology*, no. 2 (2016): 700–25; Thomas W Murphy, "Views from Turtle Island: Settler Colonialism and Indigenous Mormon Entanglements," in *The Palgrave Handbook of Global Mormonism*, edited by R. Gordon Shepherd, A. Gary Shepherd, and Ryan Cragun (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020); Thomas W Murphy, Simon G. Southerton, and Angelo Baca, "Science and Fiction: Kennewick Man/Ancient One in Latter-day Saint Discourse," *Journal of Northwest Anthropology* 56, no. 2 (2022): 137–61.

Termination

In the mid-twentieth century, American Indians in the United States faced an existential threat to their sovereignty when a group of powerful Latter-day Saint politicians and bureaucrats, led by Utah senator Arthur Watkins, began to turn Fourth Nephi's ideal of a settler nation with no more ites into a new federal Indian policy that would be called by the ominous name of "termination." Watkins framed his policies that would terminate the sovereignty of Indigenous nations, redistribute communal land and resources severally, and absorb Indigenous peoples into the settler body politic as an "Indian freedom program." The implicit "freedom" in this policy would benefit outsiders seeking to profit from Indigenous peoples, lands, and resources much more so than those who lost representative governments that could protect their interests.[22]

In a 1954 letter to LDS leadership, Watkins linked his proposed reformation of what he believed to be mistaken federal Indian policies to Book of Mormon prophecies. "It seems to me that the time has come for us to correct some of these mistakes and help American Indians stand on their own feet and become a white and delightsome people as the Book of Mormon prophecied [*sic*] they would become."[23] Fortified by his faith, "Watkins truly believed that he knew best for the Indian, whether they offered consent or not."[24] That same year, Watkins targeted Utes and Paiutes in Utah for termination and five years later the predominantly LDS Catawbas in South Carolina. Elder Spencer W. Kimball, then a member of the Quorum of Twelve and later president

22. R. Warren Metcalf, *Termination's Legacy: The Discarded Indians of Utah* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2002), 235–39; Murphy, "Views from Turtle Island," 763–65; Charles F. Wilkinson, *Fire on the Plateau: Conflict and Endurance in the American Southwest* (Washington, DC: Island Press, 1999).

23. Quoted in Erika Marie Bsumek, *The Foundations of Glen Canyon Dam: Infrastructures of Dispossession on the Colorado Plateau* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2023), 136.

24. Metcalf, *Termination's Legacy*, 239.

of the Church, offered his complementary vision of the future in 1962: "I firmly believe that tomorrow there will be no reservations," and "I believe that [American Indian] integration into our economy and community life is essential and I look forward to the day."[25]

These efforts to turn American Indians white by dissolving Indigenous sovereignty disguised baser motivations as Watkins and LDS attorneys Ernest L. Wilkinson (later president of Brigham Young University) and John S. Boyden "circumvented genuine consultations, manufactured the appearance of consent when it did not exist, coercively withheld funds, concealed conflicts of interest, amassed millions in profits, and drew the ire of Native activists whose protests would lead to the reversal of these policies under subsequent administrations." [26] While Latter-day Saint settlers profited from termination, Indigenous communities experienced devastating economic and cultural impacts. Congress would eventually recognize the failure of these policies and reverse the termination of Southern Paiutes in 1980 and Catawbas in 1993. Some Utes and their descendants, though, remain terminated to this day.[27]

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25. Quoted in Margaret D. Jacobs, "Entangled Histories: The Mormon Church and Indigenous Child Removal from 1850 to 2000," *Journal of Mormon History* 42, no. 2 (2016): 41. See also Murphy, "Views from Turtle Island," 764.

26. Murphy, "Views from Turtle Island," 764.

27. Metcalf, *Termination's Legacy*, 235–39; Murphy, "Imagining Lamanites," 127–29; Thomas G. Alexander, "Native Americans in Post War Utah," https://historytogo.utah.gov/native-americans-post-war-utah/; Stanley J. Thayne, "The Blood of Father Lehi: Indigenous Americans and the Book of Mormon" (PhD diss., University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2016); Forrest S. Cuch, ed., *A History of Utah's American Indians* (Salt Lake City: Utah State Division of Indian Affairs and Utah State Division of History, 2000); Wilkinson, *Fire on the Plateau*; Robert Gottlieb and Peter Booth Wiley, *America's Saints: The Rise of Mormon Power* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1986 [originally published 1984]); Parker M. Nielson, *The Dispossessed: Cultural Genocide of the Mixed-blood Utes: An Advocate's Chronicle* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1998); David M. Brugge, *The Navajo-Hopi Land Dispute: An American Tragedy* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1994).

