

Sin, Skin, and Seed: Mistakes of Men in the Book of Mormon

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White and Delightful

Spencer W. Kimball



"I saw a striking contrast in the progress of the Indian people today.... The day of the Lamanites is nigh. For years they have been growing delightful, and they are now becoming white and delightful, as they were promised. In this picture of the twenty Lamanite missionaries, fifteen of the twenty were as light as Anglos, five were darker but equally delightful. The children in the home placement program in Utah are often lighter than their brothers and sisters in the hogans on the reservation. "

Changing to whiteness

"At one meeting a father and mother and their sixteen-year-old daughter were present, the little member girl--sixteen--sitting between the dark father and mother, and it was evident she was several shades lighter than her parents--on the same reservation, in the same hogan, subject to the same sun and wind and weather.... These young members of the Church are changing to whiteness and to delightfulness. One white elder jokingly said that he and his companion were donating blood regularly to the hospital in the hope that the process might be accelerated."
Spencer W. Kimball
 • Improvement Era, Dec. 1960, pp. 922-923.

Who are the Lamanites?

- I tell those who come to my office that a Lamanite is a descendant of one Lehi who left Jerusalem six hundred years before Christ and with his family crossed the mighty deep and landed in America. And Lehi and his family became the ancestors of all of the Indian and Mestizo tribes in North and South and Central America and in the islands of the sea, ...
- Not until the revelations of Joseph Smith, bringing forth the Book of Mormon, did any one know of these migrants. ... Now the Lamanites number about sixty million; they are in all of the states of America from Tierra del Fuego all the way up to Point Barrows, and they are in nearly all the islands of the sea from Hawaii south to southern New Zealand.
- Spencer W. Kimball, *Ensign*, July 1971, p. 7

Folk Biology



- This presentation examines the use of folk biology to naturalize social relations in the Book of Mormon.
- It identifies problems Mormons face in the twenty-first century as we encounter modern biogenetic understandings of similar body images.
- Latter-day Skeptic's perspective

Sin, Skin, & Seed

- Is the Book of Mormon's assumption that skin color reflects sinfulness consistent with biogenetic understandings of human physical variation?
- Is the Book of Mormon's assumption of a patriarchal seed transmitted from fathers to sons consistent with modern understandings of biogenetic procreation?
- Is an Israelite heritage of Nephites and Lamanites reflected in the genes and biology of American Indians?

Mistakes of men.



- "And now if there be fault, it be the mistake of men; wherefore condemn not the things of God." 1830 title page
- "I give unto men weakness that they may be humble; ... if they humble themselves before me, and have faith in me, then will I make weak things become strong unto them." Ether 12:27

Book of Mormon's nineteenth century folk biology

- Humility may demand viewing Mormon scripture as fiction.
- Book of Mormon's view of Indian origins and skin color rooted in nineteenth century biblical hermeneutics.
- Book of Mormon's view of seed is drawn from patriarchal models of procreation & kinship in the Bible.

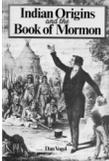


Native American Objections

- Jace Weaver (Cherokee), Yale University
- Mormons perpetuate "the old slur that Native Americans were descendants of the Ten Lost Tribes of Israel, a belief perpetuated by those who could not accept that indigenous people could develop any degree of 'civilization' without fertilization from the Old World."
- Tom Goldtooth (Indigenous Environmental Network) calls Mormon evangelization "ethnocidal indoctrination."



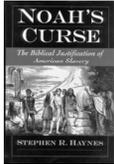
Indian Origins:
 Nineteenth century views



- Dan Vogel has traced the popular belief that Indians were descendants of ancient Israel from sixteenth century to nineteenth century
- Other popular beliefs included Indian origins in the scattering of people after the tower of Babel or of Canaanite lineage
- Isrealite heritage combined with myth of an ancient race of white mound builders by Ethan Smith (1825) and Joseph Smith (1830).

