

# Mormonism's Negro Doctrine: An Historical Overview\*

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## I

*So long as we have no special rule in the Church, as to people of color, let prudence guide, and while they, as well as we, are in the hands of a merciful God, we say: Shun every appearance of evil.—W. W. Phelps, 1833*

THERE ONCE WAS A TIME, albeit brief, when a "Negro problem" did not exist for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. During those early months in New York and Ohio, no mention was even made of church attitudes towards blacks. The gospel was for "all nations, kindreds, tongues and peoples,"<sup>1</sup> and no exceptions were made. A Negro, "Black Pete," was among the first converts in Ohio, and his story was prominently reported in the local press.<sup>2</sup> W. W. Phelps opened a mission to Missouri in July 1831 and preached to "all the families of the earth,"

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1. The injunction was found in many places in the recently published Book of Mormon (e.g., 1 Ne. 19:17; 1 Ne. 22:28; 2 Ne. 30:8; Mos. 27:25; Alma 29:8; 3 Ne. 28:29; similarly, 1 Ne. 17:35; 2 Ne. 26:26-28,33; Mos. 23:7; Alma 26:37), and was reaffirmed in a revelation to Joseph Smith, 9 Feb. 1831, published the following July: "And I give unto you a commandment that ye shall teach them unto all men, for they shall be taught unto all nations, kindreds, tongues and peoples" (*Evening and Morning Star* [hereafter E&MS], July 1832; presently D&C 42:58).

2. *Ashtabula Journal*, 5 Feb. 1831, and *Albany Journal*, 16 Feb. 1831. These papers attribute the account to the *Painesville Gazette* and the *Geauga Gazette*, respectively.

specifically mentioning Negroes among his first audience.<sup>3</sup> The following year another black, Elijah Abel, was baptized in Maryland.<sup>4</sup>

This initial period was ultimately brought to an end by the influx of Mormons into the Missouri mission in late 1831 and early 1832. Not long before the arrival of the Mormon vanguard, the "deformed and haggard visage" of abolitionism was manifest in Missouri; elsewhere Nat Turner graphically reinforced the southern phobia of slave insurrection.

At this time the Mormons were mostly emigrants from northern and eastern states, and were not slaveholders. In less than a year, a rumor was afoot that they were "tampering" with the slaves. Not insensitive to this charge, the Mormons agreed to investigate and "bring to justice any person who might. . . violate the law of the land by stirring up the blacks to an insurrection, or in any degree dissuade them from being perfectly obedient to their masters."<sup>5</sup> Their investigations proved negative as only one specific accusation was uncovered, and the elder accused had returned to the East; however, the rumors continued unabated.<sup>6</sup>

One aspect of the slaveholders' paranoia not initially touched by the Mormon presence was the dictum that free Negroes promoted slave revolts. Ten years earlier Missouri had been delayed admission into the Union for barring free Negroes from the state. A modification in the state constitution was compelled which allowed entry to the few free blacks who were citizens of other states. Consequently, free Negroes were rare in Missouri; Jackson County had none.

In the summer of 1833, the older settlers perceived a new threat to this status embodied in the church's *Evening and Morning Star*. Due to special requirements in the Missouri law affecting the immigration of free Negroes into the state, Phelps had published the relevant material "to prevent any misunderstanding among the churches abroad, respecting free people of color, who may think of coming to the western boundaries of Missouri, as members of the Church."<sup>7</sup> The Missourians interpreted the article as an invitation to "free negroes and mulattoes from other states to become 'Mormons,' and remove and settle among us."<sup>8</sup>

3. Manuscript History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, entry undated. Last preceding dated entry was from June 1831, but an intervening reprint from July suggests that the account originated in the latter month.

4. Andrew Jenson, *Latter-day Saint Biographical Encyclopedia* (Salt Lake City: A. Jenson History Co., 1901-36), 3:577.

5. "Outrage in Jackson County, Missouri," *E&MS* 2 (Jan. 1834): 122.

6. A discussion of this problem is to be found in Warren A. Jennings, "Factors in the Destruction of the Mormon Press in Missouri, 1833," *Utah Historical Quarterly* 35 (1967): 59-76.

7. "Free People of Color," *E&MS* 2 (July 1833): 109.

8. "The Manifesto of the Mob," as recorded in John Whitmer's *History*, 9; also found

This interpretation was probably unfair to Phelps as he had stated twice that the subject was especially delicate, and one on which great care should be taken to "shun every appearance of evil." However, he also included a remarkably injudicious comment: "In connection with the wonderful events of this age, much is doing towards abolishing slavery, and colonizing the blacks, in Africa."<sup>9</sup>

The local citizenry immediately drafted a list of accusations against the Saints, prominently featuring the anti-slavery issue and Phelps's article. In response, Phelps issued an "Extra" explaining that he had been "misunderstood." The intention, he wrote, "was not only to stop free people of color from emigrating to this state, but to prevent them from being admitted as members of the Church" and stated that, furthermore, "none will be admitted into the Church."<sup>10</sup> Since Phelps had stated in his first article that there was "no special rule in the Church, as to people of color," this new restriction was obviously an expedient adopted in Missouri. Incredibly, Phelps also reprinted his previous reflection on the "wonderful events. . . towards abolishing slavery."

The reversal of position on Negro membership had no discernible impact on the settlers; a redraft of their charges, with additional demands, was incorporated into several "propositions" which flatly rejected Phelps's explanation.<sup>11</sup> The subsequent events are well known: mob violence, the destruction of the *Star* press, and ultimately the expulsion of the Saints from Jackson County.

The Missouri accusations had gone "considerably the rounds in the public prints," so, on reestablishing the *Star* in Ohio, an extensive rebuttal was published. No Mormon, it was asserted, had ever been implicated on a charge of tampering with the slaves. In a broader context, the *Star* added,

All who are acquainted with the situation of slave States, know that the life of every white is in constant danger, and to insinuate any thing which could possibly be interpreted by a slave, that it was not just to hold human beings in bondage, would be jeopardizing the life of every white inhabitant in the country. For the moment an insurrection should break out, no respect would be paid to age, sex, or religion by an enraged, jealous, and ignorant black

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in Joseph Smith, Jr., *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (hereafter DHC), ed. B. H. Roberts, 7 vols. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1902-12), 1:378.

9. E&MS 2 (July 1833): 111.

10. E&MS "Extra" reprinted in *Times & Seasons* (hereafter T&S) 6:818; also DHC 1:378.

11. "Contemporaneous with the appearance of this article, was the expectation among the brethren here, that a considerable number of this degraded caste were only awaiting this information before they should set out on their journey" (T&S 6:832-3, which cites the *Western Monitor* of 2 Aug. 1833; however, Jennings, op. cit., dates the *Monitor* article 9 Aug. 1833).

banditti. And the individual who would not immediately report any one who might be found influencing the minds of slaves with evil, would be beneath even the slave himself, and unworthy the privilege of a free Government.<sup>12</sup>

The Mormons had their own reasons for being alert to the possibility of slave insurrection (and their early publications reflect this preoccupation), for back in late 1832 Joseph Smith had prophesied that a war was imminent pitting the South against the North, and that "after many days, slaves shall rise up against their masters."<sup>13</sup>

The Jackson County experience demonstrated the need for a clear statement of church policy on slavery. In December 1833, immediately following the expulsion from Jackson County, Joseph Smith received a revelation that seems to bear directly on this question. In part, it declared that "it is not right that any man should be in bondage to another."<sup>14</sup> While the most recent church pronouncement on the Negro (1969) tied this revelation to Negro slavery, it does not appear to have been used in early discourses on either side of the slavery question.<sup>15</sup>

The statement which did come to serve as the "official" church position on slavery was adopted in August 1835. This statement, worded so that it avoided comment on the morality of slavery per se, was part of a general endorsement of legal institutions. One section dealt with governments "allowing human beings to be held in servitude," and stated that under these circumstances the church felt it to be "unlawful and unjust, and dangerous to the peace" for anyone "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

12. "Outrage in Jackson County, Missouri," E&MS 2 (Jan. 1834): 122.

13. D&C 87, received 25 Dec. 1832, as quoted in the 1851 ed. of the Pearl of Great Price. Although this prophecy was not published until 1851, Orson Pratt reported in 1870 that it was in circulation in 1833, and that when "a youth of nineteen. . . I carried forth the written revelation, foretelling this contest, some twenty-eight years before the war commenced" (*Journal of Discourses* [Liverpool, England: 1854-1886; 1966 reprint] [hereafter JD—publisher changed with each issue] 13:135; also 18:224). Wilford Woodruff also reported early familiarity with the prophecy (JD 14:2).

14. The present D&C 101:77-79, revealed 16 Dec. 1833, and included in the 1835 ed. of the Doctrine and Covenants.

15. "In revelations received by the first prophet of the church in this dispensation, Joseph Smith (1805-1844), the Lord made it clear that it is 'not right that any man should be in bondage one to another.' These words were spoken prior to the Civil War. From these and other revelations have sprung the church's deep and historic concern with man's free agency and our commitment to the sacred principles of the Constitution: "It follows, therefore, that we believe the Negro, as well as those of other races, should have his full Constitutional privileges as a member of society" (First Presidency statement of 15 Dec. 1969, from the *Church News*, 10 Jan. 1970).

least to cause them to be dissatisfied with their situations in this life, thereby jeopardizing the lives of men."<sup>16</sup>

The restriction on proselyting was not felt to conflict with the universal calling of the church. Any possible question on this point was eliminated the following month in a letter from Joseph Smith to the "elders abroad." In this the prophet reaffirmed that the church believed "in preaching the doctrine of repentance in all the world, both to old and young, rich and poor, bond and free." While the elders were instructed to teach slaves only with their master's consent, if this permission were denied "the responsibility be upon the head of the master of that house, and the consequences thereof, and the guilt of that house is no longer upon thy skirts."<sup>17</sup>

During the 1830s the national debate over slavery increased sharply. Abolitionists shifted from a plea for gradual release of the slaves to a demand for immediate emancipation. Biblical arguments became more prominent as slaveholding was attacked as a sin or defended with scriptural precedents. Anti-slavery evangelists traveled circuits proselyting northern communities, and in the spring of 1836 an abolitionist visited Kirtland, Ohio, and established a small anti-slavery society. The Mormons, in spite of their repeated denials, continued to be charged with anti-slavery activity in Missouri. Now these accusations were spreading to fertile missionary areas elsewhere in the South. It was not the best time for an abolitionist to visit church headquarters.

Lest anyone gain "the impression that all he said was concurred in," the next issue of the *Messenger and Advocate* was devoted largely to a rebuttal of abolitionism.<sup>18</sup> A lengthy article was contributed by Joseph Smith, and there were others from Warren Parrish and Oliver Cowdery. Together these essays constitute the most extensive discussion of slavery to appear during the first two decades of the Restoration, and they provide an invaluable insight into the thinking of church leaders at that time.

At least five major objections to the abolitionist cause can be identified in Joseph Smith's discussion:

—First, he believed the course of abolitionism was "calculated to . . . set loose, upon the world a community of people who might peradventure,

16. D&C 134:12, "adopted by unanimous vote at a general assembly" in Kirtland. While some claim this was the work of Oliver Cowdery, the statement was supposed to have been drafted by a committee composed of Joseph Smith, Cowdery, Sidney Rigdon, and Frederick G. Williams. The statement was included in the 1835 ed. of the *Doctrine and Covenants* as section 102.

17. Published in the Sept. and Nov. 1835 issues of the *Messenger and Advocate* 1:180-81; 2:210-11.

18. M&A 2 (Apr. 1836): 289-301.

overrun our country and violate the most sacred principles of human society,—chastity and virtue.”

—Second, any evil attending slavery should have been apparent to the “men of piety” of the South who had raised no objections to the institution.

—Third, the prophet did “not believe that the people of the North have any more right to say that the South *shall* not hold slaves, than the South have to say the North *shall*”; the signing of petitions in the North was nothing more than “an array of influence, and a declaration of hostilities against the people of the South.”

—Fourth, the sons of Canaan (or Ham), whom Joseph Smith identified with the Negro, were cursed with servitude by a “decree of Jehovah,” and that curse was “not yet taken off the sons of Canaan, neither will be until it is affected by as great power as caused it to come. . .and those who are determined to pursue a course which shows an opposition. . .against the designs of the Lord, will learn. . .that God can do his work without the aid of those who are not dictated by his counsel.”

—Fifth, there were several other biblical precedents for slavery (in the histories of Abraham, Leviticus, Ephesians, Timothy).

In concluding his article, the prophet partially withdrew his previous stand on proselyting slaves, “It would be much better and more prudent, not to preach at all to the slaves, until after their masters are converted.”

Parrish and Cowdery pursued similar arguments. Parrish’s main points were that the Constitution was divinely inspired and had sanctioned slavery, and that the people should comply with the laws of the land. He also cited the curse on Ham, and declared that it would continue in effect until the Lord removed it, at which time he would “announce to his servants the prophets that the time has arrived.” Until such time, all the “abolition societies that now are or ever will be, cannot cause one jot or tittle of the prophecy to fail.” Parrish concluded with a comment on the danger to society if rebellion were fomented among the blacks.

Oliver Cowdery’s article was more directly concerned with race. He touched on most of the points raised in the other two articles, but dwelt at much greater length on the problems of insurrection and the social implications of emancipation:

Let the blacks of the south be free, and our community is overrun with paupers, and a reckless mass of human beings, uncultivated, untaught and unaccustomed to provide for themselves the necessaries of life—endangering the chastity of every female who might by chance be found in our streets—our prisons filled with convicts, and the hangman wearied with executing the functions of his office! This must unavoidably be the case, every rational

man must admit, who has ever travelled in the slave states, or we must open our houses, unfold our arms, and bid these degraded and degrading sons of Canaan, a hearty welcome and a free admittance to all we possess! A society of this nature, to us, is so intolerably degrading, that the bare reflection causes our feeling to recoil, and our hearts to revolt.

He also saw little alternative to slavery:

The idea of transportation is folly, the project of emancipation [sic] is destructive to our government, and the notion of amalgamation is devilish! . . . And insensible to feeling must be the heart, and low indeed must be the mind, that would consent for a moment, to see his fair daughter, his sister, or perhaps, his bosom companion, in the embrace of a NEGRO!<sup>19</sup>

At last an unequivocal position on Negro slavery had been taken. Should the question of Mormon attitudes arise, an unambiguous statement was now available that should satisfy the most ardent slaveholder. Questions did arise and the articles were put to use with mixed results.<sup>20</sup>

A question immediately arises as to the basis for these statements. Originating with the prophet and other prominent spokesmen of the church, many Mormons have supposed that at least part of the information was doctrinal, or even revelatory. However, far from professing divine insight, the authors made it expressly clear that these were their *personal views*.<sup>21</sup> Moreover, a comparative study will demonstrate that the ideas presented reflect a cross section of the popular arguments of the day in support of slavery.

The growth of the abolitionist movement in the mid-1830s had led to the wide circulation of anti-slavery literature. The proponents of slavery also became more active and were equally prolific pamphleteers. Many and varied defenses of slavery were to appear over the next quarter century, and several themes were evident from the start. The natural inferiority and alleged sexual depravity of the blacks alluded to in all the *Messenger and Advocate* articles were rarely missing from any general defense of Negro slavery. States' rights and the constitutional sanction of slavery

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19. M&A 2:299-301.

20. In July 1836, Wilford Woodruff and Abraham Smoot, on being charged as "abolitionists" in Tennessee, "read the seventh number of the *Messenger and Advocate* to them, which silenced the false accusations" (L. C. Berrett, "History of the Southern States Mission" [master's thesis, Brigham Young University, 1960], 117). Similar charges were made the same month in Missouri, and the First Presidency advised: "Without occupying time here, we refer you to the April (1836) No. of the 'Latter Day Saint's Messenger and Advocate'" (letter of 25 July 1836, published in the M&A 2:354).

21. Joseph Smith wrote in his article that these were the "views and sentiments I believe as an individual," and Oliver Cowdery said, "We speak as an individual and as a man in this matter."

provided the standard legal justifications; and *all* scriptural defenses of slavery cited Noah's curse on Canaan and applied it directly to Negroes. Other scriptural "precedents" were generally cited as well.

Although none of these arguments were truly unique to this period, or even to the nineteenth century, their prominence in national debate was greatest during the years from 1830 to 1860. With very little effort, one can duplicate the Mormon arguments to the most specific detail from these contemporary non-Mormon sources.<sup>22</sup> To claim these ideas originated independently within the church would require considerable justification, none of which has ever been presented.

Because of its later prominence in Mormon history, one particular argument requires careful attention: the belief that Negroes were descended from Ham. While particularly common in the first half of the nineteenth century, this idea was actually very old. Recent studies have traced the association to at least 200 to 600 A.D. Jordan reports that early Jewish writings invoked Noah's curse to explain the black skin of the Africans. Among early Christian Fathers, both Jerome and Augustine accepted the Ham genealogy for Negroes, and this belief is said to have become "universal" in early Christendom. More recently the association is evident in the earliest English descriptions of Africans in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. By the eighteenth century, the connection had become common in the New World, where it was not infrequently cited in justification of black slavery.

However, there was always disagreement on the implications of Noah's curse. Those opposed to slavery contended that the Africans were related to Ham through Cush, rather than Canaan (or occasionally, through all four sons), and therefore a curse affecting Canaan could not be applied to the blacks as a group. Furthermore, it was argued, the curse *predicted* rather than *justified* enslavement. The fundamental association with Ham was not so frequently challenged. Even among nineteenth cen-

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22. While the correlation is most startling in the primary sources, the following, more recent studies also demonstrate the extent to which the views were circulated: J. Oliver Buswell, *Slavery, Segregation, and Scripture* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans Press, 1964); William S. Jenkins, *Pro-Slavery Thought in the Old South* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1935); Eric L. McKittrick, ed., *Slavery Defended: The Views of the Old South* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1963); Louis Ruchames, *Racial Thought in America, Vol. 1* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1969); H. Shelton Smith, *In His Image, But . . . : Racism in Southern Religion, 1780-1910* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1972); Caroline Shanks, "The Biblical Anti-slavery Argument of the Decade 1830-1840," *Journal of Negro History* 15 (1931):132-57; Charles H. Wesley, "The Concept of Negro Inferiority in American Thought," *Journal of Negro History* 25 (1941):540-60. A more limited study that makes a direct comparison to Mormon views is Naomi F. Woodbury, "A Legacy of Intolerance: Nineteenth Century Pro-slavery Propaganda and the Mormon Church Today" (masters thesis, University of California at Los Angeles, 1966).

ture anti-slavery elements, the Ham genealogy was widely accepted, and among the pro-slavery forces the association was virtually axiomatic.<sup>23</sup>

It is clear that Joseph Smith accepted this traditional genealogy. As early as 1831, he had noted parenthetically that Negroes were "descendants of Ham," and he again applied Noah's curse to Negro slavery in 1841.<sup>24</sup> There is no record of him "teaching" the Ham genealogy as church doctrine. This would have been unnecessary, of course, as the association of Ham and the Negro was already common knowledge.

The first pointed reference to the Ham genealogy had actually come not with the articles in 1836 but rather a year earlier in a letter published in the *Messenger and Advocate*. W. W. Phelps proposed at that time that a lineage of blacks could be traced from Cain, through a black "Canaanite" wife of Ham, to Canaan.<sup>25</sup> The Cain genealogy had a somewhat less extensive tradition than the more straightforward Ham thesis, although it also was widely reported and can be traced back several centuries, generally in connection with the enslavement of Africans.<sup>26</sup> It had the "advantage" of including all of Ham's sons within a cursed lineage. The

23. For the early history, see Winthrop D. Jordan, *White Over Black: American Attitudes Toward the Negro 1550-1812* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1968; reprint, Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1969), 18, 36, and part I in general; also David B. Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in Western Culture* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1966), 450-1. Most of the references cited in n. 22 deal with the eighteenth century as well as the nineteenth. Regarding the curse on Ham, the noted anti-slavery evangelist Theodore Weld wrote in 1838, "The prophecy of Noah is the vade mecum of slaveholders, and they never venture abroad without it" (as quoted in H. Shelton Smith, *In His Image*, 130).

It remains a disappointment to me that Hugh Nibley in his recent treatments of the Book of Abraham has not commented on the Ham genealogy or Negro doctrine believed by so many Mormons to be based on this scripture. See, however, his *The World of the Jaredites* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1952), 160-64.

24. The parenthetical reference, to "Negroes-descendants of Ham," is found in the Manuscript History following the date 19 June 1831. The remark made in 1841 was rather arresting: "I referred to the curse of Ham for laughing at Noah, while in his wine, but doing no harm. . . . [W]hen he was accused by Canaan, he cursed him by the priesthood which he held, and the Lord had respect to his word, and the priesthood which he held, notwithstanding he was drunk, and the curse remains upon the posterity of Canaan until the present day" (DHC 4 :445-6). The prophet also modified the account in Genesis to read that Canaan had "a veil of darkness. . . cover him, that he shall be known among all men" (Gen. 9:50, *Holy Scriptures*, 1944, Independence, Mo.); the implications of the "Inspired Version" of Genesis may not be as evident as some have suggested, for Joseph Smith characterized the non-Negro Lamanites in very similar terms (2 Ne. 5:21; Jac. 3:5, 8-9; Alma 3:6-9; 3 Ne. 2:14-15; Morm. 5:15).

25. The letter, written 6 February 1835, was published in M&A 1:82. As the Book of Abraham papyri were not in the possession of the church at this time, the idea that Ham had a black "Canaanite" wife must have been based on the extant Book of Moses (7:8) reference to an antedeluvian people of Canaan who became black.

26. All the books cited in nn. 22 and 23 have references to this belief.

problem of transmitting Cain's lineage through the Flood was generally handled as Phelps did, through the wife of Ham; there have been some bizarre variants of his explanation.<sup>27</sup> Joseph Smith may also have believed that Negroes were descended from Cain, but the evidence for this claim is not very convincing. Certainly, there is presently no case at all for the idea that he "taught" this genealogy.<sup>28</sup>

It is significant, I believe, that in spite of the many discussions of blacks and slavery that had been published by 1836, *no* reference had been made to the priesthood. Yet, while there was not a written policy on blacks and the priesthood, a precedent had been established. Shortly before publication of the articles on abolitionism, a Negro was ordained to the Melchizedek priesthood. It has been suggested, considerably after the fact, that this was a mistake which was quickly rectified. Such a claim

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27. Charles B. Thompson, who left the church after the death of Joseph Smith and subsequently started his own group, claimed that the Negroes ("Nachash") were intelligent subhuman servants who had been taken onto the Ark among the other animals. Ham's "illicit union with the female" Nachash resulted in "three half-breed sons, Canaan, Mizraim, and Nimrod.." Interestingly, Thompson's linguistic pseudo-scholarship was accepted by the prominent southern slavery advocate, Samuel A. Cartwright, who characterized Thompson as "a star in the East," "a Hebrew scholar of the first-class," and incorporated his thesis into an article, "Unity of the Human Race Disproved by the Hebrew Bible," published in *De Bow's Review* (Aug. 1860). De Bow published a second article presenting the same claim in the Oct. 1860 issue of his review.