McKay Pikyavit was a member of the Kanosh band of Southern Paiutes who protested termination policies. Pikyavit remembered, "Me and my dad wrote a letter saying we didn't want termination, but they booted us anyway." Denied credit and burdened with new taxes after termination, the band lost the reservation and what had previously been a profitable nine-thousand-acre farm. Pikyavit recalled, "We were supposed to be equal to our white neighbors. That didn't work out." Senator Watkins had told him it would "be good for you, be just like a white man. I told him I ain't no white man, never will be." Exasperated with the loss, Pikyavit lamented, "There's something there that just ain't right. We ain't Lamanites. Another thing, the Book of Mormon is Indian religion. When Joseph Smith was back east he met with an Indian guy back there, asked about Indian religion, and he wrote it down. Then he made the Book of Mormon up. There was an Indian from back in Wisconsin told me."[28]

As Indigenous activists traveled and rallied around Turtle Island to protest termination, they recognized the roots of the United States federal policy of eliminating Indigenous sovereignty in the outsize influence of Latter-day Saint politicians and linked termination to the Book of Mormon's misappropriation of the Great Law of Peace. Longstanding oral traditions had told of encounters between Joseph Smith and Senecas, members of the largest Iroquois nation whose traditional lands included villages of Gä'nägweh and Ganondagan, near Palmyra and Manchester, New York. As early as August of 1830, Phineas Young (brother of future Church president Brigham Young) recognized similarities between the Book of Mormon and Haudenosaunee traditions.[29]

28. Quoted in William Logan Hebner, *Southern Paiute: A Portrait* (Logan: Utah State University Press, 2010), 64–66. See also Murphy, "Views from Turtle Island," 765. For a Pulitzer Prize–winning fictionalized account of a Chippewa community wrestling with termination and Mormons, see Louise Erdrich, *The Night Watchman: A Novel* (New York: Harper, 2020).

29. Dan Vogel, ed., *Early Mormon Documents*, vol. 3 (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2000), 353.

During an 1840 visit with Mohawks on an island in Ontario's Lake Simcoe, missionary Benjamin Johnson also found parallels and noted "their hopes of the future were almost identical to our own."[30] The earliest literary reference to the by then well-established oral history about Joseph Smith's appropriation of Iroquois narratives appeared in Texas in 1945.[31] Historian Lori Taylor credits the proliferation of stories of Seneca influence on Joseph Smith in the mid-twentieth century to the widely traveled Tuscarora activist Wallace "Mad Bear" Anderson, who helped lead the North American Indian Caravan across Turtle Island rallying grassroots opposition to termination policies. Nicholas Vrooman, who recorded a version of the story he had heard from Mad Bear in 1994 for the historian Taylor, noted that the Iroquois teachings in the Book of Mormon "got watered down and changed." The Book of Mormon's great peace, Vrooman noted, has "too much emphasis on the Christian thing, more than there used to be, more than the way that we passed it on, the Iroquois passed it on, the Seneca there to Joseph Smith."[32]

Moor's Men

While the idea that Joseph Smith may have misappropriated Iroquois oral histories may seem far-fetched to some readers, it is not outside the

30. Benjamin F. Johnson, *My Life's Review: Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin Johnson* (Provo: Grandin Book Company, 1997), 63–64.

31. C. Stanley Banks, "The Mormon Migration into Texas," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 49, no. 2 (1945): 238.

32. Lori Elaine Taylor, "Telling Stories about Mormons and Indians" (PhD diss., State University of New York at Buffalo, 2000), 309–14; Lori Taylor, "Joseph Smith in Iroquois Country: The Handsome Lake Story," *Juvenile Instructor* (blog), June 30, 2010, http://juvenileinstructor.org/joseph-smith-in-iroquois-country-the-handsome-lake-story/; Lori E. Taylor, "Joseph Smith in Iroquois Country: A Mormon Creation Story," in *Essays on American Indian and Mormon History*, edited by P. Jane Hafen and Brenden W. Rensink (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2019), 42–45; Murphy, "Views from Turtle Island," 751–52.

range of plausibility. There are several candidates and multiple locations where these transmissions may have occurred.[33] Ample opportunities for intercultural exchange flourished between 1811 and 1816 at Moor's Indian Charity School in Hanover, New Hampshire, attended by Joseph Smith's older brother Hyrum Smith and his cousin Stephen Mack Jr. Their Iroquois classmates who would likely have been familiar with the Great Law of Peace included Kahnawà:ke Mohawk Louis Langford, Ahkwesáhsne Mohawk (or possibly Stockbridge) John Weal, and three Senecas: Jacob Jameson, James Stevenson, and John Whalebone. In the mid-1820s Stephen Mack Jr. joined "a government expedition around the [Great] lakes from Detroit to Green Bay" that had been "tasked with exploring the prospects for relocating the Iroquois" to what is now Wisconsin. Mack married a Winnebago (Ho-Chunk) woman named Hononegah during the winter of 1828–1829, and the Ho-Chunk responded by adopting Mack into the tribe.[34] Did Hyrum or Stephen introduce Joseph to any of their classmates or convey some of their stories to him secondhand?

All three of Hyrum's and Stephen's Seneca classmates would likely have returned to western New York after their schooling at Moor's. Jacob Jameson certainly did. He returned to Buffalo Creek in 1817,

33. For more examples and extended analyses see Murphy, *Unsettling Scripture*.

34. Richard K. Behrens, "Dreams, Visions, and Visitations: The Genesis of Mormonism," *John Whitmer Historical Association Journal* 27 (2007): 177; Richard K. Behrens, "Dartmouth Arminianism and its Impact on Hyrum Smith and the Smith Family," *John Whitmer Historical Association Journal* 26 (2006); Colin G. Calloway, *The Indian History of an American Institution: Native Americans and Dartmouth* (Lebanon, N.H.: Dartmouth College Press, 2010), 89, 195–96; Dean McMakin, "Hononegah: A New Biography," *Nuggets of History* 41, no. 4 (2003); Edson I. Carr, *The History of Rockton, Winnebago County, Illinois, 1820–1898* (Rockton, Ill.: Herald Office Print, 1898), 6; Don Bradley, "The 'Indian Problem': The Uncertain Place of Native Americans in Anglo-America," 2018; Dan Blumlo, "Pocahontas, Uleleh, and Hononegah: The Archetype of the American Indian Princess," *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society* 110, no. 2 (2017): 137–39.

