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Science and Fiction: Kennewick Man/Ancient One in Latter-day Saint Discourse

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Abstract *In June of 1997 Orson Scott Card, a popular science fiction author and prominent Latter-day Saint, seized upon the news of the erosion of an ancient skeleton out of a riverbank along the Columbia River in eastern Washington during the previous summer. Card prematurely suggested to a Mormon audience that this Kennewick Man represented an ancient founding Caucasoid population displaced by ancestors of American Indians. Indigenous peoples called this ancestor the Ancient One and participated in a long and contentious struggle between a team of scientists and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers over repatriation. This article critically examines the deployment and evolution of images of Kennewick Man in Latter-day Saint discourse about Native Americans, DNA, and the Book of Mormon. Despite cautionary warnings from the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and Latter-day Saint scientists, the latest pseudoscientific resurrection of a Latter-day settler colonial narrative about ancient America appears as David Read's* Face of a Nephite *(2020) featuring a racialized and creationist distortion of the scientific analysis and facial reconstructions of Kennewick Man. Read's book feeds into a larger discourse advocating a Heartland setting for the Book of Mormon in North America advocated by Rodney Meldrum's misnamed Foundation for Indigenous Research and Mormonism (FIRM). These authors anachronistically racialize both scripture and human DNA, misrepresent archaeological and genetic science, draw from fraudulent and looted materials, and disregard Indigenous perspectives on the Ancient One, now firmly established as ancestral to American Indians.*

Keywords Ancient One, anthropology, Book of Mormon, DNA, Kennewick Man, Mormonism, Native American, racism, repatriation.

Introduction

In June of 1997, the popular science fiction writer and prominent Latter-day Saint, Orson Scott Card (1997), seized upon the news of the erosion of a skeleton out of a riverbank along the Columbia River in eastern Washington during the previous summer. Card expressed excitement at the discovery and frustration with the Umatilla Nation and others who sought repatriation of this Ancient One through the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA). The science fiction author used the skeleton to suggest that Native Americans had inflicted "exactly the kind of displacement… on their predecessors" as Europeans had done to Indigenous peoples in their conquest of the Americas. He depicts these predecessors as "racially different people" from

"native-Americans." Seeking to undermine the autochthonous heritage of American Indians he proclaimed, "We are all immigrants to the New World." He directed particular animosity toward the "Umatilla Indians" who he feared "may succeed in hiding away this skeleton that could never have belonged to a member of their or any living tribe." In contrast to his negative characterizations of repatriation efforts, Card expressed "pleasure" in the report of a skeleton of presumed "Caucasoid physical structure" from ancient America and its implications for "Book of Mormon culture and archaeology." Card inappropriately racialized the skeleton and then used that interpretation to insinuate that American Indians were the first to commit genocide and that Indigenous claims to repatriation must therefore be invalid.

Card's perspective is representative of widely held beliefs the authors have heard expressed in Latter-day Saint communities around the turn of the century. Card, though, does note that "some Mormons will take no comfort from any of this, being unwilling to consider any artifact dating before 4,000 bc as genuine." He contrasts those young earth creationists from himself and other Latter-day Saints like him "who take a more flexible view of the calendar." He suggests that "the 9,000 year-old dating of Kennewick man dovetails nicely with the probable date of Jaredite-era migrations" assumed by Latter-day Saint apologist Hugh Nibley. The Jaredites were the earliest of three migrations from the ancient Near East to the Americas described in the Book of Mormon. Joseph Smith (1830), recognized as a prophet by the various branches of the Mormon Restoration, first published this purportedly scriptural account of ancient America in Palmyra, New York, in 1830.

In the years that have followed Card's blog, Latter-day Saint interpretations of the Book of Mormon have shifted dramatically. DNA evidence challenged the traditional interpretation of the text as a hemispheric history of ancient America providing a simplistic explanation for the origins of American Indians. The genetic evidence demonstrated the antiquity of Indigenous occupation of the Americas, millennia before the events described in the Book of Mormon. Shared DNA lineages indicate that the closest relatives to modern American Indians can be found in North and East Asia, not the ancient Near East (Murphy 2002, 2003a, 2003b, 2004; Murphy and Southerton 2003; Southerton 2004, 2020; Baca 2008; Murphy and Baca 2016, 2020). References to Kennewick Man have recurred throughout subsequent Latter-day Saint literature reinterpreting the Book of Mormon in response to DNA evidence. This article offers a critical review of depictions of the Ancient One in four branches of Book of Mormon discourse: 1) a Mesoamerican limited geography; 2) a Heartland limited geography; 3) the official statements and essays of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS, the largest Mormon denomination); and 4) decolonizing scholarship.

Both the Mesoamerican and Heartland advocates inaccurately racialize ancient human remains such as Kennewick Man. Mesoamerican advocates and the LDS Church's official essays reinterpret the historical narrative of the Book of Mormon and minimize hemispheric teachings of early church leaders. Heartland proponents respond by resurrecting widely discredited archaeological frauds and selectively reasserting earlier interpretations of the Book of Mormon that supported a North American setting while also minimizing the previously predominant hemispheric models. They deceptively point to a mitochondrial lineage known as X2a, found among some North American Indians, as an indication of a Book of Mormon era immigration from the ancient Near East to North America. Patent attorney David Read's *Face of a Nephite* (2020) has recently joined the Heartland narrative by reasserting a creationist reading of the American past like that decried by Card two decades earlier. Read misleadingly employs dates of carbonates in and on Kennewick Man's skeleton to undermine its antiquity and offers disputations of the molecular clock to advocate for a timing of X2a's appearance that is more compatible with the Book of Mormon.

Meanwhile, the LDS Church's official essays have encouraged spiritual over historical readings of the Book of Mormon, repudiated the racism underlying both Mesoamerican and Heartland models, and cautiously discouraged efforts by Heartland advocates to misuse the DNA evidence.

Decolonizing interpretations of the Book of Mormon offered by Latter-day Saints of Indigenous heritage provide an alternative to the juggernaut of limited geographic settings that are dependent upon misrepresenting either the science or the scripture. Indeterminate or figurative readings of the Book of Mormon eschew the racism and nationalism inherent in the determinate settler colonial interpretations that see the scripture as the one and only true narrative of ancient America. Indeterminate, or figurative, readings of the Book of Mormon allow for both science and fiction, requiring that neither displace each other nor that either displace the varied narratives of origins coming from Indigenous peoples across the hemisphere.