Another variant was presented by Joseph F. Smith, while president of the church. He recounted an idea which "he had been told. . .originated with the Prophet Joseph, but of course he could not vouch for it," to the effect that Ham's wife was illegitimately pregnant "by a man of her own race" when she went aboard the Ark, and that Cainan [sic] was the result of that illicit intercourse" (First Presidency meeting, 18 Aug. 1900, minutes in the Adam S. Bennion papers, Brigham Young University, or George Albert Smith papers, University of Utah). Smith was first counselor at this time but repeated the comment eight years later as president (see Council Meeting minutes of 26 Aug. 1908, in Bennion or Smith papers).

28. The sum total of the evidence presently available that the prophet accepted this connection is one parenthetical statement: "In the evening debated with John C. Bennett and others to show that the Indians have greater cause to complain of the treatment of the whites, than the negroes or sons of Cain" (Manuscript History, 25 Jan. 1842; also DHC 4:501). There is no known reference in which the prophet applied the Book of Moses comment that "the seed of Cain were black" (Moses 7:22) to the Negro.

In addition to Phelps's letter, there were other references to Cain in the mid-1830s. Apostle David Patten reportedly claimed to have "met with a very remarkable personage who had represented himself as being Cain" while on a mission in Tennessee in 1835. Patten, who described the "strange personage" as "very dark," "covered with hair," and wearing "no clothing," appears to have taken the claim seriously, and eventually "rebuked him" and "commanded him to go hence." The account was reported over fifty years later by Abraham Smoot (see Lycurgus Wilson, *Life of David Patten, the First Apostolic Martyr* [Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1904], 45-47). About 1836 a non-Mormon traveler reports being told by a Mormon "that the descendants of Cain were all now under the curse, and no one could possibly designate who they were" (see Edmund Flagg, *The Far West or A Tour Beyond the Mountains*. . .[New York: Harper & Brothers, 1838], 2:111).

is totally unfounded, and was actually refuted by Joseph F. Smith shortly after being put forth.<sup>29</sup> Elijah Abel was ordained an elder March 3, 1836, and shortly thereafter received his patriarchal blessing from Joseph Smith Sr.<sup>30</sup> In June he was listed among the recently licensed elders,<sup>31</sup> and on December 20, 1836, was ordained a seventy.<sup>32</sup> Three years later, in June 1839, he was still active in the Nauvoo Seventies Quorum,<sup>33</sup> and his seventy's certificate was renewed in 1841, and again after his arrival in Salt Lake City.<sup>34</sup> Moreover, Abel was known by Joseph Smith and reportedly lived for a time in the prophet's home.<sup>35</sup>

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29. From the Council Meeting minutes of 4 June 1879 (Bennion papers), five days after Coltrin related his account: "Brother Joseph F. Smith said he thought Brother Coltrin's memory was incorrect as to Brother Abel being dropped from the quorum of Seventies, to which he belonged, as Brother Abel has in his possession, (which also he had shown Brother J.F.S.) his certificate as a Seventy, given to him in 1841, and signed by Elder Joseph Young, Sen., and A. P. Rockwood, and a still later one given in this city. Brother Abel's account of the persons who washed and anointed him in the Kirtland Temple also disagreed with the statement of Brother Coltrin, whilst he stated that Brother Coltrin ordained him a Seventy. Brother Abel also states that the Prophet Joseph told him he was entitled to the priesthood."

30. Date of ordination from Jenson, *Latter-day Saint Biographical Encyclopedia*, 3:577. The patriarchal blessing is found in Joseph Smith's Patriarchal Blessing Record, p. 88 (undated), and is headed, "A blessing under the hands of Joseph Smith, Sen., upon Elijah Abel, who was born in Frederick County, Maryland, July 25, 1808." No lineage was assigned. It is clear that the blessing was given after Abel's ordination, for the patriarch states, "Thou hast been ordained an Elder."

31. M&A 2:335.

32. "Minutes of the Seventies Journal," kept by Hazen Aldrich, 20 Dec. 1836. Abel was one of several ordained by Zebedee Coltrin to the 3rd Quorum of Seventy. Aldrich and John Young, who with Coltrin were presidents of the seventies, also ordained several seventies that evening. This journal is found in the Historical Department of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

33. *Ibid.*, 1 June 1839, records: "Elder J. M. Grant communicated to the council a short history of the conduct of Elder Elijah Able [sic] and some of his teachings etc such as teaching that there would be stakes of Zion in all the world, that an elder was a High Priest and he had as much authority as any H.P., that he commanded some of the brethren from Canada to flee from there by such a time saying that if they did not cross the river St. Lawrence then they could not get into the States and that in addition to threatening to [knock] down Elder Christopher Merkley on their passage up Lake Ontario, he publicly declared that the elders in Kirtland make nothing of knocking down one another. This last charge was substantiated by the written testimony of Elder Zenos H. Gurley, most of the charges Elder Grant testified to the truth of and referred to Moses Smith, John and George Beckstead, Robert Burton and Zebedee Coltrin for testimony, for the substantiation of the remainder." No action was reported. "Pres. Joseph Smith Jr. S. Rigdon and Hyrum Smith were also present and most of the twelve."

34. Council Meeting minutes, 4 June 1879, see n. 29. Kate B. Carter (*The Negro Pioneer* [Salt Lake City: Daughters of Utah Pioneers, 1965], 15) reports that Abel came to Utah in 1847. Jenson assumed incorrectly that the certification in 1841 was the date of Abel's initial ordination (*Latter-day Saint Biographical Encyclopedia*, 3:577).

35. Jenson states that Abel "was intimately acquainted with the Prophet Joseph

The charge that Abel was dropped from the priesthood originated with Zebedee Coltrin. It is unfortunate that his memory proved unreliable on this point, as he should have been in a position to provide valuable information—for it was he who ordained Abel to the office of seventy (two years after purportedly being told that Negroes were not to receive the priesthood).<sup>36</sup> The circumstances of Coltrin's account may be of some relevance. He claimed to have questioned the right of Negroes to hold the priesthood after a visit to the South. Abraham Smoot, the only other person to claim firsthand counsel from Joseph Smith on this subject, also had asked about the situation in the South: "What should be done with the Negroes in the South as I was preaching to them? [The prophet] said I could baptize them by the consent of their masters, but not to confer the priesthood upon them." Additionally, a secondhand account related by Smoot in which Smith allegedly gave the same advice was also directed at Negroes "in the Southern States."<sup>37</sup> Most, if not all, of the Negroes involved in these accounts were slaves. It may be, notwithstanding the lack of contemporary documentation, that a policy was in effect denying the priesthood to slaves or isolated free southern Negroes. In any case, a *de facto* restriction is demonstrable in the South, and empirical justification for the policy is not difficult to imagine.

After 1836 the Mormons largely ignored the subject of slavery for nearly six years. During this time they periodically reaffirmed that they were not abolitionists, but the charge was no longer common in Missouri, nor elsewhere in the South.<sup>38</sup> In spite of the small number of Negro converts, the gospel was still proclaimed as universal. The first Mormon hymnal, printed in 1835, included a hymn exhorting the members to proclaim the message "throughout Europe, and Asia's dark regions, To China's far shores, and to Afric's black legions."<sup>39</sup> Another hymnal, in

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Smith" (*Latter-day Saint Biographical Encyclopedia*, 3:577); Carter claims, "In Nauvoo he lived in the home of Joseph Smith" (*The Negro Pioneer*, 15). See also DHC 4:365, for a passing reference to Abel by the prophet in June 1841.

36. See nn. 32 and 113; Coltrin claimed to have been instructed not to ordain Negroes in 1834.

37. Journal of L. John Nuttal, 31 May 1879, typewritten copy at Brigham Young University, 1 (1876-84): 290-93; a copy is also included in the Council Meeting minutes for 4 June 1879 (Bennion papers). Smoot attributed the second-hand accounts to W. W. Patten, Warren Parrish, and Thomas B. Marsh.

38. In July 1838, the *Elders' Journal*, Joseph Smith, ed., answered the question, "Are the Mormons abolitionists?" with "We do not believe in setting the Negroes free." In 1839 John Corriell published his *Brief History. . . of the Church* (St. Louis: "Printed for the author," 1839), with his reasons for leaving, and commented that "the abolition question is discarded by them, as being inconsistent with the decrees of Heaven, and detrimental to the peace and welfare of the community" (47-48).

39. "There's a feast of fat things for &c," hymn number 8, in *A Collection of Sacred*

1840, contained a new hymn by Parley P. Pratt, encouraging the Twelve to carry the gospel throughout the world:

India's and Afric's sultry plains  
 Must hear the tidings as they roll  
 Where darkness, death, and sorrow reign  
 And tyranny has held controll'd.<sup>40</sup>

No discrimination was evident in the 1836 rules governing the temple in Kirtland, which provided for "old or young, rich or poor, male or female, bond or free, black or white, believer or unbeliever."<sup>41</sup> Nor was a discriminatory policy projected for the Nauvoo temple when the First Presidency anticipated in 1840 that "we may soon expect to see flocking to this place, people from every land and from every nation, the polished European, the degraded Hottentot, and the shivering Laplander. Persons of all languages, and of every tongue, and of every color; who shall with us worship the Lord of Hosts in his holy temple, and offer up their orisons in his sanctuary."<sup>42</sup>

Early in 1842 Charles V. Dyer, a prominent Chicago physician, wrote to the mayor of Nauvoo, John C. Bennett, in an effort to gain Mormon support for the anti-slavery cause. Three abolitionists had recently been imprisoned in Missouri, and Dyer expressed indignation at the treatment received by abolitionists *and* Mormons in that state: "Have we not a right to sympathize with each other?" Bennett, at the height of a brief but exalted career with the Mormons, replied that he had considered the question of slavery "years ago" and was uncompromisingly for "UNIVERSAL LIBERTY, to every soul of man—civil, religious, and political." This exchange came to the attention of Joseph Smith, who wrote Bennett a short letter in apparent agreement: the subject of American slavery and the treatment of the three abolitionists made his "blood boil within me to reflect upon the injustices, cruelty, and oppression, of the rulers of the people—when will these things cease to be, and the Constitution and the Laws bear rule?"

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*Hymns for the Church of the Latter Day Saints*, selected by Emma Smith (Kirtland: F. G. Williams Co., 1835), 5.

40. "Ye Chosen Twelve," by Parley P. Pratt, in *A Collection of Sacred Hymns for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, in Europe*, selected by Brigham Young, Parley P. Pratt, and John Taylor (Manchester, England: W. R. Thomas, 1840). This hymn remains in the LDS hymnal in a slightly modified form.

41. DHC 2:368-9.

42. "Report of the Presidency" at General Conference, 3-5 Oct. 1840, in T&S 1:188, or DHC 4:213. While "washing and anointing" was performed in Kirtland, the ordinances presently denied Negroes were not announced until 1841 (sealing) and 1842 (endowments), and were not performed in the Nauvoo temple until 1846 and 1845, respectively.

Perhaps more unexpected than the contents of these letters was their subsequent publication by Joseph Smith in the March *Times and Seasons*, with an introduction that endorsed "UNIVERSAL LIBERTY" and characterized Bennett and Dyer as men of "brave and philanthropic hearts."<sup>43</sup> The anti-slavery sentiment in the letters was unmistakable, and their publication marked a virtual reversal of the published Mormon stance on slavery.

When and why this change occurred is not clear. Except for the relative silence of the preceding years, there was no suggestion of an impending change. The circumstances were obviously much different in 1842 than they had been in 1836. The slavery issue was no longer threatening to the Mormons. Although the church had previously received rough treatment at the hands of pro-slavery elements, it had no real prospect of returning to a slaveholding state. Illinois was theoretically a free state, and had only a small residual of "indentured" slaves. Abolitionist organizations and activities had declined markedly after 1837, but anti-slavery sentiment was more widespread both nationally and in Illinois. This was in part through association with the issues of freedom of speech, press, and petition, all of which were important to the Mormons. Personalities had also changed in the Mormon hierarchy.<sup>44</sup> However, for all the conducive circumstances, we have no contemporary explanation for the dramatic change in attitude.

Some authors have attempted to minimize the importance of Joseph Smith's anti-slavery views, and to suggest that his opposition to slavery was superficial or politically motivated. He did, after all, continue to deny that he was an abolitionist, rather preferring to characterize himself as a "friend of equal rights and privileges to all men."<sup>45</sup> A careful review

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43. T&S 3 (1 Mar. 1842): 722-25; Joseph Smith was then editor. By contrast, the Mormon *Northern Times*, published briefly in Kirtland, Ohio, announced in October 1835, that they had received "several communications. . . for insertion, in favor of anti-slavery" and "[t]o prevent any misunderstanding on the subject, we positively say, that we shall have nothing to do with the matter—we are opposed to abolition, and what ever is calculated to disturb the peace and harmony of our constitution and country. Abolition does hardly belong to law or religion, politics or gospel, according to our ideas on the subject" (9 Oct. 1835). A strongly anti-abolitionist letter had been published in the *Messenger and Advocate* (2:312-3) in May 1836.

44. Willard Richards and John C. Bennett expressed opinions that were significantly more "liberal" on this subject than had Oliver Cowdery. For a brief discussion of the new directions of anti-slavery, see C. Vann Woodward, *American Counterpoint: Slavery and Racism in the North-South Dialogue* (Boston: Little Brown and Company, 1971), 147.

45. T&S 3:808 (1 June 1842). This was in specific response to the charge that the letters published in March showed him to be an abolitionist. He referred to himself similarly in July 1843 (DHC 5:498); December 1843 (*General Joseph Smith's Appeal to the Green Mountain Boys—Times and Seasons Extra*); and in February 1844, he developed his position at much greater length in his "Views" on government (see n. 48 below).

of published sources, however, fails to reveal any evidence of duplicity. Rather, one finds consistent opposition to slavery from early 1842 until the prophet's death in mid-1844. Even in private conversation, the prophet advised that slaves owned by Mormons be brought "into a free country and set. . . free—Educate them and give them equal Rights."<sup>46</sup> He recorded a similar sentiment in his *History*, "Had I anything to do with the negro, I would. . . put them on a national equalization."<sup>47</sup> Many similar expressions are to be found in 1843 and 1844, although his greatest attention to slavery was evident during the 1844 presidential campaign. Joseph Smith's "Views on the Government and Policy of the U.S.," prepared in February as a campaign platform, included a plan for the elimination of slavery within six years through federal compensation of slaveholders.<sup>48</sup> He later added that this might be accomplished a few states at a time, or with a provision that slave children be freed after a "fixed period."<sup>49</sup>

The sincerity of the prophet's anti-slavery statements was challenged for several reasons. While repeatedly expressing a desire to "abolish slavery," Joseph Smith condemned the abolitionists as self-seeking and destined for "ruin, infamy and shame." Actually, the prophet's paradoxical antipathy to both slavery and abolitionism was not atypical of churchmen of his day. In the preceding few years, the majority of both the Protestant and Catholic clergy had opposed the abolitionist movement, and at the same time many also condemned slavery.<sup>50</sup> They particularly feared the divisive effect which the movement was having within

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46. 30 December 1842, in Joseph Smith's Journal, kept by Willard Richards; copy at Church Historical Department.

47. 2 January 1843 (DHC 5:217).

48. "Gen. Smith's Views on the Government and Policy of the U.S." (see T&S, 5:528-33). He subsequently spoke against slavery on 7 March 1844 (DHC 6:243); 14 April 1844 (T&S 5:508-10); and 13 May 1844 (letter published 4 June 1844 in T&S 5:545). Another indication of his interest in this subject were entries in his *History* in February 1843 on a John Quincy Adams petition against slavery (DHC 5:283), and in May 1843 on the abolition of slavery in the "British dominions in India" (DHC 5:379); in November of that year the *Times and Seasons* carried the full text of a Papal Bull "Relative to Refraining from Traffic in Blacks" (T&S 4:381-2).

49. This idea was expressed 7 March 1844 (see DHC 6:243, and Matthias Cowley, *Wilford Woodruff* [Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1909], 203). There is some uncertainty as to what the prophet planned to do with the freed slaves. At times he spoke of national equalization or equal rights; on this occasion he stated, "As soon as Texas was annexed, I would liberate the slaves in two or three States, indemnifying their owners, and send the negroes to Texas, and from Texas to Mexico, where all colors are alike."

50. Woodward, *American Counterpoint*, 153. Just a few days before his death, Joseph Smith published one of his most outspoken comments on slavery, and included an almost sympathetic allusion to the abolitionists. From a letter to Henry Clay, written 13 May 1844 and published 4 June 1844 (T&S 5:545): "True greatness never wavers, but when the

their denominations. Those abolitionists who had advocated a compensated emancipation in the previous decade were now gone, and the current uncompromising polemics were clearly aggravating badly strained inter-sectional relations. The possibility of a Civil War was especially real to the prophet; reiterating his warning of ten years before, he prophesied in 1843, that "much bloodshed" would "probably arise over the slave question."<sup>51</sup>

It also has been claimed that the prophet planned to allow Mormon slaveholders to retain their chattel property. The growth of the church in the South had led to the conversion of several slaveholders, at least three of whom moved to Nauvoo prior to the prophet's death. Two of the three claimed to have freed their slaves before coming North, but also reported that eight "ex-slaves" had chosen to remain with their masters.<sup>52</sup> Theoretically, a permanent move to Illinois should have brought freedom regardless. It appears that they were indeed freed, for in April 1844 the prophet stated with some pride that in Nauvoo there was not a slave "to raise his rusting fetters and chains, and exclaim, O liberty where are thy charms?"<sup>53</sup> Oddly, some of these blacks, and a number of others who later lived briefly in Nauvoo, again appear to be slaves several years later in Utah.<sup>54</sup>

It occurred to several prominent Mormons, working at the time in the Wisconsin pineries of the church, that there ought to be some special provision for slaveholders in the church. This idea was presented in two letters from a "Select Committee" to the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve proposing that the gospel be carried to the "South-Western States, as also Texas, Mexico, Brazil, &c" ("from Green Bay to the Mexican Gulf"), and that Texas be established as a "place of gathering for all the South." Were this done, the committee believed, thousands of rich planters "would embrace the Gospel, and, if they had a place to plant

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Missouri compromise was entered into by you, for the benefit of slavery, there was a mighty shrinkage of western honor; and from that day, Sir, the sterling Yankee, the struggling Abolitionist, and the staunch Democrat, with a large number of liberal minded Whigs, have marked you as a black-leg in politics."

51. D&C 130:12-13, dated 12 Apr. 1843.

52. James M. Flake and John H. Redd both report freeing their slaves. Henry Jolly, the third slave owner, also reported that his slaves wanted to stay with him; however, he sold all except one child whose parents had died (see Carter, *The Negro Pioneer*, 4-6, 25, 44-45).

53. T&S 5:508-10

54. Carter (*The Negro Pioneer*) and Jack Bellar ("Negro Slaves in Utah," *Utah Historical Quarterly* 2 [October 1929]:122-26) provide considerable information on the early Negroes in Utah. The problem of identifying slaves, normally complicated by the use of the term "servant" regardless of a black's legal status, is even more complex during the initial few years in Utah—during which time "slaves" were theoretically at liberty to leave their masters if they chose.

their slaves, give all the proceeds of their yearly labour, if rightly taught, for building up the kingdom." Moreover, the committee was "well informed of the Cherokee and the Choctaw nations who live between the State of Arkansas and the Colorado of the Texans, owning plantations and thousands of slaves, and that they are also very desirous to have an interview with the Elders of this Church, upon the principles of the Book of Mormon."<sup>55</sup>

Bishop George Miller, who delivered the letters, reported that the prophet's response was favorable ("I perceive that the Spirit of God is in the pineries"), and that some preliminary steps were taken towards obtaining land in Texas.<sup>56</sup> Andrew Jenson later claimed that Joseph Smith himself made the suggestion that a place be established in the Southwest for slaveholding members of the church.<sup>57</sup> As this was in March 1844, in the midst of the prophet's denunciations of slavery, a suggestion of duplicity is not unreasonable. The source of Jenson's statement was the Journal History copy of these letters. However, while the prophet included them in his *History*, there is no indication of endorsement, and he never related them to the slavery issue. Unquestionably, he favored the expansion of Mormon activities into the West, for within two weeks of receipt of the above letters he submitted a Memorial to Congress asking that he be authorized to organize a company of 100,000 men to police the West, specifically naming Oregon and Texas.<sup>58</sup>

The rather lengthy treatment of slavery included in the prophet's "Views" presented a remarkable contrast to his extensive discussion of 1836. For instance, the "Views" contained no reference to the social depravity of blacks. The "men of piety" of the South became "hospitable and noble" people who will help eliminate slavery "whenever they are

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55. Journal History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, entries dated 10 Mar. 1844 and 11 Mar. 1844. The letters were published in the *Millennial Star* [hereafter MS] some years later (23:103-4, 117-19), and most of the text is found in DHC 6:256ff, 259ff. Apostle Lyman Wight was among those who signed the letters.

The committee was at least partially correct. The slave holdings of the Cherokee and Choctaw nations together totaled several thousands. The Chickasaw, Creeks, and Seminoles also had Negro slaves (see Wyatt F. Jeltz, "The Relations of Negroes and Choctaw and Chickasaw Indians," *Journal of Negro History* 33 [1948]: 24ff; and Kenneth W. Porter, "Relations Between Negroes and Indians Within the Present Limits of the United States," *Journal of Negro History* 17 [1932]: 28ff).

56. Letter of 27 Jan. 1855, to *The Northern Islander*, included in Wingfield Watson, comp., *Correspondence of Bishop George Mille. . .* (Burlington, Wisc.: W. Watson, 1916), 20. See also Robert B. Flanders, *Nauvoo: Kingdom on the Mississippi* (Urbana, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 1965), 290-95.

57. Andrew Jenson, *Encyclopedic History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Publishing Company, 1941), 870.

58. *Millennial Star* 23:165-7, or DHC 6:275-7.

assured of an equivalent for their property." States' rights was much less evident as both the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution were interpreted broadly to provide liberty for all "without reference to color or condition: ad infinitum."<sup>59</sup> There was no hint of divine endorsement of slavery through a biblical curse; rather, the prophet lamented a situation in which "two or three millions of people are held as slaves for life, because the spirit in them is covered with a darker skin than ours." The only scripture invoked was in support of the idea that a "noble" nation should work to "ameliorate the condition of all: black or white, bond or free; for the best of books says, 'God hath made of one blood all nations of men, for to dwell on all the face of the earth.'" Moreover, the "Views" were promulgated much more actively than the earlier pro-slavery essays. Mormon missionaries were pressed into service to carry the prophet's campaign and program throughout the country, and for a short while the Mormon church could accurately be described as outspoken against slavery.