about the same time that the Smith family moved to Palmyra, New York. Jameson studied medicine in Buffalo and traveled throughout the area as an interpreter over the next two decades. Jameson and other Senecas often returned to hunt and fish at Ganargua (Mud) Creek, a favorite fishing spot for the young Joseph Smith Jr. The famous Seneca orator Red Jacket, accompanied by Blue Sky, William Sky, Peter Smoke, and Twenty Canoes, even delivered a speech to much acclaim at Palmyra Academy in July of 1822, a few months before Joseph began having visions of a spirit and buried treasure. Newspaper reports do not name Red Jacket's interpreter, but Jacob served in that capacity on many similar occasions.[35] Did Hyrum's relationship with his classmate Jacob continue over the next decade and could he, or those who accompanied him while traveling, have been the reported protagonists of Haudenosaunee oral histories?

35. William N. Fenton and Jacob Jameson, "Answers to Governor Cass's Questions by Jacob Jameson, a Seneca [ca. 1821–1825]," *Ethnohistory* 16, no. 2 (1969): 33; Timothy Alden, *An Account of the Sundry Missions Performed Among the Senecas and Munsees; in a Series of Letters* (New York: J. Seymour, 1827), 33; Thompson S. Harris, "Journals of Rev. Thompson S. Harris," *Publications of the Buffalo Historical Society* 6 (1903): 281–82, 342–43; Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents*, 3:154; Horace Eaton, *A Thanksgiving Sermon, delivered at Palmyra, N.Y., Nov. 26, 1857* (Rochester, N.Y.: A. Strong & Co., 1858); Orasmus Turner, *History of the Pioneer Settlement of Phelps and Gorham's Purchase, and Morris' Reserve* (Rochester, N.Y.: William Alling, 1851), 209, 383–84; James E. Seaver, *A Narrative of the Life of Mrs. Mary Jemison* (Canandaigua, N.Y.: J.D. Bemis and Co., 1824), 79; Chad L. Anderson, *The Storied Landscape of Iroquoia: History, Conquest, and Memory in the Native Northeast* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2020), 55; "Seneca Indians," *Palmyra Herald* (Palmyra, NY), July 31, 1822; Taylor, "Telling Stories," 343; Peter Manseau, *One Nation, Under Gods: A New American History* (New York: Little, Brown, and Company, 2015), 297–98; Thomas W Murphy, "Other Scriptures: Restoring the Voices of the Gantowisas to an Open Canon," in *Essays on American Indian and Mormon History*, ed. P. Jane Hafen and Brenden W. Rensink (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2019), 39.

Joseph Smith attributed his knowledge not to the living but to the dead seen in visions. According to his mother, Lucy Mack Smith, he shared the "most amusing recitals" long before he ever dictated the text of the Book of Mormon. She found the details about "the ancient inhabitants of this continent" so remarkable and flowing with such ease from Joseph's lips that it seemed to her "as if he had spent his whole life among them."[36] While living Senecas may be absent from the stories early Mormons shared about how American Indians came to be, they were not absent, in fact. Living Iroquois figure prominently in the stories Indigenous peoples have remembered about how Mormons came to be. It seemed, even to Joseph's mother, *as if* his interlocutors were actually alive rather than dead.

Great Peace

The literary record of Haudenosaunee oral histories corroborates the claims of activist critics of termination (Pikyavit and Vrooman) who allege that the Book of Mormon contains elements of Indigenous religion, or more specifically an overly Christianized variant of the Great Law of Peace. Haudenosaunee narratives, which have varied somewhat over time and place, recount how a Peacemaker unified the Five Nations into the League of the Haudenosaunee, the people of the longhouse, and initiated a long era of peace and equality called the "Great Peace."[37] This Peacemaker, identified variously as Teharonhiawá:kon (Holder of the Heavens), Aionwá:tha, or Tekanawí:ta (both of whom are sometimes identified as human incarnations of Teharonhiawá:kon), traveled across the salt water and spoke of another people who had rejected his

36. Larry E. Morris, ed., *A Documentary History of the Book of Mormon* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 107.

37. Arthur C. Parker, *The Constitution of the Five Nations* (Albany, N.Y.: University of the State of New York, 1916).

message of peace and murdered him. In some variants, a disillusioned Peacemaker even displayed his wounds for all to see. Some knowledge keepers explicitly teach that the Peacemaker, although originally from Turtle Island (thereby, not white), is the same person spoken of in the Bible as Jesus.[38] When and where does the Book of Mormon fit within the written records of this oral history?

