

THE USE OF “LAMANITE” IN OFFICIAL LDS DISCOURSE

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ON DECEMBER 8, 2002, A RALLY was staged on Main Street Plaza in downtown Salt Lake City in support of LDS researcher Thomas Murphy, who faced the possibility of Church discipline for publicly stating that genetic studies of Native Americans challenged claims regarding the ancient historicity of the Book of Mormon. By an unanticipated coincidence, the protest occurred on the same evening as the Church’s first ever Spanish-language devotional. Consequently, thousands of Hispanic Saints pouring out of the LDS Conference Center and across the plaza to the southeast were confronted—to the surprise of both parties—by Murphy’s supporters, who held signs reading, for example, “And it came to pass that no Lamanite DNA was found throughout all of the land.” As she passed the sign-carriers, one Latina Saint was overheard to say to her Anglo companion, “Pero yo soy lamanita!” (“But I am a Lamanite!”) Her friend responded with a muffled sound that seemed vaguely supportive but also a little uncomfortable, perhaps even unconvinced.¹

As this anecdote illustrates, different stakeholders derive different meanings from, and have varying degrees of investment in, LDS

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teachings identifying the native peoples of the Americas and the Pacific Islands as literal descendants of ancient Book of Mormon peoples (traditionally called “Lamanites,” after Laman, a character in the Book of Mormon narrative). For some, these teachings are important as a test of the truthfulness of Mormonism. Others place these teachings at the heart of their personal identity. For still others, claims about Lamanite identity are relatively inconsequential when it comes to their belief in the truth claims of the LDS Church.

That complexity has not always been appreciated in the discussions regarding Lamanite DNA that continue to play out between Book of Mormon revisionists and Book of Mormon apologists.² Both sides in these debates agree that current genetic studies challenge traditional LDS teachings that all native peoples of the Americas are the literal descendants of Book of Mormon peoples (or Lamanites). The debates have therefore tended to hinge on the status of those teachings. Are they normative, prophetic statements, or are they merely individual Church leaders’ speculations? In other words, are past statements about the identity of Lamanites official LDS Church doctrine? Both sides in the discussion typically favor straight-

gious history. Some *Church News* citations were obtained from *LDS Collectors Library, 2005* (Salt Lake City: LDS Media and Deseret Book, 2005), which does not supply page numbers and provides writers’ bylines inconsistently.

¹I witnessed this exchange while observing the pro-Murphy demonstration on Main Street Plaza on December 8, 2002.

²For studies in the vein that I am calling “revisionist,” see Thomas W. Murphy, “Lamanite Genesis, Genealogy, and Genetics,” in *American Apocrypha: Essays on the Book of the Mormon*, edited by Dan Vogel and Brent Lee Metcalfe (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2002), 47–77; Thomas W. Murphy, “Simply Implausible: DNA and a Mesoamerican Setting for the Book of Mormon,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 36 (Winter 2003): 109–31; and Simon Southerton, *Losing a Lost Tribe: Native Americans, DNA, and the Mormon Church* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2004). For examples of what I am calling “apologetic” approaches, see John L. Sorenson and Matthew Roper, “Before DNA,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 12 (2003): 6–23; Michael F. Whiting, “DNA and the Book of Mormon: A Phylogenetic Perspective,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 12 (2003): 24–35; and D. Jeffrey Meldrum and Trent D. Stephens, “Who Are the Children of Lehi?” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 12 (2003): 38–51.

forward, uncomplicated definitions of official teaching that serve their respective interests. Revisionists' insistence that science invalidates LDS doctrine about the origin of Native Americans³ relies on a broad definition of doctrine that treats most or all statements made from the pulpit by high-ranking LDS leaders as if Mormons were obligated by their faith to accept these statements as revealed truth. On the other hand, apologists' attempts to retreat from past statements by Church leaders require them to define official discourse very narrowly or to subordinate the authority of Church leaders to that of LDS scripture.⁴

Defining statements as "official" or normative because they were made by certain office holders in certain settings may be a useful move in debates over what Mormons *ought* to believe. But that kind of definition does not correspond to how authority actually works in LDS discourse. Statements exercise normative force among Latter-day Saints not simply because they are spoken by Church leaders but because they serve functions that matter to members. To recognize what was—or was not—at stake in claims regarding Lamanite identity for the parties whose paths crossed during the protest on Main Street Plaza in late 2002, it is not enough to collect statements documenting what Church leaders have taught about Lamanite identity in the past. We must also understand *why* Church leaders taught these beliefs. What did these teachings motivate Church members to

³This way of framing the issue strikes me as implicit in Brent Lee Metcalfe's description of the Lamanite DNA controversy as a "Galileo moment." See Thomas W. Murphy, "Inventing Galileo," *Sunstone*, Issue 131 (March 2004): 58.

⁴For a limited definition of official discourse, see Stephen E. Robinson's claim that only statements issued over the signatures of the First Presidency and/or the Quorum of the Twelve constitute official Mormon doctrine. Robinson, a professor of religion at Brigham Young University, does not use this definition in the specific context of Lamanite identification, but he does to disclaim responsibility for teachings by past LDS Church leaders on other subjects with which he does not agree. See Craig L. Blomberg and Stephen E. Robinson, *How Wide the Divide? A Mormon and an Evangelical in Conversation* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 140. For an assertion that the authority of scripture is superior to that of Church leaders, see Matthew Roper, "Swimming in the Gene Pool: Israelite Kinship Relations, Genes, and Genealogy," *FARMS Review* 15 (2006): 156–58.

do? How have these teachings been connected to Latter-day Saints’ understandings of salvation history—of their identity and mission, their origin and destiny?

In search of precedents to validate their rethinking regarding Lamanite identity, some apologists overstate the diversity of views on the subject espoused by past Church leaders; also, apologists obscure the extent to which such views were presented and received as prophetic declarations, not as mere opinion or speculation. On the other hand, some revisionists paint an overly homogenous picture of LDS discourse about Lamanites, overlooking the varying degrees of investment that different Church leaders have shown in the idea that Native Americans and/or Pacific Islanders may be descended from Book of Mormon peoples. In this essay, I offer a more nuanced history of Lamanite identification in official LDS discourse.

Because sitting Church presidents and apostles enjoy the greatest formal power to define normative LDS teaching, their statements are the primary focus of this study. Because Church leaders do not compose their teachings in a vacuum, some attention is also paid to statements by lower-level Church leaders (Seventies, mission presidents, etc.) and by some lay members. In this essay, “Lamanite identification” refers to statements that identify the contemporary indigenous peoples of the Americas as Lamanites (or related terms like “children of Lehi”).⁵ Borrowing terms used to describe different models for Book of Mormon geography, I speak of “hemispheric” and “limited” Lamanite identification. Hemispheric Lamanite identification is the teaching that native peoples throughout North and South America—often the Pacific Islands as well—are direct blood-descendants of ancient Book of Mormon peoples. Limited Lamanite identification is the more recent contention that the descendants of Lehi—the father of the Book of Mormon peoples—consisted of a small colony, probably in Mesoamerica, who were eventually absorbed into existing populations and whose genetic markers have evidently not survived to the present.

Although some proponents of limited Lamanite identification claim precedents in earlier LDS teachings, hemispheric identification

⁵Lamanite identification is distinct from discourse that alludes to Lamanites as characters in stories from the Book of Mormon. Lamanite identification applies the concept of “Lamanite” to people living in the present.

monopolized discourse about Lamanites until the last two decades of the twentieth century. Even so, the discourse was not static: hemispheric Lamanite identification served multiple and shifting functions in the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Hemispheric Lamanite identification enjoyed its heyday during the forty years of Spencer W. Kimball's tenure as LDS apostle and later Church president. Since Kimball's death in 1985, there has been a noticeable (though not total) decline in Church leaders' use of Lamanite identification; during the same period, some Church members have found limited Lamanite identification increasingly attractive. Contrary to what some may assume, the recent controversy over Lamanite DNA is not the only, or even principal, factor motivating Church leaders' retreat from Lamanite identification. While the DNA controversy is a contributing factor, I argue that other considerations play a role as well, including changing attitudes toward race and new administrative challenges created by the Church's international growth. Indeed, the shift away from Lamanite identification in Church leaders' discourse predates the DNA controversy. This pattern suggests that the future of LDS discourse about Lamanites may be affected, but will probably not be determined, by discussions regarding genetics and geography.

**NINETEENTH-CENTURY USAGE:
THE JOSEPH SMITH YEARS, 1827-44**

From the time of the Book of Mormon's publication in March 1830, Joseph Smith and other early Mormon leaders described it as a record of the ancestors of America's native peoples. Smith's earliest revelations referred to the living descendants of Book of Mormon peoples collectively as "Lamanites" (LDS D&C 3:20, 10:48). When early Church leaders spoke of contemporary Lamanites, they most often meant the Indians of the United States and its western territories, not North and South America as a whole. Smith, for example, explaining Mormon beliefs for two U.S. periodicals, identified the descendants of Book of Mormon peoples as "our western Tribes of Indians" or "the Indians that now inhabit this country."⁶

Similarly, Smith's revelations used the term "Lamanite" to refer unambiguously to the tribes then occupying the Indian territory west

⁶Dean C. Jessee, ed., *The Personal Writings of Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1984), 273; and reproduced as "The Wentworth Let-

of the Mississippi (D&C 32:2, 54:8). Probably this usage reflects the degree to which the United States dominated LDS leaders' mental maps of the New World. At the same time, Smith showed signs of a more hemispheric understanding of Lamanite identity. In 1841, he recognized newly discovered temples in Mesoamerica as the work of Book of Mormon peoples,⁷ and he reportedly located Lehi's landing site in the New World, on separate occasions, in both Chile and Panama.⁸

The claim that the Book of Mormon is a history of the American Indians was not a secondary selling point to arouse public curiosity: LDS writer Terryl Givens has noted that Church leaders "did all they could" to promote this claim.⁹ Apostle Parley P. Pratt, for example, dedicated an entire chapter of his 1837 *A Voice of Warning* to establishing that the Book of Mormon "reveals the origin of the American Indian, which was before a mystery."¹⁰ One reason that this claim may have been so important to Church leaders is that, by tracing Indian origins to migrations from biblical lands, the Book of Mormon affirmed the historical veracity of the Bible over against contemporary

ter," *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 4 vols. (New York: Macmillan, 1992), 4:1751.

⁷Joseph Smith, Letter to John M. Bernhisel, November 16, 1841, in Jessee, *Personal Writings of Joseph Smith*, 501–2; see also Terryl L. Givens, *By the Hand of Mormon: The American Scripture That Launched a New World Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 102.

⁸Franklin D. Richards and James A. Little, eds., *A Compendium of the Doctrines of the Gospel* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1886), 289; Joseph Smith, *Times and Seasons*, September 15, 1842, 921–22, quoted in Joseph Fielding Smith, comp. and ed., *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976), 267. Attributing these statements to Smith has been disputed in recent decades: see John E. Clark, "Book of Mormon Geography," *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 1:178; and [no author identified], "Did Lehi Land in Chile?" in *Reexploring the Book of Mormon*, edited by John W. Welch (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book/Provo, Utah: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 1992), 57–61.

⁹Givens, *By the Hand of Mormon*, 95.

¹⁰Parley P. Pratt, *A Voice of Warning and Instruction to All People* (1937; rpt., Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1952), 77; see also Dan Vogel, *Indian Origins and the Book of Mormon: Religious Solutions from Columbus to Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1986), 35.

skeptics who cited the existence of this formerly unknown race to “call in question the authority of the sacred writings.”¹¹ Identifying Indians as scattered Hebrews was one way that the Book of Mormon bore witness to the truth of the Bible.

Lamanite identification was also important as a component of early Mormon millenarianism. The equation of Lamanites and Indians made America a theater for the redemption of Israel, allowing American Saints to contribute, on their own shores, to the promised gathering of the chosen people. Missions to the Indians were thus a principal element of the work the Saints believed themselves called to undertake. The first Indian mission was launched by Oliver Cowdery, Parley P. Pratt, and others within months of the publication of the Book of Mormon. Setting a pattern that would continue into the latter half of the twentieth century, the missionaries informed Indian audiences that the Book of Mormon was the Indians’ own ancestral record.¹² Contrary to a common misunderstanding, interest in Indian missions did not decline after the essentially unsuccessful 1830 mission but continued throughout Joseph Smith’s life and beyond.¹³ The most famous Lamanite convert during the Smith years was Lewis Dana, an Oneida, who was baptized in 1840 and became a member of Smith’s elite Council of Fifty. Apostle Heber C. Kimball attributed to Dana the distinction of being “the first Lamanite” to be sealed in marriage (to his Anglo wife) in a latter-day temple.¹⁴

LDS teachings about the Indians’ destiny as Lamanites contrib-

¹¹Vogel, *Indian Origins*, 35–39; and Dan Vogel, *Joseph Smith: The Making of a Prophet* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2004), 121–23.

¹²Parley P. Pratt, *The Autobiography of Parley Parker Pratt, One of the Twelve Apostles of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Embracing His Life, Ministry and Travels, with Extracts, in Prose and Verse, from His Miscellaneous Writings*, edited by Parley P. Pratt [Jr.] (1874; rpt., Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1985 printing), chaps. 7–8.

¹³Ronald W. Walker, “Seeking the ‘Remnant’: The Native American during the Joseph Smith Period,” *Journal of Mormon History* 19 (Spring 1993): 1–33.