In favoring "equal rights" for Negroes, Joseph Smith did not wish to remove all legal restrictions on that race. Nor should the impression be conveyed that he was completely free of nineteenth-century prejudices. The aversion to miscegenation apparent in the articles in 1836 was later incorporated into the laws of Nauvoo;<sup>60</sup> and in the same breath that the prophet advocated "national equalization" for Negroes, he expressed a desire for them to be confined "by strict law to their own species." Not unexpectedly, a wide range of racial attitudes was manifest within the church during this time. These ranged from the relatively progressive Willard Richards remark about a respected ex-slave, "A black skin may cover as white a heart as any other skin, and the black hand may be as neat and clean as the white one, and all the trouble arises from want of familiarity with the two,"<sup>61</sup> to the anonymous Mormon simile published in the *Elders' Journal* (Joseph Smith, editor) regarding an especially ungrateful and "mean" man: "One thing we have learned, that there are negroes who [wear] white skins, as well as those who wear black ones."<sup>62</sup> More subtle, but nonetheless revealing, was a remark on the

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59. His change of opinion was especially marked on this point. In 1836, in addition to arguing that the North had no right to impose its will on the South, he had further characterized the interest of the free states as being based on "the mere principles of equal rights." By 1844 he had obviously reconsidered the importance of equal rights; regarding states' rights, he advised John C. Calhoun that "God. . . will raise your mind above the narrow notion that the General Government has no power, to the sublime idea that Congress, with the President as Executor, is as almighty in its sphere as Jehovah is in His" (see T&S 5:395, 1 Jan. 1844).

60. In January 1844, Mayor Joseph Smith fined two Negroes "for attempting to marry white women" (DHC 6:210).

61. Letter of 15 Feb. 1838, as quoted in Carter, *The Negro Pioneer*, 3-4.

62. *Elders' Journal* 1 (Aug. 1838): 59.

extensive actions taken by European nations to end the slave trade: "But what would those nations think, if they were told the fact that in America—Republican America, the boasted cradle of liberty and land of freedom—that those dealers in human flesh and blood, negro dealers and drivers, are allowed with impunity to steal white men."<sup>63</sup> There are very few statements on race directly attributable to Joseph Smith. While negative value judgments are occasionally suggested by his remarks, the most extensive comment reveals that he did not share the majority opinion of his day on the innate racial inferiority of Negroes.<sup>64</sup> The little that is recorded about his direct dealings with blacks is also more reflective of compassion than prejudice.<sup>65</sup>

In fourteen years Joseph Smith led the church from seeming neutrality on the slavery issue through a period of anti-abolitionist, pro-slavery sentiment to a final position strongly opposed to slavery. In the process he demonstrated that he shared the common belief that Negroes were descendants of Ham, but ultimately his views reflected a rejection of the notion that this connection justified Negro slavery. There is no contemporary evidence that the prophet limited priesthood eligibility because of race or biblical lineage; on the contrary, the only definite information presently available reveals that he allowed a black to be ordained an elder, and later a seventy, in the Melchizedek priesthood. The possibility has been raised, through later testimony, that within the slave society of the South, blacks were not given the priesthood.

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63. From a *Nauvoo Neighbor* editorial included in Joseph Smith's *History* (DHC 6:113). A similar parallel was drawn on other occasions (e.g., T&S 4:375-6).

64. "[T]hey came into the world slaves, mentally and physically. Change their situation with the whites, and they would be like them. . . . Go into Cincinnati or any city, and find an educated negro, who rides in his carriage, and you will see a man who has risen by the powers of his own mind to his exalted state of respectability. The slaves in Washington are more refined than the Presidents, and the black boys will take the shine off many of those they brush and wait on" (MS 20:278; DHC 5:217, presents a slightly different version). Joseph Smith's passing reference to "nigger drivers" or "niggers" (T&S 4:375-6; 5:395) are less readily evaluated. This epithet is said to have been less derogatory in the early nineteenth century, but even then it was without any connotation of racial respect.

65. Of the four Negro Mormons who claimed to have lived in the prophet's home (Elijah Abel, Jane James, Isaac James, and Green Flake), I have seen the reminiscences only of Jane James. She had arrived destitute in Nauvoo and was taken into the Smith home along with her eight-member family. She eventually became the housekeeper and lived in the Smith home until the prophet's death. Her account depicts Joseph Smith as benevolent and fatherly towards her, and conveys her great respect for the prophet (from "Joseph Smith, The Prophet" in *Young Woman's Journal* 16 [1905]:551-2; reprinted as "Aunt' Jane James" in *Dialogue* 5 [Summer 1970]: 128-30). On another occasion he is said to have given a Negro a horse to use to purchase the freedom of a relative (*Young Woman's Journal* 17 [December 1906]: 538). In still another case, Willard Richards, with Joseph Smith's knowledge, hid a Negro who had been beaten for an alleged robbery; subsequently, the prophet spoke out "fearlessly" against the way the case was handled (DHC 6:281, 284).

After the prophet's death, most of his philosophy and teachings were effectively canonized. There was one significant subject on which this does not appear to have been the case—the status of the Negro. A measure of the influence of Joseph Smith's personal presence in shaping early Mormon attitudes on this subject can be obtained by contrasting the church position prior to his death with the developments which followed.

## II

*[A]ny man having one drop of the seed of [Cain]. . . in him cannot hold the priesthood and if no other Prophet ever spake it before I will say it now in the name of Jesus Christ I know it is true and others know it.—Brigham Young, 1852*

The uncertainty which followed the martyrdom of Joseph Smith was not fully resolved for many months, and most of the efforts of the church during this time were directed at self-preservation. Among the early changes to emerge, one of the most dramatic involved Mormon attitudes towards blacks and slavery. Joseph Smith's anti-slavery sentiment persisted for a short time, although this was partially due to delayed publications in the *Times and Seasons*. Several talks and letters advocating the prophet's presidency and program for the abolition of slavery were published during the summer months.<sup>66</sup> The talks actually delivered during that summer were more concerned with the dwindling freedom within the Mormons' own community. Brigham Young did recommend that the Saints remain aloof from the upcoming election until "a man is found, who, if elected, will carry out the enlarged principles, universal freedom, and equal rights and protection" advocated by Joseph Smith.<sup>67</sup>

By the following spring, however, a shift had again become evident in the church position on slavery. A "Short Chapter" appeared in the *Times and Seasons* which reverted almost literally to the arguments of 1836:

History and common observation show [Noah's curse to] have been fulfilled to the letter. The descendants of Ham, besides a black skin which has ever been a curse that has followed an apostate of the holy priesthood, as well as a black heart, have been servants to both Shem and Japheth, and the aboli-

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66. See the April 1844 conference talk of John Taylor, and a letter from "HOSPES" dated 8 June 1844, both published 15 July 1844 (T&S 5:577-79, 590); and the conference minutes of 27 May 1844, published 1 August 1844 (T&S 5:506).

67. "An Epistle of the Twelve to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, in Nauvoo and all the world," 15 Aug. 1844 (T&S 5:618-20). Another article in the same issue added, "as a people we will honor the opinions and wisdom of our martyred General; and, as a matter of propriety, we cannot vote for, or support a candidate for the presidency, till we find a man who will pledge himself to carry out Gen. Smith's view. . . as he published them" (T&S 5 :617-8).

tionists are trying to make void the curse of God, but it will require more power than man possesses to counteract the decrees of eternal wisdom.<sup>68</sup>

Why did this opinion re-emerge? The short interval since Joseph Smith's death and the acknowledged basis for the article ("history and common observation") suggest that the change may not have been one of opinion so much as one of personalities. One other development may also have been a factor. Several Protestant denominations had been divided by the slavery question; in particular, the division of the Methodist, Baptist, and Presbyterian churches was covered at great length in the Mormon press. Although the articles were reprints from non-Mormon sources, comments were frequently appended, as the following example illustrates:

The Inference we draw from such church jars among the sectarian world, Is, that the glory which professing clergymen think to obtain for themselves by division on slavery, temperance, or any other matter of no consequence to pure religion, is "nothing but vanity and vexation of spirit."

Christ and his apostles taught men repentance, and baptism for remission of sins; faithfulness and integrity to masters and servants; bond and free, black and white. . . .

Like the fable of the dog and the meat, the christian community are preparing to lose what little religion they may have possessed, by jumping after the dark shade of abolitionism.—So passes falling greatness.<sup>69</sup>

The Mormon exodus to the Salt Lake Valley did not free the Saints from the slavery controversy, for much of the national debate was focused on the West. Southern congressmen were pressing for an extension of slavery into the new territories, while Northerners wanted the institution confined to the South. In this difficult situation, the Saints organized the State of Deseret and applied for national recognition. The Mormon lobbyists were aware of their delicate position and attempted to maintain complete neutrality on the slavery question. The Constitution of Deseret was intentionally without reference to slavery, and Brigham Young made it clear that he desired "to leave that subject to the operations of time, circumstances and common law. You might safely say that as a people we are averse to slavery, but we wish not to meddle with this subject, but leave things to take their natural course."<sup>70</sup> Congressional compro-

68. "A Short Chapter on a Long Subject," T&S 6:857 (1 Apr. 1845).

69. "Trouble Among the Baptists," T&S 6:858 (1 Apr. 1845). Other articles were carried 1 October 1844 (T&S 5:667-8), 15 April 1845 (T&S 6:877-8), 1 May 1845 (T&S 6:889-90), and 1 June 1845 (T&S 6:916-7, 924). The theme remained evident in Mormon discourses for several decades (e.g., JD 9:5; 10:124; 14:169; 23:85, 296-7).

70. Letter from Brigham Young to Orson Hyde, *Journal History*, 19 July 1849; see also letter of Willard Richards to Thomas Kane, *Journal History*, 25 July 1849; and the *Journal*

mise eventually created the Territory of Utah in 1850, with no restriction on slavery. This was possible, according to lobbyist John Bernhisel, because northerners believed slavery was excluded from Utah "by the physical geography of the country and the laws of God."<sup>71</sup> However, Bernhisel wrote, "If they had believed that there were even half a dozen slaves in Utah, or that slavery would ever be tolerated in it, they would not have granted us a Territorial organization."<sup>72</sup>

Shortly thereafter, the Mormons belatedly defined their position on slavery. While no law authorized or prohibited slavery in Utah, there were slaves in the territory, and all appeared to be "perfectly contented and satisfied." They were fully at liberty to leave their masters if they chose. Slave owning converts were being instructed to bring their slaves west if the slaves were willing to come, but were otherwise advised to "sell them, or let them go free, as your conscience may direct you."<sup>73</sup> In fact, the first group of Mormons to enter the Salt Lake valley were accompanied by three Negro "servants." By 1850, nearly 100 blacks had arrived, approximately two-thirds of whom were slaves. Bernhisel had performed his task well.<sup>74</sup>

The official acceptance of slavery in the Mormon community extended fully to slave owners as well. Bishops, high councilmen, and even an apostle were ordained from their small number. However, by chance or design, a number of the slaveholders were sent to San Bernardino in 1851 to establish a Mormon colony, and in the process their slaves became free.<sup>75</sup>

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History entry of 26 Nov. 1849, reporting an interview of Wilford Woodruff and John Bernhisel with Thomas Kane.

71. Letter from John Bernhisel to Brigham Young, *Journal History*, 7 Sept. 1850.

72. Letter from John Bernhisel to Brigham Young, *Journal History*, 9 Nov. 1850.

73. *Frontier Guardian*, 11 Dec. 1850; also reprinted in the *Millennial Star* 13:63 (15 Feb. 1851). J. W. Gunnison, who lived in Utah at this time, recorded that "involuntary labor by negroes is recognized by custom; those holding slaves, keep them as part of their family, as they would wives, without any law on the subject" (*The Mormons, or, Latter-Day Saints, in the Valley of The Great Salt Lake*. . . [Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott & Co., 1853], 143).

74. The figures are my own estimate, based largely on accounts included in Carter, *The Negro Pioneer*, 9, 13, 15-33, 38-9, 44; and Bellar, *Negro Slaves in Utah*, 125. The official census figures for Utah in 1850 report 50 Negroes, of which 24 were slaves. See *Negro Population 1790-1915* (Department of Commerce, Washington, D.C., 1918), 57.

75. Apostle Charles C. Rich was one of at least eight slaveholders to be sent on the mission to San Bernardino. Most of the "ex-slaves" continued to be "servants" for their masters, and several appear to have returned electively to Utah when the mission was recalled. At least one of the slaveowners, Robert M. Smith (of the San Bernardino bishopric), attempted to take his slaves to Texas, but was prevented from doing so by the sheriff of Los Angeles County. See W. Sherman Savage, "The Negro in the Westward Movement," *Journal of Negro History* 25 [1940]:537-8. Also, Bellar, *Negro Slaves in Utah*, 124-6; Andrew Jenson, "History of San Bernardino 1851-1938" (unpub. manuscript, Church

The "laissez-faire" approach to slavery in Utah was short-lived and came to an end early in 1852. As the Mormons quickly learned, Mexicans had carried out slaving expeditions into the region for decades, buying Indians from local tribes who staged raids for "captives of war." Periodically, children were offered for sale to the Mormons. The enslavement of Indians, a "chosen people" in Mormon theology, posed a much more serious problem than had Negro slavery. Governor Brigham Young took action to stop the raiding parties and in January 1852 requested legislation on the slavery question.<sup>76</sup>

In his request, Brigham Young made a definite distinction between Indian and Negro. After condemning the Indian slave trade, he observed, "Human flesh to be dealt in as property, is not consistent or compatible with the true principles of government. My own feelings are, that no property can or should be recognized as existing in slaves, wither Indian or African." However, in view of the "present low and degraded situation of the Indian race" and their current practices of "gambling, selling, and otherwise disposing of their children," the governor would condone a "new feature in the traffic of human beings"—"essentially purchasing them into freedom, instead of slavery." This was not simply buying the children and setting them free, but also caring for them and elevating them to "an equal footing with the more favored portions of the human race." There were, of course, certain economic considerations, and "if in return for favors and expenses which may have been incurred on their account, service should be considered due, it would become necessary that some law should provide the suitable regulations under which all such indebtedness should be defrayed."

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Historical Department), 10; and Joseph F. Wood, "The Mormon Settlement in San Bernardino 1851-1857" (Ph.D. diss., University of Utah, 1967), 150-52.

Apostle John Taylor and N. H. Felt were later cited as informing a "Chicago Paper" that "[s]ome slaves had been liberated. . .since they were taken to Utah; others remain slaves. But the most of those who take slaves there pass over with them in a little while to San Barardino [sic]. . .How many slaves are now held there they could not say, but the number relatively was by no means small. A single person had taken between forty and fifty, and many had gone in with small numbers" (MS 17:62-63 [27 Jan. 1855]).

76. "Governor's Message, to the Legislative Assembly of Utah Territory, January 5, 1852," copy in the Church Historical Department. This was the organizational meeting of the legislature.

The Mormons turned down the first two children offered for sale in the winter of 1847-48; when the Indians threatened to kill them if they weren't purchased, one was bought, and the other was killed. Two others brought shortly thereafter were also purchased (H. H. Bancroft, *History of Utah* [1889, reprinted Salt Lake City, Bookcraft, 1964], 278). See also Orson Whitney, *History of Utah* (Salt Lake City: George Q. Cannon & Sons Co., 1892), 1:508-11; Daniel W. Jones, *Forty Years Among the Indians* (1890, Salt Lake City: Juvenile Instructor Office [1960 reprint]), 48-51; several articles in the *Utah Historical Quarterly* 2 (July 1929): 67- 90; and Brigham Young's comments (e.g., JD 1:104, 170-1; 6:327-9).

Negro slavery was different:

It has long since ceased to become a query with me, who were the most amenable to the laws of righteousness; those who through the instrumentality of human power brought into servitude human beings, who naturally were their own equals, or those who, acting upon the principle of nature's law, brought into this position or situation, those who were naturally designed for that purpose, and whose capacities are more befitting that, than any other station in society. Thus, while servitude may and should exist, and that too upon those who are naturally designed to occupy the position of 'servant of servants' yet we should not fall into the other extreme, and make them as beasts of the field, regarding not the humanity which attaches to the colored race; nor yet elevate them, as some seem disposed, to an equality with those whom Nature and Nature's God has indicated to be their masters, their superiors.<sup>77</sup>

The suitable regulations were shortly forthcoming, and within a few weeks Young signed into law acts legalizing both Negro and Indian slavery.<sup>78</sup> Although Negro slaves could no longer choose to leave their masters, some elements of consent were included. Slaves brought into the territory had to come "of their own free will and choice" and they could not be sold or taken from the territory against their will.<sup>79</sup> While a fixed period of servitude was not prescribed for Negroes, the law provided "that no contract shall bind the heirs of the servant. . . for a longer period than will satisfy the debt due his [master]." Several unique provisions were included which terminated the owner's contract in the event that the master had sexual intercourse with a servant "of the African race," neglected to feed, clothe, shelter, or otherwise abused the servant, or attempted to take him from the territory against his will. Some schooling was also required for slaves between the ages of six and twenty.

By contrast, the more liberal act on Indian servitude required persons with Indian servants to demonstrate that they were "properly qual-

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77. *Ibid.*

78. "An Act in relation to Service," approved 4 February 1852; "A Preamble and An Act for the further relief of Indian slaves and prisoners," approved 7 March 1852.

79. "[T]he consent of the servant given to the probate judge in the absence of his master." The only exception was "in case of a fugitive from labor" (*ibid.*).

A number of slaves had escaped from their Mormon masters enroute to Utah, and Hosea Stout records an episode in which a slave attempted to run away while in Utah. In the latter case, his master was tried and acquitted on kidnapping charges after he recaptured the "fugitive" (Juanita Brooks, ed., *On the Mormon Frontier: The Diary of Hosea Stout, 1844-1861*, [Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1965] 2:597). Stout adds, "There was a great excitement on on [sic] this occasion. The question naturally involving more or less the slavery question and I was surprised to see those latent feeling [sic] aroused in our midst which are making so much disturbance in the states."

ified to raise or retain said Indian," and limited the indenture to a maximum of twenty years. Masters were also required to clothe their "apprentices. . . in a comfortable and becoming manner, according to his, said master's, condition in life." Yearly schooling was mandatory between the ages of seven and sixteen, and the total education requirement was significantly greater than for Negroes.

No other territory legalized both Indian and Negro servitude. New Mexico eventually legalized slavery in 1859, but census figures the following year listed slaves only in Utah among the western territories. Actually, the Negro population throughout the West was negligible, and several territorial legislatures even banned Negro immigration. A recent study has argued convincingly that anti-slavery sentiment in frontier territories was in part reflective of racial prejudice, and was designed to exclude Negroes from the region.<sup>80</sup> Brigham Young interpreted Utah's anomalous pro-slavery legislation as accomplishing this same end. In a message commending the legislature late in 1852, he observed, "[T]he law of the last session so far proves a salutary measure, as it has nearly freed the territory, of the colored population; also enabling the people to control all who see proper to remain, and cast their lot among us."<sup>81</sup>

Other more obvious factors contributed to the legalization of Negro slavery in Utah. Without the influx of southern converts with their slaves, no legislation would have been required. Perhaps the most fundamental factor was the declaration by Brigham Young and other Mormon leaders that the Lord had willed that Negroes be servants to their "superiors." During his tenure as head of the church, Young showed none of the variability on this subject manifest under Joseph Smith. He fully accepted the traditional genealogy of the Africans through Canaan and Ham to Cain, and repeatedly taught that this connection gave divine sanction to the servile condition of the Negroes. Nonetheless, he did not claim new information on the subject. As early as "our first settlement in Missouri. . . we knew that the children of Ham were to be 'servant of servants,' and no power under heaven could hinder it, so long as the Lord should permit them to welter under the curse, and those were known to be our religious views concerning them."<sup>82</sup>

While Brigham Young clearly rejected Joseph Smith's manifest belief that the curse on Ham did not justify Negro slavery, possibly an even greater difference of opinion is reflected in the importance Young ascribed to the alleged connection with Cain: "The seed of Ham, which is

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80. Eugene H. Berwanger, *The Frontier Against Slavery: Western Anti-Negro Prejudice and the Slavery Extension Controversy* (Urbana, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 1967).

81. "Message to the Legislature of Utah from Governor Brigham Young," MS 15:422 (13 December 1852).

82. JD 2:172 (18 Feb. 1855).

the seed of Cain descending through Ham, will, according to the curse put upon him, serve his brethren, and be a 'servant of servants' to his fellow creatures, until God removes the curse; and no power can hinder it,"<sup>83</sup> or,

[T]he Lord put a mark upon [Cain], which is the flat nose and the black skin. Trace mankind down to after the flood, and then another curse is pronounced upon the same race—that they should be the "servant of servants;" and they will, until that curse is removed; and the Abolitionists cannot help it, nor in the least alter that decree.<sup>84</sup>

Brigham Young derived a second, far-reaching implication from the genealogy of the Negro. Asked what "chance of redemption there was for the Africans," Young answered that "the curse remained upon them because Cain cut off the lives of Abel. . . . [T]he Lord had cursed Cain's seed with blackness and prohibited them the Priesthood." The Journal History account of this conversation, dated February 13, 1849, is the earliest record of a church decision to deny the priesthood to Negroes.<sup>85</sup> At the time practical implications of the decision were limited. Though reliable information is very scanty, there appear to have been very few Negro

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83. JD 2:184 (18 Feb. 1855); a separate discourse from n. 82.

84. JD 7:290-1 (9 Oct. 1859). Brigham Young cited the curse on Ham or Canaan on many occasions in addition to those cited in the text. For example, see his 1852 address to the legislature (n. 76): "The seed of Canaan will inevitably carry the curse which was placed upon them, until the same authority which placed it there, shall see proper to remove it"; his comments in early 1855 reported in the 4 May 1855, *New York Herald*, p. 8: "You must not think, from what I say, that I am opposed to slavery. No! the negro is damned, and is to serve his master till God chooses to remove the curse of Ham"; and an interview with Horace Greeley, 13 July 1859: "We consider [slavery] of divine institution, and not to be abolished until the curse pronounced on Ham shall have been removed from his descendants" (in Horace Greeley, *An Overland Journey from New York to San Francisco in the Summer of 1859* [New York: H. H. Bancroft and Co., 1860], 211-12); also see MS 21:608-11.

85. The possibility exists that a policy of priesthood restriction had been set forth shortly prior to this time. William Appleby made the following journal entry while traveling in New York, 19 May 1847: "In this Branch there is a coloured Brother, An Elder ordained by Elder Wm. Smith while he was a member of the Church, contrary, though[,] to the order of the Church on the Law of the Priesthood, as Descendants of Ham are not entitled to that privilege" (Journal of William I. Appleby, Church Historical Department). However, the question of priesthood entitlement does not appear to have been fully clear to Appleby, for he then wrote to Brigham Young asking "if this is the order of God or tolerated, to ordain negroes to the Priesthood and allow amalgamation. If it is, I desire to know it as I have yet got to learn it" (Journal History, 2 June 1847).