The founding of the League of the Haudenosaunee that gave rise to the Great Peace occurred prior to the arrival of European colonists to Iroquoia, although it was likely more of a process than an event. Ahkwesáhsne Mohawk author Darren Bonaparte has approached the variability of the accounts as evidence of a thriving culture, evolving over time in dialogue with neighbors. In a 2006 survey of the literary record of the creation and confederation of the League, Bonaparte reflected: "When viewed as a manifestation of the living culture, which evolves with a people, we can see that the confederation epic was probably based on real events, but over time has accumulated a number of supernatural elements borrowed from the Iroquoian cultural world (especially our creation story) and the traditions of other nations." Scholars have devoted much attention to the timing of the League's formation. Most accept a date around 1450–1550 CE, with some advocates arguing for earlier dates including a rather precise date of August 31, 1142 tied to a solar eclipse, and a few knowledge keepers even suggesting that the founding of the League preceded Christ's appearance in

38. Darren Bonaparte, *Creation and Confederation: The Living History of the Iroquois* (Ahkwesáhsne Mohawk Territory: Wampum Chronicles, 2006); Murphy, "Other Scriptures"; Anthony Wonderley and Martha L. Sempowski, *Origins of the Iroquois League: Narratives Symbols, and Archaeology* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 2019).

the New Testament. Many variants of the Great Law of Peace, notably, refer to multiple manifestations of peacemakers rather a singular appearance.[39]

While the Book of Mormon's account of a "great peace" lacks much of the cultural detail available in other versions, it most closely resembles the written variants proximate in time and place to Joseph Smith's reported acquisition of gold plates in 1827 in Manchester, New York. In fact, it fits neatly between the version published by the Tuscarora author and artist David Cusick in that same and following year as *Sketches of Ancient History of the Six Nations* at Lewiston, New York, and an 1845 version attributed to Onondaga Chiefs De-hat-ka-tons or Abraham La Fort and Captain Frost from Buffalo Creek, New York. The latter version first appeared in print in 1847 in Henry Schoolcraft's *Notes on the Iroquois* published in Albany, New York, and two years later as part of *Onondaga, or, Reminiscences of Earlier and Later Times*, published by historian Joshua Clark at Syracuse, New York. These accounts, along with an unpublished 1816 version from the adopted Mohawk John Norton on the Grand River Reserve in Ontario, Canada, differ from all earlier versions, which were much more secular in tone and contained much less of the marvelous.[40]

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39. Bonaparte, *Creation and Confederation*, 51–52; Murphy, "Other Scriptures," 36–37; Wonderley and Sempowski, *Origins of the Iroquois League*; Dean R. Snow, *The Iroquois* (Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell, 1996); Barbara A. Mann and Jerry L. Fields, "A Sign in the Sky: Dating the League of the Haudenosaunee," *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* 21, no. 2 (1997): 105–63; David Henige, "Can a Myth be Astronomically Dated?," *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* 23, no. 4 (1999): 127–57.

40. David Cusick, *Sketches of Ancient History of the Six Nations*, 2nd ed. (Lewiston, N.Y.: Tuscarora Village, 1828; repr., Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 2006); Henry R. Schoolcraft, *Notes on the Iroquois: or, Contributions to American History, Antiquities, and General Ethnology* (Albany, N.Y.: E. H. Pease & Co., 1847), 270–83; Joshua V. H. Clark, *Onondaga; or Reminiscences of Earlier and Later Times; Being a Series of Historical Sketches*

The Cusick account, the closest in time and place to Joseph Smith, is the first published version in the historical record to associate the founding of the League with a deity, Teharonhiawá:kon (Holder of the Heavens).[41] Historian Dale Morgan has even suggested that an 1827 announcement of Cusick's book in a Canandaigua newspaper may have been "the catalytic agent" inspiring Joseph Smith's Book of Mormon.[42] Cusick's *Sketches* contains the first written account of a Jesus-like old man who spoke of people across the great water murdering their maker. The close-knit timing and proximity suggest that Smith could have consulted Cusick's publication rather than or in addition to engaging in dialogue with Seneca or other Iroquois collaborators. Yet, the Book of Mormon's version does have a little more of the "rapturous ecstasy" characteristic of the later 1845 Onondaga version than does Cusick's version. Some of the many similarities, though, might also be explained by independent adoption of biblical allusions.[43]

Some Latter-day Saints might read Cusick ethnocentrically as a distant memory of an older account of the great peace more accurately

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Relative to Onondaga; with Notes on the Several Towns in the County, and Oswego (Syracuse, N.Y.: Stoddard and Babcock, 1849); Carl F. Klinck and James J. Talman, eds., *The Journal of Major John Norton 1809–1816* (Toronto: Champlain Society, 1970).

41. Bonaparte, *Creation and Confederation*; Wonderley and Sempowski, *Origins of the Iroquois League*.

42. John Phillip Walker, ed., *Dale Morgan on Early Mormonism: Correspondence and a New History* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1986), 310; "Indian Literature," *Ontario Repository* (Canandaigua, N.Y.), July 11, 1827, 2.

