



LATEST NEWS THE WEST UTAH ▾ SPORTS ▾ OPINION MAGAZINE MORE ▾

Report ad

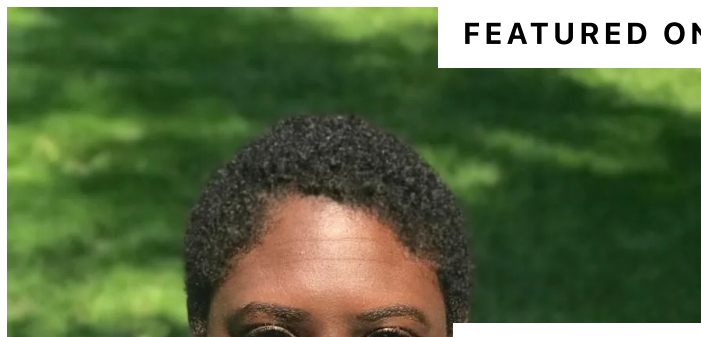
OPINION FAITH OPINION/OP-ED

# Op-ed: Speaking to the pain of a black Mormon woman

By Deseret News | Aug 17, 2017, 12:25pm MDT

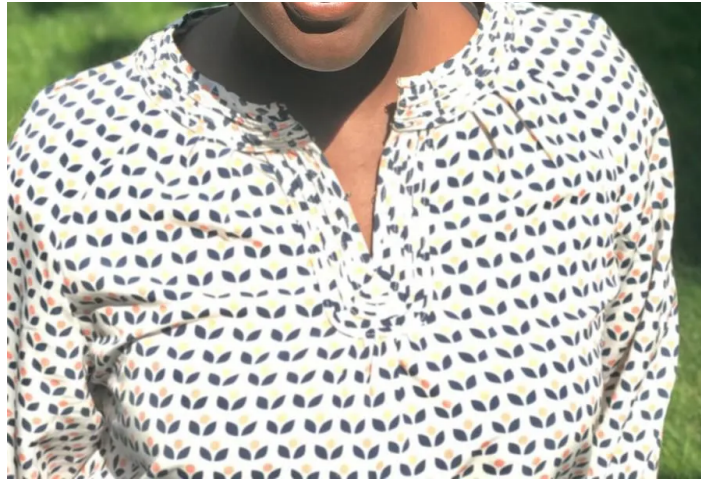
Zandra Vranes, For the Deseret News

SHARE



FEATURED ON DESERET






Zandra Vranes | Courtesy of Zandra Vranes

1 of 2



Editor's note: This article is part of an ongoing Deseret News opinion series exploring ideas and issues at the intersection of faith and thought.

Tuesday, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints released a statement, the first in its history to specifically condemn white supremacy, and boldly declared that it is “morally wrong and sinful.” When I read those words joy filled my soul. Until that moment, I don’t think I truly realized how desperately I’d been longing for words from church leaders that spoke to the pain that its members of color face every day. I pray that yesterday is just the beginning of what is yet to come.

The last time the N-word was hurled at me was in April 2017. And yes, it was the full word. Sadly, I was angrier that the guy reset my clock than I was at being called a racial slur. Trust me, every black person distinct **FEATURED ON DESERET**  called the N-word. Now, thanks to some saint with a slick tongue, it’s a frighteningly fresh wound from 2017. Oh, and if you’re wondering why I referred to him as a “saint,” well that’s the part of the verbal victimization that devastated me, he was a member of my church, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Report ad

Racism is a sin. An LDS Church definition of sin is “to willfully disobey God’s commandments or to fail to act righteously despite a knowledge of the truth.” It seems pretty straightforward, right? Except for that key word, “knowledge.” The fact is, there’s a facet of Latter-day Saints that don’t actually “know” what racism is or “know” that it’s a bigger deal to the church than say swearing. And quite frankly, how would they know? If you go to [lds.org](https://www.lds.org) and type in racism, there are resources, but refine the search to general conference, you’ll get a whopping result of ... one. Do the same thing for pornography and you’ll get talks for days. That’s exactly how LDS folks know porn’s a problem and how to face it, we learn and teach about it within the church.