Curses and dark skin:
 Nineteenth century views

- Association of curses with dark skin rooted in colonial biblical interpretations of Noah's curse of Canaan (son of Ham) to be a servant in response to Ham's observance of his drunken father's nakedness (Gen. 9)
- Book of Mormon reflects late developments in history of legend



Genesis 9 in Biblical context

- Social context of Gen. 9 most likely rooted in 6th-9th century BCE retrospective portrayal of Canaanites purportedly conquered in 10th century BCE
- Israelite conquest of Canaan questioned by biblical archaeologists & genetic research
- No explicit biblical linkage between curse and skin color in the Bible
- Only some of Canaan's descendants identified with Africa
- Ancient slavery not linked to skin color

Evolution of a myth

- 3-4th centuries BCE, readers begin to interpret story as perennial curse on 'Hamites.'
- Earliest rabbinic sources ambiguous and connection with skin color disputed.
- Scholars favoring an early association of the curse with sin & African skin color date it to the Talmud in 2nd & 3rd centuries CE.
- Christian fathers in 2nd & 3rd centuries CE establish Ham as first magician and irredeemable arch sinner.

Evolution of a myth (cont.)

- Jewish & Christian Medieval legends of Noah explain provenance of servitude, dispersion of humans, societal structure & origin of magic.
- Muslim exegetes in tenth century explicitly link curse of Ham to darkened skin of "the blacks"
- By the 1560s French Calvinists identifying Indians as descendants of Ham and inheritors of curse.
- By the 1670s 'curse of Ham' regularly employed as justification for African and Indian slavery in British colonies.

Evolution of a myth (cont.)

- *The Serviceable Man* (Cotton Mather, 1690) identifies Indians as Canaanite inheritors of curse of Ham
- Eighteenth century curse of Canaan/Ham linked to cursed seed of Cain and a corrupt priesthood
- Ethan Smith (1825) claims Indians have a notion of the "the death of Abel, by the murderous hand of Cain" and a "corrupt succession of the high priesthood in ancient Israel."

Racial myth in Mormon scripture

- Delicate balancing of various nineteenth century explanations of Indian origins
- Jaredite party comes from Tower of Babel
- Mulek, descendant of Zedekiah, comes from Jerusalem
- Lehi and Laban, descendants of Joseph, come from Jerusalem
- Joseph had married Asenath, an Egyptian
- Book of Abraham (1:21-24) would subsequently tie all Egyptians to the curse of Ham/Canaan
- Separation of Nephites from Lamanites & destruction of Nephite civilization

Book of Mormon:
 Links curse explicitly to dark skin.

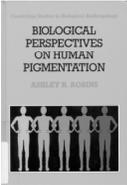
- "And he had caused the cursing to come upon them, yea, even a sore cursing, because of their iniquity. For behold, they had hardened their hearts against him, that they had become like unto a flint; wherefore, as they were white, and exceedingly fair and delightsome, that they might not be enticing unto my people the Lord God did cause a skin of blackness to come upon them. ...
- And cursed shall be the seed of him that mixeth with their seed; for they shall be cursed even with the same cursing." 2 Ne. 5:21-23.

Physical Anthropology Today

- There is no biological foundation for the belief that people's skin color changes according to adherence to or deviance from religious principles and practices.
- A growing number of biologists and physical anthropologist seriously question the existence of races, as distinct biological categories of people.
- Cleary the meanings that we apply to physical differences between humans are cultural rather than biological in origin.

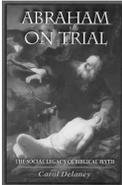
Human skin color

- Critical factor in skin color is quantitative and qualitative difference in pigment melanin
- Difference probably evolved in response to geographic variation in UV exposure
- Darker skin protects against skin cancer, lighter skin may protect against rickets, and cold injury



Abraham's Seed

- While the ideas of a dark skin as a curse for sin and of an Israelite origin of Indians owe more to nineteenth century biblical hermeneutics, the concept of a patriarchal seed of Abraham is biblical in origin.
- Carol Delaney, anthropologist at Stanford University



Ancient Hebrew concepts of gender and procreation

- "Rather than reflecting natural facts, the meanings of father and mother, paternity and maternity emerge relative to a theory of procreation. In this theory, the male is construed as the creative one: he is the one who "begets" and by means of his "seed" imparts the life-giving essence that defines a child. The female role is to nurture the seed-child implanted in her and to give birth." Delaney 1998: 18
- This bias can be plainly seen in the biblical description of the births of Manasseh and Ephraim. "And unto Joseph were born two sons ... which Asenath the daughter of Potipherah priest of On bare unto him" (Gen. 41:50).

