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# Black, White, and Red All Over: Skin Color in the Book of Mormon

*Jeremy Talmage*

IN JUNE OF 1830, THE FIRST Latter-day Saint missionary Samuel Smith journeyed through the backcountry of western New York hoping to find parties interested in the recently published Book of Mormon. Advertising the volume as “a history of the origin of the Indians,” he attempted to sell copies of the book his brother Joseph claimed to have translated from golden plates given to him by an angel.<sup>1</sup> An etiological tale of the ancient inhabitants of the continent, the Book of Mormon described the emergence of two tribes: the righteous Nephites and wicked Lamanites. After the Lamanites’ rebellion against their relatives, the Book of Mormon recounted how God afflicted them for their iniquity. Whereas they were once “white, and exceedingly fair and delightsome,” they became cursed with “a skin of blackness.”<sup>2</sup> In the ensuing ethnic conflict, the black-skinned Lamanites ultimately triumphed over their “white” kin, overrunning and

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1. Lucy Smith, *Biographical Sketches of Joseph Smith, the Prophet, and His Progenitors for Many Generations* (Liverpool: S. W. Richards, 1853), 152.

2. 2 Nephi 5:21. Though the Book of Mormon also speaks of the skin color of Lamanites as “dark,” when it does so, it always references the original curse of “blackness,” and therefore dark in this context cannot be interpreted to be any other hue than black. For example, in Alma 3:6, we are informed that “the skins of the Lamanites were dark,” but this was “according to the mark which was set upon their fathers.”

annihilating the Nephites to become the ancestors of modern-day Native Americans.<sup>3</sup>

The early proselytizing efforts of Samuel Smith and other missionaries met with some success; a number of people found this “history” plausible.<sup>4</sup> Given the Book of Mormon’s racialized representation of the Lamanites that resembled in some ways the prevalent opinions about Amerindians at the time of publication, this is not entirely surprising. In language that echoed popular perceptions about the depravity of indigenous peoples, the book described the Natives as a “wild and ferocious, and blood-thirsty people, full of idolatry and filthiness.”<sup>5</sup> Indeed, the very appearance of the Book of Mormon closely coincided with some of the most concentrated animus in the history of the United States

3. 3 Nephi 2:15; Mormon 5:15.

4. This was not a universal opinion. Others found the story to be “a nonsensical fable.” Most people, it seems, were unable to separate the book’s narrative from its provenance. See Smith, *Biographical Sketches*, 152–53.

5. Enos 1:20. For analogous portrayals of the Lamanites as savages, see 2 Nephi 5:24; Jarom 1:6; Moroni 9:9–10. Interpreters have taken a variety of positions on whether the Book of Mormon is racist. One group has claimed it cannot be racist as “white-skinned Nephites and black-skinned Lamanites” are nothing more than “metaphors for cultures, not for skin color.” See Douglas Campbell, “‘White’ or ‘Pure’: Five Vignettes,” *Dialogue* 29/4 (1996): 134; Armand Mauss, *All Abraham’s Children: Changing Mormon Conceptions of Race and Lineage* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003), 118. Other commentators have tried to downplay the charge of racism against the Book of Mormon by differentiating between the “curse” God spoke upon the Lamanites, cutting them off from his presence, and the “mark” of black skin they acquired. See John A. Tvedtness, “The Charge of ‘Racism’ in the Book of Mormon,” *FARMS Review* 15/2 (2003): 186–88; Rodney Turner, “The Lamanite Mark,” in *Second Nephi, The Doctrinal Structure*, ed. Monte S. Nyman and Charles D. Tate Jr. (Provo, UT: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1989), 133–57. This, however, sidesteps the fact that the Book of Mormon explicitly states that “the Lord God did cause a skin of blackness to come upon them” (2 Nephi 5:21). Still others have claimed there is “patent racism” in the book. See Jared Hickman, “The Book of Mormon as Amerindian Apocalypse,” *American Literature* 86/3 (2014): 436. Some characters in the narrative are undeniably racist. For example, at one point, a Nephite leader admonishes his people to “revile no more against them [the Lamanites] because of the darkness of their skins” (Jacob 3:9). On the whole, however, the central message of the Book of Mormon seems to be opposed to racism, claiming skin color is superficial and “all are alike unto God . . . black and white” (2 Nephi 26:33).

toward Native Americans. Only two months later, Congress passed the Indian Removal Act, banishing various tribes to territories west of the Mississippi River. Mirroring the widespread belief that the degraded condition of Native Americans was a curse and that assimilation was only possible if they accepted Christianity, the Book of Mormon prophesied that those who came “to the knowledge of Jesus Christ” would, in not “many generations” time, again become “a white and delightsome people.”<sup>6</sup>

Consequently, the similarities between the book’s portrayal of aboriginal Americans and the timing of its release has traditionally led scholars to conclude that the Book of Mormon can be best understood as a projection of the culture from which it emerged. As one author surmised, the book’s descriptions of Lamanites represents little more than “an exaggerated version of contemporary stereotypes about North American Indians.”<sup>7</sup> Others have comparably claimed that the book’s racial worldview “reflected Euro-American impressions of Native Americans,” serving as “a time capsule capturing elements of the moral and physical universe” of Joseph Smith.<sup>8</sup> Even those who do not draw the same conclusions about authorship from such statements acknowledge that the racial depiction of Nephites and Lamanites in the Book of

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6. 2 Nephi 30:5–6. This was later changed to “pure and delightsome” in the 1840 edition of the Book of Mormon to downplay the physical aspects of this conversion.

