

gave the Hopes their patriarchal blessings, identifying them as “associated with Manasseh,” not because of literal lineage, but consistent with his belief that blacks should be assigned to or adopted into that tribe of Israel.³⁶ Spencer sometimes related the Hopes’ experiences to congregations as he preached tolerance and Christian love for all. He praised their exemplary faithfulness when it would have been so easy for them to succumb to bitterness.³⁷

In that same year, 1947, the First Presidency assigned Heber Meeks, president of the Southern States Mission, to explore the possibility of proselyting in Cuba. Meeks asked his knowledgeable LDS friend, sociologist Lowry Nelson of the University of Minnesota, about the mixed racial picture in Cuba and whether missionaries would be able to avoid conferring priesthood on men with some negroid ancestry. Nelson sent his reply to both Meeks and to the First Presidency, expressing sharp dismay at the policy. The Presidency responded, “From the days of the Prophet Joseph even until now, it has been the doctrine of the Church, never questioned by any of the Church leaders, that the Negroes are not entitled to the full blessings of the Gospel.” Its explanation, they said, was to be found in the premortal existence.³⁸ In 1952, Nelson, still unable to reconcile this Church policy with his understanding of the gospel, published an article critical of the policy in *The Nation*, drawing national attention.³⁹

In 1949, George Albert Smith’s administration began sending out a consistent statement in response to inquiries. It followed the pattern set in earlier private correspondence by the First Presidency and by Elder McKay: “It is not a matter of the declaration of a policy but of direct commandment from the Lord, on which is founded the doctrine of the Church from the days of its organization, to the effect that Negroes . . . are not entitled to the priesthood at the present time,”⁴⁰ based on “some eternal law with which man is yet unfamiliar” by which men’s place and condition of birth and rights to priesthood must be explained, a plan “the conduct of spirits in the premortal existence has some determining effect upon the conditions and circumstances under which these spirits take on mortality.”⁴¹ The statement went beyond the evidence both in claiming a “direct commandment” from the Lord and in saying that the doctrine came “from the days of [the Church’s] organization.”

When David O. McKay became Church president in April 1951, he continued to respond to queries with this same statement.⁴² [But behind the scenes application of the policy was changing to some degree. In 1948, during the George Albert Smith administration, priesthood](#)

36. E. Gary Smith to author, January 5, 1997. A letter from the First Presidency to Spencer W. Kimball stated that “Negro members may properly receive patriarchal blessings.” That they may be declared “of certain lineage does not mean that the person’s blood may not be intermingled with the blood of other races.” That persons baptized become “members of the House of Israel by adoption . . . is not the doctrine of the Church.” Joseph Anderson, by direction of the First Presidency, to Spencer W. Kimball, May 28, 1971, Kimball Papers. See Armand L. Mauss, “In Search of Ephraim,” *Journal of Mormon History* 25, no. 2 (spring 1999) 168–69.

37. Spencer W. Kimball, Journal, October 9, 30, 1947.

38. Armand L. Mauss, “The Fading of the Pharaoh’s Curse: The Decline and Fall of the Priesthood Ban against Blacks in the Mormon Church,” *Dialogue* 14, no. 3 (fall 1981): 11; Bringhurst, *Saints, Slaves, and Blacks*, 183–84, 190; Stewart, *Mormonism and the Negro*, 46–47. Special attention is given to the role of David O. McKay in Gregory A. Prince, “David O. McKay and Blacks: Building the Foundation for the 1978 Revelation,” *Dialogue* 35, no. 1 (spring 2002): 145.

39. Lowry Nelson, “Mormons and the Negro,” *The Nation* 174 (May 24, 1952): 488.

40. David O. McKay, letter dated November 3, 1947, published in McKay, *Home Memories*, 226–31. See also August 17, 1949, statement, quoted in Lester E. Bush, “Mormonism’s Negro Doctrine: An Historical Overview,” in *Neither White nor Black*, 221, (127 n. 199 for proper date).

41. McKay, *Home Memories*, 230.

42. 1951 by President McKay, with his counselors Richards and Clark, and again between 1959 and 1961 by McKay, Clark, and Moyle, quoted in Bush, “Mormonism’s Negro Doctrine,” 46–47 and various other sources.