

# RELIGION OF A DIFFERENT COLOR

RACE AND THE  
MORMON STRUGGLE FOR WHITENESS



W. PAUL REEVE

From Not White  
Enough to Too  
White:  
Rethinking the  
Mormon Racial  
Story






“Mormon Elder-Berry—out with his six-year-olds, who take after their mothers.”

## *RELIGION OF A DIFFERENT COLOR*

- It is only in viewing Mormon whiteness as a contested variable, not an assumed fact, that a new paradigm emerges for understanding the Mormon racial story.

# *RELIGION OF A DIFFERENT COLOR*

- Development theory
  - Savagery  Barbarism  Civilization
  - Savagery  Barbarism  Mormonism

## *RELIGION OF A DIFFERENT COLOR*

- Race is both something ascribed from without and aspired to from within.

# RACE AS ASCRIBED FROM THE OUTSIDE

- Dr. Roberts Bartholow Senate Report, 1860
  - “The Mormon, of all the human animals now walking this globe, is the most curious in every relation.”
  - Mormonism is a great social blunder which seriously affected “the physical stamina and mental health” of its adherents.

# RACE AS ASCRIBED FROM THE OUTSIDE

- Polygamy was the central issue:
  - it created a “preponderance of female births”
  - high infant mortality
  - a “striking uniformity in facial expression,” which included “albuminous and gelatinous types of constitution,” and “physical conformation” among “the younger portion” of Mormons.

# RACE AS ASCRIBED FROM THE OUTSIDE

- Polygamy

- Forced Mormons to unduly interfere with the normal development of adolescence and was in sum a “violation of a natural law.”
- Mormon men were constantly seeking “young virgins, [so] that notwithstanding the preponderance of the female population, a large percentage of the younger men remain unmarried.”
- Girls were married to the waiting patriarchs “at the earliest manifestations of puberty” and when that was not soon enough, Mormons made use of “means” to “hasten the period.”
- The progeny of the “peculiar institution” demonstrated its “most deplorable effects” in “the genital weakness of the boys and young men.” Polygamy created a “sexual debility” in the next generation of Mormon men, largely because their “sexual desires are stimulated to an unnatural degree at a very early age, and as female virtue is easy, opportunities are not wanting for their gratification.”



# RACE AS ASCRIBED FROM THE OUTSIDE

- The Degraded Mormon Body:
  - “[A]n expression of countenance and a style of feature, which may be styled the Mormon expression and style; an expression compounded of sensuality, cunning, suspicion, and smirking self-conceit. The yellow, sunken, cadaverous visage; the greenish-colored eyes; the thick, protuberant lips; the low forehead; the light, yellowish hair; and the lank, angular person, constitute an appearance so characteristic of the new race, the production of polygamy, as to distinguish them at a glance.”
  - “[T]he degradation of the mother follows that of the child, and physical degeneracy is not a remote consequence of moral depravity.”

# RACE AS ASPIRED TO FROM WITHIN

- The Elevated Mormon Body:
  - “There are no healthier, or better developed children than those born in polygamy.” Plural marriage was a principle “established by revelation for the regeneration of mankind.” Mary Jane Mount Tanner, 1880.
  - George Q. Cannon in 1882 contended that “the children of our system are brighter, stronger, [and] healthier [in] every way than those of the monogamic system.”
  - Other Mormons claimed that plural marriages produced a “more perfect type of manhood, mentally and physically,” and a “fine healthy race.”

HOW DID THIS IMPACT THE RACIAL  
PRIESTHOOD AND TEMPLE RESTRICTIONS?

## MORMONS CREATED AN INCLUSIVE VISION DURING THE 1830s AND 40s

- The Book of Mormon declared “all are alike unto God,” including “black and white,” 1830.

# MORMONS CREATED AN INCLUSIVE VISION DURING THE 1830s AND 40s

- “So long as we have no special rule in the church, as to people of color, let prudence guide.”

