FIFTY YEARS SINCE LESTER BUSH, "MORMONISM'S NEGRO DOCTRINE"

Editor's Note: On June 9, 2023, the Mormon History Association held a session honoring the fiftieth anniversary of Lester Bush's 1973 article in Dialogue*, "Mormonism's Negro Doctrine: An Historical Overview." This roundtable is a publication of the panelists' remarks and remembrances. In addition, the editor solicited a remembrance and comments from Robert A. Rees, the editor of* Dialogue *who published Bush's landmark research. A great deal has changed since then, including terminology now considered offensive. Care is taken to use and consider this language in context.*

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An Appreciation

Darius A. Gray

Lester Bush's 1973 *Dialogue* article is the focus here, as it brought much-needed clarity to the convoluted, deeply entrenched Mormon attitude toward race.

We all know the story. Prior to June 1978 the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints had held that Negroes, Black people of African descent, were a lesser people, having been cursed by God himself and therefore denied ordination to the Church's priesthood and limited in attendant temple ordinances. However, a review of the

nineteenth-century minutes of the Church's First Presidency unpacks the uncertainties of that historical policy. Though a frequent topic, the responses to such inquiries varied greatly contingent upon who was asking, who was responding, and when.

An old truism offers that "you cannot teach that which you do not know." That reality challenged well-intentioned Church leadership and membership alike as Lester undertook the daunting task of researching primary sources to unfold what actually had been said and done.

The perspective provided by Lester Bush's article "Mormonism's Negro Doctrine: An Historical Overview" was not only significant, it was necessary! The history of Black people in the Church has been convoluted and fractured, thereby lending itself to faded memories and "bones to bury." Thankfully, Lester took the time, committed the energy, and applied the necessary skills to shine light on a muddled subject. Ultimately, Lester's work provided Spencer W. Kimball the roadmap with which to undertake his own research.

A most grateful,

Darius A. Gray

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A Tribute to Lester Bush on the Fiftieth Anniversary of the Article that Changed the Church

Gregory A. Prince

When the *Dialogue* office moved from Stanford to Los Angeles, it found a home in the University Religious Conference, which was kitty-corner from the UCLA School of Dentistry, where I was a student. Occasionally, I would drop by the office to see what was happening in Mormon studies. One time, I noticed a thick, black, bound volume with the intriguing title "Compilation on the Negro in Mormonism." I thumbed

through it and was fascinated to see what its author had assembled on a topic that had been only on the periphery of my consciousness until I went to Brazil in 1967 on an LDS mission. There, I encountered not only the policy excluding Black men from priesthood ordination but also the impossibility of determining accurately whether someone had "the blood," as we indelicately called it, in a country that was a racial melting pot. Indeed, that impossibility weighed heavily on Spencer Kimball after he announced the construction of a temple in Brazil, entrance to which would have been denied to anyone with Black African ancestry. I wanted a copy of the compilation.

It had the mailing address of the compiler, Lester Bush, who had sent the volume plus a manuscript. I sent a letter to the address, which was an APO box. It was forwarded to Lester in Saigon, where he was on assignment from his employer, the Central Intelligence Agency. He soon wrote back and told me he had prepared a very small number of the compilations and was not able to comply with my request. I quickly moved on to other interests.

Two years later, having completed graduate studies at UCLA, my wife and I moved to Maryland for a postdoctoral fellowship at the National Institutes of Health. We purchased a home in the Maryland suburbs of Washington, DC and began to attend the Gaithersburg Ward.

Several weeks later, we were asked to speak in our new congregation. After the service, a gentleman approached me and said, "I enjoyed your talk. I'm Lester Bush." He and his family had moved into the ward the previous year. A month later, we were invited to join a new study group that met in his home—one that still meets in ours, nearly a half-century later. Lester soon became, and has remained, my closest friend. For more than forty years, we spent countless hours together, discussing every imaginable topic within Mormonism.