¹⁴Stanley B. Kimball, ed., *On the Potter’s Wheel: The Diaries of Heber C. Kimball* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books and Smith Research Associates, 1987), 104. On Dana’s membership in the Council of Fifty, see Andrew F. Ehat, “‘It Seems Like Heaven Began on Earth’: Joseph Smith and the Constitution of the Kingdom of God,” *BYU Studies* 20 (Spring 1980): 269.

uted to the hostility against the Saints in Missouri and Illinois. On the basis of 3 Nephi 20:14–20, Joseph Smith, Parley P. Pratt, and others preached a distinctively Mormon apocalypticism in which the Indians were destined to reclaim their promised land before Christ's second coming, destroying all white settlers except those who were numbered among Israel (i.e., the Mormons).¹⁵ This preaching provoked fears that Mormons would foment Indian uprisings. During the Church's Illinois period, a Potawatomi delegation actually invited the Saints to join a ten-tribe confederation for mutual defense, an offer in which Smith, fearful of how non-Mormon whites would react, expressed cautious interest.¹⁶ Paradoxically, visions of Lamanites violently reseizing their homeland and wreaking God's justice upon the wicked existed side-by-side with expectations that Lamanites would be pacified and civilized through conversion.¹⁷ In either case, identifying the Indians as Lamanites was integral to the Saints' understanding of how scriptural prophecies would be fulfilled.

Identifying American Indians and their cultural artifacts as Lamanite also sacralized the landscapes in which the Saints found themselves. When Smith identified a skeleton uncovered in an Illinois mound as Zeph, a "white Lamanite," or when he told the Saints that there was a Nephite altar north of Far West, Missouri,¹⁸ he helped to orient his followers in unfamiliar places by relating them to events from the Saints' distinctive version of salvation history. By the same token, he promoted a sense that the Saints were living on holy ground. Smith's identification of Spring Hill, Missouri, as Adamondi-Ahman, where Adam offered up sacrifices (LDS D&C 116:1),

¹⁵Grant Underwood, *The Millenarian World of Early Mormonism* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 77–83.

¹⁶Walker, "Seeking the 'Remnant,'" 26–27.

¹⁷In the Kirtland Temple dedicatory prayer, for example, Smith prayed that the Lamanites would "be converted from their wild and savage condition" and "lay down their weapons of bloodshed, and cease their rebellions" (D&C 109:65–66; all citations from the 1981 LDS edition). The W. W. Phelps hymn, "O Stop and Tell Me, Red Man," included in the first LDS hymnal (1835), anticipated the day when God would both "break [the] Gentile yoke" from the Indians and inspire them to "quit their savage customs."

¹⁸Joseph Smith et al., *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, edited by B. H. Roberts, 2d ed. rev., 7 vols. (1932; Salt Lake City: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1980 printing), 2:79–80; 3:35.

served a similar function.

From the beginning of Mormonism, Lamanite identification served multiple purposes. Like other Americans, the first Saints manifested ambivalent attitudes toward their country's native inhabitants: guilt about the decimation and displacement of the Indians; fear of Indian violence; fascination with Indian artifacts and lore.¹⁹ Mormons, more than other Americans, intensified these attitudes by identifying Indians as Lamanites, thus giving them a prominent role in salvation history.

THE PIONEER YEARS, 1845–90

In the decades following Smith's death in 1844, hemispheric identification became firmly established in LDS discourse about Lamanites, although the Indians of the Intermountain West, being closest to home, received the lion's share of Church leaders' attention. In their 1845 proclamation to the kings of the world, the Twelve Apostles bore "testimony that the 'Indians' (so called) of North and South America are a remnant of the tribes of Israel; as is now made manifest by the discovery and revelation of their ancient oracles and records."²⁰ In his apostolic proclamation of 1852, Parley P. Pratt instructed the "Red Men of America" that Lehi's descendants had "peopled the entire continent of North and South America. . . . Peruvians, Mexicans, Guatemalans, descendants of every tribe and tongue of this mysterious race! Your history, your Gospel, your destiny is revealed."²¹ During an abortive mission to South America, 1851–52, Pratt concluded that "perhaps nine-tenths of the vast population of Peru, as well as of most other countries of Spanish America, are of the

¹⁹Historian Joel W. Martin has discussed the "tremendous symbolic power" Indians had for settlers and the complexity of settlers' "identification with Indians." See his "Indians, Contact, and Colonialism in the Deep South: Themes for a Postcolonial History of American Religion," in *Retelling U.S. Religious History*, edited by Thomas A. Tweed (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 149–80.

²⁰James R. Clark, ed., *Messages of the First Presidency of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1965–75), 1:254.

²¹Parley P. Pratt, "Proclamation! To the People of the Coasts and Islands of the Pacific (Ocean), of Every Nation, Kindred, and Tongue," *Milennial Star* 14 (September 18, 1852): 469.

blood of Lehi.”²² Consistent with this understanding of Lamanite identity, Pratt’s younger brother Orson, also a member of the Quorum of the Twelve, developed a hemispheric Book of Mormon geography, which he expounded on two occasions in the Salt Lake Tabernacle and incorporated into the footnotes of the 1879 edition of the Book of Mormon.²³

At the same time that Parley P. Pratt attempted to bring the Mormon gospel to Lamanites in South America, LDS missionaries to the Society Islands (French Polynesia) and Sandwich Islands (Hawaii) became convinced that local natives were also descended from Book of Mormon peoples. One of those missionaries, George Q. Cannon, professed to receive this knowledge by revelation around 1851.²⁴ Later, as a member of the First Presidency, Cannon preached that “no one who is not completely prejudiced and darkened through unbelief can doubt the common origin of the Polynesian nations with the . . . Indians of North America.”²⁵

This new form of Lamanite identification was well—and rapidly—received back in Utah. By 1858, Church President Brigham Young was teaching that “those islanders, and the natives of this country are of the House of Israel,” a claim he repeated in a letter to Hawaiian King Kamehameha V. Before the 1860s ended, an article in the Church’s *Juvenile Instructor* alluded to the Lehite ancestry of the Pacific Islanders as common knowledge among the Saints.²⁶ Because the Book of Mormon story of Hagoth (Alma 63:5–8) became the standard explanation for how some Book of Mormon peoples settled the

²²Pratt, *Autobiography*, 368, emphasis his.

²³Orson Pratt, December 27, 1868, *Journal of Discourses* (Liverpool and London: Latter-day Saints’ Book Depot, 1854-86), 12:337–46; Orson Pratt, February 11, 1872, *Journal of Discourses*, 14:323–35; Givens, *By the Hand of Mormon*, 106.

²⁴R. Lanier Britsch, *Unto the Islands of the Sea: A History of the Latter-day Saints in the Pacific* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1986), 97–98.

²⁵George Q. Cannon, “The Church in Polynesia,” in *Collected Discourses*, edited by Brian H. Stuy, 4 vols. (Burbank, Calif./Woodland Hills, Utah: B.H.S. Publishing, 1987–92), 2:4.

²⁶G. R., “Man and His Varieties,” *Juvenile Instructor* 3 (October 1, 1868): 146; see also Norman Douglas, “The Sons of the Lehi and the Seed of Cain: Racial Myths in Mormon Scripture and Their Relevance to the Pacific Islands,” *Journal of Religious History* 8 (June 1974): 98.

Pacific Islands, the island natives were often referred to, not as Lamanites, but as “Nephites,” the latter being how the Book of Mormon identifies Hagoth’s people. In either case, Pacific Islanders were seen as heirs of the promises that had come, on the mainland, to be associated with “Lamanite” identity. Across the second half of the nineteenth century, LDS missionaries promoted the Lamanite (or Nephite) identity of Pacific Islanders throughout the South Seas.

The belief that they were working among modern-day Lamanites inspired missionaries. It lent a sense of intensified significance to their labors and provided the basis for a special appeal in their preaching. The Book of Mormon is *your* book, missionaries informed their listeners—the record of *your* ancestors. When Apostle Moses Thatcher dedicated Mexico for missionary work in 1881, he turned the key not only for the preaching of the Mormon gospel but also for “the redemption of the Lamanites in that land.”²⁷ Thatcher thus set a pattern that other apostles would follow throughout the twentieth century: invoking Lamanite identification on high ceremonial occasions, such as mission and temple dedications, as a way of situating the Church’s work in Latin America and the Pacific Islands within the Mormon narrative of salvation history.

In addition to motivating missionaries, Lamanite identification explained the Church’s success within the framework of LDS understandings regarding the religious significance of race. LDS sociologist Armand Mauss has observed that, to preserve their identity in the face of opposition from American society, white Mormons during the nineteenth century became deeply invested in a doctrine that they were lineally descended from ancient Israel through the tribe of Ephraim.²⁸ As a corollary to this doctrine, the Church’s missionary efforts were frequently described as the gathering of scattered Israel. It followed that success in the mission field indicated the presence of “believing blood.” Lamanite identification explained how there came

²⁷Rey L. Pratt, *Conference Report of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, April 1930* (Salt Lake City: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, semi-annual), 127 (hereafter *Conference Report*); see also F. LaMond Tullis, *Mormons in Mexico: The Dynamics of Faith and Culture* (Logan: Utah State University Press, 1987), 41.

²⁸Armand L. Mauss, *All Abraham’s Children: Changing Mormon Conceptions of Race and Lineage* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003), chaps. 1–2.

to be people with believing blood in the Pacific Islands.²⁹ Related to the believing blood concept was the characterization of Lamanites as people "ready to believe" and extraordinarily firm in their commitment to the gospel, a description George Q. Cannon applied to Pacific Islanders.³⁰ Echoing Book of Mormon depictions of the exemplary fidelity of converted Lamanites, this characterization in one sense flattered those to whom it was applied, but it also tended to reinforce their status as Other and reproduced stereotypes about simple, tractable, childlike natives.

In contrast to the "positive" conception of Lamanites in the Pacific, the Mormon romance with the American Indian soured as a result of the pioneer experience in the Intermountain West. The romance had been easier to maintain before the trek west, when Lamanites were at a safe distance beyond the Mississippi River and when Indian raids were an apocalyptic scenario threatening only unrepentant non-Mormons. Once settled in the West, however, the Saints competed with native tribes for resources and thus become targets of Indian begging and, at times, of attack. At this point, many Mormons came to regard the Indians as did other white settlers: with "disgust and loathing."³¹ Idealistic missionaries and Church leaders struggled perennially against their coreligionists' disinterest in preaching to Indians or even in negotiating a peaceful coexistence with them.

Against this background, Lamanite identification offered a strategy for encouraging more generous and conciliatory Indian relations. In 1855, Apostle Wilford Woodruff demanded to know why Saints neglected Indian missions and withheld charitable assistance. Did the Saints not realize, he asked, "our true position with regard to

²⁹This point is made explicitly in G. R., "Man and His Varieties," 146: "One great evidence to the Latter-day Saints that the Sandwich Islanders are of the house of Israel is the success the Elders have had in preaching the gospel in their midst. . . . [W]hen we see a people obey the everlasting gospel in great numbers, we have a right to consider that they are descended from those to whom the promises were given."

³⁰Cannon, "The Church in Polynesia," 4.

³¹Juanita Brooks, "Indian Relations on the Mormon Frontier," *Utah Historical Quarterly* 12 (January-April 1944): 12; see also Charles S. Peterson, "Jacob Hamblin, Apostle to Lamanites, and the Indian Mission," *Journal of Mormon History* 2 (1975): 24-25. "Disgust and loathing" are Brooks's characterization.

the Lamanites”—that the Indians, unlike the Saints, were “legal heirs to the priesthood . . . of the promised seed” and that the Book of Mormon called the Saints “to do all we possibly can” to assist them?³² Similarly, Brigham Young was prone to speak of “Lamanites” instead of “Indians” when urging Saints to assist indigent natives or castigating Saints who wanted to expel or exterminate local tribes.³³

Lamanite identification motivated Church leaders to maintain missionary work among western Indians despite discouraging results. Orson Pratt, citing Brigham Young’s authority, preached that God had brought the Saints to the West “for this very purpose—that we might accomplish the redemption of these suffering, degraded Israelites, as predicted in the sacred records of their forefathers.”³⁴ The U.S. government’s campaign against Mormon plural marriage during the 1880s prompted a surge of LDS apocalypticism, one manifestation of which was a renewed interest in the conversion of the Lamanites as a precursor to the Second Coming. In 1882, Church President John Taylor warned the Saints, on the basis of a recently received revelation, that “the work of the Lord among the Lamanites must not be postponed.”³⁵ Consequently, members of the Twelve undertook missions to tribes throughout the western territories; in addition, Apostle Brigham Young Jr. reported that Church leaders “ha[d] in view the

³²Wilford Woodruff, July 15, 1855, *Journal of Discourses*, 9:227–29.

³³Brigham Young, July 28, 1866, *Journal of Discourses*, 11:263–66, referred to native peoples as “ungoverned and wild Indian[s]” in the context of urging LDS settlers to take defensive precautions against Indian attack; but elsewhere in the same address, he spoke of “poor, ignorant Lamanites” or “that poor, down-trodden branch of the house of Israel” in the context of urging the Saints to refrain from bloodshed and to let the Indians share access to the land. Another illustration of the tendency to use “Lamanite” in sympathetic contexts (albeit from a later period), is John D. Giles, “Aaronic Priesthood,” *Improvement Era*, 31 (August 1938): 492, who describes George A. Smith Jr., a missionary companion of Jacob Hamblin, as being killed by “Indians” while serving a mission to the “Lamanites.”

³⁴Orson Pratt, July 15, 1855, *Journal of Discourses*, 9:179.

³⁵Quoted in G. Homer Durham, ed., *The Gospel Kingdom: Selections from the Writings and Discourses of John Taylor* (Salt Lake City: Improvement Era, 1941), 247.