43. Cusick, *Sketches of Ancient History*; Susan Kalter, "Finding a Place for David Cusick in Native American Literary History," *MELUS* 27, no. 3 (2002): 9–42; Daniel M. Radus, "Printing Native History in David Cusick's *Sketches of Ancient History of the Six Nations*," *American Literature* 86, no. 2 (2014): 217–43; Clark, *Onondaga*, 21–30; Klinck and Talman, *The Journal of Major John Norton*, 98–106; Bonaparte, *Creation and Confederation*; Wonderley and Sempowski, *Origins of the Iroquois League*.

recorded in the Book of Mormon.[44] Yet, historical evidence suggests that the Book of Mormon's version looks like an early nineteenth-century variant of an Iroquois original stripped of much of its historical resistance to removal. The founders Aionwá:tha, Tekanawí:ta, and Thatotarho appear as ordinary human beings in all the earliest versions of the Great Law of Peace found in the historical record and none of them prior to Cusick allude to a Jesus-like character crossing the salt water. Founders of the Great Peace only begin to take on characteristics of deity with Christian allusions during the Second Great Awakening that gave rise to both the Seneca prophet Handsome Lake and the Mormon seer Joseph Smith.[45] Ahkwesáhsne Mohawk scholar Darren

44. Thomas W Murphy, "An Insufficient Canon: The Popol Wuj, Book of Mormon, and Other Scriptures," *Journal of Mormon History* 48, no. 3 (2022): 80.

45. John Heckewelder, *History, Manners, and Customs of the Indian Nations Who Once Inhabited Pennsylvania and the Neighboring States*, new and revised edition, edited by William C. Reichel (Philadelphia: Historical Society of Pennsylvania, 1881 [1819]; repr., Echo Library Reprint, 2016), 43; Douglas W. Boyce, "A Glimpse of Iroquois Culture Through the Eyes of Joseph Brant and John Norton," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 117, no. 4 (1973): 288, 93; William Dunlap, *A History of New York, for Schools* (New York: Collins, Keese, and Co., 1837), 153–54; William M. Beauchamp, "Onondaga Notes," *Journal of American Folk-Lore* 8 (1895): 215–16; Mathew Dennis, *Cultivating a Landscape of Peace: Iroquois-European Encounters in Seventeenth-Century America* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1993), 82; Wonderley and Sempowski, *Origins of the Iroquois League*, 40–54; William N. Fenton, *The Great Law and the Longhouse: A Political History of the Iroquois Confederacy* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1998), 5; Murphy, "Imagining Lamanites."; Thomas W Murphy, "Lamanite Genesis, Genealogy, and Genetics," in *American Apocrypha: Essays on the Book of Mormon*, edited by Dan Vogel and Brent Lee Metcalfe (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2002); Thomas W Murphy and Angelo Baca, "DNA and the Book of Mormon: Science, Settlers, and Scripture," in *The LDS Gospel Topics Series: A Scholarly Engagement*, edited by Matthew L. Harris and Newell G. Bringhurst (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2020); Murphy, Southerton, and Baca, "Science and Fiction."

Bonaparte noted, "We would not be wise to assume that when we hear the story of Tekanawí:ta, we are simply hearing an Iroquois version of the New Testament. Instead, we are witnessing a people paying homage to their most ancient beliefs by giving them new life, new meaning. We are witnessing the workings of a living culture and a living history."[46] In the 1820s, Iroquois nations faced an existential threat of removal. Novel biblical allusions helped advance the argument that the Six Nations needed neither civilization nor Christianity from the settlers. Literary scholar Susan Kalter summarized the implicit argument in Cusick's rendition of the Great Law of Peace: "if God can visit Israel in human form, teach love, prophesy, die, be buried and rise again, nothing prevents him from visiting North America." Missionaries who assumed "that Christ's teachings could reach the Iroquois and other Indians only through their own work" were mistaken.[47]

The dilution of the Haudenosaunee cultural context present in other accounts of the Great Peace is what makes it possible for Joseph Smith's narrator Mormon to imagine that the Peacemaker would envision a society with no manner of ites except whites. In most Iroquois versions of the Great Law of Peace, the Peacemaker, with assistance from Aionwá:tha and in some cases Tsakonsasé (Mother of Nations), brings the five nations together around a central fire at Onondaga. Mohawks, Oneidas, Cayugas, and Senecas do not forfeit their national identities to Onondagas but operate through a system of consensus that essentially grants the matrilineal clan mothers of each nation and the male representatives they select veto power over decisions of the confederacy. Citizenship in the League comes through the clan mothers, who not only represent their consanguineal kin but may adopt children and adults of any nationality. The maintenance of national sovereignty

46. Bonaparte, *Creation and Confederation*, 88.

47. Kalter, "Finding a Place," 32–34, 40.

amid confederated unity, resting ultimately in the hands of women who hold the lands of their matrilineages in common, makes the Iroquois Great Peace significantly different in structure from the settler colonial version represented by Mormon. The Book of Mormon's version erases national identities and mentions neither matrilineal kinship nor the sovereign political power maintained by the clan mothers. It also lends itself to abuse by settler politicians seeking to displace sovereignty, lands, and resources from Indigenous communities. Common ownership of lands in matrilineal clans and national sovereignty are integral elements of the Haudenosaunee recipe for peace that are absent from the culturally misappropriated variant in the Book of Mormon. Furthermore, whiteness, whether imagined ethnically or racially, plays no role in the attainment of peace in any of the authentic Haudenosaunee renditions of the Great Law of Peace.[48]

Joseph Smith may have been the first but certainly was not the last settler colonialist who deployed representations of the Haudenosaunee Great Law of Peace for their own purposes. William Canfield's 1902 *The Legends of the Iroquois, Told by "the Cornplanter"* and L. Taylor Hansen's "Pale Hea-wah-sah" from her 1963 book, *He Walked the Americas*, subsequently misappropriated and whitewashed Haudenosaunee narratives in ways that also privileged settler belonging over Indigenous sovereignty. Both accounts, much like the Book of Mormon itself, proposed much older origins for their narratives than the historical record