Although the priesthood restriction appears to have been open knowledge in the early 1850s, the first published record of which I am aware was not until April 1852 ("To the Saints," *Deseret News*, 3 Apr. 1852). Gunnison, who had resided in Utah in 1851, also referred to the policy in recounting his experiences the following year (*The Mormons, or Latter-day Saints*, 143).

Mormons in 1849. Only seven of the twenty thus far identified were men, and three of these were slaves; two of the four freemen had already been given the priesthood.<sup>86</sup>

While Brigham Young reaffirmed his stand on priesthood denial to the Negro on many occasions, by far the most striking of the known statements of his position was included in an address to the territorial legislature on January 6, 1852, recorded in Wilford Woodruff's journal of that date. In this gubernatorial address, Young appears both to confirm himself as the instigator of the priesthood policy and to bear testimony to its inspired origin:

[A]ny man having one drop of the seed of [Cain]. . . in him cannot hold the priesthood and if no other Prophet ever spake it before I will say it now in the name of Jesus Christ I know it is true and others know it.

This clearly is one of the most important statements in the entire history of this subject.

Placed in a fuller context, these remarks are part of one of several discussions of slavery and Negro capability by Governor Young in conjunction with the enactment of Utah's slavery codes in February and March 1852. Other significant points in the address include Young's statement, "The Negro cannot hold one part of Government" (this immediately followed the above quotation); he would "not consent for the seed of [Cain] to vote for me or my Brethren"; "the Canaanite cannot have wisdom to do things as white man has"; miscegenation required blood atonement (offspring included) for salvation; and the curse would some day be removed from the "seed of Cain."

While it will be seen that the church eventually abandoned a number of Young's contentions, and although one hesitates to attribute theologi-

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86. Estimates based largely on Carter, *The Negro Pioneer*. The members included Elijah Abel, his wife and four children; Jane James and six children; Francis and Martha Grice; Walker Lewis; a slave, "Faithful John"; and three "servants," Green, Allen, and Liz Flake.

The two priesthood holders were Elijah Abel (who had been recertified a seventy at least as late as 1847), and "a colored brother by the name of Lewis" who was ordained by Apostle William Smith (Journal History, 2 June 1847; the date of the ordination is not given). Two other free Negroes had left the church by this time. Black Pete, the first known Negro convert, was among those who claimed to receive revelations in Kirtland prior to leaving the church. There was also a "big, burley, half Indian, half Negro, formerly a Mormon who has proclaimed himself Jesus Christ" and who had a following of about sixty "fanatics" in Cincinnati (*The Gazette* [St. Joseph, Mo.], 11 Dec. 1846). This may be the William McCairey, or McGarry, who visited the Mormon pioneer camps in the Spring of 1847, and "induced some to follow him" (see Brooks, *On the Mormon Frontier*, 2:244, and footnote 37). Black Pete was referred to in Mormon discussions on several occasions in later years (e.g., T&S 3:747; JD 11:3-4); see also Stanley S. Ivins's Notebooks 7:134-5 (Utah State Historical Society) for an additional excerpt on Pete.

cal significance to a legislative address, were this account to be unequivocally authenticated, it would present a substantial challenge to the faithful Mormon who does not accept an inspired origin for church priesthood policy. That such statements exist and have not appeared in previous discussions of this problem, either within the church or without, is an unfortunate commentary on the superficiality with which this subject traditionally has been approached.

While it is now popular among Mormons to argue that the basis for the priesthood denial to Negroes is unknown, no uncertainty was evident in the discourses of Brigham Young. From the initial remark in 1849 throughout his presidency, every known discussion of this subject by Young (or any other leading Mormon) invoked the connection with Cain as the justification for denying the priesthood to blacks. "Any man having one drop of the seed of Cain in him cannot receive the priesthood" (1852);<sup>87</sup> "[w]hen all the other children of Adam have had the privilege of receiving the Priesthood. . . it will be time enough to remove the curse from Cain and his posterity" (1854);<sup>88</sup> "[u]ntil the last ones of the residue of Adam's children are brought up to that favourable position, the children of Cain cannot receive the first ordinances of the Priesthood" (1859);<sup>89</sup> "[w]hen all the rest of the children have received their blessings in the Holy Priesthood, then that curse will be removed from the seed of Cain" (1866).<sup>90</sup>

A more specific rationale is suggested by the foregoing extracts. Cain, in murdering Abel, had "deprived his brother of the privilege of pursuing his journey through life, and of extending his kingdom by multiplying upon the earth." Cain had reportedly hoped thereby to gain an advantage over Abel, the number of one's posterity somehow being important in the overall scheme of things. Brigham Young further explained that those who were to have been Abel's descendants had already been assigned to his lineage, and if they were ever to come "into the world in the regular way, they would have to come through him." In order that Cain's posterity not gain an advantage, the Lord denied them the priesthood until such time as "the class of spirits presided over by

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87. Matthias Cowley, *Wilford Woodruff* (Salt Lake City: The Deseret News Press, 1909), 351.

88. JD 2:142-3, 3 Dec. 1854.

89. JD 7:290-1, 9 Oct. 1859.

90. JD 11:272, 19 Aug. 1866. The belief that Ham's descendants through Canaan were to be servants would also seem to exclude them from the priesthood. This point was not emphasized under Brigham Young; the following observation was made several years later: "Now the priesthood is divine authority to preside, and to say of a race that they shall be servants forever is equivalent to saying that they shall not hold authority, especially divine authority. Hence the curse of Noah necessarily means that the race upon which it rests cannot hold the priesthood" (*Liakhona, The Elders' Journal* 5 [1908]:1164-7).

Abel should have the privilege of coming into the world." Those spirits formerly under Cain's leadership were reportedly aware of the implications of this decision, yet "still looked up to him, and rather than forsake him they were willing to bear his burdens and share the penalty imposed upon him."<sup>91</sup>

Unfortunately, Brigham Young gave no indication as to when Abel's "strain" would receive their entitlement; certainly, it was not foreseen in the near future:

When all the other children of Adam have the privilege of receiving the Priesthood, and of coming into the kingdom of God, and of being redeemed from the four quarters of the earth, and have received their resurrection from the dead, then it will be time enough to remove the curse from Cain and his posterity.<sup>92</sup>

While none in the church saw fit to question the connection of the Negroes to Cain or Ham, it did occur to several that if men were not responsible for Adam's transgressions, the restriction on the Negro could not consistently be attributed solely to his genealogy. As early as 1844, Orson Hyde had explained the status of the "accursed lineage of Canaan" in terms of the pre-existence:

At the time the devil was cast out of heaven, there were some spirits that did not know who had authority, whether God or the devil. They consequently did not take a very active part on either side, but rather thought the devil had been abused, and considered he had rather the best claim to government. These spirits were not considered worthy of an honorable body on this earth. . . . Now, it would seem cruel to force pure celestial spirits into the world through the lineage of Canaan that had been cursed. This would be ill appropriate, putting the precious and vile together. But those spirits in

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91. The initial quotation is from 3 December 1854 (JD 2:142-3); a comparable statement accompanies virtually every discussion of the curse on Cain during this time. The elaboration which follows in the text is from an explanation attributed to Young by Lorenzo Snow in a Council Meeting, 11 March 1900. The minutes of this meeting are among both the Bennion papers and the George Albert Smith papers (the latter in the University of Utah library; hereafter GAS).

Another explanation has also been attributed to Brigham Young, although indirectly, "to the effect that [Negroes] did not possess sufficient innate spiritual strength and capacity to endure the responsibility that always goes with the priesthood, and to successfully resist the powers of darkness that always oppose men who hold it; and that, were they to be clothed with it, evil agencies would harrass [sic] and torment them, frighten them with spiritual manifestations from a wrong source, and so destroy their rest and peace that the priesthood instead of being a blessing to them would be the reverse" (*Liahona, The Elders' Journal* 5 [1908]:1164-7).

92. JD 2:142-3 (3 Dec. 1854). The prospects seemed equally remote in 1859 (JD 7:290-1), and 1866 (JD 11:272).

heaven that lent an influence to the devil, thinking he had a little the best right to govern, but did not take a very active part any way, were required to come into the world and take bodies in the accursed lineage of Canaan; and hence the Negro or African race.<sup>93</sup>

Several years later Orson Pratt also attempted to explain why "if all the spirits were equally faithful in their first estate," they "are placed in such dissimilar circumstances in their second estate," and concluded, "Among the two-thirds who remained [after the Devil was cast out], it is highly probable, that, there were many who were not valient [sic] in the war, but whose sins were of such a nature that they could be forgiven."<sup>94</sup> Hyde and Pratt were primarily concerned with an explanation of the debased status of the Negro race in these early speculations, and not specifically with the priesthood.

The pre-existence "hypothesis" gained wide acceptance among the Mormons, and was even included in non-Mormon accounts of church teachings.<sup>95</sup> Brigham Young, however, did not feel it necessary to appeal beyond the curse on Cain to the pre-existence. When asked "if the spirits of negroes were neutral in Heaven," he answered, "No, they were not, there were no neutral [spirits] in Heaven at the time of the rebellion, all took sides. . . . All spirits are pure that came from the presence of God. The posterity of Cain are black because he committed murder. He killed Abel and God set a mark upon his posterity. But the spirits are pure that enter their tabernacles."<sup>96</sup>

A second fundamental assumption supported Mormon beliefs. This was their unqualified acceptance of the innate inferiority of the Negro, the undeniable evidence of the curse on that race. In significant contrast to Joseph Smith's optimistic evaluation of Negro potential, the church under Brigham Young characterized the blacks as "uncouth, uncomely, disagreeable in their habits, wild, and seemingly deprived of nearly all the blessings of the intelligence that is bestowed upon mankind";<sup>97</sup> as

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93. From a speech to the High Priests' Quorum in Nauvoo, September 1844 (see Joseph Smith Hyde, *Orson Hyde 1805-1878* [Salt Lake City: Joseph S. Hyde, 1933], 56).

94. *The Seer* 1 (Apr. 1853): 54-56.

95. John S. Lindsay, writing in the *Mormon Tribune*, 23 Apr. 1870, on "The Origin of Races," attributed to "orthodox Mormonism" the teaching that "the black race are such as, at the time of the great warfare in heaven when Lucifer and his hosts were cast out played an ignoble part, not evincing loyalty on the one hand, nor yet possessing sufficient courage to join with Satan and his band of rebels. To use a homely phrase, now current here, they were 'astraddle the fence.'"

T.B.H. Stenhouse reported essentially the same belief in 1873, attributing it to "the modern prophet" (*The Rocky Mountain Saints* [New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1873], 491-2).

96. *Journal History*, 25 Dec. 1869, citing "Wilford Woodruff's Journal."

97. JD 7:290-1 (9 Oct. 1859). A similar sentiment was implied in the 1852 address to the Utah legislature (see text and n. 77), and was repeated on a number of other occasions:

potentially "blood-thirsty," "pitiless" and a "stranger to mercy when fully aroused," and "now seemingly tame and almost imbecile."<sup>98</sup> In the fullest treatment of race to appear in a church publication in the nineteenth century, the Negro was characterized as

[T]he lowest in intelligence and the most barbarous of all the children of men. The race whose intellect is the least developed, whose advancement has been the slowest who appear to be the least capable of improvement of all people. The hand of the Lord appears to be heavy upon them, dwarfing them by the side of their fellow men in every thing good and great.<sup>99</sup>

Moreover, they were black, and for Mormons "blackness" was no mere literary figure. Two church scriptures had recounted blackness befalling people in divine disfavor, and this was understood to extend beyond the metaphorical to a real physical change.<sup>100</sup> Nor was this

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"[N]orthern fanaticism [should learn]. . .that there is but little merit in. . .substituting their own kindred spirit and flesh to perform the offices allotted by superior wisdom to the descendants of Cain." Whites, he went on, "should tread the theater of life and action, in a higher sphere" (in *Millennial Star* 15:442); or, "In the providences of God their ability is such that they cannot rise above the position of a servant, and they are willing to serve me and have me dictate their labor" (JD 10:190). These quotations are all from Brigham Young.

Not unexpectedly, Utah joined most of the nation in excluding free Negroes from the right to vote or hold office; blacks were also excluded from the Utah militia.

98. *Millennial Star* editorial, 28 Oct. 1865 (MS 27:682-3), Brigham Young Jr., ed.

99. "From Caucasian to Negro," *Juvenile Instructor* 3 (1868):142. The author continues: "The Negro is described as having a black skin, black, woolly hair, projecting jaws, thick lips, a flat nose and receding skull. He is generally well made and robust; but with very large hands and feet. In fact, he looks as though he had been put in an oven and burnt to a cinder before he was properly finished making. His hair baked crisp, his nose melted to his face, and the color of his eyes runs into the whites. Some men look as if they had only been burned brown, but he appears to have gone a stage further, and been cooked until he was quite black."

The excerpt is from a series of seven articles, "Man and his Varieties," by "G. R.," which presented an interesting combination of Mormon concepts and nineteenth-century science. Though the author rejects the chain of being, he is willing to rank the races of men—with the Caucasian at the top, and the Negro at the bottom. Racial differences are attributed to "climate, variety of food. . .modes of life. . .combined with the results of the varied religions existing among men," and ("the greatest of all") "the blessing or curse of God." These factors had led to such diversification since the days of Adam that a permanent race could no longer arise "from people so wide apart as the Anglo-Saxon and Negro. . .[a]nd further. . .it is proof of the mercy of God that no such race appears able to continue for many generations" (G.R., "Man and his Varieties: Mixed Races—The Effects of Climate," *Juvenile Instructor* 3 [1868]:165).

100. Reference has already been made to the Book of Mormon, and Book of Moses accounts (nn. 24, 25, 28). Two contemporary interpretations: ". . .a black skin. . .has ever been a curse that has followed an apostate of the holy priesthood, as well as a black heart" (T&S 6:857); "we must come to the conclusion that it is not climate alone that has made the Negro what he is [referring to skin color], but must ascribe it to the reason already given: that it is

phenomenon just an historical curiosity, for apostates from the Latter-day church were seen to darken noticeably, while more dramatic changes could still be viewed in the African and Indian races.<sup>101</sup> What clearer sign that they were cursed?

Notwithstanding the repeated denunciations of racism by the modern church, the evidence for "racist" attitudes among nineteenth-century Mormon leaders is indisputable. Despite the implications of these attitudes for modern Mormonism, their significance in the nineteenth century was negligible. "Mormon" descriptions of Negro abilities and potential can as readily be obtained from the publications of their learned contemporaries. Such a book, not atypical of this era, could be found in Brigham Young's library: *Negro-Mania: Being an Examination of the Falsely Assumed Equality of the Various Races of Men*.<sup>102</sup> While blatantly racist by any modern standard, this work cited men of acknowledged intellect from a variety of fields—Johann Friedrich Blumenbach, Baron Cuvier, Champollion, Samuel G. Morton, Rosellini, George Gliddon, Samuel Stanhope Smith, Thomas Jefferson, to name but a few. Brigham Young could find ample support for his racial views in this collection alone, and it was by no means exhaustive. Many others could have been included. The American scientific community, while divided on the question of slavery, was virtually unanimous in ascribing racial inferiority to the Negroes. So also did Louis Agassiz, Count de Gobineau, statesmen of the North as well as the South, abolitionists (excepting Garrison and a few others), slaveholders, ministers, and university presidents. In short, the "laws of nature" were interpreted in essentially the same way by most nineteenth-century Americans, Mormons included.<sup>103</sup> Possibly, Brigham Young never read his copy

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the result of the race suffering the displeasure of Heaven" (G. R., "Man and his Varieties," 166). Brigham Young was equally specific, "Why are so many of the inhabitants of the earth cursed with a [skin] of blackness? It comes in consequence of their fathers rejecting the power of the Holy Priesthood, and the law of God" (JD 11:272).

101. As late as 1891, "Editorial Thoughts" in the *Juvenile Instructor* (26:635-6) could observe, "It has been noticed in our day that men who have lost the spirit of the Lord, and from whom His blessings have been withdrawn, have turned dark to such an extent as to excite the comments of all who have known them." More recently, Hugh Nibley has concluded that the "blackness" of the Book of Mormon groups was symbolic, although again he has not referred to the Negro doctrine (*Since Cumorah* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1967], 246-51).

102. John Campbell, *Negro-Mania: Being an Examination of the Falsely Assumed Equality of the Various Races of Men* (Philadelphia: Campbell & Power, 1851). The copy from President Young's office is now in the DeGolyer Foundation Library, Southern Methodist University.

103. In addition to the references cited in nn. 22 and 23, see also, William Stanton, *The Leopard's Spots: Scientific Attitudes Toward Race in America, 1815-59* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960); and George W. Stocking, Jr., *Race, Culture, and Evolution: Essays in the History of Anthropology* (New York: The Free Press, 1968).

of *Negro-Mania*; even today the book reveals little evidence of usage. It is nonetheless important to realize that those few enlightened individuals who anticipated the mid-twentieth-century understanding of race were not generally termed "enlightened" for their racial insight a century ago.

This is not meant to minimize the prejudices of the period, nor of the leaders of the church during that time. The regrettably uniform racial attitudes of white America from colonial to modern times have been no source of pride to anyone who has studied the subject. Nor can one mistake the implicit racial judgments conveyed in many church statements. Consider, for example, the implications of the following simile from Brigham Young: "Here are the Elders of Israel who have got the Priesthood, who have to preach the Gospel. . . . They will stoop to dance like nigers. I don't mean this as debasing the nigers by any means."<sup>104</sup>

During the 1850s, the Mormons were finally able to observe the national slavery controversy with some detachment, no longer as part or pawn of the struggle. Yet even as the prophesied war became more and more probable, there were remarkably few expressions of concern for the welfare of the Union. Jedediah M. Grant said, "They are threatening war in Kansas on the slavery question, and the General Government has already been called upon to send troops there. Well, all I have to say on that matter is, 'Success to both parties.'"<sup>105</sup> The long harassed Mormons had come to view the anticipated conflict not only as the fulfilment of prophecy, but also as divine retribution upon the heads of those who had persecuted the people of the Lord.<sup>106</sup>

One thing was certain, no act of man was going to free the slaves. Late in 1859 Brigham Young again reiterated that those who have been cursed to be "servant of servants" would continue to be, "until that curse is removed; and the Abolitionists cannot help it, nor in the least alter the decree."<sup>107</sup> Two years of war and Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation failed to change his opinion:

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104. Spelling as in original. See *Journal History*, 29 May 1847. The account originated with William Clayton, official recorder for the 1847 crossing, and is also to be found in Howard Egan's diary (*Pioneering the West, 1846 to 1878* [Richmond, Utah: Howard R. Egan Estate, 1917], 57), as well as in various editions of the Clayton journal.

105. 2 March 1856 (JD 3:235).

106. For expressions of this sentiment from Young, Kimball, Woodruff, Hyde, and others, see JD 8:322-4; 9:54-5; 10:15, 46; 12:119-120; and MS 23:60, 100, 401; 25:540, 805. As to the specific culprits, Young observed in 1864: "The Abolitionists—the same people who interfered with our institutions, and drove us out into the wilderness—interfered with the Southern institutions, till they broke up the Union. But it's all coming out right,—a great deal better than we could have arranged it for ourselves. The men who flee from Abolitionist oppression come out here to our ark of refuge, and people the asylum of God's chosen" (see Fitz-Hugh Ludlow, "Among the Mormons," *Atlantic Monthly* 13 [Apr. 1864]: 489).

107. JD 7:290-1 (9 Oct. 1859).

... Will the present struggle free the slave? No, but they are now wasting away the black race by thousands. . . .

Treat the slaves kindly and let them live, for Ham must be the servant of servants until the curse is removed. Can you destroy the decrees of the Almighty? You cannot. Yet our Christian brethren think they are going to overthrow the sentence of the Almighty upon the seed of Ham. They cannot do that, though they may kill them by thousands and tens of thousands.<sup>108</sup>

President Young's confidence may have stemmed from more than his interpretation of the curse on Ham. Mormon discourses during the Civil War convey the impression that the Saints did not anticipate the United States surviving the war. Rather, the conflict was to spread until it had "poured out upon all nations." Moreover, the expectation was high that the Saints would shortly return to Jackson County and begin work on the New Jerusalem. In such a context, the entire slavery debate was somewhat academic.<sup>109</sup>

Although war's end found the Mormons still in Utah and the slaves apparently freed, the belief persisted for some time that the peace was to be short-lived and that the Saints "would most certainly return and build a temple [in Jackson County] before all the generation who were living in 1832, have passed away."<sup>110</sup> Brigham Young, in a slight shift of emphasis, acknowledged in 1866 that slavery may have been abolished:

One of the twin relics—slavery—they say, is abolished. I do not, however wish to speak about this, but if slavery and oppression and iron-handed cruelty are not more felt by the blacks to-day than before, I am glad of it. My heart is pained for that unfortunate race of men<sup>111</sup>

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108. JD 10:250 (6 Oct. 1863). For a Mormon view of the Proclamation, see MS 25:97-101.

109. I am unaware of any published study of Mormon expectations in the Civil War; my understanding derives in part from the following references from Brigham Young, Kimball, Taylor, Hyde, Pratt, and others: JD 5:219; 8:322-4; 9:5, 7, 142-3; 11:26, 38, 106, 154; and MS 23:52, 300, 396; 24:158, 456; 25:540; 26:836; 27:204-5; as well as *Deseret News* of 10 July 1861, and 26 March 1862. Boyd L. Eddins deals with this question to some extent ("The Mormons and the Civil War," master's thesis, Utah State University, 1966). Fitz-Hugh Ludlow reported after a visit to Utah in early 1864: "I discovered, that, without a single exception, all the saints were inoculated with a prodigious craze, to the effect that the United States was to become a blighted chaos, and its inhabitants Mormon proselytes and citizens of Utah within the next two years—the more sanguine said, next summer" ("Among the Mormons," 489).

110. Orson Pratt, MS 28:518. Pratt held the same opinion five years later, in 1871 (JD 14:275).

111. JD 11:269 (19 Aug. 1866). The preceding year Heber Kimball reviewed the situation, and came to a similar conclusion: "'Thou shalt not interfere with thy neighbor's wife, nor his daughter, his house nor his man servant, nor his maid servant.' Christ said this; but our enemies don't believe it. That was the trouble between the North and the South. The

However, while the war had unexpectedly ended legalized slavery, President Young left no doubt of its impact on the Negro priesthood policy. In the same speech, he affirmed once again, "They will go down to death. And when all the rest of the children have received their blessings in the Holy Priesthood, then that curse will be removed from the seed of Cain, and they will come up and possess the priesthood."

As it became apparent that the war was indeed over, and Congress acted to extend constitutional rights to all, irrespective of race, the subject of Canaan's curse of servitude disappeared from Mormon discourses. Racial restrictions were eliminated from the constitution of Utah,<sup>112</sup> and for the last decade of Brigham Young's presidency the Negro was less frequently discussed in Mormon discourses. Although in retrospect the church leadership had misread the implications of the biblical curse, no explanation was put forth for the error. There were more pressing problems at hand, for as one of the "twin relics of barbarism" was eliminated, national attention was turned to the other.