Archaeology and the Book of Mormon

The view of American antiquity in Joseph Smith's Book of Mormon complemented common nineteenth century settler colonial speculations about Israelite ancestry of American Indians. These Israelites called Nephites, Mulekites, and Lamanites purportedly came to the Americas in two migration events around 2600 B.P. (before present). These migrants found the records of a previous population (known as Jaredites), who had brought plants and animals over from the ancient Near East shortly after a world-wide Noahic flood, but had destroyed themselves in an ancient cataclysmic battle (Murphy 2003b). Climaxing with a visit to the Americas from Jesus Christ four centuries before the Lamanites reportedly destroyed the Nephites, the Book of Mormon is heralded today as a sacred text by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, the Community of Christ, and other Mormon or Restoration traditions that trace their origins to Joseph Smith's prophetic message (Givens 2002; Gutjahr 2012).

The ancient migration events and historical claims of the Book of Mormon have met with significant skepticism and charges of fraud from anthropologists, archaeologists, and historians (Pierce 1899; Silverberg 1968; Coe 1973; Vogel 1986; Williams 1991; Mann 2010; Colavito 2020; Fenton 2020; Watts 2020). Even professionally trained scholars from within Restoration and Mormon traditions have raised considerable concerns about the historicity of the text. LDS archaeologist Dee F. Green (1969:74) critiqued Latter-day Saint defenses of the historical claims of the Book of Mormon (Hunter 1956; Hunter and Johnson 1959) as "inadequate, from a professional archaeologist's point of view," noting their neglect of time and space and misrepresentations of archaeological evidence. Wayne Ham (1970), a scholar from the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (RLDS, now called Community of Christ), pointed to the lack of archaeological support for the plants, animals, and technology described in the Book of Mormon; its reliance on the King James Bible; and its questionable morality linking divine curses to skin color and justifications of colonial conquest as sufficient for treating the scripture as "a nonhistorical treatise in much the same manner as modern critics view the books of Jonah, Ruth, Job, and Daniel in the Old Testament." The private writings of theologian Brigham H. Roberts and attorney Thomas Stuart Ferguson, early and mid-century defenders of the Book of Mormon, revealed that even they had significant doubts about their public stances (Madsen 1992; Larson 1996).

Anthropologist John A. Price (1974:38–39) provided a succinct summary of key problems with the Book of Mormon's historical and ecological claims. "An impressive feature of New World prehistory is the extent to which it developed independently of the Old World." Price continues, "The aboriginal New World did not have wheat, barley, cows, oxen, horses or elephants (after about 5000 B.C.), asses, sheep,

or domesticated goats or swine. No Native Americans made grape wine or wheat bread." To the contrary, "native plants and animals were domesticated corn, beans, squashes, potatoes, tomatoes, manioc, turkeys, llamas, etc." He stated more emphatically, "The Jaredites and Nephites are portrayed as having had plow agriculture of wheat and barley and pastoralism of sheep and cattle, but nothing remotely resembling this kind of culture has ever been found, either archaeologically or ethnographically, in the aboriginal New World." Price finds similar mismatch with the buildings, housing, clothing, metallurgy, tools, weapons, vehicles, writings, languages, and religions described in the scripture. He does note, however, that "the forts and burial mounds described in the Book of Mormon are, in fact, like those of the Iroquois." Anthropologists, archaeologists, and other scholars coming from outside and within Mormonism questioned the Book of Mormon's historical and ecological claims long before the emergence of DNA evidence.

Mesoamerica

The proposal that the events in the Book of Mormon occurred within a limited regional setting in Mesoamerica rather than across two hemispheres, as the sacred text seems to describe them, first appeared in the writings of an RLDS scholar, Louis E. Hills (1917, 1918, 1919). Despite such an early proposal, this perspective would not receive widespread support until almost a century later. References to a narrow neck of land separating a land southward from a land northward, along with geographic footnotes pointing to locations spread across North and South America in the 1879 LDS edition of the Book of Mormon, hampered broad acceptance of a limited geographic setting, despite the removal of the footnotes in 1911 (Sorenson 1992:141–142; Givens 2002:106; Murphy 2003b:111–113). The Mesoamerican proposal received a boost in 1984 with publication of anthropologist John L. Sorenson's changing understandings of the Book of Mormon's ancient setting in the *Ensign*, a widely read LDS magazine. Sorenson (1984a, 1984b, 1996, 2013), though, competed with a more prominent claim that Lamanites "are the principal ancestors of the American Indians" that LDS church leaders had placed conspicuously in the introduction to their 1981 edition of the Book of Mormon (Murphy and Baca 2020:74). A broader acceptance of a smaller Mesoamerican setting would not come until new DNA research pushed this limited geographic interpretation into the forefront of twenty-first century apologetics.

Despite publication of Sorenson's proposal in a church magazine and press, peer review by his colleague Thomas Stuart Ferguson, an LDS founder of the New World Archaeological Foundation, had found it wanting for failing plant-life, animal-life, metallurgy, and script tests (Larson 1996; Murphy 2003a). LDS archaeologist and former Brigham Young University (BYU) faculty member, Deanne Matheny (1993), subsequently reaffirmed Sorenson's failure to adequately address problems with European flora, fauna, and technology and disputed his distortion of directional terminology necessary to fit his proposed setting into the isthmus of Tehauntepec. She found the archaeological record at the site of Santa Rosa, Chiapas, proposed for the Book of Mormon city of Zarahemla inconsistent with descriptions of the infrastructure, population, ecology, economy, and destruction in the text. Matheny (1993:322) describes Sorenson's method as "a bits-and-pieces approach involving a larger area and all time periods rather than the specific area and time he has selected, failing to take into account the specific cultural processes and developments in that area." The proposal that the archaeological site of Kaminaluyu in Guatemala is the city of Nephi also fails critical analysis and problematically credits Mayan cultural accomplishments to foreign influences (Southerton 2020:56–57).

Proposed alternatives to Sorenson's Mesoamerican model have included reading the Book of Mormon as "spirit writing" (Dunn 1985, 2002; Taves 2020), a "modern expansion of an ancient

source" (Ostler 1987), "midrash" or "inspired fiction" (Hutchinson 1988, 1993), "American apocrypha" (Vogel and Metcalfe 2002), "historical fiction" (Firmage 2002), pseudepigrapha (Price 2002), a "revelatory" event (Taves 2016), and an "oral performance" (Davis 2020). A recent anthology argues that the Book of Mormon "never portrays itself as an ancient text" (Fenton and Hickman 2019:7) while a contrasting monograph advocates viewing Joseph Smith as a "creative co-author" (Ash 2021).