His interest in Mormon teachings about Black people was initiated by George Romney's gubernatorial victory in Michigan in 1962 and further fed by four events in 1963: the announcement (which turned

out to be premature) of a proselytizing mission to Nigeria, aspirational comments by First Presidency member Hugh B. Brown about the possibility of admitting Black men to the priesthood, a pro-civil rights statement read by Brown in general conference, and a statement by Joseph Fielding Smith that the Church was *not* about to change its priesthood policy. Lester later wrote, "Like many others, I started a file on this increasingly awkward and public subject. Unlike others, with me the topic became an obsession."[1] Indeed, he told me he thought one needed a certain amount of obsessive-compulsive disorder to be a good historian. He published his findings in the hope that others would come to a similar understanding that might change the Church's policy, not as an overt act of advocacy.

Raised in Virginia and having attended the University of Virginia for undergraduate and medical schools, Lester had no access to Church archival materials until his medical internship at LDS Hospital in Salt Lake City in the late 1960s. Conversations at the hospital with two of David O. McKay's sons—Llewelyn, a patient, and Edward, a physician—informed him that there was more latitude on the subject within the hierarchy than he had supposed. This was an era when Joseph Fielding Smith was still Church Historian and kept a tight lid on sensitive resources in the archives. Although Lester had limited success in penetrating the curtain there, he found a trove of documents at Brigham Young University and the University of Utah, including a 1968 letter from Sterling McMurrin to Llewelyn describing a 1954 meeting with President McKay where the president spoke of the issue as "a practice, not a doctrine, and the practice will someday be changed."[2] Lester was

1. Lester Bush, "Writing 'Mormonism's Negro Doctrine: An Historical Overview' (1973): Context and Reflections, 1998." *Journal of Mormon History* 25, no. 1 (Spring 1999): 229–71.

2. Sterling M. McMurrin to Llewelyn McKay, Aug. 26, 1968. Photocopy of original letter sent by McMurrin to the author, Oct. 30, 1994.

able to flesh out a compelling story that bore little resemblance to the official narrative, one that remains intact to this day.

Eventually, Lester arranged his sources chronologically in the four-hundred-page compilation I first saw at UCLA and began to write his article while stationed in the US embassy in Saigon. In the spring of 1973, he sent his manuscript to *Dialogue*. He also sent a copy to LDS apostle Boyd Packer, who, through intermediaries, had expressed interest in it. Very soon after receiving it, Packer sent word through those intermediaries that he and his colleagues were anxious that Lester "not publish the material until after [he (Bush)] had talked with a member of the Quorum of the Twelve."[3]

Through phone and in-person conversations with Packer, Lester learned that he had no issues with the data in his manuscript—indeed, Packer knew far less about the details than Lester—but was trying to delay or block its publication without saying so directly. Packer said to him, "If those people"—the *Dialogue* editors—"thought we were interested in delaying, they would just hurry faster to get it published."[4]

Nonetheless, direct pressure was applied to Bob Rees, the *Dialogue* editor, by Robert Thomas, academic vice president of BYU and a former professor and mentor to Rees. Thomas said there might be "consequences" for Rees, but he was not specific about what those consequences might be. Rees recalls telling Thomas that he and his editorial team had discussed the fact that there might be disciplinary action taken against them, but after praying about it, they felt confirmed in their decision to publish the article.[5] It is likely that pressure was also put on John Carmack, president of the Los Angeles stake, who contacted Brent Rushforth, the *Dialogue* associate editor living in his ward, and told him "the Brethren" were concerned about the

3. Bush, "Writing 'Mormonism's Negro Doctrine,'" 251.

4. Bush, "Writing 'Mormonism's Negro Doctrine,'" 253.

5. Robert Rees, personal communication to author, Aug. 1, 2023.

article being published. Rushforth told him he would be happy to speak directly with "the Brethren" and gave him his phone number.[6] The call was never made, and after considerable discussion among the *Dialogue* editorial staff, including the decision to include responses from three respected scholars, the article was published without further incident. Brent learned many years later that pressure had been put on the stake president to discipline him and Rees, but no such action was ever taken.

Leonard Arrington's tenure as Church Historian, which began in 1972, was several years after Lester began his research, and so Lester did not meet Arrington and other professional Church historians until he had completed the manuscript. The enthusiasm with which they received him was genuine, in part because he had done what they had not been able to do. Many years later, Lester learned that even at the height of the freedom Church-employed historians had called "Camelot," they were prohibited from researching core topics that included Black members and priesthood. Lester was their avatar.

