



# DIALOGUE

a journal of mormon thought

## EDITORS

EDITOR  
ASSOCIATE EDITOR  
WEB EDITOR  
FICTION  
POETRY  
REVIEWS (non-fiction)  
REVIEWS (literature)  
INTERNATIONAL  
POLITICAL  
HISTORY  
SCIENCE  
FILM & THEATRE  
PHILOSOPHY/THEOLOGY  
ART

Boyd Jay Petersen, Provo, UT  
David W. Scott, Lehi, UT  
Emily W. Jensen, Farmington, UT  
Julie Nichols, Orem, UT  
Darlene Young, South Jordan, UT  
John Hatch, Salt Lake City, UT  
Andrew Hall, Fukuoka, Japan  
Gina Colvin, Christchurch, New Zealand  
Russell Arben Fox, Wichita, KS  
Sheree Maxwell Bench, Pleasant Grove, UT  
Steven Peck, Provo, UT  
Eric Samuelson, Provo, UT  
Brian Birch, Draper, UT  
Andi Pitcher Davis, Orem, UT

## BUSINESS & PRODUCTION STAFF

BUSINESS MANAGER  
PRODUCTION MANAGER  
COPY EDITOR

Emily W. Jensen, Farmington, UT  
Jenny Webb, Woodinville, WA  
Richelle Wilson, Madison, WI

INTERNS

Nathan Tucker, Orem, UT  
Christian Van Dyke, Provo, UT

## EDITORIAL BOARD

Lavina Fielding Anderson, Salt Lake City, UT  
Mary L. Bradford, Landsdowne, VA  
Claudia Bushman, New York, NY  
Verlyne Christensen, Calgary, AB  
Daniel Dwyer, Albany, NY  
Ignacio M. Garcia, Provo, UT  
Brian M. Hauglid, Spanish Fork, UT  
Gregory Jackson, Lehi, UT  
G. Kevin Jones, Salt Lake City, UT

Becky Reid Linford, Leesburg, VA  
William Morris, Minneapolis, MN  
Michael Nielsen, Statesboro, GA  
Nathan B. Oman, Williamsburg, VA  
Taylor Petrey, Kalamazoo, MI  
Thomas Rogers, Bountiful, UT  
Mathew Schmalz, Worcester, MA  
John Turner, Fairfax, VA  
Blair Van Dyke, Cedar Hills, UT

## BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Joanna Brooks, San Diego, CA—chair  
Michael Austin, Newburgh, IN  
Molly Bennion, Seattle, WA  
Fiona Givens, Richmond, VA  
Bob Goldberg, Salt Lake City, UT  
William Hickman, Lynnwood, WA  
Kyle Monson, New York, NY

Russ Moorehead, Brooklyn, NY  
Benjamin E. Park, Huntsville, TX  
Boyd Petersen, Provo, UT  
Brent Rushforth, Washington, DC  
Karla Stirling, Bountiful, UT  
Travis Stratford, New York, NY  
Morris Thurston, Villa Park, CA

# DIALOGUE

a journal of mormon thought

*is an independent quarterly established to express Mormon culture and to examine the relevance of religion to secular life. It is edited by Latter-day Saints who wish to bring their faith into dialogue with the larger stream of world religious thought and with human experience as a whole and to foster artistic and scholarly achievement based on their cultural heritage. The journal encourages a variety of viewpoints; although every effort is made to ensure accurate scholarship and responsible judgment, the views expressed are those of the individual authors and are not necessarily those of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints or of the editors.*

*Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* is published quarterly by the Dialogue Foundation. *Dialogue* has no official connection with The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Contents copyrighted by the Dialogue Foundation. ISSN 0012-2157. *Dialogue* is available in full text in electronic form at [www.dialoguejournal.com](http://www.dialoguejournal.com) and is archived by the University of Utah Marriott Library Special Collections, available online at [www.lib.utah.edu/portal/site/marriottlibrary](http://www.lib.utah.edu/portal/site/marriottlibrary). *Dialogue* is also available on microforms through University Microfilms International, [www.umi.com](http://www.umi.com).

*Dialogue* welcomes articles, essays, poetry, notes, fiction, letters to the editor, and art. Submissions should follow the current *Chicago Manual of Style*. All submissions should be in Word and may be submitted electronically at <https://dialoguejournal.com/submissions/>. For submissions of visual art, please contact [art@dialoguejournal.com](mailto:art@dialoguejournal.com).

Submissions published in the journal, including letters to the editor, are covered by our publications policy, <https://dialoguejournal.com/submissions/publication-policy/>, under which the author retains the copyright of the work and grants Dialogue permission to publish. See [www.dialoguejournal.com](http://www.dialoguejournal.com).

#### EDITORS EMERITI

Eugene England and G. Wesley Johnson

Robert A. Rees

Mary Lythgoe Bradford

Linda King Newell and L. Jackson Newell

F. Ross Peterson and Mary Kay Peterson

Martha Sonntag Bradley and Allen D. Roberts

Neal Chandler and Rebecca Worthen Chandler

Karen Marguerite Moloney

Levi S. Peterson

Kristine Haglund

# CONTENTS

## ARTICLES AND ESSAYS

Looking Back, Looking Forward: “Mormonism’s Negro Doctrine” Forty-Five Years Later	<i>Lester E. Bush, Jr.</i>	1
Negotiating Black Self-Hate within the LDS Church	<i>Darron T. Smith</i>	29
The Possessive Investment in Rightness: White Supremacy and the Mormon Movement	<i>Joanna Brooks</i>	45
Mormons and Lineage: The Complicated History of Blacks and Patriarchal Blessings, 1830–2018	<i>Matthew L. Harris</i>	83
Martin Luther King Jr. and Mormonism: Dialogue, Race, and Pluralism	<i>Roy Whitaker</i>	131
One Devout Mormon Family’s Struggle with Racism	<i>Robert Greenwell</i>	155

## ROUNDTABLE

The Preacher, the Labor Leader, the Homosexual, and the Jew: The Template for Achieving Great Goals	<i>Alice Faulkner Burch</i>	181
A Balm in Gilead: Reconciling Black Bodies within a Mormon Imagination	<i>Janan Graham-Russell</i>	185
When Did You Become Black?	<i>Gail Turley Houston</i>	193
Shifting Tides: A Clarion Call for Inclusion and Social Justice	<i>Cameron McCoy</i>	201
The Black Cain in White Garments	<i>Melodie Jackson</i>	209

## INTERVIEW

Father-Daughter Interview on Blacks and the Priesthood	<i>Egide Nzojibwami</i> <i>Verlyne Christensen</i> Interviewed by <i>Gregory A. Prince</i>	213
---	--	-----

## POETRY

After the Curtain Falls, Isabella Speaks in Achromatics	<i>Dayna Patterson</i>	237
--	------------------------	-----

Self-Portrait of Mormon Middle Child as Isabella	Dayna Patterson	240
The Pioneer Woman, St. George	Kevin Klein	242
One Thousand Two Hundred Sixty Days	Kathryn Knight Sonntag	244
The Tree at the Center	Kathryn Knight Sonntag	245
The Older Covenant	Kathryn Knight Sonntag	247

## REVIEWS

An Essential Conversation Matthew L. Harris and Newell G. Bringhurst, eds. <i>The Mormon Church &amp; Blacks: A Documentary History.</i>	Devery S. Anderson	249
Mother, May We? <i>Dove Song: Heavenly Mother in Mormon Poetry.</i> Edited by Tyler Chadwick, Dayna Patterson, and Martin Pulido.	Gail Turley Houston	255
Morning Has Broken Robert A. Rees. <i>Waiting for Morning.</i>	Karen Marguerite Moloney	259
It's Lonely at the Top Ryan Shoemaker. <i>Beyond the Lights.</i>	Alison Brimley	264
Priesthood Power Jonathan A. Stapley. <i>The Power of Godliness: Mormon Liturgy and Cosmology.</i>	Gary James Bergera	268
Welcome Additions Karen Kelsay. <i>Of Omens that Flitter.</i> Javen Tanner. <i>The God Mask.</i>	Edward Whitley	274

## ART ESSAY

Out of Angola	Glen Nelson	279
---------------	-------------	-----

## FROM THE PULPIT

Creating a Zion Church	Molly McLellan Bennion	295
------------------------	------------------------	-----

## CONTRIBUTORS

# LOOKING BACK, LOOKING FORWARD: “MORMONISM’S NEGRO DOCTRINE” FORTY-FIVE YEARS LATER<sup>1</sup>

Lester E. Bush, Jr.

It has been forty-five years since *Dialogue* published my essay entitled “Mormonism’s Negro Doctrine: An Historical Overview”<sup>2</sup> and forty years since Official Declaration 2 ended the priesthood/temple ban. It seems like a good time to take stock of where we are: what has changed, what has stayed the same, what changes still need to happen, and what steps need to occur to bring about those changes.

## What’s New

The first task—what has changed—is in some ways the easiest, and certainly the most uplifting. Almost everything has changed, and all for the good, beginning with the “priesthood revelation” of 1978. The obvious milestones, aside from the revelation itself, are:

- the immediate ordination of Blacks to the priesthood, soon including the office of high priest, and the resumption of temple ordinances
- just twelve years after the revelation, the first Black General Authority was called; recently, two more were called

---

1. A version of these remarks was originally given as the Sterling M. McMurrin Lecture on Religion and Culture at the University of Utah on October 8, 2015.

2. Lester E. Bush, Jr., “Mormonism’s Negro Doctrine: An Historical Overview,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 8, no. 1 (Spring 1973): 11–68.

- an inner city proselyting effort began
- African American stake presidents were called in the Deep South
- the growth of the Black membership from perhaps a few thousand to somewhere over half a million

Africa deserves special mention.

- in 1980 the Church permanently entered Black Africa through a mission to Nigeria
- there now are 26 African missions, not counting three in South Africa
- LDS stakes have been established in at least five African countries other than South Africa
- LDS temples are operating under African leadership or are under construction in four African countries
- Africans from Zimbabwe and Kenya have been called as General Authorities

Those developments, individually and collectively, far exceed what I thought possible in 1973 (see appendix). The most conspicuous shortfall is that after thirty-seven years there still is no African American General Authority.

Furthermore, the historical work surrounding the issue has been made easier and has become more sophisticated. The Church has made available a truly unprecedented amount of primary source material—well beyond what was available even during Leonard Arrington's tenure as Church Historian. As one who faced major obstacles to research during the Joseph Fielding Smith era, I'm now amazed that material that was totally inaccessible not that long ago is now readily available, even via the internet. I'm thinking here of the Joseph Smith Papers and the general church minutes from 1839–1877. And before that but well after my research and the priesthood revelation, Signature Books published the journals of Wilford Woodruff and the journals of other important



Church leaders. And (indirectly) the diaries of David O. McKay have become available.<sup>3</sup>

Most early Church periodicals are now in searchable formats online, so I can do what previously was laborious on-site research from the comfort of my own study—and even download what I find directly into word processing software. (In the early 1970s I was thankful that I had an electric typewriter—even without a correcting capability.) Beyond this, there are now scores of scholarly studies online, all illuminating aspects of the history of Blacks in the Church.

These are transformative developments. For better or worse the internet has made it impossible for history to recede invisibly into the past. Unlike the case seventy-five or more years ago, our previous record now lives on and is often just a few clicks away.

In terms of new understanding, over the past four decades a near avalanche of insightful books and articles has been published. I once assembled a selected bibliography on Blacks and the priesthood, which included ninety-seven items published between 1900 and 1973. Over 90 percent of that material had appeared in the twenty-three years since

---

3. "Historian's Office General Church Minutes, 1839–1877," CR 100 318, LDS Church History Library, <https://eadview.lds.org/resource/public/collection/pdf/172>. Scott G. Kenney, ed., *Wilford Woodruff's Journal, 1833–1898*, 10 vols. (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1988). Other potentially relevant published diaries include those of apostles Abraham H. Cannon (Edward Leo Lyman, ed., *Candid Insights of a Mormon Apostle: The Diaries of Abraham H. Cannon, 1889–1895* [Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2010]), Anthony W. Ivins (Elizabeth O. Anderson, ed., *Cowboy Apostle: The Diaries of Anthony W. Ivins, 1875–1932* [Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2013]), Anthon H. Lund (John P. Hatch, ed., *Danish Apostle: The Diaries of Anthon H. Lund, 1890–1921* [Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2005]), Reed Smoot (Harvard S. Heath, ed., *In the World: The Diaries of Reed Smoot* [Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1997]), B. H. Roberts (John Sillito, ed., *History's Apprentice: The Diaries of B. H. Roberts, 1880–1898* [Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2004]), and L. John Nuttall (Jedediah S. Rogers, ed., *In the President's Office: The Diaries of L. John Nuttall, 1879–1892* [Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2007]).

1950, and two-thirds in just the eight years since 1965. If anything, since 1973 this attention has intensified. Between 1978 and 1980, for example, there were eighteen comparable publications; thirty in the 1980s; twenty-four in the 1990s; and another thirty-six since 2000. Altogether, 118 notable books and articles since 1973.<sup>4</sup> And some of the most important scholarship is just now being published.

In retrospect, it has turned out that back in 1973 I had enough information to correctly work out the basic outline of the history of the priesthood ban. But publications since then have cast new light on the early history, in addition to highlighting the lives of contemporary Black Mormons and detailing the Church's entry into Africa. Some of this new information was published soon after 1973,<sup>5</sup> but important material has continued to appear—particularly during this past decade.

The remarkable faith of Black Mormons Samuel D. Chambers<sup>6</sup> and Jane James<sup>7</sup> and the problematic behavior of William McCary in Winter

---

4. These totals reflect conservative selections. Chester Hawkins's much more inclusive survey, which included some newspaper articles, more publications from LDS periodicals, dissertations and theses, and several unpublished works, identified 370 just between 1900 and 1990. Similar to my review, he found that 86% appeared after 1950. See Chester Lee Hawkins, comp., "Selective Bibliography on African-Americans and Mormons 1830–1990," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 25, no. 4 (Winter 1992): 113–31.

5. Two particularly informative articles were published by Newell Bringhurst: "An Ambiguous Decision: The Implementation of Mormon Priesthood Denial for the Black Man—A Reexamination," *Utah Historical Quarterly* 46, no. 1 (Winter 1978): 45–64; and "Elijah Abel and the Changing Status of Blacks Within Mormonism," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 12, no. 2 (Summer 1979): 22–26.

6. William G. Hartley, "Samuel D. Chambers," *New Era*, June 1974, <https://www.lds.org/new-era/1974/06/samuel-d-chambers?lang=eng>; and "Saint Without Priesthood: The Collected Testimonies of Ex-Slave Samuel D. Chambers," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 12, no. 2 (Summer 1979): 13–21.

7. Henry J. Wolfinger, "A Test of Faith: Jane Elizabeth James and the Origins of the Utah Black Community," in *Social Accommodation in Utah*, edited by Clark

Quarters were first illuminated in the 1970s.<sup>8</sup> And there were studies on early Black priesthood holders Elijah Abel and Walker Lewis.<sup>9</sup> The 1980s and 1990s were dominated by publications on the Church in Africa and contemporary Black Latter-day Saints. But then, the most comprehensive priesthood-related studies to date have appeared just within the past decade. These include studies on Walker Lewis,<sup>10</sup> another early Black priesthood holder named Joseph T. Ball,<sup>11</sup> several lengthy works on Elijah Abel,<sup>12</sup> and some studies looking at notable race-related parallels

---

S. Knowlton (Salt Lake City: American West Center, 1975), 126–72; soon followed by Linda King Newell and Valeen Tippetts Avery, "Jane Manning James: Black Saint, 1847," *Ensign*, Aug. 1979, <https://www.lds.org/ensign/1979/08/jane-manning-james-black-saint-1847-pioneer?lang=eng>.

8. Bringhurst, "An Ambiguous Decision." Bringhurst also discusses Elijah Abel and Walker Lewis.

9. Bringhurst, "Elijah Abel and the Changing Status of Blacks." As noted, some of this had been anticipated in his 1978 *Utah Historical Quarterly* essay "An Ambiguous Decision."

10. Connell O'Donovan, "The Mormon Priesthood Ban and Elder Q. Walker Lewis: 'An Example for his More Whiter Brethren to Follow,'" *The John Whitmer Historical Association Journal* 26 (2006): 48–100.

11. Connell O'Donovan, "Joseph T. Ball, the First African American High Priest in the LDS Church" (paper presented at the John Whitmer Historical Association Annual Conference, Independence, Mo., Sept. 2009).

12. Russell W. Stevenson, "'A Negro Preacher': The Worlds of Elijah Ables," *Journal of Mormon History* 39, no. 2 (Spring 2013): 165–254; Russell Stevenson, *Black Mormon: The Story of Elijah Ables* (Afton, Wyo.: PrintStar, 2013); W. Kesler Jackson, *Elijah Abel: The Life and Times of a Black Priesthood Holder* (Springville, Utah: CFI, 2013).

between Mormon policy and that of Freemasonry.<sup>13</sup> Even now the first book-length studies of Church policy since 1981 are being published.<sup>14</sup>

Returning to what I once thought of as the “modern era,” the late 1960s, when I did some of my most intense research, was a period of relative openness within the Church. Those years spawned *Dialogue*, the Mormon History Association, and ultimately the calling of Leonard Arrington as Church Historian.

I remember reading an article in the Church’s *Instructor* magazine just as this era was beginning that discussed Tracy Y. Cannon, who for twenty-three years was chairman of the Church’s General Music Committee. According to the article, Cannon faced recurring problems because some Church policies “did not result in the highest artistic result in Church music.” However, whenever he became discouraged and was inclined to give up, the impression would come to him that he had died and was standing before the Lord answering for “his lack of

---

13. E.g., Michael W. Homer, “Why Then Introduce Them into Our Inner Temple?: The Masonic Influence on Mormon Denial of Priesthood Ordination to African American Men,” *John Whitmer Historical Association Journal* 26 (2006): 234–59; and Michael W. Homer, *Joseph’s Temples: The Dynamic Relationship Between Freemasonry and Mormonism* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2014). See especially chap. 5, “Pharaoh’s Curse” (113–37) and chap. 14, “Legends and Folklore” (360–92).

14. These include: Russell W. Stevenson, *For the Cause of Righteousness: A Global History of Blacks and Mormonism, 1830–2013* (Draper, Utah: Greg Kofford Books, 2014); W. Paul Reeve, *Religion of a Different Color: Race and the Mormon Struggle for Whiteness* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015); Matthew L. Harris and Newell G. Bringhurst, eds., *The Mormon Church and Blacks: A Documentary History* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2015); and W. Paul Reeve, Christopher B. Rich, Jr., and LaJean Purcell Carruth, “*Enough to Cause the Angels in Heaven to Blush*”: *Race, Servitude, and Priesthood at the 1852 Utah Legislature* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, forthcoming). Prior to this outpouring of scholarship on race, the previous scholarly book was Newell G. Bringhurst, *Saints, Slaves, and Blacks: The Changing Place of Black People Within Mormonism* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1981).

action." When he explained that "I was following the policy set by those in authority," the Lord always responded, "But, Tracy, *you knew better*."<sup>15</sup>

To be clear, in 1973 I didn't believe I "knew better" regarding the subject of Blacks and the priesthood. I did think I knew the history better than what had been published to that point, both by those supporting the Church and its policies and by those who opposed them. That didn't mean I thought my 1973 article would end the priesthood ban. Rather, I thought it would lead to the Church History Department's being tasked to develop the story more fully. It was disappointing to learn from discussions with Elder Packer at that time that this was not going to happen, and only later did I learn that the History Department had been barred from working on the priesthood question. More positively, I soon heard that many of the General Authorities had read my article, and I was not surprised that there was a very mixed response. I was told by one General Authority that it had "stirred the pot" and made an impact that would not be acknowledged. Only recently did I learn that at some point President Kimball had studied it carefully and marked it up extensively. But it wasn't until decades later that Church historians and their consultants finally did study the history of Blacks and the priesthood in some detail.

Since 1978, the progression of President Kimball's thinking on the priesthood ban has received some attention, though without his own firsthand account the story is still conjectural. His son Edward included then Elder Kimball's 1963 comments in a letter to Edward in *The Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball*, published in 1982.<sup>16</sup> In it, the elder Kimball observed that "[t]he prophets for 133 years of the church have maintained the position of the prophet of the Restoration that the Negro could not hold the Priesthood nor have the temple ordinances which are prepara-

---

15. Clawson Y. Cannon, Jr., "His Lifetime Mission," *Instructor*, Dec. 1965, 472–73.

16. Edward L. Kimball, ed., *The Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball: Twelfth President of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1982), 448–49.

tory for exaltation.” Then he added, “I know the Lord could change his policy and release the ban and forgive the possible error, which brought about the deprivation.” While this suggests an unexpected degree of flexibility on Kimball’s part, had I known of it I would have believed it more likely that he was simply reflecting back language contained in a question posed by his son Edward.

In August 1970, when I spoke with President Kimball, who then was the Acting President of the Quorum of the Twelve, he seemed quite confident about the legitimacy of the priesthood ban and quoted the book of Abraham as the basis. (Kimball’s son Edward said that even within the family, Kimball “always responded to questions about policy and doctrine with traditional, orthodox explanations.”<sup>17</sup>) Then, in December 1973, soon after becoming the twelfth president of the Church, Kimball responded to a reporter’s question on Blacks and the priesthood: “I am not sure that there will be a change, although there could be. We are under the dictates of our Heavenly Father, and this is not my policy or the Church’s policy. It is the policy of the Lord who has established it, and I know of no change, although we are subject to revelations of the Lord in case he should ever wish to make a change.”<sup>18</sup> He responded very similarly just over two months later in an interview on NBC’s *Today Show*: he did “not anticipate [a change in the racial policy]. If it should be done the Lord will reveal it.”<sup>19</sup>

Despite those conservative responses, it is clear from what little has become public that President Kimball soon was intensely focused on the priesthood ban. In 1975 he distributed to his counselors in the First

---

17. Edward L. Kimball, “Spencer W. Kimball and the Revelation on Priesthood,” *BYU Studies* 47, no. 2 (2008): 40.

18. As reported in “President Spencer W. Kimball Ordained Twelfth President of the Church,” *Ensign*, Feb. 1974, <https://www.lds.org/ensign/1974/02/president-spencer-w-kimball-ordained-twelfth-president-of-the-church?lang=eng>; also in *The Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball*, 449.

19. Interview on *The Today Show*, Mar. 12, 1974.

Presidency a collection of statements on the subject by early Church leaders and asked for their reactions. He later did the same thing with the Quorum of the Twelve. In June 1977, he asked at least three General Authorities to give him papers on the subject, including two of the ban's strongest supporters—apostles Bruce R. McConkie and Boyd K. Packer.

Apostle Dallin H. Oaks, who was then president of Brigham Young University, also recalls being asked by Kimball for his views about that time and says Kimball talked to dozens of people. One of these was Jack Carlson, a trusted advisor, with whom Kimball spoke several times in the fall of 1977. Although Kimball appeared still to be searching for an answer, he did ask Carlson, "What do you think would happen if we changed the policy [of denying Blacks the priesthood]?" On another visit with Carlson, Kimball said, "I don't know that I should be the one doing this, but if I don't my successor [Ezra Taft Benson] won't."<sup>20</sup>

During early 1978, Kimball repeatedly talked with the Quorum of the Twelve about the question. His wife, Camilla, recalled Kimball as thinking, "I had a great deal to fight . . . myself, largely because I had grown up with this thought that Negroes should not have the priesthood and I was prepared to go all the rest of my life . . . fight[ing] for it and defend[ing] it as it was."<sup>21</sup> This notwithstanding, on March 23, after a night of reflection, he told his counselors that his "impression" was that the priesthood ban should be ended. After his counselors said they would support this decision, Kimball set to work to gain the concurrence of the Quorum of the Twelve.

On June 1, 1978, Kimball met with his counselors and the Twelve and again brought up the possibility of conferring the priesthood upon worthy men of all races. A two-hour discussion followed around

---

20. Kimball, "Spencer W. Kimball and the Revelation on Priesthood," 42–43. The fuller account of this conversation is in an interview with Carlson's wife, Renee, by Gregory Prince, June 2, 1994. Renee was present for at least one of the conversations.

21. Kimball, "Spencer W. Kimball and the Revelation on Priesthood," 48.

Kimball's belief that the priesthood ban should be ended. This later was characterized by Elder McConkie as an "outpouring of unity, oneness, and agreement."<sup>22</sup> Kimball then prayed on behalf of the group. "I told the Lord if it wasn't right, if He didn't want this change to come in the Church that I would be true to it all the rest of my life."<sup>23</sup> But the revelatory experience that followed confirmed Kimball's belief that the ban should be ended.

Whether Kimball's actions were prompted by his own long-standing concerns—in 1976 he told someone he had been praying about the subject for fifteen years without an answer<sup>24</sup>—or by the prospects of a temple in Brazil, or by some awkward legal entanglement, is not known. Personally, I think it was the growth of the Church in Brazil, perhaps facilitated by a increased understanding of the history of the priesthood ban—an understanding that afforded him greater latitude to act. Clearly, he felt a greater urgency to act than had any of his predecessors. I also think Kimball's son Edward was correct to emphasize an early Kimball observation that "revelations will probably never come unless they are desired. . . . I believe most revelations will come when a man is on his tip toes, reaching as high as he can for something which he knows that he needs."<sup>25</sup>

### What's Ongoing

In keeping with a long tradition of offering little or no explanation for apparent changes in policy and doctrine, there was no official discussion of the priesthood ban's origins, either in 1978 or later. As I wrote in 1984, "a revelatory experience was alluded to, the priesthood made available

---

22. 22. Spencer Kimball, *Church News* interview, Dec. 1978.

23. Spencer Kimball, *Church News* interview, Dec. 1978.

24. Kimball, "Spencer W. Kimball and the Revelation on Priesthood," 42.

25. *Ibid.*



to all 'worthy males,' and the subject quietly but firmly declared dead."<sup>26</sup> Of course, the subject wasn't dead, as the traditional understanding of the ban's origins continued to be perpetuated in influential Mormon publications—and in the minds of many members. The most important of these, of course, was Bruce R. McConkie's *Mormon Doctrine*, which continued in print another thirty-two years. But there eventually was a quiet, unannounced evolution in the leadership's thinking, or at least in how the history of the subject was presented. In 2006, an indication of this came when Elder Jeffrey R. Holland was interviewed by PBS and responded to questions about the Church's former teachings on Blacks. Elder Holland labeled the former explanations for the priesthood ban "folklore" and suggested that the origins of the ban were unknown: "[H] owever well intended the explanations were, I think almost all of them were inadequate and/or wrong. . . . [W]e simply do not know why that practice, that policy, that doctrine was in place."<sup>27</sup>

Another development came two years later, in 2008, when *BYU Studies* published Edward Kimball's forthright account of developments surrounding the priesthood revelation. Within this was a candid summary of the history of Church teachings on Blacks, drawn from the scholarly work on the subject.<sup>28</sup> I thought this notable because *BYU Studies* certainly first would have obtained the approval of the Church's General Authorities.

That the old beliefs nonetheless persisted gained national attention in February 2012, when the *Washington Post* published an article with an explanation of the origin of the priesthood ban by BYU religion

---

26. Lester E. Bush, Jr., "Whence the Negro Doctrine?" 213.

27. PBS interview, Mar. 4, 2006.

28. Kimball, "Spencer W. Kimball and the Revelation on Priesthood." This informative account still needs to be read in conjunction with other summaries, e.g., Armand L. Mauss, "The Fading of the Pharaohs' Curse: The Decline and Fall of the Priesthood Ban against Blacks in the Mormon Church," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 14, no. 3 (Fall 1981): 10–45.

professor Randy Bott. Bott gave the reporter a reasonable summary of popular Church beliefs of the early 1970s, but his explanation sounded even more horrific in the twenty-first century than it would have in the twentieth:

According to Mormon scriptures, the descendants of Cain, who killed his brother, Abel, “were black.” One of Cain’s descendants was Egyptus, a woman Mormons believe was the namesake of Egypt. She married Ham, whose descendants were themselves cursed and, in the view of many Mormons, barred from the priesthood by his father, Noah. Bott points to the Mormon holy text the Book of Abraham as suggesting that all of the descendants of Ham and Egyptus were thus black and barred from the priesthood. . . .

As recently as 1949, church leaders suggested that the ban on blacks resulted from the consequences of the “conduct of spirits in the pre-mortal existence.” As a result, many Mormons believed that blacks were less valiant in the pre-Earth life, or fence sitters in the war between God and Satan. That view has fallen out of favor in recent decades. . . .

[Bott] quotes Mormon scripture that states that the Lord gives to people “all that he seeth fit.” Bott compares blacks with a young child prematurely asking for the keys to her father’s car, and explains that similarly until 1978, the Lord determined that blacks were not yet ready for the priesthood. . . . “So, in reality,” [Bott says], “the blacks not having the priesthood was the greatest blessing God could give them.”<sup>29</sup>

As appalling as this was to read, especially amidst the strides being made by the Church in Africa and elsewhere, I felt a little bad for Professor Bott. He really had only presented the authoritative views of past Church leaders, views which had yet to be authoritatively disavowed. What he said was not much different from what McConkie wrote in *Mormon Doctrine*, which had continued in print without official censure until

---

29. Jason Horowitz, “The Genesis of a Church’s Stand on Race,” *Washington Post*, Feb. 28, 2012, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/the-genesis-of-a-churchs-stand-on-race/2012/02/22/gIQAQZXyfr\\_story.html?noredirect=on&utm\\_term=.d88a36728856](https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/the-genesis-of-a-churchs-stand-on-race/2012/02/22/gIQAQZXyfr_story.html?noredirect=on&utm_term=.d88a36728856).

2010, just two years earlier. *Mormon Doctrine* still would have been sold in 2012 had not a faithful African American member arranged to purchase the remaining 515 copies in 2010 to get them off the market.

While not feeling a need to correct these ideas for the benefit of Black Latter-day Saints, the media storm forced the Church's hand, and public affairs immediately issued a rebuttal, prompted, it said, by media inquiries following Bott's comments.<sup>30</sup> The statement read in part:

The positions attributed to BYU professor Randy Bott in a recent *Washington Post* article absolutely do not represent the teachings and doctrines of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. . . .

For a time in the Church there was a restriction on the priesthood for male members of African descent. It is not known precisely why, how, or when this restriction began in the Church but what is clear is that it ended decades ago. Some have attempted to explain the reason for this restriction, but these attempts should be viewed as speculation and opinion, not doctrine. The Church is not bound by speculation or opinions given with limited understanding.

We condemn racism, including any and all past racism by individuals both inside and outside the Church.

While a useful rebuttal, the statement was a little disingenuous in its observation that "it is not known precisely why, how, or when this restriction began" and in its dismissal of attempts to explain the restriction as "speculation and opinion, not doctrine."

In 2013, a new edition of the Doctrine and Covenants carried a new introduction to Official Declaration 2, the declaration that announced the priesthood revelation. It was a little more candid and acknowledged some of the history:

During Joseph Smith's lifetime, a few black male members of the Church were ordained to the priesthood. Early in its history, Church leaders

---

30. "Church Statement Regarding 'Washington Post' Article on Race and the Church," *Newsroom*, Feb. 29, 2012, <https://www.mormonnewsroom.org/article/racial-remarks-in-washington-post-article>.

stopped conferring the priesthood on black males of African descent. Church records offer no clear insights into the origins of this practice. Church leaders believed that a revelation from God was needed to alter this practice and prayerfully sought guidance. The revelation came to Church President Spencer W. Kimball and was affirmed to other Church leaders in the Salt Lake Temple on June 1, 1978. The revelation removed all restrictions with regard to race that once applied to the priesthood.

By far the most forthright statement came later that year. A December 2013 LDS.org essay titled “Race and the Priesthood,” cleared by the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve, said in part:

During the first two decades of the Church’s existence, a few black men were ordained to the priesthood. One of these men, Elijah Abel, also participated in temple ceremonies in Kirtland, Ohio, and was later baptized as proxy for deceased relatives in Nauvoo, Illinois. There is no reliable evidence that any black men were denied the priesthood during Joseph Smith’s lifetime. . . .

In 1852, President Brigham Young publicly announced that men of black African descent could no longer be ordained to the priesthood. . . .

Over time, Church leaders and members advanced many theories to explain the priesthood and temple restrictions. None of these explanations is accepted today as the official doctrine of the Church. . . .

The justifications for this restriction echoed the widespread ideas about racial inferiority that had been used to argue for the legalization of black “servitude” in the Territory of Utah. According to one view, which had been promulgated in the United States from at least the 1730s, blacks descended from the same lineage as the biblical Cain, who slew his brother Abel. Those who accepted this view believed that God’s “curse” on Cain was the mark of a dark skin. Black servitude was sometimes viewed as a second curse placed upon Noah’s grandson Canaan as a result of Ham’s indiscretion toward his father. Although slavery was not a significant factor in Utah’s economy and was soon abolished, the restriction on priesthood ordinations remained. . . .

Today, the Church disavows the theories advanced in the past that black skin is a sign of divine disfavor 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 in any way to anyone else. Church leaders today unequivocally condemn all racism, past and present, in any form.<sup>31</sup>

In contrast to 1973, for at least the past decade Mormon historians have been consulted internally about Church teachings on Blacks. Their contribution is implicit in the various statements recently issued, and explicit in the LDS.org essay on "Race and the Priesthood"—which also is the first on this subject to include footnotes and references to scholarly publications. Among these cited references have been detailed non-Mormon studies of the long-since abandoned beliefs about Black ancestry, the first to appear in a Church-issued statement. Less apparent was the contribution of another faithful African American member, who argued successfully for the explicit disavowal of the previous justifications of the priesthood ban.

### What Remains

Although recent Church statements continue to claim that the original reason for the priesthood ban is not known, I wonder if anyone has asked Brigham Young. He, after all, was the one who introduced it. If he ever is asked, he will be quite clear—as he repeatedly was during his presidency. It was because African Blacks were descendants of Cain.

Over the next century his successors said the same thing, including the First Presidency in 1949. Even the omission of this linkage from the 1969 First Presidency statement appears to have reflected a public relations decision rather than a change in leadership beliefs. Just the previous year, the First Presidency had concluded that the more they said about

---

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

the basis of the priesthood ban, “the more we shall have to explain,” and that future statements “should be clear, positive, and brief.”<sup>32</sup>

There were, as Church spokesmen recently have claimed, some speculative after-the-fact attempts to explain the basis for the doctrine—these were not attempts to explain the priesthood ban per se but rather were speculations on why the *descendants of Cain* were denied the priesthood. As is well known, these primarily were hypothetical notions about the premortal existence.

So far as I know, no one, no matter how great, has ever been entirely free of the social and anthropological understanding of their age. It does not diminish their stature to know they believed the accepted wisdom of their day—notwithstanding that these beliefs were later discredited and abandoned. The historical record shows this to be true of early Mormon leaders, which personally I find to be a good thing. It’s not by their global knowledge that they are judged, but by their global accomplishments despite the limited understanding of their age. To me, it makes their accomplishments all the more remarkable.

There are many examples in Church history of ideas—even doctrines—being advanced that ultimately did not survive. Those “errors” occurred despite the fact that the organization led by these individuals thrived. A safe example may be that of apostle Orson Pratt, arguably one of the brightest of the early Mormon leaders, who was known for favoring the right of Blacks to vote and for opposing Brigham Young, both on the legalization of “servitude” and the notion that curses could extend across generations.<sup>33</sup>

---

32. David O. McKay, journal entry, Mar. 1, 1968; see Lester E. Bush, Jr., “Writing ‘Mormonism’s Negro Doctrine: An Historical Overview,’” *Journal of Mormon History* 25, no. 1 (1999): 244.

33. Reeve, *Religion of a Different Color*, 150–51. Reeve considers Pratt to be “politically progressive, well ahead of Young, his fellow Saints, and the rest of the nation” (153).

Notwithstanding Pratt's progressive beliefs in some areas, he was still very much a product of his time. In 1845, for example, he combined his understanding of Mormon theology with contemporary science to determine how much older Christ, the first born in spirit, was than the youngest spirit. He did this by assuming that spiritual gestation was about a year—just as it is on earth—and calculating the total number of spirits born in the premortal existence. He believed that the earth would be inhabited for eight thousand years, with an average of five hundred million inhabitants every fifty years, and that in addition to the earth's inhabitants a third of the spirits were cast out of heaven in the premortal existence. Pratt also believed that our solar system had thirty other inhabitable planets and moons, with the same God and populated by the same heavenly family in proportion to the earth. Together, these assumptions yielded a spirit population of one quadrillion and twenty trillion, which therefore was in years the age differential between the first and last born. Hesitating at the magnitude of these numbers, Pratt recalculated on the assumption that spirits were born at a rate of one per minute, which only would have taken one billion and nine hundred million years, or at a rate of one per second—sort of an insect model—which yielded a figure of only thirty million years. In fact, though, Pratt thought a short gestation period “very improbable.”

Pratt returned to this question in 1853, not to dismiss it but rather to revise his assumptions. This time he limited the earth's functional life to seven thousand years, and—consistent with the latest scientific thinking—disregarded any other potentially inhabited spheres. So, only one hundred billion spirits were needed. With polygamy now public, he assumed these spirits were the offspring of one hundred polygamous wives—so only a billion years of annual childbearing was needed. Now that was a creative mind!<sup>34</sup>

---

34. In the mid-nineteenth century, when Pratt was writing, the universe was believed to be eternal, so his initial timeline—which is some 140,000 times longer than the current estimates for the age of the universe—was not a prob-

Obviously, Pratt's efforts—however serious—were not intended to establish doctrine. One has to wonder if even he found it a little preposterous. My point is that it doesn't detract from his overall brilliance to read this speculative analysis from a vantage point of 160 years later. And he was far from alone. At least on the question of whether the other planets were inhabited, he could name many learned men in agreement, with the first significant challenge to this idea coming in 1853. Pratt was hardly unique in his "scientific" speculations—others among his fellow apostles, for example, worried about the physical growth of spirits and their elastic properties.

An important question, perhaps only for internal leadership deliberation, is what sustained the priesthood ban for so many decades after science had discredited the popular nineteenth-century notions that gave rise to the ban in the first place. In the hundred years prior to the priesthood revelation, Church leaders repeatedly revisited the question of Blacks and the priesthood. Just between 1879 and the early 1950s, there were at least twenty-three First Presidency or combined First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve meetings during which some aspect of the subject was discussed. Many of these involved questions about cases with some distant African ancestry, and infrequently at least one participant argued unsuccessfully for flexibility in applying the "any African ancestry" exclusion. Failure to relax the so-called "one-drop" rule stemmed both from precedent and from another lingering bit of nineteenth-century pseudoscience. This was the non-genetic notion that racial identity could be thought of as "blood," along with the belief that this blood could continue to be passed down through many generations and then somehow reconstitute the long-forgotten racial type of some

---

lem. He probably would have believed that his revised calculation of a billion years was very consistent with current estimates of the age of the earth, which is about five billion years.



remote ancestor. Brigham Young believed this, and so did his counselor and eventual successor as Church president Joseph F. Smith.<sup>35</sup>

Never entering the discussion, of course, was the more recent scientific demonstration that ultimately all human ancestry can be traced back to Africa. It's not likely that this would have changed the earlier decisions, of course, because the modern scientific timeline is hundreds of thousands of years of human life, while the Church leadership was following a seven thousand-year biblical model.

On several occasions the senior leadership decided that there should be a collection of previous rulings to help with future discussions.<sup>36</sup> One notable insight from these collections should have been the narrow focus of the discussions. The methodology was always the same: reliance on the statements and discussions of revered predecessors, often the First Presidency, though sometimes just the opinion of an influential apostle.<sup>37</sup> Given the stature of these respected forebears, it made sense that later reviews would prayerfully consider earlier decisions. In hindsight, however, it is apparent that no effort was made to verify the earlier claims (which could have revealed poor memories), nor to identify beliefs simply imported from the conventional wisdom of an earlier era. These earlier beliefs and the decisions they supported simply passed unchanged through successive generations of leaders.<sup>38</sup>

---

35. "President Smith . . . referred to the doctrine by President Brigham Young which he (the speaker) said he believed in himself" (council minutes, Jan. 2, 1902).

36. E.g., 1908 (just a few entries), 1940, 1947, 1953, and perhaps 1963.

37. Notwithstanding his erroneous memory, George Q. Cannon, a counselor in the First Presidency, dominated discussions at the turn of the century, and in the mid-twentieth century even the First Presidency referred inquirers to apostle Joseph Fielding Smith's *The Way to Perfection* (Salt Lake City: Genealogical Society of Utah, 1931) for a fuller explanation of Mormon beliefs on Blacks.

38. An explicit acknowledgement of this fact was made during a 1908 council discussion of Church policy, when President Joseph F. Smith observed that "he did not know that we could do anything more in such cases than refer to the

Given the extent to which indefensible nineteenth-century beliefs had spawned and continued to justify the priesthood ban, this approach seems to me to be unfair to both the institution and to those whose dated beliefs continued to be perpetuated. How fair would it be to judge our current opinions by what is known 150 years in the future? So why should we judge nineteenth-century Church leaders by their dated views?

Not until the 1960s did any Church leader argue to end the priesthood ban. During that decade, Hugh B. Brown twice proposed this. The first time, in 1963, was an unsuccessful proposal to allow the conferral of the Aaronic Priesthood in conjunction with a plan to open a mission in Africa. In some ways this was a curious idea, which I thought of as Brown's thinly disguised attempt at a first step. Brown's second effort, in 1969, was an attempt to end the ban altogether, which I think may have reflected a mistaken belief by Brown that President McKay did not think the ban was of divine origin.

The good news here, in my view, is that over the past decade, and especially the past few years, Church statements finally reflect the involvement of historians in developing statements about Church history. On the specific issue of Blacks and the priesthood, what I had hoped would happen in 1973 finally has happened.

Of course, acknowledging a doctrinal mistake does run into the issue of infallibility, which many probably think is more important than providing an honest explanation. When I was doing my research, it was apparent that the leading General Authorities did not believe even their most confident colleagues were infallible, even on doctrine. The evolution of doctrine—including abandonment of some once-central beliefs—surely supports that notion, and the greater availability of early Church records now makes this fact undeniable. President Dallin H. Oaks has made this point quite clearly: “Every student of church his-

---

rulings of Presidents Young, Taylor, Woodruff and other Presidencies on this question” (council minutes, Aug. 26, 1908).

tory knows that there have been differences of opinion among church leaders since the Church was organized.”<sup>39</sup>

The Church leadership periodically has acknowledged that its predecessors have speculated on doctrinal subjects or simply been wrong. Dieter F. Uchtdorf, then a member of the First Presidency, made this observation in the October 2013 general conference: “And, to be perfectly frank, there have been times when members or leaders in the Church have simply made mistakes. There may have been things said or done that were not in harmony with our values, principles, or doctrine. I suppose the Church would be perfect only if it were run by perfect beings. God is perfect, and His doctrine is pure. But He works through us—His imperfect children—and imperfect people make mistakes.”<sup>40</sup> J. Reuben Clark, of an earlier First Presidency, made a similar observation sixty years before Elder Uchtdorf when he spoke of doctrines “where a subsequent President of the Church and the people themselves have felt that in declaring the doctrine, the announcer was not moved upon by the Holy Ghost.”<sup>41</sup> Perhaps the clearest such statement came from B. H. Roberts of the First Quorum of the Seventy. An intellectual, albeit with his own indisputable race bias, he wrote in 1908 of the possibility of a

---

39. Dallin H. Oaks, *The Lord's Way* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1991), 200.

40. Dieter F. Uchtdorf, “Come, Join With Us,” Oct. 2013, <https://www.lds.org/general-conference/2013/10/come-join-with-us?lang=eng>.

41. From an address to seminary and institute teachers at Brigham Young University on “When are the Writings or Sermons of Church Leaders Entitled to the Claim of Scripture?,” delivered July 7, 1954, and published in the *Church News*, July 31, 1954. Somewhat more recently this talk was reprinted in *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 12, no. 2 (Summer 1979): 68–81. Clark offered several criteria for deciding that something was *not* Church doctrine. Basically, this was any statement by someone other than the Church president that asserted “as the settled doctrine of the Church,” something that was “in dispute” or which modified or proclaimed new doctrine or a revelation. The practical problem is that, at least since 1970, disagreements among Church leaders almost never become public.

Church leader “speaking sometimes under the influence of prejudice and preconceived notions.”<sup>42</sup>

What limits the usefulness of these acknowledgements is that they are non-specific and often relatively limited, e.g., “a statement made by a Church leader decades ago”<sup>43</sup> or a statement “of a highly speculative character.”<sup>44</sup> Moreover, some important early Church leaders deemed substantial errors to be impossible. Orson Hyde, president of the Quorum of the Twelve, observed in 1860 that “to acknowledge that this is the Kingdom of God, and that there is a presiding power, and to admit that he can advance incorrect doctrine, is to lay the ax at the foot of the tree. Will [God] suffer His mouthpiece to go into error? No. He would remove him, and place another there.”<sup>45</sup> Brigham Young held the same view: “you may go home and sleep as sweetly as a babe in its mother’s arms, as to any danger of your leaders leading you astray, for if they should do so the Lord would quickly sweep them from the earth.”<sup>46</sup> Even the candid B. H. Roberts wrote that “absolute certainty, except as to fundamental things, the great things that concern a man’s salvation, may not be expected. . . . [I]n things fundamental, we have the right to expect solid rock, not shifting sands, and God gives that certainty.”<sup>47</sup> Roberts’s perspective requires a strong and consistent official record on “things fundamental.” No longer much talked about, this notion

---

42. B. H. Roberts, “Answer to Ministerial Association Review,” *Improvement Era* 10, no. 9 (July 1907): 692.

43. Neil L. Andersen, “Trial of Your Faith,” Oct. 2012, <https://www.lds.org/general-conference/2012/10/trial-of-your-faith?lang=eng>.

44. Clark, “When Are the Teachings.”

45. See Gary Bergera, “The Orson Pratt–Brigham Young Controversies: Conflict Within the Quorums, 1853 to 1868,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 13, no. 2 (Summer 1980): 7–49, quote from p. 29.

46. Brigham Young, Feb. 23, 1862, *Journal of Discourses*, 9:289.

47. B. H. Roberts, *Comprehensive History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1930), 1:166.

presently would force an unseemly argument that the priesthood ban was not a thing fundamental—when it was and still is fundamental to many people.

### What's Left

To recapitulate, in the final analysis, this subject comes down to at least three fundamental questions, all of which usefully could be answered officially. First, and most importantly, what was the original basis for the priesthood ban? As I've said, to my way of thinking, the simplest way to answer this question is to ask Brigham Young, who said that those of African descent were descendants of Cain and thereby ineligible for the priesthood.

Closely related to this first question is why assumptions about lineage carried the case for Young but not for Joseph Smith, who seemed to hold the same popular assumptions about Black ancestry. This may be a task for historians, though they may not get closer to a definitive answer than already has been offered: that differing personal beliefs about Black potential, coinciding with concerns about interracial marriage, fears about what has been termed "interracial sexual excesses," and restrictions put in place by Masons on African American membership led Brigham Young to reach a new conclusion.<sup>48</sup>

The third question of why the ban persisted even after science discredited the old assumptions about lineage, genetics, and heredity seems to be within the purview of the Church's senior councils. As an outsider, the most obvious thing is that the many reviews that were undertaken of the subject were, until very recently, limited to what early leaders had said, with no apparent effort to use broader resources to identify potentially imported opinions. A secondary factor was that late in the history, another speculative indirect explanation for the ban had emerged

---

48. Reeve, *Religion of a Different Color*, 107; and Homer, *Joseph's Temples*, chaps. 5 and 13.

invoking the premortal experience. In fact, however, the Cain connection remained the foundation of the discriminatory policy, while the new secondary view only provided a more comfortable pretext for Church policy than invoking the increasingly anachronistic Cain justification.

There is little question in my mind where all this is heading. The historical record is clear, and is now widely available, that Brigham Young allowed his nineteenth-century beliefs about Cain and nineteenth-century concerns about racial purity to drive a decision to bar Blacks from the Mormon priesthood and temple ordinances. Young said as much repeatedly, with no uncertainty as to why he was acting. He may well have felt inspired in so doing, but viewed from the more fully informed perspective of another century, he was wrong about lineage and its implications. This doesn't lessen Young's substantial accomplishment in establishing the Mormon kingdom in the American West, nor of successfully leading the Church through some of its greatest challenges. It is still appropriate to acknowledge that, on this particular question, he made a mistake.

Failure to acknowledge this error leaves the impression that the Church still believes the ban might have been of divine origin even if the explanations were not. That's a pretty heavy message for the Black Mormon community. Back while the priesthood ban was still in effect, I used to speak to small groups, some with a few or even many African American (and some African) members. I walked pretty carefully through the history, thinking I didn't want to bruise anyone's testimony. What I quickly learned was that it was the white members, not the Blacks, who had problems, if any, with the history. The Black view tended to be, "Oh, so it was just a white guy thing. What a relief." That made sense to them because they assumed racial bias was pretty much everywhere. What they were worried about was that God—not white guys—thought they were less worthy.

A second important cost of failing to acknowledge the error is that this silence undercuts the repeated denunciation of racism made by

Church leaders since the priesthood revelation.<sup>49</sup> Those members who seek some theological justification for their personal bias still can tell themselves that God is on their side.<sup>50</sup>

Church leaders will eventually acknowledge these points, perhaps even within the next decade. The groundwork certainly has been laid through the various statements published in the past few years. Given the Church's acknowledgement that the ban began with Brigham Young and its rejection of the explanations previously given for the ban, it is a relatively short additional step to admit that it was Young's belief in this "folklore" that gave rise to the ban in the first place. I believe that a substantial proportion of the Church membership, including at least some General Authorities, already believe this.

Back in 1973 I ended my historical overview with three provisional conclusions, presented in question form:

- First, do we really have any evidence that Joseph Smith initiated a policy of priesthood denial to Negroes?
- Second, to what extent did nineteenth-century perspectives on race influence Brigham Young's teachings on the Negro and, through him, the teachings of the modern Church?
- Third, is there any historical basis from ancient texts for interpreting the Pearl of Great Price as directly relevant to the black-priesthood question, or are these interpretations dependent upon more recent (e.g., nineteenth-century) assumptions?<sup>51</sup>

---

49. E.g., *First Presidency* (1988), John Carmack of the First Quorum of the Seventy (1993), President Gordon B. Hinckley (2006), LDS.org (2013).

50. Anecdotally, at least, Blacks within the Church report periodic encounters with racist comments, and according to an informal 2014 survey even the important 2013 LDS.org essay on race and priesthood was known to only about 20 percent of Church members—and that figure only in the United States. A hope that the essence of this statement would be included in a general conference talk has not been realized, nor has a Church website for the discussion of race planned in 2012 ever been implemented.