48. Lewis Henry Morgan, *League of the Iroquois: A Classic Study of an American Indian Tribe With the Original Illustrations* (New York: Citadel Press, 1962); Fenton, *Great Law*; Tom Porter, *And Grandma Said . . .: Iroquois Teachings, as Passed Down through the Oral Tradition* (Bloomington, Ind.: Xlibris Corporation, 2008); Barbara Alice Mann, *Iroquoian Women: The Gantowisas* (New York: Peter Lang, 2011); Brian Rice, *The Rotinonshonni: A Traditional Iroquoian History through the Eyes of Teharonhia:wako and Sawiskera* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 2013); Kayanesenh Paul Williams, *Kayanerenkó:wa: The Great Law of Peace* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2018); Murphy, "Other Scriptures."

supports and lacked verifiable manuscripts in support of their claims for Indigenous sources. Anachronisms, confusion of Algonquian and Iroquoian cultural traits, taking stories out of their cultural context, and a fetishized focus on racialized features of protagonists accompany the dubious circumstances surrounding the acquisition of these narratives by settler colonial authors.[49]

Conclusion

A Christian utopia in which there are no ites except whites is a classic example of a settler colonial illusion. Historian Lorenzo Veracini "argues that all settler projects are foundationally premised on fantasies of ultimately 'cleansing' the settler body politic of its (indigenous and exogenous) alterities."[50] The Book of Mormon portrayal is not "a proto-postmodern view of race as a historical construct." While the scripture does present a mutable concept of race, this malleable racial body is better described as a common nineteenth-century settler colonial construct rather than something akin to a novel postmodern perspective. The presumption that whiteness is nonracial is a dangerous interpretation that has done, is doing, and will continue to do significant harm to Indigenous communities in settler colonial societies. The extent to which the Book of Mormon might teach that "race was not real," that "race was not a permanent part of God's vision for humanity," or that

49. William W. Canfield, *The Legends of the Iroquois, Told by "the Cornplanter"* (New York: A. Wessels Co. , 1902); Wonderley and Sempowski, *Origins of the Iroquois League*, 83–85; Christopher Vecsey, *Imagine Ourselves Richly: Mythic Narratives of North American Indians* (New York: Crossroads Publishing Co., 1988), 96; Henige, "Can a Myth be Astronomically Dated?," 140–42; L. Taylor Hansen, *He Walked the Americas* (Amherst, Wis.: Amherst Press, 1963); Bonaparte, *Creation and Confederation*, 48–50, 90–94. For an extended discussion of these and other sources see Murphy, *Unsettling Scripture*.

50. Lorenzo Veracini, *Settler Colonialism: A Theoretical Overview* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 33.

readers "were charged with spreading Christ's gospel of (potential) racial reunification" masks a deeper, hidden logic of extermination. The presentation of whiteness as "raceless" fails to consider the settler colonial setting of the Book of Mormon's production. The scripture's "white universalism" is more accurately recognized as a settler colonial erasure of indigeneity.[51]

Coming to terms with the Book of Mormon as a flawed and incomplete scripture has surprisingly opened my eyes to new ways of reading this problematic text. Joseph Smith must have recognized at some level the injustice at the heart of the settler colonial United States of America and sought theological means for making what was so wrong appear right. He appears to have, as the activists against termination claimed, encountered Iroquois narratives of the Great Law of Peace in person or maybe in print. Lamentably, in the stories he told, he displaced these living Iroquois neophytes with dead white Nephites.

51. Mueller, *Race and the Making of the Mormon People*, 12, 19–20. See also Murphy, "Laban's Ghost," 113.

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ROOTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Charlotte Hansen Terry

A few years ago, I had the opportunity to take a seminar from a professor at my university in the Native American and Indigenous Studies Department, focused on religious and/or spiritual traditions, belief systems, and worldviews of Native American and Indigenous peoples in the Americas. As part of that course, one of our assignments was to reflect on the course materials and to express what the texts had meant to us, and what they had led us to think about and consider. In a book I read in this class and some others, *Anishinaabe Ways of Knowing and Being*, Lawrence Gross explains how he tells his students, when they consider a religious tradition, to think about what kind of human beings the given tradition is trying to create.[1] This was something I kept coming back to during that class and since then. What kind of human beings do different worldviews try to create?

In the many worldviews we discussed in class, knowledge and wisdom are continually based in space and place. This wisdom is passed on through storytelling, through repetition, so that the next generation can become rooted.[2]

The readings in this class encouraged me to self-reflect. Am I rooted? And if I am, what am I rooted in? What space and place? When I took that class, the place I was rooted in was the land that is the home of Patwin people in what is known as Northern California. This place

1. Lawrence W. Gross, *Anishinaabe Ways of Knowing and Being* (Farnham, UK: Ashgate Publishing Group, 2014), 238.

2. Gross, *Anishinaabe Ways of Knowing and Being*, 164; Keith H. Basso, *Wisdom Sits in Places: Landscape and Language Among the Western Apache* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1996), 127.

impacted what I learned in my PhD program and what my scholarship would look like. But I have other roots as well.

My sister is a printmaker. A few years ago, she made a print showing various root vegetables, including carrots, beets, and radishes, with the words "love your roots" carved above. Of course she was playing on words here. She is a gardener. But I can also consider a bigger meaning from this. Do I love my roots? My history? My family history? What do I love, and what do I not? Am I truly myself with others?