7. Dan Vogel, *Indian Origins and the Book of Mormon: Religious Solutions from Columbus to Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1986), 66.

8. Craig R. Prentiss, “Loathsome unto Thy People’: The Latter-day Saints and Racial Categorization,” in *Religion and the Creation of Race and Ethnicity: An Introduction*, ed. Craig R. Prentiss (New York: NYU Press, 2003), 128; David Persuitte, *Joseph Smith and the Origins of The Book of Mormon* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 1985), 6. Similarly, Thomas Murphy has claimed that the Book of Mormon’s racial “beliefs echo the ethnocentrism, prejudice, and privilege of white men in the nineteenth century” (Thomas W. Murphy, “Sin, Skin, and Seed: Mistakes of Men in the Book of Mormon,” *John Whitmer Historical Association Journal* 25 [2005]: 50). For an opposing view that the Book of Mormon does not simply regurgitate common racial ideas, see Michael Jensen, “As a Lion among Beasts’: Squaring Mormon Views of the Indian with Those of Nineteenth-Century White America,” in *Archive of Restoration Culture: Summer Fellows’ Papers, 1997–1999*, ed. Richard Lyman Bushman (Provo, UT: Joseph Fielding Smith Institute for Latter-day Saint History, 2000), 177–82.

Mormon at least “sound like the Jacksonian view of Indians common to most Americans in 1830.”<sup>9</sup> There has existed for some time a widespread consensus that the passages of the Book of Mormon mentioning race bear a remarkable resemblance to the book’s nineteenth-century environment.<sup>10</sup>

More recent examinations of the racial outlook presented in the Book of Mormon have added significant insights to the subject, proposing that, upon closer inspection, the text offers a much more nuanced view than a cursory reading would suggest. Jared Hickman, for example, has demonstrated the abnormality of the narrative’s “novel racial eschatology” that predicts the triumph of “dark-skinned” natives over their “fair” relatives. This “inversion,” while attractive to the book’s intended Indian audience, offered a powerful cultural critique of the predominant “(post-) Puritan racial theology” of early America.<sup>11</sup> Also of note, Max Perry Mueller has recently highlighted important ways in which the Book of Mormon “departed from the antebellum intellectual and theological world from which it emerged.”<sup>12</sup> Most significantly, the book’s passages about the future transformation of American Indians challenged ideas about the immutability of race. In his view, despite its racialized portrayal of characters, “the Book of Mormon taught its earliest believers that race was not real, that is, race was not a permanent part of God’s vision for humanity.”<sup>13</sup> As this new research suggests, the Book of Mormon’s comments on race might be more complex than previously supposed.

Nearly all examinations of race in the Book of Mormon, however, have generally made unfounded assumptions about the book’s working racial paradigm, the most recent scholarship not excluded. Though noting the Book of Mormon’s prediction about a future racial order, they

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9. Richard L. Bushman, *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005), 97–98.

10. See Mauss, *All Abraham’s Children*, 117–18.

11. Hickman, “Book of Mormon as Amerindian Apocalypse,” 429–30.

12. Max Perry Mueller, *Race and the Making of the Mormon People* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017), 33.

13. Mueller, *Race and the Making*, 19–20.

essentially agree with many others that nineteenth-century notions about race undergird the text's framework.<sup>14</sup> In doing so, they have overlooked or misconstrued its comments on the most prominent feature of Indian-ness—skin color. While this paper will not respond to all the supposed correspondences between the Book of Mormon's views about race and Joseph Smith's culture, it will demonstrate that the book expressed vastly different presumptions about the complexion of Native Americans. In the 1830s, American Indians were overwhelmingly described as red, something the Book of Mormon never does.<sup>15</sup> In the nineteenth century, white, black, and red were clear-cut color classifications that carried with them expectations of origin, nature, and rights. Images of Indians as “red skins” pervaded all aspects of culture, from scientific treatises on race to poetry, hymnody, and literature. Almost no one, excepting in the Book of Mormon, styled them as black, which was a descriptor reserved solely for Africans in antebellum America.<sup>16</sup> After analyzing the history of the racial categorization of Native Americans, contemporaneous descriptions of Indians in potential sources of the Book of Mormon, and the perseverance of these ideas, it becomes clear that the Book of Mormon's views about skin color were unique and did not match the prevailing racial attitudes of the time. For a book supposedly about the origins of the “red man,” it curiously pictured Native Americans in black and white.

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14. Hickman has written how the Book of Mormon “mythologize[d]” such ideas, noting how it shared the worldview of “many nineteenth-century romantic radicalists” (Hickman, “Book of Mormon as Amerindian Apocalypse,” 436, 443). Mueller ultimately concluded that the book's assertion that Native American's “dark skin results from twice-fallen ancestors” made it somewhat “standard fare in the antebellum United States” that “bears the makings of its nineteenth-century ‘translator,’ including the linguistic and cultural assumptions about the hierarchies of the races and the taxonomies of these races” (Mueller, *Race and the Making*, 40).

15. Hugh Nibley appears to have been one of the first to notice this. He wrote in 1950: “There is no mention of red skin, but only black and white” (Hugh Nibley, “Lehi in the Desert,” *Improvement Era* 53 [1950]: 449).