William W. Phelps, “Free People of Color,” *The Evening and the Morning Star*, July 1833.

# MORMONS CREATED AN INCLUSIVE VISION DURING THE 1830s AND 40s

- “All the families of the earth . . . should get redemption . . . in Christ Jesus,” regardless of “whether they are descendants of Shem, Ham, or Japheth.” W. W. Phelps, “The Gospel. No. 5,” *Latter Day Saints’ Messenger and Advocate*, February 1835.
- All people were “one in Christ Jesus . . . whether it was in Africa, Asia, or Europe.” W. W. Phelps, “The Ancient Order of Things,” *Latter Day Saints’ Messenger and Advocate*, September 1835.

## MORMONS CREATED AN INCLUSIVE VISION DURING THE 1830s AND 40s

- Apostle Parley P. Pratt professed his intent to preach “to all people, kindred, tongues, and nations without any exception” and included “India’s and Afric’s sultry plains” in a poetic expression of his global dream for Mormonism . (Parley P. Pratt, *A Voice of Warning*, 1837; *The Millennium and Other Poems*, 1840).

# MORMONS CREATED AN INCLUSIVE VISION DURING THE 1830s AND 40s

- At Nauvoo the Saints envisioned “people from every land and from every nation, the polished European, the degraded Hottentot, and the Shivering Laplander” flowing to that city. “Report from the Presidency,” *Times and Seasons*, October 1840.
- The Saints at Nauvoo anticipated “persons of all languages, and of every tongue, and of every color; who shall with us worship the Lord of Hosts in his holy temple, and offer up their orisons in his sanctuary,” “Report from the Presidency,” *Times and Seasons*, October 1840.



# MORMONS CREATED AN INCLUSIVE VISION DURING THE 1830s AND 40s



- “It is nothing to do with the blood, for of one blood has God made all flesh.”
- “We [h]av[e] one of the best Elders[,] an African in Lowell—a barber.”
- “We don’t care about the color.”

Brigham Young, General Church Minutes, 26 March 1847.

# OUTSIDERS PERCEIVED THAT MORMONS WERE TOO INCLUSIVE IN THE CREATION OF THEIR RELIGIOUS KINGDOM

- Mormons accepted “all nations and colours.”
- Mormon elders maintained “communion with the Indians,” and walked out with “colored women.”
- Mormons welcomed “all classes and characters” into their society.
- They included “aliens by birth” and people from “different parts of the world” as members of God’s earthly family.

# OUTSIDERS PERCEIVED THAT MORMONS WERE TOO INCLUSIVE IN THE CREATION OF THEIR RELIGIOUS KINGDOM

- Mormons honored “the natural equality of mankind, without excepting the native Indians or the African race.”
- The Mormons “opened an asylum for rogues and vagabonds and free blacks.”
- Mormons promoted black “ascendancy over the whites.”

# OUTSIDERS PERCEIVED THAT MORMONS WERE TOO INCLUSIVE IN THE CREATION OF THEIR RELIGIOUS KINGDOM

- The Book of Mormon ideal that “all are alike unto God,” including “black and white,” made it unlikely that the Saints would “remain unmolested in the State of Missouri.”
  - Edward Strutt Abdy, *Journal of a Residence and Tour in the United States of North America, From April, 1833, to October, 1834*, 3 vols. (London: John Murray, 1835), 1: 324-325; 3: 40-42, 54-59.



“Affecting parting of  
Brigham Young from  
his interesting little  
family”