Two years after the article was published, Packer told Scott Kenney, the editor of the newly launched *Sunstone* magazine, that he was still displeased that Lester had published it "against General Authority counsel during a time of threats and violence against the Church."[7] Six months after it was published, Lester passed through Salt Lake City en route to Washington, DC, and met with General Authority Hartman Rector, who told him all the General Authorities had read it—something Lester dismissed as an overstatement—and there had been no groundswell of opposition following its publication.[8]

When Lester and his family moved to Maryland in 1974, he received a note from General Authority Marion D. Hanks, who told him Lester's work "probably had a far greater effect than was acknowledged to

6. Brent Rushforth, multiple conversations with author, undated.

7. Bush, "Writing 'Mormonism's Negro Doctrine,'" 262.

8. Lester Bush to author, Oct. 10, 2005.

you or than has yet been evidence[d]. Recent conversations suggest that this is so."[9] Two decades later, when I interviewed Hanks for my biography of David O. McKay, he reiterated this thought by telling me, "[Lester's] article had had far more influence than the Brethren would ever acknowledge. . . . It started to foment the pot."[10]

Reaction among the LDS historical community was uniformly favorable. Shortly after the article was published, Leonard Arrington said there was "a relief that it was finally out in print where it could be discussed, and [he] made an analogy to the relief felt when *Mountain Meadows Massacre* was published by [Juanita] Brooks."[11]

Although the article will always be regarded as Lester's most important—indeed, I believe it was the most consequential article in the field of Mormon studies published in the twentieth century—it was only the beginning of his contributions to the field. Shortly after Lester moved to Maryland in 1974, *Dialogue* moved to nearby Virginia, and he became associate editor.

He soon recruited me as book review editor, and I saw firsthand how he shaped much of Mormon scholarship during his years in that position. My wife, JaLynn, and I would go to his home every Sunday evening for dinner, followed by wide-ranging discussions of topics that needed scholarly treatment. Then, he either would go to the person most expert in the field and request an article for *Dialogue* or, if no one was expert, he would recruit someone. Resulting from the scholarship he nurtured were unprecedented and definitive articles on the Adam–God doctrine, the second anointing, and Tony Hutchinson's landmark study, "A Mormon Midrash? LDS Creation Narratives Reconsidered,"

9. Bush, "Writing 'Mormonism's Negro Doctrine,'" 266.

10. Marion D. Hanks, interview with the author, May 27, 1994.

11. Bush, "Writing 'Mormonism's Negro Doctrine,'" 267–68; Juanita Brooks, *The Mountain Meadows Massacre* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1950).

which, more than anything preceding it, defined the revelatory process of Joseph Smith.[12] The articles published during his tenure, in the aggregate, represent a high-water mark in the journal's six decades of existence.

A medical doctor, Lester also wrote a definitive article on birth control among the Mormons; an underappreciated book commissioned by religious historian Martin Marty, *Health and Medicine Among the Latter-day Saints*; and, in his final contribution to Mormon studies, a timely and probing *Dialogue* article with the provocative title "Gerontocracy and the Future of Mormonism."[13]

Prior to 1978, he and I rarely discussed his article on Black men and priesthood. Publishing the article had been secondary to his own quest to understand the policy, and he felt his work was accomplished with its publication. I once asked if he thought the policy would ever change. "Perhaps," he answered, "but not for at least fifteen years"—an oblique reference to men he assumed would need to "graduate" before it could change.

He spoke frequently on the topic to groups in the DC area, always with a good number of African Americans in the audience. He told me he could predict the point in his presentation at which there was an aha moment: "Oh, now we get it! This is just White guys being racist. We were worried God hated us."[14]

On June 8, 1978, Lester's wife Yvonne called me at work and said she had just heard, on good authority, that Spencer Kimball had received a revelation allowing all worthy men to receive the priesthood. Lester was

12. Anthony A. Hutchinson, "A Mormon Midrash?: LDS Creation Narratives Reconsidered," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 21, no. 4 (1989): 11–74.