16. Given the history of African American slavery in America, it is rather surprising that the Book of Mormon never described the black Lamanites as slaves. Instead, it is the white Nephites who fall into bondage at the hands of their dark kin. See Mosiah 21:13.

## A History of the "Red Man"

Initial contact with the indigenous people of America resulted in confusion on the part of Europeans. Struggling to make sense of what the newfound race they encountered might be, conquistadors and colonists applied various color classifications to the natives. Christopher Columbus, on his first trip to the New World, described the Native Americans he came across as "the color of the Canarians, neither black nor white."<sup>17</sup> Later, reports of the natives characterized their skin as resembling the "color of a nut."<sup>18</sup> Still other accounts mentioned the "very dark skin" and the "Copper-colour'd Complexion" of those they met.<sup>19</sup> In fact, during the seventeenth century, as Europeans came into contact with the original inhabitants of America, according to one historian, they often painted the picture of a varied "palette of tawny, brown, yellow, copper-colored, and occasionally red" Indians.<sup>20</sup>

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17. Christopher Columbus, *The Diario of Christopher Columbus's First Voyage to America, 1492–1493/Abstracted by Bartolome De Las Casas*, trans. Oliver Dunn and James E. Kelley, Jr. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1989), 67.

18. Francis Daniel Pastorius, "Circumstantial Geographical Description of Pennsylvania, 1700," in *Narratives of Early Pennsylvania, West New Jersey and Delaware, 1630–1707*, ed. Albert Cook Myers (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1912), 384–85.

19. William Byrd, *The History of the Dividing Line betwixt Virginia and North Carolina*, ed. William Boyd (1728; Raleigh: The North Carolina Historical Commission, 1929), 120.

20. Nancy Shoemaker, *A Strange Likeness: Becoming Red and White in Eighteenth-Century North America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 130. The description of Native Americans as having red skin, while not universal, does go back to the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. In 1574, Spaniard Juan López de Velasco described the inhabitants "from above Florida and Nueva Galicia to the Rio de La Plata and the providences of Chile by the Strait of Magellan" as the color of "cooked quince" (Juan López de Velasco, *Geografía y descripción universal de las Indias*, ed. Justo Zaragoza [Madrid: Establecimiento Tipográfico de Fortanet, 1894], 27). Quince, a pear-like fruit, undergoes a radical transformation when poached, as the usually colorless flesh turns a deep ruby with the release of red pigments from their chemical bonds. Likewise, William Strachey, a Jamestown resident who wrote about the early settlement of Virginia, likened the skin color of the natives there to "sodden quince." Though he had heard rumors they were born "from the womb indifferent white," he claimed they daily "died [*sic*] themselves red" using "red tempered oynments of earth" that permanently

By the turn of the nineteenth century, however, the diversity of description had almost entirely disappeared. In an effort to simplify the world's racial diversity, European scientists introduced a color-based racial classification system that quickly became the predominant way to imagine Native Americans. The soon-to-be common association of Africans as "black," Europeans as "fair," and Americans as "copper-colored" first appeared in Carl Linnaeus's 1740 *Systema Naturae*.<sup>21</sup> A few years later, in 1774, a French priest who had traveled through America noted the widespread view that "many believe[d]" that Indians "constitute[d] a third species of men between the blacks and whites," agreeing that the natives were "very swarthy and of a dirty dark red," with a "copper complexion."<sup>22</sup> The next year, in 1775, this hard-and-fast classification of Caucasians as white, Africans as black, and Native Americans as "copper colored" was all but cemented when the distinguished German naturalist Johann Friedrich Blumenbach published his influential *On the Natural Variety of Mankind*.<sup>23</sup> It was no surprise, then, when later European explorers and politicians described Native Americans as "naturally of a colour bordering upon red" and as "all of a copper colour."<sup>24</sup> Scientific encyclopedias marveled at how, among Indians of all parts,

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"cast them into that stayne" (William Strachey, *The Historie of Travaile into Virginia Britannia* [1612; London: Hakluyt Society, 1849], 63–64).

21. See Robert J. Richards, "Race," in *The Oxford Companion to the History of Modern Science*, ed. John L. Heilbron (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 697. Even Linnaeus's Swedish compatriots as late as 1702 claimed that the color of Native Americans varied, "in some places being black, and in others, brown or yellow" (Thomas Campanius Holm, *Description of the Province of New Sweden*, trans. Peter S. Du Ponceau [Philadelphia: McCarty & Davis, 1834], 35). Nancy Shoemaker has made the case that this threefold color classification actually first originated with Native Americans in the southeastern United States and was later appropriated by Linnaeus. See Nancy Shoemaker, "How Indians Got to Be Red," *American Historical Review* 102/3 (1997): 627–29.

22. François Xavier de Charlevoix, *Journal of a Voyage to North America*, Vol. 2, ed. Louise Phelps Kellogg (Chicago: Caxton Club, 1923), 83–84.

23. Johann Friedrich Blumenbach, *De Generis Humani Varietate Nativa* (1775; Göttingen: Vanderhoek et Ruprecht, 1795), 294.

24. Antonio Ulloa and Luís Pinto de Sousa Coutinho, quoted in *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, s.v. "America" (Edinburgh: Archibald Constable, 1823), 2:5.