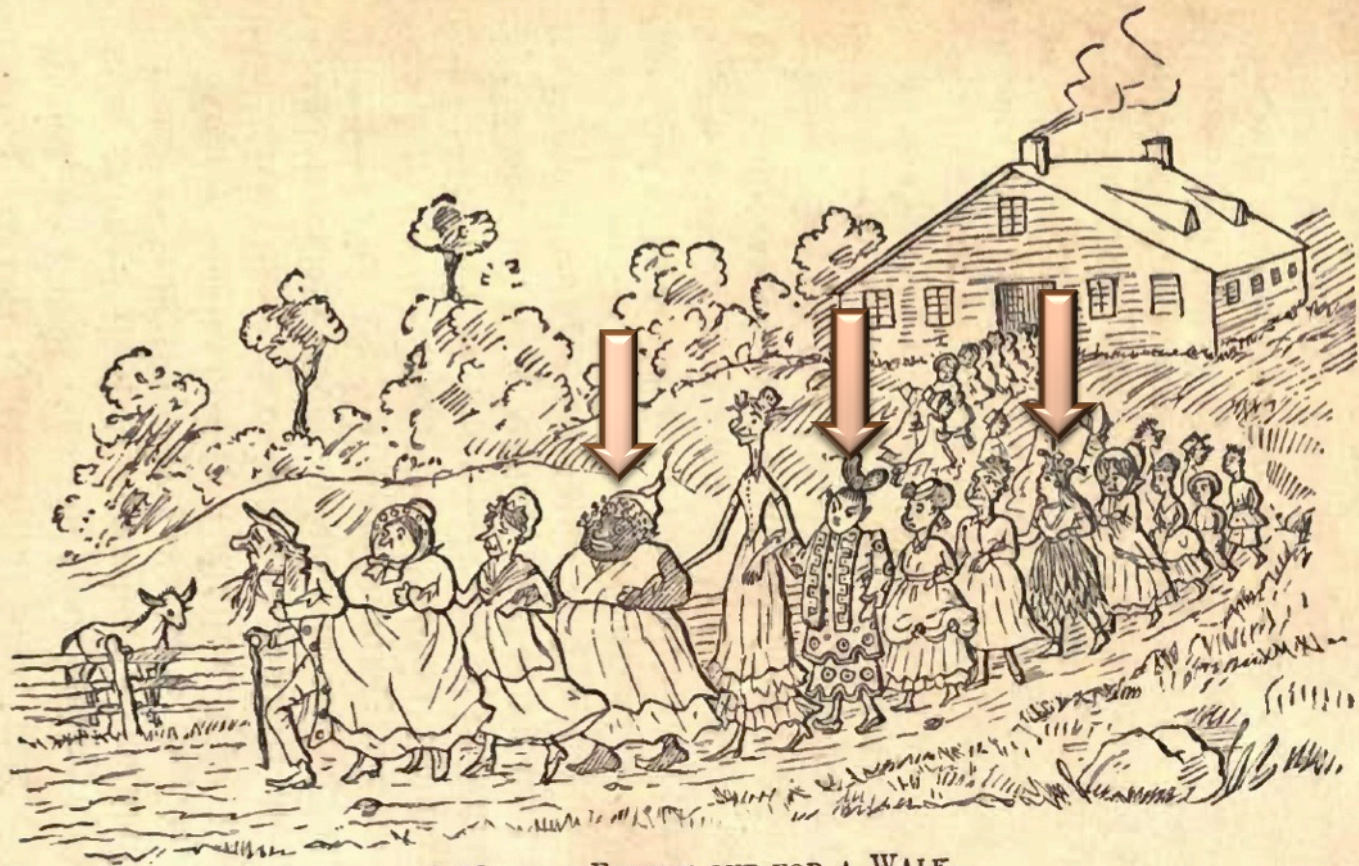
*Frank Leslie's Budget  
of Fun, 1872*



# *New York World*

The ungovernable propensity of the negroes to miscellaneous sexual indulgence, and the powerful instinct of their race toward unreasoning superstition, will make the four millions of freedmen the most promising field in the world for the propagation of the Mormon faith. Mormonism cannot mai

"Negro Suffrage and Polygamy," 12 October 1865



A MORMON FAMILY OUT FOR A WALK.

John D. Sherwood, *The Comic History of the United States*, 1870.





A "CULLUD" MORMON.

Alfred Trumble, *The Mysteries of Mormonism*, 1882.