51. Bush, "Mormonism's Negro Doctrine," 49.

Forty-five years later, the answer to all three questions is clear. The demarcation between the policies of Smith and Young has been strongly reaffirmed, no evidence has emerged that Young's decisions were derived from anything other than his belief in the Cain connection, and even the iconic Hugh Nibley has written against any Pearl of Great Price-based justification.<sup>52</sup>

Paradoxically, the Church has yet to acknowledge the easiest of these questions: What evidence is there that Brigham's views were independent of his nineteenth-century environment? As a cursory review of his discourses will quickly reveal, there is none. Awkward as it may be to admit this, it is past time that this acknowledgement be made. Had it been done forty years ago, the story now would be old history. Hopefully, forty years from now, it finally will indeed be old history.

## Appendix

In more detail:

1978 – First ordination to Melchizedek Priesthood since Joseph Smith (William Cannon [Guam], Joseph Freeman Jr. [Utah])

1978 – First temple ordinances since Joseph Smith (Joseph Freeman Jr. [Utah])

1978 – First post-revelation Black missionary (Marcus Martins [Brazil])

1978 – First Black high priest (Ruffin Bridgeforth [Utah])

1978 – First missionaries to Black Africa (Nigeria and Ghana)

Early 1980s – First Black bishop (Hervé Martins); first branch president 1979 (Robert Lang), 1980-Accra (Emanuel Kissi)

1980 – First mission to Black Africa (Africa West, in Nigeria [1980], followed by Ghana [1985] and Congo [1987]). There are now twenty-six missions open in Africa, not counting the three in South Africa.

1985 – Johannesburg South Africa Temple opened with Black temple workers; Black majority of Church members in South Africa by 1988

---

52. Hugh Nibley, *Abraham in Egypt* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1981), 134.



1987 – First Black mission president (Hervé Martins [Brazil Fortaleza Mission]); later, Joseph Sitati was called as president of the Nigeria Uyo Mission [2007] and Edward Dube as president of the Zimbabwe Harare Mission [2009])

1988 – First entirely Black African stake (Nigeria)

1988 – First Black stake president (David Eka [Nigeria]); later, Edward Dube served as stake president in Zimbabwe [1999], Joseph Sitati in Kenya [2001], and Jackson T. Mkhabela in Soweto, South Africa [2005])

1990 – First Black General Authority (Hervé Martins [Brazil], Second Quorum of the Seventy)

1991 – Two stakes organized in Ghana

2003 – First African member of the Relief Society general board (Florence Chukwurah [Nigeria])

2004 – Accra Ghana Temple opened

2005 – Aba Nigeria Temple opened

2009 – First African General Authority (Joseph Sitati [Kenya], First Quorum of the Seventy)

2010 – First African temple president (Alexander Odume [Nigeria])

2011 – Kinshasa Democratic Republic of the Congo and Durban South Africa Temples announced

2012 – First Ghanaian temple president (George Afful)

2012 – First Black president of Atlanta Stake (Jermaine Sullivan)

2013 – Second African General Authority (Edward Dube [Zimbabwe])

2013 – First Black stake president in Alabama (Peter Johnson [Bessemer Alabama Stake])

2014 – First African member of the Young Women general board (Dorah Mkhabela [Soweto, South Africa])

2015 – Abidjan Ivory Coast Temple construction announced

TBD – First Black apostle



Hildebrando de Melo  
Eye of God III (2018)  
30" x 23"  
mixed media on paper

# NEGOTIATING BLACK SELF-HATE WITHIN THE LDS CHURCH<sup>1</sup>

Darron T. Smith

*“Our living prophet, President David O. McKay, has said, ‘The seeming discrimination by the Church toward the Negro is not something which originated with man; but goes back into the beginning with God.’”*

*—First Presidency statement, December 15, 1969<sup>2</sup>*

It has been forty years since the landmark decision by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints to end its long-standing restriction on people of African descent from full participation and recognition as worthy spiritual beings in a majority white religion. Since the ban on Black priesthood ordination was lifted in June 1978, subsequently allowing every worthy Black male access to its lay priesthood and all Black men and women their temple ordinances, the Church has made small strides and modest growth in the expansion of its Black urban membership. It is hard to know for certain the exact number of Black members in the Church, as the institution purportedly does not keep records based on racial demographics; however, in 2009, the Pew Research Center estimated that around 3 percent of US Mormons are Black.<sup>3</sup>

---

1. I would like to thank my wife, Tasha Sabino, for her creativity and brilliance, along with Kerry Brown, Adewale Sogunru, Dr. Brenda Harris, and Dr. Boyd Petersen for their efforts in helping this manuscript come to fruition.

2. First Presidency statement, Dec. 15, 1969, available at [BlackLDS.org](http://BlackLDS.org), <http://www.blacklds.org/1969-first-presidency-statement>.

3. “A Portrait of Mormons in the U.S.,” Pew Research Center’s Forum on Religion and Public Life, July 24, 2009, <http://www.pewforum>.

Given this dearth of Black membership, high-ranking Church officials have purposefully engaged in public awareness campaigns in Los Angeles; Washington, DC; Harlem; and New York City.<sup>4</sup> And utilizing its vast media resources, Church leadership worked to undo the Church's image as a racist faith tradition hostile to Black people. The "I'm a Mormon" print and television ad campaign led by Church public relations was another attempt to represent the Church as multicultural by highlighting a few Black faces. But, as the Tony Award-winning musical *The Book of Mormon* demonstrated in its satirical portrayal of the LDS Church's racial ignorance, stereotypes die hard. And if the Broadway production and its lampooning of anti-Black Mormon attitudes is any indication of how the greater public views those in the fold, the battle to increase the number of Blacks will remain a difficult undertaking.

The question remains: why would any self-aware Black person find Mormonism the least bit appealing given its ignoble history of racial exclusion and marginalization? In fact, white male Church leadership is notorious for sidelining any individual or group that poses a threat to its established order of truth-making from groups like Native Americans, the LGBTQ+ community, disaffected Mormons, and politically progressive members.<sup>5</sup> This paper is intended as a theoretical analysis into the complex issue of religious identity and internalized oppression in the lives of Black members of the conservative LDS Church, as these devout

---

org/2009/07/24/a-portrait-of-mormons-in-the-us.

4. Armand L. Mauss, *All Abraham's Children: Changing Mormon Conceptions of Race and Lineage* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003).

5. See, for example, Kristen Moulton, "Kelly on Excommunication from Mormon Church: 'I've Done Nothing Wrong,'" *Salt Lake Tribune*, June 24, 2014, <http://archive.sltrib.com/story.php?ref=/sltrib/news/58104587-78/women-kelly-church-ordain.html.csp>; and Laurie Goodstein, "Mormon Church Threatens Critic with Excommunication," *New York Times*, Jan. 15, 2015, <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/01/16/us/john-dehlin-mormon-critic-facing-excommunication.html>.

individuals struggle to find validation, a voice, and equal representation within a space they hold so dear.

### Introduction: Racial Battle Fatigue

Throughout US history, Black Americans have long been required to seek the approval of whites in order to gain some semblance of economic, political, and material advantage. Post-civil rights assimilation did not improve racial matters beyond superficial changes and the gospel of colorblindness spoken in public spaces.<sup>6</sup> The ongoing attempt to desegregate America did, however, bring many African Americans in closer proximity with implicit and explicit racial bias and mistreatment at the hands of mostly white Americans.<sup>7</sup>

Since the election of Barack Obama (and particularly through Donald Trump's salacious campaign and stunning victory in 2016), polls from reliable sources have consistently shown a growing tension over the state of US race relations.<sup>8</sup> This anxiety is most acutely felt among

---

6. Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, *White Supremacy and Racism in the Post-Civil Rights Era* (Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2001).

7. Darron T. Smith, "Images of Black Males in Popular Media," *Huffington Post*, Mar. 14, 2013, [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/darron-t-smith-phd/Black-men-media\\_b\\_2844990.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/darron-t-smith-phd/Black-men-media_b_2844990.html); Hugh Honour, *From the American Revolution to World War I, part 1: Slaves and Liberators*, vol. 4 of *The Image of the Black in Western Art*, edited by David Bindman, Henry Louise Gates, and Karen C. C. Dalton (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1989); and Adam Waytz, Kelly Marie Hoffman, and Sophie Trawalter, "A Superhumanization Bias in Whites' Perceptions of Blacks," *Social Psychological and Personality Science* 6, no. 3 (2015): 352–59.

8. See Eugene Scott, "Most Americans Say Race Relations Are a Major Problem, but Few Discuss it with Friends and Family," *Washington Post*, May 31, 2018, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2018/05/31/most-americans-say-race-relations-are-a-major-problem-but-few-discuss-it-with-friends-and-family/>; and Ryan Struyk, "Blacks and Whites See Racism in the United States Very, Very Differently," *CNN Politics*, Aug. 18, 2017,

working-class white Americans who feel their white-skin privilege slipping away with the encroachment of racial diversity.<sup>9</sup> Hence, behind the polarizing moniker “Make America Great Again” is this unfounded racial fear that drove many whites to cast their ballot for an open and unapologetic bigot. Whether it is “sitting at Starbucks while Black,” “barbecuing while Black,” or “kneeling while Black,” Black folk remain the object of white contempt and scorn.<sup>10</sup>

As widespread ideas around the inherent inferiority of Blacks continue to inform American society, whites (and other groups) react to these dehumanizing messages and insults through the implementation of racial microaggressions.<sup>11</sup> These automatic put-downs are guided by unconscious thought and have a deleterious effect on the lives of Black people. Actions like name-calling, hair-touching, calling law enforcement for triviality, or second-guessing someone’s ability to perform in school or on the job are but a few of the relentless daily affronts (or stressors) that Blacks face.<sup>12</sup> Black people, both young and old, who endure these

---

<https://www.cnn.com/2017/08/16/politics/blacks-white-racism-united-states-polls/index.html>.

9. Sarah McCammon and Alyssa Edes, “Michele Norris on the Anxiety of White America and Her Optimism for the Future,” *NPR*, Mar. 13, 2018, <https://www.npr.org/sections/codeswitch/2018/03/13/593243772/michele-norris-on-the-anxiety-of-white-america-and-her-optimism-for-the-future>.

10. Recently, there has been a spate of incidents caught on camera where whites have called the police on people of color who are engaging in nonthreatening, legal activities. These activities include but are not limited to golfing “too slow,” shopping for prom, touring a college campus, checking out of an Airbnb, waiting for a meeting at Starbucks, grilling at the park, selling bottled water to baseball fans, swimming at the neighborhood pool, wearing socks at the pool, and napping in a college dorm lounge.

11. Derald Wing Sue, Christina M. Capodilupo, and Aisha M. B. Holder, “Racial Microaggressions in the Life Experience of Black Americans,” *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice* 39, no. 3 (2008): 329–36.

12. Chester Pierce, “Psychiatric Problems of the Black Minority,” in *American Handbook of Psychiatry*, vol. 2, edited by Silvano Arieti (New York: Basic Books,

offenses on a routine basis find themselves susceptible to racial battle fatigue (RBF).<sup>13</sup>

The fundamental premise of RBF is that the accumulation of racial insults (microaggressions) are overtaxing to the body, keeping it in a chronic state of hyperarousal.<sup>14</sup> This autonomic and uncontrollable fight, flight, or freeze response can be detrimental to psychobiological regulatory systems necessary for optimal health.<sup>15</sup> The stress hormone cortisol is well documented as a major factor in the body's response to stressful stimuli. But when cortisol remains elevated for too long, wear and tear can occur to vital organs such as the brain, kidneys, eyes, and heart.<sup>16</sup> Research has shown that Black Americans, irrespective of income or socioeconomic status, have incessantly elevated cortisol levels

---

1974), 512–23; and Chester Pierce, “Stress Analogs of Racism and Sexism: Terrorism, Torture, and Disaster,” in *Mental Health, Racism, and Sexism*, edited by Charles V. Willie, Patricia Perri Rieker, Bernard M. Kramer, and Bertram S. Brown (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1995), 277–93.

13. William A. Smith, Walter R. Allen, and Lynette L. Danley, “‘Assume the Position . . . You Fit the Description’: Psychosocial Experiences and Racial Battle Fatigue among African American Male College Students,” *American Behavioral Scientist* 51, no. 4 (2007): 551–78; and William A. Smith, Man Hung, and Jeremy D. Franklin, “Racial Battle Fatigue and the *Mis*Education of Black Men: Racial Microaggressions, Societal Problems, and Environmental Stress,” *The Journal of Negro Education* 80, no. 1 (Winter 2011): 63–82.

14. William A. Smith, Man Hung, and Jeremy D. Franklin, “Between Hope and Racial Battle Fatigue: African American Men and Race-Related Stress,” *Journal of Black Masculinity* 2, no. 1 (2012): 35–58; and Bessel A. Van der Kolk, “The Body Keeps the Score: Memory and the Evolving Psychobiology of Posttraumatic Stress,” *Harvard Review of Psychiatry* 1, no. 5 (1994): 253–65.

15. Marni N. Silverman and Esther M. Sternberg, “Glucocorticoid Regulation of Inflammation and its Functional Correlates: From HPA Axis to Glucocorticoid Receptor Dysfunction,” *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences* 1261, no. 1 (2012): 55–63.

16. Bruce S. McEwen, “Stress, Adaptation, and Disease: Allostasis and Allostatic Load,” *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences* 840, no. 1 (1998): 33–44.

compared to white Americans, due in part to living with white racial discrimination in all aspects of their lives.<sup>17</sup> Furthermore, we know through epigenetic research that trauma and neglect can modify cellular DNA of their victims and can be carried intergenerationally to future progeny, leaving deep scars of emotional instability.<sup>18</sup> In other words, spending too much time interacting with whites can be a potential hazard to Black physical and mental health.

African Americans occupy unequal terrain alongside whites who have been socialized to devalue Black people as unthinking, lazy, incompetent, criminal, indolent, overly sexual, athletic, and much more.<sup>19</sup> These racialized images were historically crafted by elite white men as a method of social control (of the Black body) codified not only in popular culture through media representations but also in white religious thought.<sup>20</sup> In

---

17. Arline T. Geronimus, Margaret Hicken, Danya Keene, and John Bound, "'Weathering' and Age Patterns of Allostatic Load Scores among Blacks and Whites in the United States," *American Journal of Public Health* 96, no. 5 (2006): 826–33.

18. Marjolein V. E. Veenendaal, Rebecca C. Painter, Susanne R. de Rooij, Patrick M. M. Bossuyt, Joris A. M. van der Post, Peter D. Gluckman, Mark A. Hanson, and Tessa J. Roseboom, "Transgenerational Effects of Prenatal Exposure to the 1944–45 Dutch Famine," *BJOG: An International Journal of Obstetrics & Gynaecology* 120, no. 5 (2013): 548–54; and David R. Williams, Rahwa Haile, Hector M. González, Harold Neighbors, Raymond Baser, and James S. Jackson, "The Mental Health of Black Caribbean Immigrants: Results from the National Survey of American Life," *American Journal of Public Health* 97, no. 1 (2007): 52–59.

19. Tim Marcin, "Forty Percent of Whites Think Black People Just Need to Try Harder, Poll Finds," *Newsweek*, Apr. 4, 2018, <https://www.newsweek.com/forty-percent-whites-think-black-people-just-need-try-harder-equality-poll-872646>; and Aaron Blake, "Republicans' Views of Blacks' Intelligence, Work Ethic Lag Behind Democrats at a Record Clip," *Washington Post*, Mar. 31, 2017, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2017/03/31/the-gap-between-republicans-and-democrats-views-of-african-americans-just-hit-a-new-high>.

20. Robert M. Entman and Andrew Rojecki, *The Black Image in the White Mind: Media and Race in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000); and Edward J. Blum and Paul Harvey, *The Color of Christ: The Son of*



response to these stereotypical and racist views, white people engage in unconscious bias during their interpersonal dealings with Blacks.

The long-term impact of centuries-old white racial ideology about Black people as an abomination and the ubiquitous nature of this thinking have left a stain on the Black psyche. In truth, it is not possible for a people to spend 246 years in bondage followed by one hundred years of Jim Crow choking the life out of Black progress and emerge whole from the experience. Some Black people in the LDS Church and elsewhere in the US adopt proracist,<sup>21</sup> white attitudes and understandings, accepting the white definition of Blackness, which is tantamount to an assault on Black dignity and self-love.<sup>22</sup> In addition, the expenditure of energy required to assuage white fears, prejudice, and ignorance depletes psychological reserves needed for other important, creative, and productive areas of life. In this effort, Blacks are exposed to a host of shame-related, dehumanizing interactions, chipping away at their self-worth and enabling the development of toxic, internalized self-hatred.<sup>23</sup>

---

*God and the Saga of Race in America* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 2012).

21. The term “proracist” refers to the negative attitudes, beliefs, actions, and assumptions that white Americans communicate about Black people as lazy, on welfare, criminal, etc. Compliant Blacks use these same hateful views to denigrate other Blacks who are thought to be out of step with white standards.

22. Brenda Major, John F. Dovidio, Bruce G. Link, and Sarah K. Calabrese, “Stigma and Its Implications for Health: Introduction and Overview,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Stigma, Discrimination, and Health*, edited by Brenda Major, John F. Dovidio, and Bruce G. Link (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 3.

23. Ronald E. Hall, “Self-Hate as Life Threat Pathology among Black Americans: Black Pride Antidote vis-à-vis Leukocyte Telomere Length (LTL),” *Journal of African American Studies* 18, no. 4 (2014): 398–408; and Christopher Charles, “Skin Bleaching and the Cultural Meanings of Race and Skin Color,” *Social Science Research Network*, Mar. 21, 2014, [https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=2412800](https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2412800).

## The Vulnerability to Black Internalized Oppression in Mormonism

It has been nearly half a century since the priesthood ban was removed, and still the majority of Mormons—from the elite Quorum of the Twelve to the rank-and-file members—believe in the offensively racist folk teachings of the curse of Cain that are well known in Mormon circles.<sup>24</sup> It was evident just how extensive these doctrines were embedded within the culture when in February 2012, Brigham Young University religion professor Randy Bott publicly expressed much of the old racist theology that had been in existence for over 130 years in the Church. In an interview with *Washington Post* reporter Jason Horowitz, Bott spoke of curses and marks on African peoples, invoking Genesis 9:18–27 and Abraham 1:26–27.<sup>25</sup> Randy Bott had been a towering figure at BYU for over two decades.<sup>26</sup> His instruction was highly influential on campus, which means that he was responsible for the racial indoctrination of generations of young, mostly white, Latter-day Saints.

Even though Mormon leadership quietly and publicly debunked these recursive explanations of the ban, the reality is that many white

---

24. Newell G. Bringham and Darron T. Smith, eds., *Black and Mormon* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004); Newell G. Bringham, *Saints, Slaves, and Blacks: The Changing Place of Black People Within Mormonism* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Publishing Group, 1981); and Lester E. Bush, Jr., “Mormonism’s Negro Doctrine: An Historical Overview,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 34, no. 1/2 (2001): 225. Note that this latter citation is from a commemorative issue of *Dialogue*; the article was originally published as Lester E. Bush, Jr., “Mormonism’s Negro Doctrine: An Historical Overview,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 8, no. 1 (Spring 1973): 11–68.

25. Jason Horowitz, “The Genesis of a Church’s Stand on Race,” *Washington Post*, Feb. 28, 2012, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/the-genesis-of-a-churchs-stand-on-race/2012/02/22/gIQAQZXyfr\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/the-genesis-of-a-churchs-stand-on-race/2012/02/22/gIQAQZXyfr_story.html).

26. See Bott’s webpage, which is still posted with BYU’s department of Religious Education ([http://religion.byu.edu/randy\\_bott](http://religion.byu.edu/randy_bott)) and the Wikipedia entry for Bott’s publication record ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Randy\\_L.\\_Bott](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Randy_L._Bott)).

Latter-day Saints (like other white folk) cannot easily shake off their inured racial prejudice. This is apparent from the 2016 Pew Research Center exit poll data that indicated that 61 percent of Latter-day Saints voted for Donald Trump even though his past and present racism was on full display throughout his campaign and current administration.<sup>27</sup> In turn, Mormon racial theology does not foster spiritual growth for people of color, but in fact is antithetical to Black group uplift. Black members rarely, if ever, have the opportunity to “speak their truth” about living in a racialized body within official Church settings, lest they be met with white resistance, fragility, and bitter defensiveness.<sup>28</sup> In situations where the normalcy of white space is merely disturbed, white people will seek to reestablish control of the discussion while silencing Blacks, leaving them deeply afflicted. Not only does this tension contribute to the development of racial battle fatigue (RBF), but it can also result in faith crisis. This psychic war will leave many Black Mormons unwittingly vulnerable to feelings of inadequacy and self-doubt, the reverse of what religion is supposed to instill in its believers. Johnisha Demease-Williams is an African American student at Brigham Young University who decided to interview her white classmates about their racial understandings. In the twenty-five-minute short video, “The Black Student Experience—BYU,” Demease-Williams encounters and comes to understand the deep disjuncture between whites’ understandings of race and the reality she faces daily.<sup>29</sup> Experiences like this may cause

---

27. Gregory A. Smith and Jessica Martínez, “How the Faithful Voted: A Preliminary 2016 Analysis,” Pew Research Center, Nov. 9, 2016, <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/11/09/how-the-faithful-voted-a-preliminary-2016-analysis>.

28. Darron T. Smith, “Unpacking Whiteness in Zion: Some Personal Reflections and General Observations,” in *Black and Mormon*, 148–66.

29. Johnisha Demease-Williams, “The Black Student Experience—BYU,” Nov. 3, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wyx9kpDThh4>; Peggy Fletcher Stack, “It’s Not Easy Being Black at BYU, Film Shows,” *Salt Lake Tribune*, Dec. 8, 2016, <http://archive.sltrib.com/article.php?id=4601215&itype=CMSID>.

some Black members to renounce their faith while others, at some point, must confront this double bind and reconcile their existence within the whiteness of Mormonism.<sup>30</sup>

It is within the sacredness of this white space where Blacks who choose to remain in the faith must find meaning in their Church membership and purpose beyond racial group affiliation.<sup>31</sup> But this does not come without cost. In staying, Black Latter-day Saints must seek to compensate for their relegation and isolation in the Church. They implement cognitive strategies to deflect pain associated with the shame of rejection from their community and uncaring Church leadership as well as the ongoing racial ignorance from their well-meaning white brothers and sisters. Some rely on apologia, believing that Church authorities are fallible men who harbor unexamined prejudice. These Black members recognize that Church leaders do not have all the answers (particularly regarding racial matters) but believe that they are inspired to lead Mormonism down a righteous path nonetheless. Black apologists often employ humor, intellectualism, verbal jousting, and music to pander to the white members in efforts to mitigate the discomfort associated with existential insignificance among the LDS people.<sup>32</sup> In other instances,

---

30. Internalized oppression is unavoidable in a white racist society. In order to reduce prejudice some Blacks turn their rage, frustration, fear, and powerlessness on each other. This is done through the invalidation of Black people and the Black experience. White supremacy has driven many Black folk to unwittingly attack, criticize, or have unrealistic expectations of other Blacks, particularly those willing to step forward to challenge systemic injustice. See Darron Smith, "These House-Negroes Still Think We're Cursed: Struggling against Racism in the Classroom," *Cultural Studies* 19, no. 4 (2005): 439–54.

31. Elijah Anderson, "The White Space," *Sociology of Race and Ethnicity* 1, no. 1 (2015): 10–21.

32. Trent Toone, "Sistas in Zion Are Voices of Humor and Faith on Stereotypes, Misconceptions, and All Things Mormon," *Deseret News*, Aug. 15, 2013, <https://www.deseretnews.com/article/865584709/Sistas-in-Zion-are-voices-of-humor-and-faith-on-stereotypes-misconceptions-and-all-things-Mormon.html>.

when racialized teachings within the Church confound human reason, these Black Mormons adopt an extreme form of self-deprecation, permitting them to deal with the uncertainty they feel with regard to their acceptance and status in Mormonism. These members tend to ignore or downplay the profound racial contradiction found within their house of worship in their role as both an insider and outsider.<sup>33</sup>

Both groups of Blacks openly sustain Church authorities as inspired mouthpieces for God while they wrestle with the troublesome narrative and widespread use of racist dogma they are left to emotionally address. But the latter group must acquiesce to white prejudice, even when Church authority is patently wrong. Put differently, these Black Mormons must accept on some level an “inferior” status to accommodate white understandings of Blackness in Mormon theology. A study by writer-researcher Jana Riess of the Religion News Service found that 70 percent of Black Latter-day Saints believe the Mormon racial folklore of themselves as a cursed lineage. Not only is this number astounding in itself, but it actually surpasses the number of white Mormons who believe in this teaching (61 percent).<sup>34</sup> More than a few prominent Black

---

33. Jennifer Crocker and Brenda Major. “Social Stigma and Self-Esteem: The Self-Protective Properties of Stigma,” *Psychological Review* 96, no. 4 (1989): 608–30.

34. Jana Riess, “Forty Years On, Most Mormons Still Believe the Racist Temple Ban Was God’s Will,” *Religion News Service*, June 11, 2018, <https://religionnews.com/2018/06/11/40-years-later-most-mormons-still-believe-the-racist-priesthood-temple-ban-was-gods-will>. The survey question asked respondents to rate the following statement as true, probably true, might be true, probably not true, or not true: “The priesthood and temple ban on members of African descent was inspired of God and was God’s will for the Church until 1978.” The numbers cited represent the first two categories added together (i.e., those who said it was true as well as those who believed it was probably true). This question appeared as one of fifteen “testimony” statements, and in that context, received the lowest scores of any other testimony question. So these numbers are high and surprising, but they are possibly higher than they would have been if the question had not been embedded in a series of other positive-response questions like “God is real” and “Joseph Smith was a prophet.”

members in North America have gone on record vocalizing these same racist sentiments.

One outspoken defender of Mormon racism is Salt Lake City attorney Keith Hamilton, an African American Latter-day Saint who wrote a memoir entitled *Last Laborer: Thoughts and Reflections of a Black Mormon*.<sup>35</sup> In the book, Hamilton states that, “Withholding the priesthood from blacks was part of God’s unfolding plan.” Despite the ban’s existence through a century and a half of racism in American history, Hamilton explains that it was “no man-made policy . . . nor a policy instituted because some white LDS Church leader(s) had concerns about black-white relations.”<sup>36</sup> Instead, he assumes the old LDS canon that Blacks were deficient enough to warrant a divine curse.<sup>37</sup> From this standpoint, Hamilton endorses the racist mythology that he was an inferior being prior to the 1978 proclamation.

Other Black Mormons have found additional ways to deflect the pain they endure at the hands of white members as a result of these extreme racist views still found in Mormon theology.<sup>38</sup> These Blacks follow many Church authorities in maintaining an aloofness and denial of white racial oppression by stating that “only God knows” the origins of the now-defunct ban. For example, Alan Cherry, another one-time well-known Black Mormon name in Utah County, was one of a hand-

---

35. Peggy Fletcher Stack, “Black Mormon Defends Priesthood Ban Thirty-Three Years after It Was Lifted,” *Salt Lake Tribune*, June 9, 2011, <http://archive.sltrib.com/article.php?id=51976643&itype=cmsid>; and Keith N. Hamilton, *Last Laborer: Thoughts and Reflections of a Black Mormon* (South Jordan, Utah: Ammon Works, 2011).

36. Quoted in Stack, “Black Mormon.”

37. Now that the Church has posted the “Race and Priesthood” essay to its official website, which points the finger at Brigham Young as the instigator of the priesthood ban, should we expect Hamilton to offer up a redaction to that section of his manuscript?

38. Matthew L. Harris and Newell G. Bringhurst, eds., *The Mormon Church and Blacks: A Documentary History* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2015).

ful of African Americans who converted to the Church and attended BYU in the 1970s before the restriction was lifted.<sup>39</sup> In an interview with the LDS-owned *Deseret News*, Cherry told a reporter, “From the very beginning my impression that came from heaven was I was not to worry about priesthood restriction.”<sup>40</sup> He continued by saying that men and women must stop looking for inequalities and injustices, and instead be happy for those who have more. Sadly, Mormon racial folklore is a primer for proracist attitudes and self-hate for some Blacks over time. This is evidenced in the ways in which these individuals speak and write about being Black in Zion.

### Love is Not Enough: Finding a Place in the LDS Church is Difficult

On an individual level, Black Mormons often meet with supportive white persons who truly care for their welfare. These Black members feel adoration, validation, and a sense of belonging. Though they may not experience individual racist incidents, these are but one form of racism. Unfortunately, interpersonal bias is the only example of racism that the general public acknowledges and remotely comprehends. White Americans (and some white-identified proracist Blacks) tend to view racism as an individual matter wherein one race has animus for the other. Such a narrow definition of white supremacy does very little to explain the stark systemic inequities (in education, healthcare, crime and punishment, etc.) that Black Americans and other Americans of color disproportionately encounter in a so-called post-racial society. Treating racism as isolated acts of meanness mystifies its pervasiveness

---

39. Alan Gerald Cherry, *It's You and Me, Lord!: My Experiences as a Black Mormon* (Provo: Trilogy Arts, 1970).

40. Molly Farmer, “Having Priesthood ‘Is My Better Means to Serve,’” *Deseret News*, May 21, 2008, <http://www.deseretnews.com/article/705383516/Having-priesthood-is-my-better-means-to-serve.html?pg=all>.

in US society and in the Western world as a whole. It's not individual examples of bigotry, but rather a well-coordinated system founded on racist principles, practices, assumptions, policies, methods, and laws (enacted by elite white men) that creates the backdrop for Black members of the Church. Yet, Latter-day Saints as a group do not recognize this form of domination.

Instead, the faith tends to promote the "prosperity gospel," a particularly American ethos steeped in the notion that obedience translates into monetary success.<sup>41</sup> When the wealthy lives of white members are juxtaposed against the bleak life circumstances of many Black Americans, it is not hard for Black Mormons to imagine that such a comfortable lifestyle may come from keeping the commandments. Further, the nature of LDS church participation for Black people requires them to go through extraordinary measures to "assimilate" in an effort to fit in and appear "less Black," and therefore, less threatening to white people. Conflict between hyper-whiteness in the meetinghouse and the struggle for acceptance as fellow saints in society can leave many Black saints jaded, longing for acknowledgement on their own terms. This is an unjust reality for those deemed the "least of these" by white society. And such a cycle can lead to Black self-hatred as well as loathing for other Blacks, especially the poor and working class, blaming them for their circumstances in life.

The culture of whiteness, in its acutely cruel variations, encompasses every facet of US society from the criminal justice system, public school curricula, healthcare access, housing, and employment. The LDS Church, being uniquely American in the narrative of manifest destiny through Mormon pioneers' westward expansion, follows a similar trajectory. Church publications extol the virtues of white men and their dealings with Jesus, and Church leaders remain overwhelmingly white and male. Just as in mainstream American culture, whites within the

---

41. See Kate Bowler, *Blessed: A History of the American Prosperity Gospel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).



Mormon Church have little empathy for Blacks as a group, though they make exceptions for a few token individuals (many of whom are socially white in their self-presentation). They love us when it is expedient to do so, but they fear Blackness and what it has come to embody in the despicable history of Mormon race relations. Despite the love from a few close personal Church members, Black members find Mormonism to be a place of unapologetic whites. Consequently, Black membership within the LDS Church comes at an emotional cost to those individuals.

### Can Faith Move the Mountain of White Supremacy?

For many Black Latter-day Saints who stay and practice their faith, the emphasis of the doctrines of the Mormon gospel on family and community often trump the racist past (and present). Still others have come to believe, like their white counterparts, that statements by Church leaders on controversial issues are institutionally-sanctioned pronouncements by God, when, in fact, they often reflect individual political and social bias. Thus, pointing out these inconvenient truths in the Church is akin to cultural warfare. Black Latter-day Saints spend a great deal of energy reaffirming their humanity against the conservatizing forces in the Church. And despite it all, these Black members remain optimistic and hopeful that the Lord will cause the scales to fall from the eyes of white folk and deliver them from the morass. To this end, Blacks in the Mormon Church exert much labor muddling through the rigors of racial battle fatigue, straddling two distinctly different and unequal worlds.

For decades, the Church has not forthrightly addressed its racist past despite calls to do so from many of its more progressive Black and white members. Not surprisingly, then, the Black membership in the United States is minuscule. And the reality is that a fair number of those Black members who practice Mormonism in the United States do not actually identify as African American but are first- or second-generation immigrants mainly from the West Indies, South Africa, Ghana, Nigeria,

and the Congo. These low membership numbers suggest that the Church has done very little to atone for its racist past and open the door to fellowship for African Americans, who are also children of our Heavenly Father. If recompense were sincerely a principle taught from the pulpit, then we should expect no less of an apology than that shown by Pope Francis, who recently begged the indigenous native peoples of South America for forgiveness for the atrocities committed in the name of the Roman Catholic Church during the colonial era.<sup>42</sup> Is such a token gesture beneath the LDS Church? Do Black lives not matter enough to deserve the same full consideration from the LDS Church? Until these questions can be addressed with action as opposed to rhetoric, Black people have no cause to celebrate but should approach the LDS Church with measured caution, paying attention to the realities marked by race, power, and privilege.<sup>43</sup>

---

42. Nicole Winfield and Frank Bajak, "Pope Francis: I'm Sorry," *US News and World Report*, July 9, 2015, <http://www.usnews.com/news/world/articles/2015/07/09/pope-to-meet-with-workers-grass-roots-groups-in-bolivia>.

43. Darron T. Smith, *When Race, Religion, and Sport Collide: Black Athletes at BYU and Beyond* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman and Littlefield, 2015).

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

Joanna Brooks

*As members of the Church, we need to have the hard and uncomfortable conversation of racism. We need to keep having it to expel all the hot-air anger and have it until we're able to reach effective dialogue during which we are truly hearing one another, learning, and changing our generations-old myth-based paradigm—however subconscious it may be. —Alice Faulkner Burch<sup>1</sup>*

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

---

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

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

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

---

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

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

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



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

---

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

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

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

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

---

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

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

until at least 1862, if not longer. After some debate, the measure passed unanimously in early February 1852.<sup>8</sup>

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

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

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

---

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

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

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

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

---

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

---

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

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

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

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

Similarly, she dismissed the quest for suffrage:

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

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

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

*The Holy Priesthood's pow'r. Who can describe  
 The heav'nly order who have not the right,  
 Like Abra'm, Moses, and Elijah, to  
 Converse with God, and be instructed thro'  
 The Urim and the Thummim as of old?  
 Hearken, all ye inhabitants of earth!*

*All ye philanthropists who struggle to  
 Correct the evils of society!  
 You've neither rule or plummet.*

*Here are men  
 Cloth'd with the everlasting Priesthood: men  
 Full of the Holy Ghost, and authoriz'd  
 To 'stablish righteousness—to plant the seed  
 Of pure religion, and restore again  
 A perfect form of government to earth.*

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

---

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

---

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

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

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

---

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

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

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

1 " woman (16 years old) \$500

1 " girl (11 years old) \$300

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



---

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

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

Dear Sister Lewis:

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

Your brother in the gospel, Brigham Young.

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

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

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

---

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

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

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

---

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

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

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

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

---

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

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

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

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

---

25. *Ibid.*, 77–78 and 86–88.

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

---

26. *Ibid.*, 55.

27. *Ibid.*, 55.

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

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

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

---

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

29. *Ibid.*, 207.

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

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

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

---

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

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

33. Ibid.

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



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

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

---

35. Ibid.

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

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

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

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

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

---

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

---

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

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

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

---

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

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

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

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

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

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

---

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

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

In December 1866, Thomas Coleman, an African American man, was found murdered in Salt Lake City—stabbed and his throat cut, a method of killing resembling “penalties” affixed in early Mormon temple rituals. An anti-miscegenation warning was inscribed on a sheet of paper and “attached” to his corpse, as reported by the *Salt Lake Daily Telegraph* of December 12.<sup>44</sup>

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

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

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

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

---

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

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

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

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

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

In the 1950s, high-ranking LDS Church leaders Mark E. Petersen and Bruce R. McConkie delivered remarks and published as authoritative “doctrine” anti-Black speculative theology supporting segregation, opposing interracial marriage, and claiming that African Americans were cursed by God and that white supremacy was God’s will. Their words were, in Petersen’s case, circulated in typescript among BYU religion faculty through the 1960s, and in McConkie’s case remained in print with only minor revisions in the book *Mormon Doctrine* until 2010.<sup>49</sup>

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

---

47. Ibid., 171.

48. Ibid., 103.

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



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

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

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

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

---

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

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

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

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

This is not a comprehensive list.

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

### Movement from the Top

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

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

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

---

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

---

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Enlist more people of color in the Mormon Tabernacle Choir.

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

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

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

Create a Church-sponsored Mormon and Black website akin to the one found at [mormonandgay.org](http://mormonandgay.org).

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

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

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

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

---

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

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

### Movement from the Margins

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

### Movement from the Middle

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

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

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



Hildebrando de Melo  
Eye of God IV (2018)  
30" x 23"  
mixed media on paper



# MORMONS AND LINEAGE: THE COMPLICATED HISTORY OF BLACKS AND PATRIARCHAL BLESSINGS, 1830–2018

Matthew L. Harris

Declaring the lineage of Black Latter-day Saints is a challenging problem for patriarchs in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Mormons, like many Protestant Christians in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, asserted that Black people were a cursed race. Mormons and Protestants believed that God placed a curse of dark skin on Black people as descendants of Cain, the biblical counterfigure who murdered his brother Abel, to distinguish them from God's covenant people. The curse, carried on through the lineage of Noah's son Ham, relegated Blacks to a lifetime of servitude and bondage to white people. The divine curse provided a rationale for early Americans to enslave millions of Africans and to impose harsh penalties on Blacks and whites who transgressed strict laws forbidding interracial intimacy, love, and sex.<sup>1</sup> For Mormons,

---

The author wishes to thank Darron T. Smith, Newell G. Bringhurst, H. Michael Marquardt, Stirling Adams, Gary Bergera, Boyd Jay Petersen, and the anonymous reviewers for their constructive feedback on this article.

1. Stephen R. Haynes, *Noah's Curse: The Biblical Justification of American Slavery* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002); Molly Oshatz, *Slavery and Sin: The Fight against Slavery and the Rise of Liberal Protestantism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012); Colin Kidd, *The Forging of Races: Race and Scripture in the Protestant Atlantic World, 1600–2000* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2006); David M. Goldenberg, *The Curse of Ham: Race and Slavery in Early Judaism, Christianity, and Islam* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University

the divine curse prohibited persons of African ancestry from holding the priesthood and participating in sacred temple rituals—a prohibition that lasted from 1852–1978.<sup>2</sup>

Somewhat quixotically, Mormons claimed to be the literal descendants of the House of Israel, in particular the lineage of Ephraim—the favored son of Joseph, the great grandson of the powerful Hebrew patriarch Abraham. As the self-appointed heirs of Ephraim, Mormon leaders theorized that Ephraim’s descendants would play a significant role in the restoration of ancient priesthood rituals foretold in Mormon scripture. Mormon scripture also affirms that Ephraim’s descendants would preach the gospel to the other tribes of Israel and lead the Church in the latter days.<sup>3</sup>

By the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Mormon leaders articulated more fully what it meant to be God’s covenant people.<sup>4</sup> They tied their “chosen status” as Ephraim’s descendants through “assignment to a particular lineage that preceded birth itself.”<sup>5</sup> Lineage would be assigned by a patriarch, either from the Office of the Patriarch or

---

Press, 2003); and David L. Chappell, *A Stone of Hope: Prophetic Religion and the Death of Jim Crow* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004).

2. Matthew L. Harris and Newell G. Bringhurst, eds., *The Mormon Church and Blacks: A Documentary History* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2015); W. Paul Reeve, *Religion of a Different Color: Race and the Mormon Struggle for Whiteness* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015); Newell G. Bringhurst, *Saints, Slaves, and Blacks: The Changing Place of Black People Within Mormonism* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1981); Russell W. Stevenson, *For the Cause of Righteousness: A Global History of Blacks and Mormonism, 1830–2013* (Draper, Utah: Kofford, 2014); and Lester E. Bush Jr., “Mormonism’s Negro Doctrine: An Historical Overview,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 8, no. 1 (Spring 1973): 11–68.

3. Abraham 2:9; Doctrine and Covenants 133:30–34, see also 64:36. For an expression of these duties, see Spencer J. Palmer, *The Expanding Church* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1978), 26.

4. Armand L. Mauss, *All Abraham’s Children: Changing Mormon Conceptions of Race and Lineage* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003), 18–26.

5. Terryl L. Givens, *People of Paradox: A History of Mormon Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 55; and Mauss, *All Abraham’s Children*, chap. 2.

from a local patriarch in one of the stakes of the Church. Patterned after Jacob's blessings to his twelve sons in the Bible, Mormons accept these patriarchal blessings "as sacred words of instruction and promise."<sup>6</sup> In these special blessings Mormons would learn their designated Israelite lineage, through which they would receive eternal blessings and salvation. As Michael Marquardt has shown in his compilation of patriarchal blessings, most Mormons claim lineage through the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh, but other lineages are named too.<sup>7</sup> According to the Church Historian's Office, which made a report to the Quorum of the Twelve in 1970, ten of the twelve tribes of Israel are represented in lineage pronouncements and as many as "fifteen other lineages had been named in blessings, including that of Cain."<sup>8</sup>

The Church Historian's report is not available, nor are the blessings themselves, which accounts for the dearth of scholarship on Blacks and patriarchal blessings.<sup>9</sup> Nevertheless, enough blessings are available through

---

6. John G. Turner, *Brigham Young: Pioneer Prophet* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2012), 48. For Jacob's blessings to his twelve sons, see Genesis 49:1–27. For the notion that patriarchal blessings were part of a series of rituals inspired by the Book of Mormon and Bible, see Jonathan A. Stapley, *The Power of Godliness: Mormon Liturgy and Cosmology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 6.

7. H. Michael Marquardt, comp., *Early Patriarchal Blessings of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: Smith-Pettit Foundation, 2007); H. Michael Marquardt, comp., *Later Patriarchal Blessings of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: Smith-Pettit Foundation, 2012). Marquardt provides an updated list of blessings on his website: <https://user.xmission.com/~research/mormonpdf/additionalpb5c.pdf>.

8. As cited in Irene M. Bates, "Patriarchal Blessings and the Routinization of Charisma," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 26, no. 3 (Fall 1993): 4.

9. Of the rich body of scholarship on Mormons and race, surprisingly little has been written about Blacks and patriarchal blessings. One exception is Bates, "Patriarchal Blessings," 3–8. Two seminal studies on Mormons and patriarchal blessings both skirt questions of race and lineage. See Irene M. Bates and E. Gary Smith, *Lost Legacy: The Mormon Office of Presiding Patriarch*, 2nd ed. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2018); and Gary Shepherd and Gordon Shepherd, *Binding Earth and Heaven: Patriarchal Blessings in the Prophetic Development of*

archives to make informed judgments about Blacks and lineage. Enriched by meeting minutes from the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve, as well as firsthand accounts of patriarchs who gave the blessings, these valuable documents allow us to construct a rich narrative examining the complicated problem of declaring lineage to Black Latter-day Saints.

In this essay, I argue that Mormon leaders created an inchoate, confusing, and unevenly applied policy. Some patriarchs pronounced “the seed of Cain” on Black members during their blessings; others the blessings of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; while still others no lineage at all. Not until the late twentieth century did Mormon leaders begin to address the inconsistent and haphazard manner in which patriarchs declared lineage on Black Latter-day Saints. Eldred G. Smith, the great-great grandnephew of LDS Church founder Joseph Smith and the eighth patriarch of the LDS Church, claimed that Blacks should not receive a lineage designation because God had cursed them, which placed them outside of the House of Israel. His teachings clashed with those of other General Authorities, who averred that persons of African descent should receive a lineage designation. The priesthood revelation of 1978 allowing Black men to receive temple and priesthood privileges only complicated matters.

This new policy change posed all sorts of theological questions for Mormon leaders, prompting them to declare that Blacks could now be “adopted into the House of Israel.” Yet, even as the priesthood revelation challenged previously accepted concepts of Mormon lineage theology, it failed to resolve the nagging question of whether or not Blacks had been—or still were—a cursed race. Indeed, after the priesthood revelation LDS leaders maintained a troubling silence regarding the lineage of Black Latter-day Saints. In 2018, some forty years after the priesthood and temple ban ended, Black lineage remains a vexing problem in the LDS Church.

---

*Early Mormonism* (University Park: Penn State University Press, 2012). Mauss’s *All Abraham’s Children* also ignores patriarchal blessings in his discussion of Black and Native American lineage within Mormonism.



The earliest known Black man to receive a patriarchal blessing was Elijah Abel, a faithful Latter-day Saint who joined the Church in 1832. Abel was one of a handful of Blacks who received the priesthood prior to Joseph Smith's death in 1844. Early Church records indicate that Abel, Joseph T. Ball, and Walker Q. Lewis all held the priesthood, and possibly two other men of African descent, William McCary and Black Pete.<sup>10</sup> Available records indicate that during the Church presidencies of Joseph Smith and Brigham Young just five African Americans received their patriarchal blessings: Elijah Abel, Joseph Ball, Walker Lewis, Anthony Stebbins, a Black slave, and Jane Manning James.

Abel was ordained to the office of an elder in the Melchizedek Priesthood in 1836 and ordained to the Third Quorum of the Seventy some nine months later.<sup>11</sup> Also that year he received his patriarchal blessing from Joseph Smith Sr., whose appointment to the Office of the Patriarch

---

10. Reeve, *Religion of a Different Color*, 109–10, 112, 128, 131; Bringham, *Saints, Slaves, and Blacks*, 37–38; and Stevenson, *For the Cause of Righteousness*, 6–7, 210–12, 230–31, 248–49. For William McCary's experience in the Mormon Church see Angela Pulley Hudson, *Real Native Genius: How an Ex-Slave and a White Mormon Became Famous Indians* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015), 65–68; and Angela Pulley Hudson, "William McCary, Lucy Stanton, and the Performance of Race at Winter Quarters and Beyond," *Journal of Mormon History* 41, no. 3 (2015): 97–130.

11. Kirtland elders' certificates, 1836–1838, Mar. 31, 1836, CR 100 401, 61, Church History Library, Salt Lake City and name listed among ministers of the gospel in "Kirtland, Ohio, June 3, 1836," *Latter Day Saints' Messenger and Advocate* 2 (June 1836): 335. See also Stevenson, *For the Cause of Righteousness*, 211–12. For insightful studies on Abel's life, consult Newell G. Bringham, "Elijah Abel and the Changing Status of Blacks Within Mormonism," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 12, no. 2 (Summer 1979): 22–36; W. Kesler Jackson, *Elijah Abel: The Life and Times of a Black Priesthood Holder* (Springville, Utah: Cedar Fort, 2013); Russell W. Stevenson, "'A Negro Preacher': The Worlds of Elijah Abels," *Journal of Mormon History* 39, no. 2 (Spring 2013): 165–254; and Russell W. Stevenson, *Black Mormon: The Story of Elijah Ables* (Afton, Wyo.: self-pub., PrintStar, 2013).

was hereditary, as stipulated in Mormon scripture.<sup>12</sup> As the Church grew and requests for patriarchal blessings increased, Mormon founder Joseph Smith Jr. appointed local patriarchs to meet this demand.<sup>13</sup> Available records do not indicate if local patriarchs blessed early Black Latter-day Saints. Joseph Smith Sr. most likely gave the first patriarchal blessing to an African American Latter-day Saint. Smith had few instructions to go on and fewer still on how to bless Blacks. There was not a lineage policy for them, despite Joseph Smith Jr.'s asserting that Black people derived from the "seed of Cain."<sup>14</sup> Abel's patriarchal blessing reads more like a "father's blessing," proclaiming him an "orphan"—a pointed reference signifying that Abel's father was not a Latter-day Saint and could therefore not bless his son as the family patriarch. His blessing was full of warnings and admonitions. It also included blessings and promises. "Thou shalt be made equal to thy brethren and thy soul be white in eternity and thy robes glittering," the elder Smith promised.<sup>15</sup> Abel's blessing did not include a designated lineage.<sup>16</sup>

Following Joseph Smith Sr.'s tenure as presiding patriarch from 1834 until the time of his death in 1840, his son Hyrum succeeded him in that

---

12. Doctrine and Covenants 124:91–93.

13. Bates and Smith, *Lost Legacy*, 39–40. For the office of local patriarch in Mormon scripture, see Doctrine and Covenants 107:39.

14. "History, 1838–1856, volume A-1 [23 December 1805–30 August 1834]," 83, The Joseph Smith Papers, <http://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/history-1838-1856-volume-a-1-23-december-1805-30-august-1834/89>; Joseph Smith Jr., *History of the Church*, 7 vols., 2nd ed. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976), 4:445–46; Richard Lyman Bushman, *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005), 288–89; and Bringham, *Saints, Slaves, and Blacks*, 41–43, 86–87.

15. Blessing of Elijah Abel by Joseph Smith Sr., c. 1836, Church History Library, Salt Lake City, courtesy of Lester Bush. Also in Marquardt, *Early Patriarchal Blessings*, 99.

16. H. Michael Marquardt has published many of Smith's blessings in *Early Patriarchal Blessings*. See also Marquardt's website, which includes blessings from Joseph Smith Sr.: <https://user.xmission.com/~research/mormonpdf/blessingsbyjssr.pdf>.

office, serving from 1840–1844. On March 6, 1844, Hyrum Smith gave a patriarchal blessing to a former slave named Anthony Stebbins assigning him the lineage of “Cainaan.”<sup>17</sup> Smith also blessed Stebbins’s sister-in-law Jane Manning James, a faithful and loyal house servant to Joseph Smith Jr.<sup>18</sup> James, baptized in Illinois in 1842, later relocated to Nauvoo, where she received her patriarchal blessing on May 11, 1844. Familiarly known as “Aunt Jane” by her fellow Mormons, Hyrum Smith blessed her that God would reveal the “Mysteries of the Kingdom” according to her “obedience” to God’s “requisitions.” He assigned her lineage through “Cainaan the Son of Ham,” proclaiming that if she lived worthily, God would lift the curse and “stamp . . . his own lineage” upon her.<sup>19</sup>

---

17. According to Bringhurst, *Saints, Slaves, and Blacks*, 101, n. 14. Unfortunately, not much is known about Stebbins.

18. For an insightful study of James’s life, see Max Perry Mueller, *Race and the Making of the Mormon People* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017). See also Quincy D. Newell, “The Autobiography and Interview of Jane Elizabeth Manning James,” *Journal of Africana Religions* 1, no. 2 (2013): 251–91; and Quincy D. Newell, “‘Is There No Blessing for Me?’: Jane James’s Construction of Space in Latter-day Saint History and Practice,” in *New Perspectives in Mormon Studies: Creating and Crossing Boundaries*, edited by Quincy D. Newell and Eric F. Mason (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2013), 41–68.