Along with rootedness, what am I reaching for? What type of world am I wanting to help perpetuate? What communities am I a part of, since it is in community that strength can come? Learning comes in the walking together; it comes in the connections we make.

So, what are my roots? I am the descendent of white Mormon settlers who came to the United States in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. My ancestors were settlers who lived on Native lands throughout the North American West, particularly Shoshone, Paiute, Goshute, and Ute lands. I have women in my ancestry who joined the Church because of the hymn "O My Father." There are some women who participated in polygamy, and others who apparently threatened their husbands with axes if they took other wives. I have ancestors who participated in missionizing efforts in the United States and in the Pacific. That past informs who I am and how I approach my scholarship. I come from a family that is more liberal in its understandings of Mormonism but certainly still has its flaws and shortcomings, as any family does. I carry my family with me in my name. I am named after one of my grandmothers, which has certainly made me remember her, her works, and her words of caution as I pursued my graduate studies. This legacy has impacted what I study. I particularly want to reflect on my grandmother's life and experiences and how she has influenced me.

My grandmother, Charlotte Hawkins England, grew up in Iowa and in Salt Lake City. In 1954, when my grandmother was twenty and a newlywed, she went with my grandfather, Gene, on a mission to Sāmoa.

Figure 1. Charlotte and Eugene England arriving for their mission in Sāmoa, 1954. Courtesy Charlotte England.

This was certainly more uncommon as a practice by the 1950s. They were called in particular to teach school in the village of Vaiola for the first part of their mission, were then separated and put with different companions in various districts for a bit, and then worked together again teaching school. I recently read through their mission journal. It was an interesting practice, reading their mission journal with the critical eye I might use when I read other mission journals for my scholarship. They used the same book to journal in, with my grandmother using the pages on the left, my grandfather the pages on the right. It was particularly eye-opening to me to read their words from when they were only twenty and see their thought processes, their personalities, and their frustrations. And I particularly enjoyed the various drawings my grandmother made throughout the journal pages, from images of large waves crashing on the shore to a sketch of the full moon to diagrams showing the layout of certain events and gatherings.

They talked about how troubled they were with how Tagata Sāmoa (Native Samoans) were treated by other missionaries as less than and as servants. They tried to teach love and be good examples. Their mission helped them both realize that they loved teaching. Some missionaries kept trying to treat my grandmother as if she was just their cook and cleaning lady and did not always see her as a real missionary. She would try to call these missionaries out for their behavior and stand up for herself, being the only woman there, but she did not always succeed. She got pregnant one year into her mission and was transferred to Hawai'i so she could have access to better medical care at the end of that pregnancy, which meant she did not die in childbirth in 1956.

They also had their own biases that emerge in their writings, and I could see how they struggled with those. They made assumptions about the nature of the Pacific Islands and expressed fascination with a place and people so different from what they knew at home. At times they recognized this and tried to acknowledge it. Other times, they did not. I continued to think about the legacies of colonialism as well, including the fact that they were even in Sāmoa on a mission, showing the roots of US imperialism and Mormon participation in those efforts. In my dissertation I have considered the importance of schools started by white Mormons in the Pacific, from Hawai'i in the 1850s to Aotearoa (New Zealand) in the 1880s and Sāmoa in the 1890s, and the use of such schools by missionaries to help strengthen their connections with the US consulate and reinforce the image of themselves as Americans. And here in my grandparents' journal I can see the successors to that practice. They talked about making lesson plans and included details about teaching these Tagata Sāmoa children particular manners and dances, teaching European fairy tales, teaching them songs in English, teaching them sewing, and teaching them many other Anglo-American-centric practices.

Growing up, I knew the general details about my grandparents' lives after their mission: coming home, moving to various places in the

United States for school and jobs, starting *Dialogue* while they were in California, eventually ending up in Utah, my grandfather teaching at Brigham Young University and having to "retire" early from teaching there during the 1990s, and my grandfather finishing his career at what was then Utah Valley State College. Very often as a child, I learned more about my grandfather's work and writings, about his thoughts on particular topics. After his death in 2001, when I was fifteen, there became even more of an emphasis and encouragement for me to read what he wrote, to remember his life. Very often this focus on my grandfather meant that my grandmother and her thoughts and ideas have not always been the focus, even though my grandmother has always been a larger part of my life, the one I have felt closer to, the one I spent more time with, and the person I have always felt a special bond with.

As an adult, I have had the chance to have more in-depth conversations with my grandmother about her experiences. I think much of this has become possible because of the frequent trips I made to her home when I lived in Utah to help her organize her papers. When I have not lived in the state, she always asks when I will be coming to Utah so she can have me work with her for a day and go through papers more or help organize and edit her writings about her life. We have continued reorganizing her papers and files, and with each reorganization I have had the chance to ask her questions about different parts of her life. As I have helped edit some of her writings more recently, I have been able to learn more intimate details about her and what has mattered to her. And I think my own studies during my master's degree, as I took more women's history courses, researched and read women's diaries, and looked at the position of women in the Church, meant I approached these conversations with my grandmother from a different position.