13. Lester E. Bush Jr., *Health and Medicine Among the Latter-day Saints: Science, Sense and Scripture* (New York: Crossroad, 1992); Gregory A. Prince, Lester E. Bush Jr., and Brent N. Rushforth, "Gerontocracy and the Future of Mormonism," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 49, no. 3 (2016): 89–108.

14. Lester Bush, personal communication to author.

doing some medical work at Bethesda Naval Hospital, and his brother managed to reach him before Yvonne could, to give him the good news.

My wife JaLynn and I spent the evening at the Bush home. My diary entry was brief:

> Lester has had such an intense interest in the Church policy on Blacks that the shock and delight of this announcement is nearly overwhelming. He received phone calls all evening, from all over the country. We can't help but think that his monumental paper on the 'Black policy' had something to do with the turn of events.[15]

A quarter century later, Lester told me he assumed his article's impact was probably in "preparing the way" by raising doubts in the minds of leaders about the established doctrine and conventional wisdom about the issue.[16]

The revelation was the good news. But beneath that good news was a gradual, covert effort to shun Lester—an embodiment of the aphorism "No good deed goes unpunished." While Lester never complained and few recognized the process, I saw it up close.

Its first embodiment surfaced in the mid-1970s. In 1975, President Kimball announced the reconstitution of the First Quorum of the Seventy. In elevating the office to General Authority status, he discontinued it at the local level, a move that resulted in the ordination of all local Seventies to the office of high priest. The move simultaneously redefined the role of high priest, which had been one of presidency. With the change, nearly any man over the age of thirty who was an active Church member became a high priest—except Lester. A decade or more older than the next oldest member of the elders quorum, he became an obvious outlier.

I spoke several times to his stake president, who was my neighbor and a close friend, and urged him to rectify the situation. I told him we were at great risk of losing Lester if he continued to be shunned. He

15. Gregory A. Prince diary (hereafter GAP diary), June 8, 1978.

16. Lester Bush to author, recorded in GAP diary, Oct. 10, 2005.

said he would investigate it, but he never acted on it. I knew him well enough to read between the lines: someone at a higher level had sent a message.

Among those who took an interest in Church history, the euphoria of the 1978 revelation was gradually replaced by anguish over the disintegration of what was being called the "New Mormon History," which was an evolution from devotional to data-based history. Although we were enthralled with the "Camelot"-era early output of Leonard Arrington's history division, it set off alarms at Church headquarters.

Unwilling to concede the writing of the Church's history to professional historians, senior apostles Ezra Taft Benson and Mark Petersen, with ample assistance from junior apostle Boyd Packer, set about to undermine Leonard Arrington's franchise. Because of his *Dialogue* article and his editorship, Lester was a clearinghouse of information regarding Church history. In mid-1981, he told me there had been a "secret" meeting the prior week at the historical department that included all historians working for the Church. G. Homer Durham, its executive director, told them they were no longer to conduct any research except what was specifically assigned to them by the Church. The archives would be closed to them for personal research, even after hours.[17] Without any discussion, he closed the meeting and announced that he would not be available for comment, as he was leaving for a five-week vacation. It was another step in the ending of Leonard Arrington's franchise: his demotion from Church Historian, cancellation of the sixteen-volume sesquicentennial history, transfer of the historical department to BYU, and now closure of the archives to independent research by Church employees.

By 1982, the work of Benson, Petersen, and Packer was done. Those who hungered for the truth about their religious history became part of Boyd Packer's triad of "enemies of the Church," along with feminists

17. GAP diary, July 19, 1981.

and gay people.[18] The decade-long era referred to above as "Camelot" (so named by former Assistant Church Historian Davis Bitton) was gone.

Buoyed by his success, Mark Petersen unilaterally turned his attention to historians whose paychecks were not signed by the Church. He had two assistants draw up a list of eight men—later expanded in number—whose writings he saw as threatening to the Church and personally called the stake president of each. His instructions were to call in these men and check on their "worthiness." Seven of the eight stake presidents responded with varying levels of adverse action.