5,000,000 Lamanites in Mexico."³⁶ In 1855 Apostle Wilford Woodruff asserted that "the Lamanites of these mountains will yet be a shield to this people"—that is, the Saints—against "the knives of our enemies."³⁷ This view was a variation on the Book of Mormon's vision of the Lamanites trampling unrepentant non-Mormons. The Saints' apocalyptic hopes for the redemption of the Lamanites were reinforced by the apocalypticism then spreading among western tribes in response to the tribes' own struggles against the federal government. Apostle Heber J. Grant, for example, said he met an Indian named Lehi who was having dreams that corresponded to Mormon prophecies about the last days.³⁸

In 1890, two events occurred that initiated decisive shifts in the social positioning of, respectively, Mormons and American Indians: the Wilford Woodruff Manifesto, which initiated the end of polygamy, and the Wounded Knee Massacre, which effectively marked the end of armed Indian resistance to the U.S. government and, with it, the end of the American frontier. Mormons' accommodation to American society and Indians' submission to the reservation system dulled apocalyptic expectations about Lamanites violently reclaiming their promised land. However, hemispheric Lamanite identification, which had solidified during the pioneer years in tandem with the doctrine of Mormons' lineal Israelite descent, persisted well into the twentieth century.

**TWENTIETH-CENTURY USAGE:
THE PRE-SPENCER W. KIMBALL YEARS, 1890–1943**

After the closing of the frontier in 1890, the next major landmark in LDS discourse about Lamanites came in 1946, when Apostle Spencer W. Kimball (ordained October 7, 1943) was assigned responsibility for the Church's Indian affairs. During the intervening years, Church leaders and missionaries continued to promote hemispheric Lamanite identification in connection with the Church's growth in Latin America and the Pacific Islands and as part of a continuing commitment to the doctrine of lineal Israelite descent for Mormons generally. At the same time, LDS intellectu-

³⁶Peterson, "Jacob Hamblin," 29.

³⁷Wilford Woodruff, July 15, 1855, *Journal of Discourses*, 9:227.

³⁸Rachel Grant Taylor, "The Arizona Apostle," *Improvement Era* 34 (July 1942): 474.

als, some of them General Authorities, began to nuance hemispheric identification to mitigate tensions with scientific discourse about the origins of the peoples whom Mormons called Lamanites. Also during this period, a schism in Mexico (discussed below) revealed that Lamanite identity could be claimed for ends Church leaders found uncomfortable.

With the pacification of the American Indians at the end of the nineteenth century, the millennial vision of Lamanites as peoples of “savage condition” (D&C 109:65) who would one day tread down the Gentiles became anachronistic. But Church leaders continued to describe the redemption of Lamanites—in the sense of their conversion, civilization, and rise to prosperity—as an important facet of the Saints’ mission. The conversion of Lamanites was a necessary precursor to the Second Coming and a principal purpose of the Book of Mormon—“the chief reason,” in fact, that God gave the Saints the book, according to Melvin J. Ballard, another apostle with a special interest in Lamanite mission.³⁹

Despite this continuing emphasis on Lamanite redemption, LDS missionary work among American Indians was not pursued energetically during the first half of the twentieth century.⁴⁰ Prejudices against Indians that had developed during the pioneer years persisted—a fact that would later outrage Spencer Kimball—and there was no longer an apocalyptic impulse to compensate for most Saints’ disinclination to work with Indians. Lamanite missions continued with greater enthusiasm in the more rewarding fields of the Pacific Islands, where by 1913 the Church’s membership encompassed 25 percent of native Hawaiians and 10 percent of New Zealand Maoris.⁴¹ Latin America was another center for continuing Lamanite missions: missionary work in Mexico resumed in 1901, after a ten-year hiatus following the Woodruff Manifesto, and South America was dedicated for the preaching of the gospel in 1925.⁴²

Hemispheric Lamanite identification remained integral to missionary teaching in the Pacific Islands and Mexico and was reg-

³⁹Melvin J. Ballard, *Conference Report*, October 1926, 40; see also Melvin J. Ballard, *Conference Report*, April 1930, 156.

⁴⁰Mauss, *All Abraham’s Children*, 79–80.

⁴¹Laurie Maffly-Kipp, “Looking West: Mormonism and the Pacific World,” *Journal of Mormon History* 26 (Spring 2000): 46.

⁴²Although LDS leaders conceived of South America as a Lamanite

ularly invoked by Church leaders in prophetically charged settings such as general conference addresses and mission and temple dedications. Texts composed for the first Spanish hymnals, published by the Mexican mission, celebrated the coming of the gospel to the "thousands who live in the south" who were of the blood of "the Lamanite people."⁴³ Rey L. Pratt of the First Council of the Seventy and long-time Mexico mission president, reported to general conference several times during the 1910s and 1920s on his work among "the Lamanite people [who] extend from Alaska to Patagonia."⁴⁴ Apostle Melvin J. Ballard's oft-quoted 1925 dedicatory prayer for South America included a petition for "the fulfilment of Thy promises, contained in the Book of Mormon, to the Indians of this land, who are descendants of Lehi."⁴⁵ During three different temple dedications—in Hawaii (1919), Alberta (1923), and Arizona (1927)—Church President Heber J. Grant prayed for the "descendants of Lehi" living in those locales.⁴⁶ Church President Joseph F. Smith told Stuart Meha, a Maori Latter-day Saint visiting Salt Lake City in 1913, that "you brethren and sisters from New Zealand, you are some of Hagoth's people, and there is no *pea* [that is, doubt] about it!"⁴⁷ Smith's statement was cited in later decades as prophetic confirmation of the Pacific Islanders' Book of Mormon origins.⁴⁷ As an apostle, Heber J. Grant received an impression, on the occasion of dedicating Japan for missionary work in 1901, that

mission field—Melvin J. Ballard's dedicatory prayer alluded to "the descendants of Lehi[,] millions of whom reside in this country"—missionary work was confined to peoples of mostly European ancestry in Argentina and Brazil until after World War II.

⁴³The quoted text is from "La obra ya empieza." See John-Charles Duffy and Hugo Olaiz, "Correlated Praise: The Development of the Spanish Hymnal," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 35 (Summer 2002): 92–93.

⁴⁴Rey L. Pratt, *Conference Report*, October 1913, 48.

⁴⁵Bryant S. Hinckley, ed., *Sermons and Missionary Services of Melvin J. Ballard* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1949), 96.

⁴⁶Quoted in N. B. Lundwall, ed., *Temples of the Most High* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1968), 146, 159, 173.

⁴⁷Meha later said of Smith's statement, in a 1962 tape-recorded interview, that "this is the word of a prophet of God, we need look no further." Quoted in Robert E. Parsons, "Hagoth and the Polynesians," in *Alma: The*

an influx of Nephite and Lamanite blood explained what Grant perceived as physical similarity between the Japanese and the American Indians. Grant's idea, however, was not widely shared.⁴⁸

Even though Church leaders remained committed to hemispheric Lamanite identification through the first half of the twentieth century, a certain defensiveness surrounded the topic. As Mormons came into greater contact, post-polygamy, with the mainstream of American society, they had greater opportunities to experience the dissonance between hemispheric Lamanite identification and scientific theories regarding the origins of Native Americans and Pacific Islanders. Several LDS writers moved to reduce the dissonance, cautioning their fellow Saints that the Book of Mormon did not preclude the possibility of other migrations to the Americas and that the hemisphere's native peoples were not *altogether* descended from Book of Mormon peoples. LDS researcher Matthew Roper has charted these disclaimers, which became increasingly frequent from the 1920s on. Among the writers who made these disclaimers were popular scriptural commentator Janne M. Sjodahl, Seventies B. H. Roberts and Milton R. Hunter, and Apostles Anthony W. Ivins, John A. Widtsoe, and Richard L. Evans.⁴⁹

The import of these disclaimers should not be overstated: The writers were not abandoning hemispheric Lamanite identification. Mormon discourse about Lamanites during the first half of the twentieth century was still firmly embedded in doctrines about believing blood and the worldwide scattering of Israel. These doctrines implied a worldview in which Native Americans and Pacific Islanders constituted a single racial stock—mingled with other bloods, but with Israelite blood predominating. Similarly, most twentieth-century LDS leaders believed that the blood of Ephraim predominated among An-

Testimony of the Word, edited by Monte S. Nyman and Charles D. Tate Jr. (Provo, Utah: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1992), 256.

⁴⁸Alma O. Taylor, Letter to Joseph E. Taylor, September 1, 1901, Journal History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (chronological scrapbook of typed entries and newspaper clippings, 1830–present), LDS Church Archives.

⁴⁹Matthew Roper, "Nephi's Neighbors: Book of Mormon Peoples and Pre-Columbian Populations," *FARMS Review* 15 (2003): 91–128.

glo-Saxons.⁵⁰ It was crucial for this worldview that Lamanite identity be a *racial* identity, because it was through bloodlines that certain traits and rights to covenantal promises flowed. The importance of race in Lamanite identification during this period may be seen in Anthony W. Ivins's interest in redeeming "the probably 100,000,000" of the remnant of Israel living "from Mexico to Cape Horn whose blood has not been contaminated by admixture with any other race"; in Rey L. Pratt's reminder that the Lamanites south of the American border were "blood relatives" of the Saints in Utah because their blood was that of Ephraim and Manasseh; in James E. Talmage's assertion that "Lamanites have lived on as the degraded race of red men, whom Columbus found in the land"; and in the widely held expectation, echoed by Melvin J. Ballard in his dedicatory prayer for South America, that the Lamanites "would again become a white and delightful people."⁵¹

A racial conception of Lamanite identity was one manifestation of the coalescing of LDS "antimodernism" during the first half of the twentieth century.⁵² Like Protestant fundamentalism (which coalesced during the 1910s and 1920s), Mormon antimodernism took a defensive stand on certain defining issues that served to set Mormons over against science in the name of revealed truth. For Protestant fundamentalists and Mormon antimodernists alike, this meant rejecting organic evolution and biblical higher criticism; for Mormons, it also meant affirming the ancient historicity of the Book of Mormon, of which hemispheric Lamanite identification was understood to be a corollary. From his position in the First Presidency, J. Reuben Clark vigorously promoted antimodernism within the Church Education

⁵⁰Mauss, *All Abraham's Children*, 26–31.

⁵¹Anthony W. Ivins, *Conference Report*, April 1901, 58; Rey L. Pratt, *Conference Report*, October 1924, 144; James E. Talmage, *The Vitality of Mormonism* (Boston: Gorham Press, 1919), 135; and Hinckley, *Sermons and Missionary Services*, 96.

⁵²I borrow the term "antimodernism" from Armand L. Mauss, *The Angel and the Beehive: The Mormon Struggle with Assimilation* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 98. Antimodernism means the same thing as "fundamentalism" as applied to Protestants. I use "antimodernism" instead of "fundamentalism" to avoid confusion with "Mormon fundamentalism" (i.e., the unsanctioned practice of plural marriage).

System after 1935.⁵³ As will be seen during the Spencer W. Kimball years, the most popular apostle-scriptorians of the mid-twentieth century were antimodernists as well. Disclaimers about non-Lamanite groups having migrated to the New World nuanced—but only lightly—the antimodernist worldview that dominated Mormonism until the final decades of the twentieth century, a worldview grounded in scriptural literalism, nineteenth-century conceptions of race, and a sense of Mormon superiority over the wisdom of the world.

From the beginning of Mormon missionizing, Lamanite identity was offered to native peoples as a dignifying vision of their past and future.⁵⁴ At times, missionaries and Church leaders even spoke of Lamanites as superior to whites by virtue of the promises made to their lineage.⁵⁵ However, when recipients of Lamanite identity asserted for themselves a status superior to that of white Saints, Church leaders balked. From 1937 to 1946, a third of the Church's members in Mexico belonged to a schismatic movement called the Third Convention, which arose out of members' frustrated desires for a greater native voice in local ecclesiastical government. The convention was inspired by the writings of longtime member Margarito Bautista. Fusing Lamanite identity with postrevolutionary Mexican nationalism, Bautista asserted that the Mexican revolution (fought throughout the 1910s) had initiated the promised day when the Lamanites would reclaim their land and liberty from Gentile powers. The importance of Lamanite identity for the Third Convention is indicated by the title of the organization's magazine: *El Sendero Lamanita* (The Lamanite

⁵³Mauss, *The Angel and the Beehive*, 95–99.

⁵⁴There was, however, a less dignifying side to Lamanite identification. As Laurie Maffly-Kipp, "Looking West," 50, observes: "The call to preach to the Lamanites encoded a double message: On the one hand, missionaries carried an announcement of salvation and future hope; on the other, they reminded converts that they were degraded, uncivilized creatures who had fallen from the virtues of their ancestors."

⁵⁵In 1862, George Q. Cannon told native Sandwich Islanders that, because they were of the house of Israel, they had the potential to "outstrip their white brethren," who were Gentiles. Quoted in Douglas, "Sons of Lehi," 97. Apostle Wilford Woodruff, July 15, 1855, *Journal of Discourses*, 9:228–29, preached that because the American Indians were Lamanites, "instead of them being inferior to us in birthright, they are superior, and they stand first in many instances, with regard to the promises."

Path). Bautista also maintained, on the authority of the Book of Mormon, that white Latter-day Saints had a status subordinate to that of Lamanites because they were Gentiles adopted into the house of Israel, not Israelites by blood descent. J. Reuben Clark disputed this teaching in a letter he wrote on behalf of the First Presidency formally chastising the Third Convention: Anglo-Scandinavian Saints, Clark insisted, were literally of the blood of Israel through Ephraim and thus shared in the promises made to the Lamanites.⁵⁶ Although the schism was healed during the presidency of George Albert Smith, the controversy demonstrates the importance, for all parties, of literal, lineal descent in early twentieth-century teaching. The controversy also demonstrates the power of Lamanite identification to inspire those so identified to a sense of status and mission sometimes beyond Church leaders' ability to manage.