I've got a big brunette. And a blonde to pet. I've got 'em short, fat, thin and tall . . . I've got a 'Cuban gal, 'and a Zulu pal. They come in bunches when I call: And that's not all—I've got 'em pretty too, Got a homely few, I've got 'em black to octoroon. I can spare six or eight. Shall I ship 'em by freight? For I am the Mormon coon."

# MORMONS MOVE TOWARD WHITENESS

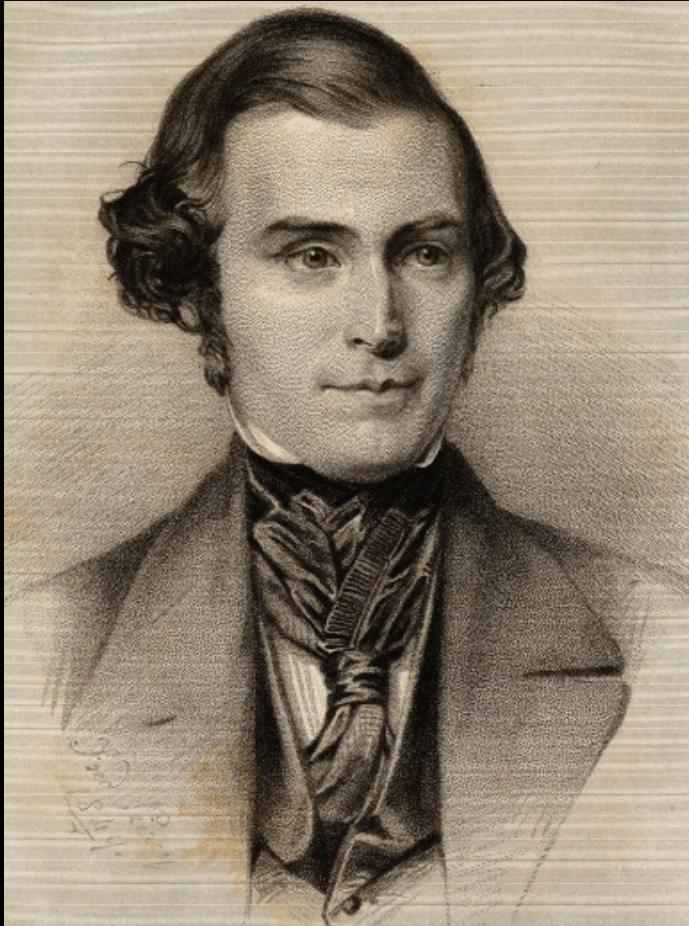
- “Now dear Br, I wish to know if this is the order of God or tolerated in this Church ie to ordain Negroes to the Priesthood, and allow amalgamation. If it is I desire to know it, as I have yet got to learn it.”
  - William I. Appleby, Batavia, New York, to Brigham Young, SLC, Utah, 2 June 1847.

# MOVE TOWARD WHITENESS

- 3 December 1847, Winter Quarters
- 23 January 1852, First open articulation of a race-based priesthood restriction by a Prophet
- 5 February 1852, most forceful articulation