“distinction of colour was not to be found. In the torrid zone there were no negroes, and in the temperate and frigid zones there were no white people. All of them were a kind of red copper colour.”<sup>25</sup>

Americans quickly followed suit by adopting red as the common descriptor of Indian skin tone. James Adair, in his 1775 *History of the American Indians*, claimed that “the Indians are of a copper or red-clay colour.”<sup>26</sup> Similarly, Elias Boudinot, a believer that Native Americans were descendants of the ten lost tribes of Israel, gave his own description of the “colour of the Indians” as “red, brown, or copper coloured,” though he favorably quoted others that simply referred to natives as “red men.”<sup>27</sup> Josiah Priest’s *Wonders of Nature and Providence, Displayed*, first printed in 1826, concluded that Indians were “all of one colour”: red or copper.<sup>28</sup> In addition to historical works that mentioned Native American’s ruddy complexion, printed newspapers helped solidify “red man” as a colloquial substitute for “Indian.” In 1830, the same year the Book of Mormon appeared, the *Ohio Star* printed a poem about Indian origins under the title “The Red Man of the South.”<sup>29</sup> Imagery of Indians as “red skins” had become universal.

This tripartite model—envisioning all Indians as part of a red race distinct from whites and black Africans—was ubiquitous in America.

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25. Ulloa and Pinto de Sousa Coutinho, *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, s.v., “America,” 2:5.

26. James Adair, *The History of the American Indians* (London: E. and C. Dilly, 1775), 1. Adair, in other parts of his history, said the “Indians are of a reddish or copper colour” and referred to them as “red men” (James Adair, *History of the American Indians*, 4, 355).

27. Elias Boudinot, *A Star in the West* (Trenton, NJ: D. Fenton, S. Hutchinson, and J. Dunham, 1816), 137, 262.

28. Josiah Priest, *Wonders of Nature and Providence, Displayed* (Albany, NY: T. and E. Hosford, 1826), 381. This book was available in the Manchester Rental Library near Joseph Smith’s home and has been considered a possible source for the Book of Mormon. See Manchester Rental Library, accession number 208, in Robert Paul, “Joseph Smith and the Manchester (New York) Library,” *BYU Studies* 22 (1982): 350.

29. “The Red Man of the South,” *Ohio Star* (Ravenna, OH), August 11, 1830. Interestingly, future Latter-day Saint and plural wife of Joseph Smith, Eliza R. Snow, authored this poem. Reprinted in Eliza R. Snow, *Poems, Religious, Historical, and Political*, Vol. 1 (London: Latter-Day Saint’s Book Depot, 1856), 35–36.

Though interracial reproduction existed, scientific thought and folk theories of the time suggested that such unions produced unfit offspring, ensuring the perpetuation of only the three principal races on the continent.<sup>30</sup> A popular investigation into the origin of the “Red Race” noted the “copper or brown-red color” of Native Americans, claiming that “no varieties have been observed, which approach the Indians anywhere near the white and black races.”<sup>31</sup> This clean division into three varieties, “the white, red, and black races,” the book claimed, was “acknowledged by most physiologists” and formed “a component part in nearly every complete system yet proposed.”<sup>32</sup> Identically, the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* noted that in Native Americans, “the two extremes of complexion, the white of Northern Europe and the black of Ethiopia, are unknown amongst them.” Rather, the “copper shade is found more or less in them all” pervading “nearly all the numerous tribes from the Arctic Ocean to Cape Horn.” Clarifying what “copper” meant, it continued, “their colour inclines less to the yellow, and more to the reddish brown.”<sup>33</sup> “Red” replaced all other descriptions of Native American skin color and remained so well into the early twentieth century.<sup>34</sup> The Book of Mormon’s portrayal of “red men” as possessing a “skin of blackness” was certainly unconventional.

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30. Often compared to sterile mules, the progeny of amalgamation were widely believed to “be bad breeders and bad nurses.” As one physician concluded, “many do not conceive,” and of those who did, “most” of their children were “subject to abortions, and a large portion of the children die young.” The few who did survive to adulthood were “intermediate in intelligence,” “less capable of undergoing fatigue and hardships,” and “subject to a variety of chronic diseases” (Josiah C. Nott, *Two Lectures on the Natural History of the Caucasian and Negro Races* [Mobile, AL: Dade and Thompson, 1844], 32).

31. Alexander W. Bradford, *American Antiquities and Researches into the Origin and History of the Red Race* (New York: Dayton and Saxton, 1841), 256, 259. Other historical works likewise described the skin color of natives as “a reddish brown, nearly resembling copper” (George Henry Loskiel, *The History of the Moravian Mission among the Indians in North America: From Its Commencement to the Present Time, with a Preliminary Account of the Indians* [London: T. Allman, 1838], 2).

32. Bradford, *American Antiquities and Researches*, 250.

33. *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, s.v. “America,” 2:616.