THE SPENCER W. KIMBALL YEARS, 1943–85

During Spencer W. Kimball's tenure as Church apostle (1943–73) and Church president (1973–85), discourse about Lamanites was more widely disseminated and more strongly emphasized than at any other time in LDS history. Hemispheric Lamanite identification was the foundation for Kimball's enthusiastic pursuit of Lamanite mission, as well as for enduring LDS antimodernism and Book of Mormon apologetics. Also during this period, however, the relevance of Lamanite identification was undermined by the Church's own increasingly international scope, by the imperatives of Church correlation, and by ambivalence toward Lamanite identity within the very groups to which it had traditionally been applied. The Kimball years thus witnessed both the zenith of Lamanite identification and the beginnings of its decline.

In the late 1930s and early 1940s, Church Presidents Heber J. Grant and George Albert Smith came to feel that the Church needed to do more to discharge its obligations to take the gospel to the Lamanites, meaning, more specifically, the American Indians.⁵⁷ As Apostle Matthew Cowley lamented, the Saints had "neglected these relatives of Samuel the Lamanite" (speaking of the Navajo), even

⁵⁶Tullis, *Mormons in Mexico*, 122–27, 142, 148; Thomas W. Murphy, "Other Mormon Histories: Lamanite Subjectivity in Mexico," *Journal of Mormon History* 26 (Fall 2000): 188–206.

⁵⁷According to George Albert Smith's biographer, LDS Church Pres-

though a missionary presence had been steadily maintained among their “relatives” in the Pacific Islands.⁵⁸ In 1946, George Albert Smith responded to this sense of neglect by giving junior apostle Spencer W. Kimball the special assignment to “watch after the Indians in all the world.”⁵⁹ Kimball pursued the assignment for the next quarter century, at which point he became president of the Church, an office that allowed him to marshal the resources of the whole Church in service of the Lamanite mission.

Kimball was born in 1895, the son of the president of the Church’s Indian Territory Mission, and grew up in Arizona, where he was struck by the sight of Indians riding atop railroad cars because they were refused seats inside. His patriarchal blessing told him that he would “preach the gospel to many people, but more especially to the Lamanites.” The patriarch also said that he would live to see the Lamanites “organized and be prepared to stand as the bulwarks around this people”—suggesting that Wilford Woodruff’s apocalyptic vision of the Indians defending the Saints from their enemies continued to fire the imaginations of members at the grassroots.⁶⁰ LDS teachings regarding the restoration of the Lamanites captivated Kimball. Though he is probably most remembered for ringing in the

ident Heber J. Grant gave Smith the special assignment “to work with the Lamanites” around 1938, in response to which Smith toured the Pacific Islands and Hopi and Navajo villages. Like Jacob Hamblin before him and Spencer W. Kimball after him, Smith was known as the “Apostle to the Lamanites.” Francis M. Gibbons, *George Albert Smith: Kind and Caring Christian, Prophet of God* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1990), 246–47. BYU religion professor Richard O. Cowan attributes the opening of the Church’s Navajo-Zuni Mission in 1943 to a personal petition made by an LDS Navajo woman to President Grant. Reportedly moved to tears, Grant told George Albert Smith: “The time has arrived for the preaching of the gospel to the Lamanites of the Southwest.” Richard O. Cowan, *The Church in the Twentieth Century* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1985), 222.

⁵⁸Matthew Cowley, *Matthew Cowley Speaks* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1954), 118.

⁵⁹Edward L. Kimball and Andrew E. Kimball Jr., *Spencer W. Kimball: Twelfth President of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1977), 237.

⁶⁰Spencer W. Kimball, “Lamanite Prophecies Fulfilled,” *BYU Speeches of the Year, 1963* (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University, 1965), 2–4.

"long-promised day" when priesthood ordination and temples were opened to people of black African ancestry, Kimball's great passion was the "day of the Lamanite."

As in the nineteenth century, Lamanite identification served Kimball as a means to counteract prejudice and encourage humanitarian service to Indians. In an address during the April 1954 general conference, he asked that Church publications stop using the demeaning terms "buck" and "squaw" in favor of "Indian men and women" and "Lamanite brethren and sisters." He was outraged by a letter he received from an anonymous Latter-day Saint who complained that the presence of Indians in the temples and in local Church leadership was an imposition "on the white race."⁶¹ As head of the Church's Lamanite Committee, Kimball was the driving force behind a number of Church and Brigham Young University programs to benefit "the Lamanites," usually targeting American Indians: Lamanite seminary, Lamanite Mutual Improvement Associations, Lamanite youth conferences, a BYU Institute for Lamanite Research and Service, and, most famously, the Indian (or Lamanite) Student Placement Program, which placed Indian children temporarily in the homes of white Mormons so they could attend off-reservation schools.⁶² In the 1970s, BYU boasted that it spent more, per student, on American Indian education than on any other undergraduate program and spent more on Indian scholarships than all other colleges and universities in the United States combined; this commitment was explained as an expression of the Church's mission to the descendants of Book of Mormon peoples.⁶³

Lamanite identification gave rise to Kimball's oft-professed love for the Indians, but it did so in ways that encouraged paternalism and *noblesse oblige*. Kimball appeared sincerely scandalized that "[we], their conquerors" had confined the Indians to "reservations with

⁶¹Spencer W. Kimball, *Conference Report*, April 1954, 103; and Spencer W. Kimball, *Faith Precedes the Miracle* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1972), 293.

⁶²These programs are named in *Lamanite Handbook of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, February 23, 1968, LDS Church History Library and Archives, Salt Lake City.

⁶³*The Lamanite Generation*, BYU-produced pamphlet, LDS Church History Library and Archives. The library dates the pamphlet to the 1970s.

such limited resources . . . while we become fat in the prosperity from the assets we took from them.” However, Kimball’s vision of Lamanite redemption left the Indians dependent on whites for a better future: “Only through us, the ‘nursing fathers and mothers,’ may they eventually enjoy a fulfilment of the many promises made to them.”⁶⁴ To imagine white Saints as nursing fathers and mothers was, by extension, to imagine Indians as children. That image was fundamental to an anecdote involving Boyd K. Packer that Kimball found moving. Packer, holding on his lap a “little Lamanite ragamuffin” who had wandered into a Church meeting Packer was attending in Peru, felt that “it was not a single little Lamanite I held” but “a nation, indeed a multitude of nations of deprived, hungering souls.”⁶⁵ The paternalism implicit in this brand of Lamanite identification came under fire in the 1970s with the emergence of American Indian civil rights activism: the Church’s Placement Program was one of the chief targets of activists’ criticisms.⁶⁶

Although American Indians were the principal focus of the Church programs Kimball inaugurated, his vision of Lamanite identity was hemispheric, and his work therefore encompassed Latin America and the Pacific Islands as part of what he called “the Lamanite world.”⁶⁷ In 1947, just a year after George Albert Smith charged him to minister to the Lamanites, Kimball toured the Church’s Mexican mission and later testified during general conference of his love for the “children of Lehi in the islands of the sea, and . . . in North and South America.”⁶⁸ Two years later, he asked the president of the Uruguay Mission for a status report on proselytizing among the Lamanites there; the mission president shortly af-

⁶⁴Spencer W. Kimball, *Conference Report*, April 1947, 151–52.

⁶⁵Kimball, *Faith Precedes the Miracle*, 347–48. Consider, in light of this anecdote, the potentially paternalistic connotations of the expression “*children of Lehi*.”

⁶⁶Mauss, *All Abraham’s Children*, 87; James B. Allen, “The Rise and Decline of the LDS Indian Student Placement Program, 1947–1996,” in *Mormons, Scripture, and the Ancient World: Studies in Honor of John L. Sorenson*, edited by Davis Bitton (Provo, Utah: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 1998), 85–119.

⁶⁷Spencer W. Kimball, *Conference Report*, April 1953, 107.

⁶⁸Spencer W. Kimball, *Conference Report*, April 1947, 145; and Spencer W. Kimball, *ibid.*, October 1947, 19.

terward persuaded the First Presidency and Twelve to initiate missionary work in Paraguay, one of his appeals being that Paraguay's indigenous population would make it the first Lamanite mission in South America.⁶⁹ In 1952, Kimball dedicated Central America for the preaching of the gospel, asking for blessings upon "the seed of Lehi . . . in these countries."⁷⁰ As apostle and later Church president, he made multiple visits to Latin America and the South Pacific, regularly calling the Saints of native descent in these regions "Lamanites." Hemispheric Lamanite identification was integral to Kimball's sense of the scope of his work. He was fond of citing a figure of 60 million Lamanites worldwide to illustrate the magnitude of the task.⁷¹ An article in the *Church News* published in 1984, at the end of Kimball's presidency, set the number of Lehi's posterity even higher, at 177 million, with a map breaking that figure down by the countries of North and South America and the Pacific.⁷²

Having grown up in the early twentieth century, Kimball placed great importance on the racial nature of Lamanite identity. Lamanites should be proud to claim that name, he explained during a 1959 general conference address, because it indicated that "in your veins flows the blood of prophets and statesmen; of emperors and kings; apostles and martyrs."⁷³ Kimball was particularly interested in the Otavalo Indians of Ecuador, whom he visited in 1967, because

⁶⁹Frederick S. Williams and Frederick G. Williams, *From Acorn to Oak Tree: A Personal History of the Establishment and First Quarter Development of the South American Missions* (Fullerton, Calif.: Et Cetera Graphics, 1987), 283–85.

⁷⁰Craig A. Hill, "New Facility Evidence of Growth," *Church News*, July 18, 1992.

⁷¹Spencer W. Kimball, *Conference Report*, April 1947, 145; Kimball, *ibid.*, October 1959, 57; Kimball, *ibid.*, October 1976, 9; Kimball, "Of Royal Blood," *Ensign*, July 1971, 7; Kimball, "A Report and a Challenge," *Ensign*, November 1976, 8; Jay M. Todd, "Report of the Seminar for Regional Representatives," *Ensign*, May 1977, 105.

⁷²John L. Hart, "Children of Promise," *Church News*, February 26, 1984, 3. A similar, though less exhaustive, breakdown by country had appeared in the 1968 "Lamanite Handbook," 20, which had been prepared under Kimball's direction.

⁷³Kimball, *Conference Report*, October 1959, 57–58.

he felt they “might be of pure Lamanite descent.”⁷⁴ Kimball espoused a doctrine of “believing blood,” affirming that “the converted Lamanite is devout. Few ever apostatize. . . . [T]he children of Lehi of the twentieth century have inherited that grace and ability to believe like their ancestors of long ago.”⁷⁵ He also believed that the Lamanites were literally becoming whiter-skinned in fulfillment of prophecy. During a 1960 general conference, he displayed a photograph to demonstrate that Lamanite missionaries had become “as light as Anglos,” and he claimed that “children in the home placement program in Utah are often lighter than their brothers and sisters in the hogans on the reservation.”⁷⁶ Like Kimball’s paternalism, these racist claims would become uncomfortable for many Mormons, especially after the civil rights era of the 1960s.

Kimball invoked scriptural and prophetic authority to assure Lamanites of their identity. The Book of Mormon “sets at rest” all speculation about “the origin of the early Americans,” Kimball declared in general conference in 1959.⁷⁷ He repeated the point during a Lamanite youth conference in 1971: Prior to the coming forth of the Book of Mormon, no one knew the true origin of the Native Americans and Pacific Islanders, “but now the question is fully answered.”⁷⁸ During a 1976 tour of the Pacific as Church president, Kimball instructed the Saints of Hawaii, Samoa, Tonga, and New Zealand that their ancestors had crossed the Pacific with Hagoth; he even proposed the route they had taken.⁷⁹ Kimball further lent his prophetic authority to Lamanite identification during temple dedications or rededications in Arizona, Hawaii, and Brazil.⁸⁰ By citing the Church’s growth among American Indians, in Latin America, and in the Pacific as fulfillment of the promises made to the Lamanites in scrip-

⁷⁴Francis M. Gibbons, *Spencer W. Kimball: Resolute Disciple, Prophet of God* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1995), 238–39.

⁷⁵Spencer W. Kimball, *The Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball*, edited by Edward L. Kimball (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1982), 178.

⁷⁶Spencer W. Kimball, Conference Report, October 1960, 34.

⁷⁷Kimball, *Conference Report*, October 1959, 61.

⁷⁸Kimball, “Of Royal Blood,” 7.

⁷⁹Parson, “Hagoth and the Polynesians,” 252; Russell T. Clement, “Polynesian Origins: More Word on the Mormon Perspective,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 13 (Winter 1980): 92–97.

⁸⁰Reports in *Church News*: “Temple Dedicatory Prayer,” April 19,

ture, Kimball linked Lamanite identification to the Saints' faith in prophecy and their vision of salvation history.