Seminal seed

- Abraham's posterity is imagined as *his* seed and portrayed in almost exclusively male terms.
- Biblical authors claimed creative powers of women for themselves and their male Creator God.
- Just as Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph transmitted the seed of their paternal predecessor Abraham, so too does the Book of Mormon patriarch Lehi carry the seed of Joseph to a promised land. Nephi, Lehi's son, and *his brethren* continue to transmit the seed of their father Lehi. The Book of Mormon extends its promises to the seed of Lehi, Nephi, Laman, Joseph, Jacob and Abraham but never to the seed of Sariah, the unnamed wives of Nephi and Laman, Asenath, Rachel, or Sara.

Naturalizing white authority

- Racialization of seed in Book of Mormon claims authority for white men, portrayed as just & holy.
- "And the skins of the Lamanites were dark, according to the mark which was set upon their fathers, which was a curse upon them because of their transgression and their rebellion against their brethren, who consisted of Nephi, Jacob, and Joseph, and Sam, who were just and holy men.
- And their brethren sought to destroy them, therefore they were cursed; and the Lord God set a mark upon them, yea, upon Laman and Lemuel, and also the sons of Ishmael, and Ishmaelitish women."

Denunciation of Lamanite culture as "incorrect traditions."

- "And this was done that their seed might be distinguished from the seed of their brethren, that thereby the Lord God might preserve his people, that they might not mix and believe in incorrect traditions which would prove their destruction.
- And it came to pass that whosoever did mingle his seed with that of the Lamanites did bring the same curse upon his seed." (Alma 3:6-9)
- Book of Mormon conflates biological features with cultural practices to endow white men with authority, reifying and naturalizing that privilege.

Biogenetic reproduction today

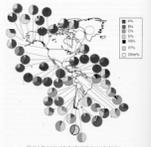
- Males do not have a patriarchal monopoly on creative powers.
- Male and female each account for half the creative genetic endowment (23 chromosomes each).
- Women contribute more: nurture fetus for nine months, give birth, nurse, etc.
- Book of Mormon's concept of a cursed male seed planted in a female's womb is a racist and sexist folk biological (cultural) construction.



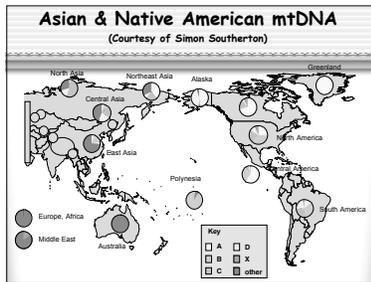
Molecular Anthropology

- New findings from genetics have confirmed anatomical, archaeological, and linguistic data that all indicate American Indians derived from Northeast Asian populations, approximately 20-30,000 yrs. ago.
- No intimate linkage exists between DNA of Jews and any known population of modern or ancient American Indians.
- Lamanites could not possibly be "the principal ancestors of the American Indians" as claimed in the current introduction to the Book of Mormon

Distribution of founding American mtDNA lineages



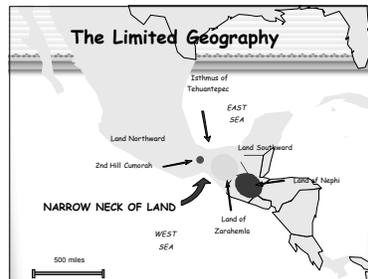
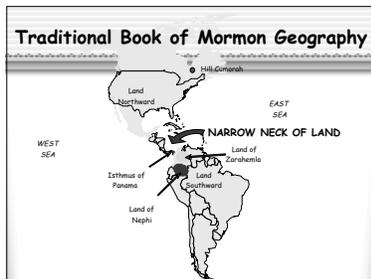
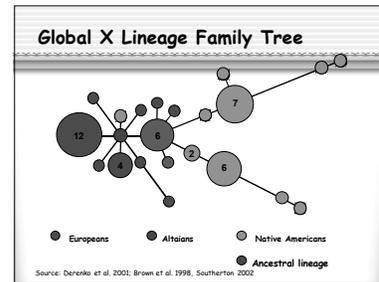
- 98% belong to A, B, C, or D
- 2% appear to be X6/X7 (closely related to C & D) or Brown's X
- 99.4% traceable back to Asia
- Separation from Asian lineages approximately 25,000 years ago
- Greatest affinity with Mongolia, Manchuria, Southern Siberia