DNA research summarized by anthropologist Thomas W Murphy (2002, 2003a, 2003b, 2004) and geneticist and former Mormon bishop Simon G. Southerton (2004) accelerated debate about the Book of Mormon's historicity by demonstrating no close affinity between Native American populations and those of the ancient Near East. Murphy and Southerton (2003) found that 99.4% of mtDNA from published samples of 7,300 Native Americans demonstrated their closest affinity with populations in north and east Asia rather than the Middle East. The mtDNA lineages A-D were only found in the Americas and northern and eastern portions of Asia. While the lineage X could also be found in Europe, Africa, and the Middle East, the American branch separated from the others millennia before the migrations described in the Book of Mormon. The remaining 0.6% showed affinities to lineages found in Africa and Europe, most likely the result of recent admixture, long after the events of the Book of Mormon. Biological anthropologist Michael Crawford stated the case more bluntly, there is not "one iota of evidence that suggest a lost tribe from Israel made it all the way to the New World. It is a great story, slain by ugly fact" (Egan 2000). Biologist Scott Woodward, then at Brigham Young University (BYU), acknowledged that BYU's tests of 6,000 Native Americans, primarily from Peru, were consistent with those of other researchers (Fabrizio et al. 2002).

Two documentary films (Kramer and Reyes 2003; Baca 2008) and widespread news coverage of the LDS Church's efforts to discipline Murphy and Southerton for their academic publications drew significant attention to the lack of genetic support for the Book of Mormon (Lobdell and Stammer 2002; ICTMN Staff 2002; Lyke 2003; Dobner 2005; Associated Press 2005a, 2005b; Lobdell 2006). A flurry of articles from the Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies (FARMS) at BYU and the Foundation for Apologetic Information and Research (FAIR, now known as Faithful Answers, Informed Research) employed a limited geographic setting in which a small group of immigrants entered a much larger Mesoamerican population. Authors then proposed dilution by gene flow, genetic drift, and founder effects as possible explanations for the lack of genetic markers connecting Near Eastern populations to the Americas (Gardner 2003; Stewart 2006; Peterson 2008).

Kennewick Man would figure prominently in writings by Latter-day Saints employing a limited geographic setting as a possible explanation for the lack of genetic evidence. Anthropologist D. Jeffrey Meldrum and biologist Trent Stephens (2007:22), both from Idaho State University (ISU), acknowledged that "DNA data lend no obvious support" to Book of Mormon populations as the source for "all pre-Columbian inhabitants of the Americas," but held out hope for smaller migrations. Much like Card, however, these LDS authors racialized the Ancient One and portrayed Umatillas as hostile to science. Calling features of the Kennewick skull "Caucasoid," they raised the question of "an earlier population" lacking ties to Asians "that predated modern Native Americans." They accused Umatilla of ignoring "data coming out of the earth" and denigrated Umatilla "oral histories" by equating them with "folklore" and questionable interpretations that "have strayed beyond the Book of Mormon story." Meldrum and Stevens (2007:22–23, 79–80) present themselves as open to science and willing to reconsider previous interpretations while they portray Umatillas as dismissive of scientific theories and the Book of Mormon.

Other Latter-day Saint scholars also echo some of Card's early claims. Religion and literary

professor Terryl Givens (2002:148–149), from the University of Richmond, asserted that the Army Corps of Engineers covered the site where Kennewick Man was found "under a politically motivated directive of the Clinton administration." He deployed this story as an example of an allegedly more widespread effort to suppress evidence for "transoceanic contact with the Americas long before Columbus (whether Semitic injections or other kinds)." Givens suggests that suppression originates from fear that such revelations might damage "Native identity." Anthropologist John Sorenson (2008:8) and biologist David McClellan (2008:137), both from BYU, suggested that Kennewick Man's "European-like" appearance could be "due to a Haplogroup X people from Europe who reached America" or at least "allow for the possibility of Caucasoid habitation in the Americas." Although Kennewick Man and Native Americans carrying the X lineage lived far away from their favored setting in Mesoamerica, Latter-day Saint scholars repeated problematic racialized characterizations of Kennewick Man from the media and the presence of the X lineage in Europe and the Middle East as support for the plausibility of their regional interpretations of the Book of Mormon (Figure 1).

Heartland

DNA evidence fostered movement away from hemispheric toward more limited settings for purported Book of Mormon migrations. A geographic disconnect, though, appeared between