# PRATT ON 27 JAN. 1852

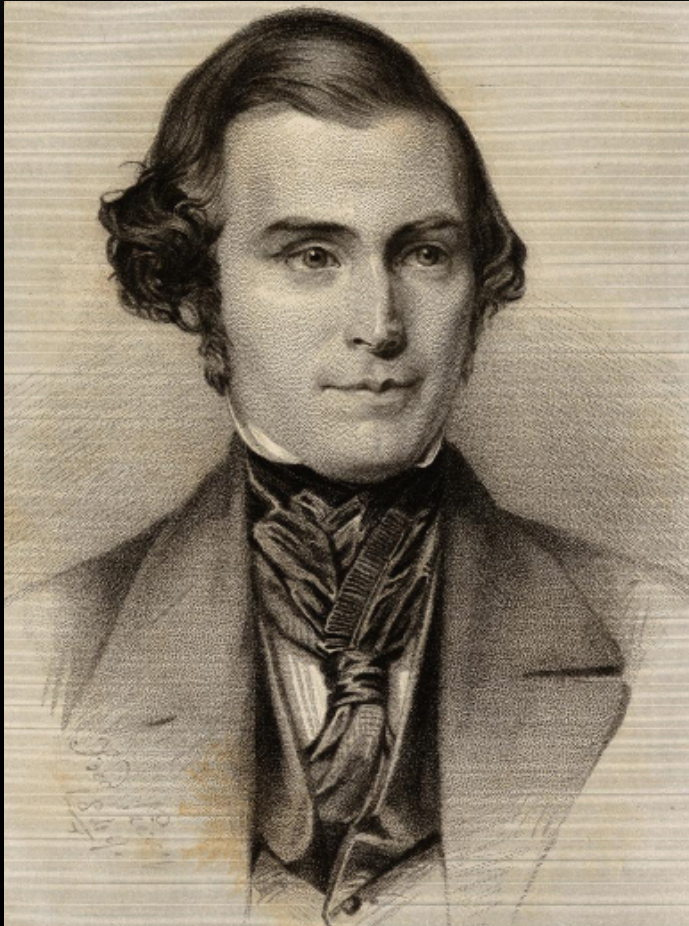


Orson Pratt in 1851

- Moved that “servant code” be “rejected” in its entirety.
- Argued that only God administered divine curses and that they were particular to a given time and place.
- Curses were not multigenerational.
- “Shall we take then the innocent African that has committed no sin and damn him to slavery and bondage without receiving any authority from heaven to do [so]?”
- He found the idea “preposterous.”
- It was “enough to cause the angels in heaven to blush.”



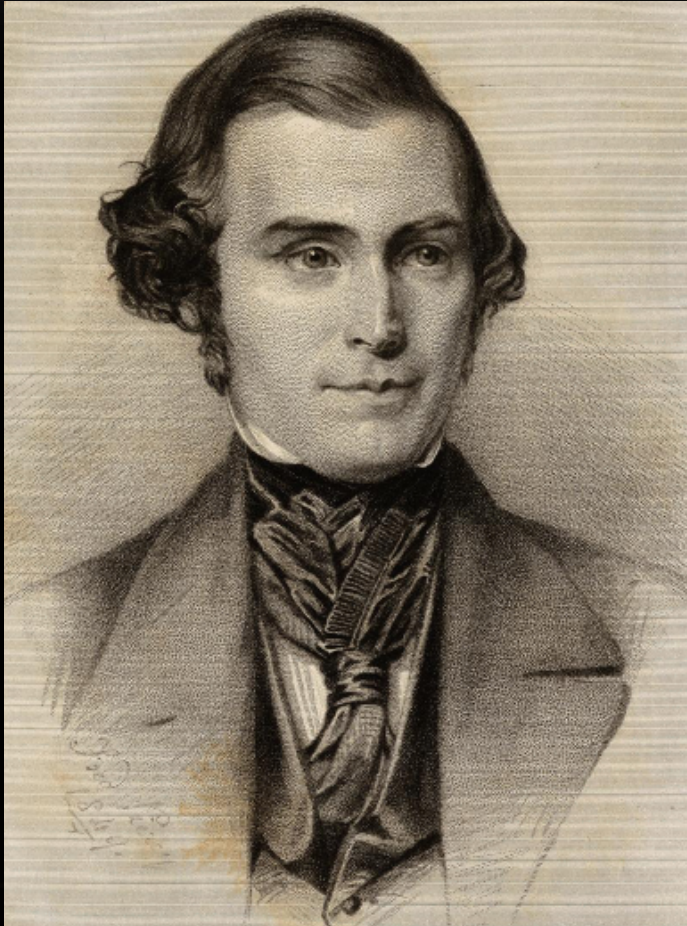
## PRATT ON 5 FEB. 1852



Orson Pratt in 1851

- Voted against the Cedar City and Fillmore incorporation bills.