34. Thompson Ferrier, commenting on the tripartite model of racial citizenship in 1906, noted that “the commonest mistake made by his white well-wishers in dealing

## The “Red Man” in Potential Sources of the Book of Mormon

One of the clearest places to see the contrast between the Book of Mormon’s description of Native American skin color and prevalent portrayals of Indians as “red” can be found in the works of literature that have been linked to it as possible sources. As soon as the volume appeared in print, those who dismissed Joseph Smith’s story of its angelic origin proposed other possible explanations for its provenance. One of the earliest theories suggested that Smith simply plagiarized from a lost 1812 manuscript authored by Solomon Spalding.<sup>35</sup> First popularized in 1834, Eber Howe’s *Mormonism Unveiled* published eight affidavits collected by Doctor Philastus Hurlbut in which witnesses recalled similarities between Spalding’s *Manuscript Found* and the Book of Mormon.<sup>36</sup> This explanation of the origins of the Book of Mormon relied on the unfounded speculation that Smith’s later associate, Sidney Rigdon, passed the document to him well before the two ever met, yet the story proliferated, as it was impossible to examine the misplaced manuscript.<sup>37</sup> Rediscovered in 1884, Spalding’s story did not match the text of the Book of Mormon or tell the story of the founding of America by Nephi and Lehi as the witnesses attested, but instead it contained an account of a Roman vessel bound for Britain that became blown off course and landed in the Americas.<sup>38</sup>

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with the Indian is the assumption that he is simply a white man with a red skin.” The next most frequent mistake was “the assumption that because he is a non-Caucasian he is to be classified with other non-Caucasians, like the Negro” (Thompson Ferrier, *Indian Education in the North West* [Toronto, ON: Dept. of Missionary Literature of the Methodist Church, 1906], 6).

35. For a detailed investigation into the Spalding manuscript, see Matthew Roper, “The Mythical ‘Manuscript Found,’” *FARMS Review* 17/2 (2005): 7–140.

36. Eber D. Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled* [sic] (Painesville, OH: Telegraph Press, 1834), 278–90.

37. See Lester E. Bush, Jr., “The Spaulding Theory Then and Now,” *Dialogue* 10 (1977): 44–53.

38. While the content of *Manuscript Found* hardly matches that of the Book of Mormon, the description of its discovery does contain interesting parallels. Like Joseph Smith, the unnamed narrator claimed to have found a large stone that he could only open with the assistance of a lever, that revealed an “earthan Box” containing ancient

Parallels between the two are mostly superficial, seriously calling into question the validity of this theory, though recent wordprint studies have revived interest.<sup>39</sup>

At least in regard to skin color, the Book of Mormon did not borrow ideas about the Native Americans from Spalding's *Manuscript Found*. Mentioning the color of the natives, the narrator of *Manuscript Found* described their complexion as "copper coulerded [*sic*]."<sup>40</sup> The shipwrecked Romans initially debated whether intermarriage with this tribe could result in children "as fair & nearly as white" as Europeans, but eventually became convinced they must move away in order to not "degenerate into sa[va]ges & by mingling with them become the most a[wf]ul race of beings in existence."<sup>41</sup> Reflecting common cultural descriptions about Native Americans, Spalding's *Manuscript Found* presents the expected descriptors of Indians as copper or red colored. Nowhere does it mention the skin color of the natives resembling anything close to black.<sup>42</sup>

The next naturalistic explanation of Book of Mormon emerged around the beginning of the twentieth century, positing that Joseph

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records (Solomon Spalding, *Manuscript Found: The Complete Original "Spaulding Manuscript,"* ed. Kent P. Jackson [Provo, UT: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1996], 1). Both stories are also closely associated with caves. See Cameron J. Packer, "Cumorah's Cave," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 13/1 (2004): 52.

39. See Matthew Jockers, Daniela Witten, and Craig Criddle, "Reassessing Authorship of the Book of Mormon Using Delta and Nearest Shrunken Centroid Classification," *Literary and Linguistic Computing* 23/4 (2008): 465–91. For a rebuttal, see G. Bruce Schaalje, Paul J. Fields, Matthew Roper, and Gregory L. Snow, "Extended Nearest Shrunken Centroid Classification: A New Method for Open-Set Authorship Attribution of Texts of Varying Sizes," *Literary and Linguistic Computing* 26/1 (2011): 71–88.

40. Spalding, *Manuscript Found*, 12.

41. Spalding, *Manuscript Found*, 13, 21.

42. The natives as a whole are described as of a "copper" color, but individual tribes and characters express variations to this general rule. The Deliwān's had a more "brownish hue," while the Ohon's skin tone bordered "on an olive tho of a lighter shade." Another character in the novel, Baska, is depicted as "a little whiter" than others, though so few details are given about him in an aborted chapter, it is unclear if he was an Indian since he is described as "different from the natives" and from another "country" (Spalding, *Manuscript Found*, 15, 27, 41).

Smith stole from Ethan Smith's 1823 *View of the Hebrews*.<sup>43</sup> Blending scientific opinion with biblical interpretation, the book outlined parallels connecting Indians and Israelites to argue that Native Americans were descendants of the lost ten tribes. By 1922, noted Latter-day Saint apologist B. H. Roberts had studied these similarities and concluded they represented "a serious menace to Joseph Smith's story of the Book of Mormon's origin."<sup>44</sup> Others soon became attracted to this theory, and it remains popular today, despite numerous differences between the two texts.<sup>45</sup>

If the *View of the Hebrews* did serve as source material for the Book of Mormon, Joseph Smith ignored its description of the skin color of Native Americans. Quoting the opinions of influential historians, Ethan Smith noted the consensus among scholars, all of "the same opinion," that "the colour of the Indians generally is red, brown, or copper."<sup>46</sup> Though "different shades of complexion [are] found among different tribes of Indians," they were, in essence, "of one colour," red.<sup>47</sup>

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43. The first publication to make this connection was apparently I. Woodbridge Riley's *Founder of Mormonism: A Psychological Study of Joseph Smith, Jr.* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1902), 124–26. See also Richard Bushman, *Joseph Smith and the Beginnings of Mormonism* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1984), 191.

