

HOLY RACES:
RACE IN THE FORMATION OF MORMONISM AND THE NATION OF ISLAM

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INTRODUCTION

The English settlers that laid the foundation of American civilization in seventeenth-century Virginia consciously included their religious mission in the first paragraph of their civic charter. The first colonists claimed all territories in “America” not under the control of a Christian “Prince” or “People.” Through these claims, the settlers solemnly promised to spread “the Christian religion to such People, as yet live in Darkness and miserable Ignorance of the true Knowledge and Worship of God.”¹ The British sought to spread the Christian gospel to teach every nation and baptize every person into the fellowship of the universal family of mankind. Despite what they viewed as altruistic aims, the British placed themselves at the top of religious and racial hierarchies. Britons, as “white,” believed their skin pigmentation was a sign of divine favor. All other races, including Native Americans and African slaves, belonged on the lower rung of the racial and spiritual ladders. Historian Rebecca Goetz writes that Jamestown’s earliest settlers continued the tradition of their sixteenth-century ancestors, who maintained “both a commitment to the unity of mankind and a sense of exclusivity and superiority” to individuals and races that did not practice Christianity. More than a century later, in 1705, Virginians codified white superiority while paradoxically offering the equalizing force of Christianity to enslaved Africans. Conversion made individuals “Christian,” but whites born into Christianity received preferential treatment in Virginia’s racial and religious hierarchies.²

The New England Puritans held similar views with their Virginian counterparts on race and religion. Historian Richard Bailey has argued that Puritanism “fostered the development of

¹ “The First Charter of Virginia; April 10, 1606,” *Yale Law School*, accessed September 26, 2014, http://avalon.law.yale.edu/17th_century/va01.asp.

² Rebecca Anne Goetz, *The Baptism of Early Virginia: How Christianity Created Race* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012), 4-5.

racial thinking and eventually...racism.”³ Puritan clergymen and lay folk alike employed various “civil and uncivil attempts to control New Englanders of color.” The puritan worldview theologized the natural world from the tenets of the Mayflower Compact to their famous assertion that their new society provided an example to the rest of the world as a “city upon a hill” that could not be hid. It is not surprising to historians of race and religion that these English immigrants “relied on their theological convictions to make sense of their social realities.”⁴ The settlers of Jamestown and New England both grappled with making sense of the relationship of race and religion before the thirteen colonies won independence from Great Britain. Controversies over race and religion continued through the War for Independence. After the ratification of the Constitution in 1789, Americans found new ways of using religion to understand racial differences and maintain racial hierarchies. The rise of evangelical Christianity, for instance, required new Methodist and Baptist converts to wrestle with racial distinctions and to adapt to the American dependence upon slavery.⁵ Long before South Carolinians fired upon Fort Sumter, theologians had waged a war of scriptural exegesis in relation to the biblical justification for slavery.⁶ It is not an exaggeration to say that religion has informed and justified American racial definitions from Jamestown to the present day. Factors of politics, economics, and science that have shaped the course of American race culture were in turn influenced by religious thought.⁷

³ “Of Servants and Slaves in Virginia, 1705,” *National Humanities Center*, accessed September 26, 2014, <http://nationalhumanitiescenter.org/pds/amerbegin/power/text8/BeverlyServSlaves.pdf>.

⁴ Richard A. Bailey, *Race and Redemption in Puritan New England* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 7-8.

⁵ Christine Leigh Heyrman, *Southern Cross: The Beginnings of the Bible Belt* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 206-252.

⁶ Mark A. Noll, *The Civil War as Theological Crisis* (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 2006; Molly Oshatz, *Slavery and Sin: The Fights against Slavery and the Rise of Liberal Protestantism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

⁷ For instance, see Thomas F. Gossett, *Race: The History of an Idea in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997); John P. Jackson and Nadine M. Weidman, *Race, Racism, and Science: Social Impact and*

This thesis examines two religions established in the United States 100 years apart from one another, Mormonism and the Nation of Islam. There are certain chronological drawbacks to comparing two groups established over such a broad period of time. First and foremost, American racial culture changed significantly between 1830 and 1930. Americans fought a Civil War over national sovereignty and the ability of individual states to allow slavery. After the Civil War, in lieu of theological justifications for slavery, American theologians re-cast Jesus as a Nordic figure, which celebrated white masculinity. In place of Jesus' Judaism, Americans imagined a hyper-masculine, white Jesus that reinforced the value of whiteness in American religious culture.⁸ American definitions of race also significantly changed in the century between the births of Mormonism and the Nation of Islam. The American economy, government, and racial composition also radically changed between 1830 and 1930.

In spite of these historical issues, there are several reasons why Mormonism and the Nation of Islam are especially fruitful for comparative analysis. First, Mormonism celebrated whiteness as a mark of God's favor for the majority of its existence and the Nation of Islam has defined blackness as godly in similar suit for the entirety of its existence. These two beliefs at opposite ends of the racial spectrum provide an excellent opportunity to examine how new religions employ race to maintain religious boundaries along racial lines. Second, both religions formed during times of intense racial debate that resulted in major changes to definitions of race in America. Both nineteenth and twentieth-century racial debates incorporated scriptural and scientific reasoning to make arguments for white supremacy. These changing definitions

Interaction (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2005); Eugene D. Genovese, *The Political Economy of Slavery: Studies in the Economy and Society of the Slave South* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1989); Walter Johnson, *Soul by Soul: Life Inside the Antebellum Slave Market* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001); Walter Johnson, *River of Dark Dreams: Slavery and Empire in the Cotton Kingdom* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2013).

⁸ Stephen Prothero, *American Jesus: How the Son of God Became a National Icon* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003), 87-123; Edward J. Blum and Paul Harvey, *The Color of Christ: The Son of God and the Saga of Race in America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 141-172.

impacted the development and codification of theology in Mormonism and the Nation of Islam. Furthermore, both groups provide case studies to examine how American racial definitions have shaped religious thought among both majority white and majority black populations. Each movement will be examined according to the racial definitions of its own time and compared to how notions of race shaped the development of each religious movement.

Third, both Mormonism and the Nation of Islam have incorporated American conceptions of race into their theology and cosmology. Both religions demonstrate how racial definitions and culture have shaped new religious movements founded in the United States. The time between the two groups' respective beginnings allows for a comparison of the impact of race culture in the United States across two centuries. Fourth, both groups originated on American soil. Many religious groups have been founded across the United States since 1607, but few have had the staying power and received as much public attention as Mormonism and the Nation of Islam. Mormonism's 2012 "Moment" during Mitt Romney's campaign for the United States presidency included several articles that gave the American public a view of Mormonism's racial past.⁹ The Nation of Islam's current leader, Louis Farrakhan, continues to speak of an imminent racial apocalypse that will bring a "merciless" end to all white people.¹⁰ His May 2014 statement is only the latest in a string of statements that promise the demise of

⁹ Examples include: Eric Marrapodi, "With 'I'm a Mormon' Campaign, Church Counters Lily-White Image," *CNN*, published November 2, 2011, <http://religion.blogs.cnn.com/2011/11/02/with-im-a-mormon-campaign-church-counters-lily-white-image/>; Jason Horowitz, "The Genesis of a Church's Stand on Race," *The Washington Post*, published February 28, 2012, http://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/the-genesis-of-a-churchs-stand-on-race/2012/02/22/gIQAQZxyfR_story.html; W. Paul Reeve, "The Wrong Side of White," *The Martin Marty Center for the Advanced Study of Religion*, published May 31, 2012, <https://divinity.uchicago.edu/sightings/wrong-side-white-w-paul-reeve>; John G. Turner, "Why Race is Still a Problem for Mormons," *New York Times*, published August 18, 2012, http://www.nytimes.com/2012/08/19/opinion/sunday/racism-and-the-mormon-church.html?_r=0.

¹⁰ Louis Farrakhan, "The Divine Destruction of America: Can She Avert It?," *Final Call*, accessed September 26, 2014, http://www.finalcall.com/artman/publish/Minister_Louis_Farrakhan_9/article_7595.shtml.

whites across the globe. Both groups' place in national newspaper headlines demonstrates their importance in the discussion of race and religion in American culture.

Before outlining the four chapters, it is necessary to discuss the terms “race” and “whiteness” in the historical contexts of Mormonism’s and the Nation of Islam’s entrance into the American religious marketplace. Race is an “ideological, political deployment.” It is neither neutral nor a biologically determined element of nature.”¹¹ Racial definitions have ebbed and flowed over the course of American history, and indeed, world history. Race provides a means of categorization to separate and include individuals based on perceived differences or similarities within other arbitrarily contrived groups. Race organizes power through creating and maintaining social hierarchies created in reaction to historical circumstances “at specific cultural sites.”¹² Race is malleable and non-permanent. It is created by the individuals in historical contexts with specific catalysts and aims.

Nineteenth-century Americans defined race by a person’s geographical origin, culture, heritage, distinguishing facial features, and similar standards.¹³ Race was a biological category. Members of a particular race came to be defined biologically different from other races and peoples. German anthropologist Johann Blumenbach popularized this view in the nineteenth century by positing that peoples of African descent and non-white Europeans were an entirely separate species from human beings. Other prominent anthropologists found Africans and Asians to be entirely separate species from white Anglo-Saxons (a theory known as polygenesis). This hypothesis flew in the face of the Genesis account of creation, wherein all humanity sprung from Adam, formed from the primordial clay by God Himself (a theory called monogenesis).

¹¹ Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 14.

¹² Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color*, 11.

¹³ Jackson and Weidman, *Race, Racism, and Science: Social Impact and Interaction*, 42; Nell Irvin Painter, *The History of White People* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2010), 43-72.

“Polygenesisists” viewed Africans as less intelligent and more animalistic than whites, who required greater oversight in order to “civilize” them. Whiteness meant much more than skin color in the nineteenth century. Although connected to concepts of race, skin color was not the defining hallmark of a person’s race. For instance, Irish-Americans had to gain the privileges of whiteness in the nineteenth century through emulating American manners, customs, language patterns, holidays, and accepting other hallmarks of American culture. Their white skin did not make them white. Through dropping certain aspects of what would today be called their ethnic heritage, they became white through losing their Irishness and becoming American.¹⁴

This view carried into the twentieth century. In 1906, the United States Supreme Court’s definition of race connoted “descent,” rather than skin color.¹⁵ Although Americans used skin color as a primary indicator of race, a person’s heritage meant just as much as an individual’s pigmentation. This changed in the 1920s, shortly before the formation of the Nation of Islam. In 1922, the Supreme Court passed down a decision that rejected the notion that ethnic stock could define a person’s whiteness. The Supreme Court cited another decision from 1914 which declared whiteness could not be defined as “synonymous with the words ‘a person of the Caucasian race,’” since Caucasians could possess skin across the color spectrum.¹⁶ The Supreme Court declared that white skin meant whiteness, rather than a connection to “Caucasians” or Europeans. This decision opened up the privileges of whiteness to a host of European immigrants not considered “white” in the United States at the time, including Italians and Eastern Europeans. The Supreme Court’s decision placed racial definitions, especially whiteness,

¹⁴ Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color*, 15-17, 31, 135.

¹⁵ *Judicial and Statutory Definitions of Words and Phrases, Second Series: Public-Zinc*, “Race,” (St. Paul, West Publishing Company, 1914), 94.

¹⁶ See “Ex Parte Shahid, (E/D/ S/C/ 1913) 205 Fed. 812,” in William M. McKinley, ed., *The Federal Statutes Annotated* (New York: Edward Thompson Company, 1914), 742. The Supreme Court cited Ex Parte Shahid in the *Ozawa* decision.

“in the eye of the beholder—in disparate acts of perception engendered by the political economies and power relations.”¹⁷ This demonstrates the difficulty of employing whiteness studies while examining American race—whiteness is a constructed category with few direct statements to demonstrate change over time.¹⁸ In this thesis, I examine both “whiteness” as a racial category and “whiteness” as a marker of pale skin complexion. I examine these explicitly in the chapters on Mormonism, but also address changing notions of the racial category of whiteness as seen in the historical context of the formation of the Nation of Islam. “Blackness” could also be used interchangeably with “whiteness;” its definitions and meanings are similarly difficult to explicitly define.

The first chapter of this work describes the racial milieu in which Joseph Smith established Mormonism. Special attention is given to Smith’s conceptions of race demonstrated in the Book of Mormon and other revelations he received from 1830-1839. Converts to Mormonism believed Smith had received the sacred records of ancient inhabitants of the American continent, which he then translated and published as the Book of Mormon. Smith taught that all Native Americans described in his new scripture descended from the Hebrews and that he had a prophetic mission to gather them to his New Israel. The Mormon prophet also accepted men and women of African descent beginning in 1831 and welcomed African Americans into Mormonism until his death in 1844. The Mormon Prophet defined Africans as outside the House of Israel, but also allowed non-Israelites to enter full fellowship within Mormonism, the New Israel, through adoption by conversion. Smith also believed peoples of African descent, like Native Americans, would become white upon conversion. Smith refers to changes from dark to white through biblical metaphors of whiteness as spiritual cleanliness but

¹⁷ Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color*, 11.

¹⁸ Eric Arnesen, “Whiteness and the Historians’ Imagination,” *International Labor and Working-Class History* 60 (October 2001), 3-32, especially 5-7.

also referred to the alchemical powers of conversion to making dark skin white. White skin marked “whiteness,” or inclusion in the House of Israel, a privileged normative position within Mormonism. Race in the first fifteen years of Mormonism was incredibly fluid. Individuals and nations gained and lost whiteness based upon their personal righteousness and membership in the House of Israel. Smith made the privileges of whiteness available to all and strived to gather the entire human family into his New Israel regardless of race or skin color.

Chapter Two addresses the racial implications of the ordinances Smith introduced to Mormonism between 1839 and his murder in 1844. Smith’s new ordinances provided theological and liturgical innovations that allowed membership in the House of Israel to perpetuate in the eternities. Smith extended his ordinances to Native Americans and Africans, with the caveat that members of both groups must (re-)enter the House of Israel in order to claim Israel’s blessings in the eternities. The Mormon Prophet defined the eternal Israel in terms of “households,” presided over by recipients of God’s ordinances established by Smith in Mormon temples.¹⁹ Smith believed heads of Israel’s households could guarantee the salvation of those included under the umbrella of an eternal “Nucleus of Heaven,” the organizational framework of Israel in the eternities. After Smith’s death, Brigham Young initially sustained his predecessor’s egalitarian vision, even as he battled rivals to assume Smith’s office and led his people across North America. In the course of Young’s quest for the hearts and minds of the leaderless Mormons, his fellow apostles began asserting doctrinal justifications for the exclusion of Africans from membership in the Nucleus of Heaven. By 1852, Young believed Africans could not take part in the ordinances Smith had established to bind Israel together after death. Young’s theological justifications for excluding Africans centered on the biblical account of Cain and Abel, a

¹⁹ Stephanie McCurry, *Masters of Small Worlds: Yeoman Households, Gender Relations, and the Political Culture of the Antebellum South Carolina Low Country* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995).

narrative often used to condone exclusion of Africans from the privileges of whiteness in Western culture and equality in Christian history.²⁰ Young did, however, offer a possibility for the acceptance of outsiders to Israel into the Nucleus of Heaven after the Second Coming of Christ.

Chapter Three narrates the rise of the repressions of Jim Crow society in American culture between Brigham Young's 1852 pronouncements on race and W.D. Fard's establishment of the Nation of Islam in 1930. In complete opposition to the Mormon notion of the inherent superiority of whiteness, Fard's religion proclaimed that a black-skinned Allah created the first human beings, "Original Men" or the "Tribe of Shabazz," in His image.²¹ Fard's teachings, colloquially known as "Yacub's History," delineated the "true" history of the black man, from creation to Armageddon. These teachings elevated blackness to the status of blacks being God's chosen and beloved people. This ontological connection of skin color further promised not only the eventual demise, but the destruction of whites. The Nation of Islam's first converts generally converted from a form of evangelical Christianity. As a result, Fard also preached that whites established Christianity as a means of subjecting the black man into slavery and mental death. However, he used biblical imagery in conjunction with the Qur'an to share his message with potential converts. The Nation's message appealed to black urban-dwellers that had received discriminatory treatment from white business owners, landlords, and politicians for their entire lives. The Nation of Islam's message rested upon "the fundamental premise...of black

²⁰ David Goldenberg, *The Curse of Ham: Race and Slavery in Early Judaism, Christianity, and Islam* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2003); Stephen Haynes, *Noah's Curse: The Biblical Justification of American Slavery* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002); Sylvester Johnson, *The Myth of Ham in Nineteenth-Century American Christianity: Race, Heathens, and the People of God*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004).

²¹ Claude Andrew Clegg, *An Original Man: The Life and Times of Elijah Muhammad* (New York: St. martin's Press, 1998), 25-26, 41-76.

supremacy and white degradation.”²² Fard defined Indians, Native Americans, Asians, and Latino/as as black, rather than brown, red, or yellow, which created a black body that vastly outnumbered the global population of whites. Fard promised his followers that at Armageddon whites would be eradicated and blacks would once more reign supreme under the theocratic governance of Islam. He insisted that blacks should separate from the white race in anticipation of the white race’s demise. Fard, and later his successor, in turn sought to unify the black population to spark the impending racial Armageddon. After Fard’s mysterious disappearance in 1933, his lieutenant Elijah (Poole) Muhammad gained control of the Nation of Islam. Muhammad maintained Fard’s religious doctrine of black supremacy and the destruction of whites for their sins against Allah’s people.

Chapter Four addresses the introduction of Malcolm X to the Nation of Islam’s membership and the development of Yacub’s History in the Nation of Islam’s publications and public pronouncements. The writings of Elijah Muhammad and Malcolm X subtly shifted the focus of Yacub’s History and re-defined who would survive the racial Armageddon. No longer would the blackness of one’s skin alone provide shelter from the coming white holocaust. Conversion to the Nation of Islam would also be required. The Nation’s leaders attacked black Christian clergy and declared, though the clerics were black, they would not survive Allah’s Armageddon. Their justification for such pronouncements fastened the notion of Christianity as the white religion to the symbolic pigmentation of black Christians’ skin. These changes likely came as a result of the Civil Rights Movement, which preached the necessity and desirability of integration. The movement’s aims were anathema to the Nation of Islam’s call to blacks to separate from the world in anticipation of the destruction of the white race. Muhammad’s

²² C. Eric Lincoln, *The Black Muslims in America*, 3rd Edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1994), 72.

doctrine, preached by Malcolm X throughout the world, gradually omitted all black Christians from the righteous body whom Allah would save when he destroyed whites. Such definitions defined black Christians as pollutants to the global black body that required excising before the advent of the Armageddon.²³ Muhammad's subtle shifts to definitions of blackness directly led to Malcolm X's unceremonious exit from the Nation of Islam and his resultant murder at the hands of a handful of Muhammad's followers. After X's death, Muhammad reinforced his beliefs in the purification of the black body, as well as the elimination of the white race, at his promised Armageddon.

This thesis seeks to demonstrate that Mormonism and the Nation of Islam both incorporated contemporary definitions of race into their theology and used such definitions to police the boundaries of their religious identity. These boundaries became the de facto gate through which its members were required to pass to gain access to each respective movement's definition of salvation. Both religions also provide insight into the contexts and processes by which American religions both included and excluded racial groups within their religious frameworks. Early Mormons gave all their worldly possessions to gather and evangelized to bring others to their fellowship, but ultimately excluded others based on their non-Israelite identity. The Nation of Islam sought to unite the black population into a religious body, but later separated the majority of American blacks from its definition of what constituted blackness. Mormonism's racial theology excluded Africans from the eternal Nucleus of Heaven until after Jesus' Second Coming until a revelation reversed Brigham Young's pronouncements in 1978. The Nation of Islam addressed a monolithic black population that Muhammad eventually split into two smaller populations of the saved and damned. Both religions incorporated prevailing

²³ Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 118.

race definitions to their preferred race to justify endowments of privilege and favor by God or Allah.

This thesis further demonstrates that religion participates in the construction of race in the United States. While I primarily examine Mormonism and the Nation of Islam, the racial definitions each religion created during its first decades could similarly be examined across a wide swath of American religions. These two groups, as religious movements indigenous to American soil, offer special insight to the process by which religion incorporates race into its beliefs and practices, and those they include and exclude in their communities. Both groups engage with American culture and ultimately came to exclude certain groups they once welcomed into their respective folds. This study seeks to understand how religious groups use race to maintain and create religious boundaries through racializing the measures of religiosity. The language is then used to define who is worthy of God's or Allah's favor and who is not worthy of His blessings. Above all, this thesis shows the means by which race both united and divided religious groups in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. By placing racial formation and religious innovation in conversation with one another, I seek to illuminate the process by which religions use their definitions of race to set themselves apart from, or align themselves with, American culture. By understanding how race can be used to bring groups together and maintain distinction from their culture, readers will be able to understand how race and religion's intersection in American history has both united and divided its citizens.

CHAPTER ONE

“Thy Soul be White”:

Joseph Smith, the Fluidity of Race, and the Gathering of Israel in Early Mormonism, 1830-1839

In an official history of the LDS Church written in 1836, a scribe recorded Joseph Smith’s thoughts on the gathering of Israel, a crucial aspect of Joseph Smith’s religious motivations. The Mormon prophet first established that the gathering of Israel meant gathering the elect of the Lord “out of every nation on earth; and bringing them to the place of the Lord of Hosts, where the city of righteousness, shall be built, and where the people shall be of one heart and one mind when the Savior comes; yea, where the people shall walk with God like Enoch. And be free from Sin.”²⁴ Joseph Smith’s mind had been preoccupied with the gathering of Israel since he completed his translation of the Book of Mormon in 1829, which paid special attention to the gathering of Israel before the Second Coming of Christ. A revelation given before the publication of the Book of Mormon speaks specifically of the impetus to gather spiritually lapsed “Lamanites” (Native Americans) to the House of Israel who “dwindeled [sic] in unbelief because of the iniquities of their Fathers.”²⁵ By the time Smith received his revelation in 1836, he had also begun gathering peoples of African descent, whom he believed to be born outside of the House of Israel. Smith believed he had a prophetic charge to gather all peoples to his New Israel through conversion to Mormonism. The only requirements for entrance to the New Israel were

²⁴ “History, 1838–1856, volume B-1 [1 September 1834–2 November 1838],” *The Joseph Smith Papers*, accessed September 8, 2014, <http://josephsmithpapers.org/paperSummary/history-1838-1856-volume-b-1-1-september-1834-2-november-1838?p=134#!/paperSummary/history-1838-1856-volume-b-1-1-september-1834-2-november-1838&p=138>.

²⁵ “Revelation, July 1828 [D&C 3],” *The Joseph Smith Papers*, accessed September 25, 2014, <http://josephsmithpapers.org/paperSummary/revelation-july-1828-dc-3#!/paperSummary/revelation-july-1828-dc-3&p=2>.

conversion and a desire to “be free from sin.” Smith proselytized to all those whom he believed to be members of the House of Israel, especially whites and Lamanites (whom he believed were descendants of the House of Israel through the Tribe of Manasseh). He also sought to gather those he believed were born outside of Israel’s covenant (especially peoples of African descent), regardless of skin color, race, or ethnicity. Smith believed members of the House of Israel would all have white skin in the eternities. Darker human skin colors were divine curses for unfaithfulness and would be cleansed as individuals converted to Mormonism. Smith’s religion taught that all peoples were created spiritually equal and had equal opportunity under the Mormon gospel to gain salvation and become a part of Smith’s Israel. Despite these egalitarian ideals, whiteness, seen in a person’s skin color and signifier of personal worthiness, represented godliness and non-whiteness signaled spiritual cursing or wickedness. Smith firmly believed whiteness was the natural, desirable skin color which would be restored in the eternities. All other skin pigmentation came as a result of divine curses.²⁶ Smith’s paradoxical logic was both egalitarian and discriminatory. A person’s race marked their spiritual identity, but their race could change with corresponding changes to belief and behavior.

Gathering Israel in preparation for Christ’s return in glory and ensuing millennial reign had preoccupied Smith from the time he finished the translation of the Book of Mormon. Smith read a formal revelation at the founding of his “Church of Christ” in 1830 to that effect.²⁷ Several men served as itinerant evangelists even before the legal establishment of the Mormon Church, preaching the imminent return of Jesus while the ink on newly printed copies of the Book of

²⁶ Whiteness inherently creates hierarchies, defining whiteness as desirable and superior and all other colors as undesirable and inferior. See Steve Garner, *Whiteness: An Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 63-68.

²⁷ See “Articles and Covenants, circa April 1830 [D&C 20],” Michael Hubbard MacKay, Gerrit J. Dirkmaat, Grant Underwood, Robert J. Woodford, and William G. Hartley, eds., *Documents, Volume 1: July 1828–June 1830*, Vol. 1 of the Documents series of The Joseph Smith Papers, edited by Dean C. Jessee, Ronald K. Esplin, Richard Lyman Bushman, and Matthew J. Grow (Salt Lake City: Church Historian's Press, 2013), 120.

Mormon dried on the printer's press. Smith's millennialism did not break from religious tradition in his time. "Doomsayers" had traversed the United States and Great Britain throughout the Revolutionary period, preaching the approaching return of Christ to either punish the wicked, rescue the faithful, or both.²⁸ What set Smith's eschatological vision apart from his millennialist contemporaries was his insistence that whether a person had red, yellow, black, or brown skin in mortality, all would have universally white skin in the millennium. Smith also believed that some would even change color before the eschaton. In the midst of Indian Wars, debates of racial superiority, and African slavery, Mormonism's founding prophet sought to convert individuals of all races to his religion in anticipation of all the righteous reverting to their natural skin color—*white*. To Smith, whiteness was the norm, the frame to which non-whiteness was compared. Non-whiteness was "deviant," apart from the "normal" color in which God created humans. In order to explain the deviance from natural order, Smith taught that a non-white convert's skin color would revert to its natural color when a person harmonized with God's will through conversion to Mormonism.²⁹

Smith's racially millennialistic vision clashed with Jacksonian definitions of whiteness, which defined race by a person's geographical origin, culture, heritage, distinguishing facial features, and similar biological and cultural standards.³⁰ Smith defined whiteness in matters of religious conversion, a sign from God signifying a person's inclusion in the House of Israel. The majority of Jacksonian Americans utilized contemporarily accepted scientific evidence to "prove" non-whites were not human at all, but simply another animal under man's dominion,

²⁸ Susan Juster, *Doomsayers: Anglo-American Prophecy in the Age of Revolution* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), 57-95.

²⁹ Garner, *Whiteness*, 34-37; Richard Dyer, *White: Essays on Race and Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1997).

³⁰ Jackson and Weidman, *Race, Racism, and Science: Social Impact and Interaction*, 42; Nell Irvin Painter, *The History of White People* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2010), 43-72.

useful once domesticated or put to agricultural use. The Jacksonian Era witnessed widespread Protestant evangelism in Indian schools to Christianize and make Native Americans fit for “civilization.”³¹ Joseph Smith believed all races were “alike unto God” and could be included in his New Israel. However, there was an important caveat. Non-whites would have more to overcome because of their cursed state to gain salvation than whites who were not cursed in the eyes of God.³² Rather than subscribing to the new explanations for varieties of races in his time, Smith taught that Mormonism had alchemical powers which would spiritually and physically transform a person upon conversion.

Smith was progressive in many ways, but attributing his racialism to his time discounts the innovation of his theology, particularly his quest to gather a new House of Israel. Members of the New Israel would be their own people, who would be bound together by their religious beliefs. Their religious beliefs would cause physical changes to converts and make them literally genetically distinct from non-Mormons. Smith was ahead of his time in regards to race but he was hardly colorblind. He recognized racial difference and taught that non-white pigmentation was the result of a providential curse articulated in scripture. Smith believed that as God gathered Israel before the Second Coming of Christ, He would remove the divine curses of dark skin from the sons of Laman, Cain, and Ham.³³ Smith believed the salvation Mormonism offered would

³¹ John Demos: *The Heathen School: A Story of Hope and Betrayal in the Age of the Early Republic* (New York: Knopf, 2014), 57-66.