The eighth stake president was different. I knew something about it because he was also my stake president, a man I had gotten to know well over the four years I was an elders quorum president and to whom I reported directly, Bill Marriott.

In late March of 1983, as word of Petersen's phone calls spread, Lester debriefed me about meetings he had attended in Salt Lake City concerning medical issues. He was approached privately by a high-ranking Church bureaucrat and asked if he would offer advice on a new section of the *General Handbook of Instructions* devoted to policy and ethical issues, with a particular focus on medicine. The man emphasized to Lester that no one must know of his collaboration, given Lester's reputation at Church headquarters.[19] Although the man had worked with an internal committee to draft a statement on technological breakthroughs in reproductive medicine including artificial insemination, in vitro fertilization, and surrogate motherhood, he was not satisfied with the draft document. Lester put in a lot of effort and completely reworked the draft he was given. The eventual published version contained virtually everything Lester had recommended—something that only four people

18. Boyd K. Packer, Address to the All-Church Coordinating Council, May 18, 1993, available at https://archive.org/details/coordinating_council_1993_boyd_k_packer.

19. GAP diary, Mar. 28, 1983.

in the Church knew: the Church bureaucrat, Lester, his wife Yvonne, and me.

The same night he told me about the medical issues, and with irony you can't make up, Lester received a phone call from our stake executive secretary asking that he meet with the stake president the following evening. By then, we knew the identity of Petersen's other targets. The executive secretary gave no indication of the agenda, and neither he nor the stake president knew, or would ever know, of Lester's high-level collaboration on medical ethical issues. We speculated that the message might be that he must stop writing and speaking, or, worse, that he might be the subject of formal Church discipline for what he had already published.[20]

Immediately after the meeting with the stake president, Lester drove to my home and gave me a full account of a rather surprising conversation. Marriott began by saying he had become aware that Lester had written important articles, and he wondered if Lester would tell him about them. Having assumed he would be on the defensive, Lester was prepared. He gave a two-hour, in-depth summary of his writings, with particular focus on "Mormonism's Negro Doctrine" and a detailed account of the problems he had encountered along the way. Marriott listened intently, and as the meeting ended, he invited Lester to meet with him anytime he wished to talk about historical issues. We had heard of the experiences of others who were on Petersen's list and were surprised and pleased that this one was different.

In May 1983, six weeks after their initial meeting, Lester took Marriott up on his prior offer of being willing to meet again. In the second meeting, Marriott spoke to the genesis of their prior meeting, saying Petersen had pressed him to be harsh with Lester. Marriott later told me "he received a phone call from an Apostle"—Petersen—"in which he was asked if one Lester Bush lived in his stake. 'Yes,' he replied. 'Take

20. GAP diary, Mar. 29, 1983.

his temple recommend away,' was the response, whereupon the Apostle abruptly hung up the phone."[21] Upon consulting with the local regional representative of the Twelve, who also was one of his employees, Marriott decided to comply with the letter of the law by meeting with Lester but avoiding vindictiveness.[22] Knowing of my friendship with Lester, he later told me of the directive from Elder Petersen. His words to me: "I wouldn't do it, because it was wrong." Would that all Church leaders had the moral compass of Bill Marriott.

Two days after Lester's second meeting with Marriott, we met for lunch. He said he had been asked to prepare, without attribution, a policy statement concerning medical ethical issues that would be released with the signatures of the First Presidency.[23] Apparently, the left hand had no idea what the right hand was doing. As an aside, the bureaucrat who had requested Lester's input told him that the secretary to the First Presidency, with whom he met frequently, "admitted that the First Presidency read *Dialogue* regularly, though they were 'not pleased' with some of the articles."[24]

In late April 1983, the bureaucrat called Lester and invited him to a meeting with the Special Affairs Committee at which the policy statements would be presented for approval. He offered to pay Lester's way. It was a tempting invitation, but Lester knew he could not attend without causing a backlash. He conveyed his appreciation but said he wanted to see the statement adopted more than he wanted to attend the meeting, and he knew it must be one or the other.[25]

Two weeks later, Lester and I attended the annual meeting of the Mormon History Association in Omaha, Nebraska. Shortly after we