19. Blessing of Jane Manning James by Hyrum Smith, May 11, 1844, Church History Library, Salt Lake City, courtesy of Max Perry Mueller. Mueller notes that “Aunt Jane” was beloved by Latter-day Saints “for her indefatigable faith in Mormonism and for her memories of Mormonism’s first prophet” (*Race and the Making of the Mormon People*, 119). Reeve comments that when James died in 1908 she was “remembered as a well-respected person within the Mormon community” (*Religion of a Different Color*, 211). LDS apostles also referred to Jane Manning James as “Aunt Jane.” See Council of Twelve minutes, Jan. 2, 1902, in “Compilation on the Negro in Mormonism,” compiled by Lester Bush, 192, Church History Library, Salt Lake City. This moniker, however, was deeply racist. According to historian Eric Foner, after the American Civil War many slaves rejected being called “boy,” “auntie,” or “uncle.” These former slaves wanted complete “independence from white control,” including from names that racist whites assigned to them (*Forever Free: The Story of Emancipation and Reconstruction* [New York: Alfred Knopf, 2005], 83). Fellow Mormons called Jane Manning James “Aunt Jane” as a term of endearment signifying her advanced

If pronouncements from the lineage of “Cainaan” characterized Hyrum Smith’s patriarchal blessings on Black Mormons, William Smith, the son of Joseph Smith Sr., appears to have departed from the practice during his brief tenure as Patriarch to the Church. On July 14, 1845, he gave Joseph T. Ball, an African American from Boston, a patriarchal blessing. Ball joined the LDS Church in Boston in 1832 and was ordained an elder in the Melchizedek Priesthood in the mid-1830s in Kirtland, Ohio. In 1844 he was ordained a high priest in the Melchizedek Priesthood and served as the branch president in Boston, making him the first African American ordained to that office and the first to preside over a Mormon congregation. In Ball’s blessing, Patriarch Smith told him that he was of “Royal Stock, to whom the blessings and promises were made, even Joseph[’s] tribe whose blessing are of heaven.” Smith further proclaimed that Ball would be “called to a mighty Prophet, [a] minister of peace [and] righteousness,” promising that he would reveal “the great mysteries of the kingdom and the Salvation of Israel’s God to a dying world.” Ball was most likely the first African American to be assigned a lineage through Joseph, one of Jacob’s sons in the House of Israel, and the father of Ephraim and Manasseh.<sup>20</sup>

By the mid-nineteenth century when “Uncle” John Smith, brother of Joseph Smith Sr., became the fourth patriarch of the LDS Church, a position he occupied from 1849–1854, assignments from the lineage

---

age and beloved status within the Mormon community. Nonetheless, as Quincy D. Newell has argued in her forthcoming work on James, the term was rooted in white supremacy and the slave culture of nineteenth-century America. See *Your Sister in the Gospel: The Life of Jane Manning James, a Nineteenth-Century Black Mormon* (New York: Oxford University Press, forthcoming).

20. Blessing of Joseph T. Ball by William Smith, July 14, 1845, Church History Library, Salt Lake City, courtesy of H. Michael Marquardt. Also in Marquardt, *Early Patriarchal Blessings*, 320. For more on William Smith and patriarchal blessings, see Christine Elyse Blythe, “William Smith’s Patriarchal Blessings and Contested Authority in the Post-Martyrdom Church,” *Journal of Mormon History* 39, no. 3 (Summer 2013): 60–95. Blythe does not discuss Smith’s views on lineage for Black Latter-day Saints.



of Cain and Ham became more consistent. This change largely resulted from the priesthood restriction that Brigham Young implemented in 1852. Young declared that “A man who has the African blood in him cannot hold one jot nor tittle of priesthood.” According to Young, “if the children of God . . . mingle their seed with the seed of Cain it would not only bring the curse of being deprived of the power of the priesthood upon themselves but they [will] entail it upon their children after them.”<sup>21</sup>

Affected by Young’s pronouncement, Uncle John Smith proclaimed a cursed lineage on at least two Black Latter-day Saints according to available records. On August 18, 1850, he gave a patriarchal blessing to John Burton, a Black man, and informed him that he was of the “Blood of Cainnain.” On October 4, 1851, he gave a patriarchal blessing to Q. Walker Lewis, an African American man from Boston. Lewis was baptized into the LDS Church in 1843 and ordained an elder by William Smith, the brother of Church founder Joseph Smith by 1844. Smith declared that Lewis was of the “tribe of Canan,” following the same lineage that his nephew pronounced for Jane Manning James some seven years earlier.<sup>22</sup>

Uncle John Smith’s grandnephew John Smith also assigned Blacks lineage through the “tribe of Canan” after serving as the fifth patriarch of the Church from 1855–1911. The younger Smith, in fact, gave blessings to several Black Latter-day Saints declaring the “lineage of Cain and Ham,” though available records do not indicate who these recipients

---

21. Brigham Young address to the Utah Territorial Legislature, Feb. 5, 1852, box 48, folder 3, Brigham Young Papers, Church History Library, Salt Lake City. See also Reeve, *Religion of a Different Color*, 144–61; and Turner, *Brigham Young*, 218–29.

22. Blessing of John Burton by John Smith, Aug. 18, 1850, Church History Library, Salt Lake City, courtesy of Melvin C. Johnson. Not much is known about Burton. Walker Lewis blessing quoted in Connell O’Donovan, “The Mormon Priesthood Ban and Elder Q. Walker Lewis: ‘An example for his more whiter brethren to follow,’” *John Whitmer Historical Association Journal* 26, no. 1 (2006): 48–100 (quotations on 91–92); see also Bringhurst, *Saints, Slaves, and Blacks*, 101, n. 14.

were.<sup>23</sup> Also instructive, on October 10, 1889, patriarch John Smith granted Jane Manning James a second patriarchal blessing without assigning a lineage. The omission can be attributed to two factors: Most likely he knew she already had a designated lineage or perhaps he was not inspired to declare a new one.<sup>24</sup>

Regardless, Manning's cursed lineage was reaffirmed thirteen years later when she sought the First Presidency's approval to be eternally sealed to the prophet Joseph Smith. Rejecting her request, LDS Church President Joseph F. Smith instructed that she would be sealed as a "servant" to Joseph Smith—this "done [in] a special ceremony having been prepared for that purpose."<sup>25</sup> The servant designation, well known to the early leaders of the Church, followed the biblical injunction that descendants of "Canaan shall be . . . servant[s]" to non-cursed lineages. Joseph F. Smith and Brigham Young clearly accepted this passage of scripture, as did Southerners who appropriated it to justify slavery. Young explained, "The Lord put a mark upon [the Negro], which is the flat nose and black skin. Trace mankind down to after the flood, and then

---

23. In 1970, Assistant Church Historian E. Earl Olson researched lineage assignments. He specifically noted that John Smith, son of Hyrum Smith, gave blessings assigning the lineage of "Cain and Ham" to several Black Latter-day Saints. His findings are recorded in the Council of Twelve minutes, May 21, 1970, box 63, folder 3, Spencer W. Kimball Papers, Church History Library, Salt Lake City. My thanks to the late Edward L. Kimball for facilitating access to his father's papers at the Church History Library.

24. Blessing of Jane Elizabeth Manning Perkins by John Smith, Oct. 10, 1889, Church History Library, Salt Lake City, courtesy of Max Perry Mueller (James's married name was Perkins). In *Lost Legacy*, Bates and Smith affirm that it was not uncommon during the early days of the Church for Latter-day Saints to receive second patriarchal blessings. As of 2018, the Church handbook allows for a second blessing, providing the recipient receives permission from the Quorum of the Twelve ("Information and Suggestions for Patriarchs," rev. ed. [Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2016], 6).

25. Council of Twelve minutes, Jan. 2, 1902, in Bush, "Compilation on the Negro," 192.

another curse is pronounced upon the same race—that they should be the ‘servant of servants’; and they will be, until that curse is removed.”<sup>26</sup>

Well into the twentieth century, the ambiguous status of Black Latter-day Saints continued. This was complicated by the increased number of Blacks baptized into the Church. As Black and biracial Latter-day Saints trekked west and settled in Utah, they sought their temple and patriarchal blessings.<sup>27</sup> One of these converts, a man named “Church,” “inherited negro blood from his mother.” The patriarch informed him in his blessing that “he was of the lineage of Ephraim and that he should receive the priesthood and go on a mission.”<sup>28</sup> Cases like this prompted prolonged discussions within the Quorum of the Twelve. Apostles struggled with cases that came before them dealing with mixed-race members like Church. Could he hold the priesthood? Could he serve a mission? Was it appropriate to declare him the lineage of Ephraim? These and other questions increased after the American Civil War. In particular, the apostles were flummoxed by cases where a person with “a single drop of negro blood might be entirely white, yet one of his descendants might turn out to be a pronounced negro.” President

---

26. Genesis 9:25–27; and Brigham Young, Oct. 9, 1859, *Journal of Discourses*, 7:290–91. For more on the biblical justification of slavery, see Haynes, *Noah’s Curse*, chaps. 4–5.

27. For Blacks requesting their temple endowments and patriarchal blessings, see Council of Twelve minutes, Jan. 2, 1902, in Bush, “Compilation on the Negro”; Reeve, *Religion of a Different Color*, 193–210; and Mueller, *Race and the Making of the Mormon People*, 150–52. When the First Presidency denied permission for Black Latter-day Saints to receive their temple endowments, they sought to participate in other temple ordinances. For this point, see Tonya Reiter, “Black Saviors on Mount Zion: Proxy Baptisms and Latter-day Saints of African Descent,” *Journal of Mormon History* 43, no. 4 (2017): 100–23. For early Blacks and their devotion to the LDS church, see Kate B. Carter, *The Story of the Negro Pioneer* (Salt Lake City: Daughters of Utah Pioneers, 1965). Precise estimates are unknown, but probably fewer than two hundred Blacks were Mormon in 1900. See also Ronald Coleman, “Blacks in Utah History: An Unknown Legacy,” in *The Peoples of Utah*, edited by Helen Z. Papanikolas (Salt Lake City: Utah State Historical Society, 1976), 115–40.

28. Council of Twelve minutes, Mar. 1, 1900, in Bush, “Compilation on the Negro,” 188.

Joseph F. Smith stated that the brethren should “determine each case on its merits,” but it was “his opinion that in all cases where the blood of Cain showed itself, however slight, the line should be drawn there.”<sup>29</sup>

Without firm rules to determine lineage, some patriarchs even questioned whether or not Blacks could receive patriarchal blessings. In a letter to LDS apostle David O. McKay in 1935, a patriarch asked “whether a person having negro blood in his or her veins might receive a blessing from a patriarch” and McKay answered yes, adding: “A patriarch may pronounce upon anybody’s head the blessing to which that person may be entitled.” McKay, however, did not tell him how to declare lineage—only that “privileges . . . accorded to negroes” were limited in the Church.<sup>30</sup>

The lack of direction from Church headquarters in declaring lineage created anguish for many patriarchs. Dozens of stories, both firsthand and anecdotal, illustrate the difficulty of pronouncing lineage on the Church’s relatively small but faithful Black population. For example, Orson Sperry, a patriarch from Utah, gave patriarchal blessings to an engaged couple who were soon to be married in the Salt Lake Temple. Sperry gave the young man “a very wonderful blessing,” but when he blessed the woman he put his hands on her head and struggled. He “paused,” then said, “I’m sorry, but there’s no blessing for you. You have the blood of Cain flowing in your veins and there’s no blessing for you.” The young woman broke down and wept.” Sperry agonized over the incident, informing the couple that there would be no temple marriage because of her “negro lineage.” A similar incident occurred in Rexburg, Idaho, when a “handsome young man” requested a patriarchal blessing. A “Brother Knudsen” in the Patriarch to the Church’s office witnessed what happened. “The Church Patriarch, when he laid his hands upon

---

29. Council of Twelve minutes, Jan. 2, 1902, *ibid.*, 191–92. See also Council of Twelve minutes, Aug. 22, 1895, *ibid.*, 187.

30. David O. McKay to Henry H. Hoff, Jan. 24, 1935, in *Minutes of the Apostles of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1910–1951*, 4 vols. (Salt Lake City: Smith-Pettit Foundation, 2010), 4:336.

his head, refused to give him a blessing. He told him that he had the blood of Cain flowing in his veins.”<sup>31</sup>

James Wallis, a traveling patriarch in the Canadian and Northern States mission, was similarly anguished about giving a blessing to a person of African descent and sought assistance from Church leaders in Salt Lake City. In 1934, the Duckworth family requested their patriarchal blessings, but they “had been accused of having negro blood in them.”<sup>32</sup> Wallis agonized over the request, receiving no guidance from his ecclesiastical superiors on how to assign lineage when he was called as a patriarch in 1932. Uncertain how to proceed, he contacted apostle Charles Callis, who had extensive experience around “colored members of the Church,” having presided over the Southern States mission for nearly three decades. Callis sympathized with Wallis but did not offer assistance. Wallis then contacted apostle John A. Widtsoe, who asked LDS Church President Heber J. Grant for instruction. Grant responded through Widtsoe that it would be “alright to bless them, but as to their status in the future, that is a matter that is in the hands of the Lord.”<sup>33</sup>

Why President Grant failed to provide a definitive answer on Black lineage can only be a matter of speculation. He clearly believed that Blacks had a cursed lineage. In private letters to Latter-day Saints and in private meetings with the Quorum of the Twelve and First Presidency, he made his views known.<sup>34</sup> Nevertheless, the LDS leader and

---

31. Sidney B. Sperry, who recorded patriarchal blessings for his grandfather Orson Sperry, recounted this experience to apostles Joseph Fielding Smith and Mark E. Petersen in the Salt Lake Temple, Oct. 7, 1954, “Discussion after a talk on Racial Prejudice,” 28, box 4, folder 7, William E. Berrett Papers, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University. For Knudsen’s experience, see *ibid.*, 29.

32. Wallis journal, Oct. 16, 1934, Church History Library, Salt Lake City.

33. *Ibid.* See also Gloria Wallis Rytting, *James H. Wallis: Poet, Printer and Patriarch* (Salt Lake City: R & R Enterprises, 1989), 185–86.

34. Heber J. Grant diary, Oct. 1, 1890, 447, Church History Library, Salt Lake City; Heber J. Grant to L. H. Wilkin, Jan. 28, 1928, box 63, folder 11, Leonard J. Arrington Papers, Special Collections, Merrill-Cazier Library, Utah State

perhaps his apostles recognized the pain that such declarations would cause Black members if patriarchs pronounced the lineage of Cain in their blessings. After all, one of the purposes of blessings was to provide comfort and guidance for one's life and being associated with a cursed race, much less a figure linked with Satan, was less than reassuring.<sup>35</sup> Apostle George F. Richards seemed to recognize the precarious position of Blacks when he noted in general conference in 1939: "The negro is an unfortunate man. He has been given a black skin. But that is nothing compared with that greater handicap that he is not permitted to receive the Priesthood and the ordinances of the temple, necessary to prepare men and women to enter into and enjoy a fulness of glory in the celestial kingdom." His fellow apostle Joseph Fielding Smith put it even more bluntly in 1931: "Not only was Cain called upon to suffer, but because of his wickedness he became the father of an inferior race. A curse placed upon him and that curse has been continued through his lineage and must do so while time endures. Millions of souls have come into this world cursed with a black skin and have been denied the privilege of Priesthood and the fullness of the blessings of the Gospel. These are the descendants of Cain."<sup>36</sup>

---

University; "Minutes of a Special Meeting by President McKay," recounting President Grant's refusal to ordain to the priesthood a "negro man" because he was cursed (in McKay journal, Jan. 17, 1954, box 32, folder 3, David O. McKay Papers, Special Collections, Marriott Library, University of Utah).

35. For the linkage of Blackness with Cain and Satan in Mormon discourse, see my essay "Whiteness Theology and the Evolution of Mormon Racial Teachings," in *The Mormon Church and its Gospel Topics Essays: The Scholarly Community Responds*, edited by Matthew L. Harris and Newell G. Bringhurst (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, forthcoming).

36. George F. Richards, in Report of the Annual Conference of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Apr. 1939 (Salt Lake City: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, annual), 58–59 (hereafter cited as Conference Report); and Joseph Fielding Smith, *The Way to Perfection: Short Discourses on Gospel Themes*, 5th ed. (1931; repr., Salt Lake City: Genealogical Society of Utah, 1945), 101–02.

Grant's ambiguous response to the question of Black lineage only heightened Wallis's anxiety. Wallis agonized over "the problem of the Duckworth family," stating in his journal that it "had caused me considerable anxiety and stress of mind, realizing as I sincerely do that with me rests the responsibility of declaring their lineage." With little guidance from Church headquarters, Wallis attempted to trace the family's genealogy to determine bloodlines. He also fasted and prayed hoping that God would reveal it to him. When that failed, he resolved to give them a blessing anyway, recording in his journal: "I am sure there is no objection to giving them a blessing of encouragement and comfort, leaving out all reference to lineage and sealing."<sup>37</sup>

That same year Wallis was confronted with another challenging case when Herbert Augustus Ford, a light-skinned Black man, asked for his patriarchal blessing. Ford was originally from Saint Croix in the Virgin Islands, which had a long history of slavery and race-mixing.<sup>38</sup> According to his granddaughter, Patricia Ford, Herbert was denied the priesthood because "he was somewhat Negroid in appearance," which was "supposedly linked to his dark-skinned grandmother Mary Carden," although it was "unknown" if the grandmother had "negroid ancestry." Patricia Ford recalled that these assumptions were enough for priesthood leaders to deny "Herbert Ford and his descendants the Priesthood," which made her grandfather's life in the LDS Church "difficult." Wallis complicated the matter when he gave Ford his patriarchal blessing avowing that he was "of the blood of Abraham, through Ephraim and Manasseh." This declaration confused Ford even further because it did not resolve his

---

37. Wallis journal, Oct. 16, 1934.

38. See "An Interview Between Brother and Sister Herbert Augustus Ford and Brother Kelvin Thomas Waywell, High Councilman Advisor to the Stake President on Genealogy for the Hamilton Ontario Stake," taped on Oct. 21, 1973, Welland, Ontario, Canada, copy in box 32, folder 4, David John Buerger Papers, Special Collections, Marriott Library, University of Utah.

lineage. Rather, it placed him between two lineages, obfuscating the issue of whether or not he was eligible for the priesthood.<sup>39</sup>

Anguished over his uncertain status in the Church, Ford wrote to the First Presidency seeking guidance. Although the letter is unavailable, its contents can be gleaned from the First Presidency's response. Joseph Anderson, the First Presidency secretary, replied that "The hearts of the Brethren bleed with sorrow over the lot of yourself and millions of others who find themselves in the same situation but for which neither the Brethren nor the Church is in any way responsible. I am directed by the Brethren to reply to you in the terms in which reply has been made to many others who find themselves in the same condition and who presented their cases to the Brethren with anguish equal to your own. Your statement is noted in which you say, 'I hope for the day when things might change, maybe not in my day, that all the people who may have confronted you in your lifetime on the same trouble will be free.'"<sup>40</sup>

Ford's granddaughter Patricia experienced a similar fate. She was "denied a pronouncement of lineage by a patriarch aware of her situation" despite her protest that there was no evidence that she had "negro bloodlines." Not accepting the decision, she spent many years researching her genealogy to prove that she was not of the "restricted lineage."<sup>41</sup> (In 1976, she presented evidence to the First Presidency convincing them that her family did not have African ancestry. The First Presidency granted permission for her to receive a second patriarchal blessing, which stated that she was from the "lineage of Ephraim." It is not clear if Herbert Ford received a second blessing, though the

---

39. Blessing of Herbert Augustus Ford by James H. Wallis, July 18, 1934, in "Herbert Augustus Ford Family" family history. See also "Letter from Patricia Ford outlining her research investigations," *ibid*.

40. Joseph Anderson to Herbert Ford, Apr. 10, 1951, copy in First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve minutes, 1951, in Bush, "Compilation on the Negro," 256.

41. Patricia Ford, "Herbert Augustus Ford and the LDS Priesthood," May 31, 1978, box 32, folder 4, David John Buerger Papers, Special Collections, Marriott Library, University of Utah.



First Presidency, because of his granddaughter's genealogical research, declared him eligible for the priesthood.<sup>42)</sup>

As cases like these circulated throughout the Church, the Quorum of the Twelve and First Presidency began to discuss lineage more earnestly. Indeed, by the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, a number of theories circulated among the Church leadership "about the significance of Israelite, Aryan, or Anglo-Saxon ancestry."<sup>43</sup> Hyrum G. Smith, the presiding patriarch from 1912–1932, delivered a pointed sermon in general conference in 1929, in which he stated that at "the present time in the Church the great majority of those receiving their blessings are declared to be of the house and lineage of Ephraim, while many others are designated as members of the house of Manasseh; but up to the present time we have discovered that those who are leaders in Israel, no matter where they come, are of Ephraim." In Smith's judgment, "Ephraim seems to prevail in the greater blessings, in the greater responsibilities, and in faithfulness to the Lord's work."<sup>44</sup>

A year later, in a prominent Church publication called the *Utah Genealogical and Historical Magazine*, an author proclaimed that descendants of Ephraim hailed from white European countries like Great Britain, Scandinavia, and Germany. Descendants of Ephraim "are of the Anglo-Saxon race," the author boldly asserted, "and they are upon the face of the whole earth, bearing the spirit of rule and dictation, to go forth from conquering to conquer."<sup>45</sup> LDS lesson manuals reinforced

---

42. Ibid. See also Theodore M. Burton, president of the Genealogical Society, to Ford's stake president, Elden Clark Olson, Feb. 6, 1975, and Theodore M. Burton and Grant Bangerter to President Elden Clark Olson, Sept. 30, 1976 (affirming that LDS Church President Spencer W. Kimball lifted the restriction).

43. As perceptively noted in Mauss, *All Abraham's Children*, 26.

44. Joseph Fielding Smith, "The Day of Ephraim," in Conference Report, Apr. 7, 1929, 122–25; reprinted in *Utah Genealogical and Historical Magazine* 20 (April 1929): 123–26 (quotes on 124).

45. Archibald F. Bennett, "The Children of Ephraim," *Utah Genealogical and Historical Magazine* 21 (January 1930): 69. According to Mauss, Bennett was

a whiteness theology as well, extolling Anglo-Saxons as the “chosen seed” of Israel.<sup>46</sup> So too, did apostle Joseph Fielding Smith, whose 1931 best-selling book *The Way to Perfection* outlined in vivid detail a racial hierarchy consisting of “favored” and “less favored lineages.” The outspoken Mormon apostle asserted that some lineages were blessed because of their “valiance” in a pre-earth life, while others bore the mark of a divine curse “for some act, or acts, performed before they were born.” According to Smith, Blacks were not preassigned to a “nation or tribe” through “the lineage of Abraham.” Rather, their lineage—that of Cain and Ham—placed them outside of God’s covenant blessings.<sup>47</sup>

Smith’s teachings, couched in theological racism, echoed throughout the LDS Church, posing particular challenges for patriarchs when they gave blessings to African Americans, Black Africans, Australian Aborigines,

---

the executive secretary of the Utah Genealogical Society (*All Abraham’s Children*, 28).

46. “Our Lineage,” lessons 1 to 10 of the Course for First Year Senior Genealogical Classes (Salt Lake City: Genealogical Society of Utah, 1934); “Children of the Covenant,” A Lesson Book for Second Year Junior Genealogical Classes (Salt Lake City: Genealogical Society of Utah, 1937); “Youth and its Culture,” Manual for the Gleaner Department of the Y.W.M.I.A. (Salt Lake City: Genealogical Society of Utah, 1938); and “Birthright Blessings: Genealogical Training Class,” Sunday School Lessons for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Salt Lake City: Deseret Sunday School Board, 1942).

47. Smith, *Way to Perfection*, 43, 46, 48, 105–06, 109–10. See also Joseph Fielding Smith, “The Negro and the Priesthood,” *Improvement Era* 27 (April 1924): 564–65; Alvin R. Dyer, “For What Purpose,” address to a missionary conference in Oslo, Norway, Mar. 18, 1961, Church History Library, Salt Lake City; and Melvin J. Ballard, “Three Degrees of Glory,” discourse in the Ogden Tabernacle, Sept. 22, 1922, Church History Library, Salt Lake City. For background and context to *The Way to Perfection*, see Reid L. Neilson and Scott D. Marianno, “True and Faithful: Joseph Fielding Smith as Mormon Historian and Theologian,” *BYU Studies Quarterly* 57, no. 1 (Winter 2018): 38–40. For a nuanced account of Mormon teachings on “the premortal world,” see Boyd Jay Petersen, “‘One Soul Shall Not Be Lost’: The War in Heaven in Mormon Thought,” *Journal of Mormon History* 38, no. 1 (Winter 2012): 1–50.

Black Fijians, and Philippine Negritos.<sup>48</sup> Indeed, by the mid-twentieth century patriarchs had still received no guidance at all on how to address these “less favored lineages.” In 1942, apostle John A. Widtsoe affirmed in the *Improvement Era*, an official Church magazine, that patriarchal blessings “may declare lineage,” but he hinted that exceptions could be made for Black people. The following year the First Presidency made a similar statement, declaring that “Patriarchal blessings contemplate inspired declaration of lineage of the recipient.”<sup>49</sup> But the two statements were ambiguous with respect to Black lineage. Phrases like “may declare lineage” and “contemplate inspired declaration of lineage” left open the possibility that patriarchs could omit lineage altogether if they were not sufficiently inspired.

Allowing patriarchs to omit lineage resulted in Church leaders’ anxieties about determining who had “negro bloodlines” and who did

---

48. In the 1950s, the First Presidency cleared Negritos and Fijians for priesthood ordination and “reclassified [them] as Israelites.” For this point, see Armand L. Mauss, “The Fading of the Pharaoh’s Curse: The Decline and Fall of the Priesthood Ban Against Blacks in the Mormon Church,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 14, no. 3 (Fall 1981): 12. See also R. Lanier Britsch, *Unto the Islands of the Sea: A History of the Latter-day Saints in the Pacific* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1986), 502. For Australian Aborigines, see Marjorie Newton, *Southern Cross Saints: The Mormons in Australia* (Laie, Hawaii: Institute for Polynesian Studies, 1991), 209–10. For Black Africans, see Stevenson, *For the Cause of Righteousness*, 55–57, 75–91. Joseph Fielding Smith wrote *The Way to Perfection* during a time of intense racism in the United States. Some theologians used science, particularly eugenics, to justify racism. Others, like Smith (and other Mormon leaders), couched their racism in theology by appealing to scripture. Three books address these issues in some detail: Nell Irvin Painter, *The History of White People* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2010); Grace Elizabeth Hale, *Making Whiteness: The Culture of Segregation in the South, 1890–1940* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1998); and David L. Chappell, *A Stone of Hope*.

49. John A. Widtsoe, “What is the Meaning of Patriarchal Blessings?,” *Improvement Era* 45 (January 1942): 33, 61, 63. Also published in John A. Widtsoe, *Evidences and Reconciliations* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1943), 234. For the First Presidency statement, “Suggestions for Stake Patriarchs,” May 25, 1943, see James R. Clark, comp., *Messages of the First Presidency*, 6 vols. (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1965–1975), 6:194–96 (quotation on 194).

not.<sup>50</sup> Such anxieties were rooted in the difficulties that Americans in general had in defining African ancestry following the American Civil War and continuing into the early twentieth century. Some states stipulated that one-sixteenth African ancestry qualified for “negro status,” while other states placed it at one-eighth or one-twenty-fifth.<sup>51</sup> Mormons, by contrast, followed the “one-drop” rule—based on lineage, not skin color.<sup>52</sup> Harold B. Lee, as Church president, affirmed that “skin color is not what keeps the Negro from the Priesthood. It is strictly a matter

---

50. For an excellent expression of this problem, see Jeremy Talmage and Clinton D. Christensen, “Black, White, or Brown?: Racial Perceptions and the Priesthood Policy in Latin America,” *Journal of Mormon History* 44, no. 1 (January 2018): 119–45; Richard E. Turley Jr. and Jeffrey G. Cannon, “A Faithful Band: Moses Mahlangu and the First Soweto Saints,” *BYU Studies Quarterly* 55, no. 1 (Winter 2016): 9–38; and William Grant Bangerter, *These Things I Know: The Autobiography of William Grant Bangerter* (Salt Lake City: Voices and Images, 2013), 170. Bangerter, a mission president in Brazil in the 1950s, explained: “I very earnestly sought the guidance of the Spirit of the Lord, and because of the mixture of African ancestry among Brazilian people, it was always very difficult to determine who would be eligible to hold the priesthood” (ibid.). Apostle David O. McKay explained to a mission president in Brazil that determining who had “negro blood” in South America “is not an easy problem to handle” (David O. McKay to Rulon S. Howells, June 29, 1935, Dorothy H. Ipsen Collection of Rulon S. Howells’s Missionary Papers, 1934–1949, Church History Library, Salt Lake City). First Presidency Secretary Hamer Reiser expressed a similar concern about South Africa (Reiser oral history interview with William G. Hartley, Oct. 16, 1974, ibid.).

51. Ariela J. Gross, *What Blood Won’t Tell Us: A History of Race on Trial in America* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2008), chaps. 3–4; Peter Wallenstein, *Race, Sex, and the Freedom to Marry: Loving v. Virginia* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2014), 42–43, 56–60; and Peggy Pascoe, *What Comes Naturally: Miscegenation Law and the Making of Race in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), chaps. 3–4.

52. For the “one-drop” rule, see Smith, *Way to Perfection*, 106; Reeve, *Religion of a Different Color*, chap. 7; and Stevenson, *For the Cause of Righteousness*, chap. 10. Several states also followed the “one-drop” rule. For this point, see Pascoe, *What Comes Naturally*, 118–19, 140–54; and Wallenstein, *Race, Sex, and the Freedom to Marry*, 42, 55, 58.

of lineage and involves only African Negroes,” he declared. Lee further noted that “dark or black islanders, such as Fijians, Tongans, Samoans, or Maoris are all permitted full rights to the priesthood” since they do not descend from African ancestry.<sup>53</sup>

Various Church presidents, in fact, claimed that any mixed blood between whites and Blacks would classify them a “negro” and therefore restrict them from priesthood and temple rituals. To that end, Mormon leaders went to great lengths during the twentieth century to determine bloodlines. J. Reuben Clark, a counselor to three Church presidents, asked apostle Joseph Fielding Smith, the Church Historian at the time and a leading doctrinal authority, to research if dark-skinned peoples in the Pacific Islands were of the “seed of Cain.” After extensive research, Smith claimed he did not know.<sup>54</sup> In some cases, Clark tried to determine Black ancestry through scientific means, collaborating with Albin Matson, an LDS doctor, to learn more about “negro blood.”<sup>55</sup> In other instances, LDS leaders instructed missionaries and members to conduct genealogical studies and “lineage lessons” to determine ancestry, particularly in South Africa and Brazil—two countries with a long history of

---

53. Harold B. Lee, quoted in John Keahey, “LDS Head Says Blacks to Achieve Full Status,” *Standard-Examiner* (Ogden, Utah), Sept. 24, 1973.

54. See J. Reuben Clark office diary, Mar. 19, 1960, box 22, folder 3, J. Reuben Clark Papers, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University; First Presidency (Stephen L. Richards and J. Reuben Clark) to Joseph Fielding Smith, May 29, 1951, and Joseph Fielding Smith’s reply, June 8, 1951, both in box 17, folder 13, Joseph Fielding Smith Papers, Church History Library, Salt Lake City.

55. In the 1950s, Clark and Matson exchanged several letters in which they discussed ways to “differentiate the blood of Negroes and other peoples by means of hereditary factors in human blood.” See Matson to Clark, July 2, 1954 and Clark’s reply, July 22, 1954, box 391, folder 7, J. Reuben Clark Papers, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University; Matson to Clark, Oct. 20, 1958, Clark’s reply, Nov. 7, 1958, Matson to Clark, Dec. 16, 1958, Clark’s response, Jan. 9, 1958, all in “Clarkana” box 295, “Negro” folder, *ibid.* See also D. Michael Quinn, *Elder Statesman: A Biography of J. Reuben Clark* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2002), 350–51.

race-mixing. In lineage lessons, missionaries were instructed to discern ancestry by discreetly evaluating the person's nose, face, lips, and other features that might reveal whether or not the person had "negro blood." They would also ask suspected persons if they could review their family photo albums.<sup>56</sup>

Other leaders looked to patriarchs to solve the problem.<sup>57</sup> In Brazil, where lineage was difficult to determine, patriarchs became the final authority in determining priesthood eligibility. General Authorities instructed patriarchs that if they detected "the lineage of Cain," they were to refrain from declaring lineage. If, on the other hand, they felt prompted to declare one of the tribes of Israel, then the recipient was cleared for the priesthood and, as was often the case, missionary service. As one scholar wrote: "It was a very simple method to dispose of the difficult administrative problem of determining lineage in questionable cases."<sup>58</sup> Puerto Rico appeared to follow the same policy, as did other regions of the Church.<sup>59</sup>

---

56. This practice took place in South Africa and Brazil. See South African Proselyting Plan (December 1951), compiled by Elder Gilbert G. Tobler, Mowbray, C. P. South Africa, discussion 13, 45–46, Church History Library, Salt Lake City. For Brazil, see "Lineage Lesson," Brazil North Mission, 1970, *ibid.* See also Harris and Bringhurst, *Mormon Church and Blacks*, 102.

57. J. Reuben Clark acknowledged privately that in these racially-mixed countries there was no way to accurately determine bloodlines. He feared that bishops and stake presidents were conferring priesthood ordination on persons of African descent. For this point, see Council of Twelve minutes, Jan. 25, 1940, box 64, folder 5, Spencer W. Kimball Papers, Church History Library, Salt Lake City; also in box 78, folder 7, George Albert Smith Papers, Special Collections, Marriott Library, University of Utah.

58. Mark L. Grover, "Religious Accommodation in the Land of Racial Democracy: Mormon Priesthood and Black Brazilians," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 17, no. 3 (Fall 1984): 32.

59. Talmage and Christensen, "Black, White, or Brown?," 122–23. See also J. Reuben Clark office diary, Aug. 18, 1939, box 10, folder 5, J. Reuben Clark Papers, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University; and David O. McKay journal, Nov. 1, 1963, box 55, folder 3, David O. McKay Papers, Special Collections, Marriott Library, University of Utah.

The policy, by contrast, differed in South Africa. In 1949, South African mission president Evan P. Wright asked the First Presidency if “a patriarchal blessing is sufficient evidence for ordination to the priesthood” and the First Presidency replied no.<sup>60</sup> Nevertheless, in 1958, during a special meeting with patriarchs, Joseph Fielding Smith took a different position from the First Presidency. He instructed patriarchs that suspected “Negroes” could go to their patriarchs “who could declare lineage to see if they have the Negro blood.” Missionaries, in fact, were already doing just that. In 1953, a missionary in Chicago explained to apostle Spencer W. Kimball that a sixteen-year-old boy with “definite Negroid characteristics” received his blessing from a Patriarch Whowell. Members of the family showed “very definite Canaanite features,” the missionary reported. The family’s descendants “intermarried into many . . . other families,” making it difficult to determine the boy’s ancestry. So they sought the blessing of Patriarch Whowell, who confirmed their worst suspicion: “he could not give [the boy] the blessing of Israel because of his negro ancestry.”<sup>61</sup>

As one might suspect, patriarchs felt tremendous pressure to determine lineage. Oftentimes their declarations of lineage led to disappointment and confusion, as in 1962 when a patriarch told a newly-baptized convert, who looked “Hawaiian,” that he had “mixed lineage, which stemmed from dark-skinned people” in his family line. The patriarch explained in the blessing that “there is insufficient record or guidance for me to declare the certainty of your lineage.” The man, along with his wife who heard the blessing, was stunned, both because

---

60. Evan P. Wright to First Presidency (George Albert Smith, J. Reuben Clark, David O. McKay), Mar. 31, 1949 and First Presidency’s response, Aug. 31, 1949, both in box 64, folder 6, Spencer W. Kimball Papers, Church History Library, Salt Lake City.

61. Digest of the minutes of the meeting of patriarchs of the Church with the General Authorities held in Barratt Hall, Salt Lake City, Utah, Saturday, Oct. 11, 1958, at 8:00 a.m. with President Joseph Fielding Smith, President of the Quorum of the Twelve, box 64, folder 4, Spencer W. Kimball Papers, Church History Library, Salt Lake City; and Elder Grant Farmer to Spencer W. Kimball, Sept. 12, 1953, box 64, folder 8, *ibid*.

the missionaries told them that the patriarch could resolve the man's priesthood eligibility and because it left his lineage in limbo. In protest, the wife wrote a blunt, angry letter to President McKay. "I think this church is bigoted, biased, and prejudiced," she lashed out. "My husband joined the church to try and clear up this mess," adding, "I don't know what you can do, but please try to help us. We are a happier family because of the church, and if it wasn't for this mess, we could be deliriously happy."<sup>62</sup>

In some cases, local leaders resisted when patriarchs declared the lineage of Ephraim on dark-skinned Latter-day Saints. In 1961, Donald Hemmingway, a stake president in England, interviewed a "young man" who had "kinky hair and dark skin" and possibly even "Negro blood." Yet the patriarch proclaimed in his blessing that he descended from "the lineage of Ephraim," effectively clearing him for priesthood ordination. Hemmingway, troubled by the young man's outward appearance, refused to ordain him, at which point LDS Church President David O. McKay intervened and allowed the ordination to move forward.<sup>63</sup>

By the 1950s and 1960s it was becoming clear that President McKay had a more progressive attitude about Black priesthood ordination than some of his more conservative brethren in the Quorum of the Twelve.<sup>64</sup> He asserted that "evidence of negro blood must be definite and positive," not

---

62. An identified bishop to an unidentified stake president, Dec. 26, 1962, and the recipient's wife to President David O. McKay, May 17, 1963, both in Matt Harris files (courtesy of Newell G. Bringhurst). She included long segments of her husband's patriarchal blessing in the letter to McKay. First Presidency Secretary A. Hamer Reiser responded on behalf of President McKay. He told the woman that the matter would be referred to her stake president. See Reiser to unidentified sister, May 29, 1963, *ibid.* President McKay also instructed the woman's stake president to investigate the matter to determine if her husband had "negro blood." The results of the stake president's investigation is not known. See McKay to unidentified stake president, June 3, 1963, *ibid.*

63. Donald William Hemmingway interview by Christen L. Schmutz, July 16, 1980, Church History Library, Salt Lake City.

64. For this point, see Newell G. Bringhurst, "David O. McKay's Confrontation with Mormonism's Black Priesthood Ban," *John Whitmer Historical Association Journal* 37, no. 2 (Fall/Winter 2017): 1–11.



based on “rumor, surmise,” or innuendo. To that end, McKay instructed bishops and stake presidents to be generous in their judgement as long as the persons in question met worthiness standards. A “lack of evidence sufficient to sustain the presumption of negro blood is not enough to justify withholding the Priesthood from worthy and faithful men,” he averred.<sup>65</sup> McKay’s generosity of spirit manifested itself time and again in ad hoc cases that came before him. In 1954 he reversed a policy requiring South Africans to trace their genealogy back several generations to prove that they did not have Black ancestry.<sup>66</sup> He also encouraged bishops and stake presidents to err in favor of ordaining persons to the priesthood if there was insufficient evidence of Black blood.<sup>67</sup> He took the same liberal attitude with patriarchal blessings. When patriarchs blessed light-skinned people with “negro features” and declared them to be of the lineage of Ephraim, McKay let the persons in question advance in the priesthood.<sup>68</sup>

Addressing these cases on an ad hoc basis became even more difficult in the decades following World War II. During the post-war years as the LDS Church expanded throughout the Pacific Islands, Europe, and South America, determining lineage was nearly impossible as biracial, light-skinned, and dark-skinned Latter-day Saints joined the Church in these racially-mixed countries. Without proper guidance on how to handle

---

65. David O. McKay to an unidentified stake president, June 3, 1963, Matt Harris files (courtesy of Newell G. Bringhurst).

66. “Minutes of Special Meeting by President McKay,” Jan. 17, 1954, Church History Library, Salt Lake City; also in box 32, folder 3, David O. McKay Papers, Special Collections, Marriott Library, University of Utah; and box 64, folder 8, Spencer W. Kimball Papers, Church History Library, Salt Lake City.

67. For McKay’s overlooking Latter-day Saints suspected of having “negro lineage,” see Gregory A. Prince and Wm. Robert Wright, *David O. McKay and the Rise of Modern Mormonism* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2005), 78–79; and Mary Lythgoe Bradford, *Lowell L. Bennion: Teacher, Counselor, Humanitarian* (Salt Lake City: Dialogue Foundation, 1995), 165–66.

68. See, for example, First Presidency (David O. McKay, Hugh B. Brown, N. Eldon Tanner) to Bishop Bernard J. Price of Idaho Falls, Idaho, Apr. 16, 1964, Matt Harris files (courtesy of Newell G. Bringhurst)

these cases, patriarchs did not follow a consistent policy declaring lineage on persons with suspected African ancestry or persons whose African ancestry was unchallenged. Some patriarchs declared the lineage of Cain, some Ephraim, some Manasseh, some no lineage while others refused to grant blessings at all if they suspected them of having “negro blood.”

Concerned about the problem, apostle Joseph Fielding Smith called for a Church-wide meeting of patriarchs on October 11, 1958. They met at Barratt Hall on the campus of the LDS Business College in Salt Lake City. Smith, Spencer W. Kimball, Mark E. Petersen, Delbert L. Stapley, and LeGrand Richards, all members of the Quorum of the Twelve, attended the meeting along with patriarch Eldred G. Smith and members of the First Council of the Seventy S. Dilworth Young and Bruce R. McConkie. An undetermined number of patriarchs also attended the meeting. Smith cut right to the heart of the problem. There was “a problem which to me is serious,” he cautioned. “A Patriarch gave a blessing to an individual who had Negro blood in his veins and said you are of the House of Israel and entitled to all the blessings of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. A Negro cannot hold the priesthood and not holding the priesthood they cannot, until the Lord removes the restriction, enter into the exaltation of the Kingdom of God and that would not entitle them to all of the blessings of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. That is a very serious matter and we should be extremely careful to know the Lord is speaking to us because Negroes cannot receive the fullness.”<sup>69</sup>

Smith reiterated his hardline position during the question-and-answer period when a patriarch asked about lineage. “We have a young man who joined the Church and there is a question as to his lineage. Is there any reason why they couldn’t call upon the patriarch to see if he could give it to them, to see whether or not they have colored blood?”

---

69. Digest of the minutes of the meeting of patriarchs of the Church with the General Authorities held in Barratt Hall, Salt Lake City, Utah, Saturday, Oct. 11, 1958, at 8:00 a.m. with President Joseph Fielding Smith, President of the Quorum of the Twelve, box 64, folder 4, Spencer W. Kimball Papers, Church History Library, Salt Lake City.

Smith replied that when cases were questioned of “a person suspected of having Negro blood,” it was permissible to “go to a patriarch” to determine lineage. “He has a right to inspiration.” But Smith did not address the specific lineage in his answer, only that patriarchs have a right to declare lineage.<sup>70</sup> Later, Smith clarified Black lineage in an *Improvement Era* article that was republished in a volume called *Answers to Gospel Questions*. Smith removed any ambiguity about Black lineage when he emphatically stated that the “Negro may have a patriarchal blessing, but it would declare him to be of the lineage of Cain or Canaan.”<sup>71</sup>

Smith’s unambiguous position on the lineage of the Church’s small, but noteworthy, Black population was echoed by his son-in-law Bruce R. McConkie, who shared his father-in-law’s penchant for doctrinal certainty. In his best-selling book *Mormon Doctrine*, published in 1958, McConkie, then a member of the First Quorum of the Seventy, expressed strong anti-Black views. “The negroes are not equal with other races where the receipt of certain spiritual blessings are concerned,” he pronounced, “particularly the priesthood and the temple blessings that flow therefrom.” McConkie went on to state that “this inequality is not of man’s origin. It is the Lord’s doing . . . based on his eternal laws of justice.”<sup>72</sup> McConkie further elaborated his views in a series of lectures given in 1967 to Mormon students at the University of Utah. “You automatically got the Priesthood if you belonged to the right lineage,” he candidly explained. “Negroes . . . are Negroes because of [the] pre-existence. They were less valiant. They did not develop the talent for spirituality that some others did. The House of Israel is the House of Israel because of our pre-existence.”<sup>73</sup>

---

70. Ibid.

71. Joseph Fielding Smith, *Answers to Gospel Questions*, 5 vols. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1957–1966), 5:168. See also Joseph Fielding Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation*, compiled by Bruce R. McConkie, 3 vols. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1954–1956), 3:172.

72. Bruce R. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1958), 477.

73. See McConkie’s religion lectures, “Patriarchal Order” and “Pre-Mortal Existence,” University of Utah Institute, 1967, AV 191, CD 1–3, Church His-

McConkie's forceful views reflected the essence of Mormon lineage theology, underscoring a stark racism that consigned Black Latter-day Saints to the margins. Without fully understanding how his teachings affected people of color, the Mormon leader made it emphatically clear where Blacks stood in God's racial order. A student asked McConkie if "a Negro [can] have a patriarchal blessing and the blessing tell him he's adopted into the House of Israel" and McConkie replied no. "Negroes can't go to the temple and . . . can't have these blessings."<sup>74</sup>

Eldred G. Smith, LDS church patriarch from 1947–1979, shared Joseph Fielding Smith's and Bruce R. McConkie's doctrinal views affirming Black inferiority. When Eldred Smith was ordained as the Patriarch to the Church in 1947, then–Church President George Albert Smith instructed him "to declare lineage of those who come under your hands." For a period, Patriarch Smith declared the lineage of Blacks, though he was uncomfortable doing so. Nowhere was this more evident than with "Brother and Sister Hope," a Black couple from Cincinnati, Ohio, who flew to Salt Lake City in the spring of 1947 to receive their patriarchal blessings. According to apostle Spencer W. Kimball, the Hope family were "black members of the Church who were ostracized by their LDS congregation at Cincinnati and were asked by the branch president not to come back, so they held their own Sunday services in their home."<sup>75</sup> Feeling "somewhat perplexed" about how to declare lineage on the Hopes, Smith "spent the night in prayer and contemplation and finally felt impressed to indicate that they were 'associated with the line of Manasseh.'"<sup>76</sup>

---

tory Library, Salt Lake City. See also McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, 102, 314, 476–77, 530–31.

74. McConkie, "Patriarchal Order."

75. Eldred G. Smith's ordination blessing is included in Minutes of the Meetings of the First Presidency and Twelve, Apr. 10, 1947, in Minutes of the Apostles of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 4:333. Biographical information on the Hopes can be found in Spencer W. Kimball journal, Oct. 20, 1947, reel 5, Spencer W. Kimball Papers, Church History Library, Salt Lake City.

76. Ibid. Patriarch Smith also related this experience to BYU religion professor Roy W. Doxey, as recounted in James R. Clark's letter to his father, June 1, 1956,

But as more Black people sought their patriarchal blessings from Eldred Smith, he began to rethink how he blessed them.<sup>77</sup> In a general conference sermon in 1952, he proclaimed that Blacks were not direct descendants from the House of Israel and therefore not entitled to the priesthood or a declaration of lineage. Declarations of lineage or “assignments,” he explained, were only reserved for persons of a certain ancestry, whether born into the covenant or adopted into it through baptism into the Church. Thus, he reasoned, Blacks could not be adopted into the House of Israel and assigned a specific lineage because they were a cursed race. In another general conference sermon eight years later, he opined that “The blessings of Israel are leadership blessings and leadership blessings are the blessings of the priesthood.”<sup>78</sup> In 1964, he told Mormon students at the University of Utah that “every baptized member of the Church is entitled to a blessing with this declaration [of lineage] with one exception. And that, of course, is a Negro who can’t hold the Priesthood.” Smith went on to explain, “He can be a member of the church and he can get a blessing from a Patriarch but until we get different instructions from the Lord, a Negro does not hold the Priesthood. And so,” Smith concluded, “Priesthood blessings are leadership blessings; leadership blessings are the blessings of Israel.”<sup>79</sup>

---

box 90, folder 5, Paul R. Cheesman Papers, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University.

77. Smith affirmed that he had “given blessings to a number of Negroes who are members of the Church” (in Eldred G. Smith BYU devotional address, “A Patriarchal Blessing Defined,” Nov. 8, 1966, 10, Church History Library, Salt Lake City; copy also in box 211, folder 6, Ernest L. Wilkinson Papers, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University).

78. Joseph Fielding Smith, “Patriarchal Order of the Priesthood,” *Improvement Era* 55 (June 1952): 425; and Joseph Fielding Smith, “Your Patriarchal Blessing,” *Improvement Era* 63 (June 1960): 417.

79. Eldred G. Smith to the LDS Student Association, University of Utah Institute of Religion, “Patriarchal Blessings,” Jan. 17, 1964, 3, copy in box 6, folder 10, H. Michael Marquardt Papers, Special Collections, Marriott Library, University of Utah.

Smith refined and indeed expanded his views on race in a 1966 devotional address at Brigham Young University. In that controversial address, the outspoken Mormon patriarch reaffirmed his belief that “leadership blessings are not for the Negro,” but then added a twist: “His is to be a servant. So as a servant he cannot be a leader.” Smith further opined that since Blacks were not eligible for the “blessings of Israel” they could not receive a true patriarchal blessing. Theirs would be “not . . . much different than the blessing that any bishop or home teacher or anyone else holding the priesthood would give, except that they would have the right to have it recorded and these are recorded.” Smith also stated that patriarchs were to omit lineage during blessings to Black people.<sup>80</sup>

Patriarch Smith’s assertion that Blacks would be “servants” to whites eerily echoed the pro-slavery views that Brigham Young expressed in 1852 when he first announced the practice of restricting Blacks from the priesthood.<sup>81</sup> Smith’s frank opinions shocked even BYU president Ernest Wilkinson, who was known for his hardline views on race.<sup>82</sup> In response to Smith’s address, Wilkinson shared his concerns with apostle

---

80. Eldred G. Smith, “A Patriarchal Blessing Defined,” 9–10. William E. Berrett, BYU Vice President and Church Education System administrator, also taught that Blacks could not be given true patriarchal blessings since they could not receive “the blessings of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob” (“Race Problems,” Church History and Philosophy 245—Advanced Theology, July 10, 1956, Church History Library, Salt Lake City).

81. Bringhurst, *Saints, Slaves, and Blacks*, 125–26; and Reeve, *Religion of a Different Color*, 148–52.

82. Wilkinson’s racism was manifest most poignantly during the BYU athletic protests in the late 1960s. For Wilkinson’s reaction to the protests, see J. B. Haws, *The Mormon Image in the American Mind: Fifty Years of Public Perception* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), chap. 3; Darron T. Smith, *When Race, Religion and Sport Collide: Black Athletes at BYU and Beyond* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman and Littlefield, 2016), 85–91; Gary James Bergera, “‘This Time of Crisis’: The Race-Based Anti-BYU Athletic Protests of 1968–1971,” *Utah Historical Quarterly* 81, no. 3 (Summer 2013): 204–29.