³² *The Book of Mormon, An Account Written by the Hand of Mormon, Upon Plates Taken from the Plates of Nephi By Joseph Smith, Junior, Author and Proprietor*, (Palmyra, NY: E.B. Grandin Press, 1830), 109. (Hereafter *The Book of Mormon, An Account Written by the Hand of Mormon.*)

³³ Colin Kidd, writing about 20th century Mormonism and race wrote, “The Mormons clearly valued native Americans--though not as the upholders of a distinctive cultural tradition which ought to be valued on its own terms for what it meant to indigenous Amerindians... Mormon philanthropy and outreach were predicated upon pricing native Americans for something quite extraneous to Native American culture--their supposed descent felt the Lamanites described in the Book of Mormon. An unconscious racism lurked under the mantle of pro-Indian philanthropy. Mormons did not want to know about native Americans as they really were: the Book of Mormon provided the essential framework for understanding Lamanites ethnography, history, and identity.” The same could be said of the first decade of Mormonism. Colin Kidd, *The Forging of Races: Race and Scripture in the Protestant Atlantic World, 1600-2000* (Cambridge, UK: University of Cambridge Press, 2006), 233.

help Native Americans recover their original culture, religion, and customs. He sought to change their corrupted civilization by re-introducing them to the Mormon gospel, their true heritage.

In his religious writings and the narrative voice of the Book of Mormon, Smith's spiritual context is reflected outwardly and physically by skin color. Chasing after the evils of the world would result in a darkened skin tone. Following God's path would have a cleansing or lightening effect, resulting in fair, white, skin. Smith defined whiteness in a spiritual context, but also consistently overlaid it with physical references to becoming a "fair," "delightsome" people with white skin. To begin, I will examine race as it is defined in Smith's earliest book of scripture, The Book of Mormon.

The Book of Mormon, 1827-1831

The Book of Mormon commences with the story of the family of Lehi, a minor Jewish prophet who ministered in Jerusalem around 600 BCE. Lehi and his family fled Jerusalem before its destruction preceding the Babylonian captivity and sailed for the "chosen" or "promised" land, the American continent.³⁴ After Lehi's death, two of his sons led different factions of their father's family based on their religious convictions. One son, Laman, geographically separated from his family and abandoned his father's religion and, symbolically, the House of Israel. Lehi's son Nephi, however, remained loyal to his father and his religious principles.³⁵ The families and descendants of each group would take the name of their progenitor, and became either Nephites or Lamanites. A short time after the Lamanites are cursed, the righteous Nephites

³⁴ Joseph Smith taught that the "Promised Land" was the (North) American continent. See "Church History," 1 March 1842," in Karen Lynn Davidson, David J. Whittaker, Richard L. Jensen, and Mark Ashurst-McGee, eds. *Histories, Volume 1: Joseph Smith Histories, 1832–1844*, Vol. 1 of the Histories series of The Joseph Smith Papers, edited by Dean C. Jessee, Ronald K. Esplin, and Richard Lyman Bushman (Salt Lake City: Church Historian's Press, 2012), 11.

³⁵ *The Book of Mormon, An Account Written by the Hand of Mormon*, 72.

are described as “white and delightsome” in the eyes of God.³⁶ According to the narrative, when Laman’s family abandoned Lehi’s religion, God “caused [a] cursing to come upon them, yea, even a sore cursing, because of their iniquity...wherefore, as they were white, and exceedingly fair and delightsome, that they might not be enticing unto my people the Lord God did cause a skin of blackness to come upon them.”³⁷

The term “skins of blackness” in Smith’s scripture has often been equated with the metaphor of spiritual degeneracy. There are many instances where such an interpretation is practical.³⁸ The cursing is given in the context of Lamanite iniquity and the wicked are often referred to as “dark” throughout the Book of Mormon. Darkness is often connected to bloodthirstiness, viciousness, and general depravity. Although these spiritual descriptors could apply to anyone, these terms were often used in connection to Native Americans in Smith’s time.³⁹ The Book of Mormon, like the Old Testament, becomes a story of either strict obedience to one true God and his prophets, or cursing from God and domination by animist outsiders with unholy bloodlust. The Nephites’ proto-Christian, Jewish religion frequently alludes to spiritual darkness, including the mention of a filthy river that symbolized the “depths of hell” and “the temptations of the devil.”⁴⁰ However, there are several instances in the Book of Mormon’s text where black skin is clearly meant to be taken in a literal sense. The Lamanites were cursed with

³⁶ *The Book of Mormon: An Account Written by the Hand of Mormon*, 117.

³⁷ *The Book of Mormon: An Account Written by the Hand of Mormon*, 73.

³⁸ Notable examples which examine the symbolic place of darkness and whiteness are: Douglas Campbell, “‘White’ or ‘Pure’: Five Vignettes,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 29, no. 4 (Winter 1996): 199-135; Brant A. Gardner, *Second Witness: Analytical and Contextual Commentary on the Book of Mormon*, 6 Vols. (Salt Lake City, UT: Greg Kofford Books, 2007), 4:696–697; Hugh Nibley, *Lehi in the Desert and The World of the Jaredites* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1952), 84–85.

³⁹ Peter Silver, *Our Savage Neighbors: How Indian War Transformed Early America* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2009), 233, 244, and 246. *The Book of Mormon: An Account Written by the Hand of Mormon*, 28; 118; 176; 297; 344; 348 among others.

⁴⁰ *The Book of Mormon: An Account Written by the Hand of Mormon*, 27.

black skin as a result of their wickedness. Their skin literally became black (as a result of Laman's curse) *and* they were wicked (as a result of their personal choices).

The fluidity of skin color is similar to the Bible's use of leprosy. Both are employed as figurative and literal manifestations of impurity which can only be healed by God. In the New Testament Christ heals numerous lepers.⁴¹ In the Old Testament, God cursed people with seemingly irrevocable and debilitating disease to immediately signal disfavor to both the cursed, as well as righteous peers. These curses also safeguarded ethnic, or religious, purity by preventing procreation between the cursed and the favored. In the Book of Mormon, Smith achieved these two goals through the employment of the mark of the Curse of Laman, which preserved the Nephites' ability to distinguish the righteous from the unrighteous, presumably to safeguard the faithful from damaging interactions (or intermarriage) with the wicked Lamanites. Like leprosy in the Bible, skin color is subject to change based on God's blessing or curse in the Book of Mormon. God's curse made the Lamanites' skin instantly black in the opening chapters of Smith's scriptures, but when they converted to the Nephite religion their skin color would change as well. The Book of Mormon's narrator records that as Lamanites accepted the Nephite religion, the Lamanites' curse and black skin changed "and their skin became white like unto the Nephites."⁴²

The Nephites are not the only white persons in the Book of Mormon. In the book's literary crescendo, Jesus appears to the Nephites after his resurrection. Jesus preached to the people for several days and offered an intercessory prayer on their behalf. The Book of Mormon's narrator describes Jesus' physical features during the prayer: "his countenance did smile upon them, and the light of his countenance did shine upon them, and behold they were as

⁴¹ Luke 17:11-19; Matthew 8; Mark 1:40-45; King James Version.

⁴² *The Book of Mormon: An Account Written by the Hand of Mormon*, 228.

white as the countenance and also the garments of Jesus; and behold the whiteness thereof did exceed all the whiteness, yea, even there could be nothing upon earth so white as the whiteness thereof.”⁴³ Smith’s specifying Jesus’ race as white aligned Mormon views with depictions of Jesus during the early years of the American Republic. *Harper’s Illuminated and New Pictorial Bible* included visual representations of Jesus based on a forged letter detailing the appearance of Jesus, supposedly from a member of the Roman Senate named Publius Lentulus.⁴⁴ The Lentulus letter stated Jesus had “chestnut” colored hair and a reddish complexion.⁴⁵ By the late 1830s, the renowned American artist Rembrandt Peale taught his students the Lentulus letter’s description accurately described the Nazarene.⁴⁶ The Book of Mormon described Jesus using whiteness both metaphorically and literally. Jesus’ countenance is described as white (not bright), as well as his garments, symbolic of being “clothed in righteousness.”⁴⁷ Jesus, like the Nephites, had lighter skin and was more righteous than the dark-skinned Lamanites.

Smith drew an ontological connection between Jesus’ whiteness and the skin tone of the faithful in the Book of Mormon. In the early republic, whiteness could be gained or lost, as a measure of a person’s status within American culture.⁴⁸ If a person or group of people gave up their language to learn English, and certain cultural practices, religious views, or political alignments to match American culture, individuals and groups would become “white,” or

⁴³ *The Book of Mormon: An Account Written by the Hand of Mormon*, 495.

⁴⁴ Edward J. Blum and Paul Harvey, *The Color of Christ: The Son of God and the Saga of Race in America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 82-85. The metaphorical whiteness or brightness of Christ most likely also coincides with the different use of the adjectives “white” and “light” that refer to other peoples in the Book of Mormon.

⁴⁵ *Publius Lentulus, His Report to the Senate of Rome Concerning Jesus Christ* (London: Francis Smith, 1690).

⁴⁶ Rembrandt Peale, *Portfolio of an Artist* (Philadelphia: Henry Perkins Press, 1839), 181-182. Quoted in Blum and Harvey, *The Color of Christ*, 83.

⁴⁷ Isaiah 61:10, King James Version.

⁴⁸ Winthrop D. Jordan, *White Over Black: American Attitudes toward the Negro, 1550-1812* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1968), 7-11. Anglo-American views differed on Native American coloring, from being born white to making one’s skin darker through grease and sun exposure. See Dror Wahrman, *The Making of the Modern Self-Identity and Culture in Eighteenth Century England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 106-108.

accepted as part of the wider culture.⁴⁹ Whites, however, feared becoming dark-skinned but did not generally believe dark-skinned peoples could become white. For example, Orson Hyde, a Mormon apostle, feared the mark of Cain would afflict him after a period of apostasy, a clear reference to Mormon belief in the fluidity of race during this period.⁵⁰ Smith's teachings on race promised the person's spiritual essence could one day be literally reflected by white skin. The righteous people of the Book of Mormon (even Jesus!) are described as white in connection with their righteousness and conversion to the Nephite religion.

The geographic and spiritual separation of the Nephites and Lamanites is important to understanding Smith's views of race. As mentioned in the introduction, race meant much more than personal appearance in Smith's time.⁵¹ Race connected an individual to their geographic origin, language, culture, and religion; when the Nephites and Lamanites separated, their languages, religion, and other cultural hallmarks changed as well. Skin color marked the Lamanite separation from the House of Israel. Their dark skin betrayed their lack of commitment to the House of Israel. When Lamanites converted to the Nephite religion and spiritually re-joined the House of Israel, however, they lost the curse of black skin. Although they presumably had different languages, cultures, and customs from the Nephites, their conversion caused the curse of black skin to be taken from their bodies.⁵² Skin color was an attribute of race, but religious conversion made a person a member of the race, or House, of Israel. Skin color was an attribute, but not the definitive characteristic of members of the New Israel. The tethering of skin

⁴⁹ For a full length treatment on how groups have "become white" in American history, see Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999) and Noel Ignatiev, *How the Irish Became White* (New York: Routledge, 2008).

⁵⁰ Newell G. Bringhurst, *Saints, Slaves, and Blacks: The Changing Place of Black People Within Mormonism* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1981), 106.

⁵¹ See Painter, *History of White People*, 104-132. See also Annette Gordon-Reed, *The Hemingses of Monticello: An American Family* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2008), 48-49. Matthew Frye Jacobson astutely outlines how race was correlated with culture rather than skin color (although skin color was a factor in determining social place in American history): Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color*, 1-13 and 139-170.

⁵² *The Book of Mormon: An Account Written by the Hand of Mormon*, 456.

color to spiritual righteousness and conversion to whiteness became central to Smith's teachings on the fluidity of skin color after the publication of the Book of Mormon. Smith's Israel excluded no one from membership, provided they converted to Mormonism. All the converted would be universally white in the millennium if they were not at the time of their conversion.

The fluidity of skin color in the Book of Mormon differentiates Smith's racialism from the aims of his contemporaries. The Naturalization Act of 1790 allowed "white" individuals to become citizens, but whiteness meant much more than skin color. It justified the subjection of non-whites to forced labor and maltreatment. In short, whiteness provided a means of separating Christians from heathens, the civilized from the barbarian.⁵³ White Americans engaged in missionary work among indigenous people and enslaved tens of thousands of black Africans in part to convert them (or so they claimed) to a proper, white, civilized, Christian way of life.⁵⁴ Although these missionaries viewed their paternalistic work as winning souls for Christ, they did not attempt to make their converts "white" in terms of biological and intellectual equality—merely Christian. Joseph Smith's racial millennialism took a different tack by forging a link between a conversion to Mormonism and whiteness. Whiteness could be achieved by a conscious choice to become a member of Mormonism's House of Israel.

Nearly every mention of black skin in the Book of Mormon coincides with a discussion of the Lamanites' role in the Second Coming. Nephite prophets began to write about the restoration of the Lamanite in the first quarter of the Book of Mormon and continued mentioning it through the end of the book. One Book of Mormon prophet wrote the Lamanites "must repent, be baptized," and "[and] believe in Jesus Christ... [to be] numbered among the people of the first

⁵³ "Naturalization Law Of 1790," In *Encyclopedia of Immigration and Migration in the American West*, edited by Gordon Morris Bakken and Alexandra Kindell (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2006), 475-76. See also Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color*, 1-13, and 223-245.

⁵⁴ Demos, *The Heathen School*, 140-142.

covenant.”⁵⁵ The Book of Mormon’s prophets, speaking to the remnants of “the House of Jacob” also prophesied Lamanites would have a prominent place in the events preceding Christ’s Second Coming. He accordingly treated their gathering “by the gospel” as imperative to his religious mission.⁵⁶

Gathering the Remnants of the House of Jacob

Joseph Smith’s bringing forward the Book of Mormon created a unique facet to his millennialism.⁵⁷ Using the Book of Mormon Smith recognized the Lamanites as inheritors of a (temporarily lost) membership in the House of Israel.⁵⁸ In September 1830, only six months after registering his “Church of Christ” with the state of New York, Joseph Smith received a “revelation” calling his second in command Oliver Cowdery to serve a mission to the “Lamanites &c” in the Indian Territory. Cowdery and three companions walked 1,500 miles to Indian Territory (now Missouri, Ohio, and Kansas) to “build [the] church among thy brethren the Lamanites.”⁵⁹ Although the mission produced very few converts among Native Americans, approximately 130 men, women, and children of various races converted through the work of the four missionaries during the winter of 1830-1831. Mormon missionaries continued to labor near the “borders of the Lamanites” despite the low numbers of converts won on the western frontier of the United States.

⁵⁵ An early revelation of Joseph Smith stated that “the book of Mormon, which contains the truth and the word of God, which is my word to Gentile, that soon it may go to the Jew, of which the Lamanites are a remnant; that they may believe the gospel, and look not for a Messiah to come which has already come.” See “Revelation, circa Summer 1829 [D&C 19],” in *Documents, Volume 1: July 1828–June 1831*, 91. The Book of Mormon also specifically states that Lehi, the father of Nephi and Laman, was a descendant of Manasseh, a descendant of Israel. See *The Book of Mormon: An Account Written by the Hand of Mormon*, 248.

⁵⁶ *The Book of Mormon: An Account Written by the Hand of Mormon*, 52, 87, 464-465, 497, 527-528.

⁵⁷ Grant Underwood, *The Millenarian World of Early Mormonism* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999)76-96.

⁵⁸ The views that Native Americans were lost Israelites had been extant from the seventeenth century. See Richard Lyman Bushman, *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005), 96.

⁵⁹ “Revelation, September 1830-D [D&C 30:5-8], *Documents, Volume 1: July 1828–June 1831*, 189. See also “Revelation, September 1830-B [D&C 28],” *Documents, Volume 1: July 1828–June 1831*, 185. Joseph Smith and fellow early Mormons understood Lamanites to be Native Americans. See Armand Mauss, *All Abraham’s Children: Changing Mormon Conceptions of Race and Lineage* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003), 48-52.

In August 1831, Joseph Smith declared Jackson County, Missouri, which bordered Indian Territory, the center of Zion, the location of Jesus' seat of power during the millennium. He later described the American continent as a "promised land" for the Lamanites that would also serve as a gathering place for all members of the House of Israel.⁶⁰ The Mormon Zion's proximity to Native Americans meant those in the mass conversion of Lamanites Smith expected in fulfillment of Book of Mormon prophecy would not have to travel long distances to gather to Zion. Smith fervently believed the Curse of Laman would fall from Native Americans and that Lamanites would regain their whiteness and their chosenness through conversion to Mormonism.

Smith's commitment to the gathering and resultant whitening of Lamanites is further manifested by a revelation received in July 1831, less than one year after he had first sent missionaries to preach to the Lamanites. Smith's revelation commanded certain Mormon men to take up "wives of the Lamanites and Nephites, that their posterity may become white, delightsome and Just." Such children ("posterity"), however, would have been a fulfillment of Smith's prophecy that Lamanites would once more be "white and delightsome." Their whiteness would measure both their righteousness and their skin color. Whiteness could be attained through lineage, not just conversion to Mormonism. This suggests that Smith could have seen the lighter mixed-race children of converted Lamanites as a fulfillment of the remnants of Laman becoming white, or that at least he would not have been upset with the result of such offspring. He certainly would have seen "whitening" through mixed race children as secondary to the conversion of Lamanite women and their children. The Mormon population provided a small enough

⁶⁰ "JS, Kirtland, OH, to N. C. Saxton, 4 Jan. 1833," *The Joseph Smith Papers*, accessed September 8, 2014 <http://josephsmithpapers.org/paperSummary/letter-to-noah-c-saxton-4-january-1833#!/paperSummary/letter-to-noah-c-saxton-4-january-1833&p=1>.

community that such mixed-race children (and mixed race marriages) may have been tolerated by other Mormons.⁶¹

Whites had married Native Americans since the days of Jamestown—John Rolfe’s marriage to Pocahontas is the first American interracial marriage on record. Rolfe had to explain his decision to his superior, but remained married to his native wife. Rolfe’s marriage served the purpose of binding the British settlers to the Powhatans, a political strategy as much as a marriage.⁶² Smith’s direction to intermarry was nothing new in American history; nor was his desire to “civilize” native peoples by marrying and giving them religion. One federal agent who oversaw Indian Territories advocated intermarriage to help civilize Native Americans as late as 1822.⁶³

Smith’s revelation also stated that Lamanite women possessed more natural virtue than Gentile women. This displayed the Mormon Prophet’s belief that Lamanites had not passed the point of redemption. Native American women were preferable to marry than were wicked non-Mormons outside the House of Israel.⁶⁴ Smith firmly believed Indian marriages between Mormon men and Lamanite women would help to convert the Lamanites and make them “white, delightsome, and Just.” Thereby, they would remove the Lamanite curse of color and return them

⁶¹ There is no record of any interracial marriages occurring for religious reasons. For a thorough treatment of interracial marriage, and how interracial marriage was at times tolerated by local communities (so long as there was no resulting pregnancy of white women), see Martha Hode, *White Women, Black Men: Illicit Sex in the Nineteenth-Century South* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 19-38, 45-55, 56-65. It could also be disastrous, as seen in Demos, *The Heathen School*, 143-196.

⁶² Demos, *The Heathen School*, 57-59.

⁶³ See Theda Perdue, *Mixed Blood Indians: Racial Construction in the Early South* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2005), 73-76.

⁶⁴ This revelation was remembered by W.W. Phelps, many years after the original revelation; a contemporary newspaper article also refers to Mormons seeking to marry Native American women. See “Mormonism – Nos. VIII – IX,” *The Ohio Star* Vol. 11, No. 49 (December 8, 1831), reprinted in Eber D. Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled, or, A Faithful Account of that Singular Imposition* (Painesville, OH: Printed and Published by the Author, 1834), 200. See “A Revelation Given Through the Prophet Joseph Smith, West of Jackson County, Missouri, on July 17, 1831,” in *Unpublished Revelations of the Prophets and Presidents of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Volume 1*, edited By Fred C. Collier (Salt Lake City: Collier’s Publishing, 1981), 58. I thank Amanda Hendrix-Komoto for pointing me to these citations. Unpublished paper, “Unto the Islands of the Sea: Sexual Scandal, Millennialism, and the Politics of Mormon Missionary Work in the Pacific,” copy in my possession.

to the default whiteness of their Lehite ancestors.⁶⁵ Like his contemporaries, Smith offered the means of “civilizing” the Native American, but he viewed it as part of teaching them their religious heritage and culture. With their knowledge restored, they would help Smith build Zion.

Smith’s revelation further instructed his followers to “gird up your loins and be prepared for the mighty work of the Lord to prepare the world for my second coming to meet the tribes of Israel according to the predictions of all the holy prophets since the beginning.” Smith’s revelation instructed Mormons to convert or “whiten” Lamanites in preparation for Christ’s Second Coming. The order of the statements in Smith’s revelation was hardly happenstance. At the same time Andrew Jackson declared his decision to drive wandering “savages” from their homes as “not only liberal but generous” and necessary to save the “red man.” Joseph Smith instead sought to gather the “Lamanites” to a Zion firmly established on American soil.⁶⁶

Gathering the Race of Ham

Smith’s earliest public comments on African Americans came as a result of a newspaper article written by his faithful lieutenant, William W. Phelps, who edited the church’s newspaper in Missouri. In an article entitled “Free People of Color,” Phelps quoted “clauses from the laws of Missouri,” which enumerated the status of free blacks in the American state that housed the Mormon Zion. Phelps closed the article by proclaiming Mormons had “no special rule in the Church, as to people of color [; therefore] 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.” He also praised the work

⁶⁵ See Garner, *Whiteness*, 63-68; Dyer, *White*, 3.

⁶⁶ Andrew Jackson, “Second Annual Message,” in *The Addresses of the Presidents of the United States from 1789 to 1839* (New York: McLean & Taylor Publishing, 1839), 381. See also Marion R. Casey, “The Limits of Equality: Racial and Ethnic Tensions in the New Republic, 1789-1836,” in *Race and Ethnicity in America: A Concise History*, edited by Ronald H. Bayor (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 56-60.

of abolitionists, speaking favorably of “abolishing slavery, and colonizing the blacks, in Africa.”⁶⁷

The citizens of Jackson County decried the words of the non-slaveholding Mormons, who Missourians called “deluded fanatics.” These Missourians took Phelps’ article as an invitation for free people of color from other states to convert to Mormonism, organize, and attack their white overlords.⁶⁸ Fear of slave and native uprisings were common features of regions in which whites were outnumbered by African slaves.⁶⁹ Accordingly, the reactions to Phelps’ article serve to illuminate how politically and socially sensitive Missouri was about the subject of slavery. His article appeared only fifteen years after the Missouri Compromise and four years after Nat Turner’s Rebellion. As sectional tensions began to escalate again in the midst of abolitionism, the citizens of slave regions were often as vigilantly suspicious of political interlopers from the North as they were of their slaves who outnumbered them. Smith responded by directing Phelps to publish a clarification which assured the Missouri Mob that Mormons “opposed to having free people of color admitted into the state; and we say, that none will be admitted into the Church.”⁷⁰

This episode demonstrates the difficulty of pinpointing Smith’s thoughts on peoples of African descent for historians. Historically it is not uncommon for public figures to behave and teach differently in public than in private. The historian Annette Gordon-Reed, for example, has argued historians must take Thomas Jefferson’s “public pronouncements” on race with “a grain

⁶⁷ William W. Phelps, “Free People of Color,” *Evening and the Morning Star*, July 1833, 109-111.

⁶⁸ “The Manifesto of the Mob,” in B.H. Roberts, ed., *History of the Church, Volume 1* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1948), 374-376. Fear of blacks uprising against whites had been a local and national concern in the United States for some time. Alan Taylor has written that Virginians (but would extend to other slaveholding societies) “imagined a dreaded ‘internal enemy’ who might, at any moment, rebel in a midnight massacre to butcher white men, women, and children in their beds.” See Alan Taylor, *The Internal Enemy: Slavery and War in Virginia, 1772-1832* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2013), 7-8.

⁶⁹ Alan Taylor, *The Internal Enemy*, 1-12.

⁷⁰ “Extra,” *The Evening and Morning Star* (Independence, MO), July 16, 1833.

of salt” because they reflect his “inner struggle with socially forbidden private preferences” as much as his “desire to voice a heartfelt sentiment for the benefit of mankind.” She adds, public pronouncements “can also be about an attempt to deflect attention from an area where he or she is vulnerable.”⁷¹ Smith’s beliefs on race certainly made him politically vulnerable in a state populated by slaveholders.

Smith’s calling as the prophet who would gather all of the House of Israel before Christ’s theocratic reign certainly entitled him to allay the concerns of Missourians he viewed as enemies of God’s work. Since Smith’s public political direction concerning blacks does not match up with the way he interacted with blacks in his personal life, I have done my best to extract Smith’s religious writings and theological beliefs from his political accommodations. Accordingly, this portion of the paper seeks to piece together Smith’s thoughts through his religious writing and actions, rather than his statements on abolitionism or other political matters. Smith was a pragmatist who wanted his fledgling church to survive to accomplish the work of gathering Israel from every nation on earth in preparation for the Second Coming of Christ. Smith continued to authorize the teaching of slaves, in spite of public opposition, though a slave could only be baptized with their master’s permission.⁷²

The first convert of African descent to Mormonism was baptized by the missionaries Joseph Smith had sent to labor in the Indian Territory in the winter of 1830-1831. One Ohio newspaper described the convert, later known as “Black Pete,” as a “revelator... sometimes seized with strange vagaries and odd conceits.” His “vagaries” almost certainly contributed to his

⁷¹ Gordon-Reed, *The Hemingses of Monticello*, 343.

⁷² A master’s permission was required by other church groups as well. See Larry M. James, “Biracial Fellowship in Antebellum Baptist Churches,” and Randall M. Miller, “Slaves and Southern Catholicism,” in *Masters & Slaves In the House of the Lord: Race and Religion in the American South, 1740-1870*, edited by John B. Boles (Lexington, KY: University of Kentucky Press, 1988), 48.

later expulsion from the Mormon community.⁷³ The second Mormon convert, Elijah Abel, became a Mormon in 1832.⁷⁴ Abel was ordained to the Mormon priesthood and received permission to perform ordinances, minister, and administer in Smith's Kingdom of God. Joseph Smith called him to serve a mission to both Canada (1838) and Ohio (1841). Rules governing meetings in the Kirtland Temple (Mormon sacred space, where Smith performed sacred ordinances and held general church meetings) allowed for "old or young, rich or poor, male or female, bond or free, black or white."⁷⁵ Smith did not exclude blacks, presumably of any descent including Africans, from attending services in Mormonism's most sacred space. At the same time Smith called Abel on a mission in 1838 to preach to blacks and whites, future United States President John Tyler stated God "works most inscrutably to the understandings of men; the negro is torn from Africa, a barbarian, ignorant and idolatrous." In spite of these natural characteristics, through exposure to white culture he could become "civilized, enlightened, and a Christian."⁷⁶ Smith had sent Abel to preach to peoples of all skin colors. He was to enlighten and convert ignorant and idolatrous whites as well as blacks.

The sparse mentions of Black Pete, Elijah Abel, and other black Mormons from the written record of the first decade of Mormonism is not to say Joseph Smith did not concern himself with the condition of peoples of African descent. As discussed earlier, the Book of Mormon is replete with peoples cursed with "skins of blackness." Smith first associated blackness with the Curse of Cain while writing a "translation" of Genesis during 1830-1831,

⁷³ H. Michael Marquardt, *Patriarchal Blessings by Joseph Smith Sr.*, <http://user.xmission.com/~research/mormonpdf/blessingsbyjssr.pdf>, 73.

⁷⁴ Russell W. Stevenson, "A Negro Preacher: The Worlds of Elijah Ables," *Journal of Mormon History* 58, no. 2 (2013): 171. Stevenson uses the name "Ables;" Abel is generally identified as "Abel." The first account of Mormonism and "blacks" is Lester E. Bush, "Mormonism's Negro Doctrine: An Historical Overview," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 8 (Spring 1973): 11-68.

⁷⁵ "Rules and Regulations, 14 January 1836," *The Joseph Smith Papers*, accessed September 8, 2014, <http://josephsmithpapers.org/paperSummary/rules-and-regulations-14-january-1836>.