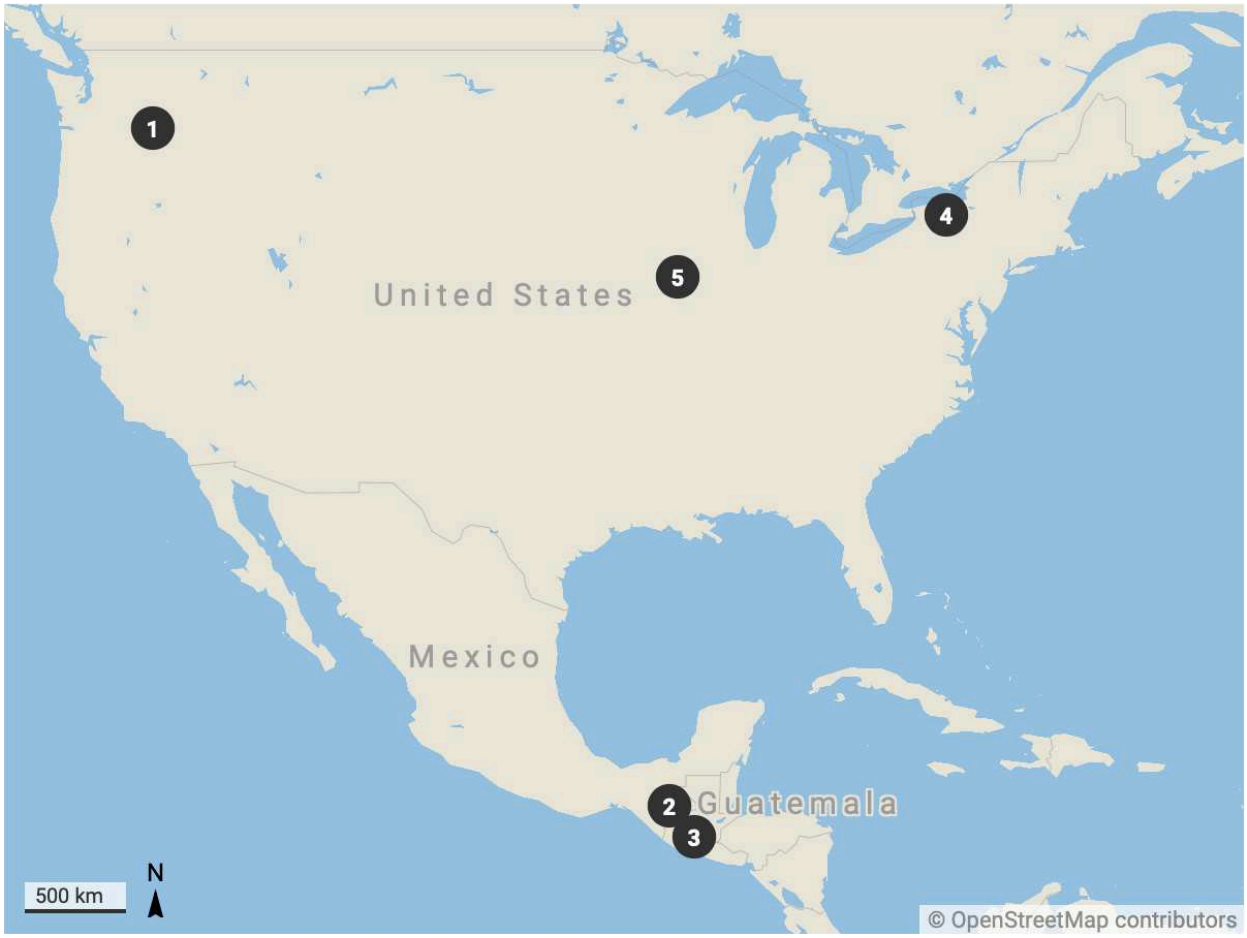

Figure 1. Key locations mentioned in the article: 1) Kennewick, WA; 2) Santa Rosa, Chiapas; 3) Kaminaljuyu, Guatemala; 4) Hill Cumorah, NY; and 5) Nauvoo, IL.

favored forms of genetic and skeletal evidence and a Mesoamerican setting for the Book of Mormon preferred by prominent Latter-day Saint scientists and scholars. A similar disjuncture existed between statements in scripture and from early church leaders that seemed to link some events and peoples in the Book of Mormon to places in North America, especially that of Hill Cumorah in New York and Zarahemla in Iowa, purportedly adjacent to the Mormon settlement of Nauvoo, Illinois (Duffy 2008; Neville 2015). This incongruity, combined with a creationist skepticism toward science more generally and an embrace of white nationalism among some Mormons, created an environment ripe for the flourishing of a limited geographic setting in North America.

Calling their proposed geography the Heartland model, new authors built upon the work of earlier advocates of a North American setting for the Book of Mormon (Olive 2000; Goble and May 2002). Rod Meldrum (2009, 2011), a business developer who claims to be a "senior scientific researcher" because of his work on a creationist "natural science textbook," began his studies after watching the video, *DNA vs. the Book of Mormon* (Kramer and Reyes 2003). Latter-day Saint purveyors of a North American setting for the Book of Mormon draw liberally from known archaeological frauds (Newark Holy Stones, Bat Creek Stone, Michigan relics, elephant pipes and effigies, etc.) to make their case for a Semitic presence in ancient America (see Feder 2006 for discussions of these frauds). Meldrum (2009) assigns Book of Mormon peoples to a European race; attributes the dark skin of Lamanites (and by implication American Indians) to a curse for their wickedness; blames the unrighteousness of Jews and Native Americans for bringing holocausts upon their own populations; inaccurately claims that the X mtDNA lineage is not found in Asian populations; and repeatedly calls the X lineage "Causasian," "white," and "European" despite its widespread distribution in Africa, Europe, Asia, and the Americas. Meldrum founded the misnamed Foundation for Indigenous Research and Mormonism (FIRM) to advocate for this racialized interpretation of the Book of Mormon.

Steven E. Smoot (2010), President of the Family First Foundation, featured the Heartland claims in a deceptively produced film, *The Lost Civilizations of North America*. The anthropologists and historians interviewed in the film issued a collective statement (Atalay et al. 2010) exposing the film maker's deception and prodigious use of fraudulent artifacts. "None of us was asked directly for our opinion on what turned out to be its underlying claim; that Old World civilizations played an active role in the development of Native American cultures, especially the mound builders." The anthropologists stated their actual views forthrightly, "there is no compelling archaeological or genetic evidence for a migration from the Middle East to North America a few thousand years ago, nor is there any credible scientific evidence that Old World civilizations were involved in developing Native American cultures in pre-Columbian times." They attested to "overwhelming evidence that Native Americans were independently responsible for designing and creating the Newark Earthworks, Cahokia Mounds, and the myriad other pre-Columbian sites across the United States." Deborah Bolnick, one of the biological anthropologists interviewed for the film, teamed up with geneticist Jennifer Raff (2015) for a peer reviewed evaluation of the Heartland advocates' claims about mtDNA haplogroup X. They demonstrated, "X2a is not found in the Middle East" and "none of the X2 lineages present in the Middle East are immediately ancestral to X2a." They continued, "the data of coalescence for X2a (14,200–17,000 cal yr B.P.) significantly precedes the hypothesized migration from the Middle East." They conclude, "X2a does not provide any evidence for an ancient Hebrew migration from the Middle East to North America."

Archaeological evidence calls into question the assertions of a Heartland Moundbuilder setting for the Book of Mormon. Meldrum's association of Jaredites with Adena or Early Woodland cultures and Nephites with Hopewell

or Middle Woodland cultures is problematic. None of the Eurasian grains or domesticated livestock portrayed in the Book of Mormon appear in those cultural traditions. Neither does plow agriculture nor pastoralism. Woodland peoples cultivated sumpweed, sunflower, gourds, squashes, goosefoot, knotweed, maygrass, little barley, tobacco, nuts (acorn), fruits, and berries. They ate migratory waterfowl, deer, raccoon, turkey, shellfish, fish, and dogs. An indigenous form of barley is found, but it could not have come from the Near East with Jaredite or Nephite colonies. Corn, the only American domesticate mentioned in the Book of Mormon, only has sporadic occurrences during the Middle Woodland period. Nor is there evidence of population scale displacements like those resembling the destructions of Jaredite and Nephite cultures in the Book of Mormon (Larson 1996; Fagan 2000; Murphy 2003b). The Heartland proposal fails critical examination.

Ian Thompson, Choctaw and Creek archaeologist, sees parallels between Kennewick Man and Moundbuilder controversies. Both assert an unwarranted discontinuity between living Native Americans and their past. Thompson (2008:208) states, "These mounds are still revered, used, and constructed today (e.g., by the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma Capitol Grounds), and there is no intervening point during which they were not." BYU archaeologist John Clark (2004:151) observed concurrently, "the archaeology of New York is persuasive evidence that Book of Mormon peoples did not live in that region." Regarding the Hill Cumorah where Joseph Smith claimed to find gold plates, he clarified, "Archaeologically speaking, it is a clean hill. No artifacts, no walls, no trenches, no arrow-heads.... Pre-Columbian people did not settle or build here." Latter-day Saint medical doctor Gregory Smith (2010) critically reviewed Meldrum's Heartland proposal, calling it "pseudoscientific snake oil and strained proof-texting." Flora, fauna, technology, and cultural continuities in the archaeological record are incompatible with a Heartland setting for the Book of Mormon.