Under Kimball's presidency, native peoples of the Americas and the Pacific were encouraged to embrace Lamanite identity as their "true heritage" and "true identity"—their answer to the questions: "Who are you?" and "Where do you come from?"⁸¹ This was the message of a pamphlet produced by the Church in 1974, *Lamanites and the Book of Mormon*, and of special conferences for Lamanite youth.⁸² A generation earlier, the same message had saturated the special *Teaching Aids for Lamanite Missionaries* developed in 1950 under the direction of Kimball's Indian Relations Committee.⁸³ Kimball promised that Lamanites could receive a testimony of their identity: "Every Lamanite who reads the Book of Mormon . . . will get a testimony that those are his ancestors, that it is his record, and that he is one of them."⁸⁴

Encouraging Native Americans and Pacific Islanders to identify as descendants of Book of Mormon peoples was nothing new, of course. However, the promotion of Lamanite identity during the Kimball years coincided with a period of rapid international growth for the Church, especially in Latin America, and with a period when "the purpose of life" was a major theme of LDS proselytizing. Together, these factors created a climate that invited unprecedented numbers of people to make Lamanite identity fundamental to their sense of self. Signs of how this invitation was received among Church members at large include the creation of the BYU performing group Lamanite Generation in 1971, as well as testimonials published in Church magazines from American Indian, Latin American, or Pa-

1975, 4–5, 14; "Pres. Kimball Offers Rededication Prayer," June 24, 1978, 5–7; "Pres. Kimball Dedicates New Temple," November 11, 1978, 6.

⁸¹The expressions "true heritage" and "true identity" are quoted from George P. Lee, "My Heritage Is Choice," *Ensign*, November 1975, 100.

⁸²*Lamanites and the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1974); *Lamanite Leadership Youth Conference Booklet 1971*, LDS Church History Library and Archives; and *Guidelines for Lamanite Youth Conferences—1975*, LDS Church History Library and Archives.

⁸³Golden R. Buchanan, *Teaching Aids for Lamanite Missionaries* ([Salt Lake City]: Radio, Publicity, and Mission Literature Committee, 1950).

⁸⁴Kimball, "Of Royal Blood," 9.

cific Islander Saints asserting that Lamanite identity had made them proud of their ethnicity or gave them hope for their nations' future.⁸⁵ One can also point to the 1983 publication of *Historia del mormonismo en México*, by Agricol Lozano, a leader of the Church in Mexico who, in 1967, had become "the first Lamanite stake president." Like Margarito Bautista half a century earlier, Lozano fused Mexican nationalism with Lamanite identity, asserting, for example, that the name Mexico was derived from the Hebrew word for "messiah." Unlike Bautista, Lozano did not challenge Church leadership or the status of white Saints.⁸⁶

Kimball was by no means alone among upper-level Church leaders in his promotion of Lamanite identification. In the four decades between 1946 and 1985, a number of apostles and Church presidents referred to American Indians, Latin Americans, or Pacific Islanders as Lamanites.⁸⁷ Among these were Stephen L Richards,⁸⁸ Matthew Cowley,⁸⁹ Joseph Fielding Smith,⁹⁰ LeGrand Richards,⁹¹ Hugh B. Brown,⁹² David O. McKay,⁹³ Gordon B. Hinckley,⁹⁴ Mark E. Peter-

⁸⁵See, for example, Lee, "My Heritage Is Choice," 100–101; "Portraits in Miniature," *Ensign*, November 1973, 60; and Lawrence Cummins, "Meet Father Lehi's Children," *Ensign*, December 1975, 26–31.

⁸⁶Murphy, "Other Mormon Histories," 206–9.

⁸⁷Kimball favored the term "Lamanite," but other Church leaders made a point of using alternatives such as "children of Lehi" to signal that the peoples in question might also be descended from other Book of Mormon lineages.

⁸⁸Stephen L Richards, *Conference Report*, October 1948, 147–48.

⁸⁹Cowley, *Matthew Cowley Speaks*, 118.

⁹⁰Joseph Fielding Smith, *Man, His Origin and Destiny* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1954), 172–73.

⁹¹LeGrand Richards, *Israel! Do You Know?* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1954), 37.

⁹²Quoted in David W. Cummings, *Mighty Missionary of the Pacific: The Building Program of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints—Its History, Scope, and Significance* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1961), 63.

⁹³David O. McKay, *Conference Report*, April 1957, 58–59; "Dedicatory Prayer Delivered by Pres. McKay at New Zealand Temple," *Church News*, May 10, 1958, 2, 6.

⁹⁴Gordon B. Hinckley, "Temple in the Pacific," *Improvement Era* 61

sen,⁹⁵ Boyd K. Packer,⁹⁶ Marvin J. Ashton,⁹⁷ Harold B. Lee,⁹⁸ James E. Faust,⁹⁹ Howard W. Hunter,¹⁰⁰ and Bruce R. McConkie.¹⁰¹ Reportedly, Apostle Harold B. Lee believed that he had received revelation that the Andean region of South America, which he dedicated for missionary work, was the setting for much of the Book of Mormon.¹⁰²

For those Church leaders who were invested in antimodernism, Lamanite identification offered an occasion to assert the superiority of revealed truth. "We Latter-day Saints have learned through revelation . . . why the Indian (Lamanite) is reddish-brown," Apostle Joseph Fielding Smith affirmed in 1954, whereas "the man who depends on his science alone cannot understand this."¹⁰³ Apostle Mark E. Petersen likewise dismissed secular theories about the origins of native peoples he regarded as Lamanites: "As Latter-day Saints we have always believed that the Polynesians are descendants of Lehi and blood relatives of the American Indians," he told a 1962 general conference, "despite the contrary theories of other men."¹⁰⁴ Petersen eschewed the nuancing disclaimers that some LDS writers used to tem-

(July 1958): 509.

⁹⁵Mark E. Petersen, *Conference Report*, April 1962, 112.

⁹⁶Boyd K. Packer, *Teach Ye Diligently* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1975), 327–28; see also Kimball, *Faith Precedes the Miracle*, 347–48.

⁹⁷Marvin J. Ashton, "Love of the Right," *Ensign*, June 1971, 32.

⁹⁸Harold B. Lee, "May the Kingdom of God Go Forth," *Ensign*, January 1973, 23.

⁹⁹James E. Faust, "The Keys of the Kingdom," *Ensign*, November 1975, 56–57.

¹⁰⁰Jack E. Jarrard, "800th Stake in Church Is Formed in Mexico," *Church News*, January 29, 1977, 3–4.

¹⁰¹Bruce R. McConkie, *The Millennial Messiah: The Second Coming of the Son of Man* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1982), 209.

¹⁰²Williams and Williams, *From Acorn to Oak Tree*, 300.

¹⁰³Smith's rejection of scientific theories regarding the origins of American Indians was linked to his conviction that "in the beginning the Lord did not make man black, yellow and brown" but rather "of one family, white and delightful." The diverse "color and national characteristics" encountered today were "added later" by the Lord through such events as the marking of Cain or the curse upon the Lamanites. See Smith, *Man, His Origin and Destiny*, 172–73, 419–20.

¹⁰⁴Petersen, *Conference Report*, April 1962, 112.

per the dissonance between hemispheric Lamanite identification and science. He insisted, rather, that “the descendants of Laman and Lemuel were sifted over the vast areas of the western hemisphere . . . from pole to pole,” with the result that “in the South Pacific Islands, 90 percent of the Church membership has Lamanite lineage.”¹⁰⁵ Popular apostle-scriptorian LeGrand Richards made a similarly bold assertion: that “all” of “the dark-skinned people who occupied this land of America” were of the blood of Israel.¹⁰⁶ For these apostles, Lamanite identification was part of an appealingly simple account of the peopling of the world, grounded in a strictly literal reading of the scriptures and bound up in the conviction that racial differences had religious significance.

Related to LDS antimodernism was the role of Lamanite identification in Book of Mormon apologetics. Mormons had a long history of pointing to the remains of civilizations in Central or South America as tangible evidence for the Book of Mormon. Joseph Smith himself had made this apologetic move.¹⁰⁷ In 1881, the same year that he dedicated Mexico for the preaching of the gospel to the Lamanites, Apostle Moses Thatcher proposed that the character Votan, from the Maya text the *Popol Vuh*, was the brother of Jared from the Book of Mormon.¹⁰⁸ Milton R. Hunter, of the First Council of Seventy, linked peoples of ancient Mexico to the Book of Mormon in general conference addresses and Deseret Book publications of the 1950s-70s. On the basis of his own study of Mesoamerican archaeology, Hunter identified the Toltecs as Nephites, the Olmecs as Mulekites, and the ancestors of the Quiché Maya as Lamanites. Hunter was a principal promoter of what proved, among Latter-day Saints, to be the popular equation of ancient Mesoamerican god Quetzalcoatl with Jesus Christ.¹⁰⁹

At the same time, other LDS writers, some ranking Church authorities among them, continued the trend of nuancing hemispheric

¹⁰⁵Mark E. Petersen, *Children of Promise* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1981), 31; Mark E. Petersen, *Joseph of Egypt* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1981), 110.

¹⁰⁶Richards, *Israel!*, 37.

¹⁰⁷Givens, *By the Hand of Mormon*, 102.

¹⁰⁸Moses Thatcher, “Divine Origin of the Book of Mormon IV,” *Contributor* 2 (July 1881): 291.

¹⁰⁹Milton R. Hunter, *Archaeology and the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake

Lamanite identification with the admission that groups other than Book of Mormon peoples had migrated to the Americas and the Pacific. Gordon B. Hinckley used careful language as early as 1947, stating that “a remnant of the Lamanite nation is found today among the American Indians.”¹¹⁰ Seventy Antoine R. Ivins was prepared to imagine “great changes” in the demographics of the Book of Mormon lands after 420 A.D. and even the possibility that “there may have been other peoples whom the Nephites never discovered then living on this great land.”¹¹¹ The most oft-cited instance of nuanced hemispheric Lamanite identification during Kimball’s years as Church president is the Introduction to the 1981 edition of the Book of Mormon, with its ambiguous assertion that “the Lamanites . . . are the *principal* ancestors of the American Indians” (emphasis mine). It is not clear what, if anything, should be made of the fact that this statement does not mention Pacific Islanders. The use of qualifying language in the 1981 introduction is important as a sign that at least some of the antimodernism of Joseph Fielding Smith and Mark E. Petersen was waning by the end of Kimball’s presidency.

Kimball’s years as apostle and Church president were the height of Lamanite identification, but that same period witnessed shifts that would contribute to a decrease in Lamanite discourse once Kimball was no longer on the scene. One of these shifts was the Church’s increasing emphasis on the Christ-centered nature of Mormonism, which gained momentum during the late 1970s and

City: Deseret Book, 1956); Hunter, *Christ in Ancient America* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1959); Hunter, *Conference Report*, October 1954, 106–14; Hunter, *Conference Report*, April 1961, 50–54; and Hunter, *Conference Report*, April 1970, 136–38.

¹¹⁰Gordon B. Hinckley, *What of the Mormons?* (Salt Lake City: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1947), 78. On the other hand, Hinckley, then an Assistant to the Twelve, in reporting on the New Zealand Temple dedication in 1958, showed that lineal hemispheric Lamanite identity, together with Anglo-Israelite identity, informed his understanding of the gathering of Israel. The temple dedication had brought together “two great strains of the house of Israel—the children of Ephraim from the isles of Britain, and the children of Lehi from the isles of the Pacific.” Hinckley, “Temple in the Pacific,” 509.

¹¹¹Antoine R. Ivins, “The Lamanites,” *Relief Society Magazine* 37 (April 1950): 508.

early 1980s in response to increased opposition to Mormonism from evangelical Protestants (as exemplified by the film *The God Makers*) and out of a desire to work with Christian coalitions like the Moral Majority.¹¹² In the post-Kimball years, LDS discourse about bringing all people to Christ came to displace lineage-centered discourse regarding the gathering of Israel, thus rendering Lamanite identification effectively irrelevant to the Church's primary mission. Another development within Mormonism that would promote dramatic changes in Lamanite discourse after Kimball was the increased engagement of LDS scholars with the mainstream of academia during the 1960s and 1970s, which had the effect of reducing Mormon antimodernism. (See next section.)

During Kimball's lifetime, the chief forces that pushed against his emphasis on Lamanites were the Church's international growth and the rise of correlation at headquarters. As the Church grew worldwide, especially in Asia, it became increasingly difficult for Church leaders to justify giving what amounted to privileged treatment to American Indians, Latin Americans, and Polynesians. Why, for example, did the Church build schools in Mexico and Polynesia but not in Asia?¹¹³ Why did BYU devote so many resources to Lamanites and not to other minorities? Kimball's approach to the Lamanites was admittedly preferential. In Kimball's view, as paraphrased by his biographers, the Lamanites had a "special claim" on the Church by virtue of the promises made to their Book of Mormon ancestors and the special charge the Saints had received to be their nurs-

¹¹²Jan Shipps, *Sojourner in the Promised Land* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 341, 350–51. For further documentation of the shift toward a more Christ-centered discourse, see John-Charles Duffy, "The New Missionary Discussions and the Future of Correlation," *Sunstone* 138 (September 2005): 44 note 30.

¹¹³Paul Rose, who had served as a mission president in the Philippines, told a BYU 1972 symposium on the Church in Asia that he had raised this issue with Church leaders: "If we had Church schools in Asia it would greatly help the work. If schools are good in Mexico, they're good in other areas. I feel very strongly about this. I've talked to Brother Neal Maxwell and others about this, and I think they're aware of the problem." R. Lanier Britsch, Paul S. Rose, H. Grant Heaton, Adney Y. Komatsu, and Spencer J. Palmer, "A Symposium: Problems and Opportunities of Missionary Work in Asia," *BYU Studies* 12 (Autumn 1971): 104.

ing fathers and mothers. Kimball espoused a doctrine of racial privilege, one that worked in the interests of the Lamanites but left other peoples without the same advantages. Kimball "reacted with shock," according to his biographers, to discover in the late 1960s that some of his colleagues among the Twelve did not share his views on the "priority" due to the Lamanites.¹¹⁴ Although Lamanite identification was part of the worldview of other apostles, the cause of the Lamanites did not occupy their vision as it did Kimball's. The needs of other segments of the Church's increasingly diverse membership called for Church leaders' attention.