Harold B. Lee and Church President David O. McKay.<sup>83</sup> In the midst of the turbulent civil rights era, Wilkinson worried about a public backlash against Mormon racial teachings. This also concerned General Authorities. In 1965, apostle Joseph Fielding Smith refused to allow BYU religion professor James R. Clark permission to publish the controversial 1949 First Presidency statement affirming Black priesthood denial in his multi-volume compilation *Messages of the First Presidency*, fearing it would bring undue critical attention to the Church.<sup>84</sup> At the same time, Church leaders reconsidered how they addressed letters from non-Latter-day Saints asking about “the Negroes holding the priesthood.” First Presidency counselor Hugh B. Brown stated “that since people do not believe in a pre-existence, such statements only lead to confusion,” and he recommended that they be stricken from letters explaining Church racial teachings. The First Presidency agreed with Brown and pledged to keep conversation about Black priesthood denial “clear, positive, and brief.”<sup>85</sup>

In the 1960s, the Church found itself under increased scrutiny for its treatment of Blacks. Michigan governor George Romney, a devoted Latter-day Saint and a leading contender for national office, became the target of intense criticism in the national news media.<sup>86</sup> Of equal

---

83. As recorded in David O. McKay journal, Nov. 13, 1966, box 63, folder 7, David O. McKay Papers, Special Collections, Marriott Library, University of Utah.

84. Smith instructed Clark not to publish any statements the First Presidency issued “during controversial periods in Church history since they would probably be misunderstood today” (in Clark’s “Memorandum on a trip to see President Joseph Fielding Smith,” June 29, 1964, box 7, folder 9, James R. Clark Papers, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University).

85. First Presidency Minutes, Mar. 1, 1968, box 67, folder 3, David O. McKay Papers, Special Collections, Marriott Library, University of Utah.

86. For criticisms of Romney and Mormon racial teachings, see J. B. Haws, “When Mormonism Mattered Less in Presidential Politics: George Romney’s 1968 Window of Possibilities,” *Journal of Mormon History* 39, no. 3 (Summer 2013): 114; Haws, *Mormon Image in the American Mind*, 38–40; and Harris and Bringhurst, *Mormon Church and Blacks*, 75, 79.

concern were naysayers within the Church, who offered pointed criticisms of Mormon racial teachings. Included in this number were Sterling McMurrin and Stuart Udall, both high-ranking government officials in the Kennedy and Johnson administrations, who published sharply-worded statements condemning LDS racial doctrine. Apostle Spencer W. Kimball lamented such attacks, noting that “there are many letters from embarrassed people, much of it negative.”<sup>87</sup>

It was in this context that Patriarch Smith gave his controversial BYU address. President McKay, upset with Patriarch Smith for expressing such extremist views, “directed that no part of [Smith’s] address be printed.”<sup>88</sup> Apostle Mark E. Petersen experienced similar criticism twelve years earlier when he gave a controversial address to religion instructors at BYU. In it, he said that if a “Negro is faithful all his days he can and will enter the Celestial Kingdom,” but “will go there as a servant.”<sup>89</sup> Concerned Latter-day Saints condemned Petersen’s sermon as a “gross misreading

---

87. Spencer W. Kimball to Edward L. Kimball, June 1963, box 63, folder 6, Spencer W. Kimball Papers, Church History Library, Salt Lake City. Sterling M. McMurrin served in the Kennedy administration as the Commissioner of Education. Stewart L. Udall served in the Kennedy and Johnson administrations as the Secretary of the Interior. For their criticisms of Mormon racial teachings, see McMurrin’s addresses to the NAACP, Mar. 8, 1960, box 220, folder 2 and June 21, 1968, box 289, folder 2, both in Sterling McMurrin Papers, Special Collections, Marriott Library, University of Utah; Udall to First Presidency, Sept. 18, 1961, box 209, folder 3, Stuart L. Udall Papers, Special Collections, University of Arizona; and Udall letter to the editor, *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 2, no. 2 (Summer 1967): 5–7.

88. McKay journal, Nov. 13, 1966. Wilkinson informed Eldred Smith that President McKay did not want the address published “because of the present turmoil over the Negro question.” See Wilkinson to Smith, November 25, 1966, box 378, folder 3, Ernest L. Wilkinson Presidential Papers, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University.

89. Mark E. Petersen, “Race Problems As They Affect the Church,” address given to religious educators at Brigham Young University, Aug. 17, 1954, Church History Library, Salt Lake City.



of LDS scripture.” One critic labeled it as “reminiscent of the Klan.”<sup>90</sup> Of course, the teaching did not originate with Smith or Petersen. They had merely repeated what Joseph Fielding Smith, Joseph F. Smith, and Brigham Young had said before, as well as various pro-slavery Protestant ministers from the nineteenth century.<sup>91</sup> But Smith and Petersen said it at a time when the LDS Church was under siege for its racial teachings.

Patriarch Smith’s statements on Black lineage only heightened an already-tense problem within the Church. “We have these conditions by the thousands in the United States,” he candidly admitted, “and are getting more of them. If they have any blood of the Negro at all in their line, in their veins at all, they are not entitled to the blessings of the Priesthood, which would eliminate them from receiving these Patriarchal Blessings.”<sup>92</sup> In a 1968 document called “Instructions to Patriarchs,” the apostles tried to clarify how Black lineage should be handled. While they did not identify the specific lineage for persons suspected of having African bloodlines, they made it emphatically clear that Blacks were not to receive the blessings of “Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob,” and therefore patriarchs should not declare that lineage on persons with “Negro blood.” The statement was essentially lifted from the 1958 meeting minutes with

---

90. LDS Bishop J. D. Williams condemned Petersen’s sermon as a “gross misreading of LDS scripture” in “Analysis of ‘Race Problems—As They Affect the Church,’” 1954, box 24, folder 2, J. D. Williams Papers, Special Collections, Marriott Library, University of Utah. LDS sociologist O. Kendall White linked the talk with the Klan (in White, “Mormonism’s Anti-Black Policy and Prospects for Change,” *Journal of Religious Thought* 29, no. 4 [1972]: 44. For more on the backlash against Petersen, see Harris and Bringham, *Mormon Church and Blacks*, 68–69, 172–73, n. 38–39.

91. Smith, *Way to Perfection*, 109–10; Joseph F. Smith, Council of Twelve minutes, Aug. 18, 1900, in Bush, “Compilation on the Negro,” 191–92; Brigham Young, Feb. 18, 1855, *Journal of Discourses*, 2:184. On pro-slavery Protestant ministers, see generally Haynes, *Noah’s Curse*; Kidd, *Forging of Races*; Oshatz, *Slavery and Sin*; Goldenberg, *Curse of Ham*.

92. Smith address to the LDS Student Association, University of Utah Institute of Religion, “Patriarchal Blessings,” 8.

Joseph Fielding Smith's instruction to patriarchs. There was no new counsel—just a reaffirmation of what had been said earlier.<sup>93</sup>

Not surprisingly, the 1968 "Instructions to Patriarchs" did not clear up the matter. Arguably it created more confusion because it failed to address the uncertainty of Black lineage. To that end, the apostles convened a special meeting of the Quorum of the Twelve in March 1970 to resolve the issue. They reviewed the minutes from Joseph Fielding Smith's 1958 meeting with patriarchs. Apostle Richard L. Evans correctly identified the problem when he said that the 1958 meeting "clearly says that the Negroes cannot receive all the blessings of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, but it does not tell the patriarch what lineage they should declare." Evans said he "researched this with Earl Olson, Assistant Church Historian, and in only a few blessings over many years has the lineage of Ham been declared." Apostle Gordon B. Hinckley "said he had some additional help on this matter" that he would share at another meeting.<sup>94</sup>

The following week the Twelve met again. The meeting was focused exclusively on "the Negro and Patriarchal Blessings." As promised, Hinckley shared his findings. He described "some of the blessings given by [Patriarch] John Smith, in May 1895, when he stated that the individual receiving the blessing was of the lineage of Ham." Hinckley also "referred to a number of other blessings which had been given by various patriarchs in the Church in which the lineage of Ham was stipulated in their blessings." The meeting minutes record that "It was discussed and it was the feeling of the Brethren that it is difficult to prescribe some of these lineages and some of the blessings, that this is a matter which should be left to the patriarch under the inspiration of the Holy Ghost." Apostle Ezra Taft Benson, who harbored negative views about Black people, reminded his colleagues that "one of the great purposes of a patriarchal blessing is to give the lineage and on many occasions when

---

93. "Instructions to Patriarchs," 1968, copy in box 6, folder 10, H. Michael Marquardt Papers, Special Collections, Marriott Library, University of Utah.

94. Council of Twelve minutes, May 14, 1970, box 63, folder 3, Spencer W. Kimball Papers, Church History Library, Salt Lake City.

the lineage is not indicated, it becomes a real concern for the recipient of the blessing.” Unable to resolve their differences, the apostles decided to discuss it at another meeting in the Council of the Twelve.<sup>95</sup>

From these two quorum meetings it is clear that members of the Twelve could not agree on a lineage policy. Thus, the apostles placed the burden of determining lineage back on the patriarchs themselves. The meetings also revealed that certain members of the Twelve clashed with Patriarch Smith over his responsibilities in the Office of the Patriarch. Indeed, the differences between the apostles and Eldred Smith revealed deep fissures within Church leadership.<sup>96</sup> In 1971, Smith met with the apostles to resolve their differences. Apostle Spencer W. Kimball characterized the patriarch as “argumentative” during the meeting.<sup>97</sup> The tension between the members of the Twelve and Smith was palpable and perhaps irresolvable. Whereas Smith instructed that Black members should not receive lineage in their blessings, some apostles insisted they should. And whereas Patriarch Smith viewed blessings for Black Latter-day Saints as “father’s blessings,” certain apostles contested that characterization.

The apostles’ inability to reach a consensus on Black lineage with Patriarch Smith and within the Quorum of the Twelve posed further problems for patriarchs. At a patriarch’s meeting on April 6, 1973, some 114 patriarchs met in Salt Lake City with apostles Delbert L. Stapley and

---

95. Council of Twelve minutes, May 21, 1970, *ibid.* For Benson’s anti-Black views, see my article “Martin Luther King, Civil Rights, and Perceptions of a ‘Communist Conspiracy,’” in *Thunder from the Right: Ezra Taft Benson in Mormonism and Politics*, edited by Matthew L. Harris (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, forthcoming).

96. There had been a longstanding tension between Eldred Smith and various apostles over many issues over many years. For this point, see D. Michael Quinn, *The Mormon Hierarchy: Extensions of Power* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1997), 116–31; Smith and Bates, *Lost Legacy*, chaps. 8–9; and Marquardt, *Later Patriarchal Blessings*, xxxi–liv.

97. Spencer W. Kimball journal, May 21, 1971, reel 35, Spencer W. Kimball Papers, Church History Library, Salt Lake City.

LeGrand Richards, along with Eldred Smith. The questions immediately turned to lineage. "In the immediate future I am going to have the opportunity of giving a blessing to a young Negro," a patriarch asked. "I am very apprehensive about the declaration of lineage." Stapley, seemingly unconcerned about Benson's assertion that lineage should be stated, opined that he "wouldn't declare the lineage in a case of that kind." He instructed the patriarch to just tell them "they would obtain their blessings through the descendants of Abraham." He admitted his counsel was "questionable," but he felt he had no other choice.<sup>98</sup>

Patriarch Smith responded, reiterating his previously-stated views on race from his controversial BYU talk. "I have given a number of blessings to Negro members of the Church. But if you give them the declaration of the blessings of Israel, you are giving them the right to the priesthood because the blessings of Israel are leadership blessings, which is priesthood. So, you give them a father's blessing or a blessing by a patriarch. You record it the same as a patriarchal blessing, but you cannot give them any blessings of Israel." Smith reaffirmed that there should be "No declaration of lineage."<sup>99</sup>

Stapley claimed that Smith did not interpret his position accurately and let him know. "I didn't say they were descendants of Abraham. I said they receive blessings through the descendants of Abraham." The exchange had an unnerving quality about it and revealed that Church leaders had different notions of lineage for Black Latter-day Saints. Complicating matters further, a patriarch asked if "lineage is not declared" could the patriarch add "an addendum to the blessing," to which Stapley replied that he could, clearly revealing his differences with Smith. But the most pointed question focused on the precise lineage that patriarchs felt inspired to declare. "If the spirit is to indicate a lineage of Cain, is it not possible to stipulate that?" a well-intentioned patriarch asked. LeGrand Richards, who was known in Church circles for his volubility,

---

98. "Patriarchs' Meeting Minutes," Apr. 6, 1973, copy in box 4, folder 3, Irene Bates Papers, Special Collections, Marriott Library, University of Utah.

99. *Ibid.*

had remained quiet up to this point. Richards responded, “I don’t think we ever ought to say anything that will discourage people. I wouldn’t tell them that they are a descendant of Cain. You can get around it easier than that, and then it won’t make them feel so bad.”<sup>100</sup>

The winds in the Church were certainly shifting. Richards understood that declaring the lineage of Cain would “discourage [Black] people.” Ezra Taft Benson said that omitting lineage made Black members uncomfortable. More to the point: the apostles had been informed about the damaging effects of LDS racial teachings. In a letter written in 1970, just a few months after the apostles discussed Blacks and patriarchal blessings in their quorum meeting, University of Utah graduate student Sharon Pugsley, a practicing Latter-day Saint, wrote a spirited letter to the apostles. “My primary concern about the teaching that Negroes have been cursed by God . . . is the incalculable potential it has for inflicting psychological damage on persons who are affected by it.” She continued: “I’m not saying that our position with regard to the Negroes is unconstitutional or illegal. I’m saying that it is immoral. It is immoral because it is degrading to certain human beings. I think it would be extremely difficult for a Negro to grow up in our country without being somewhat paranoid—regardless of the Mormon Church. But our Church, instead of being a help to him, is just one more hurt.”<sup>101</sup>

To underscore the point, Pugsley sent the apostles a copy of the *Utah Daily Chronicle*, the student newspaper at the University of Utah. In it, she highlighted an ad she placed that said “Attention L.D.S.” The statement called for a financial contribution to help Blacks:

As a Mormon concerned about racial problems, I am contributing \$\_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_. Although a financial gift can never erase the psychological hurt a child may have suffered while growing up among people who believe and teach that he and all other members of his race have been cursed by God, perhaps this gesture will be serve as

---

100. Ibid.

101. Sharon Pugsley to the Quorum of the Twelve, Aug. 20, 1970, box 9, folder 7, Joseph Fielding Smith Papers, Church History Library, Salt Lake City.

evidence of my hope that the above-mentioned belief with is accompanying attitudes and practices may be changed very soon.

Pugsley urged Latter-day Saints to support a charity run by Coretta Scott King, Dr. Martin Luther King's widow.<sup>102</sup>

Meanwhile, as criticisms against LDS racial teachings persisted, the First Presidency continued to field questions about Black lineage. Some Church leaders, unaware that Blacks could even receive their blessings, queried LDS Church President Spencer W. Kimball. In 1974, J. Duane Dudley, a stake president in Provo, Utah, interviewed a woman of "Negro descent" and wondered "if she can receive a blessing." He asked if there are "any special instructions to the patriarch." Specifically, Dudley wanted to know if there is "any particular statement that should be made about her lineage, such as using the words 'adopted' into one of the tribes of the House of Israel. Could she appropriately be promised all the blessings of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob?" he asked.<sup>103</sup> A few years earlier Kimball himself had already queried the First Presidency over these kinds of questions when he was the Acting President of the Quorum of the Twelve. First Presidency secretary Joseph Anderson responded that "Negro members may properly receive patriarchal blessings," noting that "the patriarch is entitled to inspiration in declaring the lineage of the one to whom the blessing is given." But Blacks could not be adopted into the House of Israel, he affirmed. He was "directed to tell [Kimball] that this is not the doctrine of the Church."<sup>104</sup>

Now, as Church president, Spencer W. Kimball fielded questions about Black lineage. He agonized over these questions and spent many hours in

---

102. *Utah Dailey Chronicle*, Nov. 19, 1969, copy in *ibid*.

103. J. Duane Dudley to First Presidency (Spencer W. Kimball, N. Eldon Tanner, Marion G. Romney), May 13, 1974, box 32, folder 2, David John Buerger Papers, Special Collections, Marriott Library, University of Utah.

104. Joseph Anderson to Spencer W. Kimball, May 28, 1971, box 64, folder 2, Spencer W. Kimball Papers, Church History Library, Salt Lake City.

prayer contemplating the issue.<sup>105</sup> Kimball explained to President Dudley that “Negro members may properly receive patriarchal blessings and the patriarch is entitled to inspiration in declaring lineage of the one to whom the blessing is given.” He further noted that patriarchal blessings “should contain” a declaration of lineage, although he did not state what that lineage was.<sup>106</sup> Not surprisingly, the lack of direction from Church leaders continued to frustrate patriarchs who needed guidance from Church headquarters. Apostle L. Tom Perry recognized the problem and wrote a frank report after visiting a stake in Brazil in May 1976. Perry said that he “found a problem in interviewing . . . two patriarchs. One had been giving lineage from the line of Israel to the Negroes.” Other patriarchs, he was told, pronounced “lineage from many tribes.” The patriarchs he interviewed “suggested a study be made of the blessings on file in the Historians office to see if there is a problem which exists on declaring lineage in Brazil.” Perry concurred “that such a survey be made.”<sup>107</sup>

A survey was, in fact, already underway when Perry made his report to the First Presidency. Two months earlier in February 1976, apostle Boyd

---

105. For two excellent studies depicting President Kimball’s views on Blacks, priesthood, and lineage, see Edward L. Kimball, “Spencer W. Kimball and the Revelation on Priesthood,” *BYU Studies* 47, no. 2 (Spring 2008): 5–85; Edward L. Kimball, *Lengthen Your Stride: The Presidency of Spencer W. Kimball (Working Draft)* (Salt Lake City: Benchmark Books, 2009), chaps. 20–22. My research in the Kimball papers reveals his sensitivity to Blacks and lineage.

106. First Presidency (Spencer W. Kimball, N. Eldon Tanner, Marion G. Romney) to J. Duane Dudley, May 17, 1974, box 32, folder 2, David John Buerger Papers, Special Collections, Marriott Library, University of Utah. Kimball was remarkably consistent in this position. In 1956, he counseled patriarch George E. Jorgensen “that the matter of lineage for such a person would have to be left to the inspiration of the patriarch” (as quoted from a conversation that BYU religion professor James R. Clark had with Patriarch Jorgensen, June 1, 1956, box 90, folder 5, Paul R. Cheesman Papers, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University).

107. L. Tom Perry, “Quarterly Stake Conference Report by General Authorities of the Santo André Stake Conference,” May 15–16, 1976, Matt Harris files (courtesy of Mark Grover of BYU).

K. Packer asked the Church research department to examine “precedents for stake patriarchs’ giving blessings outside their stake boundaries; information on declaring lineage in patriarchal blessings; and information on whether fathers have the right to declare lineage in patriarchal blessings on their children.”<sup>108</sup> While the results of Packer’s request are unknown, the fact that lineage was still a concern for Church leaders as late as 1976 illustrates a troubling problem in the LDS Church. And that problem persisted even after President Kimball lifted the priesthood and temple ban in 1978. Most importantly, the priesthood revelation did not resolve the question of whether or not Blacks were of a cursed lineage. A new edition of “Information and Suggestions for Patriarchs” that the Church published in 1981 avoided the subject altogether.<sup>109</sup>

Nor did the apostles mend their differences with Patriarch Smith. The priesthood revelation only widened the gulf between them, culminating in President Kimball’s decision to place Smith on emeritus status and permanently abolish the Office of the Patriarch in 1979. While the patriarch’s son, Gary Smith, writes that it is “not known what dynamics might have combined to cause Spencer Kimball to retire the office of Church Patriarch,” a major cause appears to be the patriarch’s obstinacy over the lineage issue, which put him at loggerheads with other General Authorities.<sup>110</sup> Smith stubbornly insisted that Blacks should not receive an assignment of lineage despite the fact that they could now attend the temple and hold

---

108. Bates and Smith, *Lost Legacy*, 214, 220, n. 49.

109. See “Information and Suggestions for Patriarchs,” in Marquardt, *Later Patriarchal Blessings*, 565–66. On the question of the priesthood revelation not resolving Black lineage, see Harris and Bringham, *Mormon Church and Blacks*, 118.

110. President Kimball “retired” the Office of the Patriarch in 1979 and named Eldred Smith “Patriarch Emeritus.” Bates and Smith indicate that it is “not known what dynamics might have combined to cause Spencer Kimball to retire the office of Church Patriarch” (*Lost Legacy*, 216). They speculate that “perhaps it was the desire to end more than a century of tension over the proper parameters of authority for the office and to finally put to rest the question of lineal rights of succession.” For an insightful discussion of the matter, see Kimball, *Lengthen Your Stride (Working Draft)*, 406–09.



the priesthood. He also asserted that Blacks could not be adopted into the House of Israel, which contrasted sharply with the apostles' teachings.<sup>111</sup>

For the apostles, however, the priesthood revelation changed the status of Blacks within the House of Israel, even as Church leaders remained steadfast in their belief that God had cursed them.<sup>112</sup> The revelation prompted the Church hierarchy to rethink the place of Blacks within the Church, particularly their status as God's covenant people. After 1978, apostles proclaimed that Blacks could be "adopted into the House of Israel." They could now experience all the rights and privileges that descendants of Ephraim and Manasseh enjoyed, including leadership in the Church. Theologically, this meant that whatever lineage Blacks had before 1978 no longer mattered: as bearers of the priesthood and participants in the sacred ordinances of the temple, they were now equal with God's favored lineages.<sup>113</sup>

In a private memo to President Kimball, apostle Bruce R. McConkie provided a theological rationale for the change. "Negro blood," McConkie

---

111. The ideas expressed in this section were conveyed to me in an email on February 18, 2018, by a person with direct knowledge of Patriarch Smith's views. Because of the sensitivity of the matter, I have chosen not to identify this person.

112. Books promoting the divine curse continued to circulate in the Church well after the priesthood revelation. This includes Smith, *Way to Perfection*; Smith, *Answers to Gospel Questions*; and McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*. It was not until 2013 that the Church officially renounced its long-standing teaching that Blacks bore the mark of a divine curse. For two expressions of this statement, see "Race and the Priesthood," *Gospel Topics*, Dec. 2013, <https://www.lds.org/topics/race-and-the-priesthood?lang=eng>; and Matthew L. Harris, "Mormonism's Problematic Racial Past and the Evolution of the Divine-Curse Doctrine," *John Whitmer Historical Association Journal* 33, no. 1 (2013): 90–114.

113. Two sermons both with the same title illustrates this point. See Bruce R. McConkie, "All Are Alike Unto God," address given at a Book of Mormon symposium for Seminary and Institute instructors at Brigham Young University, Aug. 18, 1978, Church History Library, Salt Lake City; and Howard W. Hunter, "All Are Alike Unto God," devotional assembly address at Brigham Young University, Feb. 4, 1979, available at [https://speeches.byu.edu/talks/howard-w-hunter\\_all-alike-unto-god](https://speeches.byu.edu/talks/howard-w-hunter_all-alike-unto-god).

reasoned, would be “purged out of a human soul by baptism [and] the receipt of the Holy Ghost and [by] personal righteousness.” Blacks would be adopted into the House of Israel as the “seed of Abraham,” thereby qualifying for the blessings of exaltation.<sup>114</sup> Apostle James E. Faust also addressed the point, asserting that “it really makes no difference if the blessings of the House of Israel come through the lineage or through the spirit of adoption.” All could be counted as the “blood of Israel,” whether figuratively or literally. A Church manual further explained: “Converts to the Church are Israelites either by blood or adoption.”<sup>115</sup>

Nagging questions about lineage persisted, however. “What lineage were the Blacks?” a high priest asked a patriarch just weeks after the priesthood ban ended. The patriarch responded that he “asked some general authorities and other patriarchs about it and they will only say ‘It’s between you and the Lord.’” Meanwhile, some patriarchs expressed trepidation about having “to discern a declaration of lineage for a black

---

114. Bruce R. McConkie memo to Spencer W. Kimball, “Doctrinal Basis for Conferring the Melchizedek Priesthood Upon the Negroes,” March 1978, box 64, folder 3, Spencer W. Kimball Papers, Church History Library, Salt Lake City. The context for this memo is important. In the months leading up to the priesthood revelation, President Kimball asked the apostles to prepare written memorandums justifying priesthood ordination on Black people. See Kimball, *Lengthen Your Stride (Working Draft)*, 345; and Joseph Fielding McConkie, *The Bruce R. McConkie Story: Reflections of a Son* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2003), 374–75. McConkie’s assertion that Gentile “blood” could be purged by baptism echoed Joseph Smith’s teachings. See Smith’s writings of June 27, 1839, in “History, 1838–1856, volume C-1 [2 November 1838–31 July 1842],” 8, Joseph Smith Papers, <http://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/history-1838-1856-volume-c-1-2-november-1838-31-july-1842/543>. Smith applied the term “Gentile blood” more broadly; McConkie associated it with “Negro” converts.

115. James E. Faust, “Patriarchal Blessings,” Brigham Young University devotional, Mar. 30, 1980, [https://speeches.byu.edu/talks/james-e-faust\\_patriarchal-blessings](https://speeches.byu.edu/talks/james-e-faust_patriarchal-blessings); and *Gospel Principles* (Salt Lake City: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2009), 273. See also Daniel H. Ludlow, “Of the House of Israel,” *Ensign*, Jan. 1991, <https://www.lds.org/ensign/1991/01/of-the-house-of-israel?lang=eng>.

person.”<sup>116</sup> Other Latter-day Saints, insensitive to Mormon racial teachings, asked Blacks about their lineage. “So what’s your lineage?” a white Latter-day Saint queried Keith Hamilton, a newly-baptized Black convert. The “seed of Cain,” Hamilton sarcastically replied. “The brother looked at his embarrassed wife and triumphantly proclaimed, ‘See, I told you.’”<sup>117</sup>

In other instances, the priesthood revelation opened up new possibilities for Black Latter-day Saints who were denied lineage in their initial blessings. Ruffin Bridgeforth, Eugene Orr, and Darius Gray, the inaugural presidency of the Genesis Group, a Black Latter-day Saint support group, each experienced this. Orr and Gray, troubled over the omission, contacted Eldred Smith, the man who gave them their blessings. Orr demanded to know why he “was given no lineage” and Smith could only reply that he did not receive a “burning in his bosom” during the blessing. Smith’s less-than-frank response frustrated Orr, prompting him to ask the patriarch why he “denied [himself] the right to receive the burning in the bosom?”<sup>118</sup> Gray expressed frustration too. “When I received my patriarchal blessing in 1966 it did not include lineage,” Gray recalled. “That’s the purpose of a patriarchal blessing and you’re entitled to go back and get a second patriarchal blessing,” his friends explained. Gray asked for a second blessing, but Patriarch Smith demurred. “It isn’t time yet,” Smith replied cryptically, confusing Gray. “I didn’t know if it was because of my race or what,” Gray affirmed. He reported that “it took twenty some years to approach [Patriarch Smith] again at the

---

116. As related in LDS Church Historian Leonard J. Arrington’s journal, June 25, 1978, box 33, folder 4, Leonard J. Arrington Papers, Special Collections, Merrill-Cazier Library, Utah State University. Keith N. Hamilton, *Last Laborer: Thoughts and Reflections of a Black Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Ammon Works, 2011), 68 (my thanks to Hamilton for sharing a copy of his book).

117. *Ibid.*, 69.

118. Eugene Orr interview with H. Michael Marquardt, Nov. 14, 1971, box 6, folder 3, H. Michael Marquardt Papers, Special Collections, Marriott Library, University of Utah. Also in Harris and Bringhurst, *Mormon Church and Blacks*, 90–91.

urging of my then-Bishop and I received a second patriarchal blessing and my lineage [was] declared.”<sup>119</sup>

Other Black Latter-day Saints also received a declaration of lineage after the priesthood revelation. “My Bl[ack] LDS fam[ily], incl[uding] Darius Gray, Joseph Freeman, Sis Jeri Harwell [and] many others all went [and] got lineage after 1978,” declared Zandra Vranes, a Black Latter-day Saint, in 2017.<sup>120</sup> But lineage remained confusing and inconsistent for many Black Latter-day Saints despite the Church’s quasi-official teaching that Blacks could now be adopted into the House of Israel. During the 1980s, a patriarch noted that he received “a specific directive from General Authorities of the Church” on how to deal with Black lineage. “Any descendant of negroid ancestry receiving a Patriarchal Blessing as regarding the declaration of lineage the promises need not include the tribal lineage, but . . . include the ‘seed of Abraham’ as sufficient. Such confirms all the blessings of the Abrahamic covenant and that is sufficient. No greater blessing of lineage can be applied.”<sup>121</sup> In 1994, it was reported that “black church members” in South Africa “were to be assigned to the lineage of Ephraim as a matter of church policy.”<sup>122</sup> By contrast, a Latter-day Saint stated that he was “aware of black people in the United

---

119. Darius Gray and Margaret Young, “No Johnny-Come-Lately: The 182-Year-Long BLACK Mormon Moment,” address at FairMormon conference, August 2–3, 2012, <https://www.fairmormon.org/conference/august-2012/no-johnny-come-lately-the-182-year-long-black-mormon-moment>. Gray also discusses his patriarchal blessing in an oral history interview with Dennis and Elizabeth Haslem, Dec. 4, 1971, box 1, folder 7, African American Oral History Project, 1971–1973, Special Collections, Marriott Library, University of Utah.

120. Sistas in Zion (@SISTASinZION), “It was church policy,” Twitter, June 7, 2017, 1:19 p.m., <https://twitter.com/SISTASinZION/status/872548570087301120>.

121. As quoted in Joseph Stuart, “Patriarchal Blessings, Lineage, and Race: Historical Background and Survey,” *Juvenile Instructor* (blog), June 8, 2017, <http://juvenileinstructor.org/patriarchal-blessings-lineage-and-race-historical-background-and-a-survey>.

122. Mauss, *All Abraham’s Children*, 40, n. 32; Armand Mauss, email message to author, Feb. 2, 2018.

Kingdom whose patriarchs declared their lineage of ‘Ham’ even after the momentous and long overdue 1978 change” lifting the priesthood restriction.<sup>123</sup> Another Latter-day Saint, a biracial man, reported that his patriarchal blessing in 1987 “specifically [omitted] reference to belonging to any tribe but [offered] him blessings ‘by reason of adoption into the House of Israel.’” Confused, the young man sought another blessing in 1991 prior to his LDS mission, and the patriarch explained that his lineage “was that of Cain and that he would be entitled to the blessings of Israel only by way of adoption into the House of Israel.” This lineage designation disturbed the young missionary who “lived believing he was truly a descendant of Cain.” He grew weary trying “to prove himself worthy of the fullness of the Lord’s blessings.”<sup>124</sup>

These stories and more underscore the difficult experience that many Black Latter-day Saints undergo when they receive their patriarchal blessings. Indeed, some Black Mormons feel uncomfortable and ashamed when denied lineage or given vague promises through “Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.”<sup>125</sup> Insensitive patriarchs are only part of the problem, though. The

---

123. As quoted in Stuart, “Patriarchal Blessings, Lineage, and Race” and confirmed in an email message to author, Feb. 14, 2018. Due to the sensitivity of the subject, I have chosen to keep the person’s identity anonymous.

124. John Dehlin, “Dustin Jones and the Lingering Legacy of the LDS Negro Doctrine,” *Mormon Stories* (podcast), May 31, 2011, <http://www.mormonstories.org/256-258-dustin-jones-and-the-lingering-legacy-of-the-lds-negro-doctrine>.

125. A point conveyed to me by numerous Black Latter-day Saints. After 1978, many Black Latter-day Saints claim lineage through Ephraim and Manasseh by adoption into the House of Israel—this according to persons knowledgeable on the subject. Because of the sensitivity of the matter, I have agreed not to identify them. Also instructive is that Black Mormons who have written about their conversion to the LDS Church have not discussed lineage in their books. See, for example, Alan Gerald Cherry, *It’s You and Me, Lord!* (Provo: Trilogy Arts Publication, 1970); Wynetta Willis Martin, *Black Mormon Tells Her Story* (Salt Lake City: Hawkes Publications, 1972); Joseph Freeman, *In the Lord’s Due Time* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1979); and Darron Terry Smith, *What Matters Most: A Story of Human Potential* (Salt Lake City: Scribe Publishing, 1999). Apologetic works by Black Latter-day Saints also omit lineage and dis-

other is the Church handbook, which neither addresses nor repudiates the Cain and Ham lineage designations. The handbook stipulates that patriarchs do not have “to declare lineage from a particular tribe,” but instructs patriarchs to assign “blessings through [Israel].”<sup>126</sup> Recognizing the problem, Darius Gray has forcefully explained that this is a deficiency that needs to be addressed. As Gray ruefully noted to an apologetic Mormon group in 2012, “We have Patriarchs who still aren’t aware that lineage can and should be declared, regardless of race or ethnicity.” He bore testimony affirming that “we can do that, get there, [and] get to be what [God] would have us be.” But Gray was cautiously optimistic. He believed that Latter-day Saints “have a long way to go.”<sup>127</sup>

From Gray’s experience and those of the participants in this story it is clear that lineage for Black Latter-day Saints has been applied unevenly and inconsistently throughout Mormon history. But the problem goes deeper than just omitting lineage. In teaching that Blacks derived from Cain and Ham, Church leaders boxed themselves into a theological corner. They discouraged patriarchs from declaring the blessings of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob on Black Latter-day Saints because those were priesthood and temple blessings; but neither did they encourage patriarchs to declare lineage through Cain or Ham, notwithstanding Joseph Fielding Smith’s statement that a “Negro may have a patriarchal blessing, but it would declare him to be of the lineage of Cain or

---

cussions of patriarchal blessings. See Luckner Huggins, *A Son of Ham: Under the Covenant* (Salt Lake City: Noah’s Family Publishing, 2005); and Marcus H. Martins, *Setting the Record Straight: Blacks and the Mormon Priesthood* (Orem, Utah: Millennial Press, 2007). Two exceptions discussing patriarchal blessings in their books include Black LDS authors Mary Sturlaugson Eyer, *A Soul So Rebellious* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1981), 66–67; and Wain Myers with Kelly L. Martinez, *From Baptist Preacher to Mormon Teacher* (Springville, Utah: Cedar Fort, 2015), 64. Neither discuss lineage, however.

126. “Information and Suggestions for Patriarchs,” 4.

127. Gray and Young, “No Johnny-Come-Lately.”

Canaan.”<sup>128</sup> The priesthood revelation of 1978 eased some of the tension when the apostles affirmed that Blacks could now be “adopted into the House of Israel” as full participants in Mormon liturgical rites. But this doctrinal shift did not resolve the vexing question of whether or not Black people derived from the “seed of Cain.” The current Church handbook states that “some church members may not have any of the lineage of Israel.”<sup>129</sup> This is a startling admission given a recent Church statement that “disavows” that Black people are cursed.<sup>130</sup> In the years to come, the Church will undoubtedly align the antiquated Church handbook with the new “Race and the Priesthood” essay. This will be an important task, especially as the Church continues to baptize and proclaim patriarchal blessings on people of color.

---

128. Smith, *Answers to Gospel Questions*, 5:168.

129. “Information and Suggestions for Patriarchs,” 4. See also Dallin H. Oaks, “Patriarchal Blessings,” *Worldwide Leadership Training Meeting* (Jan. 8, 2005): 8 (my thanks to Mike Marquardt for this reference).

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



Hildebrando de Melo  
Eye of God I (2018)  
30" x 23"  
mixed media on paper



# MARTIN LUTHER KING JR. AND MORMONISM: DIALOGUE, RACE, AND PLURALISM

Roy Whitaker

*... in my experience, our efforts as Mormons to join with others in civil rights actions and to build bridges and respond positively to black aspirations will bring special kinds of misunderstanding and pain and will sometimes make the cross harder to bear.*

—Eugene England<sup>1</sup>

*I think you are the greatest living American, Dr. King, a true disciple of Gandhi and Jesus. Don't let public opinion turn you from the way you know to be right.*

—Edris Head<sup>2</sup>

## Introduction

Scholars, from various humanities and social science disciplines, have debated the dilemma cultural diversity presents to Western societies and religions. One part of the problem is tackling implicit and explicit forms of ethnocentrism and Eurocentrism by reimagining a world that

---

1. Eugene England, "The Mormon Cross," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 8, no. 1 (Spring 1973): 85.

2. Edris Head, "Letter from Edris Head to [Martin Luther King Jr.] about [Mormons] and the Presidential Election," May 20, 1967, The King Center, <http://www.thekingcenter.org/archive/document/letter-edris-head-mlk-about-mormans-and-presidential-election>.

affirms the difference of the Other.<sup>3</sup> Since the middle of the twentieth century, there has been a particular debate within Mormonism about the form, content, and whether there needs to be further discussions about what many perceive as the legacy of racism in the Church's history and theology.

On one hand, Church officials, leaders, and the rank-and-file of the community—including prominent figures such as President Gordon B. Hinckley, President Ezra Taft Benson, President David O. McKay, Elder Bruce R. McConkie, and Mormon theologian Robert Millet—have contributed, though perhaps unintentionally, to a palpable culture of silence regarding “race talk” with those both within and outside of the Church. Many assume, for instance, that the ban prohibiting men of African descent from becoming priests was properly dealt with forty years ago with Official Declaration 2.<sup>4</sup> Armand L. Mauss, a sociologist of Mormonism, explained that to most white Mormons, the race problem was resolved in 1978, despite the Church's not offering a coherent

---

3. Jarich Oosten, “Cultural Anthropological Approaches,” in *Theory and Method in Religious Studies: Contemporary Approaches to the Study of Religion*, edited by Frank Whaling (New York: Mouton de Gruyter, 1995), 232; Robert Wuthnow, “Responding to the New Religious Pluralism,” *CrossCurrents* 58, no. 1 (2008): 43–50; Risto Saarinen, “After Rescher: Pluralism as Preferentialism,” in *Theology and the Religions: A Dialogue*, edited by Viggo Mortensen (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2003), 409; David W. Wills, “The Central Themes of American Religious History: Pluralism, Puritanism, and the Encounter of Black and White,” in *African-American Religion: Interpretive Essays in History and Culture*, edited by Timothy E. Fulop and Albert J. Raboteau (New York: Routledge, 1996), 7–20; and Reid B. Locklin and Hugh Nicholson, “The Return of Comparative Theology,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 78, no. 2 (2010): 477–514.

4. Official Declaration 2, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, available at <https://www.lds.org/scriptures/dc-testament/od/2>; and Armand L. Mauss, “Casting Off the ‘Curse of Cain’: The Extent and Limits of Progress since 1978,” in *Black and Mormon*, edited by Newell G. Bringhurst and Darron T. Smith (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2006), 82.

explanation of the origins and the timing for the removal of the ban.<sup>5</sup> In the aftermath of Official Declaration 2, President Hinckley said that the revelation speaks for itself and, therefore, nothing more needs to be done.<sup>6</sup> Millet added that non-Mormon faiths who criticize the Church because of past teachings should ask themselves if they are prepared to apply the same standards of judgment to their own tradition.<sup>7</sup>

On the other hand, a cohort of Mormon studies scholars and Latter-day Saint activists—such as Darrell Campbell, Joanna Brooks, Boyd Petersen, Mark L. Grover, Brian Birch, and many members of the Sunstone community—have encouraged more robust dialogue on multicultural issues with those within and outside of the Church.<sup>8</sup> Margaret Toscano maintains that LDS members should admit that the 1978 revelation was not about God changing his mind but the correction of human prejudice.<sup>9</sup> Additionally, Darron Smith has claimed that there is a reluctance among Church officials to engage in serious race

---

5. Mauss, “Casting Off the ‘Curse of Cain,’” 91; Armand L. Mauss, *All Abraham’s Children: Changing Mormon Conceptions of Race and Lineage* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003).

6. Gordon B. Hinckley, *What of the Mormons?: A Brief Study of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Whitefish, Mont.: Kessinger, 2004), 20; and Mauss, “Casting Off the ‘Curse of Cain,’” 82, 92.

7. Robert Millet, “What Do We Really Believe?: Identifying Doctrinal Parameters within Mormonism,” in *Discourses in Mormon Theology: The Philosophical and Theological Possibilities*, edited by James M. MacLachlan and Loyd Ericson (Sandy, Utah: Kofford, 2007), 272; Richard J. Mouw, *Talking with Mormons: An Invitation to Evangelicals* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2012).

8. Boyd Petersen, “The Continuing Importance of Dialogue,” *Dead Wood and Rushing Water* (blog), Apr. 21, 2016, <https://boydpetersen.com/2016/04/21/the-continuing-importance-of-dialogue>.

9. Margaret Toscano, “Is There a Place for a Heavenly Mother in Mormon Theology?: An Investigation into Discourses of Power,” in *Discourses in Mormon Theology*, 212.

discussions, which reinforces the falsehood that racism is no longer a significant social problem.<sup>10</sup>

This essay approaches intrafaith dialogue within Mormonism by examining Martin Luther King Jr.'s perspective on dialogue and race—including his acts of civil disobedience and his studies of the comparative philosophy of religion. He has been a vital resource for Mormon scholars, leaders, and laity to readdress cultural, political, and religious concerns within their tradition. The essay begins by discussing the sources and norms of King's rhetoric of inclusion in Black Atlantic (post)colonial culture and his ideas regarding cosmopolitanism—to take seriously the lives and works of people of African descent living in a pluralistic age. Then, Mormon responses to King's public theology are considered, focusing primarily on Eugene England's thought and Edris Head's letter addressed to King. While England wrote extensively about the ethics of diversity in the Church,<sup>11</sup> Head's personal letter to King has received limited scholarly attention.

This methodology is significant because it presents and assesses King's ideas about religious and racial diversity within the context of "Mormon outsiders." This can help scholars better ascertain his broader vision of theology and its purpose. This approach also adds to the studies of "Mormon agitators" who seek to make the Church of Jesus Christ of

---

10. Darron T. Smith, "Unpacking Whiteness in Zion: Some Personal Reflections," in *Black and Mormon*, 150; and Peggy Fletcher Stack, "Mormon and Black: Grappling with a Racist Past," *Salt Lake Tribune*, June 8, 2008, <https://archive.sltrib.com/article.php?id=9497769&itype=NGPSID>;

11. Eugene England, "Are All Alike unto God?: Prejudice against Blacks and Women in Popular Thought," *Sunstone* 15, no. 2 (1990): 21–31; Eugene England, "Becoming a World Religion: Blacks, the Poor—All of Us," *Sunstone* 21, no. 2 (1998): 49–60; Eugene England, "'No Respector of Persons': A Mormon Ethics of Diversity," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 27, no. 4 (Winter 1994): 79–102; and Eugene England, "On Being Mormon and Human," *Sunstone* 118 (2001): 76–78.

Latter-day Saints a more culturally sensitive and diverse ecclesiastical body in the modern era.

### King's Hermeneutical Account of Race and Dialogue in Black Atlantic Culture

*To discuss Christianity without mentioning other religions would be like discussing the greatness of the Atlantic Ocean without the slightest mention of the many tributaries that keep it flowing.*

—Martin Luther King Jr.<sup>12</sup>

As Paul Tillich argued about theology in general, the theologian must answer a series of questions about any theological system: What are the sources? What is the medium in which those sources are received? What is the norm that determines the use of those sources?<sup>13</sup> The major norms that informed King's approach to dialogue about race were shaped largely by three sources: the African diaspora experience, which becomes evident in his language of "exodus"; the southern African American prophetic Christian tradition, where he stood in the line of ministers all the way back to slavery; and his higher education experience and interest in the comparative philosophy of religion, which included Eastern thinkers like Mahatma Gandhi and Western philosophers like Georg Hegel.<sup>14</sup>

---

12. Martin Luther King Jr., "The Influence of the Mystery Religions on Christianity," Martin Luther King, Jr. Research and Education Institute, Stanford University, <https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/king-papers/documents/influence-mystery-religions-christianity>.

13. Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973).

14. 14. David J. Garrow, "King's Intellectual Development: Influences and Commentaries," in *Martin Luther King Jr.: Civil Rights Leader, Theologian, Orator* (Martin Luther King Jr. and the Civil Rights Movement, Volumes 1–3), edited by David J. Garrow (Brooklyn, N.Y.: Carlson, 1989), 437–52; James H. Cone, "The Theology of Martin Luther King Jr.," in *Martin Luther King, Jr.: Civil Rights Leader, Theologian, Orator*, edited by David J. Garrow (Brooklyn,

A central theme of King's ethnic and religious pluralism was how deeply entangled it was in his African diaspora experience of exodus. He possessed a religious consciousness rooted in an African diaspora experience—a consciousness that is much more than a doctrine. It is an ethos and an attitude. It is a philosophy. Anyone familiar with King will know that he was explicit about the need for continued dialogue about race within the context of one's ethnic and religious heritage. In fact, King exclaimed, "I have come to hope that American Negroes can be a bridge between white civilization and the nonwhite nations of the world, because we have roots in both. Spiritually, Negroes identify . . . with Africa."<sup>15</sup> King understood how under the conditions of white supremacy, the colonized (Black) identity and (Black) consciousness become alienated from themselves. Yet he believed that the relationship between African and African American cultural and religious identity was not severed due to the African slave experience. Specific geopolitical hot spots that resonated with King's fight for social justice included Africa, India, South America, and the Caribbean—the places most affected by Western (post)colonialism and societies made up of people of color.<sup>16</sup>

Thus, "exodus" became an impetus for King's message of universalism. To counter the lingering effects of colonialism and racism, King referred to an interrelatedness of life using the image of a "single gar-

---

N.Y.: Carlson, 1989), 216–18; and Martin Luther King Jr., "*An Autobiography of Religious Development*," Martin Luther King, Jr. Research and Education Institute, Stanford University, <https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/king-papers/documents/autobiography-religious-development>.

15. Martin Luther King Jr., "A Testament of Hope," in *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, edited by James M. Washington (New York: HarperCollins), 318.

16. Martin Luther King Jr., "The Negro is Part of That Huge Community Who Seek New Freedom in Every Area of Life," Feb. 1, 1959, Martin Luther King, Jr. Research and Education Institute, Stanford University, <https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/king-papers/documents/negro-part-huge-community-who-seek-new-freedom-every-area-life>.

ment of destiny” to highlight the fact that we are all caught in a network of mutuality.<sup>17</sup> He instilled a sense of community whereby the African American sense of *anomie*—as Émile Durkheim would put it—or *two-ness*—as W. E. B. Du Bois would put it—was abated partly because of God’s love. King concluded that African Americans have come to feel that they are “somebody” because their religion revealed to them that God loves all of his children.<sup>18</sup> King drew upon the cultural formations to envision a global “beloved community.”<sup>19</sup> In his most famous address, “I Have a Dream,” King ended with a slave song: “And when this happens . . . we will be able to speed up that day when *all* of God’s children, black men and white men, Jews and Gentiles, Protestants and Catholics, will be able to join hands and sing in the words of the old Negro spiritual: Free at last! Free at last! Thank God Almighty, we are free at last!”<sup>20</sup> African retentions, such as the singing of slave spirituals, enabled King to nurture the aesthetic resources to resist oppression.

King’s insistence on the need for more dialogue to eradicate racism emerged during the twentieth century—a particular stage of African

---

17. Martin Luther King Jr., “Letter from a Birmingham Jail,” Apr. 16, 1963, Martin Luther King, Jr. Research and Education Institute, Stanford University, <https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/king-papers/documents/letter-birmingham-jail>.

18. Martin Luther King Jr., “Address at the Freedom Rally in Cobo Hall,” June 23, 1963, Martin Luther King, Jr. Research and Education Institute, Stanford University, <https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/king-papers/documents/address-freedom-rally-cobo-hall>.

19. Joshua F. J. Inwood, “Searching for the Promised Land: Examining Dr. Martin Luther King’s Concept of the Beloved Community,” *Antipode: A Radical Journal of Geography* 41, no. 3 (2009): 487–508.

20. Martin Luther King Jr., “‘I Have a Dream,’ Address Delivered at the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom,” Aug. 28, 1963, Martin Luther King, Jr. Research and Education Institute, Stanford University, <https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/king-papers/documents/i-have-dream-address-delivered-march-washington-jobs-and-freedom>.

American religio-cultural development in North America.<sup>21</sup> During this epoch of new market forces and the process of globalization, African Americans were turning to multiple sources for insights within and beyond Judaism, Christianity, and Islam to inform their worldview. King sought resources wherever he could, to create transnational intra- and inter-religious alliances to fight against racism, materialism, and war—issues that hindered justice, freedom, and peace.

For example, King jostled his private and public acumen—knowing both the established Western (white-male) scholarly canon while studying, knowing, and preserving his own African diaspora history.<sup>22</sup> White North American and European thinkers heavily influenced King. As a student, King learned about and adopted Hegel’s dialectical method of reconciling opposing positions into a coherent one. He used Hegel to help him respond to social dilemmas. As a seminarian, King studied non-African American religions. He traced anthropological and sociological arguments for the origins of religion, concluding that truth exists in various religious and ethical traditions.<sup>23</sup> He followed truth wherever it was found and did not base his openness on the stature of the religious leader. Mentors introduced King to Eastern religious teachers, including Gandhi, and he made Gandhian nonviolence a central feature of the civil

---

21. Caleb Oladipo, “Confession, Tradition, and Perspectives: Response and Reflection of Afro-Americans to the Age of Religious Pluralism,” in *Theology and the Religions*, 73, 82; and Viggo Mortensen, “For All God’s People: Being Church in Multireligious Societies,” in *Theology and the Religions*, 465.

22. Chester M. Hedgepeth, “Philosophical Eclecticism in the Writings of Martin Luther King Jr.,” in *Martin Luther King Jr.: Civil Rights Leader, Theologian, Orator*, 541–48.

23. Martin Luther King Jr., “The Origin of Religion in the Race,” Feb. 9, 1951, Martin Luther King, Jr. Research and Education Institute, Stanford University, <https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/king-papers/documents/origin-religion-race>.



rights movement.<sup>24</sup> Despite being raised as a fundamentalist, King did not downplay his formal education. He, instead, would use his extensive training to broaden his pluralistic preaching style.

King criticized racist and fundamentalist theologies that sought to diminish discourse(s). He did not want to hamper the flourishing, for example, of an open-minded society, where care for others was essential. As an illustration, King disagreed with Back-to-Africa movements and the Nation of Islam's monolithic conception of Black culture.<sup>25</sup> King's conviction that there are no superior and inferior races was an act of resisting the temptation to create an essentialized consciousness that reifies identity—Black or otherwise. King wrote, "An individual has value because he has value to God. Whenever this is recognized, 'whiteness' and 'blackness' pass away as determinants in a relationship and 'son' and 'brother' are substituted."<sup>26</sup> For King, *agape*, or unwavering godly love—as opposed to *philos*, friendship, and *eros*, eroticism—toward all others, irrespective of their racial makeup, stood at the center of his spiritual belief.