Through three decades of discourses, Brigham Young never attributed the policy of priesthood denial to Joseph Smith, nor did he cite the prophet's translation of the Book of Abraham in support of this doctrine. Neither, of course, had he invoked Joseph Smith on the slavery issue. Nor had any other church leader cited the prophet in defense of slavery or priesthood denial. It is perhaps not surprising then that shortly after the departure of President Young's authoritative voice, questions arose as to what Joseph Smith had taught concerning the Negro.

### III

*With reference to the [Negro] question President [Joseph F.] Smith remarked he did not know that we could do anything more in such cases than refer to the rulings of*

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Abolitionists of the North stole the niggers and caused it all. The nigger was well off and happy. How do you know this, Brother Heber? Why, God bless your soul, I used to live in the South, and I know! Now they have set the nigger free; and a beautiful thing they have done for him, haven't they?" (from a talk 24 September 1865, reported in the *New York Daily Tribune*, 10 Nov. 1865, 8).

In fact, while Brigham Young had believed that Negroes were justifiably condemned to servitude, he had also spoken out repeatedly against the abuses of slavery, and encouraged slaveowners to treat the blacks "like servants, and not like brutes" (see JD 1:69, 2:184, 10:111, 190, 250). Even so, President Young's view of states' rights led him to conclude, "If we treated our slaves in an oppressive manner," it would still be "none of [the] business" of the President or Congress, and "they ought not to meddle with it" (JD 4:39-40).

112. Brigham Young wrote Thomas Kane in 1869 that the constitution of the State of Deseret had been amended, 4 February 1867, to eliminate the words "free, white, male" from voting requirements by a vote of "14,000 for, & 30 against" (letter of 26 Oct. 1869, in Brigham Young papers, Church Historical Department).

*Presidents Young, Taylor, Woodruff and other Presidencies on this question.* — Council Minutes, 1908

When John Taylor assumed the leadership of the church, there was no real question as to the basic Mormon policy toward Negroes. Brigham Young had made it quite clear that blacks, as descendants of Cain, were not entitled to the priesthood. It shortly became apparent, however, that all the related questions had not been resolved. In fact, decisions made during the next four decades were nearly as critical for modern church Negro policy as those made by Brigham Young.

By virtue of his role as first prophet of the Restoration, Joseph Smith has always been especially revered, and it is a rare church doctrine that has not been traced, however tenuously, to the prophet to demonstrate his endorsement. It was therefore no mere curiosity when just two years after Brigham Young's death, a story was circulated that Joseph Smith had taught that Negroes could receive the priesthood. As these instructions were allegedly given to Zebedee Coltrin, John Taylor went for a firsthand account.

When presented with the story, Coltrin replied that on the contrary Joseph Smith had told him in 1834 that "the Spirit of the Lord saith the Negro had no right nor cannot hold the Priesthood." While Coltrin acknowledged washing and anointing a Negro, Elijah Abel, in a ceremony in the Kirtland temple after receiving these instructions, he stated that in so doing he "never had such unpleasant feelings in my life—and I said I never would again Anoint another person who had Negro blood in him. [sic] unless I was commanded by the Prophet to do so." Coltrin did not mention ordaining Abel a seventy (at the direction of Joseph Smith?), but he did state that he was a president of the seventies when the prophet directed that Abel be dropped because of his "lineage." Abraham Smoot, at whose home the 1879 interview took place, added that he had received similar instructions in 1838.<sup>113</sup>

President Taylor reported the account to the quorum the following week, and Joseph F. Smith disagreed. Abel had not been dropped from the seventies, for Smith had seen his certification as a seventy issued in 1841 and again in Salt Lake City. Furthermore, Abel had denied that Coltrin "washed and anointed" him, but rather stated that Coltrin was the man who originally ordained him a seventy. Moreover, "Brother Abel also states that the Prophet Joseph told him he was entitled to the priesthood." Abel's patriarchal blessing was read, verifying among other

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113. Journal of John Nuttal, 1 (1876-84): 290-93, from a typewritten copy at the Brigham Young University Library. The interview took place 31 May 1879. A corrected copy of the account is included in the minutes of the Council Meeting of 4 June 1879 in the Ben-nion papers.

things that he was an elder in 1836.<sup>114</sup> The question under discussion was not whether the Negro should be given the priesthood, but rather what had been the policy under Joseph Smith. Significantly, John Taylor, an apostle under the prophet for over five years, added no corroboration to the claims of Coltrin or Smoot. Rather, he observed that mistakes had been made in the early days of the church which had been allowed to stand, and concluded that "probably it was so in Brother Abel's case; that he, having been ordained before the word of the Lord was fully understood, it was allowed to remain."<sup>115</sup>

Abel's case was further complicated by a corollary to the Negro policy. Brigham Young had not viewed the curse on Cain's lineage as limited solely to social and biological factors, and ineligibility to the priesthood; he further believed that blacks should not participate in Mormonism's most important ordinances, the temple ceremonies. To devout Negro Mormons, this restriction was even more serious than the policy of priesthood denial, for in Mormon theology these ordinances were necessary for ultimate exaltation in the life hereafter.<sup>116</sup> This was not an unexpected restriction for the men, as only Mormon men holding the Melchizedek priesthood were eligible for the ordinances. However, Brigham Young had to appeal directly to the curse on Cain to extend the

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114. Minutes of the Council of the Twelve, 4 June 1879, in the Bennion papers. An extensive excerpt from these minutes has been included in n. 29. This subject had been discussed the previous week, 28 May 1879, though the minutes of that meeting are not among the Bennion or the George Albert Smith (GAS) papers.

115. *Ibid.*

116. While not theoretically synonymous, temple marriages or sealings were generally equated with Mormon plural marriages, and thus the former received considerable attention in the years prior to the Manifesto. Angus M. Cannon, one-time Salt Lake temple president, in denouncing the candidacy of a man who "has not the courage" to live up to gospel principles, observed: "I had rather see a colored man, who is my friend here, sent to Washington, because he is not capable of receiving the priesthood, and can never reach the highest celestial glory of the kingdom of God. This colored man could go and stand upon the floor of Congress as the peer of every man there, and would be able to say conscientiously that he had not accepted the doctrine of plurality, because he could not" (*Salt Lake Tribune*, 5 Oct. 1884).

Several years later the church received national publicity when a patriarch speaking at a funeral remarked that as Elijah Abel was the only Negro to have received the Melchizedek priesthood, he was the only one of "his race who ever succeeded in gaining entrance within the pearly gates." The report, from the hostile *Tribune* (1 Nov. 1903), was probably inaccurate in some parts. Nonetheless, when the story was picked up by Eastern papers, the church felt it necessary to issue denials on two occasions through the *Deseret News*. In both cases, however, the editors avoided comment on the subtlety of Mormon theology, which allowed the belief that a Negro could go to heaven as part of his "salvation," but could not attain the highest degree of glory therein ("exaltation") because of the priesthood restriction (see *Deseret News*, "Salvation for the Negro," 28 Nov. 1903; and "Negroes and Heaven," 17 Dec. 1903, both included in the Journal History for those dates).

restriction to black women, for women normally needed only be in "good standing" to gain access to the temple.<sup>117</sup> Elijah Abel, the anomalous black who had been ordained to the priesthood, was also excluded by President Young because of the curse.<sup>118</sup>

Abel was convinced of his right to the priesthood and felt that he should be eligible for the temple ordinances. Consequently, on the death of Brigham Young, he appealed his case to John Taylor. Not only had the prophet knowingly allowed him to hold the priesthood, Abel argued, but his patriarchal blessing also promised him that he would be "the welding link between the black and white races, and that he should hold the initiative authority by which his race should be redeemed."<sup>119</sup> His patriarchal blessing had come close to this sentiment: "Thou shalt be made equal to thy brethren, and thy soul be white in eternity and thy robes glittering) thou shalt save thy thousands, do much good, and receive all the power that thou needest to accomplish thy mission."<sup>120</sup> Nonetheless, John Taylor upheld Brigham Young's ruling. Undaunted, Abel repeatedly renewed his application, until Taylor referred the case to the Quorum of the Twelve, who sustained the president's decision.<sup>121</sup> In 1883 John Taylor finally called the seventy-three-year-old Abel on a mission (from the Third Quorum, to which he had been ordained some forty-six years prior). After a year on his mission, Abel became ill and returned to Utah, where he died on December 25, 1884.<sup>122</sup> With Abel's death, the church lost the only tangible evidence of priesthood-Negro policy under Joseph Smith.

Even after his death, Abel continued to be a recurring problem for the church leadership, particularly when they reconsidered Joseph Smith's alleged teachings on the subject. Ten years later Wilford Woodruff was faced with repeated applications for temple ordinances from another black Mormon, Jane James. He eventually took the matter to the quorum and asked "the brethren if they had any ideas favorable to her race." Once again Joseph F. Smith pointed out that Elijah Abel had

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117. In practice, Negro women would have been excluded from sealings regardless, as the husband would not have held the priesthood. However, many single women have received their endowments. Later the blacks were described as ineligible for the "blessings of the Priesthood," an expression encompassing the priesthood and temple restrictions, but somehow without reference to the other ordinances requiring the priesthood for which the Negroes were eligible.

118. See Council Meeting minutes, 6 Aug. 1908, Bennion papers (or GAS papers).

119. *Ibid.*

120. See Council Meeting minutes, 4 June 1879, Bennion papers.

121. Recounted in Council Minutes, 2 Jan. 1902, Bennion papers (or GAS papers).

122. Jenson, *Latter-day Saint Biographical Encyclopedia*, 3:577. While on his mission, Abel reportedly "was not authorized to confer. . . the holy priesthood" (First Presidency letter to David McKay, 16 Mar. 1904).

been ordained a seventy "under the direction of the Prophet Smith."<sup>123</sup> However, on this occasion a new voice was heard. George Q. Cannon countered with the pronouncement that Joseph Smith had "taught" this doctrine:

That the seed of Cain could not receive the priesthood nor act in any offices of the priesthood until the seed of Abel should come forward and take precedence over Cain's offspring; and that any white man who mingled his seed with that of Cain should be killed, and thus prevent any of the seed of Cain coming in possession of the priesthood.<sup>124</sup>

This is startling information. Even Wilford Woodruff, apostle under the prophet for five years, had said nothing about Joseph Smith's views. Actually, it was not firsthand information, for when Cannon repeated these sentiments in 1900 it had become, "he understood that the Prophet had said. . . ."<sup>125</sup> Nor did the latter version include the reference to miscegenation; in the interim, Cannon had attributed this idea to John Taylor ("he understood Prest. Taylor to say that if the law of the Lord were administered upon him he would be killed and his offspring").<sup>126</sup> A more likely origin for these "quotations" was Brigham Young, who expressed

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123. Council Minutes, 22 Aug. 1895, Bennion (and GAS) papers. On this occasion, Joseph F. Smith stated that Abel "had been ordained a Seventy and afterwards a High Priest." I have found no evidence for the latter claim.

A previous appeal to Wilford Woodruff by "Aunt Jane" was reported in Matthias Cowley, 587. An appeal to John Taylor is recorded in the "Gardo House Office Journal" for 20 March 1883, included in the Bennion papers. Jane James's appeal to Wilford Woodruff in 1895 was denied, but she was later offered a remarkable alternative to her desires. George Q. Cannon, first counselor to Woodruff, suggested that while she was not eligible for the traditional ceremonies, a special temple ceremony might be prepared—to adopt her into the family of Joseph Smith "as a servant" (she having been the prophet's housekeeper). With the approval of President Woodruff, this was done, and Jane James thereby became the first black knowingly allowed into a Mormon temple since Elijah Abel had been admitted in Kirtland, Ohio, nearly fifty years before.

This special dispensation was not so major a concession as it may appear, as true "exaltation" was still impossible without the traditional ordinances. This fact was not lost on Sister James, and although she was apparently satisfied for a time, she shortly renewed her plea to participate in the regular temple ceremonies. See Council Minutes for 2 Jan. 1902, and 26 Aug. 1908, in Bennion (or GAS) papers.

124. Council Minutes, 22 Aug. 1895, Bennion (or GAS) papers.

125. Council Minutes, 11 Mar. 1900, Bennion (or GAS) papers. Cannon had joined the church in 1840, but was not ordained an apostle until sixteen years after the prophet's death, in 1860.

126. Council Minutes, dated 16 Dec. 1897 in Bennion papers (dated 15 Dec. 1897 in the GAS papers). During Taylor's presidency, Utah passed an anti-miscegenation law prohibiting marriages between a "negro" or "mongolian" and a "white person" (passed 8 March 1888).

similar sentiments on many occasions without reference to Joseph Smith.<sup>127</sup>

Another problem was considered that year. Two Negroes were discovered who had been given the priesthood, and local leaders wanted to know what should be done. Once again George Q. Cannon spoke up: "President Young held to the doctrine that no man tainted with negro blood was eligible to the priesthood; that President Taylor held to the same doctrine, claiming to have been taught it by the Prophet Joseph Smith." President Snow expressed the thought that the subject needed further consideration, to which Cannon replied "that as he regarded it the subject was really beyond the pale of discussion, unless he, President Snow, had light to throw upon it beyond what had already been imparted."<sup>128</sup>

Perhaps more than any other during this time, George Q. Cannon's confident pronouncements influenced church decisions on the Negro. At his instigation, a "white" woman *formerly* married to a Negro was denied the sealing rites to her second husband, because it would be "unfair" to admit the mother but not her daughters by the previous marriage and because "Press. Cannon thought, too, that to let down the bars in the least on this question would only tend to complications."<sup>129</sup> Similarly, Cannon on another occasion was instrumental in a decision which denied the priesthood to a white man who had married a Negro.<sup>130</sup>

Notwithstanding George Q. Cannon's assertions, the council was never presented with a direct quotation from Joseph Smith, nor is there any record of Presidents Taylor or Wilford Woodruff (both apostles under Joseph Smith) citing the prophet as author of the priesthood policy. There are, however, records of several meetings where the prophet was discussed in relation to the priesthood-Negro matter, and in which the doctrine was not attributed to Joseph Smith. Lorenzo Snow, who asked Brigham Young about the "Africans" in 1849, and who received at some point a lengthy explanation of the subject from Young, also avoided attributing the doctrine to Joseph Smith.<sup>131</sup>

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127. "Shall I tell you the law of God in regard to the African race? If the white man who belongs to the chosen seed mixes his blood with the seed of Cain, the penalty, under the law of God is death on the spot" (Brigham Young, 8 March 1863 [JD 10:110]; see also Young's address to the legislature, 16 January 1852, in the journal of Wilford Woodruff for a more graphic discussion). Most of Young's discussions of the curse on Cain emphasized it would not be lifted until all the "other children of Adam" had received their entitlement.

128. Council Minutes, 18 Aug. 1900, Bennion (or GAS) papers. Cannon was then first counselor to Snow.

129. Council Minutes, 22 Aug. 1895, Bennion (or GAS) papers. By 1908, this policy had been reversed, and a temple sealing was approved in a comparable case.

130. Council Minutes, 16 Dec. 1897, Bennion papers. See also n. 123.

131. Journal History, 13 Feb. 1849, for the original inquiry. Council Minutes of 11

Joseph F. Smith, on becoming president of the church in 1901, faced problems similar to those of his predecessors. In discussing eligibility for the priesthood in 1902, Smith reviewed the rulings of Brigham Young and John Taylor and once again remarked that Elijah Abel had been "ordained a seventy and received his patriarchal blessing in the days of the Prophet Joseph."<sup>132</sup> In 1908 the council heard President Smith recount the story for at least the fourth time, but this time the story was different. Although Abel had been ordained a seventy, "this ordination was declared null and void by the Prophet himself."<sup>133</sup> With this statement, the "problem" of Elijah Abel was finally put to rest. Why Joseph F. Smith should come forth with this information after testifying to the contrary for nearly thirty years remains a mystery. Perhaps he was influenced by others who by then had invoked Joseph Smith on behalf of the priesthood policy for nearly twenty years,<sup>134</sup> and who were now citing the Book of Abraham as a major justification for the policy. Perhaps his memory lapsed, for he erred in other parts of the account as well: He contradicted his earlier (correct) report that Abel was ordained by Zebedee Coltrin, and he further said that Presidents "Young, Taylor, and Woodruff" had all denied Abel the temple ordinances, even though Woodruff did not become president until five years after Abel's death. Beyond the historical inconsistencies, President Smith also described a situation he defined that same year as a doctrinal impossibility. In

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March 1900 reveal the question in Snow's mind as to the author of the policy. There are two versions of these minutes which should be compared. The Bennion and GAS papers have virtually identical accounts, but George F. Gibbs, secretary to the First Presidency, reported a slightly different version in a private letter to John M. Whitaker, 18 Jan. 1909 (Whitaker papers, University of Utah Library). The latter account suggests that Snow believed the explanation of the policy could have been based on the "personal views" of Brigham Young.

132. Council Minutes, 2 Jan. 1902, Bennion (or GAS) papers.

133. Council Minutes, 26 Aug. 1908, Bennion (or GAS) papers. A more extensive excerpt: "In this connection President Smith referred to Elijah Abel, who was ordained a Seventy by Joseph Young, in the days of the Prophet Joseph, to whom Brother Young issued a Seventies certificate; but this ordination was declared null and void by the Prophet himself. Later Brother Abel appealed to President Young for the privilege of receiving his endowments and to have his wife and children sealed to him, a privilege President Young could not grant. Brother Abel renewed his application to President Taylor with the same result; and still the same appeal was made to President Woodruff afterwards who of course upheld the position taken by Presidents Young and Taylor." Compare this with Smith's earliest account, quoted in n. 29.

134. In addition to George Q. Cannon, Apostle Franklin D. Richards had also attributed church policy ultimately to Joseph Smith (Journal History, 5 Oct. 1896). Richards, who joined the church in 1838, was ordained an apostle in 1849; there is no indication from his remarks that he was claiming first-hand information. Joseph Smith's *History* was also published about this time, and it contained the lone direct quote by the prophet relating the Negro to Cain (without reference to the priesthood) (DHC 4:501).

answering "whether a man's ordination to the priesthood can be made null and void, and he still be permitted to retain his membership in the Church," President Smith wrote that "once having received the priesthood it cannot be taken. . . except by transgression so serious that they must forfeit their standing in the Church."<sup>135</sup>

With Abel out of the way, the prophet Joseph Smith increasingly became the precedent maker for priesthood denial. In 1912 George Q. Cannon's secondhand account of the prophet's views was cited in a First Presidency letter on church policy,<sup>136</sup> and slightly over a decade later Apostle Joseph Fielding Smith could write, simply but definitively, "It is true that the negro race is barred from holding the Priesthood, and this has always been the case. The Prophet Joseph Smith taught this doctrine, and it was made known to him."<sup>137</sup>

A second emerging theme can be traced almost in parallel with the beliefs concerning Joseph Smith. Writing in the *Contributor* in 1885, B. H. Roberts had speculated on the background of the priesthood restriction on blacks, and drew heavily on the recently canonized Pearl of Great Price:

Others there were, who may not have rebelled against God [in the war in heaven] and yet were so indifferent in their support of the righteous cause of our Redeemer, that they forfeited certain privileges and powers granted to those who were more valiant for God and correct principle. We have, I think, a demonstration of this in the seed of Ham. The first Pharaoh-patriarch-king of Egypt—was a grandson of Ham: . . . "[Noah] *cursed him as pertaining to the Priesthood. . . .*"

Now, why is it that the seed of Ham was cursed as pertaining to the Priesthood? Why is it that his seed "could not have right to the Priesthood?"

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135. *Improvement Era* 11 (1908):465-66, as quoted in *Gospel Doctrine*:234-5, the Melchizedek priesthood quorum manual, 1970-71. President Smith allowed for an alternative which appears more applicable to the situation he described in the council meeting: "To prevent a person, for cause, from exercising the rights and privileges of acting in the offices of the priesthood may be and has been done, and the person so silenced still remains a member of the Church, but this does not take away from him any priesthood that he held." (G. R., "Man and his Varieties," 145-146)

136. First Presidency letter from Joseph F. Smith, Anthon H. Lund, and Charles W. Penrose to Milton H. Knudson, 13 Jan. 1912, Bennion papers. The presidency wrote: "[T]he Prophet Joseph Smith is said to have explained it in this way. . . ."; Cannon was not referenced, and the statement on miscegenation was deleted.

A question remains as to the specific timing of these developments. Although Joseph F. Smith is not known to have "explained" the situation with Elijah Abel prior to 1908, he had accepted Joseph Smith as the original author of the priesthood policy at least as early as 1904. That year the First Presidency wrote, without reference, "the Prophet Joseph taught the doctrine in his day that the seed of Cain would not receive the priesthood" (letter to David McKay, 16 Mar. 1904, copy in my possession).

137. "The Negro and the Priesthood," *Improvement Era* 27 (Apr. 1924) :564-5.

Ham's wife was named "Egyptus, which in the Chaldaic signifies Egypt, which signifies that which is forbidden. . . and thus from Ham sprang that race which preserved the curse in the land." . . . Was the wife of Ham, as her name signifies, of a race which those who held the Priesthood were forbidden to intermarry? Was she a descendant of Cain, who was cursed for murdering his brother? And was it by Ham marrying her, and she being saved from the flood in the ark, that "the race which preserved the curse in the land" was perpetuated? If so, then I believe that race is the one through which it is ordained those spirits that were not valiant in the great rebellion in heaven should come; who through their indifference or lack of integrity to righteousness, rendered themselves unworthy of the Priesthood and its powers, and hence it is withheld from them to this day.<sup>138</sup>

Several years later George Q. Cannon repeated the essentials of this explanation (excluding the references to the pre-existence) in the *Juvenile Instructor*,<sup>139</sup> and by 1900 Cannon was citing the Pearl of Great Price in First Presidency discussions.<sup>140</sup> This explanation appeared again in the *Millennial Star* in 1903<sup>141</sup> and in *Liahona, the Elders' Journal* in 1908.<sup>142</sup> Additional allusions were also evident in First Presidency and council discussions,<sup>143</sup> and by 1912 this relatively new argument had become a foundation of church policy. Responding to the inquiry, "Is it a fact that a Negro cannot receive the priesthood, and if so, what is the reason?" the First Presidency wrote, "You are referred to the Pearl of Great Price, Book of Abraham, Chapter 1, verses 26 and 27, going to show that the seed of Ham was cursed as pertaining to the priesthood; and that by reason of this curse they have no right to it."<sup>144</sup>

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138. B. H. Roberts, "To the Youth of Israel," *The Contributor* 6 (1885):296-7; Roberts's italics. Erastus Snow, in 1880, discussed the priesthood restriction on the descendants of Cain, and the passage of this curse through the Flood in a manner suggestive of the Pearl of Great Price account, but he did not present nearly so developed a case as Roberts. His explanation was attributed to revelation ("as revelation teaches"), which presumably referred to the Book of Abraham, as no other "revelation" has ever been cited on the subject (JD 21:370).