⁷⁶ "Virginia Colonization Society," *American Colonization Society, The African Repository and Colonial Journal* 14, no. 4 (1838): 119.

now known as his Book of Moses.⁷⁷ In Smith's history of the family of Adam, Adam's son Cain slays his brother Abel; as a consequence "the Lord set a mark upon Cain." As Smith's translation continues, all of the "seed of Cain were black" and became separated from their non-black cousins. Through this curse and separation, Cain became "a fugitive and a vagabond," literally without a home, a wanderer firmly outside the covenant of Israel.⁷⁸

In 1836, the LDS newspaper in Missouri associated Cain ("a high priest after the holy order of God") with black skin, passed on through Ham's wife following the biblical flood.⁷⁹ Later in the year, Smith came into possession of several mummies and Egyptian writings. While attempting to decipher the meaning of the Egyptian characters, Smith claimed to have discovered the personal writings of Abraham. Smith declared that Abraham associated blackness with Noah's curse upon his son, Ham.⁸⁰ Both of these "inspired" translations confirm Smith's earliest thoughts on "Negroes," which he believed to be the descendants of Ham.⁸¹ Joseph Smith's association of Cain and Ham with blackness situates the reasoning behind the existence of blacks with his contemporaries, who also believed Africans to be descended from Cain. The historians David Goldenberg and Stephen Haynes have demonstrated nineteenth-century Americans used

⁷⁷ For an explanation of the Book of Moses, see Bushman, *Rough Stone Rolling*, 131-142. The historian Stephen R. Haynes argues that in America Joseph Smith popularized the notion that blackness was Cain's mark—although it had been around in the Protestant-Atlantic world for more than a century before. See Stephen Haynes, *Noah's Curse: The Biblical Justification of American Slavery* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 15. See also Sylvester Johnson, *The Myth of Ham in Nineteenth-Century American Christianity: Race, Heathens, and the People of God*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004).

⁷⁸ "History of Joseph Smith (Continued)," *Times and Seasons* (Nauvoo, Illinois), October 1, 1843. The Book of Moses states "the seed of Cain were black, and had not place among them [the seed of Adam]." See "Old Testament Revision 1," *The Joseph Smith Papers*, accessed September 8, 2014, <http://josephsmithpapers.org/paperSummary/old-testament-revision-1?p=17#!/paperSummary/old-testament-revision-1&p=17>.

⁷⁹ W.W. Phelps, "Letter No. V.," *Messenger and Advocate*, March 1835, 81-82.

⁸⁰ "A Translation," *Times and Seasons* (Nauvoo, Illinois), March 1, 1842.

⁸¹ "History, 1838–1856, volume A-1 [23 December 1805–30 August 1834]," *The Joseph Smith Papers*, accessed September 8, 2014, <http://josephsmithpapers.org/paperSummary/history-1838-1856-volume-a-1-23-december-1805-30-august-1834?p=135#!/paperSummary/history-1838-1856-volume-a-1-23-december-1805-30-august-1834&p=135>. In this journal entry, Smith also says that Lamanites are descendants of Shem. Whites are presumably descendants of Japheth. Richard Bushman describes the meaning of translation in Smith's new scriptures in Bushman, *Rough Stone Rolling*, 57-84 and 138-146.

both the Curse of Cain and the Curse of Ham interchangeably and as a biblical justification for slavery.⁸² Colin Kidd has documented how anthropologists and religionists in the Jacksonian Era employed skin color to justify the treatment of supposedly sub-human Africans as slaves.⁸³ To Smith, the spiritual and physical darkness was removed from the African (or person of African descent, such as Africans sold in chattel slavery or what would later be termed “free blacks”) through conversion to Mormonism. Africans, too, could assist in the work of preparing for the Second Coming of Christ and the building of the Kingdom of God on earth. As one early hymn of Mormonism stated, Mormon “elders [were to] go forth and the gospel are preaching, and all that will hear them, they freely are preaching.”⁸⁴ Blacks, like Native Americans, would not remain dark-skinned when they converted. When blacks cast away their sins and joined Israel even those with skin as dark as an “Ethiop” would become completely white.⁸⁵ Smith approved preaching to individual blacks, although he eschewed issuing clarion calls for blacks to join his group. Smith hesitated to openly proselyte to blacks for pragmatic reasons, so as not to provoke the hornet’s nest of slaveholders in Missouri and elsewhere.

A patriarchal blessing given to Abel in 1833 suggests the idea of blacks becoming literally white was accepted, even prevalent, within early Mormonism. A patriarchal blessing is a blessing from an ordained patriarch (in the vein of Old Testament patriarchs), which offers direction and advice to the receiver. The blessing also declares the blood lineage of the receiver in relation to their membership in one of the twelve Tribes of Israel.⁸⁶ The earliest Church

⁸² David Goldenberg, *The Curse of Ham: Race and Slavery in Early Judaism, Christianity, and Islam* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2003), 41-79 and 178-182; and Haynes, *Noah’s Curse*, 43.

⁸³ Kidd, *The Forging of Race*, 121-167.

⁸⁴ “Hymn 3,” *A Collection of Sacred Hymns for the Church of the Latter Day Saints, Selected by Emma Smith*, (Kirtland: F.G. Williams & Company, 1835), 9.

⁸⁵ An early Mormon hymn reads, “Cast all your sins into the deep, And wash the Æthiop white.” See “Hymn 67,” in *Collection of Sacred Hymns*, 89.

⁸⁶ William James Mortimer, “Patriarchal Blessings,” *The Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, accessed September 8, 2014, http://eom.byu.edu/index.php/Patriarchal_Blessings.

patriarch in Mormonism, Joseph Smith, Sr., the father of the prophet, pronounced Elijah Abel's patriarchal blessing as he did for hundreds of other Mormons from 1834-1840.⁸⁷ Abel's blessing is peculiar in that it does not declare Abel's status as a blood member of the House of Israel.⁸⁸ Because Abel was the only African American or Native American to receive a patriarchal blessing during the lifetime of Joseph Smith, it is not possible to compare Abel's blessing with others to see if other racial minorities were considered vagabonds, outside the bloodline of the House of Israel.⁸⁹ However, analysis of the blessing's contents yields valuable information. Abel's blessing promised he would become an elder and that he would "be made equal to thy brethren and thy soul be white in eternity and thy robes glittering."⁹⁰

Joseph Smith had declared earlier in 1833, "the spirit and the body are the soul of man."⁹¹ Smith's unique statement had been given to a small group of high priests. Joseph Smith, Sr., who performed Abel's blessing, attended the meeting where Smith first introduced this doctrine.⁹² This theological definition had tremendous importance for Abel's eternal future. His patriarchal blessing did not merely promise his soul's future status as clean before God (symbolized by his glittering robes). Abel's skin would physically transform from black to white. Like Jesus in the Book of Mormon, Smith articulated a distinction between Abel's skin color and spiritual status

⁸⁷ Joseph Smith, Sr. "Appendix A," in Irene Bates and E. Gary Smith, *Lost Legacy: The Mormon Office of Presiding Patriarch* (Urbana, University of Illinois Press, 1996), 233. See *Lost Legacy* for a full explanation for the history and development of the office of patriarch and patriarchal blessings within Mormonism.

⁸⁸ Abel's is one of the very few patriarchal blessings that does not declare his lineage as a member of the House of Israel. See Marquardt, *Patriarchal Blessings*, 72.

⁸⁹ Abel's conversion to Mormonism would have included him in the New Israel.

⁹⁰ Marquardt, *Patriarchal Blessings*, 73.

⁹¹ "Revelation, 27-28 December 1832 [D&C 88:1-126]," Matthew C. Godfrey, Mark Ashurst-McGee, Grant Underwood, Robert J. Woodford, and William G. Hartley, eds., *Documents, Volume 2: July 1831–January 1833, Vol. 2* of the Documents series of The Joseph Smith Papers, edited by Dean C. Jessee, Ronald K. Esplin, Richard Lyman Bushman, and Matthew J. Grow (Salt Lake City: Church Historian's Press, 2013), 337.

⁹² Joseph Smith, Sr. had been ordained a High Priest on June 4, 1831. See Godfrey et al, *Documents, Volume 2*, 333.

(although a correlation existed). Both his soul (body and spirit) would be white as his promised glittering robes.

Joseph Smith's doctrine also taught that Abel had undergone a physical change at his conversion. Early Mormons believed those without a literal lineage to Israel (including Abel, which is suggested by the omission of his lineage from his patriarchal blessing) could become a part of God's Chosen People through the biblical and Book of Mormon notion of being "grafted" into the House of Israel by conversion. Smith preached in 1839, "the effect of the Holy Ghost upon a Gentile, is to purge out the old blood, and make him actually of the seed of Abraham. That man that has none of the blood of Abraham [and] naturally must have a new creation by the Holy Ghost." Smith went further, suggesting that the effects of conversion may be "visible to the eye," and "there may be more of a powerful effect upon the body" than upon the spirit.⁹³ Non-Israelite converts would undergo a literal physical change, the blood running through their veins would transform from its unconverted state and their skin color would correspondingly become lighter as they became "new creatures" through conversion.⁹⁴ This is important in the context of the scientific theories prevalent during Mormonism's first decade, when the western world often separated those legally recognized as white from other races by referring to them as different "species."⁹⁵ Religionists often rationalized the different "species" of humans to different periods of creation, wherein Africans, Asians, and other non-whites were considered "pre-Adamites," or created before Adam as something less than human (a theory known as "polygenesis"). Smith's creation narratives always asserted that all humans descended from Adam (a theory known as monogenesis). Shortly after the Revolutionary War, Americans began to label Native Americans

⁹³ "History, 1838–1856, volume C-1 [2 November 1838–31 July 1842]," *The Joseph Smith Papers*, accessed September 8, 2014, <http://josephsmithpapers.org/paperSummary?target=X74F05DAE-6ECF-4E1A-B8B5-B92F605E90FD#!/paperSummary/history-1838-1856-volume-c-1-2-november-1838-31-july-1842&p=544>.

⁹⁴ 2 Corinthians 5:17, King James Version.

⁹⁵ Painter, *History of White People*, 72-90.

as a separate, “vicious race of mankind,” dumb beasts, and “devils,” labels which lasted into the Jacksonian Era.⁹⁶ Though Smith believed non-whites were cursed and not living up to their spiritual privilege, he still regarded Africans as human.

Smith included peoples of African descent as a part of the broad family of man, but their divine curses of skin color differentiated the cursed from the uncursed. This made members of the House of Israel instantly recognizable for Mormon missionaries. Whites were members of Israel and, like the Lamanites, only needed to be reminded of their genetic heritage.⁹⁷ Armand Mauss’ description of the twentieth-century notion of believing blood in Mormonism is apt for early Mormonism as well. In Mauss’ words, “although the gospel and the Abrahamic covenant are ultimately for everyone,” Israelites enjoyed a privileged status by already possessing “believing blood.” They would not require a change in physical composition or appearance at conversion.⁹⁸ Smith did not offer an explanation for the connection between curses passing on from generation to generation, which suggests in some ways the sins of the parents passed onto their children. This belief came in spite of Smith’s famous declaration that men “are punished for their own sins” and for no one else’s transgressions.⁹⁹ Smith’s lack of explanation for the contradiction of dark-skinned peoples being born to other dark-skinned peoples would have enormous consequences for Mormonism following his death. Nevertheless, men and women of African descent enjoyed equal footing during Joseph Smith’s life, so far as they could be grafted into Israel and gain its privileges.

⁹⁶ For a complete overview of the monogenesis versus polygenesis debate on both sides of the Atlantic, particularly as it relates to religion, see Kidd, *The Forging of Race*, 121-167. For post-Revolutionary castigations, see Silver, *Our Savage Neighbors*, 264, 271, and 283.

⁹⁷ White privilege has often been referred to as a “visible” privilege. Because whiteness can be seen, others recognize the individual’s color and reinforce the privilege. Whiteness, as the norm, is also a form of “invisible privilege,” because white is assumed to be the standard to which all else are compared. See Garner, *Whiteness*, 39-47.

⁹⁸ The term “believing blood” was coined in the 1850s. See Mauss, *All Abraham’s Children*, 22-23.

⁹⁹ Davidson et al, *Histories, Volume 1*, 500.

There were never very many black Mormons during Joseph Smith's lifetime. Joseph Smith's apostle Parley P. Pratt stated there had never even been as many as "one dozen free negroes or mulattoes" from 1830-1840. This suggests Smith focused his efforts to gather Israel on so-called Lamanites and whites. These groups already belonged to Israel and were easy to visually identify by physical appearance.¹⁰⁰ The low numbers, however, are not due to a lack of trying to convert peoples of African descent in spite of a lack of "believing blood," or totally acquiescing to the social and political risks which came with the acceptance of free blacks and slaves into Mormonism. Joseph Smith called missionaries to preach in areas with high concentrations of free blacks, including Cincinnati, Ohio and Toronto, Ontario, Canada, and the American South. Smith sent Elijah Abel to Cincinnati and Toronto during his lifetime, probably with the city's large black populations in mind. Abel's converts gathered to either Ohio or Missouri, regardless of their skin color, just like other Mormon converts at the time. Later, when Abel served his mission in Cincinnati he served as a community and ecclesiastical leader among the Mormons. In 1843, Mormon leaders directed Abel to concentrate his efforts among the black population of Cincinnati. This direction probably came from the white population of Cincinnati to a black missionary working among whites, although it could have also been the bigotry of the Mormon hierarchs. There is no evidence Smith approved the church leaders' instructions, but Abel followed their mandate.¹⁰¹

It is unusual for the time that Abel had not previously been directed to work only among the black population. Just as white Mormon missionaries labored among peoples of all races, Abel was not originally restricted to speaking only to African Americans. Abel almost certainly

¹⁰⁰ Parley P. Pratt, *Late Persecution of the Church of Jesus Christ, of Latter-day Saints; Ten Thousand American Citizens Robbed, Plundered, and Banished; Others Imprisoned, and Others Martyred for their Religion. With a Sketch of Their Rise, Progress and Doctrine* (New York: J. W. Harrison, 1840), 28.

¹⁰¹ Stevenson, 'A Negro Preacher,' 189-191, 203-205.

evangelized among African Americans more often than whites because of the racial milieu in which he lived. Yet, no records show that Smith specifically told him to seek out blacks exclusively. He did not require Abel to work under the close supervision of whites as his Christian contemporaries restricted black evangelists.¹⁰² Presumably, Smith viewed Abel's conversion as a fulfillment of God's command to gather together scattered Israel, but quite probably also viewed Abel as proof the gospel outwardly changed a person. Abel's skin was quite light; he was occasionally described as a "mullato [sic]." Smith may have viewed Abel's light skin as a literal fulfillment of the prophecy that the skin of black persons would become white upon conversion.

Conclusion

During the years 1830-1839, Joseph Smith broke the boundaries that defined race at the same time he and his Mormons pushed the western boundary of the United States. They proselytized Native Americans and black African Americans in Missouri, a state whose relationship with slavery sparked national debate in 1819. Smith's belief in the fluidity of whiteness proved to be a danger to Mormon survival in Missouri. Mormon records show Missourians accused the Latter-day Saints of "conniving with the Indians, and stirring up the negroes to rebel against their masters, with a multitude of things of a similar character: which all tend to establish the ignorance and corruption of their authors."¹⁰³ Missourians feared the Mormons would join the Indians in combat against citizens of the United States, namely, against their non-Mormon neighbors. Missourians had similar fears regarding Mormons combining

¹⁰² Charles F. Irons, *The Origins of Pro-Slavery Christianity: White and Black Evangelicals in Colonial and Antebellum Virginia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 46-50.

¹⁰³ "History, 1838-1856, volume A-1 [23 December 1805-30 August 1834]," *The Joseph Smith Papers*, accessed September 8, 2014, <http://josephsmithpapers.org/paperSummary/history-1838-1856-volume-a-1-23-december-1805-30-august-1834?p=135#!/paperSummary/history-1838-1856-volume-a-1-23-december-1805-30-august-1834&p=135>.

forces with blacks. Smith's willingness to convert people of color—even marry them—was socially taboo (evidenced by his follower's reluctance to actually marry Native Americans). To the majority of Americans in Smith's time, blacks were simply black, and any progeny of blacks and whites simply sullied the white race instead of uplifting the black race. Their only hope was to be Christianized, although Christianity did not afford blacks the privileges of whiteness. Blacks were to be kept at a distance from whites, unless blacks were farming their fields, serving their dinners, or providing them with a sexual outlet. Smith regarded white skin as superior to all other pigmentations, the norm against which all other races were compared, but offered the revolutionary belief that the curses of Laman, Ham, and Cain could be removed. Individuals could literally see their skin transform from dark to white through conversion to Mormonism through baptism.¹⁰⁴ Smith's doctrine of the body and spirit forming the soul of man meant non-whites could overcome all the disadvantages of colored skin through conversion and enjoy the advantages of whiteness and inclusion in the House of Israel.

The Mormon belief in the fluidity of whiteness veered from the Jacksonian period's understanding of the variety of skin colors in the human species. Although some whites feared a loss of their whiteness, very few Americans believed dark-skinned individuals could become white.¹⁰⁵ Regardless of a person's pigmentation, the Book of Mormon clearly taught that God “denieth none that come unto him, black and white, bond and free, male and female...all are alike unto God.”¹⁰⁶ Because all the righteous would be white in the millennium, Smith's religious vision dictated that he should proselyte to peoples and races of all colors, regardless of the American racial and political culture in which he lived. Whiteness in early Mormonism,

¹⁰⁴ See Garner, *Whiteness*, 39-47.

¹⁰⁵ For the fear of whites losing their whiteness due to interaction with non-whites in non-European climates, see Karen Ordahl Kupperman, “Fear of Hot Climates in the Anglo-American Colonial Experience,” *The William and Mary Quarterly*, Volume 41, No. 2 (April 1984): 213-240.

¹⁰⁶ *The Book of Mormon: An Account Written by the Hand of Mormon*, 109.

therefore, was not a definition of race, but an attribute of the converted, a visible mark of membership in the House of Israel, something that could be gained or lost with spiritual faithfulness.¹⁰⁷ Religiosity in early Mormonism was racialized, but Smith's theology provided the means for all to gain the spiritual and temporal privileges of white skin through racial inclusion in the House of Israel. Blackness, conversely, denoted a person's status outside the House of Israel, but was similarly fluid. Smith's black and white binary explains how Smith could view peoples of all colors as black—even if their skin was not as dark as “black” Africans. Smith saw all being “alike unto God” because all had equal opportunity to accept Mormonism and claim salvation and the blessings of Israel, not because all peoples had equal status before conversion. Despite the setbacks he faced, Smith remained committed to gathering Israel. He sought out both lapsed members of the House of Israel (Lamanites), those with “believing blood” (whites), and those outside of Israel (Africans) to his White Zion, despite the definitions and employment of race in American culture.

¹⁰⁷ White Israelitism (British Israelitism) had existed for decades before Smith's theology developed in the Book of Mormon or the years that followed its publication. Whiteness became associated with Israel in this time. See Mauss, *All Abraham's Children*, 26-29, 29-33.

CHAPTER TWO

Outside the “The Nucleus of Heaven”:

Joseph Smith’s Nauvoo Theology and African Inclusion/Exclusion from the Mormon Priesthood, 1839-1852

During the winter of 1838-1839, Missourians forced Mormons from their state at gunpoint. Their exodus was due at least in part to the Mormon belief that Native Americans and African slaves could have equal spiritual footing with whites. Missourians accused Mormons of “conniving with the Indians, and stirring up the negroes to rebel against their masters [and] a multitude of things of a similar character.”¹⁰⁸ Although the Mormons vigorously denied any such motives or actions, rumors and the general egalitarian attitude of Mormons resulted in the loss of their Zion. During the Mormon expulsion from Missouri, Smith and several of his compatriots languished in a Liberty, Missouri jail while the body of the Saints crossed the frozen Mississippi seeking solace in Illinois. While incarcerated at Liberty, Smith penned several letters to his flock. The most historically notable letter, written to Mormon Bishop Edward Partridge, expresses Smith’s frustration with his imprisonment. Smith recorded one of his prayers in his letter, “O God where art thou and where is the pavilion that covereth thy hiding place?” He begged God to kindle his anger against his “enemis [sic] and in the fury of thine hart [sic] with thy sword avenge us of our rongs [sic].” Smith recorded that in response to his plea for divine help and comfort, God declared Smith’s persecutors would be cut off from the priesthood and the ordinances of the temple for their unholy war against the Latter-day Saints. Smith’s revelation

¹⁰⁸ Sidney Rigdon, *An Appeal to the American People being an Account of the Persecutions of the Church of Latter Day Saints; and of the Barbarities Inflicted on them by the Inhabitants of the State of Missouri, By Authority of Said Church* (Cincinnati: Shepard and Sterns, 1840), 8.

proclaimed, “They shall not have right to the priesthood nor their posterity after them from generation to generation.”¹⁰⁹

God’s promise as recorded by Smith is staggering. God’s words assured Smith anyone who inhibited the growth of Mormonism would not have access to baptism or any of the temple rituals Smith had introduced in 1836 and continued to introduce after his stay in Liberty Jail. As discussed in the previous chapter, Smith had made the ordinances of baptism and confirmation available to Native Americans and peoples of African descent, which gave them full spiritual equality once baptized. Whites who chased Mormons from their Zion would not have access to these essential rites, as racial minorities did, as a result of their actions.

Shortly after he wrote his letter to Partridge in early 1839, Smith introduced momentous additions to Mormonism’s doctrines and liturgy. These changes included the introduction of new priesthood ordinances. Smith taught that these ordinances created eternal bonds which tied members of the House of Israel to one another. These ordinances opened a new possibility to the meaning of gathering Israel. Because his Zion had been lost, Smith turned to the gathering of all peoples in the human family in eternity, not just on earth as a religious body. This was accomplished by the binding power of the priesthood and performed in private, rather than in public view. While Smith still encouraged the faithful to gather to Zion, Smith’s concept of gathering became far more grandiose. Smith aimed to bind the human race into an eternal “Nucleus of Heaven,” a term I use to describe the eternal kinship network Smith sought to create through the Mormon priesthood.¹¹⁰ Smith envisioned the bonding together of the entirety of the

¹⁰⁹ “Letter to the Church and Edward Partridge, 20 March 1839,” *The Joseph Smith Papers*, accessed July 11, 2014, <http://josephsmithpapers.org/paperSummary/letter-to-the-church-and-edward-partridge-20-march-1839#!/paperSummary/letter-to-the-church-and-edward-partridge-20-march-1839&p=4>.

¹¹⁰ “The Prophet taught us that Dominion & powr in the great future,” said early Mormon Benjamin Johnson, “would be Comensurate with the no [number] of ‘Wives Childin & Friends’ that we inheret here and that our great mission to earth was to Organize a Neculi [nucleus] of Heaven to take with us.” Todd Compton, *In Sacred Loneliness: The Plural Wives of Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Signature, 1997), 10. Although Johnson gave this

human family to one another and to God by nigh-unbreakable bonds, like the strong nuclear force that holds an atom together. The Mormon Prophet's radical new means of tying the entire human family to one another through ordinances performed in Mormon temples had enormous ramifications for peoples of all races. Smith attempted to unite peoples of all races in heaven as well as on earth. Smith framed his religious innovation in the Abrahamic covenant as he read it from the Bible. Smith combined God's promises to Abraham with his mission to gather all races into the New Israel.

Joseph Smith's re-constructing and re-imagining of the means of gathering Israel after Mormonism's rout in Missouri is often called "Nauvoo theology," named for the Illinois town in which Joseph Smith introduced his new concepts and rituals. This term encompasses the introduction of the temple endowment, the sealing ritual, and the second anointing, as well as other doctrines related to those ordinances. Smith's innovative theology and its application and interpretation following his murder in June 1844 became paramount to how Mormonism sought to gather Israel for more than 130 years thereafter.

This chapter addresses the years 1839-1852, the latter being the year Brigham Young's racially exclusive rhetoric became official church policy. (His theological justification for racial exclusion is often forgotten when telling the narrative of race, priesthood, and temple ordinances in the history of Mormonism.) It establishes that after Joseph Smith's death, several of his apostles changed the dynamics of race within Mormonism from fluid to inflexible. The new policy specifically excluded Africans, who were viewed as outside of Israel's covenant, from obtaining equal status with members of the House of Israel after Smith's death. While they could

quote in the early twentieth century, it conveys the means by which Smith wished to organize his eternal kinship network. I thank Stephen J. Fleming for pointing me to this source. For a thorough treatment of the concept of the nucleus of heaven, see Stephen J. Fleming, "The Fulness of the Gospel: Christian Platonism and the Origins of Mormonism" (PhD dissertation, University of California-Santa Barbara, 2014).

be grafted into the New Israel through baptism, they were no longer permitted to join the eternal “Nucleus of Heaven.” As a result, peoples of African descent could not become white after conversion and would not be included in the eternal bonds of Israel. Furthermore, this chapter establishes that the priesthood/temple ban specifically forbade peoples of African descent, not “blacks,” from priesthood office and temple ordinances. This denial of priesthood extended beyond the withholding of ordination to men of African descent. The ban also prevented women and children of African descent from inclusion in the Nucleus of Heaven. These changes altered Mormon definitions of race to fall in line more closely to typical nineteenth century religious definitions of race.

Temple Ordinances

The endowment included a literal washing and anointing, which blessed the person receiving their endowment with health and strength and figuratively removed the stain of the sins of the world from the recipient. After the washing and anointing, the individual took part in “a figurative depiction of the advent of Adam and Eve and of every man and every woman, the entry of Adam and Eve into the Garden of Eden, the consequent expulsion from the garden.” They also entered into covenants which allowed men and women to return to live with God after death.¹¹¹ The endowment included receiving “power from on high,” a phrase used when Smith announced new priesthood offices in 1831.¹¹² Those who received the endowment made covenants through the priesthood and received a “fullness” [sic] of the priesthood, receiving all rights available to them through the priesthood’s power and authority. Smith’s endowment

¹¹¹ James E. Talmage, *House of the Lord: A Study of Holy Sanctuaries, Ancient and Modern* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1912), 84-85.

¹¹² This “power from on high” later became associated with the LDS temple. See Michael Hubbard MacKay, Gerrit J. Dirkmaat, Grant Underwood, Robert J. Woodford, and William G. Hartley, eds., *Documents, Volume 1: July 1828–June 1831*, Vol. 1 of the Documents series of The Joseph Smith Papers, edited by Dean C. Jessee, Ronald K. Esplin, Richard Lyman Bushman, and Matthew J. Grow (Salt Lake City: Church Historian’s Press, 2013), 229-233.

anointed males to become “kings and priests” and anointed females to be “queens and priestesses” to their husbands in heaven. Such blessings were predicated upon earthly obedience and faithfulness to the Mormon gospel.¹¹³

The ordinance of sealing has often been incorrectly used interchangeably with plural marriage. To say Smith practiced plural marriage oversimplifies Smith’s religious innovations. Smith “sealed” or bound individuals and couples into his eternal household and bound other men and women together as heads of their own eternal households. Smith’s organization of the Nucleus of Heaven is similar to secular households in the antebellum period. Just as atoms have a set organization of neutrons, protons, and electrons that comprise each unique element’s structure, antebellum households had established patterns of organization that identified who was included in a person’s household. Secular households had a male head of household with the responsibility to protect and provide for his wife, children, and those under the loosely defined umbrella of his household by ensuring their temporal well-being. Antebellum households included any employees or slaves that depended upon the head of household for support in any way. In return, the householder’s dependents offered their obedience and the male head of household gained power and prestige.¹¹⁴ The Mormon prophet, rather than assuming temporal responsibilities, took upon himself the responsibility of assuring his dependents’ salvation. Smith did not organize sealings based on notions of romantic love; sealings functioned to organize the eternities and as mechanics of salvation.¹¹⁵

¹¹³ See Samuel Morris Brown, *In Heaven as It Is on Earth: Joseph Smith and the Early Mormon Conquest of Death* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 275.

¹¹⁴ See Stephanie McCurry, *Masters of Small Worlds: Yeoman Households, Gender Relations, and the Political Culture of the Antebellum South Carolina Low Country* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995),

¹¹⁵ Smith’s vision was created in the gap between the domestic ideals of the Puritan family (authoritarian with clear power structures with men at the top and all other members of the household underneath) and the Victorian family (centered on love and relationships. See Colleen McDannell and Bernard Lang, *Heaven: A History* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001), 228-229.