King argued that interfaith dialogue should be a humble art form, slowly winning over—and never punishing—the Other. In "Six Steps of Nonviolent Social Change," he taught about using grace, humor, and intelligence to translate antagonisms between groups into opportunities for mutual respect. King assisted parties with different viewpoints to reach a "higher universality." For example, civil rights marches included

---

24. Martin Luther King Jr., "Pilgrimage to Nonviolence," Apr. 13, 1960, Martin Luther King, Jr. Research and Education Institute, Stanford University, <https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/king-papers/documents/pilgrimage-nonviolence>.

25. Martin Luther King Jr., "To Edward H. Page," June 12, 1957, Martin Luther King, Jr. Research and Education Institute, Stanford University, <https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/king-papers/documents/edward-h-page>.

26. Martin Luther King Jr., "The Ethical Demands for Integration," in *A Testament of Hope*, 122; and Howard Thurman, *A Strange Freedom: The Best of Howard Thurman on Religious Experience and Public Life*, edited by Walter Earl Fluker and Catherine Tumber (Boston: Beacon Press, 1999), 256.

people from different parts of the country who belonged to different faiths.<sup>27</sup> King viewed African American prophetic Christianity on par with other socially-conscious faiths that contributed to the furthering of global social justice. He commented positively on the vitality of other faith traditions such as Indian spirituality.<sup>28</sup> Focusing on the plight of African Americans, King sought to usher in an era of justice through concerted dialogue—especially for religious and ethnic identities that were deemed Other.

The genius of King's rhetoric that all human beings belong to a shared humanity was that it was not just a theory but also a praxis. King emphasized that ideas have their value relative to their impact on oneself and on the world. He preached sermons like "Paul's Letter to American Christians" at the United Presbyterian Church's Commission on Ecumenical Mission and Relations and participated in marches, travels, and events to be in solidarity with the Other. He renewed a call for new foundations of intrafaith relation by emphasizing ecumenical social thought and action. Along with Hegel, Gandhi was King's premier role model, which enabled him to expand his theological horizon toward a commitment to global praxis. King exclaimed, "Gandhi not only spoke against the caste system but he acted against it."<sup>29</sup> King insisted that abstract notions of truth and love are insufficient to change the status quo and must become grounded in the real world. He exclaimed, "unarmed truth and unconditional love . . . have the final word in reality."<sup>30</sup> This is

---

27. Hans Jochen Margull, "The Ecumenical Movement in the Churches and at the Parish Level," in *A History of the Ecumenical Movement, Volume 2: 1948–1968*, edited by Harold E. Fey (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1968), 366.

28. Martin Luther King Jr., "My Trip to the Land of Gandhi," July 1959, Martin Luther King, Jr. Research and Education Institute, Stanford University, <https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/king-papers/documents/my-trip-land-gandhi>.

29. Ibid.

30. Martin Luther King Jr., "Acceptance Address for the Nobel Peace Prize," Dec. 10, 1964, Martin Luther King, Jr. Research and Education Institute, Stan-

a reason why King was so dismayed with fellow white clergymen in his “Letter from Birmingham City Jail”: men who supported civil rights with their words but not via their actions. From King’s perspective, dialogue about racism by itself does not translate into material freedom.

Therefore, a major driving force determining King’s commitment to dialogue about race was his African American Christian diaspora identity. His ministerial lineage and seminary training led him to become concerned about discussing the relationship between Christianity and other religions. King’s confidence in God’s grace helped him respond creatively to legacies of Western hegemony and colonialism, with its history of racial and religious oppression. Ultimately, King should not be interpreted narrowly as a Southern civil rights minister alone, but as a public theologian of inclusion who successfully constructed a universally appealing message, which led to his becoming a national and international icon—a living legend.

### King’s Hermeneutical Account of Race and Dialogue as a Resource for Mormon Theology and Culture

*... the allegation of an unspecified act or choice in the pre-existence which blacks cannot know about or repent of . . . essentially states that the most noble black man who has ever lived (choose your own example: Elijah Abel, Martin Luther King, Ralph Bunche) is in some crucial sense not up to the level of—is, in a word, inferior to—the most depraved white man (Hitler, Stalin, Charles Manson).*

—Eugene England<sup>31</sup>

---

ford University, <https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/king-papers/documents/acceptance-address-nobel-peace-prize>.

31. England, “The Mormon Cross,” 80.

*I used to be a Mormon, and my first doubts about the Church were on [the priesthood] subject.*

—Edris Head<sup>32</sup>

Max Stackhouse, scholar of public theology, argues that a serious dialogue that is not simply political posturing will recognize the validity of many possible sources and norms that could contribute to the general welfare of all.<sup>33</sup> Mormons have used King's views of dialogue and race as a constructive resource for themselves to counter what they perceive to be inconsistencies, contradictions, and paradoxes within Mormon theology and history. King enabled England and Head to respond to their traditions in three interrelated ways: (a) nurturing a critical self-consciousness of one's cultural identity within the context of one's religious identity to help transform social awareness, (b) recognizing the fallible nature of fundamentalist perspectives, seeing that claims to religious knowledge could be incorrect and, thereby, seeing value in other viewpoints that contribute to liberationist frameworks, and (c) clarifying how discourse(s), viewpoint(s), and ideologies are not separable from but constitutive of praxis and power.

England, a Mormon scholar, and Head, once a lay Mormon, share similar attitudes about Mormonism. England's "The Mormon Cross" was written as a response to Lester Bush's seminal essay on the history of the race ban. Head wrote King a brief letter, summarizing the key features of Mormon belief and practice (e.g., missionizing, baptism, women's roles, Church hierarchy, genealogies, priesthood ban), particularly in light of the Church's support of the presidential candidacy of George Romney, a Mormon.<sup>34</sup> Head saw that there was a lot of misinformation

---

32. Head, "Letter from Edris Head to [Martin Luther King Jr.]."

33. Max L. Stackhouse, "General Introduction," in *Religion and the Powers of the Common Life*, edited by Max L. Stackhouse and Peter J. Paris (Norcross: Trinity Press International, 2000), 7.

34. Stephen H. Webb, *Mormon Christianity: What Other Christians Can Learn from the Latter-Day Saints* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 1.

published by Mormon news outlets about the faith and there had not been any rebuttal by African American leaders. Head believed that a direct critique of Mormonism by King would transform the Church for the better. Indeed, King had condemned the Nazism of Hitler's Germany, the fascism of Mussolini's Italy, the apartheid and colonialism of Great Britain's India and South Africa, and American white supremacists like those of the White Citizens' Councils. As a member of the LDS Church since youth, Head felt a moral responsibility to educate King and elicit his help. It seems that, for Head as well as for England, remaining silent to injustice would have been a form of complicity.

England and Head both presented a critical overview of Mormonism and the United States at a time when King preached about the need for a nonviolent revolution because of militarism, poverty, and racism.<sup>35</sup> England himself confessed, "When I was growing up in the 1940s and 50s in Utah, I was a racist in what appeared to be a thoroughly racist society. In the 1960s, as the forces that produced black theology—the Civil Rights and Black Power movements—gained in strength, there was criticism, both from without and within the [Church], of the priesthood ban and racist Mormon teachings."<sup>36</sup> England wrote about and Head wrote to King, whom they both personally admired, during a time when not everyone agreed with his messages.<sup>37</sup> England's and Head's comments about King and the civil rights movement were a departure from what other LDS leaders had said (and had not said) about

---

35. Taylor Branch, *Parting the Waters: America in the King Years 1954–63* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1989).

36. Eugene England, "Response to Professor Hopkins," in *Mormonism in Dialogue with Contemporary Christian Theologies*, edited by Donald W. Musser and David L. Paulsen (Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 2007), 372.

37. Thomas R. Peake, *Keeping the Dream Alive: A History of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference from King to the Nineteen-Eighties* (Bern: Peter Lang, 1988); and Marshall Frady, *Martin Luther King, Jr.: A Life* (New York: Penguin, 2005).

him and the freedom cause. President Benson connected the civil rights movement to communism as a means of discrediting the movement.<sup>38</sup> The majority of white Southern fundamentalists at the time supported white supremacist laws and disagreed with King's pronouncements on the Christian gospel. King taught, "I do not feel that a man can be a Christian and a staunch segregationist simultaneously."<sup>39</sup> King hoped that Christians would (re)define themselves in truth and love. England and Head positioned themselves against Mormon customs by publicly challenging the aspects of LDS racial animus. They wanted to eradicate the individual and institutional racism that they saw in the Church. Therefore, they stressed how the Church's race ban was indicative of and central to understanding Mormon culture.

Brigham Young and other Mormon prophets (e.g., John Taylor, Wilford Woodruff, Lorenzo Snow, Joseph F. Smith, Heber J. Grant, George Albert Smith, David O. McKay, Joseph Fielding Smith, and Harold B. Lee) originally denied African descendants from becoming priests for a handful of reasons, including the so-called biblical reasons. Some ideas advanced included the notion that they were not "valiant enough" in heaven<sup>40</sup> and that they bore the curse of Cain.<sup>41</sup> Like Mormons, King believed that a loving God revealed himself through prophets and scripture. Yet King recalled that there was a time when people tried to

---

38. Report of the Semi-Annual Conference of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, September 29–October 1, 1967 (Salt Lake City: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, semiannual), available at <https://archive.org/details/conferencereport1967sa>; and Ezra Taft Benson, "A Witness and a Warning," Oct. 1979, <https://www.lds.org/general-conference/1979/10/a-witness-and-a-warning?lang=eng>.

39. Martin Luther King Jr., "Advice for Living," Sept. 1957, Martin Luther King, Jr. Research and Education Institute, Stanford University, <https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/king-papers/documents/advice-living-0>.

40. Joseph Fielding Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation*, vol. 1 (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1954), 65–66.

41. Bruce R. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1958), 109.

justify racial supremacy based on the biblical witness: “Strange indeed how individuals will often use, or should I say misuse, the Bible to crystallize the patterns of the status quo and justify their prejudices. So from some pulpits it was argued that the Negro was inferior by nature because of Noah’s curse upon the children of Ham.”<sup>42</sup> King’s method of biblical hermeneutics challenges instances where sacred texts, such as the Bible, are used to justify the racial inferiority of others.

While Head requested that King directly respond to the Mormon community, England concluded that King’s social justice efforts already helped liberate the LDS Church. England credited oppressed people for helping the “true Zion community”<sup>43</sup> to emerge. To be sure, the Black Church, under King’s leadership, was at the forefront of ending segregation laws in the South. A decade after King’s assassination, President Kimball declared, on June 8, 1978, that all the worthy male members of the LDS Church might be ordained to priesthood without any regard for race or color because the conditions had changed.<sup>44</sup> King’s message regarding social justice was understandable to those within his own tradition as well as those outside of it. He had preached as an insider in his African American religious community and as an outsider to non-African American religious people, which enabled him to work successfully in the American religious mainstream domain as well as with American religious outsiders. King said to Cesar Chavez, for example, that “our separate struggles are really one—a struggle for freedom, for dignity and for humanity.”<sup>45</sup> King’s race leadership did transform the

---

42. Martin Luther King Jr., “1966 Ware Lecture: Don’t Sleep through the Revolution,” Unitarian Universalist Association, <https://www.uua.org/ga/past/1966/ware>.

43. England, “Response to Professor Hopkins,” 377.

44. Ibid., 373; and Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Mormonism*, edited by Reid. L. Neilson (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 135–36.

45. Martin Luther King Jr., “Telegram to Cesar Chavez,” Sept. 22, 1966, available at <http://remezcla.com/culture/1966-mlk-cesar-chavez-telegram>.

African American civil rights campaign into a worldwide struggle for peace and justice.

England and Head envisioned a Mormonism that was more dialogical, in the sense of having a self-critical orientation, and less dogmatic, in the sense of having a closed-minded attitude.<sup>46</sup> They were puzzled that “many Mormons [were] still in denial about that [race] ban, unwilling to talk in [Church] settings about it.”<sup>47</sup> Older versions of the Church Educational System’s seminary textbook on the topic of Church history did not mention the race ban.<sup>48</sup> King spent paragraphs at a time in *Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community?* on African American contributions to the West because “[the] history books . . . have almost completely ignored the contribution of the Negro in American history . . .”<sup>49</sup> England and Head praised King as one of the greatest preachers and leaders for social change of his time partly because of his dialectical thinking. Head mentioned that King embodied the best ideals of both Jesus and Gandhi. Indeed, King cultivated a spirit of critical inquiry. All ideas were, for him, subject to scrutiny. Despite ideological differences, King appreciated, for example, Malcolm X’s contribution to the Black civil rights cause: “I don’t want to seem to sound self-righteous, or absolutist, or that I think I have the only truth, the only way. Maybe

---

46. Boyd Petersen, “Eugene England and the Future of Mormonism,” *Dead Wood and Rushing Water* (blog), Jan. 28, 2016, <https://boydpetersen.com/2016/01/28/eugene-england-and-the-future-of-mormonism>; and Smith, “Unpacking Whiteness in Zion,” 148.

47. England, “Response to Professor Hopkins,” 371.

48. Richard N. Ostling and Joan K. Ostling, *Mormon America: The Power and the Promise* (New York: HarperCollins, 1999), 102.

49. Martin Luther King Jr., *Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community?*, in *A Testament of Hope*, 581.



he does have some answers.”<sup>50</sup> King listened to all the viewpoints before proclaiming word and action.

That is, King looked to not only the African American heritage and the Christianity for inspiration, but he also used the ideologies of all the theologians and philosophers that were available to him—like Reinhold Niebuhr, Walter Rauschenbusch, and Paul Tillich. He effortlessly fused Georg Hegel, Immanuel Kant, and Mahatma Gandhi into the civil rights campaigns, centering their thought on African diaspora pain and struggle. King rejected binary propositions like racial reasoning (e.g., “all white people are bad”), fatalist notions (e.g., “there is no escape from systemic oppression”), or revenge models (e.g., “the oppressed should become the oppressor”). For instance, King claimed: “We do not wish to triumph over the white community. That would only result in transferring those now on the bottom to the top. But, if we can live up to nonviolence in thought and deed, there will emerge an interracial society based on freedom for all.”<sup>51</sup>

In her letter to King, Head explained that she renounced her own Mormon faith after learning about the history of the priesthood ban. Yet, from a Kingian logic, religious adherents can stay within their ethically and theologically flawed, imperfect tradition while seeking to challenge the ignoble aspects within them. England chose King’s path. King criticized his own fundamentalist religious upbringing because of its absolutizing tendencies,<sup>52</sup> the racism imbued and neutrality displayed

---

50. Martin Luther King Jr., “Chapter 25: Malcolm X,” Martin Luther King, Jr. Research and Education Institute, Stanford University, <https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/king-papers/publications/autobiography-martin-luther-king-jr-contents/chapter-25-malcom-x>.

51. Martin Luther King Jr., “Our Struggle,” Apr. 1956, Martin Luther King, Jr. Research and Education Institute, Stanford University, <https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/king-papers/documents/our-struggle>.

52. Martin Luther King Jr., “The Humanity and Divinity of Jesus,” Martin Luther King, Jr. Research and Education Institute, Stanford University, <https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/king-papers/documents/humanity-and-divinity->

by white people who belonged to churches,<sup>53</sup> and the emotionalism and classism exemplified in African American Christianity.<sup>54</sup> Nonetheless, King never rejected his African American Christian faith but instead sought to improve it. He articulated ethical and theological principles that resulted in groups acting out of moral conviction within their traditions.<sup>55</sup> In other words, intrafaith dialogue does not mean abandoning all of one's personal convictions but rather expanding those commitments to seek out higher forms of justice. It is through dialogue that one enters the process of becoming more self-aware.

England and Head insisted that in order for the best version of the LDS Church to emerge the community needs to communicate openly and frankly about vital issues of the Church and of the day without fear of negative reprisals. Threats of excommunication and the incessant need to always "follow the prophet" do not allow for independent-minded dialogue. England asserted that the problem of racism was inseparable from the problem of sexism in the Mormon community.<sup>56</sup> In her letter,

---

Jesus; Martin Luther King Jr., "What Experiences of Christians Living in the Early Christian Century Led to the Christian Doctrines of the Divine Sonship of Jesus, the Virgin Birth, and the Bodily Resurrection," Martin Luther King, Jr. Research and Education Institute, Stanford University, <https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/king-papers/documents/what-experiences-christians-living-early-christian-century-led-christian>; and Martin Luther King Jr., "How to Use the Bible in Modern Theological Construction," Martin Luther King, Jr. Research and Education Institute, Stanford University, <https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/king-papers/documents/how-use-bible-modern-theological-construction>.

53. Martin Luther King Jr., "Letter from Birmingham City Jail," in *A Testament of Hope*, 295–96.

54. Martin Luther King Jr., *Strength to Love*, in *A Testament of Hope*, 501.

55. Andreea Deciu Ritivoi, *Paul Ricoeur: Tradition and Innovation in Rhetorical Theory* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2006), 15.

56. Eugene England, "Combatting Racism and Sexism at BYU: An Open Letter to Faculty and Students," *The Student Review* 4, no. 3 (1989): 10; England, "No Respecter of Persons," 79–100; and Eugene England, "We Need to Liberate

Head raised the issue of the priesthood ban and the fact that women in the LDS Church do not have the same authority as men. Although King stressed that “people should be judged not by their skin color but by the content of their character,”<sup>57</sup> he omitted many qualified Black women from prominent leadership positions in the Southern Christian Leadership Conference.<sup>58</sup> King accepted the gender norms of the day. England and Head saw racial equality as being connected to gender equality, which King had overlooked.

African descendants, despite the priesthood ban’s idiosyncrasies, have still found a home in Mormonism. The Genesis Group is one clear example.<sup>59</sup> Darius Gray, former president of Genesis, maintained that God did not put the race ban in place but instead removed it.<sup>60</sup> Technically, the priesthood ban was not official, canonical doctrine.<sup>61</sup> Regardless of whether the ban was official doctrine or not, from a Kingian perspec-

---

Mormon Men: The Evidence of Mormon Literature,” *Exponent II* 9, no. 3 (Spring 1983): 4–5.

57. England, “Response to Professor Hopkins,” 373.

58. Rufus Burrow Jr., “Martin Luther King, Jr.’s Doctrine of Human Dignity,” *Western Journal of Black Studies* 26, no. 4 (2002): 230; Rufus Burrow Jr., *Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Theology of Resistance* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland, 2014), 213; Dwight N. Hopkins, *Shoes that Fit Our Feet: Sources for a Constructive Black Theology* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1993), 192; and Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze, *Achieving Our Humanity: The Idea of the Postracial Future* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 178.

59. The Genesis Group, [www.ldsgenesisgroup.org](http://www.ldsgenesisgroup.org); and Mauss, “Casting Off the ‘Curse of Cain,’” 104.

60. Carrie A. Moore, “Black Mormons Say Life Better since 1978,” *Deseret News*, May 25, 2003, <https://www.deseretnews.com/article/985698/Black-Mormons-say-life-better-since-1978.html>; and Ken Driggs, “‘How Do Things Look on the Ground?’: The LDS African American Community in Atlanta, Georgia,” in *Black and Mormon*, 142.

61. Moore, “Black Mormons Say Life Better since 1978”; and Craig L. Blomberg and Stephen E. Robinson, *How Wide the Divide?: A Mormon and an Evangelical in Conversation* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 140.

tive, any church that endorses a theological or philosophical precept cannot be assessed in abstraction or isolation, disregarding its social function.<sup>62</sup> Because of the ban, Black Mormons have experienced, and in many ways continue to experience, a “triple jeopardy,” possessing three “counter-identities”: one religious, one racial, and the other class-based. To mainstream Protestant, Catholic, and Orthodox Christianity, Mormon remains a heterodox community.<sup>63</sup> Black Mormons are treated as the Other not only because of their religion and race but also because they have not achieved the “upward [mobility] and [economic success]<sup>64</sup> that many white people suppose black persons should have reached at this point in history.<sup>65</sup> It is no wonder, then, that Black Mormons still experience “special kinds of misunderstanding and pain”<sup>66</sup> because they do not feel fully integrated within the Church or the larger society.<sup>67</sup>

King inspired African American Christians and non-African American Christians to embrace their ethnic and religious identities. His assertions like “Africa is our Home” and “I am a Black Man” were not mere rhetorical embellishments. They provided cultural meaning for himself and others. While in London, Eugene England applauded the culturally affirming effects that lifting the ban had on minority communities: “I went

---

62. Aasulv Lande, “Creative Dialogue,” in *Theology and the Religions*, 406–07.

63. Aleksandra Sandstrom and Becka A. Alper, “6 Facts about U.S. Mormons,” Pew Research Center, Sept. 30, 2016, <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/09/30/6-facts-about-u-s-mormons>; and Scott Keeter and Gregory Smith, “Public Opinion About Mormons: Mitt Romney Discusses His Religion,” Pew Research Center, Dec. 4, 2007, <http://www.pewresearch.org/2007/12/04/public-opinion-about-mormons>; and Webb, *Mormon Christianity*, 16–17, 111–25.

64. Smith, “Unpacking Whiteness in Zion,” 150.

65. Ibid.

66. England, “The Mormon Cross,” 85.

67. Jessie L. Embry, “Separate but Equal?: Black Branches, Genesis Groups, or Integrated Wards?,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 23, no.1 (1990): 11–37.

each Sunday to the Hyde Park Ward and saw the congregation gradually deepening and brightening in color as the 1978 revelation giving blacks the priesthood began to produce more and more dark-skinned converts from London and the West Indies and Africa, some who came in flamboyant native dress.”<sup>68</sup> African diaspora humanity was reinforced using the projection of African symbols.

England and Head felt that the priesthood ban was far more consequential than many realized, as it affected Mormons of all racial and ethnic backgrounds. They suggested that many Mormons of European descent living in the United States—as practitioners of many other white fundamentalist, evangelical, and revelatory-based Christian traditions—view the world and their religion too optimistically. England wrote, “I grew up feeling that because I was Mormon, I was different from other humans. I was special, even ‘peculiar,’ separate, better than they: I sang, ‘I might be envied by a king, for I am a Mormon boy.’”<sup>69</sup> Such a perspective of the world can add justification for superiority between groups, thereby legitimatizing the good fortunes of “the few” over “the many.” The Mormon community might be too quick to assume that the goodness of their tradition more than compensates for its problematic past.

England and Head intimated that “Mormon optimism” as an extension of “whiteness” is a privileged status that people from European descent enjoy and employ in the Church and in society. It shields white LDS members from experiencing and seeing racial discriminatory attitudes and practices, which others of a different ethnic heritage do not benefit from. Throughout his life, King remained a guarded optimist on race relations improving. He was not colorblind. He was not a fatalist either. George Santayana’s famous proclamation that “those who ignore history are bound (or doomed) to repeat it” became a truism for King. King chose to use nonviolence to resolve social conflict. King knew that

---

68. England, “On Being Mormon and Human.”

69. *Ibid.*

achieving Black liberation was not inevitable, at least not for himself. In his final address, King preached, “I may not get there with you. But I want you to know . . . that we, as a people, will get to the Promised Land.”<sup>70</sup>

## Conclusion

King’s hermeneutical account of dialogue and race presents Mormon scholars, leaders, and laity with enduring sources and norms for reinterpreting him in the light of their own struggles for moral liberation. Overall, the people who were influenced by King insisted that the LDS Church not forget its past nor be crippled by it. The priesthood ban need not be rationalized or whitewashed but fully explored and wholly accepted, acknowledging where things went wrong and how the Church made amends or did not. Likewise, the stories focusing only on King’s civil rights successes are far easier to ruminate about than his particular failures. Neither King nor the LDS Church was perfect. In the Christian community, confession and forgiveness are closely aligned: “If we confess our sins, [God] is faithful and just to forgive us our sins” (1 John 1:9)

Examining England’s and Head’s intrafaith dialogue from a Kingian view also serves to shift LDS life and thought toward a distinctive and courageous theological tradition: demotheology. Robert Tapp, a religious studies scholar, defined demotheology as “religion on the ground.” The assumption that theological systems and religious organizations—after the demise of the founder—are developed and deployed entirely by head leaders (e.g., presidents, apostles) of those institutions, and then simply taught to and followed by the practitioners is a misguided notion of how theology actually works. In fact, both ordained and lay figures—many without formal rank and stature—have altered and added to the existing

---

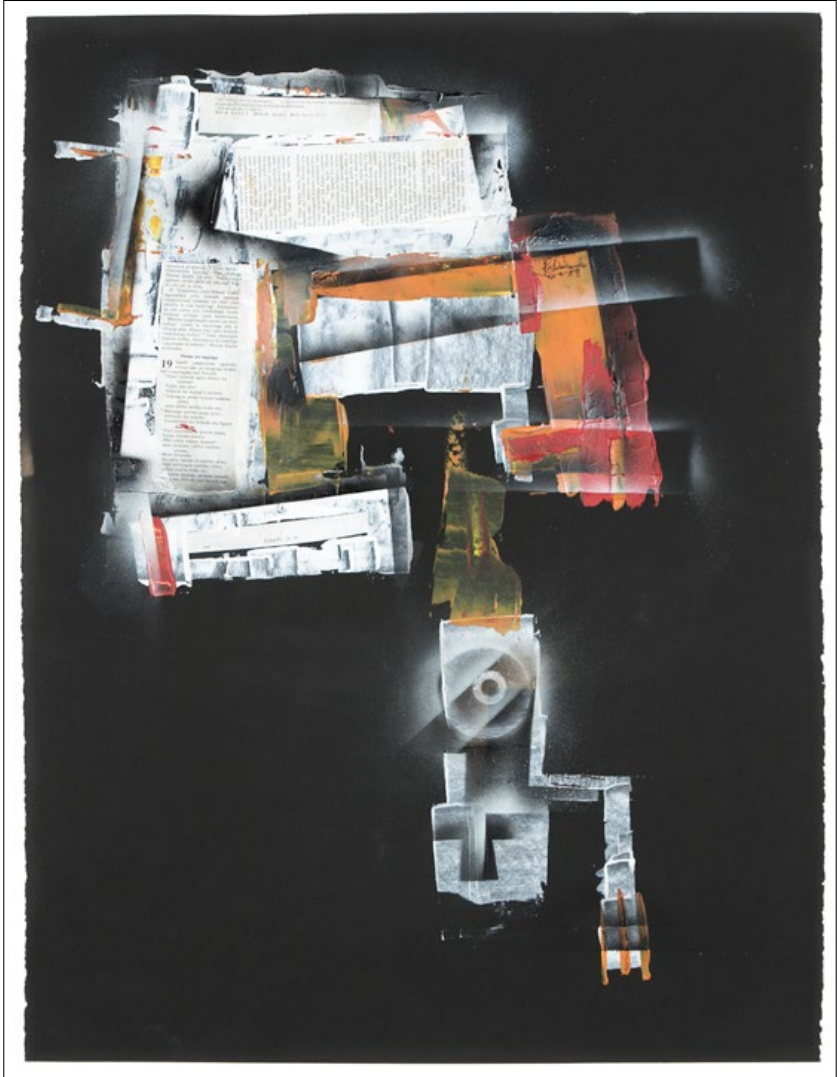
70. Martin Luther King Jr., “‘I’ve Been to the Mountaintop,’ Address Delivered at Bishop Charles Mason Temple,” Apr. 3, 1968, Martin Luther King, Jr. Research and Education Institute, Stanford University, <https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/king-papers/documents/ive-been-mountaintop-address-delivered-bishop-charles-mason-temple>.

dogma and doctrine, including the way these teachings are interpreted. England, Head, and King are all such examples. England and Head are “Mormon agitators” who share in the process of religious self-renewal by critiquing the elements of the established order that need to be changed in the Church. Head and England imitated King by not remaining silent to institutional sins but speak “truth to power,” empowering the people of faith. King’s “I Have a Dream” speech and the Book of Mormon both proclaim that “all are alike unto God” (2 Nephi 26:33).

In future areas of Mormon studies as well as King studies, scholars need to continue to include more histories, more persons, and more cultures—plus more religions—into their discourse. The Black community should also increase its knowledge of Mormonism, as Africans and African Americans are part of Mormon history and theology too.<sup>71</sup> It should be noted that the LDS Church has recently installed two new apostles, one of Chinese descent, Gerrit W. Gong, and the other of Brazilian descent, Ulisses Soares, which signals possibilities for the expansion to new horizons.

---

71. E. Dale LeBaron, *“All Are Alike Unto God”: Fascinating Conversion Stories of African Saints* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1990).



Hildebrando de Melo  
Eye of God II (2018)  
30" x 23"  
mixed media on paper



# ONE DEVOUT MORMON FAMILY'S STRUGGLE WITH RACISM

Robert Greenwell

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.<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup> 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.<sup>4</sup> 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.<sup>5</sup> 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.”<sup>6</sup> 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.”<sup>7</sup> 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.<sup>8</sup>

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.<sup>9</sup> 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.<sup>10</sup> 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.<sup>11</sup> 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.<sup>12</sup>

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.<sup>13</sup> 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.<sup>14</sup> 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.”<sup>15</sup>

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.<sup>16</sup> 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.<sup>17</sup> 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."<sup>18</sup> 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.<sup>19</sup> 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).<sup>20</sup> 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.<sup>21</sup> 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 tithe 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.”<sup>22</sup> 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.<sup>23</sup> 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.”<sup>24</sup> 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.<sup>25</sup> 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.<sup>26</sup> 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."<sup>27</sup> 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."<sup>28</sup> 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."<sup>29</sup> 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.”<sup>30</sup> 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."<sup>31</sup>

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.”<sup>32</sup> 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.”<sup>33</sup> 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.”<sup>34</sup>

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.”<sup>35</sup> 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.”<sup>36</sup> 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.”<sup>37</sup> 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.<sup>38</sup> 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.”<sup>39</sup> 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."<sup>40</sup> 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.<sup>41</sup> 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?”<sup>42</sup> 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.<sup>43</sup> A week later Eldon Marshall, who was working in Salt Lake City at the time, was ordained to the office of priest.<sup>44</sup> 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.<sup>45</sup> 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.<sup>46</sup>

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.”<sup>47</sup> 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.”<sup>48</sup> 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.”<sup>49</sup> 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.”<sup>50</sup> 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 mouthpeace [*sic*] of the Lord.”<sup>51</sup> 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.”<sup>52</sup> 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.<sup>53</sup>

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.<sup>54</sup> 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.<sup>55</sup> 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.<sup>56</sup> 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.<sup>57</sup>

---

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."<sup>58</sup> 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."<sup>59</sup> 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.”<sup>60</sup> 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.<sup>61</sup> 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.”<sup>62</sup>

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.<sup>63</sup>

---

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).

# THE PREACHER, THE LABOR LEADER, THE HOMOSEXUAL, AND THE JEW: THE TEMPLATE FOR ACHIEVING GREAT GOALS

Alice Faulkner Burch

Individually we can be strong and accomplish wonderful things. Together, united, we can be unstoppable and accomplish great things that are community-changing, world-enhancing, life-uplifting. Our differences, whatever they are from religion to lifestyle to culture to ethnicity to education to personal likes of food and entertainment and dress, all brought together are what make a beautifully life-enhancing, life-enriching experience. And when accepted, they enable us to see the strength in each individual.

Differences are only negative when we choose to see them as negative. We choose how we see one another and we choose the labels we place upon one another. We want to be seen in the best light and have our strength not our weakness acknowledged. And we don't want labels placed upon us. Therefore, we should try to do the same for others.

Persons who achieve great things understand this and understand that whatever they achieved they did so not alone but because they were united with other strong people who had skills they lacked.

In the March on Washington, DC, Martin Luther King Jr., the preacher with the gift of speech, united with A. Philip Randolph, the man who had the idea of the march on Washington; Bayard Rustin, a homosexual man with the gift of organizing; and Rachelle Horowitz, the white Jewish woman who, despite knowing nothing about transportation or

organizing, was, as Bayard Rustin described her, “compulsive . . . [and] wouldn’t lose a bus or a person.” When we stand back and look at this one scene out of billions that have taken place in our country’s history, we see many perspectives.

They were people who had varying differences.

A preacher, a labor leader, a homosexual, and a Jew—the makings of a joke.

But what they achieved together was no joke. It was an event that has become one of the greatest moments in our nation’s history. It worked because these leaders saw their differences not as weaknesses but as tools to achieving their united goal: A man who could give a good sermon; a man who wanted to organize the Pullman Porters to protest for better wages; a man rejected by society for being homosexual; and a woman who didn’t fit because of her religion. These people should not have been able to work together. The odds were against them. Their own group was against them. And yet they became the leaders of the most important pieces of the March: an idea to march, transportation to get the people to Washington, a man to speak, and organization to pull it all together.

This is the template of every great achievement. If we are wanting a great achievement today, if we use this same template, focusing as they did on what our united goal is, our differences become not a barrier to achievement but our greatest tools to achieving that goal.

I have seen that this rings true in our country, in our state, in my county, in my city, in my neighborhood, and in my life. I have witnessed and learned from other married couples that differences are a downfall *only* when people decide they are. I have watched very different people have very successful and happy marriages while listening to others remark: “They’re *so* different!” “What does he see in her?” “What does she possibly see in him?”

In my own life, my husband Robert and I are different in many ways, one being that he has attention deficit disorder and I have obsessive compulsive disorder, but because we focus on our differences

as *strengths* rather than as weaknesses we are successful together, and together we are achieving great and wonderful things. I have learned in the six years that I have been married that this is what “being one” means in its truest form: taking our differences and uniting them to achieve the good we both envision.

We have watched the success of this in our work in the Utah community. His highly intelligent and highly creative ability born from his ADD brain coupled with my skills of organization and planning and preparation born from my OCD brain have proven that what people typically see as weaknesses are in actuality great strengths, that what people typically refer to as disorders when combined are an order of a higher kind. When we work together neither my OCD nor his ADD are disorders; they are a combination to achieving success.

When we look at what were considered the weaknesses of those involved in the March on Washington, we see the same thing. Apart they had weaknesses. Together they became the tools necessary for success.

When we think of “being one” we ask ourselves “How can so many people who are so different from one another be united as one?” We fail to see that the answer is contained within the question itself. Through our differences we can achieve our common goal of raising the LDS Church from the sins of racism and separation. Each of us has a difference that can become the tool another person does not have. By bringing *all* the tools together, we have what is needed to achieve success.

The Apostle Paul states it this way: “Now there are *diversities* of gifts but the same Spirit. And there are *differences* of administrations, but the same Lord. And there are *diversities* of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all” (1 Corinthians 12:4–6). If we all had the same gift or ability in exactly the same way, we would not be blessed. (Note that “blessed” means to have God’s favor bestowed upon.)

In case we miss what is being said here, Paul states the same lesson in another manner: by using our own body as an example of the necessity of differences being strengths not weaknesses (1 Corinthians 12:14–21).

If every part of our body were an ear, how would we see? If every part of our body were a foot how would we sit? If every part of our body were an arm, would we eat and survive? Indeed, *all* parts are necessary.

Today our achievement as a Church depends upon each one of us. So today we must each choose what we will focus on: differences as weaknesses which will lead to our united downfall or differences as strengths which will lead to our united success.

# A BALM IN GILEAD: RECONCILING BLACK BODIES WITHIN A MORMON IMAGINATION

Janan Graham-Russell

I want to begin by reading a prose poem to give context to my remarks on Black bodies and reconciliation. It is entitled “Blackness” by Jamaica Kincaid.

How soft is the blackness as it falls. It falls in silence and yet it is deafening, for no other sound except the blackness falling can be heard. The blackness falls like soot from a lamp with an untrimmed wick. The blackness is visible and yet it is invisible, for I see that I cannot see it. The blackness fills up a small room, a large field, an island, my own being. The blackness cannot bring me joy but often I am made glad in it. The blackness cannot be separated from me but often I can stand outside it. The blackness is not the air, though I breathe it. The blackness is not the earth, though I walk on it. The blackness is not water or food, though I drink and eat it. The blackness is not my blood, though it flows through my veins. The blackness enters my many-tiered spaces and soon the significant word and event recede and eventually vanish: in this way I am annihilated and my form becomes formless and I am absorbed into a vastness of free-flowing matter. In the blackness, then, I have been erased. I can no longer say my own name. I can no longer point to myself and say “I.” In the blackness my voice is silent. First, then, I have been my individual self, carefully banishing randomness from my existence, then I am swallowed up in the blackness so that I am one with it. The black body is a racialized assemblage of the physical, spiritual, and emotional form. This form inhabits a peculiar existence within the American consciousness. In *The Souls of Black Folk*, W. E. B. DuBois referred to freed black people

as “refugees.” Author Michelle M. Wright, in *Becoming Black: Creating Identity in the African Diaspora*, describes African Americans as individuals fixed in the dwelling of the settler colonialist. Both point to a people in suspension. It is in suspension that the black individual crafts an identity, upheld by social, theological, and political discourses predicated on categorization. Likewise, black Latter-day Saints negotiate their subjectivity in the backdrop of a Church body embedded in its racialized history. My remarks are reflections on the suspended as well as the suspension itself.

I acknowledge that “Black,” “Blackness,” and Black bodies differ across time and space. Varied socio political exchanges between indigenous groups in Africa, citizens of the Afro Atlantic, and white Europeans make it challenging to define a monolithic Black identity. Still, I predicate my remarks on the belief that Mormonism is, arguably, a uniquely American religion. As such, I’ve formed my opinion around reflections on the construction of race in America as a social artifact, an artifact assembled by social, theological, and political theories and practices exchanged between institutions and individuals. In other words, I posit that race is a process of being and becoming. Black Latter-day Saints *became Black* through the enfleshment of the curse of Cain—whether one identified as Haitian, Ghanaian, or Malian, among others—in the Mormon imagination.

Mormonism incorporated prevailing American ideas on race, championing a “pure and delightsome” white subject, the inherently guilty Black Other, and the significance of lineage in determining both, over the course of the latter half of the nineteenth century into the twentieth century. The condemnation of Blackness rang heavily within nineteenth-century America’s flourishing religious landscape. Though some groups and individuals supported abolitionist or integrated visions of community, pro-slavery advocates and segregationists often nodded to the curse of Ham to justify chattel slavery. Meanwhile, pro-slavery preachers used scriptural references to slavery to embolden



the enslaved to remain obedient. In *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, author Harriet Jacobs recalls the words of a white reverend. She wrote:

The reverend gentleman knelt in prayer, then seated himself, and requested all present, who could read, to open their books, while he gave out the portions he wished them to repeat or respond to. His text was, ‘Servants, be obedient to them that are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in singleness of your heart, as unto Christ.’

Here, the “reverend gentleman” establishes an association between Christ and the slave master.

Lineage, as we know, underscored the creation and maintenance race in the Mormon imagination for some time. What we do not speak about in enough detail is the co-constitution of race, theo-ideologies, and lineage. Israelite lineage played a role in the development of what womanist theologian Kelly Brown-Douglas calls the “Anglo-Saxon myth.” The conflation of Israelite narratives and the racialization of bodies, Brown-Douglas notes, gave rise to a theo-ideology that recognized white frames as sacred and protected. The Anglo-Saxon myth sustained the belief that God created the white body in God’s image. The existence of the Black body, then, existed as its opposite: dangerous, unruly, and, at times, demonic.

During a confrontation in 2014, Darren Wilson, a police officer then employed by the Ferguson Police Department, shot Michael Brown, a Black eighteen-year-old from Ferguson, Missouri. When asked about the incident, Wilson stated that at one point, Michael Brown appeared to him as a demon. His words evoked the imagery of the battle between good and evil, in which good ultimately prevails. In this way, Wilson’s rhetoric implicates Michael Brown’s Black body as something to be defeated, thus justifying his death. Whether Darren Wilson saw the face of a demon moments before he ended Michael Brown’s life is not the question. Instead,



Figure 1 "Negro Rule." Vampire over NC. *The News & Observer*. September 27, 1898.

what are the implications of the connection made between Blackness, evil, and sin?

Nineteenth-century sociopolitical thought situated free Black bodies as the opposite of Western standards of reason, virtue, and purity. Though then prophet-President Joseph Smith campaigned on an anti-slavery platform in 1844, he once warned that abolition would "set loose upon the world a community of people who might peradventure, overrun our country and violate the most sacred principles of human society, chastity, and virtue."<sup>1</sup> Among his white Christian

1. Joseph Smith, Letter to Oliver Cowdery, Kirtland, Ohio, ca. Apr. 9, 1836; *Latter Day Saints' Messenger and Advocate*, 2, no. 7 (Apr. 1836): 289–91, The Joseph Smith Papers, <http://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/letter-to-oliver-cowdery-circa-9-april-1836/1>.

contemporaries, Smith was not alone in his beliefs about the supposed dangers posed by free Black people. Though the priesthood and temple restrictions did not originate in Smith's lifetime, American civil and religious discourses on race arguably underlined his and other early LDS Church leaders' interpretations of relationships between white and Black individuals. Also, it is these explanations, disseminated among the Church body, which bore a theology of racial difference. In the Mormon imagination, the priesthood and temple restrictions converged at the points of racialization, materiality, and theology, inscribing the curse of Cain into flesh. No longer able to fully participate in their faith tradition, Black members of the LDS faith had to redefine their relationships with God, the LDS Church as an institution, other members, and themselves.

In *Black Skin, White Masks*, sociologist Frantz Fanon describes an experience of alienation through his first encounter with the white gaze. He explains:

'Look, a Negro!' It was an external stimulus that flicked over me as I passed by. I made a tight smile.

'Look, a Negro!' It was true. It amused me.

'Look, a Negro!' The circle was drawing a bit tighter. I made no secret of my amusement.

"Mama, see the Negro! I'm frightened!" Frightened! Frightened! Now they were beginning to be afraid of me. I made up my mind to laugh myself to tears, but laughter had become impossible.<sup>2</sup>

And then the occasion arose when I had to meet the white man's eyes. An

unfamiliar weight burdened me.<sup>3</sup>

---

2. Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, translated by Charles Lam Markmann, forewords by Ziauddin Sardar and Homi K. Bhabha (London: Pluto Press, 2008 [1986]), 84.

3. Fanon, *Black Skin*, 83.

Fanon spoke of the disorientation that occurs when one's bodily schema is challenged and distorted beyond comprehension. He internalized this gaze—the watchful eye of a child tied to a past that trapped white and Black individuals in perpetuity.

From the time in which early LDS Church leaders implemented the racial restrictions to the present, Black and white Latter-day Saints have been engrossed in the past from which neither can easily escape. Elder Bruce R. McConkie in 1978 admonished members to:

Forget everything that I have said, or what President Brigham Young or President George Q. Cannon or whomsoever has said in days past that is contrary to the present revelation. We spoke with a limited understanding and without the light and knowledge that now has come into the world.<sup>4</sup>

As much we may hope that one would disregard the explicitly racial teachings of the past, the significance of corporeality in the Mormon imagination is such that Mormonism's racial wounds run deep. Without a thoughtful consideration of the impact of the priesthood and temple restrictions, their legacy manifests in implicit and explicit ways.

Here, Black Saints negotiate their identity concerning faith, religious practice, culture, and history. Am I Black first and Mormon second? Alternatively, am I Mormon first and Black second? The answer may mean the difference between recognition or rejection by the broader community. As one who practices Mormonism, I know that the restrictions are a part of my identity. It is my Black body that was believed to be cursed. However, to internalize that means annihilating a part of myself. Something very curious happens when the images of the divine that reside in holy places don't look like you. Moreover, though the restrictions dissolved, the revelatory voices continue to come from white Western lips. When you're told that you should marry

---

4. Bruce R. McConkie, "All Are Alike unto God," BYU Speeches, Aug. 18, 1978, [https://speeches.byu.edu/talks/bruce-r-mcconkie\\_alike-unto-god-2/](https://speeches.byu.edu/talks/bruce-r-mcconkie_alike-unto-god-2/).

someone who shares similar cultural values—knowing the interconnectedness between culture, ethnicity, and race—microaggressions turn into macroaggressions.

“But you’re not like other Black people.”

“Oh, I have a Black friend in the ward.”

“There’s a difference between these two areas we served in—the other area is more ghetto; this area has more educated people.”

When you’re called a nigger in the temple, one may begin to wonder: was I cursed?

To go about the work of healing the Black body within the Mormon imagination, we look toward an alternative vision that acknowledges it in its entirety. I speak not only to the LDS Church as an institution but to the body of Mormonism itself.

Ask yourselves, do representations of Blackness and deep skin tones in Mormonism embody the call that “all are alike unto God”? How would you react to a depiction of God with black or brown skin? Would you find comfort? Representation—not in pursuit of managing a quota or the placation of guilt—is the counter-narrative to the construction of race within the Mormon imagination. We find wholeness in seeing ourselves in the eternal in that we recognize that our existence is not an aberration, but instead, it is intentional. Speaking to Black Latter-day Saints, this includes seeing yourselves.

“(There Is) A Balm in Gilead” references Jeremiah 8:22, and also, an African American spiritual. The first verse of that spiritual reads as follows,

There is a balm in Gilead  
To make the wounded whole;  
There is a balm in Gilead  
To heal the sin-sick soul.

The balm is the hope found in Christ, whose life and ministry provided an alternative vision for those at the margins, a vision of

healing, a vision of hope, a vision that makes the wounded whole. It is in this alternative vision that the work of reconciliation begins. Because when you see people as God sees us, in understanding all of us, it is indeed transformative.

# WHEN DID YOU BECOME BLACK?

Gail Turley Houston

Growing up in a Mormon home, I was raised on genealogy. Both sets of grandparents led back through four generations of devout Mormon stock who had left England or Ireland to come join Joseph Smith's new church in America. On the Turley side (my paternal grandfather), after being converted by Parley P. Pratt in Canada, Theodore Turley moved to Kirtland, Ohio in 1838 and followed the Saints to Nauvoo. The Wilson line (my paternal grandmother) goes back to Robert Wilson, born in 1612 in Warwickshire and dying in London in 1644. The Udalls (my maternal grandfather) were called by Brigham Young to settle northern Arizona and became a sprawling, proud family of lawyers, judges, teachers, a congressman, and the Secretary of the Interior in John F. Kennedy's administration. The Lees (my beloved maternal grandmother) were a funny, close, and tragic lot, being direct descendants of John D. Lee of Mountain Meadows infamy.

My great uncle Jesse Udall had the habit of exclaiming at every gathering that the Udalls were the royal family, without batting an ironic eyelash. I was trained to believe that my Mormon ancestors and their tales of pioneer hardship in the service of the Church made me royal too. Even with that tainted Lee streak—we knew John D. was a scapegoat for Brigham and became, for us, a kind of hero in refusing to escape the kangaroo courts put together to convict him as, purportedly singlehandedly, he killed 120 men, women, and children. We were happy, when, after three decades of searching, our maiden Aunt Elma cracked the code of where the Udalls came from in England—and even found living relatives there in Kent. The Lee line stopped with John D.'s

father, the rapsallion Ralph Lee, who lived in Kaskaskia, Illinois in the early 1800s before absconding to unknown parts.

In 2015 I decided I wanted to learn even more about my genealogy and asked to have my DNA tested as a Christmas present. I wanted to know if one of my great grandmothers was Swiss Italian and if the Turleys really did go back to Ireland (MacToirdealbaigh) or if it was possible that the line went back to the south of France and was of Norman origin. I have been partial to France and the French language all my life and also loved the idea of being Irish or Italian. I also felt that I might get a little unexpected twist of *je ne sais quoi* in the DNA study. And, indeed, French, which so powerfully says so many things that can't be said in any other language, has a wonderful word that described my reaction perfectly: "*frisson*." I felt a shiver, a shudder, a pleasure mixed with utter surprise when I received the DNA results.

No surprise in the 47.5 percent British/Irish. A bit of a skitter with the 7.2 percent Scandinavian, but not surprised in afterthought for we know the Vikings made their presence felt in the British Isles. A warm grace in 18.9 percent German/French/Swiss. But the wonder, the *incroyable* moment—the *frisson*—was in learning that I was .1 percent of Central African and African hunter-gatherer descent. Immediately, the academic in me wanted to know all the ins and outs, hows, whys, wheres, and whos of this unforeseen knowledge about myself and my heritage.

Where to begin in answering all those questions? But at the most basic level, I simply liked that I was from Africa. The percentage was small but the jolt large and wondrous. In the nineteenth century, the United States had the one-drop rule about race: if you had one drop of African blood you were considered to be Black. Strangely this absurd doctrine couldn't consider it the other way around, that one drop of white blood might make one white. I don't know how to set my experience against that hypodescent notion of race. Nor do I know how to set this knowledge against what I have been teaching for years: that gender and race are fictional entities imposed by disciplinary institutional structures.



The fictionality of those categories cannot negate, of course, the very real and painful effects of racism and sexism.

Then a year later or so the website that tested my DNA gave more information. They created an “Ancestry Timeline” for each ancestry line I came from, showing “How many generations ago was your most recent ancestor for each population.” For my African hunter-gatherer population the most recent ancestor was between 1680 and 1770, six to nine generations back. Further, it was noted that this particular ancestor was likely to “have descended from a single population,” meaning a full-blooded African. Astonishing. A veritable gleam came into my eye—the genealogist’s gleam, the academic researcher’s gleam. I had to find this ancestor.

Previous to this discovery of my DNA, I had become deeply attached to the story of the first known autobiography by a female British slave, Mary Prince. I had taught her amazing story many times in my classes. We don’t know her exact birth date, probably in the 1780s, and nor do we know if she was a second-generation slave or had direct ancestors who had been brought from Africa generations before. In any case, after years of abuse by her owners, the Woods, she was brought to England by them in 1828. There she met some anti-slavery activists and after many wrangles with and continued dreadful abuse from the Woods, she walked out their door and left them forever. This was possible, because, based on the famous Somerset case ruling made by Lord Mansfield in 1772, it was believed that slaves were free on British soil. Thus, slaves brought to England after that were technically considered no longer slaves. For a brief while after Mary wrote her “History” of being a slave, with the help of Sarah Strickland and Thomas Pringle, she was a cause célèbre in the abolition movement. Two court cases ensued in 1833 regarding the claim that her history was a libel against her owners. But this is the last we hear of her life. Like so many slaves, the rest of her history is gone.

I fell hard for Mary Prince. I went to Bermuda to see Brackish Pond where she was born. Across the way was a church she may have attended.

I saw the church the slaves built at night for themselves. I saw the small island where runaway slaves were hanged as examples for other slaves, and the poles sticking out of the ground for enchaining slaves. I followed her to Turks & Caicos, where she worked in the miserable salt fields on Turks Island and possibly Salt Cay under a burning sun, blistering salt, sun and water curdling the skin on the slaves' legs. These islands are almost unbelievably beautiful, but did the slaves see that beauty? And if so, how did they relate it back to the truth of their own condition as human beings? Now I must follow the trail of my own ancestor from Africa. I must know the outlines of this ancestor's daily life.



I grew up in the fifties and came of age in the sixties, a time of enormous change and tumult in race relations in the United States. As a thirteen-year-old in 1963, I gaped at our black and white TV when a burly white man named Bull Connor used water cannons to assault innocent Black people in Birmingham. I was sickened and didn't know what it all meant. My dad was racist. He grew up in Colonia Juarez, Mexico, where, though he spoke the beautiful Spanish language fluently and with the Mormon colony exploited the lush resources and land, he hated the Mexicans. He only spoke this way in front of my brothers on fishing trips with them. My mother regularly referred to the US citizens in the small town she grew up in as "Mexicans," and she told me once how she had once used the term "Jew" as a verb when talking to a friend whom she didn't know was Jewish. It was the end of the friendship and she was appalled with herself.