139. *Juvenile Instructor* 26 (15 Oct. 1891): 635-6.

140. Council Minutes for 11 Mar. 1900 and 18 Aug. 1900, both in Bennion (or GAS) papers. In the latter meeting, "President Cannon read from the Pearl of Great Price showing that negroes were debarred from the priesthood."

141. "Are Negroes Children of Adam?" 65 (3 Dec. 1903): 776-8.

142. "The Negro and the Priesthood," 5 (18 Apr. 1908): 1164-7.

143. E.g., Council Minutes, 26 Aug. 1908; letter from Joseph F. Smith and Anthon H. Lund to Rudger Clawson, 18 Nov. 1910, both in Bennion papers.

144. Letter of 13 Jan. 1912, from Joseph F. Smith, Anthon H. Lund, and Charles W. Penrose, to Milton H. Knudson, in the Bennion papers. A similar sentiment was included in another letter, dated 1 May 1912, to Ben E. Rich (Bennion papers): "[T]he Pearl of Great Price gives particulars on this point that are very pertinent to the subject (See Book of Abraham 1:21,27). These texts show that while men of the negro race may be blessed of the Lord both temporally and spiritually. . . yet they are not eligible to the Priesthood."

When fully developed, the Pearl of Great Price argument went as follows: Cain became black after murdering his brother, Abel; among his descendants were a people of Canaan who warred on their neighbors and were also identified as black.<sup>145</sup> Ham, Noah's son, married Egyptus, a descendant of this Cain-Canaan lineage; Cain's descendants had been denied the priesthood, and thus Ham's descendants were also denied the priesthood; this was confirmed in the case of Pharaoh, a descendant of Ham and Egyptus, and of the Canaanites, and who was denied the priesthood; the modern Negro was of this Cain-Ham lineage and therefore was not eligible for the priesthood.<sup>146</sup>

Actually, a careful reading of the Pearl of Great Price reveals that the books of Moses and Abraham fall far short of so explicit an account. Negroes, for instance, are never mentioned. Although Cain's descendants are identified as black at one point before the Flood, they are never again identified. The people of Canaan are not originally black and are thus unlikely candidates for Cain's "seed." There is no explicit statement that Ham's wife was "Egyptus"; rather, the account reads that there was a woman "who was the daughter of Ham, and the daughter of Egyptus." In patriarchal accounts, this would not necessarily imply a literal daughter, as individuals are not infrequently referred to as sons or daughters of their grandparents, or even more remote ancestors. Within Abraham's

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Orson Whitney also included the Pearl of Great Price explanation in his *Saturday Night Thoughts* on doctrine in 1921, and several years later Joseph Fielding Smith began his extensive discussions of the subject.

145. These first two statements were based on the Book of Moses, revealed to Joseph Smith in December 1830, and published in August 1832. The remainder of the argument derives from the Book of Abraham which was first published in 1842. The two books were combined into the Pearl of Great Price in 1851.

146. The specific verses most widely cited:

- "Cain rose up against Abel, his brother, and slew him" (Moses 5:32, Gen. 4:8).
- "And I the Lord set a mark upon Cain" (Moses 5:40, or Gen. 4:15).
- "the seed of Cain were black" (Moses 7:22).
- "the people of Canaan. . . shall go forth in battle array" (Moses 7:7).
- "a blackness came upon all the children of Canaan" (Moses 7:8).
- "Egypt being first discovered by a woman, who was the daughter of Ham, and the daughter of Egyptus" (Abr. 1:23).
- "Pharaoh, the eldest son of Egyptus, the daughter of Ham" (Abr. 1:25).
- "the king of Egypt was a descendant from the loins of Ham, and was a partaker of the blood of the Canaanites by birth" (Abr. 1:25).
- "and thus the blood of the Canaanites was preserved in the land" (Abr. 1:22).
- "and. . . from Ham, sprang the race which preserved the curse in the land" (Abr. 1:24).
- "[Pharaoh was] cursed. . . as pertaining to the Priesthood" (Abr. 1:26).

The "complete" version of the Pearl of Great Price argument can be found in published sources after 1903 (e.g., MS 65:776-8); and can be pieced together from earlier discussions after 1884.

own account, an "Egyptus" is later referred to as the "daughter of Ham," and the Pharaoh who has been identified as "Egyptus' eldest son" is elsewhere seemingly the son of Noah. Moreover, the Book of Moses records that Ham was a man of God prior to the Flood, and that the daughters of the sons of Noah were "fair." The effort to relate Pharaoh to the antediluvian people of Canaan is especially strained, for in characterizing Pharaoh as a descendant of Egyptus and the "Canaanites" there is no suggestion that this latter group was any other than the people of Canaan descended from Ham's son, Canaan (who also had been cursed).<sup>147</sup>

How then was the Pearl of Great Price put to such ready use in defense of the policy of priesthood denial to Negroes? Very simply, the basic belief that a lineage could be traced from Cain through the wife of Ham to the modern Negro had long been accepted by the church, independently of the Pearl of Great Price. It was a very easy matter to read

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147. The term "Canaan" (or "Canaanite") appears six times in the Book of Abraham. The first two are well-known: "Now this king of Egypt was a descendant from the loins of Ham, and was a partaker of the blood of the *Canaanites* by birth. From this descent sprang all the Egyptians, and thus the blood of the *Canaanites* was preserved in the land" (Abr. 1:21-22). In the third instance, Abraham records, "Therefore I left the land of Ur, of the Chaldees, to go into the land of *Canaan*" (Abr. 2:4). The remaining three references also speak of this land, "I . . . came forth in the way to the land of *Canaan*"; "as we journeyed. . . to come to the land of *Canaan*"; "and we had already come into the borders of the land of the *Canaanites*. . . the land of this idolatrous nation" (Abr. 2:15-16, 18; emphases added to all references). The last four of these references relate ultimately to the son of Ham, Canaan, and the people traditionally descended from him. Except for its convenient use in the priesthood argument, there is no apparent reason for relating the first two uses of "Canaanite" to a different group by the same name who lived before the Flood, and who were not otherwise mentioned by Abraham.

Another particularly weak point in the Pearl of Great Price argument is the importance which must be attributed to the spellings of "Cainan" and "Canaan." Not only is it essential that there be separate antediluvian and post-Flood "Canaans," but more importantly, a clear distinction must be maintained between the "good" people and land of "Cainan" whence came the prophet Enoch, and the "bad" people of "Canaan" incorporated into the cursed lineage. The spellings in the current Pearl of Great Price are consistent, and permit a distinction to be made. However, previously published versions and the original manuscripts on which these were based demonstrate that there is a significant question about the correctness of the present spellings. Variations were evident throughout the nineteenth century (which explains the frequent "incorrect" spellings found in the Council Minutes during that time), and the earliest manuscripts suggest that Enoch may well have come from the land of "Canaan." While it is not practical to include a full discussion of this problem at present, it should be clear that the history of these works seriously undermines any argument based on a particular spelling being correct. See Richard P. Howard, "Variants in the Spelling of Canaan (Cainan) in the Original Manuscripts of the 'Inspired Version' of the Bible, as found in Genesis, Chapters 6 and 7" (manuscript, Historians Office, Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints), or my own unpublished "Compilation on the Negro in Mormonism," Appendix I, Harold B. Lee Library, Special Collections, Brigham Young University.

this belief into that scripture, for if one *assumes* that there was a unique continuous lineage extending from Cain and Ham to the present, and that this is the lineage of the contemporary Negro, then it must have been accomplished essentially as B. H. Roberts proposed.

A better question is, why wasn't the Pearl of Great Price invoked earlier on this matter?<sup>148</sup> Most probably, there was no need. The notion that the Negroes were descended from Cain and Ham was initially common enough knowledge that no "proof" or corroboration of this connection had been necessary. This belief remained in evidence throughout the nineteenth century, and as late as 1908 a Mormon author could write:

That the negroes are descended from Ham is generally admitted, not only by latterday Saint writers but by historians and students of the scriptures. That they are also descended from Cain is also a widely accepted theory, though the sacred history does not record how this lineage bridged the flood.<sup>149</sup>

In reality, these ideas were not nearly so widespread at this time as they had been a half century before. Fewer and fewer scientists were subscribing to a literal Flood, and the evidence they presented was convincing an increasing number of laymen that there had not been a general destruction as recently as Genesis suggested. Evolutionary theories even challenged Adam's position as progenitor of the human family. This dwindling "external support" probably accounts in part for the increased attention to the Pearl of Great Price evident during this time, for the traditional beliefs regarding both Cain and the Flood were essential to the church's Negro doctrine.

The shift of the rationale ("doctrinal basis") for the Negro policy on to firmer or at least more tangible ground developed not only at a time when traditional beliefs concerning Cain and Ham were fading from the contemporary scene, but also as fundamental assumptions concerning the Negro's social and intellectual status were being challenged. Even within the church, this change can easily be identified. As early as 1879, Apostle Franklin D. Richards departed significantly from antebellum Mormon philosophy in a discussion of slavery and the Civil War: "without any argument as to whether slavery should be justified or con-

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148. The correlation surely was apparent much earlier. Orson Pratt seems to have had reference to the Book of Abraham in 1853 when he wrote, "African negroes or [those] in the lineage of Canaan whose descendants were cursed, pertaining to the priesthood" (*The Seer* 1:56). Similarly, the *Juvenile Instructor* series on "Man and His Varieties" in 1868 included in the section on "The Negro Race" the comment, "We are told in the Book of Abraham. . . that Egypt was first discovered by a woman, who was a daughter of Ham, the son of Noah. This was probably the first portion of Africa inhabited after the flood." See also n. 138.

149. "The Negro and the Priesthood," *Liahona, The Elders' Journal* 5:1164-7.

demned. . . . [The Negro's] ancestor said they should be servant of servants among their brethren, making their servitude the fulfilment of prophecy, whether according to the will of God or not."<sup>150</sup> Twenty years later the church's *Deseret News* was not only questioning the old notions of racial inferiority, but had become somewhat of a champion of Negro political rights.<sup>151</sup> An ironic extreme was achieved in 1914 when a Mormon writer for the *Millennial Star* concluded, "Even the mildest form of slavery can never be tolerated by the one true church. . . . [T]he slavery of Catholic Rome must be looked upon as one great proof of apostasy."<sup>152</sup> There were reservations, and even in the midst of its "liberal" period, the *Deseret News* still felt the need for "some wise restrictions in society, that each race may occupy the position for which it was designed and is adapted."<sup>153</sup> Similarly, a seventy's course in theology could quote extensively from "perhaps the most convincing book in justification of the South in denying to the negro race social equality with the white

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150. JD 20:310-13 (6 Oct. 1829). Three years later Erastus Snow carried this sentiment one step farther: "[T]he extreme excesses perpetrated under [the system of slavery in the Southern States], in many particulars, were very great wrongs to mankind, and very grievous in the sight of heaven and of right-thinking people. And changes were determined in the mind of Jehovah, and have been affected" (JD 23:294, 8 Oct. 1882).

Although Joseph Smith's "Views" in opposition to slavery had been dropped rather quickly after his death, they were resurrected during the Civil War at a time when the Union was considered "hopelessly and irremediably broken" with the suggestion that the rejection of the prophet's plan was in part responsible for the current state of affairs (MS 25:97-101, 14 Feb. 1863). After the death of Brigham Young, the "Views" were cited more frequently. Erastus Snow, for instance, referred to the proposals on slavery on two occasions in 1882, as "the voice of the Lord through the Prophet Joseph Smith" (JD 23:91), and as "the true policy and counsel of heaven to our nation" (JD 23:296-7).

151. "[D]isenfranchisement of a class, on the ground that it is not entitled to human rights because of the color of the skin, cannot be justified by any arguments from the Scriptures" (see "The Colored Races," *Deseret Evening News*, 14 Mar. 1908, in Journal History of this date; also, the earlier editorials, e.g., "Status of the Negro," 17 May 1900; "Political Rights of Negroes," 8 May 1903; "The Negro Problem," 9 Sept. 1903).

152. Frank H. Eastmond, "Slavery and Apostasy," MS 76:269-71 (23 Apr. 1914).

153. "The Negro Problem," editorial of 12 May 1903. The editor quoted at length the "pertinent remarks" from a Southerner who said, in part, "I cannot say that I believe in the doctrine 'that education ruins the negro,' for while it may unfit him in a sense for being a hewer of wood and a drawer of water, it should, if education means anything, force him to an intellectual condition wherein he should more firmly realize his position and recognize the inherent restrictions of his race in regard to the social conditions of mankind." Similarly, the *News*, some fifteen years earlier, had reported a projection of Negro population growth which would have reached 96,000,000 in 1960, and observed that it "is not cheering to Anglo-Saxons to contemplate subjugation to the African race"; two years later the projections had proved ill-founded, and the *News* reported that the Negro "forebodes no numerical danger to the country" (from the editions of 4 Jan. 1888 and 22 July 1891, both included in the Journal History).

race."<sup>154</sup> However, the very need for "evidence" reveals a significant change from the assumptions of an earlier time.

Notwithstanding the initial failure to cite Joseph Smith on church Negro policy, there had never been any question among the leadership as to the lineage of the blacks, nor of the implications of this genealogy. John Taylor had been editor of the *Times and Seasons* in 1845 when the "Short Chapter" marked the return of the church to the "hardline" on the curse of Ham.<sup>155</sup> He accepted the traditional genealogy for the blacks,<sup>156</sup> and as president of the church denied them access to the temple because of their lineage. Also while president, he made the unique observation that this lineage had been preserved through the Flood "because it was necessary that the devil should have a representation upon the earth as well as God."<sup>157</sup>

Wilford Woodruff, an apostle to Joseph Smith, Brigham Young, and John Taylor before becoming president, believed fully in the Cain genealogy. At one point he went so far as to cite the "mark of darkness" still visible on the "millions of the descendants of Cain" as evidence for the Bible.<sup>158</sup> As with his two predecessors, Woodruff denied blacks the temple ordinances as one of the "disadvantages. . .of the descendants of Cain."<sup>159</sup> Nonetheless, he authorized the compromise allowing Jane James into the temple for an unusual sealing ordinance.

Less information is available on Lorenzo Snow. His concern for the subject is reflected in his early inquiry into the "chance of redemption" for the Africans.<sup>160</sup> As a senior apostle, he proposed that a man ruled ineligible for the priesthood for marrying a black be allowed "to get a di-

154. The thesis of this author was that social equality would lead to intermarriage, and "that the comingling of inferior with superior must lower the higher is just as certain as that the half-sum of two and six is four" (William Benjamin Smith, *The Color Line*, cited in B. H. Roberts, *Seventy's Course in Theology, First Year, Outline History of the Seventy and A Survey of the Books of Holy Scripture* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1907; repr. 1931]).

155. T&S 6:857 (1 Apr. 1845). With other Mormon leaders, Taylor had denounced both "Southern fire-eaters" and "rabid abolitionists" in the days before the Civil War, but his less restrained remarks were more often directed at the latter, with whom he had greater familiarity. Horace Greeley, for instance, was "a great man to talk about higher law, which means, with him, stealing niggers. . .they need not be afraid of our stealing their niggers" (JD 5:157; see also JD 5:119).

156. E.g., JD 18:200; 22:304.

157. JD 22:302 (28 Aug. 1881); also JD 23:336 (29 Oct. 1882). There is some basis for this idea in remarks delivered by Brigham Young to the Utah Territorial Legislature, 16 January 1852, recorded in Wilford Woodruff's diary of that date.

158. Conference address, 7 Apr. 1887, reported in MS 51:339.

159. Matthias F. Cowley, 587, from Woodruff's journal.

160. The question, posed to Brigham Young, was made the day after Snow was ordained an apostle (Journal History, 13 Feb. 1849).

voice. . . and marry a white woman, and he would be entitled then to the priesthood."<sup>161</sup> While president of the church, he upheld the decisions of his three predecessors, citing as they had the curse on Cain.<sup>162</sup>

Greater attention was focused on the Negro doctrine while Joseph F. Smith was president than at any time since the presidency of Brigham Young. While several changes are evident in Mormon teachings during his administration, President Smith relied very heavily on the rulings of his predecessors in determining the fundamentals of church policy ("he did not know that we could do anything more in such cases than refer to the rulings of Presidents Young, Taylor, Woodruff and other Presidencies").<sup>163</sup>

The most important of the new developments were the incorporation of Joseph Smith and the Pearl of Great Price into the immediate background of the Negro policy. There were also several important decisions. In 1902 the First Presidency received an inquiry concerning the priesthood restriction to a man who had one Negro great-grandparent. The basic question was what defined a "Negro" or "descendant of Cain." There were precedents for a decision, and Joseph F. Smith recounted that Brigham Young applied the restriction to those with any "Negro blood in their veins." Even so, Apostle John Henry Smith "remarked that it seemed to him that persons in whose veins the white blood predominated should not be barred from the temple." It is not clear exactly what Apostle Smith had in mind, but if he meant cases in which there were more Caucasian grandparents, for instance, than Negro, he would have been much more liberal in his definitions than the vast majority of his contemporaries.<sup>164</sup> It had long been the peculiar notion of American whites that a person whose appearance suggested any Negro ancestry was to be considered a Negro, notwithstanding the fact that perhaps fifteen of his sixteen great-great-grandparents were Caucasians. This was particularly so if it were known that there was a black ancestor. Theoretically, the presence of a "cursed lineage" should have been discernible to a church patriarch. However, a previous council had already been faced with a problem which arose when a patriarch

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161. Council Minutes, 16 Dec. 1897, in Bennion papers.

162. E.g., Council Minutes, 11 Mar. 1900, in Bennion (or GAS) papers.

163. Council Minutes, 26 Aug. 1908, in Bennion (or GAS) papers.

164. For comparison, the state of Virginia extended its legal definition of "a colored person" in 1910 to include "every person having one-sixteenth or more of negro blood," and further in 1930 to include "every person in whom there is ascertainable any negro blood." Woodward reports that the 1930 federal census enumerators were instructed to count as Negroes any person of mixed blood, "no matter how small the percentage of Negro blood" (*American Counterpoint*, 86).

For another indication of Apostle John Henry Smith's different perspective on race, see Carter, *The Negro Pioneer*, 57.

assigned a man of "some Negro blood" to the lineage of Ephraim.<sup>165</sup> Joseph F. Smith's answer to the proposal by Apostle John Henry Smith was unusually revealing:

President Smith. . .referred to the doctrine taught by President Brigham Young which he (the speaker) said he believed in himself, to the effect that the children of Gentile parents, in whose veins may exist a single drop of the blood of Ephraim, might extract all the blood of Ephraim from his parents' veins, and be actually a full-blooded Ephraimite. He also referred to the case of a man named Billingsby, whose ancestors away back married an Indian woman, and whose descendants in every branch of his family were pure whites, with one exception, and that exception was one pure blooded Indian in every branch of the family. The speaker said he mentioned this case because it was in line with President Young's doctrine on the subject, and the same had been found to be the case by stockmen engaged in the improvement of breeds. Assuming, therefore, this doctrine to be sound, while the children of a man in whose veins may exist a single drop of negro blood, might be entirely white, yet one of his descendants might turn out to be a pronounced negro. And the question in President Smith's mind was, when shall we get light enough to determine each case on its merits? He gave it as his opinion that in all cases where the blood of Cain showed itself, however slight, the line should be drawn there; but where children of tainted people were found to be pure Ephraimites, they might be admitted to the temple. This was only an opinion, however; the subject would no doubt be considered later.<sup>166</sup>

By 1907, the First Presidency and quorum had reconsidered and ruled that "no one known to have in his veins negro blood, (it matters not how remote a degree) can either have the priesthood in any degree or

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165. Council Minutes, 11 Mar. 1900, in Bennion (or GAS) papers.

166. Council Minutes, 2 Jan. 1902, in Bennion (or GAS) papers. The "doctrine" described had actually provided a theoretical model which should have allowed people with Negro ancestry to be ordained to the priesthood. Brigham Young had taught that not only could an individual "extract all of the blood" of a particular lineage from his parents, but that it was also possible for such a lineage to be "purged" from the individual's blood: "Can you make a Christian of a Jew? I tell you, nay. If a Jew comes into this Church, and honestly professes to be a Saint, a follower of Christ, and if the blood of Judah is in his veins, he will apostatize. He may have been born and bred a Jew, speak the language of the Jews, and have attended to all the ceremonies of the Jewish religion, and have openly professed to be a Jew all his days; but I will tell you a secret—there is not a particle of the blood of Judaism in him, if he has become a true Christian, a Saint of God; for if there is, he will most assuredly leave the Church of Christ, or that blood will be purged out of his veins. We have men among us who were Jews, and became converted from Judaism. For instance, here is brother Neibaur; do I believe there is one particle of the blood of Judah in his veins? No, not so much as could be seen on the point of the finest cambric needle, through a microscope with a magnifying power of two millions" (JD 2:143; also JD 11:279). Presumably a Negro would have been susceptible to a similar purge of the blood of Cain.

the blessings of the Temple of God; no matter how otherwise worthy he may be."<sup>167</sup> The doctrinal concept related by Joseph F. Smith is virtually identical to the now outdated theory of "genetic throwback." While once a widely accepted phenomenon, modern geneticists doubt that such cases ever existed.<sup>168</sup>

Another important decision made during this period involved missionary work. Under the prophet Joseph Smith, the church repeatedly claimed that its mission was to everyone, and in the year of the prophet's death over 500 missionaries were set apart to carry forth the gospel. The trials faced by the Saints after 1844 were such that it was nearly fifty years until that level was again attained. Nonetheless, under Brigham Young the church's universal call was a common theme, and this was particularly true in the days prior to the Civil War.<sup>169</sup>

Notwithstanding Joseph Smith's early instructions and the concern

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167. "Extract from George F. Richards' Record of Decisions by the Council of the First Presidency and the Twelve Apostles," in the GAS papers. The entry is not dated, but the subsequent entry was from 8 February 1907. Compare n. 164.

In 1913 Dr. Booker T. Washington delivered an address at the University of Utah, attended by "practically every one of the General Authorities." Afterwards Bishop John Whitaker asked Washington, in a private conversation, "If perchance under discussion on some negro problem the question arose as to how a negro would vote if only one drop of negro blood run [sic] in his veins which way would that drop of blood vote on a question, white or black?" Whitaker writes, "Without hesitation he said, 'If there was one drop of blood in a person and such a question arose, it would always vote with the negro.' I was struck with his ready answer, showing he had thought out almost every conceivable connection [between] white and black. And I have been told that pure white blood through intermarriage with any other blood runs out in four generations. I am told that negro blood will persist up to eight generations. There seems to be something in that accursed blood that will not yield to white blood" ("Daily Journal of John M. Whitaker," 27 Mar. 1913, in the University of Utah Library).