Smith's vision of the eternal domestic structure through the introduction of the sealing ordinance fit in with several attempts to overhaul familial and religious structures in the Jacksonian Era. John Humphrey Noyes' Oneida (upstate New York) community's domestic and sexual experimentation is well documented, as is the celibacy of the Shakers.¹¹⁶ Theologically, Smith's sealing ordinances drew "on antecedents in evangelicalism, the diluted Swedenborgianism that contributed to the domestic heaven, the Neoplatonic Chain of Being, and metaphysical Israelitism." At its heart, sealing promised "a network of eternal belonging for the Latter-day Saints."¹¹⁷ This superseded the mortal goal of gathering Israel to Zion, by adding to it a "broader goal of establishing the heaven family."¹¹⁸ Smith sought to gather Israel in the eternities on Abrahamic terms. Smith's fellow members of the House of Israel became his "seed" or spiritual progeny as they sealed themselves to him. Their number was to be like Abraham's, innumerable as the sands of the sea or the stars in the sky.¹¹⁹ Smith preached when he sealed man and woman to one another, "it secure[d] their posterity so that they cannot be lost but will be saved by virtue of the covenant of their father."¹²⁰ Sealing vouchsafed an eternal household's "eternal salvation."¹²¹ Through a little "Craftiness," or theological forethought, his household would continue on without end and gain eternal salvation. Masters of lesser households, led by men with lower priesthood office and fewer wives, became bound to Smith through this sealing

¹¹⁶ For a comparison of Mormon and Shaker sexual practices, see Stephen C. Taysom, *Shakers, Mormons, and Religious World: Conflicting Visions, Contested Boundaries* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2010), 100-151. For a comparison of Mormons, Shakers, and the Oneida community, see Lawrence Foster, *Religion and Sexuality: Three American Communal Experiments of the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992).

¹¹⁷ Brown, *In Heaven as It Is on Earth*, 229-230.

¹¹⁸ Brown, *In Heaven as It Is on Earth*, 231.

¹¹⁹ One purpose for plural marriage, given in the Book of Mormon was to "raise up seed unto [God]." See *The Book of Mormon, An Account Written by the Hand of Mormon, Upon Plates Taken from the Plates of Nephi* By Joseph Smith, Junior, Author and Proprietor, (Palmyra, NY: E.B. Grandin Press, 1830), 127.

¹²⁰ Andrew F. Ehat and Lyndon W. Cook, *Words of Joseph Smith: The Contemporary Accounts of the Nauvoo Discourses of the Prophet Joseph* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1980), 241-42.

¹²¹ See Samuel M. Brown, "Early Mormon Adoption Theology and the Mechanics of Salvation," *Journal of Mormon History* 37, no 3 (Summer 2011): 37-44.

process. Smith used these familial connections to create “welding links” between his closest friends and confidantes to him on earth, with the belief those relationships would continue on in the eternities.¹²² In the words of apostle Heber C. Kimball, “the means of uniting families together” for eternity became possible “by the connecting links of the priesthood.”¹²³

Sealings created a hierarchy—Smith and men who had multiple people sealed to them expected a greater glory in the eternities, but primarily sealings ensured the human race was welded together. As a head of household, Smith viewed his role “as part of natural order,” with men at the head of families and women, children, and servants below. Smith sealed himself to the family members of other Mormon hierarchs in order to forge eternal and temporal relationships. These families would in turn be connected to him, making Smith ruler over many households as a sort of patriarch or “prince.”¹²⁴ Dynastic relationships depended upon hierarchies, where questions of who was sealed to whom, and who relied upon whom for their salvation became very important as Smith’s doctrine unfolded. Mormons drew fences around what and who was eternally theirs and for whom they had soteriological responsibility. Antebellum Americans viewed these relationships between heads of households and their families like the relationship of a king to his country, or God over His children.¹²⁵ Smith proposed many times (successfully and not) to female members of prominent Mormon leaders’ families to become sealed to him, or to join his eternal family. This bound these women to Smith, but also the woman’s brothers, sisters, fathers, mothers, and in some cases, their

¹²² “Journal, December 1841-December 1842,” *Joseph Smith Papers*, accessed August 7, 2014, <http://josephsmithpapers.org/paperSummary/journal-december-1841-december-1842?p=76>.

¹²³ Heber C. Kimball, quoted in Charles Kelly, *The Journal of John D. Lee 1846-1847 and 1859* (Salt Lake City, University of Utah Press, 1984), 91.

¹²⁴ The number of spiritual dependents correspondingly offered greater power, honor, and prestige to the head of household. See McCurry, *Masters of Small Worlds*, 58-59. Raymond Lee Muncy, *Sex and Marriage in Utopian Communities* (Bloomington, IN: University of Indiana Press, 1973), 133.

¹²⁵ Steven Mintz and Susan Kellogg, *Domestic Revolutions: A Social History of American Family Life* (New York: The Free Press, 1989), 1.

husbands. Those individuals had others sealed to them, creating a great chain of relationships that would eventually connect all involved to the top of the hierarchy, presumably Smith.¹²⁶

Smith's innovations opened up the definition of family to mean anyone within his eternal kinship network.

The ordinance of Second Anointing, or receiving the “fullness of the priesthood,” followed the endowment and sealing ordinances.¹²⁷ Through this ordinance, men and women had their “calling and election [made] sure,” or, received assurance that they would be saved in the eternal Kingdom of God.¹²⁸ Richard Bushman has written that the ordinance “involved ordination as king and priest, words found in the Revelation of St. John: Christ ‘hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father.’” Early recipients did not disclose many details of the ordinance—Smith “was as tight-lipped as the rest.”¹²⁹ What is known is that Smith required couples to be sealed to one another before they received the “fullness of the priesthood.” For this reason, women's essential roles in the Nucleus of Heaven should not be discounted. Smith himself did not receive his second anointing until his wife, Emma Hale Smith, agreed to participate in the ordinance, after several couples had participated in the ritual.¹³⁰ The ordinance also guaranteed “eternal life, even the glory of the celestial kingdom.”¹³¹ To early Mormons, the

¹²⁶ Todd M. Compton, *In Sacred Loneliness: The Plural Wives of Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1997), 32; Andrew F. Ehat, “Joseph Smith's Introduction of Temple Ordinances and the 1844 Mormon Succession Question,” (master's thesis, Brigham Young University, 1981), 64; Brown, “Early Mormon Adoption Theology,” 34 and 39.

¹²⁷ “The Book of the Law of the Lord,” *The Joseph Smith Papers*, accessed November 1, 2014, <http://josephsmithpapers.org/paperSummary/the-book-of-the-law-of-the-lord?p=15&highlight=fullness%20of%20the%20priesthood>.

¹²⁸ Bushman, *Rough Stone Rolling*, 497; also 2 Peter 1:10, King James Version.

¹²⁹ Bushman, *Rough Stone Rolling*, 498; also Revelation 1:6, King James Version.

¹³⁰ Linda King Newell and Valeen Tippetts Avery, *Mormon Enigma: Emma Hale Smith* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 161-169.

¹³¹ “Revelation, 27-28 December 1832 [D&C 88:1-126],” Matthew C. Godfrey, Mark Ashurst-McGee, Grant Underwood, Robert J. Woodford, and William G. Hartley, eds., *Documents, Volume 2: July 1831–January 1833, Vol. 2* of the Documents series of The Joseph Smith Papers, edited by Dean C. Jessee, Ronald K. Esplin, Richard Lyman Bushman, and Matthew J. Grow (Salt Lake City: Church Historian's Press, 2013), 293.

priesthood and the ordinances made possible by receiving the priesthood's "fulness" ensured families could be bound to an eternal household after death.

Smith designed these ordinances as a means of linking individuals and families together on earth as well as in the eternities by the power of the Mormon priesthood. Indeed, Smith and his compatriots called these sealings and accompanying ordinances "the priesthood," separate from but connected to the authority Smith conferred upon others beginning in 1829. In the words of historian Jonathan A. Stapley, "kinship, priesthood, government, and salvation became synonymous" in early Mormonism as the temple liturgy unfolded.¹³² As a result of these new ordinances, members of Smith's Israel would be connected to Smith in the "priesthood" which bound members of the House of Israel to each other within the Nucleus of Heaven.

The Seed of Cain, the People of Jacob, and Sealings

Smith's new practice of sealing included members of the "Race of Ham/Cain" (peoples of African descent) and the "House of Jacob" (Lamanites or Native Americans). As discussed in the previous chapter, Smith had instructed his followers to marry "wives of the Lamanites and Nephites, that their posterity may become white, delightsome and Just" as early as 1831. The whitening of Lamanites is given primarily as a means of reclaiming these descendants of the House of Israel before the Second Coming of Christ. Smith's revelation as remembered by William W. Phelps also revealed Lamanite "females are more virtuous than the gentiles."¹³³ Phelps' memory of Smith's statement implied a special, inherently spiritual status for Native Americans in Mormonism. Although there is no available evidence any Mormons sealed

¹³² Jonathan A. Stapley, "Women and Mormon Authority," in Matthew B. Bowman and Kate Holbrook, editors, *Women and the LDS Church in Historical and Contemporary Perspective* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, forthcoming), 5.

¹³³ See "A Revelation Given Through the Prophet Joseph Smith, West of Jackson County, Missouri, on July 17, 1831," in *Unpublished Revelations of the Prophets and Presidents of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Volume 1*, edited by Fred C. Collier (Salt Lake City: Collier's Publishing, 1981), 58. See the explanatory note on page 28, fn. 69.

themselves to Native American women before June 1844, Smith endorsed sealing before his temple liturgy developed. Smith believed Lamanites belonged in the House of Israel and by extension in the Nucleus of Heaven. White Americans had used marriage as a conversion tool in the past, but few sought indigenous wives because of a belief in Native women's inherent spirituality. Indeed most Americans assumed Native Americans needed to be converted from the wallows of heathen savagery.¹³⁴

No records have been uncovered that show evidence of any Native Americans receiving the sealing ordinances during Smith's lifetime. The Book of Mormon (1829) had prophesied Lamanites would assist in the work of ushering in the Second Coming. Smith correspondingly approached missionary work among Native Americans as a step to fulfill Book of Mormon prophecy. Smith's expected mass conversions of Lamanites never materialized. The lack of female Native Americans sealed to Joseph Smith implies that the women sealed to Smith and other Mormon men may have at times had a say in which women entered their eternal households. Smith sealed several pairs of sisters to Mormon men during his lifetime, which demonstrates women chose women they trusted to enter covenant relationships with their husbands. Nearly all those who participated in Smith's sealings had long, personal relationships to the Mormon prophet.¹³⁵ No female Native American converts had the personal relationships with prominent Mormon men needed to be sealed to them. Likewise, no Native American men had risen up the ranks of Smith's hierarchy or sufficiently earned his trust to be invited to have others sealed to them.

¹³⁴ For an account of Native American polygamy and whitening through monogamy, see Nancy F. Cott, *Public Vows: A History of Marriage and the Nation* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), 23-27.

¹³⁵ Heber C. Kimball told Parley P. Pratt that those invited to participate in the endowment were a "small company that he feels safe in thare [sic] hands. and that is not all he can open his bosom to and feel him Self ... we have recieved [sic] some pressious [sic] things through the Prophet on the preasthood [sic]. Heber C. Kimball to Parley P. Pratt, 17 June 1842, quoted in John G. Turner, *Brigham Young: Pioneer Prophet* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), 87.

One account from shortly before Smith's death demonstrates he continued to believe Lamanites would one day become white through conversion. The Mormon prophet's journal keeper recorded Smith held "an interview" with several Pottawattamie chiefs in July 1843. After asking if all the Mormons present could be counted as "his friends," an Indian orator arose and related how the Indians had been driven "from our lands many times...the great spirit...told us that you are the man (pointing to the Prophet Joseph)." Smith wept, informed the Natives they were remnants of the people in the Book of Mormon, instructed them not to shed blood, and promised them "it will not be long before the great spirit will bless you & you will cultivate the earth and build good Houses like white men."¹³⁶

This meeting reaffirms Smith believed Native Americans would one day convert to Mormonism and become "like white men" through the "great spirit's blessing" and would act in society like white men. Smith's murder prevented the inclusion of any "Lamanites" into his eternal household. Such sealings would probably have taken place if Smith had lived longer—he made contacts with Native Americans for the purpose of political alliances.¹³⁷ It stands to reason that he would have ordained a Native American male to the Melchizedek priesthood and invited him to join the fraternity of the temple "priesthood" if he had not been killed. He also probably would have invited a female Native to join his eternal family, as Mormons would later do in Utah.

Joseph Smith's Sealing to Jane Elizabeth Manning James

Joseph Smith invited only one person of African descent to participate in his Nauvoo-era temple ordinances. Jane Elizabeth Manning James converted to Mormonism in Connecticut, and

¹³⁶ "History Draft [1 March-31 December 1843]," *The Joseph Smith Papers*, accessed September 5, 2014, <http://josephsmithpapers.org/paperSummary/history-draft-1-march-31-december-1843#!/paperSummary/history-draft-1-march-31-december-1843&p=117>.

¹³⁷ See William Clayton Journal, entry dated 4 April 1844, quoted in George D. Smith, ed., *An Intimate Chronicle: The Journals of William Clayton* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1995), 128.

later led a group of free African Americans to Nauvoo from the eastern United States.¹³⁸ When her group arrived in Nauvoo, Joseph and Emma Smith invited James to live in their household as a servant. In the course of her work, Smith permitted her to “handle” the Urim and Thumim, the tool Smith used to translate the Book of Mormon. She clearly had earned the Smith family’s trust.¹³⁹

According to an account recorded nearly sixty years later, James became aware of Joseph Smith’s sealings in 1843 from women she called “Brother Josephs four wives.” These women asked James “what would you think if a man had more wives than one?” She responded by jumping up, clapping her hands and exclaimed, “that’s good.” One of Smith’s “wives” told the others, “she is all right, just listen she believes it all now.”¹⁴⁰ Later, in return for her friendship and loyalty, James reported Emma Smith offered to have James sealed into the Smith’s eternal household “as a child.” James reported to her biographer that after two weeks of considering the offer, she replied to Emma, “No Mam [sic]! Because I did not understand or know what it meant.”¹⁴¹

James’ sealing as a “child” does not make sense in her the context of Smith’s actions surrounding his new liturgy. Although after Smith’s death men and women could be sealed to a priesthood holder and his wife as “children,” or heirs to an eternal household, those sealings never took place during the lifetime of Joseph Smith.¹⁴² Emma Smith most likely had inquired whether Jane James would consent to be sealed to her husband as a sealing partner, what James

¹³⁸ For an account of James’ life, see Quincy D. Newell, “The Autobiography and Interview of Jane Elizabeth Manning James,” *Journal of Africana Religions* 1, no. 2 (2013): 253-256.

¹³⁹ See Max Perry Mueller, “Playing Jane: Re-presenting Black Mormon Memory through Reenacting the Black Mormon Past,” *Journal of Africana Religions* 1, no. 4 (2013): 528-529.

¹⁴⁰ “James Autobiography,” 19. Smith himself never used the term wife.

¹⁴¹ “James Autobiography,” 20.

¹⁴² See Jonathan A. Stapley, “Adoptive Sealing Ritual in Mormonism,” *Journal of Mormon History* 37, no. 3 (Summer 2011): 69-74. John Bernhisel was sealed to Joseph Smith after his death—the only incident of a man being sealed into Joseph Smith’s eternal household in Nauvoo.

called a “wife.” James was aware of Smith’s plural “wives” and became so excited about the prospect of multiple women being sealed to a man she jumped up and clapped her hands in response to its possibility. Smith often arranged for a “wife” to propose his sealing to another woman on his behalf.¹⁴³ As the matriarch in Smith’s eternal household, Emma’s own prestige from presiding over a larger household provided her incentive to offer James a place in Smith’s household as a wife below her in the household hierarchy. Smith’s own desire to grow his household and increase his personal connections to those around him suggests Emma Smith offered James an opportunity to be sealed to Smith as a wife, not a child.

The possibility of James’ being sealed as a wife presents several interesting interpretations (if the offer actually occurred and was not a false memory recorded sixty four years after Emma Smith’s offer). Considering the hierarchical qualities of Smith’s other sealings, and that James had no connections to other influential Mormons, Smith could have viewed his sealing to James as a way to bind non-Israelites to himself. Smith probably viewed himself adding more than a wife to his eternal household. If the offer of sealing took place, Smith offered a woman of African descent whom he believed to be outside the House of Israel a place in his eternal family network. Smith believed he could graft a non-Israelite into the eternal Nucleus of Heaven as well as the New Israel.

Like Native Americans, few African Americans held the requisite priesthood office to be considered candidates for receiving the sealing ordinance. Smith oversaw the ordination of several African Americans, most prominently, Elijah Abel, who served several missions while Joseph Smith led the Mormon Church. Abel, the most likely man of African descent to be offered a place in Smith’s eternal kinship network, was in Cincinnati, Ohio for the majority of

¹⁴³ Compton, *In Sacred Loneliness*, 32. This also fits in the general time frame when Smith was sealed to the majority of women later termed his “wives.” See Compton, *In Sacred Loneliness*, 4-9.

the time Smith offered the ordinances before his death.¹⁴⁴ Abel had also only been ordained to the office of Seventy. All but two of the men who had women sealed to them before Smith's murder were High Priests, a rank higher than the office of Seventy in the hierarchy of the Mormon priesthood.¹⁴⁵ Despite his exclusion from priesthood ordinances, Abel's race would not have precluded him from joining Smith's eternal kinship network. Less than 100 individuals in Nauvoo received temple ordinances before Smith's death. No other men of African descent attained the office of high priest during Smith's lifetime, much less became confidantes of Smith. Like with the cases of Native Americans' absence from the records of temple ordinances, early Mormonism did not have enough men of African descent to warrant Smith's offer of temple ordinances to them. Smith's murder in June 1844 altered the implementation and distribution of Smith's new rituals across a wider portion of the Mormon population after that date.

Succession and Exodus

Joseph Smith outlined at least eight different plans for succession in the LDS Presidency during his lifetime, which left Mormonism to descend into chaos following his assassination in Carthage, Illinois.¹⁴⁶ Several leaders presented themselves as Smith's successor, including Smith's longtime counselor, Sidney Rigdon, and President Brigham Young of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. Rigdon argued that no man could replace Smith, but that he would act as the Church's guardian, ensuring Smith's doctrines were not corrupted. Young's argument for governing power hinged upon the apostles possessing God's authority, as "an independent body—who have the Keys of the Kingdom to all the whole world so help me God[, and] the[y] are, as the 1st pres[ide]nc[y] of the church...[You] can[']t call a Prophet you can[']t take El[der]

¹⁴⁴ Russell W. Stevenson, "A Negro Preacher': The Worlds of Elijah Ables," *Journal of Mormon History* 58, no. 2 (2013): 203-212.

¹⁴⁵ Only two men to receive the Second Anointing who were not High Priests, an office above Seventy.

¹⁴⁶ D. Michael Quinn, "The Mormon Succession Crisis of 1844," *BYU Studies* 16 (Winter 1976): 187-233.

Rig[don]...they must be ord[ain]ed by the 12...[or] God will have nothing to do with you.”¹⁴⁷

Most Mormons found Young’s argument compelling. They believed Smith’s apostles held the rights to administer the priesthood, which could authorize the performance of baptism, confirmation, and the ordinances introduced in the Nauvoo Temple. The majority of Latter-day Saints followed Young after nearly a year of public and private debates and public orations. Although rumors of multiple women being sealed to men had not been publicly substantiated by Smith, enough Mormons participated in Smith’s liturgy that knowledge of the secret ordinances leaked to the general populace. Nearly 6,000 of the 14,000 Mormons in and around Nauvoo received their endowments before moving westward from Illinois in February 1846. The vast majority of Nauvoo Mormons chose Young over Rigdon by virtue of Young’s claim to priesthood administration which authorized the performance of temple ordinances and bound individuals to households in the eternities.

Sidney Rigdon did not give up without a fight. He tried to persuade influential Mormons to follow him instead of Young by arguing the authority to perform ordinances had been restored by Smith. As a result, individual priesthood holders could perform ordinances without another church leader holding Smith’s prophetic “keys” to the priesthood.¹⁴⁸ Rigdon argued, “it [was] not necessary [sic] to build this Temple...if the Temple is build [sic], the Twelve have no power to administer the endowment.”¹⁴⁹ Rigdon received his endowment in Nauvoo, but never received the sealing ordinance or any other temple ordinances introduced by Smith after 1839.

¹⁴⁷ 8 August 1844 PM minutes in unknown scribe’s hand (General Minutes Collection), cited in Richard S. Van Wagoner, “The Making of a Mormon Myth: The 1844 Transfiguration of Brigham Young,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 28, no. 4 (Winter 1995), 169, footnote 42, 43.

¹⁴⁸ LaJean P. Carruth and Robin S. Jensen, “Sidney Rigdon’s Plea to the Saints: Transcription of Thomas Bullock’s Shorthand Notes from the August 8, 1844, Morning Meeting,” *BYU Studies* 53, no. 2 (2014): 135-136.

¹⁴⁹ Orson Hyde to Brigham Young, 26 September 1844, Brigham Young Incoming Correspondence, Brigham Young Office Files, 1832-1878, Church History Library, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah (hereafter CHL).

In 1845, Apostle Orson Hyde sought to discredit Rigdon as a viable option for church leadership in an address to a group of Mormon High Priests.¹⁵⁰ Hyde's argument followed the logic of Young's argument to the Nauvoo Saints. The keys of the Kingdom and the authorization to perform priesthood ordinances were held by the twelve apostles of the church. Hyde outlined the Mormon belief in a pre-mortal council of all God's children, in which Satan had attempted to overthrow God's plan for human trial and redemption. Lucifer, like Rigdon, attempted to usurp priesthood authority for his own glorification and had been cast out for his disobedience and hubris.¹⁵¹ Hyde proceeded to liken Mormons who could not make up their minds about following Young or Rigdon to those who had been on the fence between choosing between God's and Satan's respective plans for salvation before the world's creation. Hyde declared "those spirits in heaven that ...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." In other words, Hyde stated Africans had been on the fence in choosing God's plan before birth, and had been cursed for their lack of faith with their black skin.

Hyde's argument came only three weeks after apostle John Taylor wrote in the official LDS newspaper that because "Ham had dishonored the holy priesthood," Noah had cursed him and his posterity. As a result of his curse from Noah, Ham received black skin "which has ever been a curse that has followed an apostate of the holy priesthood, as well as a black heart...abolitionists [or those that sought the uplift of the African race] are trying to make void the curse of God, but it will require more power than man possess to counteract the decrees of eternal wisdom." Taylor's *Times and Seasons* article compared Ham to Shem and Japheth

¹⁵⁰ See Orson Hyde, *Speech of Elder Orson Hyde Delivered Before the High Priests Quorum in Nauvoo, April 27th, 1845 upon the Course and Conduct of Mr. Sidney Rigdon, and upon the Merits of his Claims to the Presidency of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Liverpool: James and Woodburn, 1845), 10-11.

¹⁵¹ Hyde, *Speech of Elder Orson Hyde*, 1.

(Noah's other sons), who had light skin, in order to demonstrate they had been blessed for their righteousness. Taylor's comments position Ham outside of Noah's family. Ham was no longer a son, but a "vagabond," literally without a home, to use Smith's description of African peoples in 1836.¹⁵² His children would become servants of servants to his brethren, and would be cut off from the blessings of inclusion in his father's household and the House of Israel.¹⁵³

Hyde's rhetorical demonstration of his position on succession with the curse of dark skin doubled as a theological position. Hyde's address built upon Taylor's ruminations in the LDS newspaper by suggesting non-whites had been cursed from before their birth, not through a connection to Ham or Cain. This is significant for several reasons. Hyde had once queried Joseph Smith about the cursed "situation of the Negro." probably due to his fear that an earlier defection from Mormonism brought upon him the Curse of Cain.¹⁵⁴ Smith responded by saying Africans had "come into the world slaves mentally & phy[s]ically" and if one changed their situation with white men they would behave like white men. Africans possessed the same spiritual, physical, and mental capabilities as whites, had souls and "are subjects of salvation." Hyde replied by stating if Negroes were on his own level they would rise above him. Smith retorted if Hyde had been oppressed his entire life, he too would want to rise above those who oppressed him. Nonetheless, Smith desired to "confine [Negroes] by strict Laws to their own Species [and] put

¹⁵² "History of Joseph Smith (Continued)," *Times and Seasons* (Nauvoo, Illinois), October 1, 1843. The Book of Moses states "the seed of Cain were black, and had not place among them [the seed of Adam]." See "Old Testament Revision 1," *The Joseph Smith Papers*, accessed September 5, 2014, <http://josephsmithpapers.org/paperSummary/old-testament-revision-1?p=17#!/paperSummary/old-testament-revision-1&p=17>.

¹⁵³ John Taylor, "A Short Chapter on a Long Subject," *Times and Seasons* (Nauvoo, IL), April 1, 1845, 857. See also Paul Harvey, "'A Servant of Servants Shall He Be': The Construction of Race in American Religious Mythologies," in Craig Prentiss, ed., *Religion and the Creation of Ethnicity: An Introduction* (New York: New York University Press, 2003), 13-27.

¹⁵⁴ See Newell G. Bringhurst, *Saints, Slaves, and Blacks: The Changing Place of Black People Within Mormonism* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1981), 106.

them on national Equalization.”¹⁵⁵ While Smith wished peoples of African descent to be wholly separated from whites he desired for them to have the ability to govern their own kind, and to hold the same rights as whites. Smith’s notion of confining blacks harmonized with many contemporary plans to fix the “slave problem” by returning slaves to Africa.¹⁵⁶ Hyde’s pronouncements argued against Smith’s statements by suggesting peoples of African descent as incapable of holding priesthood, and thus governing themselves or others, from before birth.

Hyde’s statements to the Nauvoo High Priests suggest the permanent quality of the state of Africans’ blackness due to their wicked roots. Whereas Smith preached peoples of African descent could overcome their curse by conversion to Mormonism, Hyde laid the groundwork for just the opposite. Hyde taught skin color was the inescapable punishment of blacks for choices made before birth whether by their own volition (pre-mortal fence sitting) or made through their relationship to their ancestors (Ham/Cain). Hyde’s interpretation contradicted Smith’s vision for the whitening of the New Israel upon conversion to Mormonism. Smith’s vision for the fluidity of race and the erasure of all divine curses began to erode less than one year after his death.

Apostolic Views of Race, 1847-1849

Brigham Young and his fellow apostles led the Mormon Exodus from Nauvoo in 1846 to Winter Quarters, Nebraska. In 1847, William McCary, a man of African descent, converted to the LDS Church and was probably ordained to the Mormon priesthood during the same year.¹⁵⁷ He married Lucia Stanton, the white daughter of a prominent Mormon—something permissible, but an event that would have raised eyebrows. When McCary joined the Mormons at Winter

¹⁵⁵ “Journal, December 1842–June 1844; Book 1, 21 December 1842–10 March 1843,” *The Joseph Smith Papers*, <http://josephsmithpapers.org/paperSummary/journal-december-1842-june-1844-book-1-21-december-1842-10-march-1843?p=49>.

¹⁵⁶ Colonization was a “liberal” plan to eradicate slavery during the first half of the nineteenth century. See Erskine Clarke, *By the Rivers of Water: A Nineteenth-Century Atlantic Odyssey* (New York: Basic Books, 2013); Claude Andrew Clegg III, *The Price of Liberty: African Americans and the Making of Liberia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004).

¹⁵⁷ Bringhurst, *Saints, Slaves, and Blacks*, 84-85.