I took what the Church told me about race naively and devotedly. Blacks were not valiant in the War in Heaven before coming to earth; they had sat on the fence in that fight, and so they deserved the "mark of Cain." We chosen people of the Church, we white people, that is, should not marry across racial lines—that was a sin. I remember a white friend

of my older sister, who I thought was the sweetest person I had ever met, who fell in love with a Pacific Islander. After much reflection and anguish, she gave him up because of Church teachings about miscegenation. She ended up marrying a man who physically abused her, but at least he was white. At the age of sixteen I could not understand why she, who was innocent and good, could not marry the man she loved with all her heart.

All through the sixties I heard the stupid jokes that adult Church members told about Black people; I heard rumors about how Blacks might come to Utah to riot and make an assault on the Church; or how they might rise up and invade peaceful white neighborhoods. In response to Church teachings that Black men could not hold the priesthood, many college basketball teams in the sixties and seventies protested having to compete with the BYU Cougars. I remember many Church members in our ward felt they were the misunderstood victims of such protests. These stories and fears whirled around me, and I did not know how to process it all. I was white—I had the privilege of not having to understand, not having to think about the meaning of race.

We went to an all-white grade school. In high school, there were only two Black young men. They were brothers. I admired them like everyone else. They were good looking, in all the clubs and student government offices, and on the football team, smart and going somewhere. I was somewhat of a cipher in high school. One day, the younger brother, who was in one of my classes, asked me on a date. I was floored—he was somebody and I was nobody. I don't know what I said, some lame thing about being busy or something. But I know that my answer came straight out of the unacknowledged but very real Mormon handbook that said, "Do not date or marry across racial lines." I saw the hurt in his eyes when I rejected him. The handbook didn't explain how to deal with the pain inflicted by its policies.

Afterwards, I was disgusted with myself, feeling a guilt I still cannot erase, yet, still, I was fiercely devoted to the Church that had trained me

to respond that way. I thought I had done the right thing even though I would not have been able to explain my belief if someone had asked me why ungodly behavior was alright. Only years later did I come to my own conclusions about the racism that was foundational to the Church I so loved at that time.

Foundations are everything. Biologists tell us that we are all Africans ultimately. Every race and ethnicity goes back to Africa. She is the motherland to us all. Millenia ago, the first humans arose on African soil. After more millenia some of them began to move across the land up northward into what are now known as the Middle East, Western and Eastern Europe, Asia and across the Bering Straits. My Central and South African ancestor came or was brought to England, I presume, sometime after the beginning of the continual presence of Blacks in England in 1555, when “five Africans arrived to learn English and thereby facilitate trade.”<sup>1</sup> By 1768 there were about 20,000 Blacks living in London on every level of society, from upper to lower class: prostitutes, servants, beggars, scholars, sailors, students sent by rich African leaders, or slaves who were the ornamental accoutrements to rich and middle-class Londoners wanting there stark white skin to appear whiter next to the slave’s Black skin.<sup>2</sup> Some were soldiers who had fought for the British in the American Revolutionary War and had been promised their freedom for doing so.<sup>3</sup>

Most Blacks brought to England in this time were men, and so many married white women and had families. Thus, “many thousands of British families,” if they “traced their roots back to the eighteenth or early nineteenth century, would find among their ancestors an African

---

1. Gretchen Holbrook Gerzina, *Black London: Life Before Emancipation* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1995), 3.

2. Ibid. 15.

3. Ibid. 18–19.

or person of African descent.”<sup>4</sup> My ancestor may have been brought to one of the slave ports, like Bristol, Birmingham, London, or Liverpool by his master. I do not think it was the Udall line, which goes back to the bucolic Kent, England, which had no large cities or ports. I suspect it might be the Turley line, for Theodore was born in Birmingham. It might be the Lee line, for we do not yet know Ralph Lee’s origins in England, Ireland, or France. Or it could be Robert Wilson, who was living in London in 1644.

We are all Africans. The only question is when we became Black. I became Black between the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. This facile but true statement does not give me the right to co-opt the Black experience. I experience all the privileges of being white, and because of that I have only begun my journey toward understanding race. Foundations matter, and I have learned something foundational about my being. I long to know my ancestor—but, what is more, I am now honor-bound, deeply so, to know what race does to people. I was honor-bound before to people of color, for we are all human and go back to a great mother together. But now my *amour propre* has been dignified and seared by my new feelings about ancestry. Who am I but one who must grasp for higher levels of awareness, of painful histories of generations of peoples, and the sorrows and glories of individual lives seared themselves by ancestry and race.

---

4. Peter Fryer, *Staying Power: The History of Black People in Britain* (Sterling, Va.: Pluto Press, 1984), 235.



Hildebrando de Melo  
Red as Blood III (2018)  
40.5" x 26.25"  
acrylic and charcoal on paper

# SHIFTING TIDES: A CLARION CALL FOR INCLUSION AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

Cameron McCoy

I would like to begin by recognizing that this is a celebration. Although only thirty-two years old, Martin Luther King Jr. Day is a celebration that not only commemorates, but has come to embody, all of civil rights history: *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Voting Rights Act of 1965, *Loving v. Virginia* (1967), and the 1978 revelation concerning Blacks and the priesthood.

While my message this evening will primarily focus on the symbolism of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s vision during the summer of 1965, I will look to create wider pathways of open discussion that will hopefully be fruitful, yet direct, and touch on the core of an unfulfilled dream. Therefore, I will be bold and attempt to demonstrate the strength of and respect we should have toward all civil rights activists—past and present—that have and continue to sacrifice more than I can ever imagine for *the* cause.

First, let me state a fact: systemic problems require systemic solutions. The twenty-first century has not freed us from the racial and social injustices of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Second, I am not here to over-dramatize or overstate this deleterious condition that plagues so many areas in American life (e.g., poverty, economic disparities, and racial violence); however, the majority of African Americans

---

This speech was given as the keynote at the Martin Luther King Walk of Life and Commemoration, Brigham Young University, January 17, 2018.

today continue to solidly occupy the social and professional margins of the “land of the free and the home of the brave.”

Since 1965, King’s dream has been a contested one at best, and at worst, a perennial nightmare. This has caused the inalienable rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness to remain unrealized for the significant majority of Black Americans. True justice *must* be a reality for all of God’s children. Therefore, “inclusion” must be the calling card of this new and progressive civil rights era/movement.

Martin Luther King asserted that “it would be fatal for the nation to overlook the urgency of [this very] moment. This sweltering summer of the Negro’s legitimate discontent will not pass until there is an invigorating autumn of freedom and equality. . . . Those who hope that the Negro needed to blow off steam and will now be content will have a rude awakening if the nation returns to business as usual.”<sup>2</sup> Colin Kaepernick’s autumn 2016 protest has proved less productive in bringing about the freedom and equality that King represents. It has ultimately shown that the United States is still not prepared to recognize the need for social change and justice, placing many citizens in a difficult position: searching for much-needed shade and protection from what was a harsh summer of discontented minorities facing oppression and violence. Similar to King, who fought for equal and fair relationships between all people, especially the oppressed and disadvantaged, Kaepernick, too, has not rested until people of color are justly treated as full American citizens, which is why this time feels so tumultuous to so very many. “The whirlwinds of revolt will continue to shake the foundations of our nation until the bright days of justice emerge,” King concluded.

---

2. “I Have a Dream,” address delivered at the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, Aug. 28, 1963, The Martin Luther King Jr. Research and Education Institute, Stanford University, <https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/king-papers/documents/i-have-dream-address-delivered-march-washington-jobs-and-freedom>.



Will you be a cultural arbiter to change this tide? Change, but more specifically, inclusion, within an organization doesn't happen by default; issues of injustice must be addressed swiftly, systematically, and rigorously. Institutions cannot merely opt to face these issues; they ought to do far more than take the cover off the pool. They ought to drain the very systems that filled the reservoirs of abusive patterns of behavior and created an atmosphere where justice and inclusion sank to abhorrent levels.

Many times I have been asked by white students, "What can we do to help and make a difference in the fight for racial and social justice?" "What can we do to bring about positive changes when the public discourse surrounding race is so intense, and emotionally and politically charged?" I would caution us not to reduce or sanitize the memory of Dr. King: Remember, he was seen as a dangerous, bold, and radical humanist for a just society.

My response: stop tiptoeing around the subjects of race, inequality, and inclusion. Many well-intentioned white people in this country do not understand how the deeply rooted systems of racism and inequality function. Remember that you are *the* beneficiaries of a deeply entrenched system of racial inequality and oppression. So to begin the healing process, or at least be a greater antibiotic for the ancient wounds of white supremacy and racial violence, a good place for white people to start is with abandoning their collective innocence. White supremacy was invented by, and designed for, white people. This *peculiar*, and enduring, racial and social benefit has been handed down through generations of whites. The work of dismantling this social structure is, and will continue to be, a difficult task. Nevertheless, hundreds of social justice advocates have addressed critical elements of racial and cultural injustice that progressive communities can look to as ethical templates for propagating greater inclusion.

I believe that progressive white American communities have taken bold measures that have come to serve as engines of racial and social

equity: for example, the immediate removal of the statues and names of white supremacists in city and town squares, the immediate removal of the names of bigots and oppressors such as Andrew Jackson, Theodore Roosevelt, Woodrow Wilson, and other prominent US and religious leaders from university and college buildings. Progressive white communities must dissolve barriers that deliberately keep schools, churches, neighborhoods, law enforcement, and local governments, even in 2018, artificially “white.”

Furthermore, directly confront people—friends, family, roommates, and colleagues—who make comments born from a belief that white skin is some default setting or somehow synonymous with being a “true” or first American. Progressive white communities must not “fear to do good,” which means digging into the buried past (no matter how painful) and seriously investigating those questions that many comfortable white people hope and pray that no one will ever ask, specifically regarding how his or her community’s affluence took shape and flourished.

The wounds inflicted on many minority communities by whites are extensive and traumatic! It is naïve to suggest that the process of healing wounds from centuries will occur suddenly or without complication. Acts of public commemoration, remembrance, and atonement—such as this one—should never be seen as the end of our country’s public discourse, but rather, a way to finally begin a healthy conversation. Further, this will, in no uncertain terms, foster an atmosphere conducive to long-term systemic solutions. This is only possible in progressive-minded environments that are not fueled by elitists and passive-aggressive behavior.

I challenge you to get off the bench of social inactivity and go on the offensive! Stop saying to yourself, “I’m good, I don’t need to concern myself with injustice; it’s never going to happen to me; no one in my circle is prejudiced.” I’ve heard this from so many BYU students. Worse still, some attempt to speak for people of color with absolutely no historical knowledge of the plight of marginalized and underrepresented groups.

I challenge you to hasten social justice! I dare you to do so! Hastening racial and social equity *is* the work of God; simply “seeing” others through his eyes is not enough; we must also *treat* all his children as he would. This is at the center of King Benjamin’s message of service: we must be active stewards in setting the proverbial table of equality for the downtrodden, the widowed, and the less fortunate.<sup>3</sup>

Let us cease to be reactionary as so many people in positions of influence are and more proactive like our Father in Heaven who has established the correct standard of action and focused leadership. He is not reactionary, he never has been and never will be, and those who are, are not true hearers of his vision and message of divine inclusiveness.

In 2006, then Church president Gordon B. Hinckley declared, “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 the Church. Let us all recognize that each of us is a son or daughter of our Father in Heaven, who loves all of His children.”<sup>4</sup> With this declaration, President Hinckley officially endorsed the guiding principle of “inclusion” not only among Latter-day Saints but also among all God’s children! If that was not clear enough, in early 2012, the First Presidency of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints unequivocally condemned racism, which includes any and all past racism by individuals both inside and outside the Church.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, cultures that foster beliefs of perceived racial superiority and social and cultural inferiority will always fail to gain full membership in the Lord’s kingdom.

---

3. See Mosiah 2.

4. Gordon B. Hinkley, “The Need for Greater Kindness,” Apr. 2006, <https://www.lds.org/general-conference/2006/04/the-need-for-greater-kindness?lang=eng>.

5. “Church Statement Regarding ‘Washington Post’ Article on Race and the Church,” LDS Newsroom, Feb. 29, 2012, <https://www.mormonnewsroom.org/article/racial-remarks-in-washington-post-article>.

So, are you like unto Captain Moroni? “Yea, verily, verily I say unto you, if all men had been, and were, and ever would be, like unto [Captain] Moroni, behold, the very powers of hell would have been shaken forever; yea, the devil would never have power over the hearts of the children of men” (Alma 48:17). Will you fight against the evils of racism and for principles of inclusion and equality? When I look at you can I apply these very words? Have you lived up to expectation and provided hope in a tumultuous world? Or have you allowed the moment to pass?

Will your life reflect and serve as a warning for good to those who seek to fulfill the dream of Dr. King or serve as a cautionary tale, similar to the lives of Laman and Lemuel?

Are you metaphorically “A City Upon a Hill” as the Puritan leader John Winthrop described to the emigrants on the *Arbella* as they embarked to create the first settlement in New England? Are you a standard-bearer of safety and inclusion for others to find peace and harmony in these socially tumultuous times?

If you are, is your light safely guiding the many who are trapped in the all-consuming quicksand of racial and social injustice?

Make a declaration to yourself:

Declare all-out war that you will not be allergic to extinguishing hatred and bigotry.

Declare all-out war that you will bring hope into the lives of others, that you will no longer be a liability to those striving for greater equality.

Declare all-out war that you “fear not to do good,” that you will face fear with faith.

Declare all-out war that you will live a principle-centered life, one that promotes justice and allows for freedom to ring uninterrupted.

I dare you to live a life of impeccable integrity, and not one of convenience. I dare you to live a life above reproach and take full responsibility for your actions. *Right now* is your awakening. *Right now* is the urgency of *now*! It is unacceptable to live as a mediocre member of society, one

who simply defaults on the words and promises of the Constitution and Declaration of Independence by failing to acknowledge white supremacy.

By your own actions, you will either validate white supremacy and social inequality, or not. Dr. King proved that in our most trying times, God is there, yet he is quiet. He has not abandoned us; he is watching us, and we are proving to him whether or not we are ready. You cannot simply be willing; you must act!

Don't let others hold you back from pursuing charitable and just activities because of their personal feelings! The scriptures make no mention of associated promises based on one's personal feelings; however, with every principle there is an associated promise (e.g., Moroni 10, D&C 89). On the final day, it will only be *you* standing before the judgment bar of God, not mommy, not daddy, no one else. Just you! Can the world count on you to never abandon those most in need? Will you be able to say, "not on my watch!"

Stop looking to others for answers. Look to God. "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him" (James 1: 5–6). Find the answers yourself! Often it is those who are closest to us that misguide us because they use cultural or traditional ways of evaluating life and interpreting the word of God, which typically are misinformed and incorrect, so be very careful.

This doesn't mean you can't seek guidance, but decide today that it will be you and only you who will retain responsibility and accountability for your own actions in breaking ground to pave the way for more extensive inclusion and social equity.

Again, Dr. King looked forward to a day of perfect justice. He looked forward to a day when issues such as race and status would fail to divide us. His hope and vision were that God's multi-ethnic family would unite together in spite of our differences.

In closing, as devout followers of Christ, you are each blessed and highly favored. The Redeemer's atoning sacrifice is what gives us all hope;

it stabilizes our faith and cultivates our trust in the unifying message of our Eternal Father. I finally challenge each of you this evening to be democratic torchbearers of inclusion and social justice, ready to stand tall during the most severe times of challenge and controversy.

We do not have the luxury to look the other way or bite our tongues to spare the comments or feelings of bigots, sexists, and racists; we cannot further silence the minority through inaction! We are too gifted, too educated, profoundly fortunate, and favored of God to do so. Therefore, the time is *now*! So, will you continue to allow the flickering embers of injustice to flourish or will your actions extinguish the flames of intolerance?

# THE BLACK CAIN IN WHITE GARMENTS

Melodie Jackson

I talked to my grandmother the other day. Though age beats upon her brow and three scores and ten asks remembrance of her body, her mind slips into repetition and comments about doing right and trusting in God, and not having taken an aspirin in twenty years. She remembers the fields.

“We lived on white’s man land,” she said: “We spent our days sharecropping on his land. Those were hard days. Sometimes we were overworked to exhaustion. But Papa never let us miss school. No matter how many crops we had to pick, we went to school. We would walk eight miles there and eight miles back. The white children passed by and laughed, but we kept walking. Sometimes it would just be me and three other students in the classroom during harvesting season. The fields and school. We first went to school and then to the fields.”

The complexities of being Mormon (LDS) and African American are so far-reaching that it’s often difficult to articulate. In a Church that boasts fifteen million members worldwide, one may ask “Why?” Well, my Blackness has been a direct opposition to a church that has distanced itself from that Blackness in order to reclaim whiteness. W. Paul Reeve, a Mormon historian, stated in his book, *Religion of a Different Color: Race and the Mormon Struggle for Whiteness*, that the LDS Church reshaped its identity and gained acceptance from the American public by alienating Blackness almost completely. Though earlier Black men like Elijah Abel and Walker Lewis held the LDS priesthood and participated fully in LDS congregations, in later years, missionaries were banned from directly seeking African American investigators. Many Black and African cultural

practices, such as Black religious art, music, and root work were taught as wicked traditions of fathers that lacked “inspiration” from God. Black members’ church participation was subsequently limited to being baptized, receiving confirmation, and taking the sacrament. The necessary ordinances of exaltation and other blessings, like sealings, endowments, and missions were denied only to Blacks of African descent in this attempt to reclaim whiteness.

The Church refused to grant the Black body whole recognition and divinity. To Nephi, I was not fair and delightful. To Joseph, I was a violator of the most sacred principles of society, chastity, and virtue. To Brigham, I was Cain’s curse. To McConkie, I was an unfaithful spirit, a “fence-sitter.” To you, I am colorless, my Blackness swallowed in that whiteness reclaimed, “a child of God.” Seemingly, I am invisible yet hyper-visible; for my body, although shaped and twisted into Mormonism’s image, will never fit properly in a culture that quickly vacuums spaces for Blackness. To be Black and LDS is to be Black first and LDS second, lest your identity is erased by “faith” and you become invisible and nonexistent.

Moreover, while conversations regarding Black bodies within a Mormon imagination often surround those bodies male and Black, there is a void of Black female voices. We must create space for and re-center conversations on Black LDS women. The priesthood ban should be labeled “the priesthood and temple ban.” The Church discarded Black women’s divinity and recognition, too, among LDS congregations, by denying temple access and blessings. Though many women remain nameless and faceless, in discussing bans and declarations, we must remember the Jane Manning Jameses, the Mary Francis Sturlaugsons, and the Alice Burches. These conversations must bleed into our present wards as we navigate the current racial and cultural tensions against the Sistas in Zion, the Janan Graham-Russells, and even the Melodie Jacksons.

On the cusp of the fortieth anniversary of the lifting of the priesthood and temple ban, we mustn’t neglect current racial strife and dissonance in our own spaces. We should recognize that Black members still struggle. I



still struggle. We must go to school. We must learn our history. We must remember, if we are to labor in the fields “white already to harvest.”

My grandmother taught me repeatedly, “school first, then the fields.” The road is difficult. I am often jeered along the way, but I keep walking. Even if it’s just myself in the classroom of Mormon historical truth, I remain. I am on white man’s land and am frequently overworked to exhaustion. Some days are hard. But, my Heavenly Father, my ancestors, my grandmother, Jane Manning James won’t let me miss school. I must seek first to obtain the word before I can work in God’s field. My hope is that we wander no longer in the wilderness of denial, racism, and silence for another forty years. Like Jane Manning James painstakingly wondered, “Is there no blessing for me?” Zion’s blessings will come only when Black members are visible, acknowledged, heard, and truly unbanned from within LDS congregations.



Hildebrando de Melo  
Red as Blood II (2018)  
40.5" x 26.25"  
acrylic and charcoal on paper

## FATHER-DAUGHTER INTERVIEW ON BLACKS AND THE PRIESTHOOD

Interviewees: Egide Nzojibwami and  
Verlyne Christensen  
Interviewer: Gregory A. Prince

VERLYNE: We saw a documentary a few weeks ago and you were featured in it, with Darius Gray. I don't know when it was done, but it was on Blacks and the priesthood.

GREG: Thank you.

EGIDE: I want to thank you for all the work that you have done to clarify all of the history. That's just amazing, the things we are learning now.

GREG: What I am most interested in is your personal stories of your relationship to Mormonism, but through the eyes and through the souls of people-of-color. And particularly Africans, rather than African Americans, because those are two very different populations and they come at the subject from very different perspectives. So what I want to capture is the African voice.

VERLYNE: Sounds good.

GREG: So just lead off in whatever order you wish.

EGIDE: I should start with my story about joining the Church. Back then, after the 1978 proclamation, the Church started in different parts of Africa. It started in places like Ghana and Nigeria, but in other places it started a little bit later. It was in Europe that most of us Africans, including myself, learned about the Church and joined it. The missionaries knocked on our door in 1984. It took us nine months to get baptized. We were baptized in 1985.

We were then in Belgium, in school [the family had moved from their native country of Burundi to Belgium in 1981 for Egide to attend graduate school; they stayed there until 1988]. After that, we went back to Burundi and took the Church to Burundi. There was no Church there at that time.

GREG: Let me back you up a bit. Talk about your conversion. What was it that converted you?

EGIDE: The conversion experience was an engaging one. My wife Beatrice and I didn't know anything about the Church. We had never heard of it before. It came at a time when we were searching for a church. We belonged to the Catholic Church, but for various reasons we were not satisfied with it. We went to different churches. Verlyne was already born and was a couple of years old, and we took her with us and went every Sunday to a different church. We visited every church that we knew in the area, in Liège, Belgium, but we didn't find anything that would satisfy us. So, we decided just to stay home and take a break.

Two weeks after that, two sister missionaries knocked at the door. Beatrice was there and she opened the door and talked to them. I was not there, so she decided to ask them to come back later when I was at home. That was how it started.

So the sister missionaries came, and they really taught us everything about the Church, everything about Joseph Smith—we had never heard of Joseph Smith before, we had never heard about the Book of Mormon

before. They did a lot of work to introduce us to all those concepts. We hadn't heard anything about modern revelation. I was pretty hard on them. I was a graduate student at that time, so I had a lot of questions. I questioned everything, like Jesus coming to the Americas.

To backtrack a little bit, I had met the missionaries, without recognizing them, about two years before, sometime in 1982. It happened quickly as I was going on a bus and they were coming out, and they gave me a pamphlet. By the time the sister missionaries came in 1984, we had moved two or three times, and yet I never threw away that pamphlet. But it didn't mean anything to me, because I didn't know anything about the Church. But when the missionaries came, I was able to find the pamphlet and read it, and they were able to give me some explanations about it. It's quite interesting that I hadn't thrown it away. I always knew exactly where it was.

We went through probably three sets of missionaries before we got baptized. We had a lot of questions. At one point, the missionaries challenged me to read the Book of Mormon. When I read the Book of Mormon, I could see in it my personal history and the history of our people in Burundi. We had two groups of people fighting each other, and sometimes one group was good and the other bad. I could see the same scenarios, and I could apply that book to myself. All the time I was in discussion with the missionaries, I had never taken the time to read the Book of Mormon, until that time.

When I started to read it, it was hard in the beginning. But then I took about three days off to read it completely, and I was personally converted by the Book of Mormon. I believe that God talks to anybody he chooses to talk to, and that the Book of Mormon, which to me is the same as the Bible, is the story of people who had a special relationship with God.

So that was how I got converted. Then, from there, we got baptized.

By the time we got baptized, we were pretty familiar with the Church. We were already paying tithing. Some people didn't even know that we were not members. We joined the Church in April, 1985.

GREG: At what point did you learn that there had been an exclusionary policy?

EGIDE: Among all those questions that I had, I went to the library. Back then, there was no internet, so I went to the public library to read about the Mormon Church. I read that all the information that was there and from different sources—some from the Church, some from sources against the Church. I realized that Black people were not allowed to have the priesthood until very recently. It was one of my questions, but interestingly, it was not my main issue.

GREG: Verlyne, it's your turn.

VERLYNE: I'll give you a little bit of background about myself and the Church. I was born in Belgium, while my parents were going to school over there. My two younger sisters were also born in Belgium.

My experience as a child and adolescent in the Church is probably different than most, because I experienced the Church on three different continents. My parents joined the Church in Belgium when I was about three years old. When I was six years old, they moved back to Burundi for five years.

So then I experienced the Church in Burundi. I say "the Church" in Burundi in quotation marks, because the Church was us. It was our family—my parents, myself, my two sisters, and later on, my two brothers. There was no actual organization in the country. I remember we used to have sacrament meetings in our home. My parents had a little upstairs area that was private, and we would all gather there as a family. We would

dress up as if we were going to church, and that's where we would take the sacrament, sing a hymn, and have our own little church meeting.

GREG: Were there missionaries there at that time?

VERLYNE: No, there were no missionaries. There was no Church at all in Burundi. We were the first ones to be members of the Church in Burundi. I believe my father had been given permission to administer sacrament to his family from home during the time that we were the only members in Burundi.

Later on, missionaries and General Authorities did come to Burundi to get the Church started. But for a few years it was just the five of us, and then later on six and seven of us, when my brothers were born. By the time my youngest brother was born, the Church had been established in the country. [The Church was officially established in Burundi in November 1992, with Egide Nzojibwami as first branch president.]

When we moved to Burundi, I remember knowing that I belonged to a different church. I knew that we didn't go to the Catholic Church like the rest of my extended family—cousins and grandparents and what-not—so I knew there was something that was different. But that's as far as it went. We did sacrament at home as a family, and we would sing a couple of hymns. That was the extent of my exposure to the Church while in Burundi and during most of my childhood, until I was about eleven years old.

When the Church came to Burundi, I was baptized when I was ten years old. I was actually the first person to be baptized in Burundi. I could have been baptized at eight, but when I was eight, the Church was not yet established. So my parents waited until the Church was established to get me baptized.

Soon after the Church was established, we went back to Belgium for a few years. The Church in Belgium is very small. It's very sparse. It was something that you did on Sunday for two hours, and that was the

extent of my involvement with the Church until we moved to Canada in my mid-teens.

EGIDE: We went back to Belgium because there was a civil war in Burundi, and our family fled at that time. That was in November 1993, just one year after the start of the Church in Burundi.

VERLYNE: My experience with the Church in Canada was very different. [The family moved from Belgium to Canada in 1996.] We came to Calgary, Alberta, which had a much larger Mormon population, compared to other places I had lived. It went from church being something that happened on Sunday mornings, to something that happened on Sunday mornings, some Sunday evenings for firesides, and every weekday morning for seminary, some weekday evenings for activities and the list goes on. It became much more involved than I had ever experienced. That was my experience from my mid-teens onward. It was all consuming. I remember reacting to that by thinking, "Wow!" That was a whole other experience of being Mormon than I had ever experienced up until that point.

GREG: At what point did you become aware that there had been a policy?

VERLYNE: I actually became aware that there was a policy when I was in seminary. We had just immigrated to Canada, in 1996. I was still learning to speak English. I remember sitting in the classroom and it was brought up. I remember it was mentioned in passing during a lesson, and then the topic moved onto something else. I remember just sitting there and thinking, "Did I understand this right? Or, is it just my English? Is it just me, not grasping something here? That can't be true." I remember very vividly leaving the classroom and getting in the car where my father was waiting for me. I asked him, "Do you know about this?" thinking he would say no. But, unfortunately, he said yes.



I remember feeling quite shocked and disappointed that I didn't know about something that was quite important. But again, when you look at my background, I didn't grow up going to Primary, because we didn't have it in Burundi. I didn't grow up going to Sunday School or having youth lessons until we moved to Calgary. I didn't grow up with that built-in instruction, so really my immersion in Church teachings and culture happened when we moved to Canada in my mid-teens. There were a lot of cultural and doctrinal aspects where I thought, "Oh, this is really what Mormons do?"

To give you an example, I remember being a child in Burundi. My mother had a restaurant, and sometimes in the afternoon, right before going back to school—we would come home for lunch—and I would ask for a coffee. I went on to drink coffee for a few days before my parents told me, "No, actually we don't drink coffee." It was not a big deal. They just told me. There were a lot of little things like that I just was not particularly aware of.

So a lot of things that I would hear in lessons were not things I had grown up knowing. A lot of times the lesson would come after the fact. I knew that my parents didn't drink alcohol. That was quite obvious, especially with a lot of family members having a drink. My father always had a Coke or a tonic water. I knew that part, but not the many Church policies and cultural details you end up learning if you grow up in a strong Mormon community.

So, when I learned about the policy, it was upsetting, and quite offsetting. I didn't quite know how to take it. I remember asking my father, "Why would you join such a church? Why would you do that?" That's when I started to do some reading about it and asking questions. It was the beginning of starting to ask myself about this religion, "What is this all about?" and trying to make sense of it.

GREG: Let me take you back just a little bit. Was the off-putting part of it that there had been an exclusionary policy, or was it the explanations that people gave as to why there had been a policy?

VERLYNE: In that moment, when I was talking with my father after seminary, it was the fact that there had been a policy that Black people could not have the priesthood. Later on, as I found out more about it and as I started to hear people talking more about it in lessons and talks, then it was also the explanations and justifications that were voiced to support the policy.

And all these justifications that were always given; they never really sat true for me. I remember hearing them and thinking, "That doesn't sound right." I didn't have the vocabulary for it, I didn't have the words for it, I didn't even think that I could say, "This doesn't sound right." I would be sitting there as a teenager, and as a young adult later on, and hearing the justifications and feeling like, "I don't agree with this, but I'll just set it on the side for now." That's all I felt I could do at that moment.

EGIDE: It never sounded right to me, either. When I asked the missionaries, they told me, "Yes, there is a policy that was removed in 1978. Before that, the Blacks could not have the priesthood." I said, "OK. So why?" The only answer that was available was, "It was given by revelation to the prophet, and it was removed by revelation." Until recently, that was the only answer that was given.

But that was not my main question. My main question was to find a good church. Here, we found a church that was really family-oriented, that had all the values that we were looking for. We learned a lot of things. In the first few years that we were in the Church, we learned more about covenants and other things than in the twenty-five years that I had been in the Catholic Church.

But the policy itself was always a problem for me. It never had a satisfactory explanation.

GREG: Did you feel fully included in the Church in Belgium?

EGIDE: Always. I always felt included in Belgium. Less than a year after I became a member, I was called to be Elders Quorum president. I was fully engaged there.

It was not the only thing that was wrong with the Church at that time. The problem was that everything that had been said by a prophet would be taken as doctrine. I remember my first time going to church. I was sitting in the class and the teacher was talking about the age of the earth. He was saying that the age of the earth was something like 8,000 years. That was my very first time. I was a graduate student in geology, and I knew better than that. I was working on a project where we had dated a rock at 2.7 billion years, just two weeks earlier. So I raised my hand and asked the teacher, “Well, there is something wrong here.” The teacher said, “Oh, the prophet said that! So you have to take it at face value, because the prophet said it.” I ended up being considered an apostate because I was asking those questions in that class. That was my very first time in a church class. So it was not only the policy on priesthood, but everything that Brigham Young or any other prophet had said, was taken as doctrine.

GREG: How did you deal with that?

EGIDE: Well, I knew that people are not perfect. I never expected anybody to be perfect. I have lots of respect for the prophet, but I was happy recently, when Elder [Dallin] Oaks stated, in an interview, “We don’t consider that the prophet is infallible. We don’t consider that anybody in this church is infallible, including the prophet.” I’m glad that people can recognize that, that anybody can make mistakes.

Before, anything that the prophet would say, even in a casual way, would be taken as doctrine, and people would just repeat it that way, because the prophet had said it.

In the Catholic Church, they say the same thing, that the Pope is infallible when he says something. But I knew that he was not.

VERLYNE: I think that this critical thinking my father is talking about is really important. It's not always welcomed in the LDS organization, but I think critical thinking is absolutely essential. That's what I have always used and relied on. "Is this sitting well with me? Does this make sense to me?" And not just thinking that because a bishop or stake president or apostle or president of the Church has said something, that it should be so. The critical thinking is not applied as much as it should be applied within the organization, mainly, because it has been discouraged. It's an organization that finds its security in conformity, rather than differentiation. And when you do practice critical thinking, sometimes you stand alone.

GREG: I know what you're talking about!

VERLYNE: I do want to go back to one of the explanations that my father gave me when I asked him, "Why would you join a church that did not allow Black people to have the priesthood before?" I remember him saying that his experience in the Catholic Church was not that much different. There was discrimination in the Catholic Church as well. It's difficult to find a religion that does not have some form of exclusion or racism embedded in it, in its history. That does not excuse what Mormonism has done, but I remember thinking, "Well, looks like everybody has excluded the Black race at some point or another." In the research I did, I saw that you don't have to go far back to find out that most of the religions in the world did exclude Black people. So you think, "Well, do I join nothing, because everybody has been exclusive? Do I not join

Mormonism?” You start to pick and choose what is going to serve you best and what is working for you in the present. But if you focus on the past, there has been so much exclusion of Black people, and it would be so easy to say, “I don’t want to belong to anything.”

EGIDE: Being Black in a white church came after the experience of being Black in a white culture.

GREG: In Belgium?

EGIDE: Yes. The first time I went to Belgium was 1977. I was there from 1977 to 1979 for my undergraduate work. It was a time that was really difficult, mostly because of racial profiling. At that time, there were no laws to protect anybody against racism. Trying to find housing was impossible. We would go through the listings, and they would say, “No Arabs, no Blacks, no dogs.” In the end, it was just, “No Blacks.” Everybody else was allowed, but the Black people were always the last to be allowed somewhere. By the time you would find a place to stay, it was something where you didn’t want to stay. You’d spend a day or two before you could find two or three places that would even allow you to visit. Probably half the restaurants wouldn’t let you go in. It was pretty common. So you get a few years of that, and that makes your skin a little bit tough.

By the time we joined the Church, it was 1985, when we came back to Belgium for graduate studies. At that time, the government had passed anti-racist laws, but things were still largely the same.

So going to church was really a great experience, to go into a place where they would say, “Hi,” where they would smile at you, where you would be welcome. We felt really good. We were looking forward to Sundays to go to church. If you would go to the Catholic Church next door, nobody would talk to you because of who you were. But if you would go to the Mormon Church, everybody would be excited to welcome you. It was a great, great experience.

GREG: Is it fair to say that you experienced less racism in the Belgian Mormon Church than in Belgian society in general?

EGIDE: Absolutely.

VERLYNE: I spent my early adolescence in Belgium, going to school. There are good people everywhere, but it was an environment that made your skin quite tough. What I experienced in Belgium, I have never, ever experienced in the twenty-three years we have been in Canada. Someone would call you a name on the street, for being Black. It would happen even within a school environment, and no adult would say anything. I grew up feeling, "You are Black, and people will say things that are insulting." You just kind of learn to deal with it.

Then, you walk into the Mormon Church, and people are welcoming. It is a breath of fresh air.

So our experience as Black people in a white culture, especially the general European white culture, was not always a positive one. But that being said, some of the greatest friends we have, have been from Belgium. I have very positive memories of the classmates I had in grades 7 and 8 in Belgium. It's important to remember that there are good people everywhere. But it's a very tough environment to grow up in as a Black person.

I remember my first day at school here in Calgary, wondering if I would have to relive everything that I went through when I was in Belgium. I remember kids saying hi to me. It seems so simple to say hi to somebody else, but when you've been insulted, and then somebody says hi to you, it feels like you are being treated like gold, when really it's a simple gesture.

On top of that, you go to church, and we were one of the only Black families in the area, in Calgary. So you become a novelty, and people are coming up to say hi to you. People are sometimes even overly nice.

Yes, they do ask some insensitive questions, but you go, “Well, it’s better than being mistreated.” When people ask insensitive questions and are overly nice to you, it can be perceived as a form of racism; but for me, it’s always been hard to call that racism, after the experiences that we had lived in the white European culture.

EGIDE: For sure, compared to the experiences that we had in Belgium, the experiences here in Canada have been much, much better.

GREG: At what point did you get called in Church leadership?

EGIDE: I’ve been a member of the stake presidency—I’m the second counselor—since 2015.

GREG: And prior to that?

EGIDE: Prior to that, I had different callings. I was an ordinance worker, I was stake clerk, I was ward missionary leader, I was in the high priests group leadership. I always had a calling in the Church.

VERLYNE: We might have to double-check that, but, were you the first Black person to serve in a stake presidency in Calgary? I think you might be.

EGIDE: I’m pretty sure in Calgary. That was a shock to me, and to others, too, when I was called.

It was not much different when I was called to be an ordinance worker in the temple. In this area where we live, Blacks are not common in the Church. So they were a little bit surprised at first. But now, they see us all the time, and there is no problem. It was just because they were not used to seeing Black people serving in that capacity. But if you go

in other places, like Toronto, it's completely different. There are more Black people there.

VERLYNE: But overall, the experience of being in the Church has been positive. People have been very welcoming. I would say that, at its worst, maybe someone has made an insensitive or ignorant comment during a lesson, and nobody has stood up to say, "That's not the case." It was especially hard for me to hear that in seminary or institute, and having everyone around me hearing that or participating, and there was no one to stand up and say, "Actually, this is not the way it is." As I became an adult and I was attending classes with other adults, there would be the one or two or three people who would stand up and say, "This is not how it is." But that's been the extent of it, having an insensitive or ignorant comment made. I don't want to minimize that, because it's still happening a lot, and it can be quite harmful to a young teenager, or a young child growing up, hearing those messages. When I was a teenager, there was nobody else speaking up and saying, "This is not OK. This is not right." I hope that people can now be more aware.

EGIDE: Recently, the Church published the Gospel Topics essays, where they addressed the subject of Blacks and the priesthood. That was a great thing, and I think it was long overdue. There were many remnants that were not addressed in the 1978 declaration. For example, you will see in the books that we Black people were linked to Cain and Ham and that's why we have a black skin and that's why we couldn't have the priesthood. You see that in the books of the Church. Or, that we were on the fence during the Great Council. All of that was still there for many years after. Sometimes, I had lessons where I was supposed to teach that, but I always passed it. But it is something for a young person to hear that, like Verlyne said, or anybody for that matter, and it still hits you.



VERLYNE: Yes, especially when you are young. The impact that it has on you is quite great. As an adult, you can separate things. Even as an adolescent, I was able to separate things somewhat, but it is really, really hard sitting in a classroom and hearing people saying that around you, and sometimes even having a whole lesson around that particular topic, and sitting right there in the middle and thinking, “Do they see me? Do they see that I’m Black? Do they know that I’m hearing this?”

EGIDE: They teach that in the lesson as if you were not there, because it’s part of the manual.

GREG: And we have not completely eliminated all of that from our materials. There are still some carry-overs.

EGIDE: There are some carry-overs, such as interracial marriage. President Kimball discouraged that a lot. In many manuals, you still see that. “Interracial marriage should not be encouraged.” For people like us, of the five children we have, all of them are married to white people. They are doing well, and proving the exact opposite. So there are some things that are still there, unfortunately, and the Church has not addressed them. I think most of those have now been taken away, but think about the many people who heard these things for many years, and nobody told them that this is not the case. They [the Church] just wrote one page in the Gospel Topics essay.

GREG: Yes. It’s not enough to state a new policy; you have to deconstruct what was damaging before.

EGIDE: Yes, you have to deconstruct that. You have to tell the people, not once, not twice, but repeatedly that this is not the case anymore. “You cannot say that the Black people are related to Cain or to Ham, or that they were sitting on the fence during the Great Council. You cannot say

that anymore.” But nobody says that. So today, you still find people who use an old manual and say, “OK, this is written here. I’m going to teach that in the lesson.” So those kinds of incidents happen. There is some work that still needs to be done.

VERLYNE: There is a lot of work that needs to be done. There are still patriarchal blessings that have been given to Black people that lack a lineage declaration. So no tribal lineage, which is a big part of the blessing, is given. That needs to be rectified.

The reason why I think some documents have been printed, as of late, is that there has been a push coming from the outside on many issues, not just the racial issue. They include feminist issues, the LGBTQ community—there has been so much push from the outside that it has forced the Church to review some of these documents.

But not enough has been done to try to deconstruct the past, and the past is still very much instructing the present. Something more tangible needs to be done. A page on the internet is not enough to say what has been taught in the past is no longer OK. And it was never OK.

GREG: The only time I am aware of, where racism has been specifically and strongly condemned at a general conference was in 2006, by President Hinckley.

EGIDE: Yes.

GREG: And that was in response to a correspondence with Darius Gray. But it was a one-off, and we haven’t heard it since then. And as you say, you can’t do this once. You have to send the message repeatedly, for years, because it is so deeply engrained in the opposite direction.

VERLYNE: Yes, very much.

EGIDE: The only reference that is really strong enough is the one from President Hinckley.

VERLYNE: I remember that one vividly. And you are right, it stood out.

EGIDE: Recently, Elder Ballard said something, but not as elaborative as President Hinckley. That's the main reference that we have about Church authorities condemning racism in the Church.

But on a personal level, members of the Church have been doing pretty well. The Church has the capacity—when they hear something from the pulpit at general conference, the members are really the best people who, when they are asked to do something, they will do it in the best way they can. I must say that something like the policy that was rescinded in 1978, when we came into the Church only a few years after, you wouldn't have been able to tell that the policy had been in place before. That's just amazing. But what they need to do more is to remove those remnants, like Cain, or Blacks who are still sitting on the fence. All those appendages to explain that policy, the Church needs to strongly say something about them. Otherwise, as we said, the Church has been really good to us when it comes to inclusiveness.

When we were in Africa, for the sake of keeping the members informed so that they could know what happened before—I was the first branch president in Burundi—I told the members about the policy. The members asked a few questions, “So what happened then?” “The policy was stopped in 1978.” “OK. That's it. No further questions.” I realized that everywhere in Africa, you don't see too many questions about that. For me, the main reason is that they didn't live at the time when the policy was applied to them, as opposed to the African Americans who were members of the Church at the time when they were not allowed to have the priesthood. The Church came to us in Africa only after the policy was taken away.

VERLYNE: I have a different understanding, in terms of why people in Africa might not be as shocked by the fact that Black people could not have the priesthood. If I was to go to an orthodox church and I was told that, as a woman, I couldn't participate in certain aspects of the religion, just simply because I am a woman, I'm going to say, "Oh, OK." That's what happens in Mormonism. I might ask a couple of questions about it, and not be OK with it, but go along with it, because that's what I grew up with. I think there is a bit of that playing out. It's hard to find a place in history where Black people have not been excluded or ostracized in some form or another. If you grew up in such an environment or had that experience, you don't accept it, but you do kind of go, "OK, that's what it is." It's a sad way of taking it in, but I think that's how it plays out.

GREG: Even in Africa?

VERLYNE: I would say that there is certainly an element of that even in Africa, especially due to colonization. It's not that people are OK with it; I think it's just that people have been told, at one point or another, that they couldn't have this or that choice because they were Black.

As a woman in the Mormon Church, you are told that you can't have the priesthood. If you go to another church where they don't give the priesthood to women, you're not going to fight it much, because that's what you grew up with. That has been your experience. So there is an element of why should you fight to have something that you never really had from the beginning? It's a very sad way to look at it, but there is some aspect of that. This is how Black people have been treated, and this is how women have been treated. It shouldn't be that way, and people have fought it. We see it with the feminist movement within the Church, as well as the LGBTQ community. Things have been said to be more inclusive. But changes are not coming. I almost want to compare it to how long it took Blacks to get the priesthood. It's taking a long time for these other groups to be heard, and I feel like it's history repeating itself.

I think that the Church needs to start addressing some of these major issues from a place of consideration, compassion and logic.

GREG: What is your relationship to the Church now?

VERLYNE: I no longer participate.

GREG: At what point in your life did you withdraw, and why?

VERLYNE: It's not something that happened at one point in time. I got to a point where I had to ask myself, if I was to operate from a place of integrity, what speaks to me? What is it that I can stand by? And what is it that I cannot stand by? It's a question that I have been asking myself, unconsciously, for many years, since being a teenager; and more consciously since my late 20s and early 30s. I continue to ask myself on a consistent basis. What can I stand by and still maintain my sense of integrity?

I am not un-choosing. I am choosing my path of integrity. I have often said to my parents that they chose, and they chose well based on their experiences. I think that moving from one continent to another continent—three continental moves—and not having the support of family and a culture, and being able to find that in the Mormon Church is something that has been good for my parents and for our family. For them, joining the Church was their differentiation, when everybody else was Catholic. It was their way of standing on their own two feet. It was their way of choosing, and being in a place of integrity.

EGIDE: My stand, in spite of everything we have been talking about, is that the Church has been a good place for us. We have five children—Verlyne is the eldest—and all five children are now married and they have good families. They have good values. As a parent, I think that with everything that happened, with our moving from Burundi to Belgium

to Canada, to a completely foreign environment, the Church has been the place of stability. We didn't have to adapt to a different culture, because the Church itself is the culture that took over and made the link between all those places. Our children are doing well, I would say. So we are blessed, and I am grateful for that.

Having lived the life I have lived—for example, my father was in a place where he was not allowed to go further in school. During the colonial years, my grandparents were forced into the Catholic Church because they had to do that, otherwise their land and cattle would have been taken away. I am personally grateful to live in these times when I can have all the benefits that they didn't have at that time, that I can be part of a church I choose and be fully part of it. I'm just grateful to be able to live in this time, because of them living in a time when all those things were not possible. Sometimes you have to recognize history. You have to recognize the way things were, and there is not too much you can do about it most of the time. You happen to be part of the change, and the change is mostly first for yourself before you can change anybody else. I am mostly grateful for the change that happened in our family because of the Church, despite everything else, all the imperfections.

VERLYNE: It has been good for our family. That is something that cannot be denied. It has been good. My father used to tell me it was huge for him to leave the Catholic Church to join the Mormon Church.

EGIDE: It was not an easy thing to do. We lost many of our friends. They would come over, for five or ten years, and ridicule us, until they finally realized that we were who we were. But they wouldn't take no for an answer for many years. So it's something that we took very seriously. When you talk about integrity, we felt like we were members of this church and we were not going to do it part-ways. When we were in Burundi, we were by ourselves. There were no other members there. We could just have disappeared. But from a place of integrity we said,

“We are Mormons, and we are going to stay Mormons until we can get more support.” That support took four years to get there, and the Church was finally accepted in Burundi and we were part of it. And we have been blessed for that.

VERLYNE: I think that that experience my parents had, in terms of being able to choose their religion, has given them the wisdom and the space for us to have the conversation of where I am at and where my family is at right now in the Church. They have been respectful of the choice. My father always says, “You are a great person, and you are a person with great values. And you are my daughter.” For me to be able to hear that, when I hear that so many people who leave the Church have issues with families and friends, I have been very fortunate to have their understanding. We are working, as a family, where people are differentiating; but we still are able to be a unit. We still are able to have a genuine connection. But that unit is not based on fear or conformity. It is based on—you are who you are, and I am who I am, and I am comfortable with where I am at, and therefore I can support you as the person that you are, even though it is different, and we are going to create space for one another. At this point we are moving forward with that understanding.

EGIDE: So, Verlyne, can I ask you a question?

VERLYNE: Yes.

EGIDE: What aspect of the Church influenced you?

VERLYNE: It’s a good question. The Church became a big influence when I was about fifteen years old, when we moved to Canada. Before that, much the guidance I had received was from my parents. So the values that I learned and the way that I am today, I really attribute a great part of it to my parents and personal experiences than I do to the Church. I

didn't learn to be the person that I am today at fifteen years old. They taught me before that, at a time when we were alone in Burundi, without the Church, or even in Belgium. I saw you living your life of integrity. I saw integrity and resilience.

The Church and my parents taught me much about personal spiritual development, the importance of family and prayer. I don't think that praying belongs to Mormonism. Prayer was an important part of our life when we were growing up. I knew from a very young age that I could converse with a higher being and that's powerful. I have seen and heard my parents' most heartfelt and sincere prayers. Prayer has always been and will always be a powerful part of my life. And singing—I sometimes find myself humming the odd church hymn as I go about the day, and I absolutely love it. This is still evolving. I really do feel like this is still evolving. There is no one answer at one time, and I am still evolving. But it takes a lot of strength to be who you need to be, in an organization that focuses on conformity. It takes a lot of courage to do that, especially when that courage is very quickly demeaned as apostasy, defiance, or cluelessness. It's a process.

EGIDE: OK, thank you.

VERLYNE: You're welcome.

What I just mentioned earlier is very much at the basis of the work I do as a psychologist in my private practice, working with couples and families. And it extends to communities: Can you be you, and can I be me, and can we still create an environment where both people can co-exist in their differences? Although my father and I see things differently, there is space for that difference. I have often been asked, "How can you maintain an organization if everybody is doing their own thing?" There is a fear that if somebody went in one direction and somebody else went in a different direction, that you could not have an organization, you could not have a unit. But I have seen it over and over that the strength



in an organization doesn't come because everybody is being, thinking, and acting the same; it comes because people are able to do their own thing while creating space for the other.

I recently read an article about the late Barbara Bush and how she supported her husband in a lot of the work that he had done in his political career, but there were two issues she disagreed with him on: she supported legal abortion and opposed the sale of assault weapons. She completely disagreed with her husband on those issues, but even though they disagreed, they were still in a genuine and supportive relationship. As long as there is space for both people to express their differences, that's what matters. People often equate disagreement or difference with division but it does not have to be that way. It doesn't need to break the relationship; it actually makes it stronger if both people are able to find space and express themselves.

One last point I would like to add: it has been more difficult for me to be a feminist in the Church than it has been to be a Black person in the Church. My questions around being Black in the Church have had more sympathy than my questions around being a feminist in the Church. I can't even imagine what it would have been like if a Black person had been excommunicated from the Mormon Church for asking to have the priesthood, which is what happened to Kate Kelly. When she asked for women to have the priesthood, she was excommunicated. That was really hard to see. I didn't want to believe it. It's the same feeling I had when I came out of that seminary lesson. "Did I really hear that right? Did she do something else to be excommunicated?" "No, she simply advocated for women to have the priesthood." It was really heartbreaking.

EGIDE: There will always be hard questions in an organization like this, but as far as I know it is a great organization. Is it perfect? People are not perfect. But personally, from the blessings that I have received, I can act based on those so that I can have more blessings. That's what I can do. But there definitely will be questions, and I will not agree with

everything that happens in the Church. I have some doubts and some pains, but we have a prophet of God, and so I stand pretty good with all that. Some people may do some things that are different. Some may have stronger influence than others, but I have lots of respect for the doctrine of the Church.

VERLYNE: If we look at an organization being a circle, there are a lot of people who are trying really, really hard to stay right there, just on the edge. They are working really hard, and I think that requires a lot of courage.

EGIDE: That's what we strive to do, and it's not always easy.