21. GAP diary, Nov. 16, 1986.

22. GAP diary, May 15, 1983.

23. GAP diary, Mar. 31, 1983.

24. GAP diary, Mar. 31, 1983

25. GAP diary, Apr. 23, 1983.

arrived, I ran into Leonard Arrington. The first thing he asked me was, "What do you know about the rumors we've heard about Lester?" As we compared notes, he filled in the missing pieces of the puzzle: Mark Petersen, upset at *Seventh East Press* (an independent student newspaper at BYU) for publishing an interview with Sterling McMurrin, instructed two of his aides, Tom Truitt and Roy Doxey, to compile a "hit list" of people associated with the newspaper. When they came up with four names, Petersen decided to expand the list to cover other suspicious characters. The completed list contained eight names, including Lester's.

Although Marriott had not taken adverse action, the shunning Lester received from other quarters, including remaining an elder and never having a Church calling after the late 1970s, took a cumulative toll. By the mid-1990s, he had withdrawn completely from Church activity, as had all three of his children.

In June 1997, I met with Marlin Jensen, a member of the First Quorum of the Seventy who later became Church Historian. He told me of his interest in learning more about unresolved issues regarding Black members and the Church. I did not know at the time that he had been assigned by the First Presidency to chair a committee to review Church-published materials that might still contain racist content. I conveyed his interest to Lester, and later that year, he came to my home and gave me a two-hundred-page manuscript he wrote in response to Jensen's inquiry, which described the writing of his *Dialogue* article. When I met with Jensen and showed him the manuscript, he asked if Lester had ever been subjected to formal discipline. I said he had not, that all the action taken against him was sub rosa. His reply: "That's the worst."[26] (Lester later transformed the manuscript into an article published in the *Journal of Mormon History* on the silver anniversary of his original article.[27])

26. GAP diary, Feb. 4, 1998.

27. Lester E. Bush, "Writing 'Mormonism's Negro Doctrine.'"

In 2000, Lester was writing a family history and asked if I would give him extracts from my diary that detailed our interactions over the prior quarter century. Those extracts amounted to one hundred pages. One entry speculated that his withdrawal from Church activity was caused by the cumulative pain of shunning. Upon reading it, he said it was less a matter of having endured too much pain and more one of seeing the Church change its colors concerning things of the mind such that there was a decreasing amount of room for people like him.[28] He later allowed that one of the reasons he had finally walked away from Church activity was that he had never been invested socially in the organization; that is, he had not received any significant Church calling.[29] Shunning.

One month after the inauguration of President Barack Obama in 2009, we hosted a dinner in our home that included Lester and Brent Rushforth, associate editor of *Dialogue* when Lester's article was published. During dinner, Brent said he had had house guests for the inauguration, Jordan and Rebecca Kimball. Jordan was a grandson of Spencer Kimball. Brent told Jordan he had wondered for years whether Lester's article had any influence on his grandfather. Jordan replied, "You don't need to wonder." He then told a story that his wife later put on the record for me. It began with a conversation between Jordan, Ed Kimball (his father), and Rebecca:

> Ed brought up that he had been contacted regarding a rumor floating around about a Kimball grandson having discovered the Lester Bush landmark article in *Dialogue* heavily marked up in Spencer Kimball's home office after his death. It stood out because it was the only article among the *Dialogue* issues heavily underlined in red, which was consistent with SWK's style of marking up. We told Ed that we could confirm that rumor. . . . Jordan and I haven't told many people (maybe only a couple) over the years about our discovery until we were at the

28. GAP diary, Apr. 12, 2000.

29. GAP diary, July 6, 2000.

> Rushforth's in January 2009. . . . I remember Brent saying that he and others had wondered if *Dialogue* publishing Lester Bush's article might have made any difference in influencing church leaders before the 1978 revelation. And then both Jordan and I assured him that we thought it had and shared our discovery.[30]

In 2023, Chris Kimball, another grandson of Spencer W., spoke at our home and confirmed that he, too, had seen his grandfather's copy of *Dialogue* and that it was annotated as Rebecca described.