The publication of Kennewick Man's genome further undermined the foundational Heartland claim that Indigenous X2a mtDNA was derived from Middle Eastern migrations 2600 B.P. Analysis of the genome revealed the Ancient One carried a version of the X2a lineage that was directly ancestral to all modern Native American X2a lineages (Rasmussen et al. 2015). The problem for Heartland advocates is that there has not been any scientific dispute about Kennewick Man's antiquity. His teeth were cavity free and worn down to their roots, characteristics of prehistoric hunter-gatherer teeth. He also carried an ancient projectile point embedded in his hip. Radiocarbon dating of a well-preserved finger bone revealed the skeleton's antiquity. Good quality collagen purified from the bone was found to be about 9,000 years old (Burke et al. 2008). The presence of the X2a lineage in an individual who lived in North America over 6,000 years before the Nephites in the Book of Mormon presented a serious challenge to Latter-day Saint claims of its Semitic origins.

Digital Legend recently responded to this problem by publishing *Face of a Nephite: DNA Studies and the Book of Mormon* by patent attorney David Read (2020). A major focus of the book is to cast doubt over the age of Kennewick Man. Read takes advantage of the fact that Kennewick Man's bones had been washed out of the soil profile. Consequently, painstaking forensic analysis was required to determine the original context of his burial. The study included detailed isotope analysis of the bones, examination of skeletal morphology and the projectile point embedded in the hip bone, and matching the soil attached to the bones with the nearby soil profile. Read's book advocates a creationist rebuttal of the Ancient One's age, as presented in *Kennewick Man: The Scientific Investigation of an Ancient American Skeleton* (Owsley and Jantz 2014).

Read takes full advantage of the controversial facial reconstruction by anthropologists Karin Bruwelheide and Douglas Owsley (2014).

Cree and Metis archaeologist Paulette Steeves (2021:39) calls their reconstruction "very problematic." The cover of *Face of a Nephite* features a light-colored image of the second stage reconstruction with a full beard and wavy long hair. Without informing his audience of the discrepancy, Read selected an image from an earlier step in the process rather than the final facial reconstruction to which the artist Rebecca Spivak had added "weathered dark skin" (Bruwelehide and Owsley 2014:527). Not only is Read's selection a pale misrepresentation of this particular facial reconstruction, but even the final version has come under criticism from Steeves (2021:39) because "cranial features do not inform experts as to the color of the skin, hair, or eyes or the shape of the ears or mouth." This image graces the cover of Read's book "without informing readers that soft tissue reconstructions are created through the assumed racial categories of the skulls, created by those doing the reconstructing." Steeves (2021:39) countered, "Genetic research has shown that human variation is incredibly diverse and that race is not a valid biological category for anything, including ethnic identity."

In order to discredit the scientific research on Kennewick Man, Read spends much of his time misinterpreting the radiocarbon dating of the skeleton and the analysis of soil particles attached to the bones. Read misrepresents the detailed radiocarbon analysis of Kennewick Man carried out by geologist Thomas Stafford (2014). Stafford's analysis yielded a further nine collagen radiocarbon dates that were all close to the original estimate of 9,000 years old. To understand the burial context more fully, Stafford also dated "secondary geological carbonates" derived from rainwater that had crystallized on bone and in bone cavities. The carbonates yielded dates in the vicinity of 2500 B.P. Because these dates align well with the proposed arrival of Book of Mormon migrations at approximately 2600 B.P., Read (2020:32) incorrectly concludes that the carbonate dates reflect the true age of Kennewick Man.

To cast further doubt over age, Read (2020:36–38) also claims Mazama ash (tephra) was attached to the bones. He uses this claim to advance the proposition that Kennewick Man was buried more recently than the Mount Mazama eruption which took place about 7,700 years ago. This claim is also plainly incorrect. In his study of the skeleton, archaeologist James Chatters (2014:46) observed "a concretion" on the bones that contained "allophane, a by-product of tephra weathering." The occurrence of allophane on the bones is entirely consistent with the burial position of the skeleton, which detailed soil analysis had shown to be 10 to 20 cm below the Mazama ash layer. The same water carrying dissolved carbonates weathered the tephra and carried microscopic particles of allophane down the soil profile, depositing them on the bones.

Read's errors in *Face of a Nephite* are not simple oversights. Prior to publication, Read shared sections of his book with Chatters, the forensic archaeologist who recovered Kennewick Man's bones in 1996. Chatters pointed out Read's mistaken carbonate and Mazama ash claims in emails to Read that he subsequently shared with Southerton.[1] Despite being informed about these fundamental errors Read made no retreat from his faulty conclusions.

The scientific study of Kennewick Man has provided conclusive evidence that the Heartland movement's interpretation of the Book of Mormon is based upon falsehoods. Kennewick Man's geological and archaeological timestamps are impeccable, and he provides compelling evidence that he, and the X2a mtDNA he carried, were present in the Americas about 6,000 years before the Book of Mormon claims Nephites first existed.

[1] "The ca. 2000 year dates you cling to are actually dates on soil carbonate, which deposits continuously from water percolating down from the surface. They are not dates on the skeleton at all"—Jim Chatters 2020, pers. comm.

"No Mazama ash was found in sediment around the skeleton, and believe me it is ubiquitous in younger sediments. Therefore, the skeleton if buried, went into a pit dug before the ash fell"—Jim Chatters 2020, pers. comm.

Official Statements and Essays

Formal responses to DNA research from the LDS Church are much more nuanced than simply pursuing disciplinary actions against scientists and encouraging apologetic scholarship. The LDS Church actually aborted disciplinary actions against Murphy in response to publicity and tried to reframe those against Southerton to make them appear as if they were not retaliation for scientific publications (Lyke 2003; Associated Press 2005a; Moore 2007; Lindholm 2011). In 2003 BYU dismissed biologist Scott Woodward who had been involved in amassing one of the largest private collections of DNA samples from Indigenous peoples, some of which were collected without adequate ethical review (Perego 2009; Murphy and Baca 2016:713–716; Southerton 2020:89–90). Despite the early rebuke of scientists, changing approaches took hold in the LDS Church less than a decade later. The Neal A. Maxwell Institute at BYU would absorb FARMS and in 2012 dismiss Daniel Peterson from his editorial role at *Mormon Studies Review* (Haymond 2012). Earlier support at BYU for divisive apologetic scholarship has declined over subsequent years, and new philosophies of respectful engagement with broader academic fields exemplified by the Maxwell Institute have tempered conflict (Hodges 2013). Several scholars from BYU have published in and/or edited recent anthologies that forthrightly acknowledge nineteenth century content and ideas in the Book of Mormon (Colvin and Brooks 2018; Fenton and Hickman 2019; Hafen and Rensink 2019; MacKay et al. 2020).