44. B. H. Roberts, *Studies of the Book of Mormon*, ed. Brigham D. Madsen (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1985), 240.

45. Some of the most famous scholars of the Book of Mormon have also suggested that Smith borrowed from *View of the Hebrews*. Fawn Brodie wrote: "It may, in fact, have been *View of the Hebrews* that gave Joseph Smith the idea of writing an Indian History in the first place" (Fawn Brodie, *No Man Knows My History: The Life of Joseph Smith* [New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1945], 46). Thomas O'Dea agreed that *View of the Hebrews* was "quite possibly known by Joseph Smith" (Thomas O'Dea, *The Mormons* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957], 25). For others who have subscribed to this theory, see Charles D. Tate, Jr., introduction to Ethan Smith, *View of the Hebrews: 1825*, 2nd ed., ed. Charles D. Tate, Jr. (Provo, UT: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1996), ix–xxii. For differences between the Book of Mormon and *View of the Hebrews*, see John W. Welch, "View of the Hebrews: 'An Unparallel,'" in *Reexploring the Book of Mormon*, ed. John W. Welch (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1992), 83–87; Andrew H. Hedges, "Review of *View of the Hebrews*," *FARMS Review of Books* 9/1 (1997): 63–68.

46. Ethan Smith, *View of the Hebrews* (Poultney, VT: Smith & Shute, 1823), 87.

47. Ethan Smith, *View of the Hebrews*, 87.

The enlarged and enhanced 1825 edition of *View of the Hebrews* added the additional opinion of the well-traveled explorer Alexander von Humboldt that Native Americans from “Canada, Florida, Peru, and Brazil” all had “the same swarthy and copper colour.”<sup>48</sup> The Book of Mormon’s portrayal of two groups of Indians, one with black skin and the other with white skin, is in conflict with the description of Native Americans in both the Northern and Southern Hemispheres as red or copper-colored in Ethan Smith’s *View of the Hebrews*.

By far the most common explanation for the racial attitudes of the Book of Mormon, however, is that Joseph Smith simply absorbed ideas from his surrounding culture. The first to suggest this theory was the Book of Mormon critic Alexander Campbell. Deriding the fact that the book referenced “every error and almost every truth discussed in N. York for the last ten years,” Campbell dismissed the possibility of the book being an ancient work, as it contained what he called “Smithisms” throughout.<sup>49</sup> With material for the Book of Mormon floating in the air, Smith, according to early detractors, simply “adapted [the text] to the known prejudices of a portion of the community.”<sup>50</sup> Imagining Smith as a master schemer, they claimed that he added “the known habits and characteristics of the Indian” to the Book of Mormon in order to “satisfy the credulous inquirer.”<sup>51</sup>

At the time of the Book of Mormon’s publication in 1830, undoubtedly the most popular depiction of Indians could be found in James Fenimore Cooper’s *The Last of the Mohicans*, published only four years earlier, in 1826. Cooper, also a native of upstate New York, imbued his writings with romantic images of Indians and detailed descriptions about the physical appearance of his characters that helped influence the popular perception of Native Americans. The American Indian,

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48. Ethan Smith, *View of the Hebrews*, 178. See also Alexander von Humboldt, *Political Essay on the Kingdom of New Spain*, Vol. 1, trans. John Black (London: T. Davison, 1814), 140–41.

49. Alexander Campbell, *Delusions: An Analysis of the Book of Mormon* (Boston: Benjamin H. Greene, 1832), 13, 14.

50. Jason Whitman, “The Book of Mormon,” *Unitarian*, January 1834, 47.

51. Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 47.

Cooper noted, was “not brown,” but rather “charged with the colour of the rich blood, that seemed ready to burst its bounds.”<sup>52</sup> Throughout the book, Native Americans, irrespective of tribal affiliation, are portrayed as red.<sup>53</sup> Whites in the novel alternatively refer to different groups of Indians as “red men,” “red skins,” “red friends,” “red warriors,” “red associates,” “red companions,” and “red devil[s].”<sup>54</sup>

Characters in *The Last of the Mohicans* debate the theological meaning of race, all while tacitly acknowledging the unalterable division between black, white, and red. At one point in the narrative, Major Duncan Heyward, surrounded by hostile Indian foes, attempts to defuse the situation by claiming that the “Great Father” knows “no difference in his children, whether the colour of the skin be red, or black, or white.”<sup>55</sup> Later, the villain Magua offers a contrary opinion on the same division: “The Spirit that made men colored them differently. . . . Some are blacker than the sluggish bear. These he said should be slaves; and he ordered them to work for ever.” Another group “he made with faces paler than the ermine of the forests: and these he ordered to be traders.” With “appetites to devour the earth . . . God gave him enough, and yet he wants all.” The final group, which “the Great Spirit made with skins brighter and redder than yonder sun,” were God’s “favoured people.”<sup>56</sup> *The Last of the Mohicans*, with its threefold division between blacks, whites, and “red men,” it seems, had little influence on the Book of Mormon’s binary portrayal of Indians as black and white.<sup>57</sup> Taken together,

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52. James Fenimore Cooper, *The Last of the Mohicans* (1826; London: A. & R. Spottiswoode, 1831), 11.