Quarters, McCary fabricated a biracial identity and claimed to be half-Native American and half-African. He also proclaimed himself as Jesus Christ and claimed to have received several revelations for the Church. He then proceeded to enter into sexual relationships with women whom he claimed to be sealed to. Brigham Young never gave his permission for McCary to be sealed to other women. As a result, Young charged him with apostasy and excommunicated McCary from the LDS Church.¹⁵⁸

McCary's excommunication opens a window to the racial attitudes of Brigham Young and other Mormon leaders in 1847, when they would have felt unrestrained by the norms of American culture in making their decision. Young declared McCary's expulsion had "nothing to do with" intermarriage "for one blood has God made all flesh."¹⁵⁹ In 1845, Young had performed an interracial marriage, a union between a Native American man and a white woman.¹⁶⁰ The excommunication by Young apparently did not stem from any issue with an African American holding the Mormon priesthood like fellow apostle John Taylor voiced in 1845. Young left the door open for "mulattoes" to participate in LDS temple ordinances.¹⁶¹ McCary's excommunication by Young followed his predecessor's example. Joseph Smith excommunicated church members who claimed to receive binding revelations for the entire church and had excommunicated high-ranking church leaders for performing sealings without

¹⁵⁸ Bringhurst, *Saints, Slaves, and Blacks*, 84-85. Young believed the president of the LDS Church was the only person who could authorize plural marriages or additional sealings. See Brigham Young to William Smith, 9 August 1845, Brigham Young Office Files, CHL; Larry G. Murphy, J. Gordon Melton, and Gary L. Ward ed., *Encyclopedia of African American Religions* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 170.

¹⁵⁹ Brigham Young Papers, March 26, 1847, CHL, quoted in Connell O'Donovan, "The Mormon Priesthood Ban & Elder Q. Walker Lewis: 'An Example for his Whiter Brethren to Follow,'" accessed August 7, 2014, http://people.ucsc.edu/~odonovan/elder_walker_lewis.html.

¹⁶⁰ The fact that the man was a "Lamanite" and thus an Israelite would have been more favorable in Young's eyes than a man of African descent. See D. Michael Quinn, *The Mormon Hierarchy: Origins of Power* (Salt Lake City, Signature Books, 1997), 653.

¹⁶¹ Turner, *Brigham Young*, 222.

his express permission.¹⁶² The fact that Lucia Stanton had not been sealed to McCary is also important. He had only been grafted into Israel through baptism. McCary had not been grafted into the eternal Nucleus of Heaven through the reception of requisite temple ordinances. McCary held priesthood office but was not a member of the priesthood formed by receptors of the temple ordinances.

Although Young insisted McCary had not been excommunicated for his interracial marriage, apostle Parley Parker Pratt declared McCary had the “blood of Ham in him which lineage [sic] was cursed as regards to priesthood.” This probably meant Pratt believed McCary had no claim to ordination or temple rites.¹⁶³ This statement, John Taylor’s article in the *Times and Seasons*, and Orson Hyde’s speech to the Nauvoo High Priest Quorum, demonstrate several of Smith’s apostles did not share his vision for a united human family regardless of race or skin color. Mormons continued to ordain men of African descent to Mormon priesthood office after Smith’s death, but they eventually codified the withholding of the “priesthood” of ordinations and temple ordinances from both male and female Africans. This new doctrine did not align with Joseph Smith’s policies or teachings before his death.

Shortly after the McCary incident, Brigham Young reportedly stated, “the Lamanites r [sic] purely of the house of Israel& it is a curse that is to be removed when the fulness [sic] of the Gospel comes... The Pottawatamies will not own a man who has the negro blood in him - that is the reason why the Indians disown the negro Prophet [McCary].”¹⁶⁴ Young’s statements

¹⁶² It is probable that one of Smith’s brothers and a former counselor to Smith were excommunicated for sealing women to themselves without Joseph Smith or Brigham Young’s consent. See Irene M. Bates, “William Smith, 1811-93: Problematic Patriarch,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 16, no. 2 (Summer 1983): 19; Andrew F. Smith, *The Sainly Scoundrel: The Life and Times of Dr. John Cook Bennett* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1997), 86-90.

¹⁶³ General Minutes, Church Historian's Office. General Church Minutes, 1839–1877, April 25, 1847, LDS Church Archives, as quoted in Bringhamurst, *Saints, Slaves, and Blacks*, 86.

¹⁶⁴ Minutes of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, December 3, 1847, 6, Miscellaneous Minutes, Brigham Young papers, LDS archives, cited from D. Michael Quinn Papers at Yale Beinecke Library, as quoted in

suggest Joseph Smith's belief in the removal of divine curses remained valid in 1847. However, Africans are conspicuously absent from those whom he said would have their curse removed "when the fullness of the Gospel comes." He also argued they would not "own [claim] a man" with Negro blood, implying that as members of the House of Israel, Pottawatamies would not graft outsiders into God's covenant with Israel. This statement reveals Young did not believe in the spiritual reclamation and physical whitening of peoples of African descent through conversion to Mormonism. Young became President of the LDS Church on December 27, 1847, six months after his statement that denied the fluidity of race his prophetic predecessor established before his death.

Young first vocalized his affirmation of Taylor, Hyde, and Pratt as LDS Church president in 1849. In a meeting with church leaders, apostle Lorenzo Snow asked for Young's prophetic opinion on the status of peoples of African descent. Snow asked about the "chance of redemption" for the children of Cain. Young replied:

the curse remained upon them because Cain cut off the lives of Abel to prevent him and his posterity getting the ascendancy over Cain and his generations, and to get the lead himself, his own offering not being accepted of God, while Abel's was. But the Lord had cursed Cain's seed with blackness, and prohibited them from the priesthood, that Abel and his progeny might yet come forward, and have their dominion, place, and blessings in their proper relationship with Cain and his race in the world to come.¹⁶⁵

Young's statement went beyond the biblical narrative of Cain's murder of Abel as a reason for his posterity's divine curse of blackness. He insisted Cain's seed had not only been cursed with blackness, but were to be banned "from the priesthood." Cain had killed Abel to prevent his offspring from living in dominion over Cain's children not only in mortality, but in

O'Donovan, "The Mormon Priesthood Ban & Elder Q. Walker Lewis," http://people.ucsc.edu/~odonovan/elder_walker_lewis.html.

¹⁶⁵ William S. Harwell, ed., *Manuscript History of Brigham Young 1847-1850* (Salt Lake City: Collier's Publishing, 1997), 156 (February 13, 1849).

the eternities. According to Young's logic, Cain cut off Abel from ruling his household by the priesthood, and as a result cut off Abel's would be-descendants from the priesthood. Young firmly stated Abel's household would not lose their place in priesthood power or position in the Nucleus of Heaven, nor lose the blessings of the priesthood which bound them together both in heaven and on earth. They could receive those blessings "in the world to come," not while in mortality.¹⁶⁶

"If There Never was a Prophet or Apostle of Jesus Christ Spoke it Before"

Young's statement banning priesthood ordination and temple rites for men and women of African descent became church policy for more than a century. Young's theological reasoning came in the context of a debate over slavery in Utah's territorial legislature during January-February 1852. Until recently, however, the context in which he offered his theological justifications for excluding peoples of African descent from the House of Israel have not been fully fleshed out.¹⁶⁷ Young desperately wanted the Utah Territory to join the union as a state to gain commensurate representation in the House and Senate. The United States was on the brink of Civil War due to the issue of slavery and the Missouri Compromise dictated a slave state must be admitted to the Union for every state which opposed the institution. Young came out strongly in favor of slavery because he believed Utah had a better chance to be accepted as a state under those conditions. Young lent his weight both as territorial leader and Mormonism's Prophet to ensure the territorial constitution allowed the practice of slavery in pursuit of the privileges of statehood.

¹⁶⁶ Harwell, *Manuscript History of Brigham Young 1847-1850*, 156.

¹⁶⁷ W. Paul Reeve, "If there never was a prophet or Apostle of Jesus Christ spoke it before...": Brigham Young, Race, and the 1852 Territorial Legislature," Presentation at the Annual Meeting of the Mormon History Association, San Antonio, TX, June 5-7, 2014. Copy in author's possession.

The day before Young's pronouncement, one of Young's apostles, Orson Pratt, opposed legal slavery in Utah and delivered an impassioned speech on the legislature floor to that effect. Pratt stated the Saints should not be willing to "bind the African because he is different from us in color." Such a disregard for human life was "enough to cause the angels in heaven to blush." Orson Pratt believed God had cursed Africans, just as Joseph Smith and Brigham Young had previously enumerated. However, Pratt believed abstaining from slavery would "give [Mormons] a greater [moral] influence among the other nations of earth and by that means save them."¹⁶⁸

Young's vitriolic response to Orson Pratt the next day followed the logic he and his apostolic predecessors had established nearly a decade before his speech on the floor of the Utah Territorial legislature. After declaring he did not understand slavery, Young set out the terms of a theological justification for African slavery. He declared "Cain became jealous" of Abel after Adam's banishment from Eden and became jealous of the blessings Abel garnered through "perfect obedience to the Father." Cain proceeded to murder Abel and received "that mark on the face the countenance of every African you ever did see on face of earth." Young informed his audience after cursing Cain, "the Lord told Cain he should not receive the blessings of priesthood until the last of posterity of Abel had received the priesthood until the redemption of earth." Every single member of Abel's posterity would receive the priesthood before a descendant of Cain received the priesthood's blessings, even if that time did not come until after the Second Coming of Christ.

Young proceeded to inform the assembled legislators, "if there never was a prophet or Apostle of Jesus Christ spoke it before I tell you this people that commonly called Negroes are children of Cain[.] I know they are I know they cannot bear rule in priesthood." Cain's Curse had

¹⁶⁸ LaJean Purcell Carruth, "To bind the African because he is different from us in color enough to cause the angels in heaven to blush": Orson Pratt's Opposition to Slavery in the 1852 Territorial Legislature," abstract of presentation at Mormon History Association, June 7, 2014.

passed on to his descendants and would remain with them until the rest of the posterity of Adam received the blessings of the priesthood promised to them through Abel's faithfulness. Abel's descendants would rule the Kingdom of God and hold the keys of the priesthood until God saw fit to wipe Cain's curse "from the earth."¹⁶⁹

Young thundered on, "in [the] kingdom of God on earth a man who has the African blood in him cannot hold one jot nor tittle of priesthood...the Africans cannot hold one particle of power in [church or state] government." Mingling blood with the children of Cain would result in physical death. It was preferable to have one's head removed from their body than mix the seed of blessed and cursed peoples. Young went so far as to say that Asians, whom he believed to be the children of Jews and "Negroes," could "perform all the religious ceremonies any people on earth perform," but because of their co-mingling they had lost their right to the blessings of the priesthood. Young continued to say if anyone believed "the seed of Cain" should partake of "all the blessings" God had extended to the New Israel, it marked that God had removed the priesthood from the Mormon Church. "Indians," however, remained on the same level as whites and could be trusted in church and state matters.¹⁷⁰

In the words of historian Paul Reeve, "Young was clearly setting his own agenda on race, a departure from Smith's earlier positions but also from aspects of other foundational Mormon principles."¹⁷¹ Young's speech affirms what he and other apostles had preached in previous years. Because Africans were children of Cain, they did not have the right to priesthood office or temple ordinances. Young went further with his exegesis of the first biblical fratricide, declaring Cain had murdered Abel out of jealousy for his obedience. By doing so, he attempted to cut off

¹⁶⁹ Brigham Young Speech, 5 February 1852, Papers of George D. Watt, MS 4534 box 1 folder 3, CHL; Transcribed by LaJean Purcell Carruth, corrected 26 February 2014.

¹⁷⁰ Brigham Young Speech, 5 February 1852. Young refused to participate in Indian slavery, although this speech approved of African slavery.

¹⁷¹ Reeve, "If there never was a prophet or Apostle of Jesus Christ spoke it before..." 11.

Abel's posterity from eternal salvation, one of the blessings of the priesthood brought about through Smith's temple liturgy. As a result, Cain would continue to be separated from his eternal family until all of his brother's kin could be sealed into Abel's eternal household. Furthermore, anyone who procreated with Africans would lose the blessings of the priesthood and the birthright of Israel. Mormons should die rather than forfeit Israel's blessings through the Abrahamic covenants entered into through the temple ordinances.¹⁷²

It is absolutely essential to remember Young's remarks centered on Africans, and not those with black skin. Indeed, he declared he had never seen "a white man [or] woman on earth," acknowledging some humans possessed darker skin, but all descended from the children of Adam.¹⁷³ Africans were outsiders to Israel because Cain's sins caused his offspring to lose their covenant status with God. They could not hold priesthood offices, serve in church or state government, or become members of Mormonism's eternal kinship network. Young continued to proselyte among "black-skinned" Pacific Islanders, East Indians, and South Americans, because of their membership in the House of Israel. No such effort was made among Africans because Africans had been cut off from ordination to the Mormon priesthood and inclusion in temple ordinances, although they could still convert to Mormonism.¹⁷⁴ This conclusively proves that the priesthood and temple ban came about as a means of defining the House of Israel and the Nucleus of Heaven rather than the color of a convert's skin. Young effectively put Africans on the level of those who had murdered Mormons and chased them from Missouri, whom Smith's revelation declared "cut off" from the ordinances of the temple.¹⁷⁵ Young drew a fence that allowed only heirs to Israel's birthright to join eternal households and declared that they did not

¹⁷² See Stapley, "Women and Mormon Authority," 7-10.

¹⁷³ Brigham Young Speech, 5 February 1852.

¹⁷⁴ David M. Goldenberg, *The Curse of Ham: Race and Slavery in Early Judaism, Christianity, and Islam* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003), 26-46.

¹⁷⁵ "Letter to the Church and Edward Partridge, 20 March 1839," *The Joseph Smith Papers*.

have the power to overcome the powers of Cain (their supposed progenitors). This “fully enunciated position” rejected Joseph Smith’s teaching that men would be “punished for their own sins” and not anyone else’s sins or misdeeds.¹⁷⁶ Africans could not join eternal households created by the sealing ordinance. This separated Africans from the Nucleus of Heaven along lines of the priesthood, both in terms of ordination and eternal kinship. Young did not preclude Cain’s descendants from being grafted into Israel following all of Abel’s descendants receiving temple ordinances, or from joining the LDS Church. However, the social and spiritual isolation of not being head of an eternal household would have made it difficult for African Americans to stay Mormon for long. By not firmly shutting the door on Africans receiving the privileges of the Mormon priesthood in the eternities, Young could persuade himself he remained true to Smith’s vision of an eternal family of man, unified in their religious beliefs, bound by priesthood ordinances, and universally white in skin color. He did, however, halt the Mormon belief that peoples of African descent could become part of Israel by a racial transfiguration.

Conclusion

Smith’s racial vision from the publishing of the Book of Mormon treated blackness like Deuteronomists treated leprosy. It was a divine curse which could be removed through obedience and personal righteousness. The Mormon prophet had provided a way for non-covenant peoples to enter into the New Israel, and into the Nucleus of Heaven. The seed of Ham/Cain, though outside the House of Israel, could also become heirs to God in Joseph Smith’s eternal household and vision of eternity. Soon after his death, Smith’s apostles mixed his theology with prevailing American racial philosophies, namely the Curse of Ham and the Curse of Cain. They defined peoples of African descent as cursed from before birth for their forefather’s sins. Brigham Young lent his enthusiastic, prophetic approval to John Taylor, Orson Hyde, and Parley Pratt’s

¹⁷⁶ Davidson et al, *Histories, Volume 1*, 500.

theologizing of race and priesthood. In so doing, he affirmed Smith's belief that peoples of African descent were outside the House of Israel. He broke from Smith's tradition by not providing a way for Africans to be grafted into Mormonism's eternal kinship network. Those outside the fenced-in eternal households could not enjoy the privileges of white Israelites in the Nucleus of Heaven. Smith's theology, which opened the spiritual and physical privileges of whiteness to all, had been changed to exclude peoples outside of the House of Israel from the Nucleus of Heaven. Young's pronouncements maintained that Mormons must be born into the House of Israel (be white or a Lamanite) to receive the blessings promised to its members in the eternities before the millennium. Mortal race was no longer fluid, but inflexible. Young's views aligned Mormonism's beliefs with his American contemporaries' notions of permanent white superiority. This barred peoples of African descent from participating in Mormonism's most important rituals, which prevented them from becoming a part of the Nucleus of Heaven.

CHAPTER THREE

“Original People”:

Jim Crow, W.D. Fard, and the Establishment of the Nation of Islam’s Racial Theology

The Nation of Islam rose from the ashes of Reconstruction among the victims of Jim Crow’s strange career. Less than a decade after Brigham Young’s statement on race excluded Africans from the Mormon Nucleus of Heaven, civil war fractured the United States. Americans from the Northern and Southern United States went to war over the right to own Africans as chattel. The Northern United States prevailed and imposed Reconstruction upon the Southern States, which attempted to rebuild the Southern economy without slavery. Northern politicians, or at least those who held their ideologies, gave freed slaves the right to vote, own property, and move throughout the nation in search of economic security. Southern whites chaffed at the newfound political and economic independence of blacks. Many had lost their source of inexpensive labor, slaves of African descent as a result of the Civil War. These former “masters of small worlds,” to borrow Stephanie McCurry’s phrase, resolved to retain their economic and political power over blacks through legislation and mob violence. Government leaders instituted poll taxes, literacy tests, and forced black politicians from office. Groups such as the Ku Klux Klan terrorized the black population in the name of white supremacy. Through these actions, blacks became “re-enslaved” through mob violence and Jim Crow laws.¹⁷⁷

Southerners re-forged their way of life under the philosophy of the “ideal” and “natural” superiority of the white race.¹⁷⁸ Their idealism included the total separation of whites and blacks

¹⁷⁷ Douglas A. Blackmon, *Slavery by Another Name: The Re-Enslavement of Black Americans from the Civil War to World War II* (New York: Anchor, 2009).

¹⁷⁸ Edward J. Blum, *Reforging the White Republic: Race, Religion, and American Nationalism, 1865-1898* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2007).

in public and private venues, codes of conduct for blacks, and the legalized placing of whites at the top of the racial hierarchy. In the words of historian Mae Gnai, Jim Crow “was not so much racial separation, although that was the form, but racial subordination.”¹⁷⁹ In the 1896 case *Plessy v. Ferguson*, the Supreme Court ruled in favor of legal segregation in both private and public venues and businesses. Blacks and whites could legally be separated from each other, so long as the businesses in question provided “equal” facilities, or services for people of color. This, of course, rarely happened. *Plessy v. Ferguson* placed blacks in a legally sanctioned caste system which regarded them as inferior.¹⁸⁰

Plessy v. Ferguson legalized an informal reign of terror, known as Jim Crow, which whites had inflicted upon the black community for decades. In a practice rampant throughout the Southern United States, hundreds of black men would be arrested for crimes such as vagrancy or idleness. After their arrest, they received outrageous fines for their supposed infractions. Local business owners assumed these debts and effectively owned these African Americans until convicts satisfied their debts.¹⁸¹ These practices robbed blacks of the gains they won after the Civil War, which included the right to vote and the right to own property. This “re-enslavement” of American blacks began in the early years of Reconstruction and lasted until federal legislation outlawed discrimination based on race in 1964.

W.D. Fard and Elijah Muhammad’s black power movement began in the ghettos comprised of transplanted black southerners living in Detroit, Michigan. Their organization would grow into a national phenomenon between 1930 and 1965. These religious mavericks

¹⁷⁹ Mae M. Gnai, “Race, Nation and Citizenship in Late Nineteenth-Century America, 1878-1900,” in *Race and Ethnicity in America: A Concise History*, edited by Ronald H. Bayor (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 101.

¹⁸⁰ For the purposes of this paper, black will refer to the American population in secular terms. Black (capital B) will refer to skin color in the context of the Nation of Islam’s racialized religious doctrine. The same will be employed for whites and Whites.

¹⁸¹ Blackmon, *Slavery by Another Name*, 39-58.

introduced African Americans to the notion of their “chosenness,” special favor from Allah in the teachings of their church, called The Lost-Found Nation of Islam in the Wilderness of North America (“Nation of Islam” or “the Nation” for short). The Nation of Islam’s introduction of self-respect for blacks based in religion grew in reaction to black treatment at the hands of white Christians. Many blacks viewed whites who often justified their place at the top of the American racial, economic, and political hierarchies through their religious beliefs. These white Christians emphasized tenets of Christianity that supported their cause, including forgiveness, meekness, and the admonition to turn the other cheek to abusers. This chapter examines the emergence of the Nation of Islam during a transitory time in the legal definitions of race in the United States. Whereas race in the mid-nineteenth century referred to culture, language, and shared kinship, race in the twentieth century became a much more homogenous term for large swaths of the population. The boundaries of “white” and “black” in this period expanded to include skin pigmentation in definitions of a person’s color. Much like Mormonism’s racial definitions ebbed and flowed in opposition or acquiescence to American racial definitions, the Nation of Islam’s beliefs both agreed with and cut against American definitions of race. This chapter demonstrates how the Nation of Islam grew in response to white hatred and disavowed any association with or aspiration to whiteness. Fard and Muhammad offered their followers both an outright rejection of whiteness and a new belief system that celebrated their blackness as a God-given right to pre-eminence in the world. Ironically, they took the same tack as their white counterparts did, in response to declaring skin color as a characteristic of godliness and used their beliefs to justify racialism, and at times, violence. Through an examination of the twentieth century United States’ racial milieu, I contextualize W.D. Fard and Elijah Muhammad’s cosmological myth known as the story of the “Original Man” or “Yacub’s History” as evidence of this radical new context for

blackness in America. Chapters three and four demonstrate that new American religions in the twentieth century created religious definitions using racial terminology. This shows that, just as adherents to Mormonism did in the nineteenth century, the Nation of Islam used racial language to police religious boundaries and maintain religious identity. Ultimately, like Mormonism, the Nation of Islam used racialized religious language to both unite and divide the favored from the unfavored of deity.

Prelude to Prophethood: The Racial World of a Young Elijah Muhammad

In 1897, William and Mariah Poole welcomed a son, Elijah, as the seventh of their thirteen children. They made their living as sharecroppers in central Georgia.¹⁸² The future Elijah Muhammad, leader of the Nation of Islam, grew up in a home supported not only by sharecropping but also by his father's Baptist preaching. The elder Poole did the best he could to keep food on the table, but could do nothing to protect his children from the tyranny of racial violence in the Southern United States. Only forty miles from Poole's ancestral home in Macon, Georgia, the state charged the owners of the "Kinderlou Slave Farm" for impressing servitude upon dozens of black convict laborers. At Kinderlou, white estate owners tortured, kidnapped and imprisoned blacks in order to exploit their labor against their will.¹⁸³ In addition to holding the power to impress involuntary servitude, whites controlled the power of the mob, and used that power to punish blacks who transgressed formal and informal boundaries of race relations. Between 1882 and 1930, blacks comprised 95 percent of the 450 recorded lynching victims in

¹⁸² "Elijah Muhammad," *Federal Bureau of Investigation*, accessed August 14, 2014, <http://webharvest.gov/peth04/20041018074553/http://foia.fbi.gov/muhammad/muhammad1.pdf>, 1:10 (Collection 1, page 10); "Elijah Muhammad Dead; Black Muslim Leader, 77," *New York Times* (New York City, New York), February 26, 1975, accessed September 22, 2014, <http://www.nytimes.com/learning/general/onthisday/bday/1007.html>.

¹⁸³ Blackmon, *Slavery by Another Name*, 249-252.

the South.¹⁸⁴ On average, every four days in the years from 1889-1929, Southerners murdered one of their citizens through mob violence.¹⁸⁵ The American South of Poole's childhood could accurately be described as a racial war zone. In the words of historian Douglas Blackmon, "the poisoned atmosphere and accelerating disintegration of the structure of civil society" haunted the early twentieth-century South. Indeed, the South at this time "more resembled to blacks a time two centuries earlier...[between 1903-1943] no black person outside the explicit protection of whites could feel fully secure."¹⁸⁶

At this time, and throughout American history, science and scripture provided the logical foundations of racial inferiority. Thomas Jefferson, representative of white slaveholders and government leaders in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, wrote and believed the Anglo-Saxon race was superior to all others from a cultural, intellectual, sexual, and biological standpoint. From the early 1830s to the middle of the nineteenth century, American and European scholars had classified various "races" or ethnicities as inherently inferior to whites by virtue of the scientific evidence accepted at the time.¹⁸⁷ This evidence included facial structure, head size, and the presumed mental deficiency of non-whites. To these early anthropologists and scholars of human anatomy, race was a biological category. Early Mormonism, as discussed in the previous chapter, arose in this milieu. While conceptions of race ebbed, flowed, and slowly adjusted over the nineteenth century, blacks remained inferior to whites on whatever standard individuals and groups used to measure racial traits and value.

¹⁸⁴ See E.M. Beck, "Lynching," *New Georgia Encyclopedia*, accessed August 14, 2014, <http://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/articles/history-archaeology/lynching>.

¹⁸⁵ African Americans were disproportionately victims of these crimes. Arthur F. Raper, *The Tragedy of Lynching* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1933), 36. Quoted in Isabel Wilkerson, *The Warmth of Other Suns: The Epic Story of America's Great Migration* (New York: Vintage, 2009), 39.

¹⁸⁶ Blackmon, *Slavery by Another Name*, 234.

¹⁸⁷ For a complete overview of the monogenesis versus polygenesis debate on both sides of the Atlantic, particularly as it relates to religion, see Colin Kidd, *The Forging of Races: Race and Scripture in the Protestant Atlantic World, 1600-2000* (Cambridge, UK: University of Cambridge Press, 2006), 121-167.

Most whites believed peoples of African descent were created not in *imago dei* but in the mold of and with the minds and passions of animals. Through this exegesis, American whites had divine right and moral responsibility to hold dominion over African brutes. Whites could justify harsh treatment, slavery, and racism, because they believed God favored whites above all other races and that He had decreed blacks to be worthy of nothing more than servitude.¹⁸⁸ Elijah Muhammad grew up hearing the biblical justification for slavery and black servitude taught by his Baptist father from the Bible. Christian theology fed upon Old Testament scripture which justified servitude based on racial lineage. Poole and other black Christian transplants from the South had familiarity with these teachings and their role in creating racial hierarchies in American society. By 1914, the Supreme Court defined race as:

An ethnical stock...having in common certain distinguishing physical peculiarities, and this constituting a comprehensive class appearing to be derived from a distinct primitive source. A second definition is a tribal or national stock; a division or subdivision of one of the great racial stocks on mankind, distinguished by minor peculiarities. The word "race" connotes descent.¹⁸⁹

Because of the racial climate of the American South, Elijah Poole left Georgia for Detroit in April 1923 as a part of America's Great Migration. He joined thousands of Detroit residents who hailed from Tennessee, Georgia, and Alabama as they moved North.¹⁹⁰ Hundreds of thousands of other blacks during the same time period from the rural South escaped to northern metropolises "to transplant in alien soil, to see if [they] could grow...respond to the warmth of

¹⁸⁸ Paul Harvey, "'A Servant of Servants Shall He Be': The Construction of Race in American Religious Mythologies," in Craig Prentiss, ed., *Religion and the Creation of Ethnicity: An Introduction* (New York: New York University Press, 2003), 13-27.

¹⁸⁹ *Judicial and Statutory Definitions of Words and Phrases, Second Series: Public-Zinc*, "Race," (St. Paul, West Publishing Company, 1914), 94.

¹⁹⁰ A train and bus route provided a direct route between Georgia and Detroit. See Wilkerson, *The Warmth of Other Suns*, 178; Beth Tompkins, *The Making of Black Detroit in the Age of Henry Ford* (Raleigh: University of North Carolina Press, 2014), 22-25.

other suns, and perhaps, to bloom.”¹⁹¹ The warmth of other suns included higher pay and a safer environment to raise children. Industrialists such as Henry Ford “hired thousands of African American men to work,” a decision which gave black men hope they could feed their families and discard the shackles of economic dependency placed upon them by sharecropping landlords.¹⁹² The recently concluded World War I opened up thousands of jobs for African Americans. By the time Poole arrived in Detroit, United States immigration policy had significantly reduced the number of foreign-born workers who could enter the American workforce. Blacks would work for less money than whites and filled the vacuum of cheap labor caused by the reduced numbers of European immigrants legally permitted to enter the United States.¹⁹³ The jobs now available to blacks led to a widespread exodus from South to North which permanently altered the “racial geography of the country.”¹⁹⁴

These transplanted African American families formed communities and banded together in solidarity. Blacks could not join unions but often found strength in religious organizations. Groups such as the Moorish Science Temple of America, led by Timothy “Noble Drew Ali”, drew inspiration from eastern religions, Rosicrucianism, “Egyptian Mystery Schools,” and Christianity, but defined the Moorish Temple’s doctrine as a derivative of Islam.¹⁹⁵ Drew took pieces of this diverse array of religious backgrounds to create a piecemeal religion that promised to “bring about personal transformation through mystical knowledge of the divine within.” Ali delivered sermons centered on racial pride and uplift for African Americans, whom he classified

¹⁹¹ Richard Wright, *Black Boy: A Record of Childhood and Youth* (New York: HarperCollins, 2007), 414.