VERLYNE: But there are also people who are standing just on the outside of the circle. We often hear about people who are trying so hard to change things from within, but you can also change things from the outside. If it becomes so painful to be just on the inside, then it's OK to be on the outside and just live that life, especially if it's a life of integrity and a life that makes you happy.

GREG: I think that you both have very compelling stories that need to be out there. I hope they will be read by a lot of members. They are good stories, and they are authentic.

EGIDE: Thank you.

VERLYNE: Thank you.

GREG: I see the whole purpose of the Church as providing a framework for people to act out their faith life. That can take many different forms.

After the Curtain Falls,  
Isabella Speaks in Achromatics

Dayna Patterson

*Dear Isabel,  
I have a motion much imports your good,  
Where to, if you'll a willing ear incline,  
What's mine is yours, and what is yours is mine.*  
—Vincentio, Duke of Vienna, *Measure for Measure*

What's yours is yours  
and I am

{Cool Charcoal Slate}

/sworn to simplicity

he ignores my short white veil  
chaplet of beads brown tunic/

not yours. You're silver,

{Nickel}

tarnished, a self-made  
playwright-god, blocking  
others' moves. But I'm

{Platinum Gunmetal Lead}

/not yet bride  
of christ a nova  
not yet postulant  
awaiting knotted cord

{Eider Down Whale}

wimple not yet the serre-tête  
black veil brown habit/

no actor. Throat open,

/saint clare sister  
 savior patron of laundry  
 wash me/

{Grey-green Blue-grey Glaucous}  
 would-be stage master,  
 you will hear me.

/saint clare  
 patron of goldsmiths gild  
 my speaking/

{Metallic Franciscan}  
 I've already sworn my faith to  
 /saint clare patron of television i'm antenna  
 to your signal enclose me in ghostly  
 calligraphy/

{Dark Dim Light}  
 the One  
 you've failed to impersonate.

/saint clare patron  
 of needlework stitch me  
 a center of winter/

You've un-haloed unholy  
 angels, spared a sinner-  
 brother's life. For these mercies

/saint clare patron of eye  
 disease shield these  
 orbs from/

{Fog Goblin}  
 melded, my honest  
 thanks. But I do not consent

/saint clare patron of good  
 weather blow me always  
 january/

{Storm Sleet Jet}

to your jack-in-a-box  
proposal. When you uncowl,

/grow me into thorned  
rose my blood

{Cinereous Ash}

reveal a dull crown, I unveil  
my answer, yank back crushed  
velvet to declare:

frost to snow-broth/

*/I hold the Lord—  
and I am held/*

{Smoke Marengo}

*Wolf.* I say *No.* I say

## Self-Portrait of Mormon Middle Child as Isabella

*Dayna Patterson*

### I.

One by one within a month, four siblings bring their grievances before Father, ruler of our domain. The laws of the home are too strict, they complain, no gum in the house—let alone sex or booze. No shoes on the living room's cream carpet. A three-hour dose of church Sunday morning, an hour of seminary each day. They prefer to smoke pot, join debate club and practice their hot words on the walls of our home, fire bombs through windows. They drink and fuck and play angry guitars in the garage, dip tube socks in gasoline, light them, slingshot flaming baby gerbils, rodent rockets, over the backyard fence. They raise geckos, garter snakes, an albino rat they shoot in the head when it escapes and eats a litter of baby gerbils. They hyperbolize to shock, say they've tried heroin, crack, watch Father crumble to new resolve, his whiplash no longer lax. Laws no more a scarecrow where birds perch, forgetting terror. He cuts them off, clips their wings, hurls them into future.

### II.

I cloister myself in my room, like a Mormon nun, except there's no such thing. I want strict restraint, wake before sunrise to walk to seminary, where I claw my hands to stay awake through lessons I've heard since primary. I mark up my scriptures to a rainbow of Godwords, learn my favorites first by rote, then by heart, praise fathers from the pulpit, determined to balm Dad's disappointment, to foil the failures of all my siblings, the sin of coffee far off

as Australia, the sin of sex distant as Saturn  
with its chastity belt. I would be a ring of ice rock,  
snowbroth blood. I would have God's name  
in my mouth to chew on, my sustenance to savor,  
a night-and-day saint with my symbols: a vase of milk  
-white porcelain with blooming sego,  
a golden liahona, compass with needle to arrow  
the Godward path I'd follow. I'd place on the altar 18  
months of my life, missionary away the days  
knocking on doors shut like coffin lids,  
wading through thigh-deep noes. I would marry  
in a crenellated holy temple my first kiss.  
I would sing hymns and hymns to Him,  
force my voice *forte*: louder, louder, loud  
enough to shake down angels.

## The Pioneer Woman, St. George

*Kevin Klein*

She brought her family to this god-  
forsaken place at His request.  
She will petition until He reconsiders  
and crops cover the reproach  
of a roiling red valley where  
not a single tree grows.

Only yesterday they unhitched the team,  
unloaded the wagon, pitched the tent.  
Everything they lack is exactly  
what they'll ask Him with. Is faith.

Tomorrow begins the digging, cutting,  
carting water in leaky, too-small buckets  
from streams they've already named and prayed for  
to last through summer.

All day, heat waves conjured the mirage  
or vision of oases, towns, a promised land  
that will flourish through His covenants  
and hers.



The late sun glares  
across a horizon of gray sagebrush.  
The woman shields her solemn  
brown and green-flecked eyes  
from the past, its poverty and riches.  
Shields them from this sunset,  
squints but doesn't blink  
until the bushes flame, until she too  
is afire and not consumed.

# One Thousand Two Hundred Sixty Days

*Kathryn Knight Sonntag*

*Revelation 12:6–14*

Sometimes in a long white  
gown, often in tattered brown  
wool, always with two wings  
of a great eagle on Her back, Asherah  
circles the edges  
of the square, of the wilderness where  
we have left Her,  
watching.

Sometimes in the towering sphere  
of the temple, we continue to build,  
the void at its center, the scar  
of Her uprooting  
flickers Her image—white  
bark and meat, branch and trunk,  
the softness of Her belly fruit—plump  
pears, pomegranates—  
pulling on the softness  
of my womb.

## The Tree at the Center

*Kathryn Knight Sonntag*

We talk often  
of the Son's surrender  
His long suffering, His forever  
atoning—the shards  
of the universe, gathered  
to reconcile all  
the ways in which God  
has been lost  
to us.

I want to know  
about the surrender  
of the Mother, if it felt at all  
like a body  
laid flat  
as creation writhed  
shaking the bed  
of Earth while Her mind  
broke  
into shards, into the wilderness  
into the wolf. No word, no language  
separate from the surging  
womb.

I want to know  
how death hit Her square  
on the meatiest turn  
of Her trunk, then dragged Her  
from the forest—the embroidered branches  
rent from Solomon's temple—  
to pierce Her stiff arms  
with Her son's.

I want to know  
how a forest survives  
without trees, how  
we will welcome the Son  
with the fires  
still burning.

## The Older Covenant

*Kathryn Knight Sonntag*

*Gospel of Philip  
Job 38:33–36*

Take me back  
before the broken tablets,  
back to the secrets of winds  
unfurled, constellations rising  
in a new horizon, mud  
and branch called by name.

I know of the Tree, good  
and evil swirling  
in its fruit, alive  
before the lesser law  
became our golden calf.

Lady Wisdom wanders,  
knows too well  
that nothing transgresses  
its appointed order  
but we.

Take me back  
to the pattern of the heavens  
sewn in the lining  
of Her dress.

Give me the wisdom  
of the ant, she who  
needs no instruction  
on how to gather  
and harvest, on the true  
measure of her  
creation.

Grant me a gaze  
into the Holy  
of Holies that I may know  
the paths of everything  
that lives.

## An Essential Conversation

Matthew L. Harris and Newell G. Bringhurst, eds. *The Mormon Church & Blacks: A Documentary History*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2015. 217 pp. Paper: \$25.00. ISBN: 9780039744.

*Reviewed by Devery S. Anderson*

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints continues to deal with its past racial teachings. For 126 years, African American men were denied priesthood ordination, while both men and woman of African descent were barred from receiving temple ordinances. Scholarly examinations of these controversial Mormon policies began nearly a half century ago with Armand L. Mauss, Stephen G. Taggart, and Lester E. Bush Jr., and have continued to this day with award-winning assessments by Russell W. Stevenson and W. Paul Reeve. The present volume, edited by Matthew L. Harris and Newell G. Bringhurst, examines a variety of primary documents that tell the evolution of Mormon ideas on race—from canonized teachings on racial degeneration to a full disavowal of racist views in the twenty-first century.

This is a documentary history that unfolds by telling an important story. The commentary gives it the flavor and flow of a narrative history while at the same time providing a treasure trove of rich primary documents. The volume is divided into seven chapters, each encompassing a transitional period regarding Mormons and Blacks that allows the reader to distinguish each stage of development, how each contained elements of earlier teachings, and the disconnect that occurred that left most Mormons unaware of the real history of the priesthood and temple policies. The chapters include an overview of canonical teachings about race, an examination of race during the Joseph Smith and Brigham Young eras, a look at how the priesthood

ban and racial doctrines were taught from the death of Brigham Young until the mid-twentieth century, the priesthood and temple policies during the post-WWII period, the coming of the 1978 revelation, and Mormonism in the aftermath of that revelation. Each chapter is accompanied by introductory essays that provide important, although often disturbing backstories about the documents. Dozens of documents are included and annotated, but the book benefits by the fact that it does not contain every statement mentioned by every Church leader on the subject. The documents chosen and the historical background provided are more than enough to make the case for the editors to demonstrate how each era was affected by the teachings under review. This wise selection makes the volume accessible. As such, it should be read by everyone who wants an essential grasp on the topic and to understand it sufficiently.

The book opens by reviewing passages from the LDS canon, most notably the Book of Mormon, Doctrine and Covenants, and Pearl of Great Price, which help distinguish what ideas grew from these texts and how Church leaders used them to formulate their ideas on race. Racial degeneration is clearly taught in 2 Nephi 5:21–23, in that black skin is a curse placed upon the Lamanites for unrighteous behavior. Those who mix their seed with the Lamanites bring the curse upon themselves. Although these passages have been interpreted to apply specifically to Native Americans, they perpetuate racial stereotypes already in place in antebellum America; considering that, Blacks would hardly fare better in Mormonism. Conversely, 2 Nephi 30:5–6 and 3 Nephi 2:14–16 teach that racial regeneration is possible through repentance. Mormons can distance themselves from the comments made by generations of General Authorities based on their own interpretations of these passages, but the verses remain a part of the canon, making a reinterpretation essential.

As the editors point out, racist interpretations of scripture were not controversial at the time and fall in line with theories advanced by racial theorists in Joseph Smith's day (7). The books of Moses and Abraham



speak directly to Blacks in advancing the biblical idea of a curse on Cain and his descendants and the continuation of that curse through Noah's son Ham. Pharaoh was of the lineage that was denied the priesthood. Even though this scripture came from Joseph Smith, he never applied it in the way his successors in Church leadership did. In other words, Joseph Smith shaped the canon, but the canon did not totally shape him.

Some were prone to reading more into the scriptures than what the texts say, setting in motion teachings that would take more than one generation to shake off. Abraham 3:22–23 talks of two premortal beings, Jesus and Lucifer, who were willing to come to earth and carry out the work of God. Lucifer became angered when his plan was rejected, and he took a third of the hosts of heaven with him. Orson Hyde theorized that those spirits who sided with Lucifer were born into mortality with the curse of a black skin (14). It is well known to students of Mormonism that this idea took root and was advanced unapologetically until the priesthood ban was restricted in 1978 and even thereafter. This is clear nearly a century later with the apostolic committee assigned to study Bruce R. McConkie's book *Mormon Doctrine* to determine its accuracy. The book's entries on Blacks echoed Hyde's teachings from the mid-nineteenth century but nowhere in the list of errors found by the committee was any mention of McConkie's teachings on Blacks (71–72).

The Joseph Smith and Brigham Young eras understandably each receive their own focus in this volume because these two men set the stage for the actions of their successors, who then spent decades advancing ideas they felt echoed or smoothed them out. Mormons are generally aware now that a few Blacks held the priesthood in Smith's day with his knowledge and consent, knowledge made common thanks to revisions in introductory material in the Doctrine and Covenants and the publication and dissemination of the officially sanctioned Gospel Topics essay, both released in 2013. The documents make clear that not only did Young start the racial ban, he also explained why he did so, teachings the modern Church recently denounced in its essay. Said Young,

“Now I will tell you what I know; when the mark was put upon Cain, Abels children was in all probability young; the Lord told Cain that he should not receive the blessings of the preisthood nor his see[d], until the last of the posterity of Able had received the priesthood, until the redemption of the earth. If there never was a prophet, or apostle of Jesus Christ spoke it before, I tell you, this people that are commonly called negroes are the children of Cain” (38). As uncomfortable as his teachings make us feel, we cannot deal with the ban without acknowledging Young’s thinking and analyzing where it came from. Harris and Bringhurst, throughout the entire book, not only provide the reader with the doctrines and ideas taught but include the sources that explain them. For example, three sections in the Doctrine and Covenants—87, 101, and 134—address slavery, the latter noting in verse twelve that “we do not believe it right to interfere with bond servants, neither preach the gospel to, nor baptize them, contrary to the will and wish of their masters, nor to meddle with or influence them in the least, to cause them to be dissatisfied with their situations in this life.” This statement was meant to distance Mormons from the abolitionist movement of which Ohio was a “hotbed” (17). Context is vitally important here and the editors do a fine job of illuminating it.

Instances of priesthood ordination among Black men in early Mormonism have been celebrated by modern scholars to show a degree of inclusiveness within the early Church that was lost for over 120 years. The downside of the ban on a personal level often gets overlooked. Nowhere is that clearer than in the case of Jane Manning James. Faithful to the end, James wanted nothing more than to receive her endowment and be sealed to the Prophet Joseph Smith as part of his family. After much pleading, Church leaders came up with a compromise that allowed her to be sealed eternally to Smith as a servant (50–55). Because eternity is a long time, one wonders if these leaders saw a situation in which her status would ever change. James’s letters to her leaders are included in this book in their entirety.

In the post-WWII period, Church leaders began to be confronted about the racial issue by sociologists within the Church, and by the existence of the fledgling civil rights movement, which they could not altogether ignore. Two of the most notable scholars questioning accepted LDS teachings were Lowery Nelson and later Lester Bush, and their effect on Church leadership cannot be underestimated. When Nelson was not ignored he was chastised, but the questions he raised were important and would not go away (64–65). Most of the leadership paid little attention to Bush's work either, but the more astute and sensitive among them, Spencer W. Kimball, paid attention (94–96). It was another five years before the revelation came, but scholarship had set the wheels in motion.

An examination of the aftermath of the 1978 revelation is perhaps the most important part of the book because it helps us understand how far we have come. In 1998, to quell desires for an apology or disavowal of its past, the Church announced that the revelation spoke for itself (123). Clearly, such statements only deal with a fraction of what needs to be dealt with regarding this issue. McConkie is a case in point. Shortly after the revelation he counseled members to “forget what I said” about the racial doctrine prior to June 1978. Although he altered his entry on Blacks in the next edition of *Mormon Doctrine* in light of the revelation, under the heading “Races of Men,” he held to the idea that nonwhite people are of the race they are because of some transgression in the premortal existence. Removing racial restrictions from Black men and women but failing to deal with the reasons why they did it in the first place became a controversy in and of itself. On top of that, keeping 1950s and 60s books by popular Church leaders in print that perpetuated racial myths only led to confusion. Further clarification was mandatory, but it took decades.

Clearly, LDS leaders were uncomfortable revisiting this issue for a variety of reasons. As prophets, seers, and revelators, what are the implications when evidence indicates that they were ever wrong on a policy, doctrine, or teaching, either collectively or individually? What are the

implications when culture, popular belief, and perpetuating harmful myths become intertwined with doctrine? A 1949 statement, signed by the First Presidency, carried enormous weight, and cited scripture to back up the claim that Blacks were cursed through their actions in the premortal existence. Calling Church practices concerning Blacks “not a matter of the declaration of a policy but of direct commandment from the Lord,” it quoted Brigham Young that people of African descent were “cursed with a skin of blackness” (66). By examining this and the other documents included here, the editors provide information on an important subject and forces the need for solid answers to legitimate questions. Whether they come or not is another matter altogether. Nevertheless, Mormonism has matured to the point where it should welcome a book like this that lays everything out on the table regarding its racial past.

My only real quibble with the volume is the annotation format. The notes are informative and shed light on the documents, but they are included as endnotes, something not at all convenient in documentary histories where the notes are nearly as important as the text. This is a book that cannot be properly perused and understood fully without reading the notes.

The existence of this volume provides the best response to President Dallin H. Oaks’s admonition from June 1, 2018, that we should now look forward and not backward regarding the Church’s former racial practices. Oaks is right that moving forward is essential to maintain a healthy, happy, and diverse Church membership. However, this volume provides all the legitimate reasons to look back because many questions need to be answered. The conversation this book seeks to begin is an essential step in that process.

## Mother, May We?

*Dove Song: Heavenly Mother in Mormon Poetry.* Edited by Tyler Chadwick, Dayna Patterson, and Martin Pulido. El Cerrito, Calif.: Peculiar Pages, 2018. 400 pp. Paper: \$21.99. ISBN: 9781732030206.

*Reviewed by Gail Turley Houston*

She is willful. She is in the other room. She is “the feminine / present subjunctive.” She is “tessellating.” She is “throneless, / wanders.” She is “queen of heaven.” She is a “Heavenly Hausfrau.” She is “Medusa in the kingdom.” She is the “Pillar of Womanhood.” She is “executrix.” She is a “mahogany” woman. She is “the Holy Soul.” She is.

These are among the things we learn about Mother in Heaven in *Dove Song*. It is glorious.

Edited by Tyler Chadwick, Dayna Patterson, and Martin Pulido, *Dove Song* is an anthology of almost two centuries of Mormon poetry about Mother in Heaven. A hefty tome at four hundred pages, it is not to be read in one sitting. Treasure it. We need this book, says Susan Elizabeth Howe in her introduction, for it is a “work of history” and a “sacred record” of not only Heavenly Mother’s existence but the “personal quest of the poets to learn about their Mother in Heaven” (21). Indeed, *Dove Song* gets it so right by foregrounding the historical significance of the “expansive state of contemporary Mormon poetry” that contemplates Heavenly Mother, in other words, to do for her what art works have done for over two thousand years in establishing, legitimizing, and authorizing the Christian God the Father and Jesus Christ, who were shunned and ridiculed before Constantine’s Edict of Milan in 313 CE (8).

The task is enormous. To overturn centuries of patriarchy’s occlusion, elision, and assault on the Great Mother, the Goddess, Mother Mary, Inanna, Isis, who came before. After that erasure “eons of / amnesia”

about and “partial / prints” are left of her, her “chapters purged” from the “book of history,” as so poignantly inscribed in Ann Gardner Stone’s “Mother,” Tara Timpson’s, “Missing Her,” and Paul Swenson’s “Motherless Child” (109, 268, and 135). As the editors of this volume tersely record, the “canon of scripture includes no direct, individual revelation of our Heavenly Mother” (24). Put Mother in Heaven’s tepid entry in the *Encyclopedia of Mormonism* against Jesus and God the Father and, yes, she is a cipher. With no edict from Salt Lake City regarding her authority, we are left to “infer” it from “hints” and a hymn by Eliza R. Snow.<sup>1</sup>

In their variety of genres, tones, and imagery, the poetry in this volume illustrates the understanding that a god has no crown nor scepter without art. The building, singing, painting, lyricizing, sculpting, and dancing are the infrastructure for the edifice of worship. The arts no god can essay; it is left to the realm of mortals to create—mortals who make mythologies for their gods. Many of the writers in this volume project that obligation to make a mythology for her theology: In “I Can’t Imagine Her,” Marilyn Bushman-Carlton writes, “I need to know an office you can claim / here on earth where we and myth exist” (271). Tiffany Moss Singer assumes the mantle of authority when she proclaims, “Mine is the mythos of Mother, in all her iterations” (“Flesh and Bones,” 259). Alex Caldiero, too, lyricizes the “mythic / moment” of becoming conscious of the Goddess (“Once Upon a Time,” 144). Maxine Hanks is particularly drawn to the mythos of the goddess, as in “Truth Eternal,” which limns Heavenly Mother as an “endless divine archetype” (96).

But there is more than myth-making here. Joyful exploration of so many genres praise and appraise her. Here, splendid visions and revisions of the Bible dance upon the page: psalms that “cry for wisdom” (Nola Wallace’s “A Psalm,” 117); a witty rewriting of that old misogynist St. Paul (S. E. Page, “To the Unknown Goddess”); an edgy, tongue-in-cheek Song of Solomon of sorts from Steven L. Peck (“My Turn on Earth”).

---

1. Elaine Anderson Cannon, “Mother in Heaven,” *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, [https://eom.byu.edu/index.php/Mother\\_in\\_Heaven](https://eom.byu.edu/index.php/Mother_in_Heaven).

One is bent with grace to hear Mother say, “how often / would I have gathered you as an eagle / feeds her fledglings” in Howe’s stunning parable “Mother God” (277). Catechism skitters in Timpson’s charming “Small Gifts,” where it is asked, “Is your name hidden in the color of vermillion sandstone in this / canyon” (269).

Secular forms abound in sonnets (a perfect fourteen lines manifesting the “azure” of her body in Tyler Chadwick’s “Goddess Sonnets”). A Shakespearean “O” by Emma Jay, whose sound symbolism shimmers. Charles Edmund Richardson’s “Excerpts from Footprints of Gospel Feet for the Modest-in-Heart,” written in 1891, is essentially Miltonic in explaining God and the Goddess’s ways to (wo)man. Marden Clark engages T. S. Eliot’s late poetry of hope in the lyric adeptness of his “Mother of Us All,” while Cheryl Bruno takes us into the territory of the astonishing religious poet Gerard Manley Hopkins in the lithesome line “a great loneliness has now descended” in “Message to Cecily.” Linda Sillitoe’s nursery rhyme “Song of Creation” gentles the spirit. And then there is the sheer gusto of William H. Apperley’s “To My Fellow Workers,” which was published in 1910 and reads like a Marxist manifesto, beginning and ending as it does with a call to the “Comrades,” or the sheer chutzpah of Ashley Mae Hoiland’s “Some Women Whose Stories I Have Known or Am Getting to Know,” which is wholly and, holy, a roll call of great feminist names.

Is it quibbling to note that in this volume Mother in Heaven is usually inferred as white and inordinately interested in Utah, that busy Beehive that has forgotten its Queen Mother long since (or as Patterson writes in “If Mother Braids a Waterfall,” she’s a “queen bee with no drones” [242]). The Mormoncentric-ness of, well, Mormonism, invading the exquisite territory of the divine—what can you do? But of equal concern is that, too often, where Father in Heaven is presented as tangible and ready to hand, Mother is amorphous, gauzy, seen through a soft-focus lens. She is in the sky, in the water. She is to be (not) seen and heard in nature or the aching metaphor of earthly parenting.

Perhaps I gesture here, for she is not only described in metaphor—she is metaphor, that classic bait and switch whereby the vehicle (the image) sometimes overtakes the tenor (the concept described). Rather like what patriarchy did to the goddess. She is the thorn in theology's side: there can be no Trinity with or without her. Joseph Smith probably saw that coming. He knew you could not square the paradigm of a Father, Son, and Holy Ghost with that of a mother and father godhead (which Jonathan Penny in "The Toscano Heresy" extends further with the line, "What if that Holy, Heav'nly Three / Is Godly Him and Him and She?" (184). In another riff in this theologically problematic direction is Timothy Liu's wonderful query, "Exactly how many / wives does my / Heavenly Father / have" ("Strait is the Gate," 284). Yes, this volume goes with bravado into that brave and incomprehensible world. (My sneaking suspicion is that Joseph got the whole idea of the goddess from that woman of all strengths, Eliza R. Snow, who had been raped by a Missouri mob, the appendix informs us. All Mother's mercy upon her.)

So, then, it is the brash seekers my heart follows after in this volume: Marilène Phipps in "My Father's Sister" announcing that "men occupy the earth like an army" (197). Melody Newey Johnson reminding us that "the chapel I inhabit / invites no female to the rostrum" ("How Long the Call," 193). Melissa Dalton-Bradford demanding "no intermediary, please" between her and Mother in Heaven ("Phoning Home," 212). Elisa Eastwood Pulido recognizing that even the goddess gets paid 70-odd cents to every man's dollar—"Oh Queen of the menial wage!" ("Sightings: The Heavenly Mother in North Central Texas," 244). Timothy Liu's craggy reminder that we "shit" and make love and that is why "it's okay / to contemplate / the other half / of something else / no one has seen" ("Heavenly Mother Ode," 281). Jenny Webb's elixir for those put off by endless Mormon niceness, that, "My breast is not my / Femininity," if that's why men can't just deal ("A Theology of Flesh," 294). Harlow Clark's hilarious "Adam-Ondi-Ahman" that features Eve asking Mother,



“Did you really tell him [Job] to curse God and die?” And she answers, “Yes I did” (131).

These illustrious quibblers bring to the fore the question of why so many of us have been so cautious and submissive with the brethren for so long. What makes us so afraid to ask one simple question: How can we know ourselves if we do not know her? This volume rings with that query, indirect or full-bodied.

As so many of these poems acknowledge, God is a remembering of who we are; and if God is home, then Mother must be there. As Robert A. Rees imagines it, Mother is our “deepest memory” (“Mother,” 175), or, as Nola Wallace pens this is our deepest woe, “Let me know you that I may know myself” (“A Psalm,” 117). Carol Lynn Pearson doesn’t let it go, in so many of her poems, wondering, ironically, why we must leave Mother hidden in that room of Her own.

We worshippers of Mother remain a cult within a cult if she is not known more widely. Indeed, we need this volume of poetry to prepare us for the revelations at hand.



## Morning Has Broken

Robert A. Rees. *Waiting for Morning*. Provo: Zarahemla Books, 2018. 145 pp. Paper: \$12.79. ISBN: 9780999347201.

*Reviewed by Karen Marguerite Moloney*

The day the head gasket blew in the California desert, it was late summer, 1987—and therefore, stiflingly hot. The painter’s van was hooked to a travel trailer, living quarters for my foster brother Karl, his wife, and

their five children while driving back to Utah. But with the van out of commission, they were now not only broke but stranded. An elderly man pulled them to a junk yard, the children were registered in a Victorville elementary school, and Karl walked ten miles for painting jobs—too few, however, and fewer still after the stock market crashed that October. The situation grew desperate. Thirty-one years later, a nephew recalls, “We were living in squalor; we had nothing.” Karl called my mother, then in her seventies and relying on social security, to relay the news. My mother called me, at the time a cash-strapped graduate student at UCLA. I contacted my bishop, Robert A. Rees.

Though members of the Church, Karl and his family were not members of my ward, and Bob had no official obligation to help. Even so, he responded immediately, sending me off to the local bishop’s warehouse. Laden with food, my mother and I were soon navigating lonely desert roads in search of a white painter’s van hooked to a trailer. When we found it, its cupboards were bare, the family beyond hungry. The food we delivered was a lifesaver.

I’ve wondered sometimes at the alacrity, with so few questions asked, with which Bob responded to my plea for help. But now, having read *Waiting for Morning*, his recently published, de facto “collected poems” (and window to his soul), I wonder no more. “Heart-rate Variability” and “Indigos of Darkness,” for example, both recall the day his mother left their Durango home with a boyfriend—and never returned. Bob was seven, his siblings nine and four. For two weeks, until the police arrived, the trio were on their own.

Bob recalls:

We charged food at the store next door,  
mostly candy and soda pop.

When we ran out of clean shirts,  
we wore pajama tops to school

Then stayed home  
when kids teased us. ("Indigos," 37)

Eventually the children were removed to a foster home and their father summoned, though the letters took months to reach the young seaman, recovering from extensive shrapnel wounds "in a Navy hospital in Oceanside" ("Indigos," 38). When the letters finally arrived, as Bob recollects in "Heart-rate Variability," the seaman received "special leave from the hospital. / One day he knock[ed] at the door" (35).

As Bob's readers and friends can attest (I count myself a member of both camps), that seven-year-old boy not only survived this turmoil but grew up to become a deeply sensitive and optimistic man, a caring humanitarian, and a keen observer of the natural world (not to mention a Mormon bishop par excellence, one whose compassion for a struggling family he'd never met inspires me to this day). But Bob is also more than the sum of these parts. At age forty-five, he began publishing poetry, and *Waiting for Morning* tallies for us that venture's exquisite results over his next nearly four decades.

The poems' themes are wide-ranging. A native Californian, I especially appreciate Bob's evocations of the northern California coastline: "the sea's soft sibilants, the pelican's / cry, the liquid splash of dolphins" in "Gene at Wilder Beach" (61). I relish as well his depictions of the Santa Cruz Mountains: the shadow of their redwoods in "Washing Your Hair in the Kitchen Sink" (126), their "granite / outcroppings" in "I Will Carry Stones from the River" (131), and the "blue-gray herons / above the San Lorenzo" in the haiku "[Two blue-gray herons]" (137). I smile at the California poppies growing "All along / Pacific Coast Highway" in "April" (69). As I read "Praise," I close my eyes, better to savor the "Rainbow-winged butterflies, / harlequin dragonflies," and "spotted salamanders" along King's Creek, tributary of a Sierra Nevada watercourse. Normally afraid of snakes, I even admire

a royal four-foot snake  
absorbing summer sun,

its black and white bands  
dividing the world  
with absolute certainty. (70)

I'm back to smiling as I read "Morning Glory," in which Bob makes a litany of the state's

purple larkspur,  
starflowers,  
wild lilac—and  
morning glories  
climbing the ancient oaks. (75)

California's trees also merit praise: jacarandas flourish in a series of delicate haiku ("Jacaranda," 77–78) while persimmons, bearing "endless seeds / and blossoms" ("Sun Seeds," 81), host starlings ("Turning," 83). And a eucalyptus shelters a "black-cassocked crow" ("Forgotten Birds," 84). In these poems and others, Bob transports me to the landscape of my youth.

Bob also takes us with him far beyond the Golden State's borders. Citing only a few examples, together we visit Anne Frank's hiding place ("For Anne Frank," 22; "No. 263 Prinsegracht, Amsterdam," 23); accompany Bob on a tour of China (see all seven poems in the section "China Poems," 43–51); stand by him Christmas morning in a Lithuanian orphanage ("Blackbirds," 20); sit beside him at a Chekhov play in London ("The Dancing Beggar of London," 6), and fish with him on the Upper Weber ("Fishers," 87–90). We go back in time, too, as Joseph struggles with the news that his new wife Mary is somehow, mysteriously, pregnant ("The Cradle," 115); as Joseph Smith chooses to unearth the gold plates, no matter the personal consequences ("Salamander," 105–11); and as a young Japanese woman "fears she will go mad" in 1942 at Heart Mountain, the Wyoming Relocation Camp, in a poem of the same name (5).

For me, sometimes a poet and always a teacher of verse, there are additional sharp pleasures. Bob observes in his brief introduction, "The

list of poets living and dead to whom I am indebted are too numerous to mention" (v), which may be true, but his poetic mentors are not so great a throng as to blur together, fading from sight among his lines, and their bright appearances increase at least this reader's delight. I'll likely include "Plums," the first section of his two-part "Poems" (58), for example, when I next teach William Carlos Williams's "This Is Just to Stay"; I'll juxtapose "Praise" (70) with Gerard Manley Hopkins's "God's Grandeur"; and offer "In the Leningrad Metro" (138) when we read Ezra Pound's "In a Station of the Metro." When we study Seamus Heaney's litanies, I can point to poems like the afore mentioned "Morning Glory" for comparison. This, I will tell my students, is one of the ways poets create new poems: learning their craft, but also drawing fresh inspiration, expanding the meaning and relevance of the original examples, pleasing not only fellow poets and teachers of poetry but also those who, unaware of links to past poetics, nonetheless appreciate the present.

I could go on. I could speak of Bob's spare yet heart rending approach to grief, sincerity in love, bonds with a grandson, appreciation for other religious faiths, masterful haiku, and cleverly arranged "found poems," but I'd rather have you pick up the volume for yourselves. These are poems by a Mormon poet, yes, but one with an ecumenical, all-embracing heart. Read his poetry, and I believe you'll agree: the poems exude universal appeal and deserved first publication in national journals. They are that good.

I have one quibble. The small lines that appear at the bottom of every page fail to communicate whether the poem at hand continues to the next page. This is confusing, unnecessarily breaking a poem's flow as the reader turns the page, checking to see if there is more. Why not remove the small line on pages where the poems continue? Readers would know then whether to bask in the self-contained beauty of a one-page poem, or hold their breath, turn the page, and read on.

Meanwhile, morning has broken. These poems may help me understand Bob's compassionate response to my brother's plight—he was in

a position to help; he could do nothing else—but they also allow me to rejoice with the poet in the world around us. Bob may have come to poetry later than most, but he has more than mastered his trade. He tells us he is “Waiting for Morning,” but as far as I’m concerned, he need wait no more.



## It’s Lonely at the Top

Ryan Shoemaker. *Beyond the Lights*. No Record Press, 2018. 192 pp. Paper: \$15.00. ISBN: 9780983586029.

*Reviewed by Alison Brimley*

The train, where I do most of my reading these days, can actually be a hard place to read. It can be difficult for the characters in a book to compete with the characters I encounter in front of me—the patrons of mass transit striking up conversations with each other, and sometimes, at random, with me. Ryan Shoemaker’s collection *Beyond the Lights*, published earlier this year by No Record Press, had no problem contending. His stories are immediate, accessible, and by turns humorous and heartbreaking.

The structure of *Beyond the Lights*—which is in fact divided into three disparate sections—makes you feel as though you’ve read three collections in one. The first chunk, consisting mostly of short, funny, fragmented tales of fatherhood and family life, contrasts sharply with the second section, in which one gets the sense that Shoemaker is stretching his limbs: these stories sprawl and dive deep into their characters’ psyches. Many of the stories in this second section also center on Mormon characters, though I wouldn’t say they deal deeply with Mormonism

itself. The title story, and one of the collection's strongest, reads like a blend of *American Graffiti* and T. C. Boyle's "Greasy Lake" with a little Mormonism thrown in: two boys nearing the end of high school and facing the prospect of missionary service spend one last night raising hell at the encouragement of their friend Bing, and while Bing is full of empty promises and false bravado, there's a heavy sense of nostalgia for the lost youth this tragic night represents. Young men poised on the threshold of adulthood are a favorite of Shoemaker's, reappearing in the other stories throughout this section.

The final section, though, reverts again to a more lighthearted tone (at first), and features a pair of stories that read like variations on the theme of an educator's dilemmas. The subject is treated almost satirically in "After All the Fun We Had" (which shares much in common in subject matter and tone with Donald Barthelme's "The School"), where unmotivated high school students "stare with dreamy, molasses eyes" and shout "'We're bored. . . . Bored!'" prompting administrators to hire "cool" rather than qualified teachers and implement regular school carnivals featuring rappers and inflatable bouncy castles. This same student boredom resurfaces in "Our Students," though here it is underwritten by a grittier reality. In this story, an aspiring law student takes a job teaching troubled teens for a year as a way to pad his resume, and what little idealism he may have arrived with is quickly challenged as he interacts with veteran teachers—men who once had aspirations like his own—who tell him over regular drinks, "This isn't Hollywood. These kids will break your heart, even the good ones."

Despite variations in theme and style, the thing that makes the collection feel truly united is that Shoemaker's main characters have most outward characteristics in common: they are all men, all fairly young, all fairly financially secure. Because of this, we sometimes get the feeling that we're following different permutations of the same character, dropped into different scenes and different stages of life. These varying visions of the young white American male emphasize the ways in which

a character in such a situation is both blessed and cursed. The theme of privilege—racial, economic, or both—appears frequently throughout the book, and while these stories' main characters enjoy social advantages of just about every kind, conflict often springs from their encounters with people outside their sphere. Again and again, characters are given a chance to reach out in some possibly meaningful way to someone below them, and, again and again, they squander it. It's easy to judge these characters for doing the clearly wrong thing, but after considering all alternatives, what they ought to have done doesn't become much clearer.

As a female reader, I was particularly drawn to the multiple incarnations of the wife/female-love-interest character that appear throughout the book. These women, at least as presented through the perspectives of their husbands, are not as complex or intelligent as the men see themselves to be. Sometimes this is played for laughs, as in "A Stay-at-Home Dad Documents His Sex Life on a Fitbit—Here's What Happened," where a sex-starved husband prepares his wife's favorite dinner, nibbles her earlobes in bed, then listens patiently as she "recounts the entire plot of *Vampire Chronicles* Vol. 1" in hopes of putting her in a "sexy mood." Sometimes it's more serious, as in "The Crossing," where the lawyer-narrator's nervous, pregnant wife Kendra, speaking of the Mexicans moving into their middle-class Arizona neighborhood, delivers lines like, "Don't you see? These people want what they want and they don't care how they get it." What the proliferation of female characters like these really speaks to, though, is the essential isolation at the heart of almost any short story. As writer Frank O'Connor famously said, "There is in the short story at its most characteristic something we do not often find in the novel—an intense awareness of human loneliness. Indeed, it might be truer to say that while we often read a familiar novel again for companionship, we approach the short story in a very different mood." When Kendra makes this easy-to-judge comment about Mexican migrants, she has no idea that her husband (our narrator) has been dealing at work with ethical dilemmas and physical threats stemming



from hiring illegal aliens to clean his law office. And why doesn't she have any idea? Because the narrator hasn't told her. Clearly, he doesn't feel he can. This story and others emphasize the terrible loneliness of keeping a part of yourself from the person you've chosen to be closest to.

But being cut off in some essential way from a lover isn't the only kind of loneliness the book foregrounds. For me, one of the collection's most intense moments comes in the story "The Righteous Road," which follows Derrick, a young Mormon boy passing through childhood and teenagehood alongside his magnetic friend Reed. While Derrick is mostly content to live by the rules he's been taught, ruffling no feathers, Reed develops an "ecological and humanitarian consciousness" that spurs him to take riskier stands in life—skipping school to attend protests, vandalizing butcher shops, and smoking a lot of marijuana in the process (which Derrick loyally accompanies him in)—ultimately discarding the religious teachings of his youth. In an affecting moment in their teen years, Reed seems shocked and disappointed to realize that Derrick actually believes in the "angels and gold plates" they've grown up learning about—but according to Reed, that's not the worst of it. What's worse is that Derrick seems to have no aversion to stepping into the "Mormon factory" which churns out identical people, dressing, talking, and thinking exactly alike. Derrick's response speaks to his sense of isolation from both communities: on one hand, the environmentalist rebels he spends his time with but doesn't feel wholly part of, and on the other, the "Mormon factory" symbolized by his family, which he is intrinsically part of and yet doesn't want to be, fully. "But what if we do it differently?" Derrick says. "What if we did it our way and still believed?" It can't be done, Reed tells him: "They don't want that." Indeed, the development of the story seems to bear out Reed's confident conclusion: over time, Reed and Derrick separate to different sides of the fence, neither of them able to straddle it for long. But we're left wondering if this is the only way things could have gone. For any Mormon reader who has felt pulled in similarly opposing directions, Derrick's question and Reed's

response linger, leaving us wondering who—if either of them—has it right. Can it be done differently?

Shoemaker's strength is concocting impossible situations perfectly suited to the weaknesses and contradictions at the core of each of his characters. We have here well-intentioned misogynists and benevolent racists, a cast of not-always-sympathetic characters who comfortably look down in judgment on the rest of the world. By the end of the story, their pedestals have often been knocked out from under their feet. Whether they'll stay low or scramble to rebuild them, though, remains unclear.



## Priesthood Power

Jonathan A. Stapley. *The Power of Godliness: Mormon Liturgy and Cosmology*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2018. xii + 184 pp. Photographs. Endnotes. Bibliography. Index. Cloth: \$29.95. Kindle: \$9.99. ISBN: 9780190844431.

*Reviewed by Gary James Bergera*

For the past decade-plus, Jonathan A. Stapley (b. 1976) has authored or co-authored a series of peer-reviewed article-length essays treating various aspects of LDS priesthood ritual (expressions of what he defines as liturgy). Though Stapley's academic background is in science (he holds a PhD in food science from Purdue University), his interests have gradually shifted from developing bio-renewable natural sweeteners to tracing the serpentine contours of LDS liturgical history. This, his first book, represents an expansion of Stapley's scholarly interests as well as a significant new contribution to LDS history.

While liturgy usually refers to “public” prayer and worship,<sup>1</sup> Stapley broadens the term to include all forms of ritualized worship, public and private. As Stapley asserts, Mormon liturgy comprises “the services and patterns in which believers regularly participate” and which “celebrate major life events—birth, coming of age, marriage, death” (1). While the LDS temple ceremony and ordinances represent the Church’s “most notorious” liturgical practices, Stapley sees Mormon liturgy as constituting “a much larger and more complex set of rituals and ritualized acts of worship” (2). In fact, Stapley argues, Mormon liturgy literally—and Stapley means literally, not symbolically or metaphorically—orders and structures the Mormon cosmos, both now and forever throughout time and eternity. By focusing on and expanding the concept of liturgy, Stapley hopes to open “new possibilities for understanding the lived experiences of women and men in the Mormon past and Mormon present. . . . By tracing the development of the rituals and attempting to ascertain the work they have accomplished, the Mormon universe, with its complex priesthoods, authorities, and powers, becomes comprehensible” (2). (Stapley is especially interested in rank-and-file Mormons and bookends his chapters with call-outs featuring the liturgical experiences of “average” Mormons.) The remainder of Stapley’s provocative analysis addresses the history and development of such Mormon-specific liturgical practices as priesthood ordination (including women and the priesthood),

---

1. Samuel Johnson defined liturgy in his 1755 dictionary as “form of prayers; formulary of publick devotions”; Noah Webster in his 1828 dictionary as “all public ceremonies that belong to divine service; hence, in a restricted sense, among the Romanists, the mass; and among protestants, the common prayer, or the formulary of public prayers”; the *Oxford English Dictionary* as “a form of public worship . . . a collection of formularies for the conduct of Divine service” (second definition); *Webster’s Third International Dictionary* as “a rite or series of rites, observances, or procedures prescribed for public worship in the Christian church . . .”; and the fifth edition of the *American Heritage Dictionary* as “a prescribed form or set of forms for public religious worship.”

sealings, baby blessings, healings, and the “cunning-folk traditions” of peep stones, astrology, and non-priesthood-based healing.

In each of his chapters, Stapley demonstrates an almost preternatural command of the relevant documentary sources—manuscript and printed. He also repeatedly evinces a tightly focused, scientific-like discussion that will keep scholars debating his interpretations for years. For example, in “Priesthood Ordination,” Stapley argues that over time LDS leaders gradually evolved from defining priesthood as channeling God’s power to comprising God’s power. The difference is crucially important as it allowed leaders, beginning perhaps with Church presidents Brigham Young or John Taylor, to promulgate the exclusively male ownership of the priesthood and its expression in the lives of Church members. However, since the 1970s and the rise of the women’s movement, Church officials, according to Stapley, have increasingly begun to assert a difference between priesthood authority and priesthood power. Thus, Stapley reasons, such rhetorical innovation functions to encourage women to exercise priesthood power and authority without the necessity, which currently remains unavailable to them, of holding priesthood office. While not all Church members understand and implement policy as Stapley’s interprets, his arguments offer hope to members longing for greater involvement in LDS liturgy.

In “Sealings,” Stapley builds on his notion of cosmological priesthood (more below) received as part of the 1840s Nauvoo temple liturgy as the means by which early Mormons—women and men equally—forged a new heaven on earth. Again, however, this early theology, Stapley suggests, eventually became “confusing for church leaders” (36), and Church practice moved away from focusing on salvific liturgy for the living and instead adopted a more generalized approach to salvation that targeted both the living and especially the dead (who previously were seen as unreliable “to function as links in the chain [i.e., sealing] of divine inheritance” [43]). One of the fascinating discussions in this chapter centers on the notion of “perseverance,” whereby, because of

one's eternal sealing to one's parents, one "cannot be lost but will be saved" in heaven (37). A possible corollary of this particular teaching may be found in Brigham Young's statement, during the 1845 Church trial of George J. Adams, who alleged transgressive conduct on the part of Joseph Smith's younger brother, William, that "we don't want you to say a word against W[illia]m [Smith] because [he] is bound to be saved. Joseph [Smith] got a promise of it."<sup>2</sup> Perhaps not surprisingly, such unconditional promises of salvation have since given way to a more conditionally based theology of salvation.

"Baby Blessing," "Healing, Authority, and Ordinances," and "Cunning-Folk Traditions and Mormon Authority" round out and complete Stapley's book. ("Cunning-folk" is Stapley's, and others', preferred term for "magical" or "supernatural.") Stapley tackles each topic with the same scholarly aplomb that marks his previous chapters. Stapley is a wholly original interpreter. His thoughtful arguments and analysis demand close, patient, repeated scrutiny. While Stapley's voice is distinctive and may be, at times, challenging to some readers—I periodically had to look words up and reread sentences to understand his analysis—Stapley's book is a testament to a mind alive with new ideas and ways of seeing and interpreting Mormon history and theology.

Among the more important—and novel—elements of Stapley's treatment, as I read him, is his coining and use of the term "cosmological priesthood"<sup>3</sup> to discuss earlier, more original, notions of priesthood

---

2. Minutes, Mar. 15, 1845, in *Minutes of the Apostles of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1835–1893* (Salt Lake City: Privately Published, 2010), 41. William Smith remained a disruptive influence, his transgressions a continuing distraction, and he was formally expelled from the LDS Church seven months later.

3. See Jonathan Stapley, "Adoptive Sealing Ritual in Mormonism," *Journal of Mormon History* 37, no. 3 (2011): 53–117, esp. 57; and J. Stapley, "The Cosmological Priesthood," *By Common Consent* (blog), Dec. 12, 2011, <https://bycommonconsent.com/2011/12/12/the-cosmological-priesthood/> (including comments).

power. While the LDS Church today identifies two facets of priestly authority and power—Aaronic and Melchizedek—Stapley argues for an expanded definition, one that, he believes, is firmly located in the sacred liturgy of the Nauvoo temple. For it was in the Nauvoo temple that men and women both received the power to call upon God, to be linked together forever as married and eternally sealed couples and families, promised to become gods themselves, and in some cases actually named kings and priests, queens and priestesses, with the power to bind on earth and in heaven. Important for Stapley's argument, wives were explicitly told that such blessings and powers were held in common with their husbands.

Stapley knows that his use of the term "cosmological priesthood" is idiosyncratic but hopes that it may prove useful to readers in considering his expansive notions of liturgy. For this reader, I wonder if Stapley's term may actually be understood more subversively than he intends as it seems to propose a new interpretation of priesthood. In this sense, Stapley is not merely attempting a reconstruction of the development of priesthood throughout Mormon history, he is broadening the meaning of priesthood in ways that may or may not have been foreseen by Joseph Smith and other early Mormons. According to this reading, Stapley is doing more than writing, or rewriting, history—he is attempting practical theology.

Personally, I am of two minds regarding Stapley's "cosmological priesthood." While I recognize its heuristic value, I wonder if some readers might be tempted to dismiss it as wishful thinking. Also, I wonder if Stapley's reliance on and repeated use of "cosmological priesthood" throughout the book could result in some readers concluding that such a priesthood actually exists independent of Stapley's interpretation. It remains to subsequent scholars to embrace or to reject Stapley's term.

Stapley's situating his analysis of cosmological priesthood in the Nauvoo temple seems to anticipate a thorough discussion of the temple liturgy, and especially of the culminating ordinance, the so-called second

anointing. If any LDS liturgical ordinance represents the literal creation of heaven on earth, it is the second anointing—with its promises of godship in mortality—and, thus, is the strongest evidence for Stapley's thesis. However, on these topics, Stapley demurs. He is reluctant to broach the temple ceremonies because of the vows of silence exacted from participants. Stapley's polite reticence may be understandable from a believer's position. However, I wonder if scholars within the Church may actually enjoy more freedom in discussing the parameters and meaning of the temple liturgy, including the temple endowment ceremony and practices, than they believe. Certainly, if anyone is equipped to tackle such an undertaking, it is Stapley.

On a final note, Stapley is a notably confident, self-assured writer, and does not shy away from offering critical judgments. Toward the end of his introduction, for example, he asserts that “many of the beliefs and practices of early Mormonism are now foreign to academics and believers alike” (9). In his discussion of women and the priesthood, he opines that “absent an understanding of the ‘cosmological priesthood’ and its contexts, and based on a belief that the modern liturgy concentrated within the ecclesiastical priesthood was historically normative, scholars have often distorted the past as much as clarified it” (18). Stapley may be correct in these and other criticisms. However, given the gaps in the historical record, and in view of other scholars doing their best to uncover the past, were I asked, I might recommend greater caution and generosity in evaluating the work of the writers and researchers who preceded him.

Reading Jonathan Stapley's book is an exhilarating, roller-coaster-like adventure. Virtually every page contains some intriguing insight, some surprising revelation. I don't know that it's possible to recommend *The Power of Godliness* too highly.

## Welcome Additions

Karen Kelsay. *Of Omens that Flitter*. Boston: Big Table Publishing, 2018. 88 pp. Paper: \$14.00. ISBN: 9781945917264.

Javen Tanner. *The God Mask*. Kelsay Books, 2018. 96 pp. Paper: \$17.00. ISBN: 9781947465558.

*Reviewed by Edward Whitley*

Karen Kelsay's *Of Omens that Flitter* delivers on the promise that lyric poetry has made since at least the nineteenth century to let readers overhear the musings of a thoughtful, deep-feeling person as she reflects on her life experiences. Kelsay is a particularly gifted formal poet—the third-stanza turn and rhyming final couplet of the sonnet are some of the sharpest tools in her kit—and her free-verse offerings further highlight her ability to employ a range of techniques to shape and contour the experiences she records. Two related poems on the topic of her father's aging and death, one more formally structured than the other, illustrate this tendency. The sonnet "Hard Hat Diver" is about her 85-year-old father's reluctance to give away the by-now-antique diving helmet that he had used in his youth to explore the ocean's depths.

He keeps his diving helmet in a shed.  
The memories that it buoys up, aren't dead—  
that heavy hat of bolts protects his pride.  
He seldom ever has to look inside

the wooden crate beneath the old work bench,  
where all his man-things: chisel, hammer, wrench,  
as if in dry dock, wait to be reused.  
His wife told him to toss it, he refused.



Eight lines of tight couplets paint a portrait of a very specific era of American masculinity that Kelsay's father is made to embody, while at the sonnet's turn in the ninth line, Kelsay gives us what we could presume to be a woman's voice—either her own or her mother's—yelling in italics, "*You're eighty five, you'll never need that thing!*" Unbowed, he keeps the helmet. Kelsay closes out the poem with another couplet whose precise rhyme and meter belie that uncertainty is the new normal for her soon-to-be dying father: "The chance is slim, but yet he still regards / an abalone dive as in the cards."