European and Middle East MtdNA Lineages

Population	Maternal DNA Lineage (%)							
	H.V	J	K	T	U	W, X	M	L
Middle East	44	10	7	7	5	23	1	2
Europeans	62	12	7	8	7	5	0	0

Source: Richards et al. 1996; Macaulay et al. 1999



Yet, at least 98.6% of Mesoamerican mtDNA is also traceable back to Asia.

mtDNA Frequency, * = ancient

Population	n	A(%)	B(%)	C(%)	D(%)	Other
Maya, Xcaret*	25	84.0	4.0	8.0	0.0	4.0
Maya, Copán*	9	0.0	0.0	89.0	11.0	
Aztec, Tlateloco*	23	65.2	13.0	4.3	17.4	
Modern Maya	27	51.9	22.2	14.8	7.4	3.7
Mixtec	16	62.5	31.3	6.2	0.0	
Mixtec (Alta)	15	73.4	13.3	13.3	0.0	
Mixtec (Baja)	14	92.9	7.1	0.0	0.0	
Zapotec	15	33.3	33.3	33.3	0.0	

Ancient mtDNA

- All Asian founding lineages present in ancient mtDNA
- Continuity between past and present
- Ancient & modern Mesoamerican mtDNA (Aztec, Maya) includes A-D (high frequencies of A, low frequencies of B)
- Copan Maya samples of C & D may vary from pattern
- At least 98.2% ancient Mesoamerican mtDNA traceable to Asia
- One unidentified sample may be X (also traceable to Asia).

Y-Chromosomes

- Paternal lineages confirm likelihood of Siberian origin
- 1st founding haplotype: DYS19T/1G/M3
- 2nd founding haplotype: 1C/M45
- These two >90%
- # of additional founding haplotypes?
- 20-30,000 years ago
- 2nd migration, 7-9,500 years ago?

What are the experts saying?

- "Genetic research, particularly that using mtDNA and Y-chromosome markers, provides quite emphatic refutation of any such relationship between Jews and Native Americans," David Glenn Smith, UC - Davis.
- "I don't think there is one iota of evidence that suggests a lost tribe from Israel made it all the way to the New World. It is a great story, slain by ugly fact," Michael Crawford, U. of Kansas.
- "I don't know of any data that suggests particular similarity of Native American populations to any population of the Middle East," Dennis O'Rourke, U. of Utah
- "Archeologists and physical anthropologists have not found any evidence of Hebrew origins for the people of North, South and Central America." Stephen L. Whittington, U. of Maine

What are LDS and former LDS experts saying?

- "It's pretty clear that A, B, C, D and Xs are also found in Asia." BYU has "a large sample of DNAs from South America, primarily Peru, about 6,000 samples of which we have typed mitochondrially and we find the same types of evidence that have been found by other researchers that primarily those mitochondrial DNAs are A, B, C, D and Xs and some others." Scott Woodward, BYU biologist
- "Current evidence suggests that Native Americans have a genetic history representative of Asia and not the Middle East." Michael Whiting, BYU biologist
- Simon Southerton, Australian geneticist and former LDS bishop, calls DNA "the most damning scientific evidence facing the Church today,"

BYU's highly publicized Molecular Genealogy Project "moved" early in March 2003 (three years after it began)



The Molecular Genealogy Project has moved

Out of concern that the Center for Molecular Genealogy has outgrown the resources of the university, the College of Biology and Agriculture has decided not to continue with the work at BYU. From the beginning, Scott Woodward, the Center's director, has collaborated with the Sorenson Foundation on this project. The Foundation is currently conducting a review to determine whether or not it has the capacity to continue with this project on its own.

The College and the Sorenson Foundation are continuing with their policy of strict confidentiality and protection of all collected samples, which are currently stored in a safe and secure environment.