In addition, the push for correlation—for organizational efficiency and uniformity—bred resistance to special programs or jurisdictions for Lamanites.¹¹⁵ Kimball insisted that "the Lord certainly had in mind that there should be Lamanite branches, Lamanite

¹¹⁴Kimball and Kimball, *Spencer W. Kimball*, 366. The *Lamanite Handbook*, 11, prepared by Kimball's Lamanite Committee argued for a kind of affirmative action in the Church's work with Lamanites (meaning, especially, American Indians). The context of the statement was youth programs, but the principle applied to other Lamanite programs: "Because the Lamanites have been deprived and underprivileged for many generations, it now requires an extra effort on the part of the Church system to provide the same opportunities for youth as are available to non-Lamanite youth."

¹¹⁵Resistance by Church leaders to special programs affected American Indians more than other "Lamanites" because, in Latin America and the Pacific Islands, Lamanite mission work was integrated into regular mission work, not administered through separate programs, as in the United States. This fact is important because it points to a difficulty with Mauss's treatment of the dismantling of Indian programs described in *All Abraham's Children*, an indispensable resource in many other ways. Mauss describes the dismantling of Indian programs as part of a process in which "Anglo-Mormons gradually [reconstructed] their definition of *Lamanite* in such a way as to transfer the divine destiny implied in that term to the peoples of the South, while leaving increasingly dubious the divine status of the aboriginal Indians of the North who had originally been considered the true Lamanites of the Book of Mormon" (p. 136). Mauss's interpretation does not account for the extent to which LDS discourse at various levels, official and unofficial, identified Latin Americans as Lamanites well before the late twentieth century. Mauss is correct that, since Kimball's administra-

stakes, Lamanite missions.”¹¹⁶ But other Church leaders were not persuaded. Separate programs for Lamanites required extra effort and expenditures; and given the low retention rates among Indian members (a fact that pushed against rhetoric about Lamanites’ exceptional faithfulness), not all Church leaders believed that the results justified the costs.¹¹⁷ A sign of things to come was a question that appeared on a 1975 evaluation form for Lamanite youth conferences, asking organizers how they felt about the practice of organizing separate Lamanite conferences as opposed to integrating Lamanites with other youth.¹¹⁸ Shortly before Kimball became Church president in late 1973, special Indian missions began to be dissolved into missions organized by geographical region.¹¹⁹ Gradually, Church organizations created to serve Lamanites were reconceived as serving minorities more generally. The Indian Committee became the Committee for Lamanites and Minority Affairs; Lamanite programs at BYU came under the auspices of a Multicultural Education program. The controversial Indian Placement Program was drastically cut back; by

tion, Church leaders have paid less attention to American Indians than to “Lamanites” in Latin America, where the Church has enjoyed greater “success,” as defined by Church administrators. However, this is a question of realigning institutional priorities, not of doubting the Lamanite identity of American Indians. The crucial shift in LDS discourse about Lamanites has not been from North to South, but from hemispheric Lamanite identification to limited Lamanite identification or no Lamanite identification. This shift has impacted *all* of the peoples traditionally identified as Lamanites, though the impact has been most visible for American Indians because of the loss of the special programs through which the Lamanite mission was pursued in the United States.

¹¹⁶Kimball delivered these instructions to regional representatives and other general Church authorities in his capacity as Church president. Todd, “Report of the Seminar for Regional Representatives,” 105.

¹¹⁷Mauss, *All Abraham’s Children*, 95–98.

¹¹⁸*Guidelines for Youth Conferences–1975*, not paginated.

¹¹⁹Indian missions were not the only targets of this reorganization: missions serving specific LDS historical sites (Cumorah, Nauvoo, etc.) or language groups (Spanish-American) were also integrated into missions organized according to geographic region. See “Full-time Missions,” *Deseret Morning News 2006 Church Almanac* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 2005), 484–508, entries 33, 38, 46a, 77, 78, 97.

the end of the 1990s, it had been phased out.¹²⁰

A final source of resistance to Lamanite identification came from “Lamanites” themselves. Individuals whom Church leaders considered Lamanites displayed varying degrees of commitment to the identity. This point was driven home in an *Ensign* article, published a year before Kimball became Church president, titled “What Is a Lamanite?” Written by Harold Brown, a white Latter-day Saint with extensive experience in Mexico and Argentina, the article conveyed the diversity of attitudes toward Lamanite identification among Latin American Saints by depicting an imaginary conversation among LDS young adults from several different Spanish-speaking countries. Some voices in the conversation expressed pride in their Lamanite heritage, which they conflated with ethno-nationalist sentiments recalling the glories of the Aztec, Maya, and Inca empires. But other voices maintained that Lamanite identification had little importance for them, either because their primary identity was national, not ethnic, or because they had no Indian ancestry. Brown’s article also gave voice to concerns that the name “Lamanite” connoted “benighted” and that too much emphasis on Lamanite heritage undermined bonds of unity and equality with other Church members.¹²¹ These concerns were overshadowed during the Kimball presidency, when the spotlight fell on those Saints who articulated their identities in terms that echoed Kimball’s own teachings about Lamanites. But Brown’s article was an important, if overlooked, reminder that not all Saints whom Church leaders such as Kimball saw as Lamanites understood themselves in those same terms.

THE POST-KIMBALL YEARS, AFTER 1985

The two decades following Kimball’s death in 1985 saw a sharp, immediate decline in Lamanite identification by top-level Church leaders. In large part, this decline simply reflected the fact that Kimball had been the major source of, and driving force behind, most Lamanite discourse during the preceding forty years. In addition, several factors motivated Church leaders to downplay the significance of claims to Lamanite identity: an intensified emphasis on the universal, Christ-centered aspects of LDS teaching; decreased attraction to doc-

¹²⁰Mauss, *All Abraham’s Children*, 86–87, 98–100.

¹²¹Harold Brown, “What Is a Lamanite?” *Ensign*, September 1972, 62–63.

trines of lineage as a result of the Church's international growth and shifting social attitudes about race; and rhetorical exigencies occasioned by Church leaders' desire to dismantle special Indian programs. Two factors which have been especially significant in reducing Lamanite identification since the mid-1990s are: (1) Church leaders' concerns that unity may be threatened by members' undue investment in cultural or ethnic identities; and (2) the need to accommodate limited Lamanite identification as a strategy for affirming the Book of Mormon's antiquity without seeming to challenge previous leaders' teachings regarding Lamanite identity.

With the inauguration of Ezra Taft Benson's presidency in 1985, a new emphasis took center stage in official discourse about the Church's mission, displacing Kimball's pursuit of Lamanite redemption. Benson's presidency boosted the momentum of a process that had begun in the 1950s: the promotion of an evangelical LDS discourse that was self-consciously Christ-centered and employed a Protestant-informed vocabulary about grace, sanctification, new birth, and so on. The threefold mission of the Church formulated during Kimball's presidency—perfecting the Saints, proclaiming the gospel, redeeming the dead—was summed up during Benson's presidency in a new, conspicuously Christocentric formula: “to invite all to come to Christ.”¹²² The *all* in this formula is significant because it reflects the fact that the new evangelical Mormonism was overtly universal in scope. By the end of the twentieth century, as Armand Mauss has documented, LDS leaders were “virtually ignoring” the doctrines of covenant and cursed lineages that had pervaded Mormon discourse throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, in favor of Christian universalism.¹²³ The gathering of scattered Israel to Zion was no longer the governing image for the Church's work: Church leaders now vigorously encouraged members to understand their mission as gathering all people to Christ.¹²⁴ The universal nature of the invitation to come to Christ obviated the need to call special attention to the task of redeeming the Lamanites, which had formerly been conceived

¹²²Spencer W. Kimball, “A Report of My Stewardship,” *Ensign*, May 1981, 5; and “June Videoconference: ‘Accomplishing the Mission of the Church,’” *Ensign*, September 1987, 73.

¹²³Mauss, *All Abraham's Children*, 36.

¹²⁴A disjointed, even confusing, 2006 general conference address by Russell M. Nelson illustrates how contemporary correlation strips lin-

as one theater for the gathering of Israel.

Another way that evangelical discourse yielded a reduction in Lamanite discourse was by reframing the purpose of the Book of Mormon. In reclaiming an evangelical ethos for the Book of Mormon, Church leaders promoted it as God's instrument to the Church to convince Jew and Gentile that Jesus is the Christ.¹²⁵ This was a shift away from earlier teachings that "the chief reason" God gave the Latter-day Saints the Book of Mormon was to bring to "the descendants of Father Lehi the knowledge of the Redeemer of the world, and to establish them in the faith of their fathers."¹²⁶ This was the dimension of the Book of Mormon's mission that Kimball had stressed.¹²⁷ However, Lamanite identification was less relevant to evangelical Mormonism's promotion of the Book of Mormon as a message for the whole world.

eage-based promises from discourse about the gathering of Israel. Nelson begins his talk with God's promise to make Abraham's posterity "a chosen people," followed by a historical summary of the literal scattering of Israel among "all nations" as a result of wickedness. Nelson then states that "the long-awaited gathering of scattered Israel" must occur "as part of" the promised restoration of all things. He cites the appearance of Moses, Elias, and Elijah in the Kirtland Temple as inaugurating the promised gathering and, in a footnote, refers to Orson Hyde's dedication of Palestine for the return of the Jews. From this point on, however, Nelson's talk takes a universalizing turn. Although Nelson has described the scattering as the literal displacement of a particular people from a promised homeland, he equates the gathering with family history, temple work for the dead, and missionary work. Further, he denies at some length that the gathering requires a literal migration. At an unannounced point between Nelson's discussion of the scattering and his discussion of the gathering, chosen lineages and promised lands drop out of the story, replaced by the universalist assurance that "Saints in every land have equal claim upon the blessings of the Lord." Russell M. Nelson, "The Gathering of Scattered Israel," *Ensign*, November 2006, 79–81.

¹²⁵Ezra Taft Benson and Gordon B. Hinckley identified this formula as the Book of Mormon's own statement of purpose. In one instance, Benson added, "and Lamanite," but that phrase dropped out in Church leaders' subsequent repetitions of the formula. Ezra Taft Benson, "The Book of Mormon Is the Word of God," *Ensign*, January 1988, 34; and Gordon B. Hinckley, "The Power of the Book of Mormon," *Ensign*, June 1988, 6.

¹²⁶Melvin J. Ballard, *Conference Report*, October 1926, 40.

¹²⁷The difference between Kimball's Lamanite-centered sense of the

At the same time, the international growth of the Church after the 1960s, in tandem with the anti-racist consciousness that gained ascendancy during the civil rights era, diminished the appeal of doctrines about lineage as explanations for missionary success and rendered the conception of a worldwide scattering of Israel less meaningful. With members all over the world being told in their patriarchal blessings that their lineage was of the house of Ephraim, it became less plausible to believe that these members were all literally descended from scattered Israelites. Growing numbers of Saints therefore began to conclude that their declared lineage was adoptive, a development that Church leaders tolerated, if not encouraged, through the ambiguity of official discourse on the subject.¹²⁸ If all people could obtain the blessings of the gospel by coming to Christ—as emphasized in evangelical Mormon discourse—what did it matter if one was or was not a lineal descendant of Israel?

Certainly there were many within Mormonism who remained invested in doctrines of lineage. BYU religion professors Robert Millet and Joseph Fielding McConkie, for example, were disappointed to find that many Latter-day Saint students believed themselves adopted into Israel and questioned the relevance of bloodlineage.¹²⁹ But such concerns reflected an antimodernist orientation that was becoming less compelling for many Saints, at least in

Book of Mormon's purpose and that promoted by LDS leaders after Kimball's death may be seen in his April 1977 address to the Church's regional representatives, during which Kimball quoted from the title page of the Book of Mormon. Where General Authorities after him focused on the statement that the book's purpose was to convince Jew and Gentile that Jesus is the Christ, Kimball quoted at greater length, though also selectively, to emphasize first and foremost that the book was "written to the Lamanites, who are a remnant of the house of Israel . . . to show unto . . . the House of Israel what great things the Lord hath done for their fathers; and that they may know the covenants of the Lord, that they are not cast off forever—And also to the convincing of the Jew and Gentile that JESUS is the CHRIST, the ETERNAL GOD." Quoted in Todd, "Report of the Seminar for Regional Representatives," 104–5, ellipses in original.

¹²⁸Mauss, *All Abraham's Children*, 34–35.

¹²⁹During the 1989 Sperry Symposium at BYU, Millet reported with dismay that a returned missionary had asked him some years earlier, "What difference does it make if I am of the house of Israel? Why does it matter

the United States. The logic that led some to wonder why it mattered whether or not someone was literally descended from Ephraim invited the same question about being literally descended from Lehi. As a worldview that emphasized lineage became less important for many Saints, so too did Lamanite identification. Ironically, Kimball himself had made a momentous contribution to undermining the relevance of lineage in Mormon teaching—and thus to undermining the relevance of Lamanite identity—through his role in lifting the black priesthood ban.