53. The lone exception is Chingachgook, the last chief of the Mohican tribe. He is described as “one who might claim European parentage . . . drawn in intermingled colours of white and black” (Cooper, *Last of the Mohicans*, 22). It appears that in order to make the near-extinct Mohicans more sympathetic to readers, Cooper chose to differentiate the Mohicans from their “red skin” compatriots.

54. Cooper, *Last of the Mohicans*, 95, 30, 171, 159, 219, 30, 40.

55. Cooper, *Last of the Mohicans*, 265.

56. Cooper, *Last of the Mohicans*, 343–44.

57. This tripartite division of racial hierarchy reflected not only popular opinion, but also Cooper’s own views. He wrote: “As a rule, the red man disappears before the superior moral and physical influence of the white, just as I believe the black man

all these potential sources reflect relatively expected ideas about the skin color of Native Americans whilst offering strikingly few similarities with the Book of Mormon on the subject.

### Latter-day Saints and the “Red Man”

Despite the tremendous influence of the Book of Mormon on the outlook of members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, surprisingly, the book’s description of Native American skin color failed to leave a lasting impression. Instead, Latter-day Saints consistently relied heavily on the familiar classification of Indians as red. Even Joseph Smith subscribed to racial attitudes about Native American skin color that were different from the one presented in the Book of Mormon. Like many of his contemporaries, Smith divided humanity into three great races, “red, black, or white.”<sup>58</sup> Though the Book of Mormon spoke of the black-skinned descendants of the Lamanites turning white through a process of education and acculturation, Smith himself agreed it would be the “Red Men of the western wilderness” who underwent this transformation.<sup>59</sup>

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will eventually do the same thing” (James Fenimore Cooper, *Notions of the Americans* [Philadelphia: Carey, Lea, & Blanchard, 1835], 277). Latter-day Saints in the 1830s similarly assumed a threefold division of the human race. William W. Phelps recorded that in 1831, shortly after his arrival in Jackson County, Missouri, he preached a sermon “wherein were present specimens of ‘all the families of the earth,’” namely, “several of the Lamanites . . . quite [a] respectable number of Negroes . . . and the balance was made up of citizens of the surround country.” See “History, 1838–1856, volume A-1 [23 December 1805–30 August 1834],” 129, The Joseph Smith Papers, <http://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/history-1838-1856-volume-a-1-23-december-1805-30-august-1834/135> (accessed June 12, 2018).

58. “General Smith’s Views of the Powers and Policy of the Government of the United States, 7 February 1844,” <http://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/general-smiths-views-of-the-powers-and-policy-of-the-government-of-the-united-states-7-february-1844/8> (accessed June 12, 2018).

59. “Letter from P, 15 August 1842,” 890–891, The Joseph Smith Papers, <http://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/letter-from-p-15-august-1842/1> (accessed June 12, 2018). Smith served as the editor of the church newspaper *Times and Seasons* from March to November of 1842, during which time this commentary appeared as a

Likewise, while Smith's language at times mirrored paternalistic passages of the Book of Mormon that described "white" gentiles as the "nursing fathers" of the forsaken Native Americans, in his correspondence with the Pottawatomie Indians, where he imagined himself as their "Father," he departed from the text when calling them his "red children."<sup>60</sup> Deeply affected by the Book of Mormon's descriptions and prophecies about the Native Americans, Smith, it seems, was also heavily influenced by nineteenth-century American ideas about the Indians as red.<sup>61</sup>

In a similar manner, Oliver Cowdery, Joseph Smith's scribe during the translation of the Book of Mormon, is reported to have exhibited a racial outlook about Native American skin color much closer to his contemporaries than to that presented in the Book of Mormon. Following a revelation through Joseph Smith that instructed Cowdery, Peter Whitmer, Jr., Parley P. Pratt, and Ziba Peterson to go "into the wilderness among the Lamanites," the missionaries traveled by foot over a thousand miles

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letter to the editor. On another occasion, Smith also spoke of the "face of the Red Man" turning "pale," though this appeared in the context of lamenting the wrongs committed by the state of Missouri following the eviction of the Latter-day Saints, and therefore should be interpreted as metaphoric in nature and not a literal change. See "History, 1838–1856, volume C-1 [2 November 1838–31 July 1842]," 927, The Joseph Smith Papers, <http://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/history-1838-1856-volume-c-1-2-november-1838-31-july-1842/109> (accessed June 12, 2017).

60. See 1 Nephi 13:15; 21:23; and "Letter to Pottawatomie Indians, 28 August 1843," The Joseph Smith Papers, <http://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/letter-to-pottawatomie-indians-28-august-1843/1> (accessed June 12, 2018).

61. Even though Smith viewed modern Native Americans as "red," he invoked the Book of Mormon's racial binary when he imagined their Lamanite ancestors. In 1834, while traveling with Zion's Camp through Illinois, Smith and his companions unearthed a skeleton from an Indian burial mound. Though there are multiple conflicting accounts of the event, the majority agree that Smith declared the remains belonged to a deceased "white Lamanite" named Zelph. Noting the peculiarity of a "white Lamanite," those who recorded the event further stated that Smith explained how the Book of Mormon curse was removed from Zelph due to his exceeding righteousness. See Kenneth W. Godfrey, "The Zelph Story," *BYU Studies* 29/2 (1989): 31–56. Smith appears to have accepted without reservation both descriptions of contemporary Native Americans as red and the Book of Mormon's portrayal of Lamanites as black or, in this case, white, without ever squaring these discordant descriptions.