## PRATT ON 5 FEB. 1852



Orson Pratt in 1851

- “Councilor Pratt opposed the bill on the ground that colored people were there prohibited from voting.”  
Legislative minutes on Fillmore incorporation bill

# ELIJAH ABEL

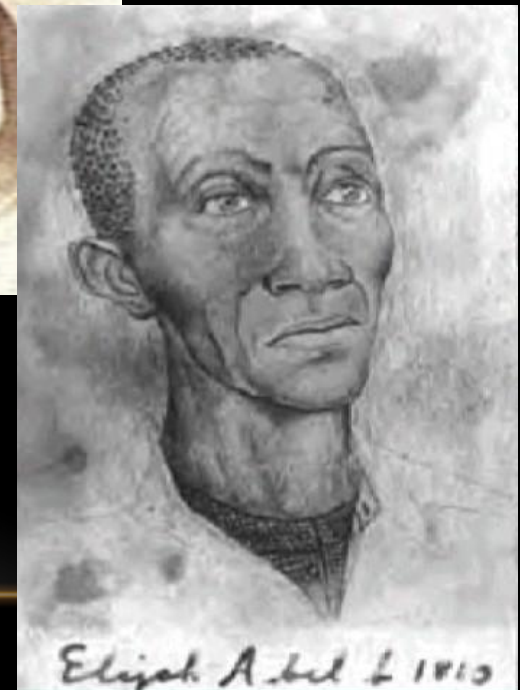
- Ordained an Elder 3 March 1836, sanctioned by Joseph Smith, Jr.
- Ordained a member of the third quorum of seventy on 20 Dec. 1836 by Zebedee Coltrin
  - 1879 Abel applies to John Taylor to receive his endowments.



# ELIJAH ABEL

- 1884 obituary in *Deseret News*

- "Died, Elijah Abel: In the Thirteenth Ward, December 25th, 1884, of old age and debility, consequent upon exposure while laboring in the ministry in Ohio. Deceased was born in Washington County, Maryland, July 23rd, 1810. He joined the Church and was ordained an Elder as appears by certificate dated March 3rd, 1836. He was subsequently ordained a Seventy, as appears by certificate dated April 4, 1841. He labored successfully in Canada and also performed a mission in the United States, from which he returned about two weeks ago. He died in full faith of the Gospel."





## 1907 FIRST PRESIDENCY STATEMENT

- “The descendants of Ham may receive baptism and confirmation but no one known to have in his veins negro blood, (it matters not how remote a degree) can either have the Priesthood in any degree or the blessings of the Temple of God; no matter how otherwise worthy he may be.”

Source: Brigham Young Papers, ms 36, box 78, folder 7, Manuscript Collection, Harold B. Lee Library, University of Utah, Salt Lake City.

# RESTRICTION IS SOLIDIFIED, 1908

## Joseph F. Smith's Evolution

- In 1879 he defended Abel's priesthood as valid.
- In 1895 reminded LDS leaders that Abel was ordained to the priesthood "at Kirtland under the direction of the Prophet Joseph Smith."
- In 1904 he called Abel's ordination a mistake that "was never corrected."
- In 1908, he claimed that Abel's priesthood "ordination was declared null and void by the Prophet himself."
- Decided that missionaries "should not take the initiative in proselyting among the negro people, but if negroes or people tainted with negro blood apply for baptism themselves they might be admitted to Church membership in the understanding that nothing further can be done for them."

## Joseph F. Smith



# 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY MORMONISM

WWW.236.COM



- “Romney Xmas Card represents the melting pot that is Utah.”
- “Who do you think is the non-Romney (or Nomney) in this photo?”

# ROMNEY MORMON MOMENT



- “The whitest white man to run for president in recent memory.”

(Lee Siegel, “What’s Race Got to Do With It?,” *The New York Times*, January 14, 2012).



# Mormon.org

# "I'm a Mormon"



MORMON.ORG

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I'm a Mormon.