¹⁹² Tompkins, *The Making of Black Detroit*, 2. Ford provided employment to blacks as part of what he believed to be the “duty” of the superior, white race. (4)

¹⁹³ For an examination of how Catholicism defined race, see Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race* (Cambridge, MA: University of Harvard Press, 1999), 69-70.

¹⁹⁴ Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, “The Long Civil Rights Movement and the Political Uses of the Past,” *Journal of American History* 91, no. 4 (Spring 2005): 1239.

¹⁹⁵ Susan Nance, “Mystery of the Moorish Science Temple: Southern Blacks and American Alternative Spirituality in 1920s Chicago,” *Religion and American Culture* 12, no. 2 (Summer 2002): 127-134.

as Asiatics, descended from the Muslim Moors of North Africa. Because his audiences were Moors, Asiatic and not African or black, Drew defined the terms “colored,” “black” and “Negro” as inappropriate for African Americans.¹⁹⁶ Ali desired the return of all blacks to Africa. He taught from the “Circle Seven Koran,” a hybrid of Christian and Rosicrucian texts that detailed supposed adult ministries of Jesus of Nazareth to India and Egypt.¹⁹⁷ W.D. Fard, the first leader of the Nation of Islam, drew tenets of his theology from Noble Drew Ali’s teachings and account of the history of the black race.¹⁹⁸

Noble Drew Ali’s theology was influenced by another young black revolutionary named Marcus Garvey (who was referred to as a John the Baptist type figure to Ali’s Jesus of Nazareth). Garvey advocated for American blacks to relocate to Africa in order to remove the colonial powers of their ancestor’s homeland. Garvey and his United Negro Improvement Association also desired the autonomy of all blacks, and promoted means which led to economic independence, including the ownership of restaurants, grocery stores, and the creation of other black-owned businesses to keep black money in black communities.¹⁹⁹ Although his call to return to Africa was never taken seriously by the Nation of Islam’s leaders, Garvey’s calls for self-sufficiency and the removal of American blacks from white society became pillars in the Nation’s belief system. Historian Herbert Berg has tied Ali’s desire “to return to Africa,

¹⁹⁶ “Nick Named,” *Moorish Guide*, 26 October 1928, quoted in Emily Suzanna Clark, “Noble Drew Ali’s ‘Clean and Pure Nation,’ The Moorish Science Temple, Identity, and Healing,” *Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions* 16, no. 3, 34.

¹⁹⁷ Nance, “Mystery of the Moorish Science Temple,” 127-34.

¹⁹⁸ Herbert Berg, “Mythmaking in the African American Muslim Context: The Moorish Science Temple, the Nation of Islam, and the American Society of Muslims,” *Journal of The American Academy of Religion* 73, no. 3: 687-688; 694-695.

¹⁹⁹ “Marcus Garvey,” *Encyclopedia Britannica*, accessed August 14, 2014, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/226276/Marcus-Garvey>.

spiritually and mentally” to Garvey’s vision for black religious and political autonomy. These desires are clearly exhibited in Fard and Poole’s theology.²⁰⁰

Definitions of Whiteness and Blackness

Shortly before the formation of the Nation of Islam, during the height of Ali and Garvey’s influence, the United States Supreme Court set out a legal definition of “whiteness.” The 1906 Naturalization Act allowed for Europeans and peoples of African descent to attain American citizenship but did not speak to the status of Asian individuals.²⁰¹ To answer this question, in 1920 a Japanese man who had lived in the United States for more than twenty years, Takao Ozawa, sued for the inclusion of the Japanese under the legal umbrella of “whiteness.” The Supreme Court’s 1922 decision to reject Ozawa’s petition cited the definition of “white” in the American 1790 Naturalization Clause. The Supreme Court argued that since the founding fathers did not include Asians under the banner of white, Ozawa could not claim to be white. The Supreme Court cited another decision from 1914 which declared whiteness could not be defined as “synonymous with the words ‘a person of the Caucasian race,’” since Caucasians could possess skin across the color spectrum.²⁰² Ozawa could not be white because the Supreme Court justices’ interpretation of the 1790 statute, which they took to mean only Europeans could be white. The Supreme Court did not know what “white” meant exactly, but they knew Ozawa was

²⁰⁰ Berg, "Mythmaking in the African American Muslim Context," 697; Jamie J. Wilson, "Come Down off the Cross and Get Under the Crescent": The Newspaper Columns of Elijah Muhammad and Malcolm X," *Biography* 36, no. 3 (Summer 2013): 497.

²⁰¹ "An Act to Establish a Bureau of Immigration and Naturalization and to Provide for a Uniform Rule for the Naturalization of Aliens Throughout the United States. Approved June 29, 1906," *The American Journal of International Law* 1 no. 1, (1907): 31-47.

²⁰² See "Ex Parte Shahid, (E/D/ S/C/ 1913) 205 Fed. 812," in William M. McKinley, ed., *The Federal Statutes Annotated* (New York: Edward Thompson Company, 1914), 742. The Supreme Court cited Ex Parte Shahid in the *Ozawa* decision.

not whatever “white” was. The Supreme Court later ruled an Indian, Bhagat Singh Thind, was not “white” by the same logic and legal precedent three months later.²⁰³

The *Ozawa* decision had an important if unintended consequence for American definitions of whiteness. The *Ozawa* decision expanded the definition of whiteness to include skin color, and as a result, whiteness became much more homogenous. As a result, more ethnic groups received the privileges of whiteness. At the same time, non-whiteness assumed a much more homogenous form.²⁰⁴ Blacks had been defined broadly as “black” regardless of genetic background for centuries, but now all people of color (blacks, American Indians, Latino/as) could conceivably be grouped together as a single group. The 1922 *Ozawa* decision made a monolith of both whiteness and blackness. When W.D. Fard introduced his doctrine of creation, he included only two racial groups, black and white, Asiatic or pale mutant devil, which reflected the *Ozawa* decision.

W.D. Fard: Historian of the Tribe of Shabazz, Allah Incarnate

Elijah Poole’s Detroit provided greater opportunities for blacks to obtain jobs than did the American South. Henry Ford, among other car manufacturers, provided thousands of jobs to blacks. Poole himself worked for Chevrolet Axle for six years, but lost his job in the enormous layoffs of the Great Depression, brought on by the Market Crash of 1929. By 1930, Detroit had the highest level of unemployment of any American metropolis, over fifty percent.²⁰⁵ Blacks lost their jobs in record numbers and many could not provide food and shelter for their families, a state of affairs eerily similar to the economic climate they thought they had fled in the American

²⁰³ Supreme Court decision given in full in Ian Haney Lopez, *White by Law: The Legal Construction of Race* (New York: New York University Press, 2006), 177-179. Lopez’s analysis of the decision is found on pages 35-56. See also Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race* (Cambridge, MA: University of Harvard Press, 1999), 223-245.

²⁰⁴ Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color*, 223-245.

²⁰⁵ “Wallace D. Fard,” *Federal Bureau of Investigation*, accessed August 19, 2014, <http://webharvest.gov/peth04/20041019050148/http://foia.fbi.gov/fard/fard1.pdf>, (hereafter “Wallace D. Fard,”), 1:34; Tompkins, *The Making of Black Detroit*, 120.

South. In the midst of the hopelessness of the Depression, Detroit possessed “a climate very conducive to the nurturing of young radicals.”²⁰⁶ In this context, W.D. Fard arrived in Detroit to gather the “lost-found members of the Tribe of Shabazz.”²⁰⁷

Much of Fard’s life defies any attempt to establish a definite chronology or geographic certainty before 1930 or after 1934. Fard’s birth certificate declared Los Angeles his hometown, although he moved frequently throughout his life.²⁰⁸ He certainly served a stint in San Quentin Prison in 1926.²⁰⁹ After his prison term in California, he made his way to Chicago, where he came into contact with Garveyism and the Moorish Science Temple of America. After his sojourn in Chicago, Fard journeyed north to Detroit, where he began to garner a following and claimed to be a minister or prophet while he peddled goods door to door. Fard informed blacks they were the “chosen people,” not Hebrews or whites. This followed a theme within the African American community prevalent since Reconstruction (and followed white’s beliefs in their membership in the House of Israel).²¹⁰ The Nation of Islam’s leader did not associate blacks with Israel, whom Mormons claimed to be descendants from. Instead, he taught blacks that Allah created them in His image. In addition to his incorporation of the teachings of the Moorish Science Temple and Garveyism, Fard introduced what he called the “true” history of the Black Man. This history, often referred to as Yacub’s History, served as both creation myth and cosmological explication for the Nation of Islam under Fard and his successor, Elijah Poole (Muhammad).

²⁰⁶ Tompkins, *The Making of Black Detroit*, 172.

²⁰⁷ Erdmann Doane Beynon, “Voodoo Cult Among Negro Migrants in Detroit,” *American Journal of Sociology* 43, no. 6 (May 1938): 900.

²⁰⁸ “Wallace D. Fard,” 1:2.

²⁰⁹ “Wallace D. Fard,” 1:4.

²¹⁰ For a complete treatment of the notion of Black Israelitism/Hebrewism, see Jacob S. Dorman, *Chosen People: Their Rise of American Black Israelite Religions* (New York, Oxford University Press, 2013). Chapter 1 of this thesis explores how Mormonism fell into the belief of British Israelitism. See Armand Mauss, *All Abraham’s Children: Changing Mormon Conceptions of Race and Lineage* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003), 17-40.

Fard's religious teachings always came back to the chosenness of the black race. In the words of the pioneer scholar of black Muslims, C. Eric Lincoln, the Nation of Islam's religious basis is "the fundamental premise...[of Fard's] theory of black supremacy and white degradation."²¹¹ Fard's myth began with the story of God's Original Race the Tribe of Shabazz, who governed their people by Allah's teachings, Islam. Eventually, an evil scientist named Yacub discovered he had elements of "brownness" in his genetic structure—he was not purely black. Yacub eventually established a colony at Patmos, where he worked to genetically engineer an entirely brown race through his exploitation of recessive gene structures and liberal use of birth control and infanticide. Eventually, Yacub "grafted" his racially engineered creations into complete whiteness. They lost all their dark pigmentation and lost all godliness that existed through the Black Man's ontological connection to Allah's blackness.²¹² All who did not have their Blackness grafted out remained Black; all those who did became White. This Black/White binary meant, in Fard's eyes, Native Americans, Asians, and Latinos/as could trace their lineage to the Asiatics, the Original People.

The white mutants of Fard's history lost the achievements of black civilization, waged war on the Black Man, and inhabited the "caves of Europe," where their pale skin and blue eyes signified their status as "devils."²¹³ Unfortunately for the Black Man, the spiritual leaders of the Black Nation foretold the White Man's enslavement of the Black Man for a period of six thousand years.²¹⁴ Slavery was a test from Allah designed to try His people and their faith in Him and Islam. Slavery eventually brainwashed the Black Man, wherein he forgot his proud heritage

²¹¹ C. Eric Lincoln, *The Black Muslims in America*, 3rd Edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1994), 72.

²¹² Because the manuals Fard produced are largely unavailable, I will rely on the FBI's reproduction of two pamphlets found in Elijah Muhammad's home following his arrest for draft dodging in 1942. Although I cannot be sure they are the pamphlets, they match the question and answer format and direct quotations from several books on the Nation of Islam. See "Wallace D. Fard," 1:110-126.

²¹³ "Wallace D. Fard," 1:113-114.

²¹⁴ "Wallace D. Fard," 1:125.

in Black Civilization and Allah. This “Lost Nation” could only be found through a return to Islam and the renunciation of Christianity, “the religion of the white race.”²¹⁵ The Tribe of Shabazz’s spiritual leaders also prophesied an end to the subjection of the Black Man to their White counterparts. Finally, Fard’s narrative foretold a reversal of the racial order by Allah through the deployment of a plethora of airplanes of Japanese origin. These planes would all carry explosives that caused injury and death only to the white population and spare the black population. After this apocalyptic episode, the Black Man would once again become a unified religious body and be ruled by Allah’s religion, and legal code, Islam.²¹⁶ In preparation for the day in which Blacks would rule over Whites, Fard’s message and mission to find and convert the Lost Nation of Islam meant undoing the brainwashing of blacks from their historical and religious traditions.

Fard’s unorthodox version of human history blended Black Hebrewism, racial science, and Bible-esque tales of the rise, fall, and eventual apocalypse (none of Fard’s myth refers to the Bible, although it mentions Moses and Jesus).²¹⁷ Fard’s theological cocktail of black supremacy and Islam refuted whites’ claims to racial and religious superiority and held obvious appeal to African Americans in northern metropolises like Detroit. The majority of the city’s black population had left the South because of the murderous racial milieu only to find a similar, second-class status in the North during the Great Depression. Contrary to the naturally inferior status below whites which they had been taught all their lives, Fard taught blacks they were of the Original Race, the “Tribe of Shabazz,” a “chosen” people personally guided, taught and

²¹⁵ Berg, "Mythmaking in the African American Muslim Context," 22.

²¹⁶ See Claude Andrew Clegg, *An Original Man: The Life and Times of Elijah Muhammad* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998), 61-65.

²¹⁷ Chapter Four will focus on Fard’s myth, Elijah Muhammad’s expansion on the myth, and how the Nation of Islam came to employ the myth of the Tribe of Shabazz to draw boundaries between Muslims, Black Christians, and whites. That explication will offer many more details to the myth along with analysis of the myth itself. This section merely seeks to place elements of the myth within historical context.

favored by Allah. Allah cared for Shabazzians personally; they shared an ontological connection with Him through their shared Blackness. He provided Islam, which allowed the Black Nation to flourish as a civilization for trillions of years. Whites in turn became mutants, a degraded version of the Black Man, with their godliness “grafted” out of them by the experiments of a mad scientist.²¹⁸ Allah had chosen them because of their Blackness, and through a Black Allah members of the Nation of Islam gained a sense of racial pride. Fard’s doctrine gave many of his converts racial confidence, which they and their ancestors had lost after enslavement by Americans and Europeans. Blacks, according to the Nation, who did not recognize the promise of Fard’s theology still lived under the delusions of their brainwashing. The promised overthrow of the white status quo drew on the eschatology of black slave religion, “in which the slaves fulfilled their desire that whites suffer just retribution for their brutality toward those they held in bondage.”²¹⁹

The conflation of scientific racism and religion had been present since the early American republic. Just as Joseph Smith and Brigham Young’s definitions of race emerged during the monogenesis vs. polygenesis debates, W.D. Fard’s Nation of Islam similarly arose in the midst of racial arguments over pseudo-scientific race ranking. The American eugenics movement had gained steam throughout the 1920s, which argued for “race purity” and “evidence”-based superiority of the white race and the unchangeable inferiority of non-whites.²²⁰ In a fascinating turn of events, eugenicists continued on in a form of the monogenesis vs.

²¹⁸ “Wallace D. Fard,” 1:116 and 1:121; Clegg III, *An Original Man*, 49.

²¹⁹ Michael Lieb, *Children of Ezekiel: Aliens, UFOs, the Crisis of Race, and the Advent of End Time* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998), 148; For a full account of slave eschatology, see the sixth chapter of Albert Raboteau, *Slave Religion: The “Invisible Institution” in the Antebellum South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 289-319.

²²⁰ See Peggy Pascoe, “Miscegenation Law, Court Cases, and Ideologies of ‘Race’ in Twentieth-Century America,” *The Journal of American History* 83, no. 1 (June 1996): 44-69; Marouf Arif Hasian, *The Rhetoric of Eugenics in Anglo-American Thought*, (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1996); Christine Rosen, *Preaching Eugenics: Religious Leaders and the American Eugenics Movement* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).

polygenesis debates: Which race was superior? How could the white race's superiority be proved? Eugenicists argued because whites wielded economic and political clout and produced the majority of the great works in science and the humanities, whites must be naturally superior to people of color. To explain the inferiority of non-whites, many scientists defined people of color as less than human, which took the same tack as nineteenth-century anthropologists and theologians. For instance, the Scottsboro Trial witnessed nine black boys and teenagers arrested for sexual assault of two white teenagers in Alabama in 1931. Although the boys had witnesses which placed them far away from the women at the time of the alleged sexual assault, eight of the nine young men received death sentences and all received guilty verdicts. Eight of the nine decisions were overturned on appeal, but the episodes revealed white willingness to classify blacks as naturally sexually aggressive, lazy, dishonest, and disposed to inhuman savagery.²²¹

Eugenicists did not frame their arguments against blacks as subhuman in the theory of polygenesis, which would have been political suicide in the decade after the Scopes Trial. Instead, they claimed blacks perpetuated an inferior gene pool—generations of subhuman blacks had perpetuated future generations of biologically inferior children. These scientifically trained white supremacists suggested and provided evidence blacks bred (for want of a better term) as inferior beings and in turn produced inferior beings as offspring. While eugenicists targeted other groups, such as Jews, the mentally handicapped, and homosexuals, African Americans became the targets of scientific theorizing concerning their own natural inferiority.

Fard's myth turned the eugenic science on its head—he taught his followers that whites descended from corrupt, demonic blacks who had lost all godliness and praiseworthiness from the once black, now white, population. Grafting also caused whites to possess weak bones, weak

²²¹ See Dan T. Carter, *Scottsboro: A Tragedy of the American South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2007).

blood, weak muscles, and a brain that only functioned at 80 percent capacity of the Black Man's. Fard's myth also ensured whites could not become a part of the "Lost Nation" to which their ancestors had belonged. Because it took six hundred years for a white devil to be "grafted" back to his original blackness, Fard informed his followers the White Man had to be taken "off the planet" rather than returned to Blackness.²²² Whites could not find salvation through membership in the Lost (but now) Found Nation of Islam because there was not enough time for them to be returned to their black heritage before Armageddon.²²³ Whites would be destroyed because they could not regain their black pigmentation before the apocalypse.²²⁴ In this way, Yacub's History reflected racial definitions at the time—humans could be either white or "other." Whereas white Americans used these homogenous terms to exclude non-whites from their privileges, Fard employed the large population of non-whites to build solidarity across all non-white peoples. Whereas Mormonism initially viewed whiteness and race as fluid, where non-whites could be "grafted" into Israel and into whiteness, the Nation of Islam defined race as inflexible. It could not be changed through conscious action on the part of an individual.

Perhaps most important to the growth of his nascent religion, Fard's religious language resonated with black Christians. In the early twentieth century, 75% of American blacks claimed the Baptist faith as their primary religious affiliation.²²⁵ The Christians who heard Fard's message in cottage meetings or from converts could identify Christian motifs in the Nation of Islam's distinctive account of Creation. Events like the formation of the Tribe of Shabazz (Creation), the appearance of Moses and Noah, the persecution of believers (the Book of Acts),

²²² "Wallace D. Fard," "Wallace D. Fard," 1:124.

²²³ Early Mormons had a very different idea of grafting. They believed in grafting someone into the House of Israel, rather than a race being created through a graft, or small live portion of a plant, to create a new tree. See Chapters One and Two of this thesis.

²²⁴ Mormons, as seen in Chapters One and Two, initially viewed whiteness as something that could be gained and then whiteness became inelastic as time went on.

²²⁵ Richard Brent Turner, *Islam in the African-American Experience* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1997), 49.

and the apocalypse (the Christian eschaton) could be recognized by the biblically literate. The Nation of Islam employed Yacub's History in a way so that potential converts from Christianity could understand the Nation's narrative more clearly.

“Voodoo Cult”

The racial atmosphere of the Motor City provided an ideal incubator for the Nation of Islam and its mysterious prophet. African Americans in the early stages of the Great Depression faced a grim reality of joblessness and hopelessness all too familiar to them, their parents, and grandparents. As sociologist Joe Feagin described this time period, “the sustained exploitation of black Americans for centuries had created in the United States a hierarchical structure of racial classes with whites firmly at the top.”²²⁶ Blacks had left the South for the dream of better wages and living conditions but never gained a high enough position in the racial hierarchy to protect their families from white exploitation.²²⁷ The dream of financial and social security abruptly come to an end with the onset of the Great Depression, when once again blacks witnessed white men protecting white men and white interests through firing African Americans. Fard's founding of the Lost-Found Nation of Islam in this setting has been viewed as a scam perpetrated amongst the black population of Detroit in the midst of their despair. Fard's run-ins with the law and the financial assistance he received from converts certainly support this conclusion.²²⁸ This explanation, although plausible, is too simplistic and underestimates the allure of a religion which celebrated the strength of blacks, white inferiority, and the violent reversal of the racial order. Blacks had long been the victims of white slave masters, white landlords, and white business owners who took advantage of their financial capital, their control of law enforcement,

²²⁶ Joe R. Feagin, *The White Racial Frame: Centuries of Racial Framing and Counter-Framing* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 174-175.

²²⁷ Feagin, *The White Racial Frame*, 174.

²²⁸ “Wallace D. Fard,” 1:4; Clegg III, *An Original Man*, 34.

and the power of the lynch mob to maintain the racial status quo. A 1938 study of early Nation of Islam members demonstrates Fard's converts became "more conscious of race discrimination on the part of Caucasians" than their fellow American blacks. Nation of Islam converts realized their former slave masters and the current lynch mobs "worshiped the same God...in the same way" as black Christians.²²⁹ As Kelly Baker has demonstrated, the Ku Klux Klan appealed to Protestant America throughout the 1920s—white racism and Christianity had formed and maintained a partnership since early Virginia. The subjugation of black Christians by their white counterparts turned many American blacks away from Christianity. While all Christianity did not celebrate white supremacy, all Americans felt the impact of race and religion's entangled relationship.²³⁰ As one convert wrote, "me and my people who have been lost from home [through slavery] for 379 years have tried this so-called mystery God for bread, clothing, and a home. And we received nothing but hard times, hunger, naked and out of doors." The convert also testified blacks were "beat and killed by fellow Christians."²³¹ For disaffected blacks, Fard offered a new way of life, including a strict dietary code, abstinence from alcohol and "stimulants," and a new name. The new name, an "original" name, replaced the white surname of their former masters. For a fee of ten dollars, converts could shed their "slave" names and connect with their strong, noble ancestors who ruled the world before white devils enslaved and brainwashed them. Converts could attend classes at the University of Islam on astronomy, math, history, and the Qur'an.²³² Through the Nation of Islam, blacks could identify with a Black deity.

²²⁹ Erdmann Doane Beynon, "The Voodoo Cult Among Negro Migrants in Detroit," *American Journal of Sociology* 43, no. 6 (1938): 898.

²³⁰ Kelly J. Baker, *Gospel According to the Klan: The KKK's Appeal to Protestant America, 1915-1930* (Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas Press, 2011); Rebecca Anne Goetz, *The Baptism of Early Virginia: How Christianity Created Race* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012).

²³¹ Beynon, "The Voodoo Cult," 898.

²³² Beynon, "The Voodoo Cult," 901,

Perhaps more importantly, Fard and Muhammad's racial myth celebrated blackness and "proposed a radical alternative which promised to end or even reverse current injustices."²³³

The Nation of Islam did not escape the attention of law enforcement for long. Local police began to keep tabs on Fard's newfound "Voodoo Cult," which had more than 8,000 members by 1934.²³⁴ Of those 8,000 members of the Nation of Islam, Elijah Poole, now Elijah Muhammad, became the most important. He became a devoted disciple from the time of his conversion in August 1931. After his conversion, Muhammad approached Fard and asked if Fard was Allah. Fard confided to his disciple he was the incarnated Allah, in a manner similar to how Christians believe Jesus Christ to be God the Father incarnate.²³⁵ Muhammad received Fard's secret with joy and worked for the remainder of his life to seek out and convert lost members of Shabazz's Tribe to the Nation of Islam.

W.D. Fard disappeared from the historical record in 1934, immediately after an arrest in Detroit. Fard struck a deal with Detroit police that exiled him to Chicago in lieu of jail time. Whether Fard went to Chicago or elsewhere, Elijah Muhammad claimed Fard had anointed him prior to his departure as his "Messenger" to the world and assumed control over the Nation of Islam. Muhammad then told the world W.D. Fard was Allah incarnate and he, Elijah Muhammad, was his Messenger.

Blacks in the New Deal and World War II

The Nation of Islam's religious mission kicked hard against the political ideals and mission of Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal. Roosevelt's program to invigorate the national economy, and the economic architects who constructed the programs which comprised the New

²³³ Berg, "Mythmaking in the African American Muslim Context," 701.

²³⁴ Beynon, "The Voodoo Cult," 897.

²³⁵ Clegg, *An Original Man*, 22-23.

Deal, often included African Americans in their plans or on their committees.²³⁶ Historian Lauren Rebecca Sklaroff has argued the New Deal fought for interracial equality and for the betterment of all Americans regardless of color.²³⁷ Unfortunately for African Americans and other racial minorities, Roosevelt's New Deal was far more committed to keeping the Democratic Party in office rather than racial egalitarianism. The President did not take strong public stands for racial equality, although some have argued his wife, Eleanor, took on the cause of racial equality on his behalf (so as not to lose the votes of the South).²³⁸ Roosevelt, his cabinet, and his advisors should not receive all the blame for the New Deal's failure to fully address the needs of African Americans. Blacks rarely held the power to control their economic destiny through business ownership or possessing controlling investments in corporations. As a result, blacks lived disproportionately in poverty in relation to the nation as a whole. Blacks relied on white employers and government programs controlled by whites for jobs—they could not control what money or jobs would be available to them through government programs. The blacks in the South had even less control over their economic lives, despite the efforts of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and other groups that sought racial equality.²³⁹ The Roosevelt Administration could not persuade white business owners and small-town governments run by whites to offer jobs to blacks when so many white men could not feed their families.²⁴⁰ Furthermore, unions did not admit blacks into their ranks,

²³⁶ John B. Kirby, *Black Americans in Roosevelt Era: Liberalism and Race* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1982), 106-110.

²³⁷ Lauren Rebecca Sklaroff, *Black Culture and the New Deal: The Quest for Civil Rights in the Roosevelt Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 23-25.

²³⁸ Sklaroff, *Black Culture and the New Deal*, 1; Kirby, *Blacks in the Roosevelt Era*, 76-78.

²³⁹ Kirby, *Blacks in the Roosevelt Era*, 222-223.

²⁴⁰ The New Deal combated this idea by focusing on class equality. See Kirby, *Blacks in the Roosevelt Era*, 56-62.

and as a result, blacks “gained little” in labor’s victories in the 1930s.²⁴¹ The economic lot of blacks slowly improved, but not nearly at the rate of whites during the same period.

The New Deal’s programs reinforced the Nation of Islam’s views on the need for separation from whites in the present and a radical racial overthrow in the future. Many northern blacks viewed the white liberal action in the Roosevelt Administration as a means of building a New South and not the elevation of African Americans in the United States.²⁴² Radical blacks, like members of the Nation of Islam, opposed gradual change in the racial, social, and economic climate in America.²⁴³ They believed they had been patient for long enough. In the words of Langston Hughes, they wanted America to “be the dream the dreamers dreamed...where never kings connive nor tyrants scheme, that any man be crushed by one above.” The America sung about in patriotic anthems had never been the same country for African Americans as for whites. They never found “freedom in this ‘homeland of the free.’”²⁴⁴ As a result, many blacks sought racial justice, and members of the Nation of Islam sought a complete overthrow of the long-established racial order. Members of the Nation of Islam and other black Americans’ lives had been much more aligned with the words of “Strange Fruit” than “My Country ‘Tis of Thee.”