**FEATURED ON DESERET**

Yet racism, a sin that’s occurring within the walls of our chapels, temples and at church-sponsored events, even perpetrated by our own against our own, \*crickets.\* No, members aren’t running around the chapel in KKK hoods, but that’s not the only way racism rears its head, it’s not always overt. Sometimes it looks like being quick to blame the Spanish-speaking ward every time something comes up missing or breaks

while the white missionaries go inside and teach them the gospel, instead of telling them that in order to join this church they'd need to stop harboring prejudice.

When we don't understand the very real damage that even the smallest act of racism does to those it is inflicted upon, we sit silently. Which means we've convinced ourselves that we don't need to speak up against it, because discomfort is too high a price to pay to keep our Christian covenant to comfort those who stand in need of comfort.

Nine months ago I found myself sitting in a hospital room with a teenage girl I didn't know. She had gone to school a few days earlier where someone casually mentioned that she was black and didn't deserve to live. So she went home that day and attempted to end her life. Thankfully she failed, but could not be released from the hospital because she would not agree that if released she would not attempt to end her life again.

By chance I met a friend of her family, who, desperate to help, asked me to contact the family. We don't live in the same state, so I had to travel a distance to make the visit. During those hours of my road trip I thought of all the ways I could share with her that God loved her and wanted her to live. When we finally came face-to-face, the weight of how unqualified I was for this life or death situation left me at a loss for words. After I mumbled my name, and sat there stupidly, she finally asked me why I was there.

"I think 'cause you're black and I'm black, security just assumed we were related and sent me in here." She laughed, and it broke the ice.

**FEATURED ON DESERET**



Report ad

I began to tell her the things that I had rehearsed on the car ride, that God loved her, and how the gospel teaches us that we are of infinite worth, that Jesus knew what she was feeling, how the church gives us a family, a divine support system, etc, etc, etc. She quietly listened to it all and when I finally paused she said, “the person that made me wanna do it, (he or she) goes to our church too and. ...” She trailed off. “And everything I’m telling you you’ve heard before, and so has (he or she), but it didn’t stop (them) from doing what (they) did, right?” I finished for her. She nodded, and I sighed.

There were no conference talks for me to reference, no section of For the Strength of the Youth for me to read her, no LDS Pinterest q **FEATURED ON DESERET** ✕ dilemma, so I bagged it all and for the next six hours we got real. We swapped stories of hurts inflicted on us by people that claimed that they believed that “all are alike unto God,” and of the many folks who had counseled us to “just ignore it,” or “be the bigger person.” I sat and listened to every experience and validated every feeling she had, and it wasn’t hard for me to do, because many people I knew had faced them too.

Next year, June 8, 2018, will mark the 40th anniversary of the restoration of the priesthood to black Latter-day Saints. We as a church have been like the children of Israel, after decades of crying, “Let my people go!” June 8, 1978, was our parting of the Red Sea, but like the Israelites we have spent 40 years wandering in the wilderness, justifying the ban, petrified to be open about the racial history of our church, and pretending that without specific corrections and current teachings, 1978 just made all the racism in the church disappear.

Today a friend confided in me that she’s afraid to get happy about the statement because what if that is it, but I feel restored with hope anew that after 40 years, just as the children of Israel, we shall wander no more.

Zandra Vranes is a speaker, author and co-founder of the website [SistasinZion.com](https://SistasinZion.com)

---

RELATED

**One of the ‘Sistas in Zion’ tweets her thoughts on people who leave the LDS faith**

**Sistas in Zion are voices of humor and faith on stereotypes, misconceptions and all things Mormon**

---

## Join the Discussion

 [VIEW COMMENTS](#)

### State of Faith with Kels FEATURED ON DESERET

Get weekly stories to help deepen your understanding of religion in the public square. ✕

Email Address



By signing up, you agree to our [Privacy Notice](#) and European users agree to the [data transfer policy](#).

