

and to which it was forced to adjust” (xi). These six models include: charismatic rule, monarchy, prophetic politics, wisdom politics, apocalyptic politics, and New Testament politics. They exist as paradigms within the Bible’s larger epic story, and Hanson sets forth that the development of these six models over a period of thousands of years show that political models always develop “in the realm of the provisional and the ephemeral” and are incredibly dynamic and tuned to specific historic contingencies (xi). Hanson forcefully argues that it is a dire mistake to seek single truths or monolithic political models from the Bible. The Bible’s stories of God and His guiding hand in all human governance are tales of constant change, a dynamism in accord with the answers the Bible offers for how justice and peace might be pursued to help rule and heal a “threatened planet” (127).

The dynamism of the six models explored in part two provide the foundation for Hanson’s epilogue. It is here that Hanson offers a five-step plan for constructive political dialogue and common action. He argues that it is only by taking into account a wide diversity of religious perspectives that constructive political discourse leading to virtuous action can be obtained. No single religious perspective is capable of holding the entirety of God’s truth. Leaders from various religious points of view must seek common ground and clarify attainable common goals in order to find a productive way forward. It is here that one most clearly sees the deeply optimistic character of Hanson’s book, and it is also here that some questions remain unanswered. For what if various voices simply refuse to join with others? (Certain strains of Christian and Islamic fundamentalism come to mind here.) One can only admire a book that works so hard to provide a theoretical blueprint for a “healing of the world,” even if one is forced at the same time to wonder if humans are capable of such comradery in facing the increasingly complex challenges of a world that seems to tend ever more toward fragmentation over unity (640).

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The Mormon Church and Blacks: A Documentary History. Edited
by **Matthew L. Harris and Newell G. Bringham.** Urbana:
University of Illinois Press, 2015. x + 217 pp. \$25.00 paper.

In February 2012, as Mitt Romney moved to claim the Republican nomination for President of the United States, a religion professor at Brigham Young University answered questions from a *Washington Post* reporter concerning

the theology of race in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (the Mormons). Explaining what he clearly thought was standard Church doctrine, the long-time religious educator explained (according to the article) the “theological underpinning” of the ban on admitting blacks into the priesthood of the church: “According to Mormon scriptures, the descendants of Cain, who killed his brother, Abel, ‘were black.’ One of Cain’s descendants was Egyptus, a woman Mormons believe was the namesake of Egypt. She married Ham, whose descendants were themselves cursed and, in the view of many Mormons, barred from the priesthood by his father, Noah.” It was just a fact that “God has always been discriminatory,” he said, explaining why it was that until 1978, “the Lord determined that blacks were not ready for the priesthood” (138).

For much of Mormon history, particularly from the time of Brigham Young through many of the church’s major theologians in the twentieth century, this indeed would have been standard doctrine, hardly something to raise a ruckus. The year 2012 was different, however. Church leaders immediately condemned the sentiments expressed in the interview, saying: “We do not tolerate racism in any form,” pointing out that the ban on blacks in the priesthood had ended decades previously, and adding that any attempt to explain the reason for that ban in the first place could count only as speculation, and did not speak for the Church. The following year the Church issued a lengthy, even stronger statement, giving an extended historical summary of the origins of the ban in the nineteenth century, connecting it to a white supremacist culture in which Mormonism emerged, and concluding that, “Today, the Church disavows the theories advanced in the past that black skin is a sign of divine disfavor or curse, or that it reflects unrighteous actions in a premortal life; that mixed-race marriages are a sin; or that blacks or people of any other race or ethnicity are inferior in any way to anyone else” (“Race and the Priesthood,” <https://www.lds.org/topics/race-and-the-priesthood?lang=eng>, accessed 21 October 2016). Prominent Mormon scholars and historians such as W. Paul Reeve and Patrick Mason provided crucial historical detail in fashioning the statement.

This well-conceived and expertly executed documentary history provides a wide variety of documents exploring the history of Mormonism and race. Both sides of the above dichotomy—the Church’s long-standing doctrine employing folklore and biblical speculation about the origin of the curse on African Americans, and the Church’s recent forthright embrace of an increasingly multi-cultural membership in LDS congregations worldwide—have representative documents and explanations here. Impeccably researched and extensively footnoted introductions provide abundant and indispensable context for each document. This is a model for the genre, and sure to receive extensive use in classrooms.

The collection includes both well-known and more obscure documents. Brigham Young talks and interviews are reprinted extensively, including his infamous 1863 sermon pronouncing “death on the spot” for any white man of the “chosen seed” who “mixes his blood with the seed of Cain” (43). Letters from early black Mormon pioneer Jane Manning James, originally a house servant to Joseph Smith and then part of the migration to Utah, pleading her case for full temple endowments at the end of her life in the late nineteenth/early twentieth century, are particularly poignant in their brief, humbly spoken prose. The long life of the “curse” theology in twentieth-century Mormon thought comes through in documents from church leaders and educators Mark Petersen, Bruce McConkie, and most stridently (and embarrassingly, even for church leaders of the pre-1978 period) from anticommunist firebrand Ezra Taft Benson. The collection then reproduces key documents from Spencer W. Kimball, the apostle who realized that the church’s expansion into the mixed-race culture of Brazil demanded that something be done about the ban, as it was in 1978. Perhaps most important of all, the collection includes outstanding selections from black Mormons active during this period in challenging the Church’s theology, including Darius Gray and David Jackson. Not content simply with the lifting of the priesthood ban, they continued to attack the remnants of the theology of “the curse” on black skin which continued to be reproduced in some theological works and study materials put out by the Church.

This collection makes an outstanding accompaniment to the recent work of W. Paul Reeve, in *Religion of a Different Color: Race and the Mormon Struggle for Whiteness* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015) which analyzes how nineteenth-century Mormons tried to make themselves “white” within a culture that had racialized them as something else, non-white. The collection here also makes for excellent background reading to the moving documentary available on video, *Nobody Knows: The Untold Story of Black Mormons* (Independent Feature Productions, 2008; copy provided to author by Margaret Blair Young), and for the forthcoming pioneering work of scholar Max Mueller, *Race and the Making of the Mormon People* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press). All of these make for vital scholarship to provide context for a time in which conservative white men continue to serve as the public face of the Church, but Latinos, Indians (especially Navajo), African Americans, Pacific Islanders, Brazilians, and Africans comprise a large and rapidly growing body of Mormon believers, both in the United States, and internationally.

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