The costs of Mormon beliefs: Whitening American Indian Children

- Mormon efforts to turn American Indian children "white and delightful" through adoption and intermarriage began as early as the 1840s and continues unofficially today.
- In 1967 Cordell Anderson, a former LDS missionary, set up the Paradise Valley Plantation in Guatemala, where he "had to use every trick he knew to convince them (Indians) that they should let their children attend the plantation school" and he would unofficially adopt dozens of parentless or malnourished children in hopes of "converting Indian Israel" and fulfilling the prophecy "that they will become a white and delightful people." *Ensign*, July 1971, p. 24.
- Between 1954 and 1996 the official Mormon Indian Placement Program placed more than 70,000 Indian children in urban white Mormon foster homes. Quietly phased out.

Baby Autumn



- December 8, 2002
- Lorraine Martinez Cook shared the tragic story of her newborn granddaughter (mixed heritage of Mexican, Apache and Yaqui). She has reasonable suspicions that an LDS bishop persuaded the birthmother toward adoption, and LDS Family Services persuaded the birth mother to subvert the paternal rights of Cook's non-Mormon son.
- "Baby Autumn" remains in an undisclosed Mormon home in Utah.

Summary

- Mormons have a moral and ethical responsibility to relegate the following ideas to the category of mistakes of men.
 - A dark skin is a curse from God for wickedness.
 - Creative power is embodied exclusively in a seminal seed.
 - The Lamanites are the principal ancestors of the American Indians.
 - Religious conversion turns Native children "white and delightful."
- To escape these errors Mormons may need to reconsider how we approach scripture.

Conclusion

- Mormon folk biology reflects self-interested mistakes of white men.
- While Mormons share the mistaken understandings of the creative power of seminal seed with Judeo-Christian and Islamic traditions, the folk biological concepts linking sin, skin, and Native American origins remain predominantly ours. Most other traditions have rejected these ideas as outdated folk biology.
- Unlike other religious traditions that gave birth to them Mormons have endowed linkages of sin and skin color and claims of a Hebrew ancestry for American Indians with the status of the word of God.

"I like the color I am."

- "Only one thing I don't understand," he grins. "It [the Book of Mormon] says we'll be a white and delightful people someday. I like the color I am. In fact, I don't know any Indian who wants to change." Larry Echohawk, LDS Pawnee
- *Ensign*, Dec. 1975, p. 29
- For more information please see: <http://faculty.edcc.edu/~tmurphy>



Recommended Reading

- A special thanks to Simon Southerton for the use of several of his slides and a summary of his research.
- Alfred Cave, "Canaanites in a Promised Land: The American Indian and the Providential Theory of Empire," *American Indian Quarterly* 12 (Fall 1988): 277-297.
- Michael H. Crawford, *The Origins of Native Americans: Evidence from anthropological genetics* (New York: Cambridge U. Press, 1998).
- Carol Delaney, *Abraham On Trial: The Social Legacy of Biblical Myth* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton U. Press, 1998).

Recommended Reading

- Stephen R. Haynes, *Noah's Curse: The Biblical Justification of American Slavery* (New York: Oxford U. Press, 2002).
- T.M. Karafet et al. "Ancestral Asian Source(s) of New World Y-Chromosome Founder Haplotypes," *American Journal of Human Genetics* 64 (1999): 817-831.
- Andrew Merriwether, "A Mitochondrial Perspective on the Peopling of the New World," in *The First Americans*, edited by Nina G. Jablonski (San Francisco: California Academy of Science, 2002), 295-310.

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- Thomas W. Murphy, "Lamanite Genesis, Genealogy, and Genetics," in *American Apocrypha*, edited by Dan Vogel and Brent Metcalfe (Salt Lake City: Signature, 2002), 47-77.
- Thomas W. Murphy, "Laban's Ghost: On Writing and Transgression," *Dialogue* 30 (Summer 1997): 105-126.
- Thomas W. Murphy and Simon G. Southerton, "Genetic Research a 'Galileo Event' for Mormons," *Anthropology News* 44.2 (February 2003): 20.
- George E. Tinker, *Missionary Conquest: The Gospel and Native American Cultural Genocide* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 1993).

Recommended Reading

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