### Here is BYU's uniform combo for its Big 12 opener at Kansas

[Read More](#)

### You Might Also Like

Recommended by Outbrain



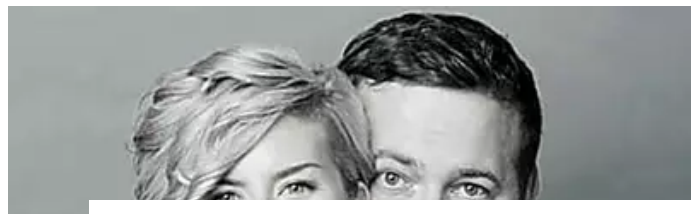
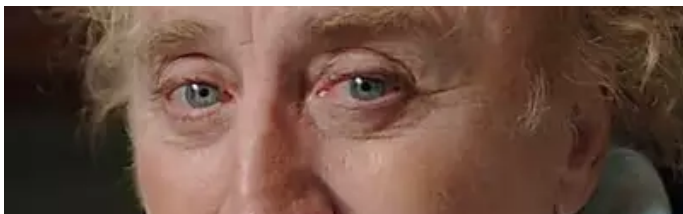
### 17 Maps That Show Us A New Perspective Of The U.S.

Sponsor: Definition



### The First Ladies Were Just Ranked: You'll Be Surprised Who's #1

Spon **FEATURED ON DESERET**





### It Was The Most Famous Movie Line Ever, But He Was Never Meant To Say It

Sponsor: Investing Magazine



### Totally Fake - The 35 Most Fake Reality Shows People Actually Believed Were Real

Sponsor: YourDIY



### The Deadliest Animal In Each State Of The U.S.

Sponsor: Definition



### The Best Men's Shoes for Walking and Standing All Day

Sponsor: Comfort Men Shoes



### 20-year-old Latter-day Saint sister missionary from Seattle area dies in Philippines

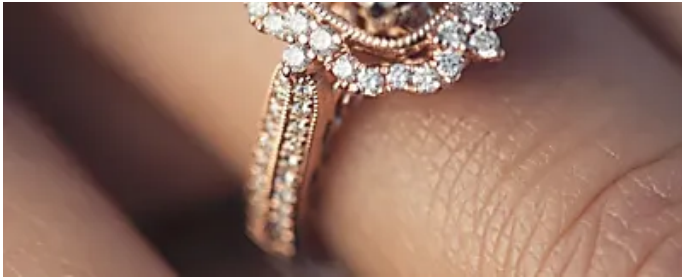
Deseret News



### ‘It’s **FEATURED ON DESERET** Alex Smith shares update on daughter’s health

Deseret News





## Hard to believe: Here's what a lab grown diamond ring really costs in 2023

Sponsor: Lab Diamonds | Search Ads



## 20 Movies That Are So Good, They're Considered Perfect

Sponsor: Definition

FEATURED ON DESERET



Report ad



- 
- 1 **It's been 7 years in the making. Lagoon's newest ride has an official opening date**

---

  - 2 **Perspective: How impeachment lost its power**

---

  - 3 **Perspective: The Constitution was designed for a moral and religious people**

---

  - 4 **Puka Nacua broke multiple NFL rookie records on Sunday**

---

  - 5 **Highlights, key plays and photos from BYU's thrilling win over Arkansas**

**FEATURED ON DESERET**



## Comments

# Join the conversation

REGISTER

SIGN IN

### Deseret News Community guidelines

We believe it's possible to disagree without being disagreeable. In short, we encourage comments that are:

- Civil and constructive
- Clear and to the point
- Respectful and empathetic toward other community members and their opinions

See our **full list of community guidelines**.

All Opinion and Perspective articles are set to premoderate due to the tenor of the conversations.

If you already have an account but are unable to access it, please click on the sign in button below and then reset your password.

Comments are closed on this story.

All Comments 117

Sort by **Newest**

– **moi2u** 6 years ago  
@ gratefulmouse - san angelo, tx

Not sure why you think I have "anger in my heart" simply because I asked a legit question and followed it through with the logical conclusion. In any event, your attempt at discernment is incorrect, albeit I stand by my logical question and conclusion.

[Top of comments](#)

[Top of article](#)

RESPECT   REPLY   SHARE

REPORT

FEATURED ON DESERET

Load All Comments

Report ad

**COMPANY**

About Us  
Editorial Staff  
Careers

**REACH OUT**

Contact Us  
Technical Support  
Advertise  
Send Us a Tip  
Do Not Sell My Info

**GET MORE**

Newsletters  
Print Subscription  
iOS App  
Android App  
Deseret News Marathon

**CONNECT**

Twitter  
Facebook  
Instagram

---

Copyright © 2023 Deseret News Publishing Company. All Rights Reserved

[Terms of Use](#) • [Privacy Notice](#) • [CA Notice of Collection](#) • [Cookie Policy](#)

**FEATURED ON DESERET**