Church leaders' desire to continue dismantling the special Indian programs created under Kimball's tenure was yet another motivation to reduce Lamanite discourse, since leaders needed to downplay the special claims for Lamanites that had originally legitimated those programs. An unforeseen consequence of this development was the excommunication of Navajo Seventy George P. Lee in 1989. Incensed by the dismantling of Indian programs, Lee quoted the Book of Mormon (much as Margarito Bautista had done half a century earlier) to assert a subordinate role for white Saints and thus for the majority of LDS leaders. They were Gentiles adopted into Israel, while Lamanites were Israel by blood-descent. In addition, Lee accused the First Presidency and Twelve of “teaching that the ‘Day of the Lamanites’ is over and past”; “downplay[ing] the role of the Lamanites in these last days”; teaching “that the Book of Mormon is not written to the Lamanites but to the Gentiles in our day”; and “com[ing] very close to denying that the Book of Mormon is about

that I am of the tribe of Ephraim?” Millet had then asked the class, “‘How many of you feel that you are adopted into the house of Israel?’ Of the eighty members of the class, perhaps sixty raised their hands, evidencing their own misunderstandings concerning patriarchal declarations of lineage.” Robert L. Millet, “The House of Israel: From Everlasting to Everlasting,” in *A Witness of Jesus Christ: The 1989 Sperry Symposium on the Old Testament*, edited by Richard D. Draper (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1990), 178. Millet's complaint was reprinted in 1994 and 2000: Millet, *The Power of the Word: Saving Doctrines from the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1994), 209–27; and Millet, *Selected Writings of Robert L. Millet: Gospel Scholars Series* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2000), 255–75. See also Robert L. Millet and Joseph Fielding McConkie, *Our Destiny: The Call and Election of the House of Israel* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1993; rpt., Sandy, Utah: Leatherwood Press, 2006).

Lamanites.” Taking cues, perhaps, from the rhetoric of non-LDS Indian activists, Lee characterized these shifts in discourse as a “silent behind the scenes subtle scriptural and spiritual slaughter of the Lamanites.”¹³⁰ Granted that Lee’s account of Church leaders’ teachings is exaggerated, his complaints nevertheless provide a window onto Church leaders’ retreat from Lamanite discourse following Kimball’s death.

The ascendance of evangelical Mormonism, the corresponding decline in the salience of doctrines of lineage, and the dismantling of Indian programs all prompted a general reduction of Lamanite identification in Church leaders’ discourse. At the same time, a new, *limited* Lamanite identification came to compete with hemispheric Lamanite identification in Latter-day Saints’ imaginations.¹³¹ Limited Lamanite identification was a corollary to BYU anthropologist John Sorenson’s Tehuantepec setting for Book of Mormon geography, which he introduced to Church members near the end of Kimball’s presidency through articles in the *Ensign* and the Deseret Book publication *An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon*.¹³² Sorenson’s limited geography—which posited a narrow physical stage for Book of Mormon events in southern Mexico, near the Yucatan Peninsula, as opposed to much larger sections of North and South America—appealed to a category of LDS intellectuals that started to emerge during the late 1970s. These new intellectuals, or “faithful scholars,” were neither antimodernists nor self-taught dilettantes. Rather, they were trained academics who wanted a faith that was orthodox (entailing, in this case, affirmation of the antiquity of the Book of Mormon) yet credible by mainstream secular standards. The Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies (FARMS), housed at BYU and eventually adopted as part of its struc-

¹³⁰Quoted in “The Lee Letters,” *Sunstone*, August 1989, 50–55.

¹³¹The term “imagination” used here refers neutrally to the images, conceptualizations, or understandings of Lamanite identity (and of the setting of Book of Mormon events) that Latter-day Saints carry in their minds.

¹³²John L. Sorenson, “Digging into the Book of Mormon: Our Changing Understanding of Ancient America and Its Scripture, Part 1,” *Ensign*, September 1984, 26–37, and Part 2, October 1984, 12–23; and John L. Sorenson, *An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book/Provo, Utah: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 1985).

ture, became a center of gravity for such scholars and their lay supporters after the mid-1980s, with encouragement from Apostles Neal A. Maxwell, Dallin H. Oaks, and Jeffrey R. Holland. Not incidentally, FARMS was also a primary promoter of the limited geography theory.

Hemispheric Lamanite identification was a liability for faithful scholars because it stood in greater tension with mainstream science than they could tolerate. A limited Book of Mormon geography resolved what they perceived as pressing secular challenges to the Book of Mormon. Of course, a limited geography theory also created problems for Saints whose identities were bound up in hemispheric Lamanite identification; but those identity problems did not directly touch the mostly white, English-speaking Americans drawn to FARMS.

It is important to note that hemispheric Lamanite identification did not disappear entirely in the post-Kimball years. Church leaders retreated from teachings that gave Lamanites privileged status in the Church, but some senior officials continued to identify Native Americans of both continents as Lamanites, or “children of Lehi” (the preferred term after Kimball’s death), as they had been taught while growing up during the early twentieth century. Right through to the beginning of the twenty-first century, members of the First Presidency—Howard W. Hunter, Gordon B. Hinckley, Thomas S. Monson, and James E. Faust—continued the tradition of referring to Latin Americans as children of Lehi on ceremonial occasions such as temple dedications.¹³³ For Hinckley, at least, Lamanite identification remained explicitly racial, albeit with some nuance. He told an audience of Mexican Saints in 1996 that “father Lehi” would be pleased by

¹³³While organizing the Church’s 2000th stake in 1994, Hunter told his Mexican audience that “the promises made to Father Lehi and his children about their posterity have been and are continuing to be fulfilled in Mexico.” Quoted in “Pres. Hunter’s Admonition: Let Lives Reflect the Gospel,” *Church News*, December 17, 1994. He had made a similar statement when organizing the Church’s 800th stake, also in Mexico in 1977. Quoted in “800th Stake in Church Is Formed in Mexico.” As Church president, Hinckley repeatedly told American Indian and Latin American Saints that Father Lehi must weep (with joy or sorrow, depending on the context) when he looks upon his posterity. See “Mexico Welcomes Prophet’s Visit,” *Church News*, February 3, 1996; “Messages of Inspiration from President Hinckley,”

the faithfulness of “his children, so many of you who carry within your veins his blood.”¹³⁴

Quotations from various Seventies and mission presidents appearing in *Church News* stories from the post-Kimball years demonstrate that traditional Lamanite identification continued—especially in Latin America but also among American Indians—to motivate missionary work, to demonstrate the fulfillment of prophecy, to fuel a sense of walking where ancients prophets walked, and to provide the satisfaction of helping restore a branch of the house of Israel in preparation for Christ’s second coming.¹³⁵ Even some non-nuanced versions of hemispheric Lamanite identification persisted. In 1995, emeritus Seventy Ted E. Brewerton quoted Mark E. Petersen to assert that “the descendants of Laman and Lemuel . . . are found from pole to pole.”¹³⁶ Five years later, on the cusp of the new millennium, Walter F. Gonzalez (then an area authority Seventy, later a member of the First Council of Seventy) cited Spencer W. Kimball’s definition of

Church News, May 3, 1997; Gordon B. Hinckley, “Look to the Future,” *Ensign*, November 1997, 67; and “President Hinckley Tours Mexico and Belize,” *Ensign*, February 1998, 77. Hinckley employed the same image when, as a counselor in the First Presidency, he dedicated the Lima Peru Temple in 1986. Quoted in Glen V. Holley, “Lehi’s Children Blessed by Lima Temple,” *Church News*, January 27, 1990. See also temple dedicatory prayers by Hinckley, Monson, and Faust for 1999–2000, quoted in Southerton, *Losing a Lost Tribe*, 38–39.

¹³⁴“Mexico Welcomes Prophet’s Visit.”

¹³⁵See the following *Church News* articles: Vira H. Blake, “Dedication Honors ‘Ancient Ones,’” January 30, 1988; John L. Hart, “Call Is in Keeping with Ancient Promise,” July 1, 1989; Elayne Wells, “A Land of Prophecy,” February 17, 1990; Craig A. Hill, “New Facility Evidence of Growth,” July 18, 1992; Julie A. Dockstader, “Spiritual Foundation Set Early in Life,” August 8, 1992; and “Eight New Missions Announced,” March 6, 1993.

¹³⁶Ted E. Brewerton, “The Book of Mormon: A Sacred Ancient Record,” *Ensign*, November 1995, 30, emphasis his. Brewerton nuanced his hemispheric identification with an acknowledgment that “many migratory groups came to the Americas,” but he nevertheless maintained that peoples throughout the Americas were blood descendants of Book of Mormon peoples: “The blood of these people flows in the veins of the Blackfoot and the Blood Indians of Alberta, Canada; in the Navajo and the Apache of the American Southwest; the Inca of western South America; the Aztec of Mexico; the Maya of Guatemala; and in other native American groups in the

Lamanite as including "all Indians and Indian mixtures."¹³⁷ It is noteworthy, however, that Lamanite discourse in the post-Kimball years was more likely to appear in the *Church News* than in the *Ensign* and to come from Seventies or mission presidents than from apostles. In other words, official discourse at the highest tiers was comparatively more reserved about identifying contemporary peoples as Lamanites except for ceremonial contexts like temple dedications.

One aspect of Lamanite identification that seems to have actually disappeared, not just declined, from Church discourse at the highest levels is the identification of Pacific Islanders as Lamanites. As noted earlier, the Introduction to the 1981 edition of the Book of Mormon was silent about whether Pacific Islanders are descended from Book of Mormon peoples. In a similar way, Church leaders speaking in the Pacific Islands since the 1990s omitted allusions to Book of Mormon descent in settings where such allusions would have been likely had the audiences been Latin American. When Gordon B. Hinckley dedicated the Kona Hawaii and Suva Fiji temples in 2000, or the rebuilt Apia Samoa temple in 2005, his prayers made no reference to peoples of the Pacific being children of Lehi.¹³⁸ Such references were likewise missing from *Church News* coverage of Hinckley's tours of New Zealand in 1997 and of various Pacific Islands in 2000,¹³⁹ as well as from coverage of a number of milestone events such as the sesquicentennial of the Mormon presence in the Pacific or the organization of the 100th

Western Hemisphere and the Pacific islands" (30–31).

¹³⁷Walter F. Gonzalez, "Book of Mormon Has Direct Message for Children of Lehi," *Church News*, January 1, 2000, 6, 13.

¹³⁸The dedicatory prayer for the Kona Hawaii Temple is published as "Here to Taste the Sweet Refreshment of the Holy Spirit," *Church News*, January 29, 2000. Excerpts from the Suva Fiji Temple dedicatory prayer appear in "May Be Blessed with Peace," *Church News*, June 24, 2000; full text available at <http://www.ldschurchtemples.com/suva/prayer> (accessed June 14, 2007). For the dedicatory prayer of the rebuilt Apia Samoa Temple, see "'A Sacred House' Again in Samoa," *Church News*, September 10, 2005.

¹³⁹"Pres. Hinckley Visits New Zealand," *Church News*, May 17, 1997; "We Have Been on a Long Journey—But It Was a Great Occasion," *Church News*, July 1, 2000.

stake in the Pacific Area.¹⁴⁰

Possibly Church leaders at these events made allusions to Lamanite identity that the *Church News* reports did not include; still, the omission stands out given that Lamanite identification appeared in *Church News* coverage of similar events in Latin America around the same time. It is true that Hinckley told American Samoans that they were “a choice and delightful . . . people” who had been “born with a great and precious birthright,” and his dedicatory prayer for the Apia Samoa Temple stated that “in these islands of Samoa” the Lord had remembered his “ancient promise ‘unto them who are upon the isles of the sea’ (2 Ne. 10:21).”¹⁴¹ But these were at best ambiguous affirmations of Book of Mormon ancestry. If Church leaders deliberately refrained from identifying Pacific Islanders as Lamanites, they may have done so because they were conscious of the ethnic diversity of the Church’s membership in these islands, which included descendents of European and East Asian immigrants.¹⁴² At the same time, a pageant produced by the Kauai Hawaii stake in 1996 reflected a continued attachment to the idea of descent from Hagoth’s people.¹⁴³

In the late 1990s and early 2000s, additional motives have arisen

¹⁴⁰*Church News*: John L. Hart, “Celebrating 100 Years in Tonga,” August 31, 1991; Sarah Jane Weaver, “Pacific Area Reaches Milestone with 100th Stake,” July 19, 1997; Scott Lowe, “Thousands Honor ‘Pioneers of Pacific,’” October 18, 1997; “50 Years in Fiji,” December 18, 2004.

¹⁴¹“We Have Been on a Long Journey”; “‘A Sacred House’ Again in Samoa,” *Church News*, September 10, 2005.

¹⁴²See, for example, references to the Church’s ethnic diversity in New Zealand: “Pres. Hinckley Visits New Zealand,” *Church News*, May 17, 1997; “Steadfast in Faith from One Era to the Next,” *Church News*, July 26, 2003; “Pageant Reflects Heritage,” *Church News*, October 2, 2004. In “Pres. Hinckley Visits New Zealand,” Hinckley told one New Zealand audience that their ethnic diversity demonstrated the principle that God is no respecter of persons.