168. It is surprising that this idea has not appeared in the explanations of how the "pure" Negro lineage was transmitted through the Flood. See n. 27.

169. The millennialist expectations at that time lent a certain urgency to the call of the Church to carry the gospel to every nation, kindred, tongue, and people. As the Civil War approached, the universal obligation came to be viewed more symbolically. Wilford Woodruff, in 1855, observed that "we have preached. . . in France, Italy, Germany, and the States of the German Confederacy; and it has been preached in the British Isles, in North and South America, and the Society and Sandwich Islands, and to China, and we have even sent them to the dark regions of Asia and Africa. . . [T]wo of our brethren. . . have been to those countries. Chauncey West has been through that country. . . he has cleared his skirts of those people among whom he travelled, and he has cleared this people, for they have been commanded to preach this Gospel to all the nations of the earth" (JD 9:226). Three years later the missionaries were recalled from abroad as Johnston's army moved on Utah. At this time Orson Pratt wrote, "Now, the Lord moves upon the hearts of the First Presidency to say. . . 'It is enough: come home. Your testimony is sufficient'" (JD 6:201). By 1860, Brigham Young could say that "my brethren have said enough to warn the whole world. This frees our garments" (JD 8:147).

under Brigham Young that the gospel at least symbolically be carried to all nations, a new understanding was evident after 1900. A former South African Mission president reported an unusual problem: "An old native missionary" had been converted to Mormonism, and was anxious to begin missionary work among the natives, as was the recently converted son of a Zulu chief. Should the gospel be preached to native tribes? The quorum in response cited rulings of the First Presidency that "our elders should not take the initiative in proselyting among the negro people."<sup>170</sup> The rationale was set forth in response to an inquiry from another South African mission president who wrote in 1910 to ask if "a promiscuously bred white and Negro" could be "baptized for his dead," adding that "he did not wish it to be inferred that he and his fellow missionaries were directing their work among the blacks, as they were not, he having instructed the elders to labor among the white race."<sup>171</sup> In reply, the First Presidency noted the policy of discrimination, and stated,

[T]his is as it should be, and we trust that this understanding will be clearly had by all of our missionaries laboring in South Africa, and who may be called there hereafter. In the Book of Moses (Pearl of Great Price) chapter 7, verse 12, we learn that Enoch in his day called upon all the people to repent save the people of Canaan, and it is for us to do likewise.<sup>172</sup>

Once instituted, this policy remained in effect for over fifty years.

What of Negroes being baptized for the dead? President Smith could

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170. Council Minutes, 26 Aug. 1908, in Bennion (or GAS) papers. Anthon H. Lund, writing "on behalf of First Presidency," had given the same advice the previous month (letter of 11 July 1908 to H. L. Steed, in my possession). A remarkably different philosophy had been developed at length in a *Deseret Evening News* editorial just five months before:

"And how do we know that the disciples of the Apostles did not go both to China and to the interior of Africa? To assert that they did not do so, should not be done without sufficient evidence. There is no reason to believe, against tradition that their labors were confined to the Mediterranean coast lands. . . ."

"But, without going any further into this, it seems to us that the commission given by the Lord to His Apostles embraced every human being. For He commissioned them to preach the gospel to 'every creature.' If that means anything, It means that neither color, nor ignorance, nor degeneration is a bar to salvation. No one is so black that he is not one of God's creatures" ("The Colored Races," 14 Mar. 1908).

171. Letter from B. A. Hendricks reported in Council Minutes, 10 Nov. 1910, in Bennion (or GAS) papers. Hendricks described the blacks as "good honest people."

172. Letter from Joseph F. Smith and Anthon Lund, 18 Nov. 1910, in Bennion papers. They continued, "But at the same time where honest-hearted Negroes who perchance hear the gospel preached, become pricked in their hearts and ask for baptism, it would not be becoming in us to refuse to administer that ordinance in their behalf."

A decade prior, George Q. Cannon had made a point of the fact that "Enoch in his day called upon all people to repent save it were the descendants of Cainan [sic]" (Council Minutes, 18 Aug. 1900, in Bennion or GAS papers).

see "no reason why a negro should not be permitted to have access to the baptismal font in the temple to be baptized for his dead, inasmuch as negroes are entitled to become members of the Church by baptism." Consequently, the First Presidency informed the mission president that while it was not the current practice, they did not "hesitate to say that Negroes may be baptized and confirmed" for the dead.<sup>173</sup> With this, the temple was once again opened to Negro Mormons.

One additional area of doctrinal import was considered during this period. In spite of Brigham Young's statement to the contrary, the notion that the curse on Negroes was somehow related to their relative neutrality in the War in Heaven had gained in popularity. It was evident in B. H. Roberts's *Contributor* article in 1885, and by 1912 the idea was being advanced by many elders as church doctrine. In response to an inquiry as to the authority for this belief, the First Presidency wrote, "[T]here is no revelation, ancient or modern, neither is there any authoritative statement by any of the authorities of the Church. . . [in support of the idea] that the negroes are those who were neutral in heaven at the time of the great conflict or war, which resulted in the casting out of Lucifer and those who were led by him."<sup>174</sup> An explanation based solely on an ancestral connection still must have been unsatisfying, for the presidency later wrote, "Our preexistence, if its history were fully unfolded, would no doubt make the subject much plainer to our understanding than it is shown at present."<sup>175</sup>

Though most studies of the church's Negro policy ignore the decades from 1880 to 1920, it is apparent that few periods have been as important for modern church teachings. During this time the church adjusted to the effective loss of two external rationales for the priesthood

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173. President Smith's remark is found in the Council Minutes, 10 Nov. 1910. The mission president was informed via a letter from Joseph F. Smith and Anthon H. Lund, to Rudger Clawson, 18 Nov. 1910, both among the Bennion papers. The letter continued, "But in thus answering we do not wish President Hendricks [of the South African Mission] or his successors in office to encourage the Negro saints of South Africa to emigrate to Zion in order that they may be in a position to do temple work." Nor did they wish a gathering to be preached to the whites.

174. First Presidency letter from Joseph F. Smith, Lund, and Charles Penrose, to M. Knudson, 13 Jan. 1912, in Bennion papers. The letter also reported that "there is no written revelation going to show why the negroes are ineligible to hold the priesthood, the Prophet Joseph Smith is said to have explained." See nn. 124, 136, and text.

175. First Presidency letter from Smith, Lund, and Penrose, to Ben Rich, 1 May 1912, in Bennion papers. The suggestion that Negroes had been committed to Cain's lineage in the pre-existence, and were perhaps electively remaining in that line, attributed by Lorenzo Snow to Brigham Young (see n. 91 and text), had not necessarily implied a "neutral" performance on their part. See Matthias Cowley's account of Snow's belief to this effect, reported in a talk at the L.D.S. University Branch, Chicago, 4 Oct. 1925, copy at Church Historical Department.

policy—the general acceptance of the Negro's biblical lineage and his inherent inferiority. In their place were introduced the much more substantial evidences of the Pearl of Great Price, and the increasing weight (or inertia) of church rulings that could now be traced through six presidents to the very earliest days of the Restoration. In addition, the policy had been elaborated and refined to such a point that no real modifications were felt necessary for nearly fifty years.

#### IV

*The attitude of the Church with reference to Negroes remains as it has always stood.—The First Presidency, 1949*

No major changes in church Negro policy were evident during the second quarter of the twentieth century. Both Heber J. Grant, and his successor, George Albert Smith, continued to base the priesthood restriction ultimately on the curse on Cain, and both cited the Pearl of Great Price as concrete evidence of the divine origin of this practice.<sup>176</sup> There were a few new developments of theoretical significance.

Joseph Fielding Smith's *The Way to Perfection* was published in 1931, and it contained by far the most extensive treatment of the Negro policy to date (and remains even today the only comparable work by a general authority). Through the influence of this book, and other publications, Apostle Smith became very closely identified with the Negro policy, perhaps more so than any other figure of the twentieth century. In his writings, he effectively summarized church policies under his father, Joseph F. Smith, and at the same time provided a theoretical foundation for these policies based on his understanding of history and the Pearl of Great Price. In many ways his works constitute the fullest development of Mormon thought on the Negro, and they were considered by many to be the definitive background study.<sup>177</sup> Where the progress of science and popular sentiment had left the church almost totally without support for its assumed genealogy of the black ("There is no definite information on this question in the Bible, and profane history is not able to solve it"), Apostle Smith put forward "some definite instruction in regard to this

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176. See, for example, letters of Heber J. Grant to H. L. Wilkin, 28 Jan. 1928; of Grant, Anthony W. Ivins, and Charles W. Nibley to Don Mack Dalton, 29 Nov. 1929; of Grant, J. Reuben Clark Jr., and David O. McKay to Graham Doxey, 9 Feb. 1945; and of George Albert Smith, Clark, and McKay to Francis W. Brown, 13 Jan. 1947; and of Smith, Clark, and McKay to Virgil H. Sponberg, 5 May 1947; all found among the Bennion papers.

177. In 1947 the First Presidency wrote, "The rule of the Church as heretofore followed has been set forth by the early Church leaders. You will find a discussion thereof in Brother Joseph Fielding Smith's book, 'The Way to Perfection,' chapter 16" (letter of 13 Jan. 1947, to Francis Brown, in Bennion papers).

matter" from the "Pearl of Great Price and the teachings of Joseph Smith and the early elders of the church who were associated with him." In so doing, he moved confidently through the negligible evidence concerning the prophet's views and concluded, "But we all know it was due to his teachings that the negro today is barred from the Priesthood."<sup>178</sup>

His most significant contribution to the Negro doctrine may well have involved the "pre-existence hypothesis." Apostle Smith was aware that both Brigham Young and Joseph F. Smith had denounced the idea that Negroes were "neutral" in the war in heaven, and that Young had particularly objected to the implication that the spirits of Negroes were tainted before entering their earthly bodies. On the other hand, Smith also knew that other prominent Mormons had felt it necessary to appeal beyond this life to some previous failing for ultimate justification of the present condition of the blacks.<sup>179</sup> *The Way to Perfection* seemingly reconciled these two positions. Treading a fine line, Apostle Smith distinguished between the neutrality condemned by Brigham Young and another condition comprised of those "who did not stand valiantly," who "were almost persuaded, were indifferent, and who sympathized with Lucifer, but did not follow him." The "sin" of this latter group "was not one that merited the extreme punishment which was inflicted on the devil and his angels. They were not denied the privilege of receiving the second estate, but were permitted to come to the earth-life with some restrictions placed upon them. That the negro race, for instance, have been placed under restrictions because of their attitude in the world of spirits,

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178. Joseph Fielding Smith, *The Way to Perfection* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1970, reprint of 1931 edition), 103, 111. Smith deals directly with the Negro doctrine in chapters 7, 15, and 16. He had previously published two short articles on the subject, "The Negro and the Priesthood," *Improvement Era* 27 (Apr. 1924): 564-65, and "Salvation for the Dead," *Utah Genealogical and Historical Magazine* 17 (1926): 154.

179. Smith quoted Brigham Young's statement on neutrality, and would also have been aware of his father's opinion, as he was an apostle when Joseph F. Smith expressed himself on the subject. *The Way to Perfection* also included Roberts's *Contributor* article.

More recently, Orson Whitney had dealt with the related problem of a curse on Canaan, and "the unsolved problem of the punishment of a whole race for an offense committed by one of its ancestors." He concluded, "It seems reasonable to infer that there was a larger cause, that the sin in question was not the main issue. Tradition has handed down something to that effect, but nothing conclusive on the question is to be found in the standard works of the Church. Of one thing we may rest assured: Canaan was not unjustly cursed, nor were the spirits who came through his lineage wrongly assigned. 'Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.' Or, putting it inversely: Whatsoever a man reaps, that hath he sown. This rule applies to spirit life, as well as to life in the flesh" (Forest Green, comp., *Cowley & Whitney on Doctrine* [Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1963—originally M. F. Cowley, *Cowley's Talks on Doctrine* [1902] and Orson F. Whitney, *Saturday Night Thoughts* [1921]], 313-14, from a series of articles by Whitney written in 1918-19).

few will doubt."<sup>180</sup> With regard to Brigham Young's comment that "all spirits are pure that came from the presence of God," Smith wrote, "They come innocent before God so far as mortal existence is concerned."<sup>181</sup>

As with those previously proposing this general explanation, Apostle Smith viewed the priesthood restriction as evidence for his thesis, rather than the reverse: "It cannot be looked upon as just that they should be deprived of the power of the Priesthood without it being a punishment for some act, or acts, performed before they were born."<sup>182</sup> After 1931, the "pre-existence hypothesis" was presented with increasing frequency and confidence until 1949 when it formed a major portion of the first public statement of church policy towards blacks to be issued by the First Presidency.<sup>183</sup>

The decision to deny the priesthood to anyone with Negro ancestry ("no matter how remote"), had resolved the theoretical problem of priesthood eligibility,<sup>184</sup> but did not help with the practical problem of identifying the "blood of Cain" in those not already known to have Negro ancestry. The need for a solution to this problem was emphasized by the periodic discovery that a priesthood holder had a black ancestor. One such case came to the attention of the quorum in 1936. Two Hawaiian members of the priesthood who had performed "some baptisms and other ordinances," were discovered to be "one-eighth negro" and the

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180. *The Way to Perfection*, 43. For Smith, the restrictions extended beyond the priesthood policy—Cain "because of his wickedness. . . became the father of an inferior race" (101).

181. *Ibid.*, 43-44, 105-6. Since the argument was being advanced that blacks were coming from their "sin" in the pre-existence to a penalty in this life, it is not exactly clear how the term "innocent" is being applied. Smith references D&C 93:38.

182. *Ibid.*, 43-44

183. A representative progression: "[I]t is highly probable" (Orson Pratt, 1853); "It seems reasonable to infer" (Orson Hyde, 1918-19); "It is a reasonable thing to believe" (Joseph Fielding Smith, 1924); "few will doubt" (Joseph Fielding Smith, 1931); "it is very probable that in some way, unknown to us, the distinction" (John Widstoe, 1944); "Is it not just as reasonable to assume" (Harold B. Lee, 1945); "Your position seems to lose sight of the revelation of the Lord touching the pre-existence of our spirits, the rebellion in heaven, and the doctrine that our birth in this life and the advantages under which we may be born, have a relationship in the life heretofore" (First Presidency, 1947); "Accepting this theory of life, we have a reasonable explanation of existent conditions in the habitations of man" (David O. McKay, 1947); "Under this principle there is no injustice whatsoever involved in this deprivation as to the holding of the priesthood by the Negroes" (First Presidency statement, 1949).

184. An extreme of a sort was achieved on 28 August 1947, when the quorum upheld a decision by John Widstoe denying a temple recommend to a "sister having one thirty-second of negro blood in her veins" (one black great-great-great grandparent). Widstoe did question "whether in such cases the individual. . . might be recommended to the temple for marriage," but previous policy prevailed (Council Minutes, 28 Aug. 1947, in Bennion papers). See n.164.

question arose, what should be done? A remarkably pragmatic decision was reached. The case was entrusted to senior apostle George Albert Smith who was shortly to visit the area, with instructions that if he found that their ordinances involved "a considerable number of people. . . that ratification of their acts be authorized. . . ;[but] should [he] discover that there are only one or two affected, and that the matter can be readily taken care of, it may be advisable to have re-baptism performed."<sup>185</sup> A decade later similar cases were reported from New Zealand, and it was "the sentiment of the Brethren" on this occasion that "if it is admitted or otherwise established" that the individuals in question had "Negro blood in his veins," "he should be instructed not to attempt to use the Priesthood in any other ordinations."<sup>186</sup>

The growth of the international church was clearly bringing new problems. Brazil was particularly difficult. Later that year J. Reuben Clark, first counselor to George Albert Smith, reported that the church was entering "into a situation in doing missionary work. . . where it is very difficult if not impossible to tell who has negro blood and who has not. He said that if we are baptizing Brazilians, we are almost certainly baptizing people of negro blood, and that if the Priesthood is conferred upon them, which no doubt it is, we are facing a very serious problem."<sup>187</sup> No solution was proposed, although the quorum once again decided on a thorough review. Elsewhere the problem was not so complicated. South African "whites" had simply been required to "establish the purity of their lineage by tracing their family lines out of Africa through genealogical research" before being ordained to the priesthood.<sup>188</sup> Polynesians, though frequently darker than Negroes, were not generally considered to be of the lineage of Cain.<sup>189</sup> Within the United States, cases in which there was no acknowledged Negro ancestry were ultimately determined on the basis of appearance. Responding to an inquiry about a physical test for "colored blood," the First Presidency wrote that they assumed "there has been none yet discovered. People in the South have this problem to meet all the time in a practical way, and we assume that

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185. Council Minutes, 29 Oct. 1936, Bennion papers. By 1950, at least sixteen such cases involving either the priesthood or admission to the temple had come to the attention of the quorum or First Presidency, exclusive of such groups as those found in Brazil; additional cases are also reported from other sources.

186. Council Minutes, 30 Jan. 1947, Bennion papers.

187. Council Minutes, 9 Oct. 1947, Bennion papers.

188. See the "South African Mission Plan," Dec. 1951, 45-46, copy in Church Historical Department.

189. Most Mormons associated the Polynesians with the Lamanites (e.g., *Juvenile Instructor* 3:145-46) rather than Cain or Ham; there were exceptions. See *Juvenile Instructor* 3:141-42, and *Dialogue* 2 (Autumn 1967): 8, letter from Gary Lobb.

as a practical matter the people there would be able to determine whether or not the sister in question has colored blood. Normally the dark skin and kinky hair would indicate but one thing."<sup>190</sup>

In spite of the progressive editorials of a few decades before, Utah joined the nation in segregating blacks in hotels, restaurants, movie theaters, bowling alleys, etc., and in otherwise restricting their professional advancement in many fields.<sup>191</sup> Following the Second World War, the general movement to guarantee more civil rights to blacks was also manifest in Utah. While church and civic leaders spoke in favor of "equal rights" during this time, this was in the context of the "separate equality" of *Plessy vs. Ferguson*,<sup>192</sup> and between 1945 and 1951 the Utah legislature killed public accommodation and fair employment bills on at least four occasions.<sup>193</sup> As elsewhere, the ultimate argument advanced against a change in policy was that it would lead to miscegenation. While there was no published instruction from the First Presidency on this matter, their response to a personal inquiry is illuminating. A member had written from California to inquire whether "we as Latter-day Saints [are] required to associate with the Negroes or take the Gospel to them." Their answer, in part:

No special effort has ever been made to proselyte among the Negro race, and social intercourse between the Whites and the Negroes should certainly not be encouraged because of leading to intermarriage, which the Lord has forbidden.

This move which has now received some popular approval of trying to break down social barriers between the Whites and the Blacks is one that

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190. First Presidency letter from George Albert Smith, Clark, and McKay, to Francis W. Brown, 13 Jan. 1947, Bennion papers.

191. See Wallace R. Bennett, "The Negro in Utah," *Utah Law Review* (Spring 1953); "Symposium on the Negro in Utah," held November 20, 1954, by the Utah Academy of Sciences, Arts, and Letters, at Weber College; or David H. Oliver, *A Negro on Mormonism* (USA [Salt Lake City]: D. H. Oliver, 1963).

192. E.g., J. Reuben Clark wrote in the *Improvement Era* (49:492) in August 1946, "It is sought today in certain quarters to break down all race prejudice, and at the end of the road, which they who urge this see, is intermarriage. That is what it finally comes to. Now, you should hate nobody; you should give to every man and every woman, no matter what the color of his or her skin may be, full civil rights. You should treat them as brothers and sisters, but do not ever let that wicked virus get into your systems that brotherhood either permits or entitles you to mix races which are inconsistent." The following year Clark is also cited on this matter in a council meeting, "President Clark called attention to the sentiment among many people in this country to the point that we should break down all racial lines, as a result of which sentiment negro people have acquired an assertiveness that they never before possessed and in some cases have become impudent" (Council Minutes, 9 Oct. 1947, Bennion papers).

193. See Wallace R. Bennett.

should not be encouraged because inevitably it means the mixing of the races if carried to its logical conclusion.<sup>194</sup>

An aversion to miscegenation has been the single most consistent facet of Mormon attitudes towards the Negro. Although the attitudes towards the priesthood, slavery, or equal rights have fluctuated significantly, denunciations of interracial marriage can be identified in discourses in virtually every decade from the Restoration to the present day. While these sentiments can never be said to have dominated Mormon thought, they did become a major theme in the years following the Second World War and are to be found in both published and private remarks, generally in connection with the civil rights discussion.<sup>195</sup> The church viewed miscegenation from the unique perspective of the priesthood policy, but was, of course, by no means unique in its conclusions; in fact, the leadership generally invoked "biological and social" principles in support of their conclusions on the subject.<sup>196</sup>

Within the church, segregation was not a major concern. Occasionally, the few Negro members did pose a problem, and, not unexpectedly, these difficulties were resolved after the manner of their contemporaries. Responding to a situation in Washington, D.C., in which some Relief Society sisters had objected to being seated with "two colored sisters who are apparently faithful members of the Church," the First Presidency advised:

It seems to us that it ought to be possible to work this situation out without causing any feelings on the part of anybody. If the white sisters feel that they may not sit with them or near them, we feel sure that if the colored sisters were discretely approached, they would be happy to sit at one side in the rear or somewhere where they would not wound the sensibilities of the complaining sisters.<sup>197</sup>

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194. Letter from the First Presidency (Smith, Clark, McKay) of 5 May 1947 to Virgil H. Sponberg, in Bennion papers.

195. See n. 192; also Harold B. Lee's address over KSL, 6 May 1945, "Youth of a Noble Birthright" (copy in Church Historical Department); and First Presidency letter of 17 July 1947, to Lowry Nelson, copy at the Brigham Young University Library.

196. Of the three instances cited in n. 195, Clark stated, "Biologically, it is wrong"; Lee invoked the "laws of heredity and the centuries of training"; and the First Presidency characterized intermarriage as "a concept which has heretofore been most repugnant to most normal-minded people." These arguments were, of course, secondary to the doctrinal objections.

In 1939 Utah extended its anti-miscegenation statute to prohibit a "white" from marrying a "Mongolian, a member of the malay race or a mulatto, quadroon, or octoroon."

197. First Presidency letter (from Presidents Smith, Clark, and McKay) to Ezra T. Benson, 23 June 1942, in Bennion papers. A similar problem was resolved in 1936 by a branch president in Cincinnati, Ohio, by ruling that a "faithful" Negro family "could not come to Church meetings." See Mark E. Petersen, "Race Problems—As They Affect the Church,"

It is, of course, no more justified to apply the social values of 1970 to this period than it was to impose them on the nineteenth century, and the point to be made is not that the church had "racist" ideas as recently as 1950. No one who has lived through the past two decades can doubt but that the racial mood of America has been transformed, as it has been on a grander scale in the past two centuries; these changes greatly complicate the assessment of the ethics of earlier times. On the other hand, from our present perspective it is impossible to mistake the role of values and concepts which have since been rejected in the formulation of many aspects of previous church policy. The extent to which such influences may have determined present policy is clearly an area for very careful assessment.