In late 2014, I sent an email to Elder Jeffrey Holland, whom I had known for over forty years, asking if anything could be done to affirm to Lester that his work had been beneficial to the Church. He promptly replied that although he had no official reason to reach out to Lester, he would look for an opportunity.

In February 2015, Lester was invited to give the Sterling M. McMurrin Lecture at the University of Utah. He called me the following day and said he was on the fence as to whether to accept the invitation, in part because he had had virtually no contact with the Church for many years. I pointed out that I could think of only two people in the history of the Church who would forever be considered the founders of scholarship on important topics: Juanita Brooks on the Mountain Meadows Massacre, and he on race and priesthood. Everything that had been written since their initial works had built on them without materially changing their findings. Lester could not name a third person.[31]

The lecture was in October. I thought it might be the opening for a meeting with Elder Holland, and so I wrote to him. In September, Lester and I received an invitation from his secretary to meet him for breakfast the morning after the lecture.[32]

30. GAP diary, Apr. 14, 2014.

31. GAP diary, Feb. 2, 2015.

32. GAP diary, Sept. 21, 2015.

The night of the lecture, Lester, Yvonne, and I had dinner with Marlin Jensen, then emeritus Church Historian. He listened intently as Lester told the story of how he came to write about race and priesthood and was visibly pained to hear of the harsh treatment and shunning it caused. At several points along the way he told Lester how much his writing had meant to him and how much it had meant to the Church. Although Elder Jensen did not attempt to apologize on behalf of the Church, the fact that the prior Church Historian was so affirming went a long way toward healing wounds that had festered for four decades.[33]

The four of us then drove the short distance to the University of Utah campus for Lester's lecture. Bob Goldberg, chair of the event, ushered Lester and Yvonne to the green room, and a short time later, when I saw Darius Gray enter the auditorium, I gathered him and Marlin and told them they were about to witness history. I then took them to the green room, where Lester and Darius met in person for the first time.

The following morning, we met Elder Holland for breakfast. As Lester told him about his life and about the article on Black people and the priesthood, it became clear that Elder Holland knew only the broadest outlines of the story, and nothing of the shunning by Church leaders in general and the adverse action taken by Mark Petersen in particular.

Elder Holland said Juanita Brooks had been his English teacher when he was a student at Dixie College, and he idolized her for what she had done. He compared Lester to Juanita, saying, "You two are pillars on which important parts of Church history rest." As he walked us to our car, he put his arm around Lester's shoulder and said, "Lester, you have made Church history, and I am grateful for that."[34]

Hours after the breakfast, Elder Holland sent me an email: "I loved every minute of my time with you and Lester. I found him to be

33. GAP diary, Oct. 8, 2015.

34. GAP diary, Oct. 9, 2015.

delightful. I hope he felt my genuine interest in and true admiration for his work."[35]

A few days later, Elder Holland copied me on an email:

> Lester, I don't know when I have enjoyed a morning more than the one I had with you and Greg. I only wish we had had another hour or two together. I hope you will stay in touch with me and share anything you write. I will be edified and blessed by it.[36]

Three years later, Lester and I flew to Salt Lake City for the fortieth anniversary of the 1978 revelation. The morning of the anniversary celebration, I took Lester to the Church History Library, which he had never seen. Hearing Lester was in the building, Steve Snow, then Church Historian, came down from his office to greet us. He was most cordial, and he reiterated how grateful he and others were for the scholarship that Lester had done. The wounds were healed, and just in time.[37]

It turned out to be my last trip with Lester. Early signs of dementia, which had taken the life of his father, had begun to appear. One year later, he and Yvonne moved to California to be close to their sons. Within a year of their arrival there, Lester entered a memory care facility. He passed away on November 23, 2023.

We are all indebted to Lester, upon whose shoulders others have stood and will continue to stand. An "amateur" with no professional training in historiography, he set a standard that many will admire but few will surpass—or even reach. Perhaps deep within his memory remained the knowledge that he changed the Church.

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35. Jeffrey R. Holland email to the author, Oct. 9, 2015.

36. Jeffrey R. Holland email to Lester E. Bush, copied by Holland to the author, Oct. 13, 2015.

37. GAP diary, June 1, 2018.