The LDS Church also modified the controversial claim linking the Book of Mormon to Native Americans that had appeared prominently in its editions of the scripture since 1981. The claim that Lamanites were "the principal ancestors of American Indians" became "among the ancestors of American Indians," beginning with a Doubleday edition in 2006, and then in its own English editions in 2013. The 2013 edition also softened racial language in chapter headings (Stack 2007, 2013). In June of 2016, President Russell M. Nelson told a gathering of mission presidents that the Book of Mormon "is not a textbook of history, although some history is found within its pages. It is not a definitive work on ancient American agriculture or politics. It is not a record of all former inhabitants of the Western Hemisphere, but only of particular groups of people" (Sterzer 2016). The Church subsequently suspended its Hill Cumorah Pageant in New York that had featured actors in redface playing Lamanite characters from 1937 to 2019 (Baca 2008; Murphy and Baca 2020; Taylor 2021). In October of 2021, Nelson announced a $2 million donation to the First Americans Museum in Oklahoma City and again clarified that the Book of Mormon "is not a textbook" (Swenson 2021). These changes make some dramatic departures and important gestures distancing the Church from the previous positions linking all American Indians to Lamanites.

There is some evidence indicating lay membership is also changing its perspectives on the Book of Mormon, race, and evolution. The Next Mormons Survey, a recent large scale, national study of four generations of Mormons, demonstrates that confidence in the truth of the statement, "The Book of Mormon is a literal, historical account," drops from 62% of Boomer and Silent generations, to 53% of GenX, and only 50% of Millennials." Confidence in a statement attributing earlier racial bans to God dropped from just 44% of Boomer and Silent generations to 30% of GenX. Millennial confidence falls in between at 37% (Riess 2019:19). The same survey also shows nearly half of Mormons in the United States support evolution as the best explanation for the development of life on earth, while the remainder doubt or reject it. The support for evolution is strongest among Millennials at 58% versus 38% for older generations (Riess 2019:286). These data suggest that the Heartland movement may be, at least in part, resistant to changing social attitudes among younger generations of lay membership. Generational differences accent a review by BYU graduate

student and member of GenZ, Hanna Seariac (2021), who critiques the Heartland movement for its overt American nationalism and "language of Anglo-Saxon heritage and bloodlines [that] cements the connection between the Heartland movement and white supremacy."

Formal statements and online essays authorized by church leadership have reinforced these changing perspectives. A newsroom statement in the midst of the Mitt Romney campaign for President of the United States declared, "The Church unequivocally condemns racism, including any and all past racism by individuals both inside and outside the Church" (Walker 2012). "Gospel Topics" essays on race and DNA released in the following couple of years illustrate these shifts (Church 2013, 2014). The first reiterated, "Church leaders today unequivocally condemn all racism, past and present, in any form." The second stated, "the primary purpose of the Book of Mormon is more spiritual than historical." For those who might wonder about historical issues, the DNA essay points to a limited geographical setting in no specific location, accompanied by gene flow, genetic drift, and founder effect, as possible explanations for the lack of genetic evidence for Book of Mormon migrations in Native American ancestry. The essay, notably, acknowledges Asian affinities in Native American genetics and chastises those who use DNA both to critique and defend the Book of Mormon (Murphy and Baca 2020).

The Church's implicit critique of the Heartland advocates for their claims that DNA supports historical assertions of a North American setting for the Book of Mormon is noteworthy in light of the subsequent publication of Kennewick Man's DNA. Analysis published in *Nature* found that the Ancient One's mitochondrial genome "is placed at the root of haplogroup X2a" and rejected "the hypothesis that Kennewick Man is more closely related to Ainu or Polynesians than he is to Native Americans." Instead, it showed "that Kennewick Man has ancestry proportions most similar to those of other Northern Native Americans… including the Colville" who had petitioned for his repatriation. In striking contrast to the scientists who opposed repatriation and the media who used terms "European-like" and "Caucasoid" to describe the features of the Ancient One, this team of scientists found that "Kennewick Man's pattern of craniometric affinity falls well within the range of affinity evaluated for individual Native Americans." They faulted plaintiff scientists for not "explicitly taking into account within-population variation," concluding that "biological affinities of individual specimens [using craniometric data] cannot be resolved with any statistical certainty." They contrast this uncertainty with "autosomal DNA data [that] are highly statistically significant." More reliable genetic data show "stronger association of the Kennewick Man with Native Americans than any other continental group." They demonstrate "that the autosomal DNA, mitochondrial DNA and Y chromosome data all consistently show that Kennewick Man is directly related to contemporary Native Americans, and thus show genetic continuity within the Americas over at least the past 8,000 years" (Rasmussen et al. 2015).

The analysis of the Ancient One's DNA confirmed positions of claimant tribes and anthropologists who had supported initially unsuccessful attempts at repatriation. Donald Sampson (2008:40–41), former Executive Director of the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation, had long objected to racializing the Ancient One with outdated craniometric methodologies, noting "it is common knowledge among good anthropologists that it is impossible to determine the so-called 'race' of an individual. A sample group is needed so that common traits can be determined." Umatilla, he insisted, "do not reject science." The tribes employ "anthropologists and other scientists" and "use science every day to help protect our people and the land.… However, we do reject the notion that science is the answer to everything, and therefore should take precedence over the religious rights and beliefs of U.S. citizens." Umatilla religious leader Armand Minthorn

(2008:43) reflects, "We believe that humans and animals change over time and adapt to their environment. And our Elders have told us that Indian people did not always look the way we look today." Minthorn emphasized "We are not trying to keep anything from anyone. All we want as Umatilla tribe is a voice in how these remains are treated" (Riffe 2000). Archaeologist Darby Stapp (2008:58) observed, "there is no evidence in the archaeological record of displacement or migration of any of the Columbian Basin peoples throughout prehistory." In fact, "no such hiatus" was found in ethnological, oral tradition, or linguistic analysis. Anthropologist Ann Kakaliouras (2019:83) concluded that the Ancient One's "genetic results have ended craniometry's authority to classify ancient American skeletons." After publication of the DNA analysis, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers finally ended a decades long struggle by returning the Ancient One to the tribes who claimed him as their ancestor on February 17, 2017, for a private reburial in an undisclosed location (Burke Museum 2017).

