

ment made *no* mention of previous authorities and church educators cited past teachings.<sup>20</sup>

of 1978 there emerged a fourth of the previous one. During Mitt Romney's presidential run in 2012, LDS leaders labeled as such folklore, church leaders' positions, specifically those penned by Joseph Smith, Bruce R. McConkie, and other erstwhile teachings on the divine clearly passé in Mormonism as a result of this development, church leaders' teachings, spawned by such earlier teachings, first century when then president labeled such elements of racism as blasphemous to God.<sup>22</sup>

an explanation for the priesthood ban document. The church's explanation of racism in the larger American context, where people of African descent lived in conditions not just common but customary aspects of people's lives, including the teachings of Brigham Young, largely influenced the church's explanation of the priesthood ban. In essence, the church's explanation is other than divine revelation.<sup>23</sup>

the church's struggle with racism despite its best efforts in scoring this problem is the stark reality that more than one percent of the church's membership are black people and black traditions are part of the church's temple rituals. Likewise, just three percent of general authority since 1978.<sup>25</sup> In 2012, the church has made progress, particularly in a significant black population, such as in countries in black Africa, and many states and elsewhere with large

Knights, NBA basketball player, and their spiritual home. Less notable is the church's message, despite the challenge it faces. But most encouraging for

church leadership is what the future holds. Mormons today generally embrace a racially inclusive church while simultaneously rejecting Mormonism's racially exclusive past. According to a public opinion poll in 2012, conducted during Mitt Romney's presidential run, over 90 percent of Mormons polled had either never heard of the church's racial doctrine or rejected it completely.<sup>28</sup> This is an encouraging sign for the Mormon faithful. It is proof that LDS racial attitudes are evolving, and that Mormons are more accepting of a people they had once shunned.

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This volume offers an important new perspective of LDS racial history through the lens of authoritative documents.<sup>29</sup> The seven chapters contain official and/or authoritative statements tracing the changing status of black people during the period 1830 (the date of the founding of the Mormon church) down to the present. The documents include statements from relevant LDS scriptural works produced by Mormon founder Joseph Smith and canonized as scripture on par with the Old and New Testaments—in particular, the *Book of Mormon*, *Doctrine and Covenants*, and *Pearl of Great Price*. But the majority of documents are noncanonical statements given by Mormon leaders and/or church spokesmen, most of which were publically stated and/or circulated through official church publications and/or through the media.<sup>30</sup>

Each of the seven chapters begins with a brief introduction outlining the historical context and unifying theme. Also included are extended contextual essays for each document, carefully explaining its meaning, importance, and influence. While no claim is made that one general authority speaks for the church on doctrinal matters, it is clear that certain general authorities exerted a stronger authoritative voice than others. The only documents bearing the imprimatur of the church are a handful of First Presidency statements on race made in the latter half of the twentieth century, along with two official statements in 2012 affirming the equality of all races, and one in 2013, where the church disavowed its earlier teachings undergirding the priesthood ban.<sup>31</sup> Nevertheless, a sampling of the documents reveals certain patterns and themes in Mormon racial history, particularly the divine curse and other theological rationales for the ban.

One final note: To avoid repetition, we use the terms *priesthood ban*, *priesthood exclusion*, and *priesthood denial* interchangeably. All denote the restriction of black men from the LDS priesthood. Finally, we do not call LDS leaders by their preferred names of “elder” or “president” so as to avoid unnecessary confusion for readers not familiar with LDS nomenclature. We have opted for the more transparent title of “apostle” when describing members of the Quorum of the Twelve, “church president” when referring to the church prophet, or “First Presidency counselor” when referring to a member of the First Presidency.