¹⁴³Julie A. Dockstader, “Hawaiian Saints Keep ‘Promise’ to Touch Lives,” *Church News*, September 7, 1996. A few years earlier, the *Church News* had dedicated an entire article to a Sperry Symposium paper by emeritus BYU religion professor Robert Parsons, who affirmed that “there have been enough semi-official statements by prophets of the Lord to leave little doubt that the Church believes that the Polynesians are direct blood relatives of Lehi’s colony and that Hagoth’s lost ships provide at least one con-

for Church leaders to avoid Lamanite identification. First, since the mid-1990s, the correlation impulse and the challenges of managing diversity in the international Church have intensified leaders' desire for uniformity.¹⁴⁴ This impulse has translated into an insistence that members subordinate their ethnic and cultural identities to their identities as members of Christ's church. In the campaign to subordinate cultural diversity to gospel unity, Elder Jeffrey R. Holland specifically targeted Lamanite identity. At a pioneer sesquicentennial conference for Native Americans in 1997 and again at a conference held in 2006 on the Navajo reservation, Holland called on American Indians in the Church to relinquish Lamanite identity as their primary identity—a reversal of the message they had received during Kimball's presidency. "We do not emphasize racial, or cultural distinctions, including Lamanite or tribal distinctions, in the Church," Holland preached. "We are moving toward that millennial day where . . . there are no more -ites among us." To diminish the special role in salvation history that past LDS teachings had assigned to Lamanites, Holland recast those teachings into a context of Christian universalism. The going forth of the gospel to the Lamanites was a sign that the gospel was again going forth to *all* people. The promised blossoming of the Lamanites referred to individual spiritual growth, not to the dramatic, wholesale restoration of a people. In lieu of special Church programs such as Indian Student Placement, Holland explicitly recommended "a new placement program—placing ourselves within the covenants, ordinances and promises of the gospel of Jesus Christ." Holland was trying to produce major changes in how Indian Saints understood and esteemed Lamanite identity. However, on both occasions his new vision for Lamanite identity competed with reiterations of older teachings by other speakers who were not General Authorities. These speakers affirmed that Native Americans "are a mixture of the seed of" the Hebrew tribes of Ephraim, Manasseh, and Judah, and that Christ had visited the ancestors of conference attendees.¹⁴⁵

The second motive—a potential one, at least—for avoiding Lamanite identification in official discourse is the controversy

nection between the Americas and Polynesia." "Hagoth Believed To Be Link Between Polynesia and Peoples of America," *Church News*, July 25, 1992.

¹⁴⁴Duffy, "New Missionary Discussions," 38–39.

¹⁴⁵See *Church News*: "All Cultures are Children of One God," August

over Lamanite DNA that began in 2000–01. Coverage of the controversy in well-respected national venues such as the *Los Angeles Times*¹⁴⁶ prompted some FARMS writers to elaborate more fully than had been done previously the implications of limited geography for Lamanite identity: to assert that Book of Mormon peoples were actually a very small group who migrated to an already populated continent and were eventually absorbed into the existing populations, thus leaving behind no discernible DNA trace. Because the long history of hemispheric Lamanite identification in LDS teaching could not be entirely dismissed as folklore or speculation, some writers proposed that the terms “Lamanites” or “children of Lehi” could be appropriately applied to peoples of native ancestry throughout the Americas in a nonlinear sense—for instance, as a term designating all non-Nephites in the New World or indicating the adoption of non-Israelite individuals into the gospel covenant.¹⁴⁷

The Church has stopped short of officially endorsing these arguments. However, Elder Dallin H. Oaks has indicated that he personally favors a limited geography model,¹⁴⁸ and links to FARMS scholars’ arguments provided on the Church’s official website have given the argu-

2, 1997, 5; “Native People Descendants of Abraham,” August 2, 1997, 2; and Gerry Avant, “Children of Lehi: Gospel Is First Loyalty,” March 25, 2006, 6–7.

¹⁴⁶William Lobdell and Larry B. Stammer, “Mormon Scientist, Church Clash over DNA Test,” *Los Angeles Times*, December 8, 2002, A21; William Lobdell, “Bedrock of a Faith Is Jolted,” *Los Angeles Times*, February 16, 2006, A1.

¹⁴⁷Sorenson and Roper, “Before DNA,” 11; Meldrum and Stephens, “Who Are the Children of Lehi?”; Roper, “Swimming in the Gene Pool.”

¹⁴⁸Oaks explains that, as a lawyer, he finds the limited geography model attractive because it is more defensible than a hemispheric Book of Mormon geography. The sweeping claim that the Book of Mormon is “a history of all the people who have lived on the continents of North and South America in all ages of the earth” is extremely vulnerable to contradiction: a single counterexample suffices to disprove the claim. In contrast, the more modest claims of a limited Book of Mormon geography are virtually impossible to disprove, retaining plausibility despite a lack of hard evidence for Hebraic ancestry or cultural influence. With a shift from hemispheric to limited geography, “the burden of argument changes drastically.” Dallin H.

ments an aura of Church approbation in addition to raising awareness of limited Lamanite identification among Latter-day Saints.¹⁴⁹ The DNA controversy appears, also, to have effectively silenced public support for hemispheric Lamanite identification. No major LDS writer has cited prophetic authority to counter FARMS's limited Lamanite identification, even though such an argument could be made easily and is a natural corollary to the doctrine of lineal Israelite descent that Robert Millet, for example, championed as recently as 2000.¹⁵⁰ The absence of a prominent defense of hemispheric Lamanite identification suggests that the status of antimodernism has sharply declined within the Church and that more progressive "faithful scholarship" currently enjoys the leadership's favor.

Has the DNA controversy prompted senior Church leaders, reared in the early twentieth century, to reconsider what they grew up believing about the extent to which contemporary peoples are lineal descendants of Book of Mormon peoples? It is impossible to know, barring some kind of highly unlikely public self-disclosure by Church leaders, who have long been reticent to explicitly contradict the teachings of their predecessors. Nor are they likely to see any virtue in disturbing the faith of members who believe themselves to be lineally descended from Lehi. Holland, while downplaying and metaphorizing the significance of claims to Lamanite identity, does not deny those claims. A chief attraction of the limited Lamanite identification as elaborated by FARMS writers is that it allows Church leaders to go on applying the term "children of Lehi" to the same peoples to whom apostles and Church presidents have applied the term since the 1850s: the term remains valid even if it no longer means lineal descent. Church leaders thus have the option of retaining traditional Lamanite discourse—for example, at temple dedications—while tolerating or encouraging a shift away from hemispheric identification.

Oaks, "The Historicity of the Book of Mormon," in *Historicity and the Latter-day Saint Scriptures*, edited by Paul Y. Hoskisson (Provo, Utah: BYU Religious Studies Center, 2001), 238–39. FARMS scholars have, naturally, quoted Oaks's supportive position. See Sorenson and Roper, "Before DNA," 6–7; Roper, "Nephi's Neighbors," 92–93.

¹⁴⁹See, for example, "Comments on the News: DNA and the Book of Mormon," *Newsroom.LDS.org*. <http://www.lds.org/newsroom/mistakes/0,15331,3885-1-18078,00.html> (accessed April 1, 2004).

¹⁵⁰Millet, *Selected Writings of Robert L. Millet*, 255–75.

The solution is to be ambiguous about the meaning of Lamanite identification, in much the same way that official discourse has become ambiguous about the meaning of declarations of lineage in patriarchal blessings.

Recent Church-sponsored events for Hispanic Saints offer hints about the direction that official Lamanite discourse may be headed. Since December 2002, the Church has held a number of Spanish-language devotionals in its Salt Lake City Conference Center, in recognition that Spanish-speakers will soon surpass English-speakers as the Church's largest language group. The General Authority addresses delivered at these devotionals have not been published, but coverage of the events in Church-owned media reported, as of 2005, no instances of Lamanite identification.¹⁵¹ As we have seen, a similar silence is found in the reportage of Church leaders' addresses to Pacific Islanders. Whether the silence means that speakers actually refrained from discourse about Lamanites or that reporters opted not to include such discourse in their coverage, the silence is a striking departure from the prominence of Lamanite identification in Church discourse directed to Hispanic Saints as recently as a quarter century ago.

It is also noteworthy that these most recent events for Hispanic Saints have targeted a group of Church members defined by language (Spanish) and geographical region (Latin America) while, during Kimball's tenure, these same members would have been grouped with American Indians and Pacific Islanders under the rubric "Lamanite." Possibly Church leaders are sensitive that Lamanite identification is not applicable to all Hispanic Saints since not all have Indian ancestry. The *Church News's* coverage of a 2004 Hispanic cultural festival staged in the Conference Center only hinted at Lamanite identification. The reporter described a Mesoamerican pyramid that dominated the stage as a "Book of Mormon-themed set," while Seventy Jay E. Jensen, who in other settings has been clear about his conviction that Latin Americans are children of Lehi, offered oblique tes-

¹⁵¹Jason Swensen, "Cling to Roots, LDS Hispanics Urged," *Deseret News*, December 9, 2002, <http://deseretnews.com/dn/print/1,442,450019520,00.html> (accessed December 9, 2002); Jason Swensen, "Hispanic Growth in Church a 'Miracle,'" *Deseret Morning News*, September 19, 2005.

timony that "the Book of Mormon is Israel's book."¹⁵² These are muted, ambiguous echoes of a discourse that in Spencer W. Kimball's day took the form of bold prophetic declaration.

CONCLUSION

Lamanite identification has served different functions over the course of LDS history: as the basis for apocalyptic scenarios of Indian violence against unrepentant whites; as part of a broader worldview assigning religious significance to lineage and race; as an account of the peopling of the western hemisphere grounded in scriptural literalism; as a presupposition undergirding popular Book of Mormon apologetics; as a motivation for missionizing and an explanation for missionary success; as a rhetorical appeal to counteract prejudice against native peoples; as the foundation for an inspiring concept of one's "true identity." Different functions have had greater significance at different periods, and Lamanite discourse has had greater prominence during different periods. Nevertheless, for the first 150 years of LDS history, Church presidents and apostles consistently identified Lamanites as the literal ancestors of the native peoples of both American continents, as well as (an identification with a somewhat shorter history) the Pacific Islands.

Very quickly after 1985, Lamanite identification declined in official discourse because Church leaders came to place less value on the functions that Lamanite identification had historically served. The need to promote unity in a culturally diverse church, greater investment in a universal Christian message, and shifting social attitudes about race all worked to make Lamanite identification a liability in the eyes of Church leaders. At the same time, hemispheric Lamanite identification became indefensible in the eyes of many "faithful scholars," leading them to promote instead limited Lamanite identification as a strategy for affirming the intellectual credibility of belief in the antiquity of the Book of Mormon. Recognizing the apologetic value of limited Lamanite identification, Church leaders have, at a minimum, tolerated

¹⁵²Jason Swensen, "Celebration: Luz de las Naciones," *Church News*, November 20, 2004, 10. See also Jay E. Jensen, quoted in Julie A. Dockstader, "Spiritual Foundation Set Early in Life," *Church News*, August 8, 1992, where he expressed excitement that he and his wife would soon "go back to Latin America . . . where we can work with the children of Israel, Father Lehi's children, and serve them."

it; one could even argue that they have given it their tacit approval.

It is not clear, however, to what extent commitment to hemispheric Lamanite identification has declined outside the circles of intellectuals orbiting around organizations such as FARMS. Many Saints now living have been taught to believe either that they themselves are Lamanites or that the Lord has called them to work among Lamanites. They have been taught this concept not only by parents and/or teachers of Church classes but also through channels that Saints often regard as revelatory: the sermons of Church presidents and apostles, patriarchal blessings, the settings apart of missionaries, temple dedications, and so on. Leaders they revere as prophets have told them that “there is no *pea* about” their Lamanite identity (Joseph F. Smith) or that the Book of Mormon “fully answer[s]” the question of the origin of Native Americans (Spencer W. Kimball). Some Saints have received what they understand to be testimonies of their own Lamanite identity or the Lamanite identity of people they serve. For others, Lamanite identification has been bound up in their faith in prophecy or in the superiority of revealed knowledge to secular learning. How will the retreat from Lamanite identification affect Saints such as these? How will they react to declarations by LDS researchers—advertised on the Church’s website—that scientific findings have disproved hemispheric Lamanite identity?

Church leaders may be able to avoid these potential dilemmas by pursuing a strategy in which they quietly pull back from Lamanite references in official discourse or employ ambiguous references, while encouraging all Saints everywhere to embrace a common identity based on Christian discipleship and membership in a worldwide union of Saints. Evidence that Church leaders may, in fact, be pursuing such an approach includes recent remarks by Jeffrey R. Holland and Jay E. Jensen delivered to Native American or Latin American audiences, together with the disappearance of discourse about the Book of Mormon ancestry of Pacific Islanders. In the past quarter century, Church leaders have used similar strategies to shift official discourse away from doctrines of lineage and expectations of an imminent Second Coming. Those past successes seem to bode well for the current effort to deemphasize Lamanite identification.¹⁵³

On the other hand, Margarito Bautista and George P. Lee are reminders that the potency of Lamanite identity could overflow the

¹⁵³As this article was going to press, the *Salt Lake Tribune* reported a

bounds set by Church leaders. Over thirty years ago, Harold Brown's *Ensign* article, "What Is a Lamanite?", alerted English-speaking Saints to the diverse attitudes that Latin American Saints have developed toward Lamanite identification. As Latin Americans become the numerical majority in the Church, their attitudes toward Lamanite identity could yield persistent tensions, both among Latin American Mormons themselves and in relation to changing attitudes toward Lamanite identification among whites, who continue to dominate Church leadership. Alternatively, questions about exactly who is a Lamanite and what that means could be relegated to the category of folklore or doctrinal mystery. Only time will tell. What is clear, though, is that the future of Lamanite discourse depends on much more than the outcome of debates over DNA.

newly ordered revision to the 1981 Introduction to the Book of Mormon, which appeared in October 2006 Doubleday's second edition (first edition 2004). Henceforth the introduction will read that Lamanites "are among the ancestors of the American Indians," not their "principal ancestors." The new language is broad enough to accommodate both nuanced hemispheric and limited understandings of Lamanite identity. This change thus provides additional support for my argument that Church leaders are pulling back from assertions of hemispheric identification in favor of ambiguity. Peggy Fletcher Stack, "Single Word Change in Book of Mormon Speaks Volumes," *Salt Lake Tribune*, November 8, 2007, http://www.sltrib.com/lds/ci_7403990 (accessed November 11, 2007).