Decolonization

Decolonizing methodologies that center on the perspective of Indigenous peoples have begun making an impact in twenty-first century studies of the Book of Mormon (Baca 2008; Benally 2017; Covin and Brooks 2018; King 2019; Hafen and Rensink 2019; Hernandez 2021; Simon 2022). *In Laman's Term*s, a documentary film directed by Diné and Hopi anthropologist Angelo Baca (2008), featured scientists discussing new DNA research alongside Native Americans expressing concerns over cultural misrepresentations in the Book of Mormon. Tim Roderick (Wampanoag) told the audience that he thought stories of violent Lamanites helped white Latter-day Saints "let themselves at ease" over their own complicity in atrocities against American Indians. G. Peter Jemison (Seneca) objected to the Book of Mormon's claim that his ancestors had destroyed an ancient white nation of Nephites, "We were never the kind that thought you had to wipe out every last person." Forrest Cuch (Ute) objected, "We are not of Israelite" heritage, and "certainly are not going to turn white someday." Māori scholar Hemopereki Simon (2022:6–7) identifies the following priorities for engagement between Critical Indigenous Studies and Mormon Studies: "the relationship of Mormonism… to settler colonialism;" "The appropriateness of assigning a religio-colonial [Lamanite] identity upon Indigenous groups or people;" "Questioning the position of whiteness within Mormon culture;" "Advocating for cultural engagement with the Church, particularly around *taonga* [precious treasure, Indigenous knowledge] the Church may hold or exploit;" "Moving the Church and its members to accept the spiritual nature of the Book of Mormon (i.e., that the Book of Mormon is not actually factual);" and "Preventing the further destruction of Indigenous cultural heritage sites as a worldwide archaeological project of the Church and its members to validate the Book of Mormon as historically accurate." Scientific and cultural concerns about the Book of Mormon's historical claims overlap (Baca 2008).

If the LDS Church seeks to achieve its laudable goal of rejecting racism then it needs to consider repatriation of human remains, cultural materials, and lands taken without consent from Indigenous peoples. "A fundamental problem," noted by Murphy and Baca (2016:702, 706), is that the faith's foundational events "began with the looting of Indigenous artifacts and graves and were made possible through the theft of Indigenous lands." If there are actual gold plates inscribed with reformed Egyptian hieroglyphics, from which Joseph Smith said he translated the Book of Mormon, or if he used Indigenous artifacts in his translation activities, "then they would rightfully have belonged to the Seneca from whose graves or ruins they were taken." The Seneca, on whose traditional lands the founding events of Mormonism took place, have strong beliefs about the sanctity of the ancestors and their burials. Seneca elder Geraldine Green explains that "the digging up of human remains… is not

our way of life." After a person is buried and there is a funeral address, Green states, "We leave them alone, they are through.... They have done their jobs; we need not bother them anymore. That is why they go to rest; they have finished their job here, and it is very important to us that we not disturb them anymore," the Longhouse elder concludes (Jemison 1997:59–60). Even under English common law, Pascua Yaqui law professor Rebecca Tsosie (1997:66) notes, "dead bodies cannot be owned, and the removal of funerary objects from a burial site is considered a dreadful and abhorrent crime."

Seer stones, gold plates, and Egyptian papyri involved in the production of Mormon scripture are inescapably linked to looting. Murphy (2021a) lamented, "While we can view Joseph Smith as a product of his settler culture, he set a regrettable example with grave consequences for successive generations of Latter-day Saints who have learned that it is okay to take sacred records, artifacts, and even remains from human graves." Baca (2018:74) observes that if the Church does have sacred artifacts of Indigenous origin "then they need to be examined by outside anthropologists and archaeologists as well as through consultation with Native American tribes." Murphy (2018:55) reflects, "If we insist upon the truth claim that the Book of Mormon is an ancient Indigenous scripture, then an ethical decolonization effort requires that it be returned to the people from whom it was stolen." Choctaw artist Gary White Deer (1997:39–43) calls the "finders-keepers notion of buried objects... the Buried Treasure Syndrome." He calls "collecting Indian remains and grave objects as buried treasure" an unacceptable practice. He continues, "What is needed at this moment is a return of the sacred." That would include "objects of cultural patrimony [such as seer stones]... used to mediate between the seen and unseen." Since passage of NAGPRA, LDS church museums have repatriated dozens of human remains and funerary objects but still retain Egyptian papyri and Indigenous artifacts (gorgets, spindle whorl, etc.) used as seer stones by early church leaders (Murphy and Baca 2016; Murphy 2020, 2021a, 2021b). The dilemma facing Mormons is similar to the ethical quandary posed by the colonial legacy of anthropology and archaeology and the debate over the repatriation of the Ancient One it generated (Riffe 2000).

Dakota Latter-day Saint historian Elise Boxer (2019:9) notes that even after recent changes, "The Introduction to the Book of Mormon and the history theirin not only ignores the diversity of Indigenous Peoples completely, but ignores their unique history that intimately connects them to the land." The association of American Indians with Lamanites "erases the diverse creation stories and histories unique to each tribe." In common settler colonial readings of the Book of Mormon, such as those found in both the Mesoamerican and Heartland movements, "Indigenous identity, history, sovereignty, and belief systems have not only been dismissed but replaced with a limited, racialized identity grounded in Mormon religious discourse." In its depictions of "Indigenous Peoples as Lamanites, or the first immigrants to this continent, the Book of Mormon provides the necessary justification for Indigenous removal and dispossession by Mormon settlers" (Boxer 2019:4). Boxer (2019:5) clarifies that her "rereading of the Book of Mormon is not about its veracity, or challenging its ecclesiastical authority, but rather how [the] text operates as a definitive history of Indigenous Peoples in the Americas."

A recent *Dialogue* podcast on Indigeneity and Mormonism (King et al. 2021) highlighted concerns about settler colonial interpretations of the Book of Mormon. Diné sociologist James Singer stated, "The Book of Mormon is a book of faith.... It is not a history. But, we have been taught it is a history. So, what do you do with that?" Diné historian Farina King repeated, in a paraphrase, President Nelson's recent statement, "the Book of Mormon is not a textbook, it is not a history textbook." Tsimshian blogger Sarah Newcomb noted, though, that despite some shifting perspectives among church leadership, missionaries continue to teach the Book of Mormon as history.

Literary scholar Jared Hickman (2020:75–76) highlights what he calls a decolonizing potential within the Book of Mormon. Hickman's interpretation draws from common nineteenth-century definitions of "translation" to suggest that Joseph Smith may have employed more of a metaphysical than a linguistic concept of translation when he looked into his seer stone to dictate the scripture. Hickman suggests that Smith acts "as if" Native voices "had cried from the dust" (3 Nephi 3:19–20). He represents Smith's role as more like that of an "activist; that is someone acting on behalf of Native peoples as a 'spokesman'… rather than as an actual medium of Native peoples." Recognizing the inherent limitation of such a settler colonial spokesperson, Hickman advocates conceding interpretive authority to Indigenous peoples, "the Book of Mormon has to be ceded to indigenous peoples and made to serve their fruition, as determined by them." In light of the conflict over the Ancient One, one might read Hickman's interpretation as akin to a literary repatriation of at least interpretive authority.