The United States entered World War II in the aftermath of Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, a day Roosevelt declared would “live in infamy.” When the Japanese dropped torpedoes on the Hawaiian naval base, African Americans could not serve alongside white troops—a tradition established during the Revolutionary War. In no small act of irony, the United States set out to fight a nation led by an avowed eugenicist with an army separated into classes by skin

²⁴¹ Raymond Wolters, *Negroes and the Great Depression: The Problem of Economic Recovery* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1970), xi.

²⁴² Kirby, *Blacks in the Roosevelt Era*, 75.

²⁴³ Kirby, *Blacks in the Roosevelt Era*, 93.

²⁴⁴ Langston Hughes, “Let America be America Again,” in *The Collected Poems of Langston Hughes*, edited by Arnold Rampersand (New York: Vintage Press, 1995), 189-191.

color. Thousands of blacks served in the Second World War in segregated units. Race relations turned at the Battle of the Bulge, when Dwight D. Eisenhower grew desperate enough for additional troops that he allowed blacks to fight alongside whites against the Axis Powers.²⁴⁵ This decision led to a federal order from President Harry S. Truman in 1948, which desegregated all branches of the United States Armed Forces.

On the American home front, blacks continued to participate in New Deal programs and to support the war effort from American soil. Blacks often filled jobs left by American soldiers, which allowed them to fight for greater equality in the workplace and in society. The effects of the “March on Washington Movement” provided more jobs to blacks than had previously been available. Labor leaders A. Phillip Randolph and Bayard Rustin called for 10,000 men to march to Washington in protest of the race discrimination rampant in the defense industry. To avoid the embarrassment which accompanied the march, Roosevelt signed Executive Order 8802 on June 25, 1941, which outlawed racial discrimination in the defense industry. After the passage of Roosevelt’s Executive Order, the Second World War presented unique opportunities for blacks to prevail against the bonds of their economic, political, and social oppression. W.E.B. DuBois believed blacks who battled race prejudice faced not only “the rational, conscious determination of white folk to oppress [them]; [they faced] age long complexes sunk now largely to unconscious habit and irrational urge, which demanded on our part not only the patience to wait, but the power to entrench [themselves] for a long siege against the strongholds of color caste.”²⁴⁶ The advances blacks gained in these years became the foundations of the Civil Rights Movement which took place twenty years later. In James Baldwin’s words, “the treatment accorded the

²⁴⁵ Jonathan D. Sutherland, *African Americans at War: An Encyclopedia, Volume 1* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2004), 85-86.

²⁴⁶ W.E.B. DuBois, *Dusk of Dawn: An Essay Toward an Autobiography of a Race Concept: The Oxford WEB DuBois, Vol. 8*, edited by Henry Louis Gates, Jr. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 148.

Negro during the Second World War [marked]... a turning point in the Negro's relation to America," particularly white America.²⁴⁷

Muhammad at the Helm: The Nation of Islam 1934-1946

Elijah Muhammad's first years as Messenger and leader of the Nation of Islam display a commitment to Fard's message of black superiority and an imminent racial apocalypse. Muhammad began a newspaper to spread his prophetic message and membership steadily grew through the remainder of the 1930s. While very few contemporary documents are available to shed light on the Nation's activities between Fard's disappearance and World War II, the increased numbers of converts demonstrate Muhammad's message reached thousands of Detroiters and made its way into America's prisons. Converted prisoners spread the Nation of Islam's message of Black superiority throughout the United States. Members of the Nation sided with the Japanese before the advent of their conflict with the United States and continued to support them through the duration of the war. Most likely following the letter of Fard's law to band together with all Asiatics (Blacks), Muhammad and his flock likely felt a kinship to the Japanese, as fellow Asiatics. Shabazzian Asiatics refused to fight in "the white man's war" against their Asiatic brethren in combat and refused to enlist in the selective service in solidarity with all Blacks. This attitude did not find favor with the FBI, who had already tracked the Nation of Islam for some time before Muhammad's arrest.²⁴⁸ FBI agents also recorded a minister in the Nation of Islam preach the construction of a "mother airplane" in Japan which signaled the end of the White Man.²⁴⁹ All the whites would die and 'the Moslems' [Blacks] will kill them...[and] will destroy the devil and give the black man peace and happiness. All those who do not fall in

²⁴⁷ Quoted in Richard M. Dalfiume, "The Forgotten Years' of the Negro Revolution," *Journal of American History* 55 (June 1968): 90.

²⁴⁸ "Wallace D. Fard," 1:71.

²⁴⁹ "Wallace D. Fard," 1:21.

line with the Moslems will be destroyed and there will be no room for them.”²⁵⁰ Muhammad and his followers clearly expected Apocalypse in the form of a racial Armageddon. World War II, with Asiatics against the White devils of North America, seemed to follow Fard’s prophecy to the letter.

The anticipated eschaton never came. The FBI arrested Muhammad in 1942 for refusal to register with selective service. The interview recorded after the Messenger’s arrest by FBI agents established the foundational tenets of the Nation of Islam as taught by W.D. Fard. The interview hints at the future of the movement which followed the Messenger’s release from prison. Muhammad also recounted his personal history, and detailed his birth, family life, and escape from the South to the North. He also informed the FBI that “Moslems” could only serve one nation, and he had chosen the Nation of Islam. The Nation of Islam and all Blacks everywhere would take their rightful place at the top of the racial hierarchy when “the darker races” won the war. He would not fight for whites “on the side of the infidels.”²⁵¹ Furthermore, Muhammad insisted he had not seen Fard since 1934, but had led the Nation of Islam since Fard’s disappearance—the only statement from Muhammad about his activities during this early period of the Nation of Islam.²⁵² He also explained that he did not know the meaning of the Nation of Islam’s choice to portray a lynched black man in their temples and classrooms, but knew it meant death. His belief in the Nation of Islam’s doctrine associated death with whites and the white religion, Christianity. Muhammad escaped the South as a young man and claimed the Nation of Islam had similarly set him “free” from Christianity.²⁵³

²⁵⁰ “Wallace D. Fard,” 1:41.

²⁵¹ “Wallace D. Fard,” 1:23, 1:25, 1:34; “infidels” on “Wallace D. Fard,” 7.

²⁵² “Wallace D. Fard,” 1:35, 1:36.

²⁵³ “Wallace D. Fard,” 1:37.

Conclusion

The Nation of Islam incubated and matured in a milieu of black fear, oppression, and violence—a milieu sustained for hundreds of years in the United States. The American South lorded over the black population with Jim Crow terrorism and whites controlled communities and employment opportunities throughout the United States. The Great Migration, which led to seismic shifts in American racial geography, concentrated large numbers of African Americans in northern cities. Although blacks made gains after World War II, the vast majority of African Americans had few options for empowerment and betterment or hope for the same. W.D. Fard and Elijah Muhammad's ministry began among impoverished black men and women looking for a religious option outside of Christianity. The Nation of Islam's doctrine, largely its creation myth, provided a desirable alternative narrative for blacks who yearned for freedom from white oppression. Fard's belief that there were only two races, white and black, agreed with American definitions of race created by the *Ozawa v. United States* decision, and made his religion very attractive to American blacks. The Nation of Islam used race to both unite and divide the human race into binary terms of black and white. Their racializing of religiosity provided blacks with a religion that celebrated their race. Ironically, they used their religion to discriminate against whites and justify violence against pale "devils," when they found converts by arguing Christianity used race to unfairly discriminate against blacks. In direct and defiant contradiction of the centuries-old, prevailing claims of white superiority in Christian religion and American society, the myth racialized religion explicitly through its definition of white as demonic and black as godly.

CHAPTER FOUR

Separating Black from White and Cross from Crescent:
The Nation of Islam's De-Christianization of the Black Religious Body

Elijah Muhammad spent more than four years in prison for his refusal to register with Selective Service and his suspected treason. The Nation of Islam dwindled as a result of Muhammad's prison time and his failed prophecy concerning the triumph of the "Dark Races" in World War II. Scholars estimated a body of 8,000 converts to the Nation of Islam in 1938 but numbers dwindled to an estimated flock of 400 by 1952. Malcolm Little spent the years that spanned 1946-1952 in a Massachusetts prison cell for larceny. Little was the son of Garveyites from the Midwest who had moved to Detroit after his father's murder for his role in organizing African Americans' actions for better economic opportunities. After his father's death and mother's confinement to a mental institution, Little survived by "hustle" and the profits of petty crime. As a result, an embittered Little found himself behind bars for his role in a series of home invasions. Little manifested his frustration with life in prison through bellowing blistering tirades full of profanity and epithets against fellow prisoners, guards, and God. His tirades earned him the nickname "Satan" from both fellow inmates and prison staff, alike. Little's outbursts suddenly stopped as he learned the "true" history of the Black Man from his brother Reginald, who had converted to Elijah Muhammad's Nation of Islam in 1947. Reginald described Muhammad as "a black man, just like us," who identified all whites, without exception, as devils. In 1948, Little began to abstain from pork and to correspond with Muhammad, converted to the Nation of Islam in 1949, and by 1950 referred to himself in correspondence with Muhammad and his own family as "Malcolm X."²⁵⁴

²⁵⁴ Manning Marable, *Malcolm X: A Life of Reinvention* (New York: Viking Press, 2011), 71, 76-79.

Federal law enforcement's introduction to Malcolm X and his religious beliefs came as the Nation of Islam's "warning to all...Black people so we can pull ourselves away from the ways of the leprous [sic] devil."²⁵⁵ In the Nation of Islam's cosmology the end of the reign of demonic white men was imminent. The FBI began reading Malcolm X's mail in 1950 in connection with his political activities (X confided to a Bureau informant he had always been a communist and had tried to enlist with the Japanese Army during World War II). The Federal Bureau's interest quickly shifted from Mr. X's purported criminal activities to his conversion to "the Muslim Cult of Islam in the United States." The first letters documented in the FBI's files on Malcolm X describe his allegiance to "Elijah Mohammed and the cult's ministers," Mr. X insisted blacks were "moroly [sic] slave[s] of this country and will continue to be slaves until they free themselves by destroying non-Muslims and Christianity in the war of 'Armageddon.'...The time is coming for the devils to be destroyed." Through "casting aside the way of the devils," blacks could escape the coming Apocalypse, wherein blacks would take their rightful place as arbiters of power in a theocratic society governed by Islam.²⁵⁶ Mr. X's intense commitment to the Nation of Islam centered in his belief that "every white he had ever known had held a deep animus towards blacks."²⁵⁷ Upon his release, he rose quickly in the Nation of Islam's hierarchy, and held the title of minister for the congregation at Mosque No. 7 in Harlem from 1950-1963. After the hemorrhage of so many members after World War II, Muhammad and the Nation of Islam sought new means to share their message with the help of radio, newspapers, television, and the charismatic appeal of its new convert, Malcolm X.

²⁵⁵ "Malcolm X," *Federal Bureau of Investigation*, accessed September 18, 2014, <http://webharvest.gov/peth04/20041015082916/http://foia.fbi.gov/foiaindex/malcolmx.htm>, collection 1, page 8, <http://vault.fbi.gov/malcolm-little-malcolm-x/malcolm-little-malcolm-x-hq-file-01-of-27/view#document/p1>. After the first mention of the set of documents in the collection (1-24), I will abbreviate to the number followed by the page number (1:8).

²⁵⁶ "Malcolm X," 1:2-4.

²⁵⁷ Marable, *A Life of Reinvention*, 77.

Malcolm X's FBI files demonstrate his commitment to the Nation of Islam's wholehearted endorsement of their central teachings, black supremacy and white inferiority. W.D. Fard, the mysterious founder of the Nation of Islam, introduced this doctrine in the early 1930s and Elijah Muhammad continued to teach the doctrine to potential converts in northern metropolises from 1934-1956. Muhammad's doctrine did not add to Fard's message of black supremacy during the first twenty-two years of his ministry. This doctrine taught blacks they had been created *imago dei* as Allah's Original People. Original People fell under the rule of whites as part of a Divine test designed to chasten and prove Allah's people as His own. The Nation of Islam celebrated the ontological connection between Allah's blackness with their skin pigmentation and defined Islam as the true religion of the Blackman. The Nation of Islam also argued Christianity spawned from a race of unnatural mutants, Whites. With the charismatic firebrand Malcolm X at his disposal, Muhammad introduced nuances and enlarged the symbolic meanings of white and black in the myth's narrative.

In order to examine this historical change to the Nation of Islam's myth and its implications for the Nation as a religious body, this chapter examines the development of W.D. Fard's origination myth and its role in the Nation's cosmology from 1930-1965. The nine year period between 1956 and 1965 demonstrates that the Nation of Islam expanded its creation myth through changes made to its racial definitions of "white" and "black" in anticipation of the Nation's prophesied racial Armageddon. Whiteness represented much more than skin color or depravity towards blacks. Whiteness symbolized an association with Christianity and the oppression of blacks justified by Christian doctrine and theology. Blackness, in turn, came to symbolize not just the pigment of an individual's skin, but whether or not a person would be saved at Armageddon through membership in the Nation of Islam.

In Muhammad's estimation, American white supremacy was proof blacks were being punished for falling away from Islam for the man-made religion of Christianity.²⁵⁸ Black superiority is inherent in the Nation of Islam's creation myth and was essential to organizing blacks as a unified people. The myth also defined whites and Christians as apart from Allah and Islam in the Nation's historical and cosmological narrative.

There is a crucial difference between Christianity being "white" and Christianity being the white man's religion. Membership in the Nation of Islam came to mean being truly black and adhering to the Black man's religion. The Nation of Islam maintained their religious boundaries during the nine-year period from 1956-1965 by calling Christianity "white" and Islam "black." By 1957, probably in response to the Civil Rights Movement's Christian leadership and overarching philosophy, Black Christians were no longer recognized by the Nation of Islam as truly black. In fact, they were considered white through their continued subscription to white religion. The Nation of Islam viewed Christianity as a bastardized form of Islam, a demonic religion that taught blacks subservience and self-hatred rather than their inherent superiority over whites. In the language of Mary Douglas, whose work explores religious boundary maintenance, black Christians did "not fit the pattern of the [Nation of Islam's] cosmos. They [were] incompatible with blessing." Whites and Black Christians struck against the order established by Allah and presented a threat or "danger" to blackness and Islam.²⁵⁹ The Nation of Islam used Christianity and Islam to impose racial meanings to religion and maintain a "semblance of order" with a "rigid" boundary line in their racial and religious hierarchies.²⁶⁰ While I employ Douglas' work, I recognize her work can be used to paint overly broad strokes, relies too heavily on texts,

²⁵⁸ Malcolm X and Alex Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X: As Told to Alex Haley* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1987), 169-170.

²⁵⁹ Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 118.

²⁶⁰ Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, 5.

and present the pitfalls of comparing religious groups' ideas of "purity" and "pollution." However, the Nation of Islam is a relatively small religious body with a small corpus of texts which explain the core of their ideology. Furthermore, the Nation of Islam compares Christianity to its own teaching which offers an ideal case to apply Douglas' thesis because it does not compare pollution as defined by several religious groups. With an understanding and explanation of Douglas' shortfalls, the chapter begins with an examination of the creation myth and cosmology taught by the Nation of Islam from 1934-1965 as the racial milieu shifted during this period.

Fard's Tale of Original Man: 1930-1956

W.D. Fard's message to Detroit blacks during his brief ministry centered on the premise that God favored all blacks above whites. Fard's origination myth became the most attractive feature to downtrodden African Americans and "the fundamental premise" of the Nation of Islam's dogma.²⁶¹ Unfortunately for historians of religion, no extant documents are available that quote the words Fard preached in Detroit cottage meetings. However, the FBI collected Nation of Islam missionary tracts and transcribed them, which allows modern researchers to piece together the Nation of Islam's narrative as constituted in 1942. The FBI's information appears to come from a pamphlet entitled *Teaching for the Lost Found Nation of Islam in a Mathematical Way*. The myth was also passed down through oral tradition, an effective means of communicating religious doctrine in a "semi-literate" religious group.²⁶² As a result, FBI field notes written in the 1950s provide the best resource for gleaning the Nation of Islam's beliefs in 1956. An FBI interview with Muhammad in 1942 and the sermons of Malcolm X further

²⁶¹ C. Eric Lincoln, *The Black Muslims in America*, 3rd Edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1994), 72.

²⁶² "Wallace D. Fard," *Federal Bureau of Investigation*, accessed September 18, 2014, <http://webharvest.gov/peth04/20041019050148/http://foia.fbi.gov/fard/fard1.pdf>, 1:50.

establish the Nation's teachings on Fard's myth up to the FBI's transcriptions and field notes. This myth, colloquially known as "Yacub's History" in the Nation of Islam, details the "true" (i.e. non-White) history of humankind to blacks.

In Yacub's History, Allah created the first humans, the Tribe of Shabazz, in the image of His own Blackness.²⁶³ Allah guided and nurtured this race of "Asiatics" or Original Men and they lived in peace and harmony under Islam for several thousand years.²⁶⁴ Some time after the creation of the Original Man, an evil genius named Yacub swore "when he was old enough he would make a nation" and he would raise a separate race to himself. He plotted to "graft" the blackness out of his followers and promised to teach his nation the "tricknowledge" [sic] required to rule the world. The trusted spiritual leaders of the Original Race prophesied Yacub's grafted race would rule the children of their Black ancestors for 6,000 years.²⁶⁵

Yacub's plan involved a 600-year process of genetic engineering on the Isle of Patmos. Yacub arranged marriages and introduced birth control when followers matured to sixteen years of age in order to control the genetic composition of future races. Although Fard did not explain how multi-colored peoples came into his population, his myth described a part of the black population as possessing a "brown germ" (the individuals had brown skin). Those with the brown germ had lighter pigmentation and Yacub forced them to breed and produce progressively lighter children. Yacub euthanized black children in the population through lethal injection or fed them to wild beasts. The punishment for medical professionals who delivered colored babies who did not murder such children at their birth was immediate death. Yacub cremated the bodies of the murdered babies to conceal the very existence of blackness within his community and

²⁶³ Elijah Muhammad, "Savior's Day," first published February 26, 1936, *Muhammad Speaks*, accessed September 18, 2014, <http://muhammadspeaks.com/home/the-nation/master-farad-muhammad/saviours-day-1936/>.

²⁶⁴ Claude Andrew Clegg III, *An Original Man: The Life and Times of Elijah Muhammad* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998), 52. "Wallace D. Fard," 1:81.

²⁶⁵ "Wallace D. Fard," 1:121.

erased his follower's cultural memories of Islam. According to Fard, it took Yacub and generations of his followers 600 years to graft the "original [Black] blood" out of the brown population until his people became white. The "grafted" population lost all godliness that originally existed through the Black Man's ontological connection to Allah's blackness.²⁶⁶ These "degenerate offshoots" or "devils" lost the religion and progress of black civilization, waged war on the Black Man, and upon their defeat, fled to the "caves of Europe."²⁶⁷ These unnatural, mentally and physically deficient white mutants had been completely transformed from godly Blacks to a depraved race of White demons. Allah promised to allow these devils to rule over blacks for a period of six thousand years, as a punishment for the black man's waning faithfulness to Islam. Fard promised their reign had ended in 1914 and their demise would precede the restoration of the Black Man to power and the destruction of whites by fire.²⁶⁸ In the words of Herbert Berg, "the appeal of the race myth is obvious. A history that "reversed the contemporary racial hierarchy" soon became "a source of pride, inspiration, and revolutionary ideas" to converts.²⁶⁹

This 1955-1956 preaching of Yacub's History by Elijah Muhammad reveals several key themes which reflect the context of the Nation of Islam's birth, as discussed in the previous chapter. Blacks, as Original Men, were not subhuman or a separate species as theories of polygenesis, eugenics, and various Christian theologians had taught blacks for more than a century. With the knowledge they were descendants of Original Men, converts to the Nation of Islam escaped the shame of blackness taught to them in many Christian churches. Converts no

²⁶⁶ "Wallace D. Fard," 1:110-126.

²⁶⁷ "Wallace D. Fard," 1:81, 1:113-114.

²⁶⁸ "Wallace D. Fard," 1:82, and 1:123-124.

²⁶⁹ Herbert Berg, "Mythmaking in the African American Muslim Context: Moorish Science Temple, the Nation of Islam, and the American Society of Muslims," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 7, no. 3 (September 2005): 694.

longer felt bound by the religious dogma of their (Christian) upbringing which Whites wielded to subdue blacks. Contrary to Christianity, the Nation of Islam taught “freedom, justice, and equality.” Muhammad viewed his mission from Allah in the vein of Moses; his mission was to take “the Black Man out of slavery.”²⁷⁰

The Nation of Islam’s myth promised a future racial Armageddon that would destroy every member of the white race. Muhammad divulged the secret Japanese “blueprints” for a gargantuan plane that could fly “a mile” above the earth. The plane would bring destruction to all Whites, not Black Asiatics. Although neither Fard nor Muhammad divulged the means by which the plane would recognize Whites over Asiatics, the plane’s weapons would remove whites from the earth and from their perch at the top of America’s racial hierarchy. After this apocalyptic episode, the Black Man could unite as a political and religious body ruled by Islam.²⁷¹ Whites, or anyone else who refused to “accept the teachings of MOHAMMED or become a part of his organization will be destroyed....[indeed, they] must be exterminated along with all of those [who] serve the devil’s purpose.”²⁷² Muhammad asserted there was no afterlife to enjoy the blessings of a life lived in Christian patience and longsuffering. The only reward for blacks was happiness on earth. The Nation of Islam insisted blacks should not submit to whites for the promise of future heavenly mansions that would never come. Blacks must assert their rights in the present to change the world’s racial hierarchy to reap a reward from Allah in the present. In anticipation of Allah’s Armageddon, Elijah Muhammad argued blacks should seek separation from the white devils, become economically self-reliant, and resurrect their minds from the spiritual death inflicted upon them by whites and Christianity.

²⁷⁰ “Wallace D. Fard,” 1:37, 1:83.

²⁷¹ Clegg, *An Original Man*, 61-65.

²⁷² “Wallace D. Fard,” 1:82-86.

The Early Civil Rights Movement, 1950-1957

Malcolm and Muhammad's teachings reached black audiences who were sensitive to the treatment of blacks at the hands of white Christians. Blacks and whites served alongside one another in Korea, the first American War after segregated military units had been abolished in 1948.²⁷³ In 1952 a Kansas family took their public school district to the Supreme Court to argue the legality of *Plessy v. Ferguson*. The Warren Court sided with the Brown family and in a unanimous decision declared "separate educational facilities are inherently unequal."²⁷⁴ The limited court ruling predictably met resistance across the American South and the United States. Opponents exploited a legal loophole which did not require *Brown*'s immediate enactment. School districts asked for relief from compliance with integration in 1955 only to be rebuffed by the Court's new instructions to carry out desegregation efforts "with all deliberate speed."²⁷⁵ Black children and white children began to attend school together, although *Brown II* did not require private businesses to adhere to integration. Despite the narrowness of the *Brown* decisions, American blacks proceeded to take deliberate steps to speed along the cause of Civil Rights. On December 1, 1955, Rosa Parks refused to yield her seat to a white bus rider in Montgomery, Alabama, which led to a bus boycott by the black community. A young graduate of Boston University named Martin Luther King, Jr. reluctantly led a peaceful boycott until the city's bus line changed its policy 385 days later.

Shortly before the Montgomery bus boycott in 1955, a fourteen year old boy from Chicago named Emmett Till visited relatives in Money, Mississippi. The teenage Till, unaware

²⁷³ Executive Order 9981, July 26, 1948; General Records of the United States Government; Record Group 11; National Archives.

²⁷⁴ *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*, Opinion; May 17, 1954; Records of the Supreme Court of the United States; Record Group 267; National Archives.

²⁷⁵ *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*, Implementation Decree; May 31, 1955; Records of the Supreme Court of the United States; Record Group 267; National Archives.

of social mores between blacks and whites in the South, inappropriately spoke to and whistled at Carolyn Bryant, a white woman.²⁷⁶ The woman's husband, Roy Bryant, and an accomplice took Till from the home of his grandfather, tortured, and shot the fourteen year old, and threw his body in the Tallahatchie River for his violations of Southern racial etiquette. Till's mother refused to hold a closed-casket funeral. She explained her decision to the press, "I couldn't bear the thought of people being horrified by the sight of my son. But on the other hand, I felt the alternative was even worse. After all, we had averted our eyes for far too long, turning away from the ugly reality facing us as a nation. Let the world see what I've seen."²⁷⁷ Till's murder led to a national outcry from all races for justice. In January 1956 Roy Bryant and his accomplice granted an unrepentant interview with *Look Magazine*, in which they confessed to the murder in graphic detail. The national magazine shared more than grisly details of Till's murder and the town's indifference to his murderers. The author informed the nation Bryant's social life revolved around family and "the Baptist church." Although the article did not suggest that Bryant's church ordered or even condoned the murder, southerners had grounded racial violence in Christian theology for generations and understood the implicit connection. The Nation of Islam's theology appealed to broad swathes of blacks in the wake of Till's murder by white Christians who wanted to keep "niggers in their place."²⁷⁸ In 1960, Minister X would invoke Emmett Till's murder as evidence of white depravity and presented it as evidence of the white man's deserving of eradication from the earth.²⁷⁹

²⁷⁶ "Emmett Till," *Federal Bureau of Investigation*, accessed September 25, 2014, <http://vault.fbi.gov/Emmett%20Till%20/Emmett%20Till%20Part%2001%20of%2002/view>, 1:40-42

²⁷⁷ Mrs. Till quoted in Maurice Berger, *For all the World to See: Visual Culture and the Struggle for Civil Rights* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 101.

²⁷⁸ William Bradford Huie, "What Happened to the Emmett Till Killers?," *Look* (January 1956), 56-60.

²⁷⁹ "Malcolm X," *Federal Bureau of Investigation*, accessed September 18, 2014, <http://webharvest.gov/peth04/20041017085144/http://foia.fbi.gov/malcolmx/malcolmx7.pdf>, 7:23.

Subtle Shifts: 1957-1958

In the late 1950s Elijah Muhammad and Malcolm X authored a series of newspaper columns in “Black” newspapers. These columns demonstrate important shifts in the Nation of Islam’s aggressive missionary work for and among black Christians. In one article, Muhammad used fifteen verses of scripture to convince black Christians of their racial error perpetuated by their religious choices. Of the fifteen verses quoted by *The Messenger*, eleven traced back to the Bible and only four came from the Qur’an.²⁸⁰ Muhammad had greater familiarity with Christian writ than the Qur’an (although he read it while in prison for draft-dodging), and these articles betray his reliance on the religion of his youth.²⁸¹ Beyond his familiarity with the text, Muhammad’s (and Malcolm X’s) heavy emphasis on the Bible had several purposes. First, the Nation of Islam’s Christian audience could recognize the Nation’s narrative, stories, and teachings as they related to biblical episodes. Muhammad weaved the Bible through his religious teachings, especially the Nation of Islam’s belief in black supremacy. Instead of reaching out to irreligious blacks, Muhammad and Malcolm X’s sermons aimed to convert black Christians. Black Christians, after all, comprised the largest religious group in the black population of the United States. Malcolm X promised his audiences the Nation of Islam cleaned up the “mysteries of the Christian faith,” including the true history of the human race, and the lives of biblical figures such as Moses and Jesus.²⁸² Malcolm argued blacks followed whites and white religion because their Islamic heritage had been stolen from them through the damnable brain-scrubbing power of Christianity. Minister X insisted Jesus of Nazareth had been a Muslim and taught Islam

²⁸⁰ Jamie J. Wilson, “‘Come Down Off the Cross and Get Under the Crescent’: The Newspaper Columns of Elijah Muhammad and Malcolm X,” *Biography* 36, no. 3 (Summer 2013): 499-501.

²⁸¹ Herbert Berg suggests Muhammad was actually quite familiar with the Qur’an, but he did not read it as orthodox Muslims read the text. See Herbert Berg, “Early African American Muslim Movements and the Qur’an,” *Journal of Qur’anic Studies* 8, no. 1 (2006): 29-33.

²⁸² “Malcolm X,” *Federal Bureau of Investigation*, accessed September 18, 2014, <http://webharvest.gov/peth04/20041017101521/http://foia.fbi.gov/malcolmx/malcolmx2.pdf>, 2:93.

but that his teachings had been diluted and distorted into Christianity. He claimed he could prove it from the Bible. Unfortunately for blacks, he explained, the Bible's original teachings had been warped to support white supremacy.²⁸³ Only the Nation of Islam taught Allah's true religion, but the Bible's imagery and some of its teaching could be used to explain Allah's concepts to His people.