I have had conversations with my grandmother about her experiences as a woman in the Church, the labor she has performed in church that often goes unrecognized, and the frustrations she has had about women's position within the faith. I see how she is treated by family at

Figure 2. Charlotte England organizing her files and recipes, 2023. Courtesy Charlotte Hansen Terry.

times as not important, and that her opinions don't matter as much as her spouse, who has been gone now for almost twenty-five years, and this has all led me to think more deeply about the gendered dynamic of scholarship within Mormonism.

My grandfather is known for his teaching and scholarship—scholarship that has certainly impacted me and how I think. My grandmother is known for being there at his side, being part of the conversations, welcoming people into her home, making lovely meals, especially her bread and ice cream. Of course, his scholarship and who he was was not possible without her. Without her work balancing the household, raising six children, bouncing off ideas with him and pushing him further in his conceptions he wouldn't be the man whom so many respected. And she was there having her faith challenged, too, as the behavior of

people in positions of power in the Church hurt her as well, and she saw contradictions between this behavior and the principles she believed in. People questioned her about why she remained in the Church with all that happened. She wrote about fifteen years ago about how "such an action would mean abandoning our core beliefs, which were too deeply embedded for us to forsake."[3]

She often even downplays herself and her life as she tries to emphasize my grandfather's writings and work. Each Christmas for a few years she would call me and ask for my opinion on which of my grandfather's essays she should print off and share with all my cousins. Most of that side of my family no longer attends church, and I would say almost all my cousins do not see themselves as members of the Church. Many of my cousins were young when my grandfather died, so he is a more distant memory. But we all feel very close to my grandmother. I have recently started to encourage her to also share some of her own writings about her life with her grandchildren, insisting that we all want to learn more about her, too, and hear more of her thoughts and experiences. We want her recipes, her artwork, and more of her in our lives. She luckily has started to do that, printing off drafts of papers she is writing, sending us little watercolors in the mail, some of them on the back of my grandfather's old business cards. Recently we worked to collect some of her recipes and shared those with everyone for Christmas, to the delight of many of my cousins. And hopefully I can eventually convince her to share her writings with all her grandchildren. For now, I feel lucky to be trusted with them, with her thoughts and feelings that she is hesitant for all to know.

During my master's program at the University of Utah, I was in a research seminar on US colonialism and needed to pick a paper topic. Since I had grown up hearing about my grandparents serving a mission

3. Charlotte England, "My Leaps of Faith," in Robert A. Rees, ed., *Why I Stay: The Challenges of Discipleship for Contemporary Mormons* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2011), 174.

Figure 3. Charlotte England drawings, 2021. Courtesy Charlotte Hansen Terry.

in Sāmoa, I became curious about when the United States got involved in Sāmoa and when Mormons showed up there, so I looked it up and saw that it was close to the same time, in the 1870s and 1880s. This led to me doing a research paper to consider this conjunction and what it meant. I do not think I would have even considered going in that direction for a paper without knowing about my grandparents. As I write this piece, I am completing my PhD in history, where I explore white and Pacific Islander Mormon attempts to define and expand racial, religious, familial, and national belonging, informed both by my history classes but also by my classes in Native American and Indigenous studies. As I have worked on this dissertation, I have needed to consider what questions and topics I can look at and which ones I should not because of my positionality and privilege as a white woman. While I have done my historical research on an earlier period in the nineteenth

century, I also continue to think back, especially recently, on my grandmother's experiences in Sāmoa in the 1950s, how it changed her, and how she also participated in US colonialism through her missionary work. During my dissertation work, I have read many missionary diaries, seen the artifacts they brought back from their missions and the photographs they took with people in the Pacific. I have thought of parallels with my own grandmother when she reopened her mission trunk after not doing so for about fifty years, and I saw her lay down items, including tapa cloth gifted to her on her mission, now with significant creases from being folded for decades. This period of her life from so long ago still had such an impact on her present moment, and she spoke about all these items, refamiliarizing herself with these artifacts of her youth after they had been shut away for so long.

When I told my grandmother I was considering getting a PhD, she was very serious with me on the phone. She told me to keep in mind how much doing that work can impact your family and how it will affect your husband and your relationship. It is not easy, she said. It takes both of you to get through that. And as she said that, I thought back to what it must have been like for her as a Mormon woman during the 1950s and '60s. I am in a different place as her granddaughter. But I still have to grapple with particular gendered dynamics within my faith that might question why I went off to pursue graduate work, with my husband putting his career on a slower trajectory as he followed me to a new location.

Being named for my grandmother, and looking a good deal like her, does not mean I will make the same decisions she made or think the same things she does. But I am rooted in her, and the rest of my family, and my past. Her deep desire to love and care for those around her, how she shares her love through food and enjoys sitting and chatting over a cup of tea, are definitely things I have picked up from her, too. And how she has loved her church and community while at the same time challenging it and disagreeing with positions has provided an important example for me.

Figure 4. Charlotte England at her cabin in Provo Canyon, Utah, 2019. Courtesy Charlotte Hansen Terry.

I am rooted in that Mormon history. And I would not be where I am, studying what I am, having the questions I do about Mormon history, without that rootedness in my grandmother. As I consider what directions I might go with my scholarship and work as well as my place within my faith community, I continue to reflect on my responsibility in my scholarship to grapple with this family history and Mormon past. I can focus on loving fiercely and holding my faith accountable. But I also continue to grapple with these complex gendered and colonial legacies in which I am rooted.

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