Indigenous Latter-day Saint scholars have offered interpretations that escape some of the historical difficulties in both the Mesoamerican and Heartland models of the Book of Mormon. Taos Pueblo literary scholar P. Jane Hafen (2018:273) notes, "For Mormons to see Indigenous peoples as 'alike unto God' (2 Nephi 26:33), the relationship must decolonize." Hafen (2018:263) distinguishes between determinate and indeterminate approaches to origins. Fixed or determinate origins "may lead to racism or nationalism." On the other hand, "If an origin is indeterminate, or perhaps simply figurative, a door is opened to multiple interpretations and understandings. These various understandings decolonize the dominant culture." Hafen (2018:266) emphasizes, "Listening to Natives tell their own stories about their origins is a decolonizing act." Wīnak anthropologist Daniel Hernandez (2021:10) highlights "many Indigenous Mormons who use extra-canonical texts to add to an expanding world view, which include the oral, woven, tattooed, and written sacred stories of the ancestors of the Americas and Polynesia." Indigenous Mormons often read the Book of Mormon's references to "other scriptures" as validation of canonical status for oral traditions and other sacred texts such as the Code of Handsome Lake, Popol Wuj, and Black Elk Speaks (Murphy 2018, 2019, 2022). Indeterminate Indigenous approaches allow for the co-existence of multiple origins, while determinate settler colonial readings of the Book of Mormon displace those alternatives.

Similar perspectives to those of Hafen appear in dialogue between archaeologists and Native Americans. Archaeologist Larry Zimmerman (1997:54) regrettably acknowledged, "Pasts created by archaeologists have been imposed on Indian pasts without a chance for debate." He prefers to see these narratives as "analogues, not homologues." Indigenous and archaeological narratives, he explains, "need not be the same stories even if they are discussing the same past(s)." Anishinaabe-Ojibwe archaeologist Sonya Atalay (2006:285) noted settler colonial complicity in the discipline, "Through the process of colonization, Westerners gained the power to study not only those distant from themselves by time but also the pasts of others who were distant from themselves culturally, and often geographically—those who had been subjected to colonial rule around the globe." Pawnee archaeologist Roger Echo Hawk (1997:89) observed, "A religious approach accepts oral texts as the source of holistic truths rather than as documents that require evaluation for historicity." Harvey Moses, Jr. (2008:102), former member of the Colville Business Council, advises those who "want answers about our (American Indians') past, present, or future… need to come and talk to us." In this decolonizing dialogue, there is space for multiple approaches to and interpretations of the past.

Dakota anthropologist Kim Tallbear (2013:116) highlights a significant difference between Native American and Mormon approaches to the use of genetics in the interpretation of the settlement of the Americas. She describes

a discussion on a genealogical listserv, "One lister posted favorable comments of Mormon scholars who attempt to use genetics to support church views of creation and the settlement of the Americas." Even there, the poster was met with an unfavorable response, "He was roundly criticized and his views were declared irrelevant to the list." This incident inspired Tallbear to lament that "Native American and Christian perspectives that are critical of genome knowledge are seen to fall on the same side of a religion-versus-science divide." She identified mistaken assumptions, "Unlike Christian traditions, Native American origin narratives are generally missing the will to convert and so are without intolerance of other ontologies." Native Americans, she notes, are much more concerned about "who has the power to research whom and how, and who has the power to make policy that affects Native American lives." She objects to a "false comparison between Christian creationists and tribal creation narratives." Indigenous concerns about the Ancient One, in this respect, are better understood as protecting particular "notions of the sacred, and [as] political resistance to being objects of research."

Diné scholar Moroni Benally (2017:72) highlights a decolonizing approach to the Book of Mormon through his family's negotiation of spirituality and place in a colonizing Latter-day Saint faith tradition. His family "respectfully negotiated the doctrines of the Church with their Navajo practices, always viewing the Church structure and organization within the broader context of colonization." The experience, he explains, is more aptly described as "conversation" than "conversion." The Book of Mormon, Benally (2017:73) clarifies, operates dually as an instrument of evangelism and as "a tool of erasure for Indigenous people's rightful claim to land, politics, economies, and power." In this context, "the struggles of native peoples in the United States—and in the Church—becomes a struggle against elimination, against their erasure." "The Book of Mormon," Benally (2017:74–77) observes, "functions as both a tool of invasion and replacement, but also, strangely, as an instrument of resistance against the Church itself." His grandfather's "negotiation of membership into the LDS church" was not governed by "historical inconsistencies" or a "belief in being an Israelite." His family, like many other Indigenous Mormons "continue to participate in their own ceremonies because these ceremonies expand the meaning of Church doctrine and reify the core purposes of the Book of Mormon." In this "mode of non-compliant resistance," Benally (2017:77–78) concludes, "Indigenous faith *blossoms*."

Conclusion

Injudicious use of ethnic terminology, craniometrics, and facial reconstructions by some anthropologists and, even more carelessly by the media, have fed Latter-day Saint misrepresentations of Kennewick Man as a white Jaredite or Nephite from the Book of Mormon. These Latter-day Saint depictions, especially those associated with the Heartland movement, share much in common with the "virulently racialized representations of Kennewick Man at white nationalist and white supremacists sites" analyzed by Kakaliouras (2008:89). Even a popular science fiction author and biologists and anthropologists at BYU and ISU, who would likely bristle at any association with white nationalism, have racialized the skeleton, mischaracterized Native American perspectives about science, and portrayed ancient American populations as white. In these respects they undermine recent efforts of their own church leadership to reject racism in any form.

Long-standing challenges posed by archaeology and more recent ones coming from genetics have led the two largest Mormon denominations to distance themselves from racist; hemispheric; and even, to a limited extent, literal historical readings of the Book of Mormon. The Heartland movement appears to resist changing perspectives by hearkening back to teachings of earlier church leaders, res-

urrecting archaeological frauds, and repeating creationist objections to radiocarbon dating in service of settler colonial readings of the Book of Mormon. The recent publication of *Face of a Nephite* (Read 2020) inappropriately racializes the Ancient One and his mitochondrial lineage and deliberately misrepresents radiometric dating in support of a white nationalist reading of the Book of Mormon.

Indigenous Mormons have objected to racist and historical readings of the Book of Mormon, insisted that the Book of Mormon is not a history, called for repatriation of human remains and sacred items taken from Indigenous graves, and read scripture in ways that validate Indigenous sacred traditions. In the inclusive, indeterminate, and analogic approaches to the past advocated by Indigenous Mormons, there is space for dialogue, oral tradition, science, and sacred narrative—even for allegory, pseudepigrapha, and inspired fiction.

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