Kelsay knows exactly what she's doing with such formal turns. So when she shifts to free verse in a poem about her father's death in a hospital bed ("Freedive"), the imagery of deep-sea diving plays out with less irony and more melancholy. "In the hospital, he floated on a foam mattress / while an eternity of wavy lines rolled across the monitor," she writes.

He angled through his options.  
He said he wanted to go home.  
He said he wanted to go fast.

Then he removed his oxygen mask  
and began a freedive.

When Kelsay abandons the formal constraints that she holds herself to elsewhere in the book, the contrast is often, as in the differences between "Hard Hat Diver" and "Freedive," stunning. Laying aside the effects of surprise and delight that rhyming couplets can offer at the end of a poem—effects that Kelsay consistently uses to her advantage—allows her to let an emotion land with real force.

Javen Tanner's *The God Mask* opens with "Genesis," a poem that brings together Tanner's thoughtful meditations on faith with his knowledge of the Bible (Shakespeare and the Greeks feature prominently in the collection as well), his playful approach to storytelling, and his articulate sense of loss. "In the beginning there was a dark pool," Tanner

writes. “And God said, ‘Let us take a swim in the beginning.’” Tanner’s embodied God “flipped his wet bangs out of his face” before declaring “it was good.” From there, Tanner’s creation story takes a series of left turns that follow the cadence of the biblical account but offer none of the familiar content.

God saw that it was good. And in the light he mused.  
And the greater light he called heartbeat, and the lesser,  
blackbird. And the heartbeat raced, and the blackbird bruised

its wings until the inner torso let it go.  
And God called the torso earth. And the earth began  
to turn. (This was about six thousand years ago.)

Cheeky nods to creationist theology aside, Tanner is much more concerned with the power of faith to comfort weary hearts than he is to parse the wheat of doctrine from the tares of either culture or myth. As such, “Genesis” ends on a note that Tanner returns to throughout *The God Mask*—the persistent sense of loss that accompanies every aspect of the human experience, including joyful swims in dark pools.

Then God sat on the shore and considered the cost  
of all that had been lost. And he wept. This is how  
it was in the beginning: everything was lost.

Such melancholic reflections on loss appear throughout *The God Mask* but are often twined with moments of play. “Economy Domini” combines the myth of Charon the ferryman on the river Styx with the story from Matthew 17 of Christ finding a coin in the mouth of a fish. “To hell with Caesar,” says Jesus as he hands the coin to a man on his way to the underworld. “Forget the fishers of men. You’ll need this if you’re crossing with the boatman.”

More somber moments appear in poems such as “Blessing My Father in the Emergency Room,” which describes the contemporary Latter-day Saint experience of trying to channel the power of godliness in the face of fear and confusion. “I’m never sure / where my desire ends / and the

will of God begins," Tanner writes. "The prayer is short and quiet; / I do not dare command the winds / to crack." Following the blessing,

We embrace and wonder  
if God has heard. Through the thin veil  
of the bedside curtain,

a man weeps,  
a soft voice says,  
"This is going to hurt."

Rather than the voice of God being heard in the words of a priesthood holder, it is an ailing patient in the adjoining bed whose voice emerges "through the veil." His message echoes that of the God of Tanner's "Genesis": "This is going to hurt."

Both Tanner and Kelsay understand that not only are feelings of loss and suffering central to the human experience, but that we have the obligation to process those feelings through creative use of language. *The God Mask* and *Of Omens that Flitter* are welcome additions to the archives of literature that strive to do precisely that.



Hildebrando de Melo  
VORAX System (2018)  
48" x 48"  
acrylic on canvas

# OUT OF ANGOLA

Glen Nelson

*Essay reprinted from Nzambi (God): Hildebrando de Melo by Glen Nelson, a catalogue of de Melo's work produced by the Mormon Arts Center in 2018.*

The artwork of Hildebrando de Melo rises from Angola itself—from the valleys near Huambo where he was born, through the urban streets of Luanda where he lives with his wife and children, amid the dynamism of one of the world's most expensive cities, between the sounds of Portuguese and tribal Bantu languages, in the art and artifacts created by centuries of Africans, from the history of his ancestral tribal kingdom of Bailundo, with the political fallout in a country emerging from decades of brutality and war nearly incomprehensible to a foreigner and the convoluted legacies of racism, slavery, colonialism, liberation, interventionist politics, poverty, riches, and injustice, with the artist's own history, his religious probing, the nation's budding contemporary art scene, the artist's global travels—and his attempts to reconcile and personify all of it.

De Melo was born in 1978,<sup>1</sup> three years after Angola declared its independence from Portugal. The catalysts for self-rule were the death of António Salazar in 1970, the Portuguese dictator who ruled his country and its far-flung colonies ruthlessly for 40 years, and the Carnation Revolution of 1974, when the Lisbon government of Marcello Caetano was toppled bloodlessly in a *coup d'état*.<sup>2</sup>

---

1. For biographical information, see *Hildebrando de Melo, Deep Hildebrando de Melo: 20 Years of Work*, (Hildebrando de Melo Atelier, 2015).

2. For Angolan political history, see David Birmingham, *A Short History of Modern Angola*, (Oxford University Press, 2015).

The modern history of Angola—and it is a narrative caked in violence—is dominated by Portugal and mass migration from and then back to the Middle African nation on the Atlantic coast. Before that, a half million Africans were taken as slaves in the 19th century, nearly all of them men, and sent to Brazil, São Tomé, and other destinations. A century later, a similar number of wealth-seeking Europeans moved to Angola for a slice of its natural resources.<sup>3</sup> The African nationalist movement in the 1970s ejected colonialists from Angola but left a void of power for the Soviets, Cubans, Chinese, Americans, Congolese, and South Africans to attempt to fill. They backed, by covert or overt means, the warring forces within the country: FNLA (Front for the National Liberation of Angola), MPLA (Movement for the Popular Liberation of Angola), and UNITA (Union for the Independence of the Totality of Angola).<sup>4</sup> Angolan armies and rebels would brutalize their own citizens in a Civil War that lasted until 2002, interrupted sporadically with brittle truces. This coincided in world history with the fall of Saigon in 1975, American humiliation after the Vietnam War, and a fear in the western hemisphere that Angola might become the next global flash-point. Meanwhile, as vast Angolan petroleum and mining industries were developed, the balance of political might was further warped by multi-national corporate influencers and foreign powers who played the long game to secure their own emerging interests.

In this, Hildebrando de Melo was no bystander. His paternal grandfather King Ekuikui II of Bailundo—the tribal kingdom dates back to the 15th century—and grandmother Laura de Jesus were among the pioneers in Angola's diamond industry. Adept at maneuvering between politicians, they instilled nonetheless in their children and grandchildren a sense of national responsibility. Both his mother and father held

---

3. Birmingham, *A Short History of Modern Angola*, vii.

4. Birmingham, *A Short History of Modern Angola*, 67–80.

important posts in government, as well. And his uncle is currently a prominent ministry official.<sup>5</sup>

De Melo tells the story that at his birth, his grandfather took one look at him and protested loudly that his daughter would dare to bring a white child into his house. He laughs as he recounts the anecdote, but whether it was originally spoken in jest or not, it reflects a life of nuanced racial definition that mirrors the country's itself. When an expedition of 19th century Germans explored Angola, they imagined that they would be the first white men to uncover Central Africa. Their expectations of finding barely-evolved primitives were dashed as they met Africans who spoke fluent Portuguese, led them over well-traveled paths of commerce, and wore clothing much like their own. These Angolan guides they called "white men," not because of the color of their skin but because they wore shoes and trousers. As historian David Birmingham writes of Angolans, "Identity was effectively determined by culture rather than by pigmentation."<sup>6</sup> The artist notes that in the de Melo family tree is a white British ancestor and that his immediate siblings today include multiple races, all of which give him a broad racial identity.

His life tracks closely the trauma of his nation being born, as well. This included violence and death. Writing about his childhood,

As a child in Angola, I used to build roads of sand, and I would play with toy cars and insects that I captured. I would create stories out of these things. As an adult, I am still like a child, Hildebrando.

These things grew out of the state of terror and the war in my country. I lived in a city named Lobito, and when five years old, I remember seeing a dead body, spread on the ground at the Catumbela airport. I was only a child, traveling to Europe, but the memory has always stayed with me. It is like a wave that crashes against the shore and recedes.<sup>7</sup>

---

5. Interview between Hildebrando de Melo and the author, April 26, 2018, New York City.

6. Birmingham, *A Short History of Modern Angola*, 3.

7. de Melo, *Deep Hildebrando de Melo: 20 Years of Work*, 20.

At the age of five, de Melo became seriously ill and was anemic. With few treatment options in Lobito, his parents put him on an airplane to Portugal by himself with a sign attached to his chest that read, "Deliver to Laura de Melo," where his grandmother resided. He received doctors' care and lived with her. The family planned to have the boy seek medical help and then return home to his parents and siblings, but he so reminded his grandmother of her own, distant son—in his walk, voice, and facial features—that she convinced them that the child would be safer in Portugal with her, his aunt, uncle, and cousins. A woman of means who had traveled widely and was friends with Coco Chanel and other luminaries of the age, she became a powerful figure in the boy's life.

They lived in the northern seaside city of Porto, the second-largest city in Portugal, and de Melo describes his childhood as idyllic and carefree. He vacationed at the shore, played in forests, watched American movies like *Huckleberry Finn* and *Tom Sawyer*, and he imagined that he was like them. He showed an early aptitude for drawing, and his grandmother encouraged him to enter a national drawing competition after she saw his sketch of the title pair of dogs from Disney's animated film, *Lady and the Tramp*.

After he had been in Portugal a few years, his grandmother welcomed Mormon missionaries into their home, and the entire family in Portugal was baptized. Mormon doctrines of a preexistence, of spirit children living with a fatherly God before they are born, and a life after mortality with infinite development among eternal families made a permanent impression on the young artist in exile.

Their religion was new to the country. The first official meetings of the Church in Portugal were with U.S. military personnel stationed there in 1970, which coincided with the death of Salazar. The Portugal Lisbon Mission was established in 1974 when four LDS missionaries were transferred to Portugal from Brazil. By 1978, 1,000 members lived in the country, but in Porto, by the time of the family's conversion, according to the artist, the de Melos were the city's first members. Shortly there-



after, his grandmother became ill, and one of her dying wishes was to be buried with a copy of the Book of Mormon in her hands.<sup>8</sup>

All the while, his mother, father, and siblings remained in Angola as the country fell into waves of chaos of martial factions, reprisals, and repression of the war of liberation. Whenever peace seemed even a remote possibility between UNITA and MPLA, the nation witnessed a mass migration of former Angolans back into the country, and many of these people settled into the capital city of Luanda. Specifically, adult men went to the capital. Women, largely, remained in the countryside. The interior was a place where young men were kidnapped and forced into army service, and where women, children, and old men attempted to subsist as a cruel consequence of land mines—several million of them—which utterly destroyed their once-robust agricultural systems.<sup>9</sup>

His life darkened as well. After his grandmother's death, his aunt and uncle moved to a small town, where he had no friends. His grades faltered, and his aunt removed him from school and placed him in a factory to work. His life became what he refers to tearfully as a kind of indentured servitude. Occasionally, he was the sole breadwinner for his Portuguese relatives. His parents in Angola were kept in the dark about these developments. They were told that all was well and that Hildebrando was safe and happy.<sup>10</sup> He ran away from home, returned, and bided his time until he could reach the legal age of 18 and go back to Angola.

Art making had become a safe haven. At the age of 11 or 12, a teacher named Ana Ilhão took him under her wing, and seeing his skills, she provided advanced training in painting while other students in the class were making basic sketch drawings. He was exposed to modern European art, and he began to imagine a career in the field.

---

8. Hildebrando de Melo interview, April 26, 2018.

9. Birmingham, *A Short History of Modern Angola*, 93–107.

10. Conversation between Hildebrando de Melo and the author, April 22, 2018.

The day after his eighteenth birthday, he flew home to Angola, to siblings he had never met, and to parents he had left thirteen years earlier. He arrived home, a stranger to Angola. Even his Portuguese was different than theirs. He knew little about Angolan culture. And of course, the fighting had dramatically altered everything. A conflict as a result of a failed election (1992–1994) had been one of the most violent yet, and for the first time, cities were attacked, and citizens suffered widespread starvation. President José Eduardo dos Santos, who had been at war with his own people for twenty years, consolidated power into totalitarianism and privatized the nation's assets for his own needs.<sup>11</sup> Birmingham writes, "By 1996, the orchestrated politics of violence were extended to include xenophobia and crowds were permitted to attack anyone who might be branded as 'foreign.'"<sup>12</sup> Briefly, the government considered issuing identity cards to each of its citizens denoting their ancestral tribes as a way to determine who might be loyal to the president. This was the Angola to which de Melo returned. Suffering was omnipresent, and the government did not permit humanitarian aid into Angola to temper it. In the countryside, children were routinely kidnapped to become soldiers. This bleakness continued until 2002, when Jonas Savimbi, the man who had been the leader of the liberation movement UNITA, was killed and buried, secretly.

At this point, the majority of Angolans—up to 75% of them—had never known peace. It had been forty years since independence from Portugal was declared and war had begun. Neither did they know about democracy, the rule of law, peaceful elections, trial by jury, nor the role of citizens in government. Still, the wars ended. The country had had enough.

Upon his return to Angola, de Melo felt that he was unready to begin painting. Instead, he immersed himself like a student in the culture and

---

11. Birmingham, *A Short History of Modern Angola*, 114.

12. Birmingham, *A Short History of Modern Angola*, 115.

history of his country. This included building expertise regarding the objects created over centuries by his people—both those of his own tribe and others. He collected many African sculptures, and all the while he situated himself philosophically into their history. Despite his claim to tribal birthright and social position, de Melo sensed he had to earn his place anew. It was insufficient to be welcomed like the biblical prodigal son and celebrated for simply having returned home. Among his peers, these acts gave him increased credibility. It was lost on no one that he chose to return voluntarily to a ravaged country still in the midst of war.

He began to make art that spoke to the politics all around him. His preferred method of making art is to work in series of intense bursts of activity to produce approximately two dozen objects on a shared theme or visual conceit. His first series of mature works is titled *Corpo e Alma* (Body and Soul).<sup>13</sup> Made in 2005, the series is a politically strident group of eighteen images. Like the country itself that is shown emerging from bloodshed, the images use graffiti, collage, abstraction, and cartoon to question the nation's future. In one work,  $0 \div \textit{Baratas} = \textit{Angola}$ , the artist has painted a mathematical equation. Cockroaches are depicted trapped in a glass (the word *baratas* means “cockroaches”). It is a portrait of a nation that is caught by forces larger than itself, but the message is also that the ensnared can see what is happening. They are aware of their captivity.

In other works in the series, he scrawls phrases in English, Latin, and Portuguese that attempt to rally viewers to activism, including: “Freedom works” and “*carpe diem*.” He paints “Fragile” alongside the goblet that is the universal shipping symbol of warning. One exchange reads: “*Quem te mandou*” and “*Não te mintas*” (Who sent you? Don't lie to me).

---

13. In 2015, the atelier of Hildebrando de Melo published a 536-page book, *Deep Hildebrando de Melo: 20 Years of Work*, that presented twenty years of his work—from two early paintings created in Portugal through 23 series of works that lead to 2015.

*Humby H. Eating each other*<sup>14</sup> is the name of a work from *Corpo e Alma* that would likely have little meaning to anyone outside the country, but an Angolan would recognize its umbi umbi birds, common creatures that according to local tradition bring good news. Here, they are depicted attacking and consuming each other—a metaphor for the Civil War itself and an indictment of the regime of José Eduardo dos Santos.

Each of this series' works is raw and accusatory. Collaged pages from the Bible first appear in his work here and add an almost religious zealotry to the artist's message. The scriptures are paired with images of blood and decay under titles including *Projecto Fusão* (Fusion Project) and *Projecto Fusão de Sangue* (Blood Fusion Project). This series is the most overtly political in the artist's oeuvre, but only because their texts are impossible to miss. These are fearless works of protest, the type that one can imagine someone leaving anonymously in a back alley. Of course, the difference here is that de Melo's name is emblazoned on them. There have been consequences for this activism. According to the artist, as retaliation he has been threatened, beaten, poisoned, and imprisoned.<sup>15</sup>

The Civil War destroyed the nation's infrastructure—its public transportation, electrical and water systems. The artist has used these as symbols for larger issues. A *candongueiro* is an Angolan mini-bus, and this network is a symbol of adaptability. These ubiquitous, privately owned, white-blue painted buses represent, for the artist, a circulatory system of the country. Without it, the artist says, the country would stop.<sup>16</sup> In 2008, de Melo created a series of works honoring the *candongueiro* but also deploying it as a symbol of tenuous national stability. The art critic Nadine Siegert wrote of the works, "In his new series *Empirico Candongueiro* he draws more from the concrete situation of the people in the

---

14. The artist commonly titles his works in English. All translated titles are presented in parentheses.

15. Conversation between Hildebrando de Melo and the author, April 22, 2018.

16. Conversation between Hildebrando de Melo and the author, April 22, 2018.

metropolis of Luanda. *Candungueiros*—the most important means of public transport—that is chaos, tightness but above all the exigency for the search of possibilities of survival in this constantly changing urban environment.”<sup>17</sup>

Survival is a continuing theme of de Melo’s art. It underpins his images of organisms like spiders, baobab trees, and hybrid creatures of his own imagination. These connect to the mythological, like Anansi, a character in West African folklore who is a spider able to appear as a human. De Melo’s 2010 series, *Spider* is about shapeshifting, regeneration, the legendary agility of spiders, and by extension, the artist’s willingness to reinvent himself, as well as the hope that a nation can do the same.

While Angola struggled to rebuild itself and remake its identity, de Melo left the relative comforts of family life and moved into an abandoned, rat-infested, raw building without windows. And he began to create a studio and artworks to populate it.<sup>18</sup> A constant challenge was light. At the time, the national electrical grid was in tatters, and he often painted by candlelight. Frequent power outages caught him as he was painting, and not wanting to—or unable to—stop, he codified the gestures of painting through repetition to such an extent that he became able to paint in the dark. These ingrained kinetics grew into a visual lexicon that he taps into still, allowing him to enter a zone of image making and memory, free from the distractions of his surroundings.

As an artist working in abstract modes, he calls on the viewer to participate in this transformation, too: a loose network of vertical black lines, for example, become more than a graphic; it takes life, changes from inert marks into a creature, a presence, an animated object. The process of this changing is much of his point. The messiness is also on display—how a mark emerges and becomes a thing that is more than a

---

17. Nadine Siegert, untitled article was published in *Deep Hildebrando de Melo: 20 Years of Work*, 2015. The German Siegert’s writing appears in Portuguese and English.

18. Conversation between Hildebrando de Melo and the author, April 22, 2018.

mark, something in and of itself, powerful. The picture of a spider as a symbol is rich enough, but de Melo presents something more profound: a picture about the spider coming into being with the simple gesture of a line transformed in the crucible of the viewer's mind. And this is what the artist's work is primarily about.<sup>19</sup> He searches for the moment of transformation. He wishes to explore the power necessary to imbue life into the inanimate or to create order from chaos. This act, then, is political, autobiographical, and spiritual.



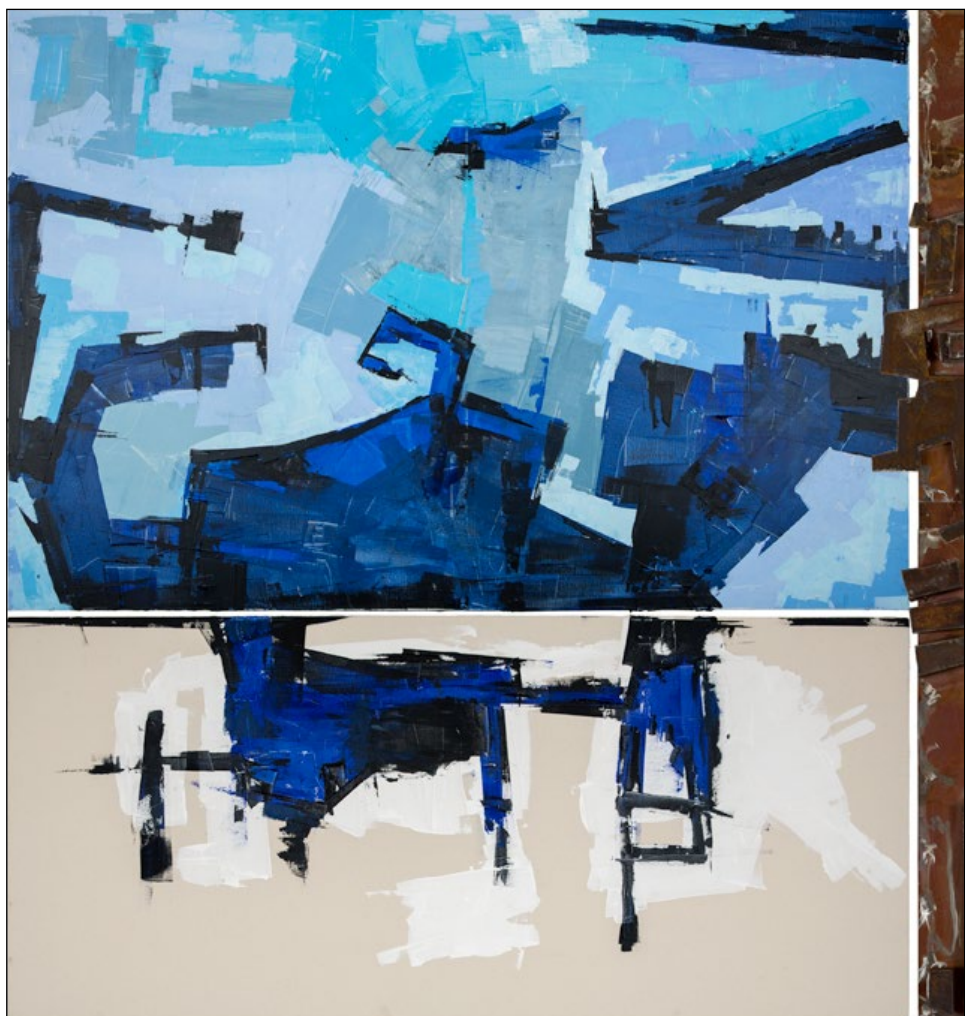
Hildebrando de Melo, photo courtesy of the artist

---

19. Also see the artist's series *Molimo/Deus* (Spirit/God) (2006), *Deep Hildebrando de Melo: 20 Years of Work*, 80–103.



Hildebrando de Melo  
Red as Blood I (2018)  
40.5" x 26.25"  
acrylic and charcoal on paper

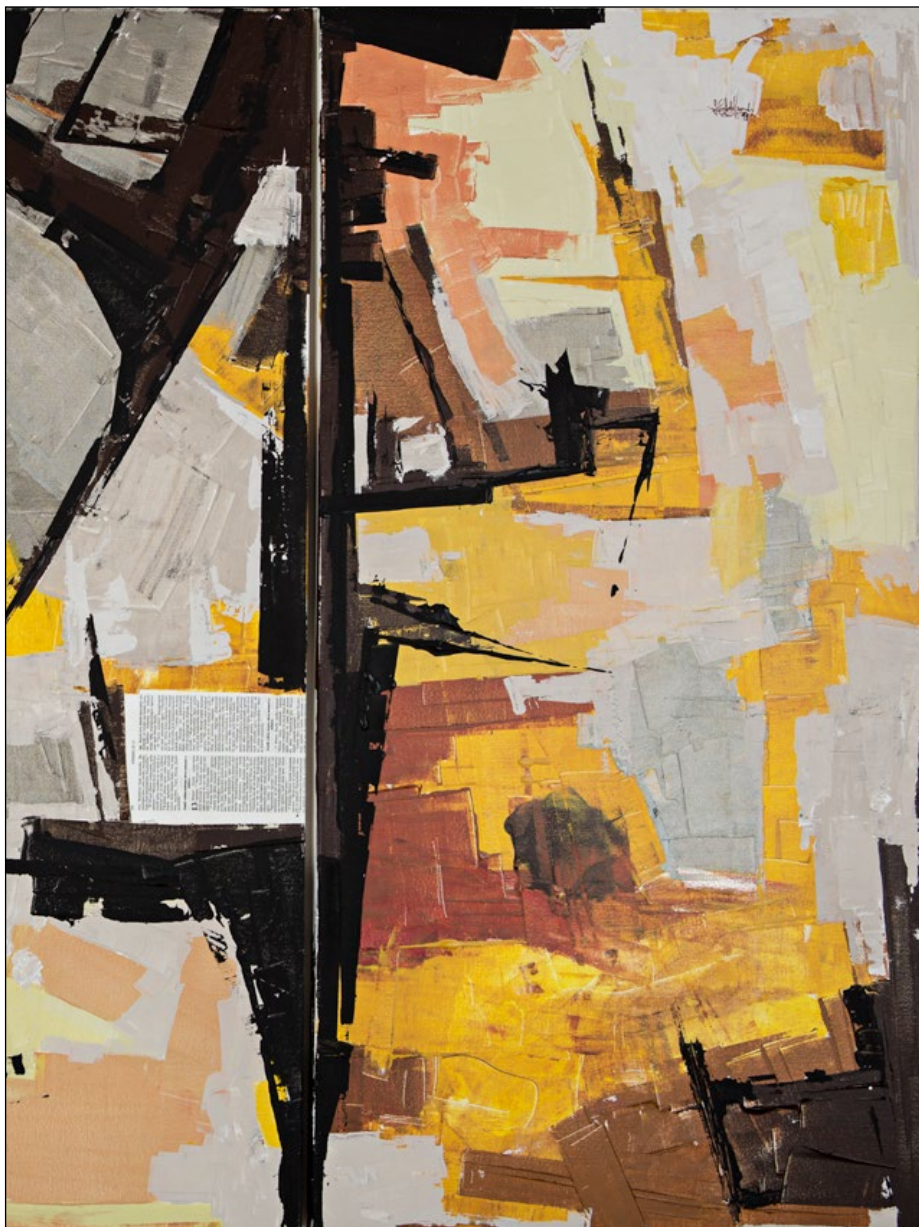






Hildebrando de Melo  
Pre-God (2018)  
80.25" x 152.75"  
acrylic on canvas and welded iron





Hildebrando de Melo  
Mustard (2018)  
48" x 73.5"  
acrylic and mixed media on canvas





Hildebrando de Melo  
Red as Blood IV (2018)  
40.5" x 26.25"  
acrylic and charcoal on paper

## CREATING A ZION CHURCH

Molly McLellan Bennion

In Jacob we read eight times the Lord lamented that it grieved him to lose the branches of his vineyard. Surely it grieves him to lose those who have left the Church today. There are no studies necessary to tell us we are missing family members and old friends. Some left for good reasons—to preserve a family, for instance. But some left with little understanding of the gospel. They know what they don't like but they don't know what they are leaving. I miss them all. I love the gospel and care deeply about the Church. I like being at Church, taking the sacrament and being among good people. You are good people. I know any organization touched by humans is flawed, but I see so much good and so much more potential for good in the Church. What I will say today is motivated by love for God, love for the Church, love for those who stay, and love for those who go.

The bishop asked me to speak about Zion. Zion is aspirational; it would require us to be better in so many ways. If we were, perhaps some of your loved ones and mine would return. Could we actually create a Zion of a Church? Maybe. It wouldn't be easy. But just trying should bring only good. Zion is not impossible. It is a lofty goal but it isn't heaven. What is it? Zion is an earthly concept of safety, both physical and spiritual. It is a place and a community. The ancient Jews tried to create Zions, walled cities on hills; the early Mormons tried to create Zions in several places. Both first sought physical safety, which is not our central concern. But both also sought spiritual safety: a safe place to know and serve God. That would be Zion.

What threats to knowing and serving God do we face? We aren't running from armies and mobs. We face insidious dangers like confusion

and soul-destroying philosophies. Dangers like ignorance of God's nature and will, narcissism, materialism, prejudice, a proclivity for ease and comfort, the degeneration of faith in basic moral and ethical values (think kindness, generosity, honesty, integrity). We face dangers like a lack of respect for others, hedonism, greed, selfishness, a lack of compassion, a lack of purpose and meaning in our lives. All exist side by side the many wonderful aspects of human life. All are real dangers to our mortal and eternal happiness just as surely as was the sword to our ancestors. All leave a trail of sorrow.

They are within our hearts and minds and they are all around us. We cannot hide from them on a hill or in the wilderness but we can combat them. Some of that work is best done in face-to-face community. What community could be more logical than the Church?

How do we start? By understanding what the gospel is and requires. How do we gain that knowledge? With heartfelt prayer and robust study. Time is short; today let's focus on study. Study is only one endeavor of a Zion, but it's a foundational one. There are many righteous people who do not know God, but knowing God makes it so much easier to be righteous.

We do a good job of teaching obedience to many wise practices, but we could do a better job teaching and learning doctrines that would bring us closer to God. We could explore many of the most profound Mormon doctrines more deeply—not just mention them more often but really study them. These few come quickly to mind:

Our God of passion and empathy is unusual in Christendom. He is approachable so it's easier to approach him. Mormon doctrine frees humans from original sin and predestination, the belief our eternal fate is sealed when we are born. In this Church, we start clean and have a chance.

Our doctrine adds meaning and justice to ordinances by providing for all. How inclusive and loving is that! I've thought any ordinance confined to the few who hear of it and accept it must be simply a prop

to strengthen those folks on earth. It would be so unjust to make, say, baptism, a requirement for the eternities, leaving out billions who couldn't possibly know of it.

We take the burden and condemnation of the Fall off women. So much of sexism stems from denying Eve the honor of her courageous and generous choice.

Would we ease the pain of sisters who feel marginalized in the Church if we openly revered our Mother in Heaven? Several years ago, *BYU Studies* devoted most of an issue to arguing there has never been a doctrinal reason not to love her publicly.<sup>1</sup> Women's place in the Church remains a challenging issue.

If truly internalized, the doctrine that we are all literally brothers and sisters would go a long way to eliminating prejudice, racism, sexism, tribalism, homophobia.

Doesn't it make it easier to look to God when we know that he did not create the evil that harms us? And that is a radical doctrine.

I have rarely heard these seminal doctrines explored in Church. Even such key doctrines as the atonement are treated in generalities about following the Savior and loving God. Perhaps we should get in the weeds to think through the doctrine of the atonement. A friend who has spent his life as a bishop, stake president, or patriarch told me he's concluded we do a lousy job of teaching the atonement because he has tried to help so many who gave up any hope of salvation after a first serious sin. He's been surprised that so many had no faith in the atonement. One sin and they felt doomed. One strike and you're out. Scripture posits numerous theories of the atonement. Some are hard to accept. For instance, would God really have so little power over evil that he would have to ransom our souls with an innocent life? Furthermore, the theories ignore the incompatibilities or treat the atonement as a given we are just supposed to accept without reason. Most of us like ideas to make sense.

---

1. David L. Paulsen and Martin Pulido, "A Mother There': A Survey of Historical Teachings about Mother in Heaven," *BYU Studies* 50, no. 1 (2011): 70–97.

My favorite atonement theory was suggested by Gene England and gleaned from the totality of the scriptures rather than any one section. Gene suggested an innocent Christ had to die not just any death but a particularly brutal death to get our attention. We are jaundiced and skeptical. Gene suggested we might be more inclined to dismiss Christ but for his voluntary submission to one of the most horrific deaths possible. The shock of the cross forces us to put aside our rationality and consider Christ's message of his love and God's love. We can't imagine such love. It gets our attention. We are drawn to it. We begin to glimpse the truth that love is God's power and our goal. And that love is the key to understanding the character of God. He is not an arbitrary source of human misery but a loving Father, mourning with us, hoping for us, helping us where he can within the limitations of free agency and its essential consequences. The work of fellow Mormons like Gene would enrich our study immeasurably.<sup>2</sup>

Today as we study, we often proof-text the scriptures, mining them for little gems we think we understand. We look for a few words we can lift from the text to prove what we already know rather than approach the scriptures with open minds. This year we study the Old Testament. Have you considered scholar David Bokovoy's conclusion that the Old Testament is not a book but a library and as such does not have a single perspective on any topic of importance? That changes our reading. Have you thought of taking a look at newer translations with more accurate renditions of ancient Hebrew? Do you know Joseph Smith saw weaknesses in the King James version, the product of a committee 400 years ago, that he didn't finish his attempt at a retranslation and that he favored a German bible? Have you read the work of Mormon Old Testament scholar Ben Spackman? How seriously would you like to study the Old Testament?

---

2. Eugene England, "That they Might Not Suffer: The Gift of the Atonement," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 1, no. 3 (Autumn 1966): 141–55.



To know God is to love him. To know God is to know that we can only show our love for him by loving and serving each other. The City of Enoch got it. It was called Zion because “they were of one heart and one mind, and dwelt in righteousness; and there was no poor among them” (Moses 7:18). They must have pondered God seriously. And I doubt they all agreed on every point. All we know of human history says that Zion cannot be an island of sameness surrounded by a sea of pluralism. It’s not just that pluralism would seep and press in. It’s that sameness would be so boring, so limiting. What would be left to learn and what hope would we have of learning it in a cookie cutter world of imperfect clones? We’d just keep reinventing our mistakes. I know I need your study, your thoughts, your great examples of Christlike love to reach anywhere near my potential.

So what does it mean to be of one heart and one mind with diverse people in a pluralistic world, say, in a ward like ours?

Let me say again: Zion is not a concept of sameness but of safety for all God’s diverse family to seek and serve him. There cannot be one way to feel or one way to think. There can be and there are ultimate truths, but God allows for different personalities and talents to adopt them. One heart is a group of hearts open to each other. One mind is a group of minds open to each other. The walls of the hearts and minds of Zion are porous and receptive, without borders, separate but connected.

A Zion church would be a place where those hearts and minds are engaged in honest, vigorous, and humble truth seeking by thought and deed. Hugh B Brown said that “Neither fear of consequence or any kind of coercion should ever be used to secure uniformity of thought in the church. People should express their problems and opinions and be unafraid to think without fear of ill consequences. . . . We must preserve freedom of the mind in the church and resist all efforts to suppress it.”<sup>3</sup>

---

3. Hugh B. Brown, “An Eternal Quest—Freedom of the Mind,” *BYU Speeches*, May 13, 1969, [https://speeches.byu.edu/talks/hugh-b-brown\\_eternal-quest/](https://speeches.byu.edu/talks/hugh-b-brown_eternal-quest/).

As President Uchtdorf stated, "... as good as our previous experience may be, if we stop asking questions, stop thinking, stop pondering, we can thwart the revelations of the Spirit. ... How often has the Holy Spirit tried to tell us something we needed to know but couldn't get past the massive iron gate of what we thought we already knew?"<sup>4</sup>

This is a golden age of Mormon history and theology; we have no shortage of great study sources. Classes could be meaty and relevant. Unanswered questions and differences of opinion would send us to research and prayer, not to condemnation or fear. My friend, Mike Austin, wrote of this challenge: "We must find ways to disagree with each other about things that are very important to us while remaining a people of one heart and one mind. This is hard because human beings are spectacularly bad at disagreeing without being disagreeable. Our evolutionary programming works against us. ... when somebody disagrees with us, we feel personally attacked, and our fight-or-flight kicks in. We have an overwhelming desire to run away or to lash out and label offending individuals as 'them.' But there can be no 'them' ... Everybody is 'us' or it isn't Zion."<sup>5</sup> In other words, it's safe for everyone who wants to be here or it isn't safe.

An LDS doctor serving lepers in India drew an analogy in a recent *Dialogue* article. Leprosy nerve damage to arms and legs causes the tissue to be reabsorbed into the body but nails still grow. They turn black and must be cut. One day, Dr. Long set his cutting tool on what he thought was a black nail and just as he was to cut it off realized it was in fact healthy

---

4. Dieter F. Uchtdorf, "Acting on the Truths of the Gospel of Jesus Christ," Worldwide Leadership Training, Feb. 2012, *Church News*, <https://www.ldschurchnews.com/archive/2012-02-11/president-dieter-f-uchtdorf-acting-on-the-truths-of-the-gospel-of-jesus-christ-38107>.

5. Michael Austin, "Can I Mourn with Those that Mourn Even If They Are for Gay Marriage?," *By Common Consent* (blog), Nov. 5, 2013, <https://bycommonconsent.com/2013/11/05/can-i-mourn-with-those-that-mourn-even-if-they-are-for-gay-marriage/>.

toe tissue the body needed. We must take care to create a welcoming, loving community for we need everyone to unite the human family for God. We must take care not to cut off the healthy tissue of the Church, even that that might at first look a little weak.<sup>6</sup>

The Zion I see is “a community of Saints who have . . . the habits and attitudes that make Zion possible.” As I said earlier, it won’t be easy. Mike Austin also has some practical ideas of habits and attitudes to make our study together fruitful.

We must understand that people disagree with each other because we all see the world through different filters and assumptions and not because we are crazy, stupid, or evil.

We must care more about human relationships than about winning arguments.

We must try to understand each other.

We must recognize our own biases.

We must forgive.

I would add to Mike’s list: We must recognize Church policies and practices have continually changed throughout the history of the Church. There is no reason to think they will not continue to change. Consequently, it seems foolish not to embrace each other despite disagreement over a current position. And it seems potentially foolish to leave the Church over disagreement over even important issues before weighing the rich doctrines unique to our faith. In all honesty, I joined the Church in 1967 praying for major change, particularly that Blacks would receive the priesthood and that things would improve for women.

Both have happened, though I still feel a need to pray for more change on both those issues and others. And I don’t feel any less a Mormon than anyone who has no prayers for change. Nevertheless, I

---

6. Lon Young, “That’s Where the Light Enters,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 50, no. 2 (Summer 2017): 139–46.

have watched countless friends leave the Church or be told to leave over these disagreements. One friend was excommunicated for publishing the same documents of women's history you can now find on the Church's website. (I'm happy to say my friend is back in the Church researching women's history.) I miss all who are not back, those with whom I generally agreed and those with whom I didn't.

What would be our personal experience in this would-be Zion ward? Exciting. Thirty years ago I asked my Church hero, scholar and humanitarian, Lowell Bennion, how to deal with the frustration of shallow Church study. A convert, I wanted more help learning. Lowell said I would have to study on my own, but that I could look to the Church to serve and bless and be served and blessed. The serving and blessing part is brilliant but three decades later I have seen too many leave us for want of understanding of basic doctrine. We must find a way to explore those doctrines together. In our Zion, I think we could be learning and serving on steroids. No one would lazily leave the study and service to others. And because we would better understand God, we would better respect and care for each other. We would better understand the power of love. We would do nothing that would make it harder for anyone seeking God to be with us. When we learned we can only show our love for God by feeding his sheep, we would make sure that all have meaningful opportunities to serve in and out of our Zion. We would be more righteous, like the city of Enoch. We would be happy. Some people would see our new grasp of truth and goodness and want to be with us again. We would be so strong.

## CONTRIBUTORS

---

DEVERY S. ANDERSON {deverysa@gmail.com} is the award-winning author of a serialized history of the Dialogue Foundation. He is the editor of a three-volume documentary history of LDS temple worship, and author of *Emmett Till: The Murder That Shocked the World and Propelled the Civil Rights Movement*.

MOLLY MCLELLAN BENNION {molly.bennion@gmail.com} is an attorney and investor. She earned her degrees at Smith College and the University of Houston, where she was an editor of the law review, and attended the University of Washington in between. She taught business law at the University of St. Thomas in Houston prior to practicing law, specializing in commercial litigation. Today she manages capital for two family businesses, one engaged in commercial land development and the other in marine engine distributorship including boatyard and repair services. She has served on the BYU Law School Board of Visitors and the Dialogue Board, twice as its Chair. She has published essays in *Dialogue*, the anthology *Why I Stay* (ed. Robert A. Rees), and the upcoming *The Mormon World* (ed. Richard Sherlock and Carl Mosser). Molly and her husband, Roy, live in Seattle. They are parents of four children and grandparents of six.

GARY JAMES BERGERA is the managing director of the Smith-Pettit Foundation and the company director of Signature Books Publishing.

ALISON BRIMLEY {alison.maeser@gmail.com} is the winner of the 2018 Sunstone Fiction Contest, the 2018 Association of Mormon Letters Short Fiction Award, and the 2017 Mountain West Writers Contest. Her work is forthcoming in *Western Humanities Review* and elsewhere.

JOANNA BROOKS {jimb Brooks@sdsu.edu} serves as chair of the Dialogue Board of Directors. Brooks is an award-winning scholar of American religion and culture and the editor or author of nine books, including *The Book of Mormon Girl: A Memoir of an American Faith* (Free Press / Simon & Schuster, 2012) and *Mormon Feminism: Essential Writings* (Oxford, 2015). She and her husband, David, live in San Diego, California, and have two school-age children.

ALICE FAULKNER BURCH {NJoytheJurnee@hotmail.com} is the daughter of Cleo and Elwanda Faulkner. Currently she serves as the Relief Society President of the Utah Genesis Group. She is the founder-owner of Ask Mama Alice (AskMamaAlice@outlook.com) where she works as a parent mentor with White parents who have adopted Black children to aid them in successfully raising their children.

LESTER E. BUSH, JR. {lesterbush@cs.com} is a physician living in Maryland. Formerly an associate editor of *Dialogue*, he has published two books and many articles on Mormon history, and twice won the annual MHA Best Article Award, and once the MHA Best First Book Award.

VERLYNE CHRISTENSEN is a psychologist in private practice since 2009. Her work focuses mainly on relational dynamics within couples, families and communities (ethnic, racial, or religious). She writes and has given presentations on the nature of relationships and on matters of feminism, race, and religion. She and her husband are raising their family in Calgary. Verlyne has recently joined the editorial board of *Dialogue*.

JANAN GRAHAM-RUSSELL studies womanist theology, Afro-Atlantic religion, and contemporary Mormonism. She specifically engages racial identity and religious expression among Black Latter-day Saint women in the Afro-Atlantic. Her work has been featured in two books: *Mormon Feminism: Essential Writings* (Oxford University Press, 2015) and *A Book of Mormons: Latter-day Saints on a Modern-Day Zion* (White Cloud Press, 2015) as well as *The Atlantic* online. Janan holds an MA in Religion from the Howard University School of Divinity.

ROBERT GREENWELL {u0853646@utah.edu} is an independent scholar specializing in Mormon studies. He received a BS in history at Weber State University, an MA in history at the University of Utah, and was a doctoral candidate in history at The Ohio State University, specializing in modern German history. From 1972–1974 he was a DAAD Research Fellow in the Federal Republic of Germany researching modern German political history.

GAIL TURLEY HOUSTON {ghouston@unm.edu} is a professor in the English Department at the University of New Mexico. She has published

four books and numerous articles on the Victorian period and is now focusing on Charlotte Brontë and a little known early nineteenth-century radical named Eliza Sharples.

MELODIE JACKSON {melodiejackson629@gmail.com} is originally from Vicksburg, Mississippi, and is a BYU student majoring in American studies. “Black Cain in White Garments” was the award-winning essay from BYU’s 2018 Martin Luther King Day Student Essay Contest.

KEVIN KLEIN {kevinmklein575@gmail.com} likes learning and writing about things, including poetry, picture books, family building, instructional design for gospel learning, math education, and bean-to-bar chocolate. His greatest interest is people. Kevin studied at Brigham Young University, Utah Valley University, and Edith Cowan University before teaching high-school English for the space of a time at a Catholic school in Perth, Australia. He now lives back in Utah County, where he creates teacher training materials for the K-12 crowd and lives after the manner of happiness with a wonderful woman and two kids.

MATTHEW L. HARRIS {matt.harris@csupueblo.edu} is a professor of history at Colorado State University–Pueblo. He received a BA and MA in history from Brigham Young University and an MPhil and PhD, also in history, from the Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs at Syracuse University. He is the author or editor of numerous books and articles, including *The Mormon Church and Blacks: A Documentary History* (University of Illinois Press, 2015), *Thunder on the Right: Ezra Taft Benson in Mormonism and Politics* (University of Illinois Press, 2019), and “Watchman on the Tower”: *Ezra Taft Benson and the Making of the Mormon Right* (University of Utah Press, 2019). He is currently at work on two book-length manuscripts: “*The Long Awaited Day*”: *Blacks, Mormons, and the Lifting of the Priesthood and Temple Ban, 1945–2018*; and *Hugh B. Brown: Mormonism’s Progressive Apostle* (Signature Books).

CAMERON MCCOY {cameron\_mccoy@byu.edu} is an assistant professor of US diplomatic and military history at Brigham Young University and a reserve Marine Corps infantry officer. His research investigates the factors and pressures leading to the racial turbulence in the Marine Corps from the end of World War II through the Vietnam era, and the

efforts, on the part of civilian and military officials, to maintain institutional racism. He is also the co-author of the book chapter, "We Are AAMRI: Redefining Black Male Excellence at the University of Texas at Austin," in *Recruiting, Retaining, and Engaging African-American Males at Select Prestigious Research Universities: Challenges and Opportunities in Academics and Sports*, several book reviews, and editorials.

KAREN MARGUERITE MOLONEY {kmoloney@weber.edu} is a professor of English at Weber State University. She earned a PhD in modern British and Anglo-Irish literature at UCLA and is the author of *Seamus Heaney and the Emblems of Hope* (University of Missouri Press, 2007). Her poems and essays have won various awards and appeared in *Twentieth Century Literature*, *Memoir*, *Jacaranda Review*, *Westwind*, *Dialogue*, and other journals. She's currently putting finishing touches on *Watermarked*, a play set in North Friesland.

GLEN NELSON {glen.nelson.nyc@gmail.com} is the author of *Joseph Paul Vorst*, *Mormons at the Met*, and twenty other books—some of these as a ghostwriter. Three of them have been New York Times bestsellers. He has curated solo gallery exhibitions of Annie Poon, Casey Jex Smith, and the American lithographs of Joseph Paul Vorst (all for Writ & Vision Gallery, Provo, Utah) and written catalogs for each of them. He is the librettist of three operas by Murray Boren and a number of other works in collaboration with composers, including new commissioned projects with Ethan Wickman and Lansing McLoskey that will premiere in 2019 and 2020, respectively. He founded Mormon Artists Group in 1999. He hosts the podcast "Mormon Arts Center's Studio Podcast," and he is co-executive director of the Mormon Arts Center.

EGIDE NZOJBWAMI is an engineer and has his own consulting firm in Calgary, Alberta. He and his spouse, Beatrice, joined the Church in 1985 while pursuing his PhD in Belgium. They are the parents of five adult children who are all married. The whole family immigrated to Calgary, Alberta in 1996. Egide is currently serving in the Calgary West Stake presidency.

DAYNA PATTERSON {daynaepatterson@gmail.com} earned her MA in literature from Texas State University–San Marcos and her MFA



from Western Washington University. Her creative work has appeared recently in *Hotel Amerika*, *Western Humanities Review*, *So To Speak*, *Sugar House Review*, and *Zone 3*. She is the founding editor-in-chief of *Psaltery & Lyre*, a former managing editor of *Bellingham Review*, and poetry editor of *Exponent II*. She is a co-editor of *Dove Song: Heavenly Mother in Mormon Poetry*. Her website is [daynapatterson.com](http://daynapatterson.com).

GREGORY A. PRINCE {[gprince@erols.com](mailto:gprince@erols.com)} is a scientist and author. He served on the board of directors of *Dialogue* for fifteen years.

DARRON SMITH {[darron.smith@memphis.edu](mailto:darron.smith@memphis.edu)} is an instructor of sociology at the University of Memphis. He has written for various media outlets and has appeared in ESPN's *Outside the Lines*. Smith is also featured in the CBS Sports documentary, *The Black 14: Wyoming Football 1969*. His research and scholarship include: Mormon studies, health care inequities, race relations, sports, and transracial adoption. He is the co-editor of *Black and Mormon* (2004), *White Parents Black Children: Experiencing Transracial Adoption* (2011), and the author of *When Race, Religion & Sports Collide: Black Athletes at BYU and Beyond*, released in 2016 by Rowman & Littlefield Press.

KATHRYN KNIGHT SONNTAG {[kavaliere@gmail.com](mailto:kavaliere@gmail.com)} holds a master's degree in landscape architecture and environmental planning and works as a land planner in Salt Lake City. Her research focuses on the role of the transcendent in landscapes and greatly informs her first collection of poetry, *The Tree at the Center*, forthcoming from BCC Press.

ROY WHITAKER {[dwhitaker@sdsu.edu](mailto:dwhitaker@sdsu.edu)} is an Assistant Professor of American Religious Diversity at San Diego State University. His research area is contemporary religion with a specialization in African American pluralism and humanism.

EDWARD WHITLEY {[whitley@lehigh.edu](mailto:whitley@lehigh.edu)} is an Associate Professor of English at Lehigh University in Bethlehem, PA. He has written about Eliza R. Snow in his first book, *American Bards: Walt Whitman and Other Unlikely Candidates for National Poet*, and has an essay forthcoming in the Oxford University Press volume *The Book of Mormon: Americanist Approaches*.

# EUGENE ENGLAND MEMORIAL PERSONAL ESSAY CONTEST

In the spirit of Gene's writings, entries should relate to Latter-day Saint experience, theology, or worldview. Essays will be judged by noted Mormon authors and professors of literature. Winners will be notified by email and announced in our Winter issue and on Dialogue's website. After the announcement, all other entrants will be free to submit their essays elsewhere.

## Prizes

First place, \$300; second place, \$200; and third place \$100

## Rules

1. Up to three entries may be submitted by any one author. Send manuscript in PDF or Word format to [englandcontest@dialoguejournal.com](mailto:englandcontest@dialoguejournal.com) by January 31, 2019.
2. Each essay must be double-spaced. All essays must be 3500 words or fewer. The author's name should not appear on any page of the essay.
3. In the body of the email, the author must state the essay's title and the author's name, address, telephone number, and email. The author must also include language attesting that the entry is her or his own work, that it has not been previously published, that it is not being considered for publication elsewhere, and that it will not be submitted to other publishers until after the contest. If the entry wins, Dialogue retains first-publication rights though publication is not guaranteed. The author retains all literary rights. Dialogue discourages the use of pseudonyms; if used, the author must identify the real and pen names and the reasons for writing under the pseudonym. Failure to comply with the rules will result in disqualification.

# DIALOGUE

a journal of mormon thought

## IN THE NEXT ISSUE

Terryl Givens's "Heretics in Truth: Love, Faith, and Hope as the Foundation for Theology, Community, Destiny"

Mette Harrison's "Resurrection"

Blaire Ostler's "Mother in Heaven"

Join our DIALOGUE!

Find us on Facebook at Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought  
Follow us on Twitter @DialogueJournal

### SUBSCRIPTION OPTIONS

PRINT: 1 year (4 issues) \$50 | international \$70 | seniors/students \$35

ELECTRONIC (PDF): 1 year (4 issues) \$25

DVD ARCHIVE: Volumes 1–44 (1966–2011) in PDF format, \$40

More titles and special offers available on our website:

[www.dialoguejournal.com](http://www.dialoguejournal.com)

DIALOGUE  
PO Box 1094  
Farmington, UT 84025  
*electronic service requested*