This was not the view twenty-five years ago. In spite of the numerous reviews of church policy towards the Negro that had taken place since 1879, the First Presidency could write as recently as 1947, "From the days of the Prophet Joseph until now, it has been the doctrine of the Church, *never questioned* by any of the Church leaders, that the Negroes are not entitled to the full blessings of the Gospel"<sup>198</sup> (emphasis mine). The reevaluations have always started with the assumption that the doctrine was sound.

In 1949 the church issued its first general statement of position on the Negro, and thereby provided an "official" indication of current thinking at the end of this phase of the history. Four basic points can be identified in the statement. First, there was no question as to the legitimacy of the doctrine, as it was asserted that the practice of priesthood denial dated "from the days of [the] organization" of the church and was based on a "direct commandment of the Lord." Second, while no rationale for the practice was given, there was a short quotation from Brigham Young on the "operation of the principle" which stated that a "skin of blackness" was the consequence of "rejecting the power of the holy priesthood, and the law of God," and that "the seed of Cain" would not receive the priesthood until the "rest of the children have received their blessings in the holy priesthood." Third, Wilford Woodruff was quoted as stating that eventually the Negro would "possess all the blessings which we now have." (Woodruff had actually been quoting Brigham Young.) The largest portion of the statement was devoted to a fourth point which presented the "doctrine of the Church" that "the conduct of spirits in the premortal existence has some determining effect upon the conditions and circumstances under which these spirits take on mortality." As the

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address delivered at Brigham Young University, 27 Aug. 1954, copy at Church Historical Department.

198. First Presidency letter (from Presidents Smith, Clark, and McKay) to Lowry Nelson, 17 July 1947, copy at Brigham Young University Library.

priesthood restriction was such a handicap, there was "no injustice whatsoever involved in this deprivation as to holding the priesthood by the Negroes."<sup>199</sup>

One cannot help but wonder why, in view of the hundreds of millions of men who have been denied the priesthood either because it had not been restored or because of their inaccessibility to the gospel, a relatively insignificant additional handful should be singled out for the same restriction based on the elaborate rationales that have accompanied the Negro policy. While church leaders have frequently spoken of the millions who have been denied the priesthood because of the curse on Cain, Negroes were really no less likely to receive the priesthood prior to the Restoration than anyone else, nor are they presently any less likely to receive the priesthood than the majority of mankind.<sup>200</sup> Ironically, the few men who have been denied the priesthood only because they were Negroes are the rare blacks who have accepted the gospel; yet acceptance of the gospel is frequently cited as a sign of "good standing" in the pre-existence when the individual is not a Negro.

The "fourth period" in the history of the Negro in Mormonism has not been especially eventful. Changes were again evident in the stated rationale for the priesthood restriction, and though the curse on Cain and Pearl of Great Price arguments were still considered relevant, they were superseded to a significant degree by the new emphasis on the role of Negroes in the pre-existence. Basic church policy, however, remained essentially unchanged, and while the church confronted new social and anthropological problems, these problems were generally dealt with in the context of previously established policy.

## V

*Negroes [are] not yet to receive the priesthood, for reasons which we believe are known to God, but which He has not made fully known to man.—The First Presidency, 1969*

The most widely publicized development of the past two decades

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199. First Presidency statement, 17 Aug. 1949, copy at Church Historical Department; also in Bennion papers, and elsewhere. William E. Berrett, in "The Church and the Negroid People," 16-17, conveys the incorrect impression that this statement was issued in 1951; see Berrett's supplement to John J. Stewart, *Mormonism and the Negro* (Orem, Utah: Community Press, 1967).

200. Even with the genealogical advances having progressed to the point where several million men can be vicariously ordained in the temples each year, it will still require centuries to provide this opportunity for the billions of men who have been ineligible for the priesthood on other than racial grounds.

has been the transformation of the segregationist sentiments of the 1940s and early 1950s into an official endorsement of a civil rights movement associated with the elimination of a segregated society. As a result (or in spite) of the persistent and publicized pressure of the Utah NAACP, Hugh B. Brown read the following statement in 1963, on behalf of the church:

During recent months, both in Salt Lake City and across the nation, considerable interest has been expressed on the matter of civil rights. We would like it to be known that there is in this Church no doctrine, belief, or practice, that is intended to deny the enjoyment of full civil rights by any person regardless of race, color, or creed.

We say again, as we have said many times before, that we believe that all men are the children of the same God and that it is a moral evil for any person or group of persons to deny any human being the right to gainful employment, to full educational opportunity, and to every privilege of citizenship, just as it is a moral evil to deny him the right to worship according to the dictates of his own conscience.

. . . We call upon all men, everywhere, both within and outside the Church, to commit themselves to the establishment of full civil equality for all of God's children.<sup>201</sup>

While dissenting voices were heard from within the church hierarchy, it has become evident that this was not a temporary change of position. In December 1969, the First Presidency issued a statement which said in part that "we believe the Negro, as well as those of other races, should have full Constitutional privileges as a member of society, and

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201. Conference address reported in the *Deseret News*, 6 Oct. 1963; a slightly different version appeared in the December 1963, *Improvement Era*. In March 1965, pressure was again brought to bear on the church to issue a statement in conjunction with civil rights legislation then pending in Utah. After several hundred marchers demonstrated in front of church offices, the *Deseret News* carried an editorial, "A Clear Civil Rights Stand," which reprinted Brown's remarks as a "concise statement given officially" on the subject, which was both "clear and unequivocal" (*Deseret News*, 9 Mar. 1965).

Although Apostle Mark E. Petersen has been singled out for his extensive, unequivocally segregationist remarks in 1954 (see n. 197), he had not strayed significantly from the sentiments expressed by other church leaders in the preceding few years. Just three months before, the First Presidency had "directed" their secretary, Joseph Anderson, to respond to a correspondent: "That the Church is opposed on biological and other grounds, to intermarriage between whites and negroes, and that it discourages all social relationships and associations between the races, as among its members, that might lead to such marriages" (letter of 4 May 1954, from Anderson to Chauncey D. Harris, copy in my possession). The presidency also believed that "all men, without regard to race or color" were entitled to "full civil rights and liberties, social, economic, and political, as provided in the Constitution and laws."

we hope that members of the Church everywhere will do their part as citizens to see that these rights are held inviolate."<sup>202</sup>

Less well publicized, but of greater doctrinal significance, was the decision to open the first mission to blacks. In a virtual reversal of the policy laid down a half century before, David O. McKay announced in 1963 that missionaries were shortly to be sent to Nigeria, Africa, "in response to requests. . .to learn more about Church doctrine."<sup>203</sup> This was not a decision made without lengthy deliberation. Requests for missionaries to Nigeria had been received for over seventeen years, and an in-depth assessment had been under way for several years prior to the 1963 announcement.<sup>204</sup> Sadly, the Nigerian government became more fully aware of the scope of Mormon teachings on the blacks, and denied the church resident visas.<sup>205</sup> This decision was appealed, and the church negotiated for over two years in an effort to establish the mission as planned. These efforts were finally terminated shortly before the outbreak of the Nigerian civil war. The initial plan envisioned the creation of a large number of independent Sunday schools to be visited periodically by the missionaries to teach and administer the sacrament and other ordinances. Estimates for the number of "Nigerian Mormons" who would have been involved ranged from 10,000 to 25,000, nearly all of whom were Biafrans.<sup>206</sup>

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202. First Presidency statement, 15 Dec. 1969, "by Hugh B. Brown, N. Eldon Tanner" (*Church News*, 10 Jan. 1970, 12). President McKay, who was gravely ill at the time, died 18 January 1970.

203. "Church to Open Missionary Work in Nigeria," *Deseret News*, 11 Jan. 1963.

204. As early as 1946, Council Minutes report correspondence from Nigeria which "pleads for missionaries to be sent. . .and asks for literature regarding the Church" (see Council Minutes of 24 Oct. 1946 and 9 Oct. 1947, both in Bennion papers). *Time* magazine ("The Black Saints of Nigeria," 18 June 1965) reported that Lamar Williams was sent to Nigeria in 1959 to investigate the situation; Henry D. Moyle seems to date this as 1961 in a talk late that year ("What of the Negro?" 30 Oct. 1961, copy at Church Historical Department), although he apparently errs in identifying the country involved as South Africa.

205. A Nigerian student attending school in California learned of the planned mission, and sent a copy of John J. Stewart's *Mormonism and the Negro* to the *Nigerian Outlook*, along with his analysis of church beliefs on the Negro. The *Outlook* published the letter, excerpts from the book, and an editorial, "Evil Saints," which demanded that the Mormons not be allowed into the country. See *Nigerian Outlook*, 5 Mar. 1963, photocopy at Brigham Young University Library.

206. Information obtained largely in an interview with Lamar S. Williams, who had been set apart as the Presiding Elder over the Nigerian Mission. Two derivative groups of the original Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, both of whom ordain Negroes to the priesthood, have also been involved with Nigerian "Mormons." The Church of Jesus Christ (Monongahela, Pennsylvania), who trace their origins to William Bickerton, and Sidney Rigdon, and accept the Book of Mormon, have had a mission to Nigeria for nearly twenty years. The Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints also opened a mission to Nigeria in the mid-1960s. Both groups have ordained Nigerian elders.

Receiving no publicity, though possibly of greater significance than the foregoing developments, were subtle indications of a new flexibility in the basic Negro doctrine itself. With the concurrence of President McKay, a young man of known Negro ancestry was ordained to the priesthood after receiving a patriarchal blessing which did not assign him to a "cursed" lineage.<sup>207</sup> In another case, President McKay authorized two children with Negro ancestry to be sealed in the temple to the white couple who had adopted them.<sup>208</sup> Additionally, the last vestige of discrimination based solely on skin color was eliminated, as priesthood restrictions were removed from all dark races in the South Pacific.<sup>209</sup> Finally, it became evident that still another policy had been supplanted as the rare members of the priesthood who married blacks were not debarred from their offices.

President David O. McKay, the man who presided over these developments, was widely acclaimed at his death as a man of unusual compassion who had truly loved all his fellow men.<sup>210</sup> With regard to the priesthood policy, it was frequently said he had been greatly saddened that he never felt able to remove the racial restriction. Curiously, a somewhat different claim was made by Sterling McMurrin in 1968. He reported that President McKay told him in 1954 that the church had "no doctrine of any kind pertaining to the Negro," and that the priesthood restriction was "a practice, not a doctrine, and the practice will some day be changed."<sup>211</sup> While there was never an official statement of McKay's

207. Information obtained from a principal in the case who had interceded on behalf of the person involved (the latter previously had been denied the priesthood because of his black ancestry).

208. Information obtained from a former temple president who possesses a copy of the authorization signed by President McKay.

209. This point was made public by President Harold B. Lee, in an interview published in the *Salt Lake Tribune*, 24 Sept. 1972, which reported, "President Lee said skin color is not what keeps the Negro from the priesthood. It [is] strictly a matter of lineage and involves only African Negroes. In comparison, he noted, dark or black islanders, such as Fijians, Tongans, Samoans, or Maoris, are all permitted full rights to the priesthood."

Another policy change which had no contemporary impact, but which would have posed an interesting problem for nineteenth-century literalists, was the decision to stop segregating Negro and white blood in the church hospitals' blood banks. This decision, prompted by Public Health Service rulings and affecting many hospitals nationally, has no doubt resulted in many instances wherein members of the priesthood have had several drops of "Negro blood" in their veins, at least for a few weeks.

210. As early as 1924, McKay had published a short article, "Persons and Principles," criticizing the hypocrisy of "pseudo-Christians" who preached "universal Brotherhood" and then showed prejudice towards Negroes and others in their daily lives. See MS 86:72 (31 Jan. 1924).

211. Quoted in a letter from Sterling McMurrin to Llewelyn R. McKay, 26 Aug. 1968, copy in my possession. An excerpt has been published in Stephen G. Taggart, *Mormonism's Negro Policy: Social and Historical Origins* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1970), 79; see also *Salt Lake Tribune*, 15 Jan. 1970, "Educator Cites McKay Statement."

views as president of the church, many have doubted that he expressed the latter sentiment exactly in the form McMurrin presented it.<sup>212</sup> Just a few years prior to his alleged comments to McMurrin, McKay had endorsed the First Presidency statement of 1949 to the effect that the priesthood restriction was "not a matter of the declaration of a policy but of a direct commandment from the Lord, on which is founded the doctrine of the Church. . .to the effect that Negroes. . .are not entitled to the Priesthood at the present time."<sup>213</sup>

Some of the confusion over President McKay's opinion may be attributable to word choice. A clearcut distinction between "practice," "policy," "doctrine," and "belief" has not always been maintained in the history of this subject. Normally, a "doctrine" is a fundamental belief, tenet, or teaching, generally considered within the church to be inspired or revealed. A "policy" is a specific program or "practice" implemented within the framework of the doctrine. Some policies or practices are so loosely tied to their doctrinal base that they may be changed administratively; other policies or practices are so closely tied to a doctrine as to require a revision of the doctrine before they can be changed. The First Presidency statement in 1949 was emphasizing that there was more to giving the Negroes the priesthood than an administrative decision to change the practice or policy. The McMurrin quotation cited above may reflect a rejection by President McKay of the previous "doctrinal" bases for the priesthood restriction, without at the same time questioning the appropriateness of the practice.

If one reads "no known doctrinal basis" in place of McMurrin's reported "no doctrine," then the sentiment is very similar to the view previously expressed by McKay in 1947.<sup>214</sup> Responding to the question of "why the Negroid race cannot hold the priesthood," he had written that he could find no answer in "abstract reasoning," that he knew of "no scriptural basis. . .other than one verse in the Book of Abraham (1:26)," and "I believe. . .that the real reason dates back to our pre-existent life." There is no hint of a "Negro doctrine" here, but McKay had made it even

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212. The remarks were not recorded for several hours after the interview, and the original notes have reportedly been lost. However, Llewelyn McKay has stated that he showed McMurrin's letter to President McKay, and that the prophet verified the account (see Taggart, 79, and *Salt Lake Tribune*, 15 Jan. 1970, "Educator Cites McKay Statement of No Negro Bias in LDS Tenets"). There has been no official response by the church to Llewelyn's claim; a senior apostle has said privately that the verification came only because of President McKay's debilitated condition.

213. First Presidency statement, 17 Aug. 1949; McKay was then second counselor. Henry D. Moyle reported that the statement was reaffirmed in 1961.

214. Letter of 3 Nov. 1947, published in Llewelyn R. McKay, *Home Memories of President David O. McKay* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1956), 226-31; or William E. Berrett, 18-23.

clearer when he explained that the "answer to your question (and it is the only one that has ever given me satisfaction) has its foundation in faith. . . in a God of Justice. . . [and] in the existence of an eternal plan of salvation." In so many words, he had expressed his dissatisfaction with an explanation limited to a curse on Cain or quotations from the Book of Abraham. Yet he did not reject a church policy extending back well over a hundred years, and which was believed to have originated with the first prophet of the Restoration. Rather, he chose to place his trust in God's justice, and (as he later elaborates) his belief that earthly limitations are somehow related to the pre-existence.

In dissociating the priesthood restriction from its historical associations, McKay anticipated the current belief that there is no known explanation for the priesthood policy. President McKay was too ill to sign his endorsement to the First Presidency statement of 1969; however, it is surely no mere coincidence that after eighteen years under his leadership the church would state that the Negro was not yet to receive the priesthood, "for reasons which we believe are known to God, but which He has not made fully known to man."<sup>215</sup> Unlike the First Presidency statement of twenty years before, there was now no reference to a "doctrine," but rather the practical observation that "Joseph Smith and all succeeding presidents of the Church have taught."

As relieved as the educated Mormon may be at not having to stand squarely behind the curse on Cain or a non sequitur from the Pearl of Great Price, nor ultimately to defend a specific role for blacks in the pre-existence (e.g., "indifferent," "not valiant"), there is little comfort to be taken in the realization that the entire history of this subject has been effectively declared irrelevant. For if the priesthood restriction now stands independently of the rationales which justified its original existence, the demonstration that these rationales may have been in error becomes an academic exercise.

There have been no official statements on the Negro since President McKay's death. Although Joseph Fielding Smith had previously left little doubt as to his views on the subject, he did not reiterate them as president of the church. He did continue the progressive policies of his predecessor and authorized still another innovation, the formation of the black "Genesis Group."<sup>216</sup>

During the few months that Harold B. Lee has led the church, he has

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215. First Presidency statement, 15 Dec. 1969.

216. The Genesis Group, organized in Salt Lake City, in October 1971, was designed to provide the church auxiliary programs, except Sunday school, for black members in the Salt Lake Valley. The group had a "group presidency" and officers and teachers drawn from the Negro membership in the area.

been quoted in the national press as explaining the priesthood restriction in terms of the pre-existence.<sup>217</sup> In spite of the precedent established while President McKay led the church for scrutinizing such remarks from all angles, it does not seem indicated to speculate on future possibilities based on this type of "evidence."

A few final remarks should be made regarding a relatively new variant on the pre-existence theme. For over a century, those who dealt with the pre-existence hypothesis derived the idea that Negroes had performed inadequately in the pre-existence from either the assumed inferiority of the race or the policy of priesthood denial. Recently, however, one finds that a critical transposition has been made which transforms the earlier belief, that Negroes were substandard performers in the pre-existence because they had been denied the priesthood, into the claim that Negroes are denied the priesthood because of their status in the pre-existence. Thus one who questions the priesthood policy must now, by extension, involve himself in the speculative maze of premortal life. This development has probably been encouraged by an error in context found in the last First Presidency statement, which reads:

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. . . .

"Revelation assures us that this plan antedates man's mortal existence extending back to man's pre-existent state."<sup>218</sup>

Beyond the fact that McKay was a counselor when he made these observations, two false impressions are conveyed. The initial quotation was not a "pronouncement," but rather was the conclusion of his reasoning that if the Lord originated the priesthood restriction, and if the Lord is a "God of Justice," then there must be an explanation that "goes back into the beginning with God." The paragraph which preceded the second quotation is also relevant:

Now if we have faith in the justice of God, we are forced to the conclusion that this denial was not a deprivation of merited right. It may have been entirely in keeping with the eternal plan of salvation for all of the children of God.

Revelation assures us that this plan. . . .<sup>219</sup>

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217. See "Lee Says Complete Status for Negroes in LDS Priesthood Only Matter of Time," *Salt Lake Tribune*, 24 Sept. 1972. For an indication of President Lee's views in 1945, see his "Youth of a Noble Birthright," n. 195.

218. First Presidency statement, 15 Dec. 1969.

219. See n. 214.

President McKay had not said that a revelation assured us that the Negro was denied the priesthood as part of the plan of salvation. We have assured ourselves that this is the case.

## VI

Mormon attitudes towards blacks have thus followed an unexpectedly complex evolutionary pattern. When first apparent, these beliefs were sustained by the widely accepted connection of the Negro with Ham and Cain, the acknowledged intellectual and social inferiority of the Negro, his black skin, and the strength of Brigham Young's testimony and/or opinion. With the unanticipated termination of the curse of slavery on Canaan, the death of Brigham Young, increased evidence of Negro capability, and the decline of general support for the traditional genealogy of the blacks, justification of church policy shifted to the Pearl of Great Price (and an interpretation derived from earlier beliefs) and the belief that the policy could be traced through all the presidents of the church to the prophet Joseph Smith. By the middle of the twentieth century, little evidence remained for the old concepts of racial inferiority; skin color had also lost its relevance, and the Pearl of Great Price alone was no longer considered a sufficient explanation. Supplementing and eventually surpassing these concepts was the idea that the blacks had somehow performed inadequately in the pre-existence. Most recently, all of these explanations have been superceded by the belief that, after all, there is no specific explanation for the priesthood policy. Significantly, this progression has not weakened the belief that the policy is justified, for there remains the not inconsiderable evidence of over a century of decisions which have consistently denied the priesthood to blacks.

No one, I believe, who has talked with leaders of the contemporary church can doubt that there is genuine concern over the "Negro doctrine." Nor can there be any question that they are completely committed to the belief that the policy of priesthood denial is divinely instituted and subject only to revelatory change. The not infrequent assumption of critics of church policy that the demonstration of a convincing historical explanation for modern church teachings would result in the abandonment of the Negro doctrine is both naive and reflective of a major misunderstanding of the claims of an inspired religion. Yet, among the parameters of revelation, careful study has been identified as a conducive, if not necessary, preliminary step (D&C 9:7, 8). A thorough study of the history of the Negro doctrine still has not been made. In particular, three fundamental questions have yet to be resolved:

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 Negro-priesthood question, or are these interpretations dependent upon more recent (e.g., nineteenth-century) assumptions?

For the faithful Mormon, a fourth question, less amenable to research, also poses itself: Have our modern prophets received an unequivocal verification of the divine origin of the priesthood policy, regardless of its history?

The lack of a tangible answer to the fourth question emphasizes even more the need for greater insight into the first three. We have the tools and would seem to have the historical resource material available to provide valid answers to these questions. Perhaps it's time we began.

*Mormonism's Negro Doctrine*

I can't resist the latest flier on current subject matter (the Spring 1973 issue), so am saving grocery money and will enclose a money order for a subscription whenever I reach the \$10 mark. I can rationalize the Book of Mormon's rather 19<sup>th</sup> century Presbyterian language to my non-member friends and myself, but never have come to a way to even *discuss* the Negro issue. I'm off to another macaroni casserole.

Mrs. Douglas H. Fraser  
Sierra Madre, California  
from Vol. 8, No. 2 (1973)

What a sneaky way to push me into subscribing again to *Dialogue*! I am glad, though, for I have missed it, and have meant to subscribe again. Besides missing it, I would feel terrible if the magazine did not survive, and I had not done my small share in supporting it. . . .

Some time ago, while I was still working, a customer found out that I was a Mormon, and asked about the attitude of the Mormons on the Negro question. When I tried to explain, I found myself in tears. I was embarrassed at the time, but have decided, in retrospect, that evidence that a Mormon really cared about this problem to some extent changed this person's attitude about Mormons themselves.

Please send the most recent issue as soon as possible. I will look forward to having *Dialogue* again.

Rebecca J. Welker  
Estacada, Oregon  
From Vol. 8, No. 2 (1973)

Lester E. Bush's article, "Mormonism's Negro Doctrine: An Historical Overview," is excellent. It seems to me that the Negro Doctrine is the most difficult problem facing the church today. Dr. Bush's article should help us understand how the problem has developed.

Members of the Reorganized Church like to point out that there are black men in its priesthood. However, we Reorganites tend to overlook that we deny a much larger segment of the human race the opportunity to hold the priesthood. I see no difference between denying the priesthood to women and denying it to blacks. Both practices seem absurd today.

William D. Russell  
Lamoni, Iowa  
from Vol. 8, No. 2 (1973)