Muhammad's doctrine offered an alternative "genealogy of black people" and gave a voice to the suffering of blacks in a format familiar to his audience. Muhammad also employed biblical exegesis and Christianity to attack the black Christian church. Muhammad argued "lying" black ministers and their pro-white teachings in the Christian church created "division and disunity" among black people. These divisions and resultant disunity made racial progress and the advent of his expected Armageddon impossible.²⁸⁴

Muhammad's articles labeled the black Christian church an enemy of black self-respect and pride. The Messenger accused the Christian church of making "everything white as being right, which automatically compelled [blacks] to believe that all that was dark was to be wrong." Malcolm X continued to wage war on black preachers, the "tools" of white exploitation, and even demonic reinforcements of black subservience.²⁸⁵ The "very evils" Christian clergy believed empowered blacks in fact tore black communities apart.²⁸⁶ Malcolm and Muhammad designed their articles to weaken the power black Christian ministers and community leaders held over their congregations and constituencies. Through doing so, they presented the Nation of Islam as a viable alternative to the self-serving religion of white men. So long as blacks

²⁸³ "Malcolm X," 2:32, 34, 98.

²⁸⁴ "Malcolm X," 2:30; Malcolm X, "God's Angry Men," *Los Angeles Herald Daily* (Los Angeles, CA), 7 November 1957, quoted in Wilson, "Come Down Off the Cross and Get Under the Crescent," 501.

²⁸⁵ "God's Angry Men," *Los Angeles Daily Herald* (Los Angeles, CA), 7 November 1957, quoted in Wilson, "Come Down Off the Cross and Get Under the Crescent," 501.

²⁸⁶ *New York Amsterdam News* (New York City, NY), 27 Apr. 1957, quoted in Wilson, "Come Down Off the Cross and Get Under the Crescent," 496.

subscribed to a “white man’s heaven” they would live in a “black man’s hell. Conversion to the Nation of Islam would make their lives a “black man’s heaven” after Armageddon, with no whites to lord over their entire existence. White destruction and black ascension in the racial hierarchy promised to give whites a taste of the hell their mutant race had inflicted upon descendants of the Original People for thousands of years.

Mr. X also rhetorically blistered black ministers for preaching the “religion of the white man” to the descendants of Original People. He accused black Christian preachers of “getting paid to deceive the black man by teaching him what the devil (white man) wants him to learn.”²⁸⁷ These accusations eroded the confidence of black Christians that converted to the Nation of Islam. The Nation’s attacks on black clergy forced potential converts to consider the meaning of Christian teachings in light of his or her own experience with white Christians. Minister X delivered this message to black churches around the country, but one particular sermon delivered on June 15, 1957 in Adam Clayton Powell’s Abyssinian Baptist Church of Harlem exemplifies the Nation of Islam’s juxtaposition of Christianity and Islam. After his traditional sermon on the treachery of white violence and oppression, he turned his attention to Christian teachings that reinforced white supremacy. He proceeded to expound on Jesus’ Muslim faith, the true history and religion of the black man, and the process by which Christianity turned blacks into mental and physical slaves. He then advised his audience to “accept the [religion] who offers the most” to blacks.²⁸⁸

Muhammad and Malcolm X’s articles also introduced the concept that blacks could be destroyed by the Mother Plane when Blacks claimed their position at the top of the racial hierarchy. In an article written in the *Pittsburgh Courier* in March 1957, Elijah Muhammad

²⁸⁷ “Malcolm X,” 1:69-70

²⁸⁸ Malcolm X,” *Federal Bureau of Investigation*, accessed September 18, 2014, <http://webharvest.gov/peth04/20041017093055/http://foia.fbi.gov/malcolmx/malcolmx3a.pdf>, 3A: 59-72.

admonished Christians to “come down off the cross and get under the crescent to avoid God’s wrath.”²⁸⁹ This statement is the first intimation that any of the Nation of Islam’s leaders believed blacks could be destroyed at the moment of black liberation. Indeed, Muhammad’s rehearsal of Yacub’s History in 1955-1956 took care to define all blacks, not just members of the Nation of Islam, as “Asiatics” and heirs to the promised redemption of their Black ancestors. Although the FBI’s 1955-1956 summary allowed for the extermination of those who reject the Nation of Islam, the text suggests only whites would be the ones killed at Armageddon by the Mother Plane’s weapons.²⁹⁰ Minister X also deviated from earlier Nation of Islam teachings when he declared “lying” black ministers would “burn with the rest of North America” at a speaking engagement during the same time period.²⁹¹ He would later add FBI spies or “any man or woman who refuses to follow [his teachings] will share the white man’s doom.”²⁹² Malcolm and Muhammad asserted that Christians could avoid God’s wrath only through conversion—membership in the Nation of Islam would be required for racial redemption. This standard, or “norm” in Mary Douglas’ vernacular, creates a category for “impurity” within the black population. Black Christians were subject to the same punishment as their white tormentors. In the Nation of Islam’s estimation, Black Christians were just as impure as white demons if they would not “come off the cross” and “get under the crescent.”²⁹³ Muhammad and Malcolm’s pronouncements of the destruction of black ministers during Armageddon provided a way for the Black Islamic community to purge itself of Christianity’s influence in their future utopia. Black

²⁸⁹ Wilson, “‘Come Down Off the Cross and Get Under the Crescent,’” 496; Elijah Muhammad, “Mr. Muhammad Speaks,” *Pittsburgh Courier* (Pittsburgh, PA), 16 March 1957, quoted in Wilson, “‘Come Down Off the Cross and Get Under the Crescent,’” 496.

²⁹⁰ “Wallace D. Fard,” 1:82-86.

²⁹¹ “Malcolm X,” 3:28.

²⁹² “Malcolm X,” 7:69; “Malcolm X,” *Federal Bureau of Investigation*, accessed September 18, 2014, <http://webharvest.gov/peth04/20041017095238/http://foia.fbi.gov/malcolmx/malcolmx8b.pdf>, 8B:44.

²⁹³ Wilson, “‘Come Down Off the Cross and Get Under the Crescent,’” 496; Muhammad, “Mr. Muhammad Speaks,” *Pittsburgh Courier* (Pittsburgh, PA), 16 March 1957, quoted in Wilson, “‘Come Down Off the Cross and Get Under the Crescent,’” 496.

Christians were “polluting persons,” dangerous threats to the religious body which required removal. Although black Christians had not intentionally moved away from Allah (they had, after all, been brainwashed), they still presented a danger to the descendants of Original Men.²⁹⁴ Their definitions of blackness hearkened to the nineteenth century view of race, wherein skin color was only a portion of what constituted a person’s race. This change to the way the Nation of Islam racialized religiosity pitted African American Christians (who under the Nation’s logic were white) against Islam (whose members were black).

Muhammad and Minister X’s newspaper columns reflected the views they expounded from the pulpit. Malcolm X’s cross-country travel schedule provided him with opportunities to share the views of the Honorable Elijah Muhammad on his behalf until his expulsion from the Nation of Islam in 1963. At these speaking engagements Mr. X added subtle details from Muhammad’s new book *The Supreme Wisdom: Solution to the So-Called Negroes Problem* to his sermons. However, he probably introduced new theology as a result of his own study or as off-the-cuff comments that gradually became permanent fixtures in his preaching.²⁹⁵ Muhammad did not vet every word spoken by members of the Nation of Islam’s hierarchy. Minister X’s sermons from 1957-1963 expand the time of the Original Men lived on the Earth before whites and added detail to the process of white eradication during Armageddon to a broader audience than those that read Muhammad’s books. Although Muhammad’s new book admonished blacks to “follow the Right Path and the RIGHT GUIDE,” the book did not suggest that any blacks would perish at Armageddon. The Messenger’s writings suggest that all blacks would convert before Armageddon. Muhammad insisted that blacks would “do well to listen and grasp”

²⁹⁴ Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, 140.

²⁹⁵ For instance, X once made candid comments about JFK’s assassination that resulted in X’s suspension from public speaking. See Marable, *A Life of Reinvention*, 272-274, 277.

Muhammad's message, but non-believers were not yet damned to extinction with whites.²⁹⁶ On November 3, 1958 Malcolm told a Philadelphia crowd "black men ruled the earth [for] trillions of years before the white people."²⁹⁷ This statement, employed against integrationists in the Civil Rights Movement, made the absurdity of living with whites readily apparent to his audience. For trillions of years Allah watched over his people and blessed them with peace and prosperity—he would do so again. Minister X also preached to his Harlem audience in March 1960, that "sixty-six trillion years ago, there was dissatisfaction amongst the people of earth. He said a great black scientist set off a blast from the center of the earth." This blast ripped the earth in pieces. One piece of the Earth jettisoned into space and became "the planet that we call the moon."²⁹⁸ X's comments delivered less than a year after the USSR launched Sputnik, were probably an attempt to draw in converts based on current events.²⁹⁹

In 1960 and 1961, Minister X also provided details to the process by which Allah would remove whites and black Christians from the earth. He preached the continued existence of the Japanese "Mother Plane" or "Ezekiel's Wheel" that had been described by Elijah Muhammad during World War II (although Malcolm did not state the plane came from Japan in his accounts). The plane's size allowed for 15,000 or 35,000 planes to fit comfortably in its belly. The planes would be equipped with three bombs each, more than enough firepower to bring

²⁹⁶ Elijah Muhammad, *The Supreme Wisdom: Solution to the So-Called Negroes Problem* (Phoenix: Secretarius MEMPS Publications, 2008, 41 and 55.

²⁹⁷ "Malcolm X," *Federal Bureau of Investigation*, accessed September 14, 2014, <http://webharvest.gov/peth04/20041017090259/http://foia.fbi.gov/malcolmx/malcolmx4.pdf>, 4: 141-142.

²⁹⁸ "Malcolm X," *Federal Bureau of Investigation*, accessed September 18, 2014, <http://webharvest.gov/peth04/20041017095548/http://foia.fbi.gov/malcolmx/malcolmx5.pdf>, 5:147.

²⁹⁹ The Nation of Islam was not the only religion which used space exploration towards religious ends. See Alexander C. T. Gepper, "Extraterrestrial Encounters: UFOs, Science, and the Quest for Transcendence, 1947-1972," *History & Technology* 28, no. 3 (September 2012), 335-362. For a thorough analysis of the Nation of Islam's belief in the Mother Plane and its place in racial and biblical exegesis of UFOs, see the last four chapters of Michael Lieb, *Children of Ezekiel: Aliens, UFOs, the Crisis of Race, and the Advent of End Time* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998), 129-229; Wayne Taylor, "Premillennium Tension, Malcolm X, and the Eschatology of the Nation of Islam," *Souls: A Critical Journal of Black Politics, Culture, and Society* 7, no. 1 (August 2006): 56-58.

about the demise of all whites on earth.³⁰⁰ The Nation of Islam's myth and cosmology became more concrete, with specific numbers attached to past and promised events. These additions demonstrate the Nation of Islam's desire to detach converts to their organization from any affiliation with Christianity. Malcolm X and Muhammad added these details to the Nation's cosmology even as they continued to use biblical narrative and preached from Christian pulpits to Christian audiences. The added detail demonstrates the Nation's desire to separate from Christianity even as it used its framework to attract members. This change is likely due to the Christian leadership which directed the swelling ranks, both black and white, of the Civil Rights Movement in the United States.

1957-1964: Integration, Civil Rights

The Civil Rights Movement's urgency increased after the encouraging *Brown* decisions, the horrors of Emmett Till's murder, and the Montgomery Bus Boycott. Martin Luther King, Jr. accepted the position of president in the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) and worked with local, regional, and national leaders to organize non-violent protests to discriminatory laws and practices. Hundreds of black and white volunteers "sat in" at lunch counters to end segregation in private businesses. In 1960, President Dwight D. Eisenhower signed the 1960 Civil Rights Act into law in order to close legal loopholes that southern states used to continue segregation in schools. In 1961, Northern college students from the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and other student groups organized "Freedom Rides" to the Deep South to register African Americans to vote. Black Americans, however, often remained silent on Civil Rights issues out of fear or indifference.³⁰¹ Although King, SNCC, and

³⁰⁰ "Malcolm X," 5:35, 5:81.

³⁰¹ For a thorough account of the Freedom Riders' philosophy, as well as biographies of the Riders, see Raymond Arsenault, *Freedom Riders: 1961 and the Struggle for Racial Justice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

other Civil Rights groups succeeded in their attempts to organize local communities, white leaders of Southern states continued to oppose their actions and received massive support from their communities. King responded to these leaders through preaching sermons on love, moral justice, and improved economic and political opportunities for all races. The Nation of Islam instead preached separation instead of integration. Minister X famously quipped, “it will take more than a cup of tea in a white restaurant to make me happy.”³⁰² King’s non-violent approach did not move as quickly as the Nation desired, nor did it accomplish its aims of replacing white supremacy with black sovereignty. Malcolm attacked King in print, and hurled the label of “Uncle Tom” and “traitor” at the Georgian preacher and those who subscribed to his non-violent approach.³⁰³

Minister X’s attacks on Reverend King stemmed not only from ideological difference. King and his movement attracted many more African Americans to their cause, and more importantly, attracted a much larger middle-class audience than the Nation of Islam.³⁰⁴ Although the Nation of Islam had expanded its membership from 400 in 1950 to nearly 100,000 in 1960, the vast majority of converts lived in poverty and had little formal education, much like the first generation of W.D. Fard’s converts in the early 1930s.³⁰⁵ King’s non-violent movement also attracted liberal whites. Minister X loathed whites and white power, but the Nation’s refusal to include them in their plans to change black Americans made it difficult to maintain adequate financial support, receive positive media attention, or utilize the political connections necessary to organize wide-scale demonstrations. For example, King’s August 1963 March on Washington happened only after the approval of white administrators and the cooperation of white policemen

³⁰² “Malcolm X,” 6:88.

³⁰³ “Malcolm X,” 3A:18.

³⁰⁴ Marable, *A Life of Reinvention*, 255-257.

³⁰⁵ “Wallace D. Fard,” 1:50.

and other support staff. Afterwards, Malcolm mocked the March and called it the “Farce on Washington,” although he attended the March against the express wishes of Elijah Muhammad.³⁰⁶ He publicly scoffed at the March after its successful completion and asked, “who ever heard of angry revolutionists swinging their bare feet together with their oppressor in lily-pad park pools, with gospels and guitars and "I Have A Dream" speeches? And the black masses in America were—and still are—having a nightmare.”³⁰⁷

Yet, while Malcolm leaned against a tree far away from the speaker’s podium at the Lincoln Memorial, Minister X must have realized his organization did not have the power to organize such an event or fight for change on a global scale. Mr. X had visited the Middle East and met Muslims who shared the Nation’s concerns about American anti-Islamism and the “nightmare” of racial violence in the United States.³⁰⁸ During his travels Minister X recognized that not all Muslims had black skin. Many of the dignitaries who greeted him had white or brown skin but still followed the teachings of Allah.³⁰⁹ According to his biographer, Manning Marable, at this point Malcolm began to doubt the Nation of Islam’s deviations from orthodox Islam during those visits because he had to reckon with the whiteness of many faithful Muslims.³¹⁰ The March on Washington caused similar doubts to take hold in the Nation’s firebrand. Just as not all Muslims had to be black, not all blacks who uplifted their race believed in Islam. Shortly after the March on Washington, Minister X spoke at the University of California-Berkeley campus and told the audience, “when you become a Muslim, you don’t look at a man as being black, brown, red, or white. You look upon him as being a man.” The Minister’s statement at Berkeley

³⁰⁶ Marable, *A Life of Reinvention*, 262-264.

³⁰⁷ Malcolm X and Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, 286.

³⁰⁸ Marable, *A Life of Reinvention*, 167-169; Malcolm X and Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, 369-373.

³⁰⁹ Malcolm X and Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, 242.

³¹⁰ Marable, *A Life of Reinvention*, 167-168 and 368-369.

contradicted Nation of Islam theology and practice in relation to the destruction of all whites at Armageddon. Minister X believed all Muslims could be in “harmony with the cosmos” and receive Allah’s blessings for the faithful and survive the racial Armageddon. Whites, white Muslims at any rate, could reap the benefits of Allah’s promised restoration of *Islam* (not a black race populated and ruled by Islam). Non-Muslims remained pollutants, but could convert to Islam and take part in Allah’s new government at Armageddon.³¹¹ Although Malcolm continued to preach within the Nation of Islam, including sharing Yacub’s History, after the March on Washington, his decision to leave began to form before his suspension for inflammatory remarks about John F. Kennedy’s assassination in 1963. However, X’s ideas about race, religion, and creating a unified black body became less focused on white hatred and concentrated instead on building unity among his race. Minister X’s suspension later in the year for comments about the assassination of President John F. Kennedy, coupled with X’s desire to organize larger swathes of the black population and greater involvement in the Muslim community, directly led to X’s acrimonious exit from the Nation of Islam in early 1964.³¹² Mr. X no longer believed Muhammad could unite the righteous “under one god Allah” because he believed whites could be saved at Armageddon as Muslims. Ironically, he believed Muhammad’s teachings divided the black population against itself, something the Messenger and Malcolm had accused Christian ministers of doing throughout the 1950s.

Message to the Blackman in America

Malcolm X’s exit from the Nation of Islam left Elijah Muhammad without a national figure to speak for his movement. Manning Marable has written that Muhammad was “a poor

³¹¹ Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, 118.

³¹² Marable, *A Life of Reinvention*, 283-296.

public speaker, without charisma or even basic language skills.”³¹³ The Nation’s actions towards the former Minister and his family, including firebombing their house, did not raise sympathy with the national media. Malcolm X’s murder on April 4, 1965 came during X’s ascension as a global voice for Islam and the unity of American blacks with the rest of the world, particularly Africa.³¹⁴ X’s death, attributed to the Nation of Islam, drove popular opinion even more forcefully against Elijah Muhammad and his followers. Seemingly as a response, or at least to capitalize on the attention his religion received at X’s murder, Elijah Muhammad authorized a printed collection of his doctrine, theology, and recounting of Yacub’s history. This collection, entitled *Message to the Blackman in America*, provided the world with a straightforward assessment of the Nation of Islam’s beliefs, doctrines, and positions on integration and the creation of a unified black nation.³¹⁵ *Message to the Blackman* reflects Muhammad’s desire to demonstrate how he and Malcolm X’s beliefs differed from one another at the death of his former protégé.

Muhammad’s teachings in *Message to the Black Man in America* reaffirm many of the Nation of Islam’s teachings of black supremacy and the Muslim origin of all blacks. The Messenger identified the Tribe of Shabazz with the knowledge, truth and power of the Egyptian empires, which endured for millennia. The Egyptians established great libraries, universities, charted celestial bodies, and subjected white labor to construct the pyramids. Egypt’s pyramids provided tangible proof of black dominion over whites, and more importantly that whites had not always had power over blacks. The Nation’s creation myth also recounted an attempt by whites to overthrow the Tribe of Shabazz shortly after the creation of the white race. Blacks rebuffed

³¹³ Marable, *A Life of Reinvention*, 87.

³¹⁴ Marable, *A Life of Reinvention*, 360-387.

³¹⁵ The original was republished in 2011. See Elijah Muhammad, *Message to the Blackman in America* (Phoenix: Secretarius MEMPS, 2011).

the white devils and sent them to Europe, far away literally and figuratively from the standards, progress, and privileges of black, Islamic civilization. The Nation of Islam's ties to Egypt demonstrated black civilization had achieved great success in politics, war, economics, art, and architecture. An emphasis on Yacub's "big head" jabbed at black and white intellectuals who called for Civil Rights at a gradual pace—a pace that in Muhammad's mind would never achieve equal rights. The Messenger also made several direct statements to integrationists, Martin Luther King, Jr., and even the Ku Klux Klan which affirm Muhammad's belief in racial separation rather than segregation.³¹⁶

Message to the Blackman displays Elijah Muhammad's zealous commitment to separating black skin from the Nation's iteration of Islam. Allah would not protect blacks, the descendants of his Original People, if Asiatics would not return to the religious body of their ancestors and separate from their white tormentors at once. Friendship with whites or a willingness to work with whites in society signaled an acceptance of death.³¹⁷ Martin Luther King, Jr., the NAACP, and other groups did good things for blacks, but they did not have authority to promise victory over whites because they had not been called by Allah to overthrow the white devils.³¹⁸ Muhammad also indirectly addressed the defections from the Nation of Islam which resulted from Malcolm X's split with the Nation and ensuing murder with disdain—"Jesus had similar defections."³¹⁹ Muhammad's flippancy betrays his fear of losing his congregations to non-Islamic groups. The Messenger warned his black audience not to follow in X's footsteps and join any integrationist, pan-Africanist, or any other group that did not demand the white race's violent demise when he informed his audience "the non-Muslim world cannot win a war against

³¹⁶ Muhammad, *Message to the Blackman in America*, 214, 217-218, 231, 240-243, 330-335.

³¹⁷ Muhammad, *Message to the Blackman in America*, 107.

³¹⁸ Muhammad, *Message to the Blackman in America*, 308.

³¹⁹ Muhammad, *Message to the Blackman in America*, 306.

Allah.”³²⁰ Because Muhammad had been called as Allah’s prophet, no other man could lead blacks to “heaven,” or a world without whites. The Messenger reminded his own religious group “Islam is heaven for my people.” His words possess a sense of decisive finality. He could have more accurately stated his beliefs by saying the Nation of “Islam is [the only way to] heaven” for blacks.³²¹

Muhammad aimed his rhetoric to curb the influence of Malcolm X but he leveled his most visceral attacks in his pleas to black Christians to join the Nation before the racial Armageddon. Muhammad employed the biblical figure of Noah to reach these lapsed Shabazzians in their own religious language.³²² The Messenger wrote, “The people of Noah and the parties after them rejected prophets before them, and every nation purposed against their Apostle to destroy him, and they disputed by means of the falsehood that they might thereby render null the truth.” Muhammad also quoted the Qur’an which stated Allah “destroyed” the people of Noah because of their rejection of the truth and thus became “inmates of the fire.”³²³ Muhammad’s words reaffirm what he and other leaders in the Nation of Islam had preached for several years. Blacks could only find safety in the Nation of Islam. The Mother Plane, the harbinger of white destruction, would drop pamphlets to blacks in order to warn them before Armageddon, but blacks must still convert from Christianity to the Nation of Islam to avoid certain death. Their conversion was not guaranteed to happen, as the Messenger had written in 1957. Muhammad probably believed *Message to the Blackman* to be one of these pamphlets that called blacks to repentance. In the final chapters, he predicted “within 24 months, every one of you who is now a disbeliever in Allah and the great brotherhood of Islam will be suffering the

³²⁰ Muhammad, *Message to the Blackman in America*, 280.

³²¹ Muhammad, *Message to the Blackman in America*, 304.

³²² Noah is also a Qur’anic figure, but Noah would have resonated with Jewish and Christian audience as well.

³²³ Muhammad, *Message to the Blackman in America*, 293.

punishments that I have mentioned in the above chapters and verses.”³²⁴ Black Christians, like whites, could not be blessed or saved as a result of their affiliation with an unnatural, demonic religion.³²⁵

Conclusion

In the 1950s, the Messenger and Malcolm shamed black preachers for dividing the black community against itself. They argued whites had invented Christianity to squash the Blackman’s religious history, cultural identity, and to divide the black population itself in wars over the devil’s religious philosophy. Malcolm X realized the logical gaps in Muhammad’s rhetoric and left the Nation of Islam in 1964 to form an Islamic political group dedicated to the unification of blacks across the globe. His organization did not exclude any black, white, Muslim, or Christian from Allah’s blessings, provided they sought the uplift of both blacks and Muslims. To Mr. X, the black and Muslim populations of the world needed each other to achieve Allah’s purposes.

Elijah Muhammad’s religious mantra swung the opposite direction, most likely in response to black Christians organizing the Civil Rights Movement in the 1950s and 1960s. W.D. Fard had pleaded for the unification of the black man in the 1930s and Muhammad stayed true to the Nation’s founder for more than two decades. The introduction of the Civil Rights Movement, with Christian leaders and an explicitly Christian mission to “save the soul of America,” caused the mature Messenger to deviate from Fard’s course and from American racial definitions of who was white and who was black.³²⁶ Muhammad’s re-defining whiteness and blackness as membership in the Nation of Islam split the black community in twain, through its

³²⁴ Muhammad, *Message to the Blackman in America*, 298.

³²⁵ Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, 7.

³²⁶ Adam Fairclough, *To Save the Soul of America: The Southern Christian Leadership Conference & Martin Luther King, Jr.* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2001).

definition of blackness as religious identity rather than skin color. Muhammad's pronouncements, like Brigham Young's 1852 sermon on race, created racial boundaries within his own religion. Also like Mormonism, Muhammad's teachings contradicted his charismatic predecessor's views on race, and affected racial hierarchies within his own religious organization.

CONCLUSION

This thesis has examined how both Mormonism and the Nation of Islam have racialized religiosity from their inception through the first few decades of their existence. In doing so, I have examined “whites,” Native Americans, and peoples of African descent. Analysis of the treatment of all three groups by early Mormons, and whites and blacks by the Nation of Islam has offered valuable insight into the role of race and religion in America, particularly new religious movements founded in the United States.

Studying these two groups demonstrates that American religionists have incorporated prevailing definitions of race into their religious terminology. In the nineteenth century, Mormonism used what today might be seen as “ethnic” definitions of race, wherein a person’s history, genetic descent, and culture defined race more than did an individual’s skin color. Joseph Smith claimed that a person’s religion defined their race. Those who converted to Mormonism were physically transformed and became literal blood members of the House of Israel. Smith’s views influenced Mormonism’s views on both Native Americans (Lamanites) and peoples of African descent (those not born into the House of Israel). I defined and examined how Smith and Young approached missionary work among both groups to understand early Mormonism’s definitions of race. In early Mormonism, Native Americans needed only to convert to in order to regain their racial privilege. Their skin color would change, but racially they were already Israelites. Peoples of African descent, on the other hand, needed to undergo a transformation. Their blood literally changed upon conversion, presumably changing their genetic structure and making them literal members of the House of Israel by nineteenth century racial standards. A person’s skin color was an important aspect of understanding a person’s position in the House of Israel, but was not the sole characteristic that defined a person’s race

within Mormonism. By 1852, those outside the House of Israel could become Israelites, but were not included in the Nucleus of Heaven. Mormonism used definitions of race to define who would gain eternal salvation and who would be excluded from such assurance during mortality.

The Nation of Islam used the legal definition of race created by the *Ozawa v. United States* decision of 1922. The decision created large, homogenous racial groups by legally defining race by skin color. W.D. Fard and Elijah Muhammad defined all non-whites as blacks; they pronounced them descendants of the Original People who would be saved at Armageddon. Any person with dark skin pigmentation, including Asians, Africans, South Americans, and American Indians were defined as black. From 1930-1956, the Nation of Islam's leaders used this broad definition of race to call all non-whites to join their new religious movement. All non-whites would be saved by Allah when The Mother Plane brought an end to the white race. After 1956, however, Muhammad came to define a person's race by their religious convictions. Only members of the Nation of Islam could be considered black, and thus would be saved at Armageddon. This religious definition of race divided the black population against itself. A person's race determined who would be saved and who would be destroyed during Muhammad's predicted racial apocalypse.

Studying these two groups has shown that race has both united and divided religious groups in the United States. Mormonism and the Nation of Islam, which entered the religious marketplace in two different centuries, both employed racial definitions to separate the favored of deity from the unfavored. Both groups racialized religiosity by using definitions of race to correspond with requirements for, or signs of, salvation. No religious group in the United States can escape racial issues, no matter the century they are first organized. It is clear that race is and was a central issue to both religions and the American cultures they emerged from. However,

through understanding how these two very different faiths employed race as religious markers, it becomes possible to understand how each movement interacted with prevailing racial definitions in the United States. These two religious movements, native to the United States, show how American religious innovations always bear the marks of the United States' racial culture. One thing above all others becomes abundantly clear after analyzing these two groups: throughout the history of the United States race has both united and divided religious Americans.

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