to Indian Territory.<sup>62</sup> After reaching their destination, Cowdery, according to a witness, addressing the displaced Delaware Indians through an interpreter, told of a “Book in the earth . . . found and made known in the latter day to the pale faces who should possess the land; that they might again make it known to the red man.”<sup>63</sup> This news, “which will do the red man good,” contained the history of the “red men’s forefathers” written “in the language of the forefathers of the red man.” Presenting a copy to “our red friend, the chief of the Delawares,” the missionaries promised that “if the red man would then receive this Book and learn the things written in it, and do according thereunto, they should . . . become one people . . . in common with the pale faces.”<sup>64</sup> Warping the Book of Mormon through the lens of American racial understanding, Cowdery inadvertently changed the book’s white/black dichotomy into a pale/red one. Though both Smith and Cowdery were involved in the publication of the Book of Mormon, both expressed a racial vision of Indians as red in conflict with the text’s claim to the contrary.

Following their lead, subsequent Church officials also frequently referred to Indians in their public speeches as “red men” or “red skins.”<sup>65</sup> In private, Latter-day Saint leaders alternatively called Native Americans

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62. D&C 32:1–3. For more information on early Latter-day Saint missionary activity among Native Americans, see Ronald W. Walker, “Seeking the ‘Remnant’: The Native American during the Joseph Smith Period,” *Journal of Mormon History* 19/1 (1993): 1–33.

63. Parley P. Pratt recorded Cowdery’s comments years later. While there is no reason to question his general retelling of the episode, it is possible that some of the dialogue, including the term “red men,” reflected Pratt’s racial views and not those of Cowdery. Indeed, Pratt thought of Native Americans as “red.” See Parley Pratt, *The Autobiography of Parley Parker Pratt*, ed. Parley P. Pratt (Chicago: Law, King & Law, 1874), 26. Cowdery, however, in other places did refer to the American Indians as “red men,” lending credibility that this represents his actual comments on that occasion. See Oliver Cowdery, “Letter VII,” July 1835, in “History, 1834–1836,” 87, *The Joseph Smith Papers*, <http://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/history-1834-1836/91> (accessed June 12, 2018).

64. Pratt, *Autobiography of Parley Parker Pratt*, 58–59.

65. Examples from the *Journal of Discourses* (London: Latter-day Saints Book Depot, 1855–1886) include Brigham Young 1:163, 6:329, 10:108, 11:265; George Q. Cannon

their “red neighbors,” “red brethren,” and “untutored red men.”<sup>66</sup> Despite the insistence of the Book of Mormon text that the Lamanites inherited a “skin of blackness,” modern Indians were universally classified as red.<sup>67</sup> The terms “Lamanite” and “Indian” soon became interchangeable with “red man” in common parlance. Notably, neither was ever employed synonymously with black.<sup>68</sup> Commenting on this fact, historian W. Paul Reeve finds it “ironic” that “the color [Latter-day Saints] ascribed to Native Americans . . . did not fit the color of the Book of Mormon curse,” something they never did reconcile.<sup>69</sup>

This rhetoric, that Indians were the “red-skinned” progeny of Book of Mormon peoples, was not only perpetuated by officials, but also penetrated into popular discourse through hymns.<sup>70</sup> Included in the Church’s first hymnal edited by Emma Smith and appearing in subsequent Latter-day Saint hymnals until 1927, W. W. Phelps’s “O Stop and Tell Me, Red Man” imagined a conversation between a white settler and Native American. Asked “Who are you? Why you roam? And how you get your living? Have you no God;—no home?,” the “Red Man” surprisingly responded that he is a descendent of Ephraim and “Before your nation knew us, Some thousand moons

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22:255–56, 23:105; Franklin D. Richards 26:257; John Taylor 23:223, 26:69; and John Henry Smith 26:180.

66. Brigham Young to George A Smith, May 29, 1856, George A. Smith Papers 1834–1877, Church History Library, Salt Lake City; Amasa M. Lyman to Brigham Young, January 20, 1858, Brigham Young office files 1832–1878, Church History Library, Salt Lake City; and Brigham Young to Amasa M. Lyman, February 4, 1858, Brigham Young office files 1832–1878, Church History Library, Salt Lake City.

67. For information on the Church’s later relationship with Native Americans, see Mauss, *All Abraham’s Children*, 41–153.

68. John-Charles Duffy, “The Use of ‘Lamanite’ in Official LDS Discourse,” *Journal of Mormon History* 34/1 (2008): 118–67.

69. W. Paul Reeve, *Religion of a Different Color: Race and the Mormon Struggle for Whiteness* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 56.

70. For more information on the portrayal of Native Americans in Latter-day Saint hymnody, see P. Jane Hafen, “‘Great Spirit Listen’: The American Indian in Mormon Music,” *Dialogue* 18/4 (1985): 133–42.

ago, Our fathers fell in darkness, and wander'd to and fro.”<sup>71</sup> Filled with racist images of “idle Indian[s]” with “savage customs,” the hymn makes clear that these Lamanite descendants are “Red Men.”

If anything, the association between the Book of Mormon curse and “red skin” only solidified in hymnody during the Utah Period. Charles W. Penrose, a Latter-day Saint Apostle, composed the hymn “Great Spirit, Listen to the Red Man’s Wail,” which appeared in four editions of the Latter-day Saint hymnal between 1871 and 1927. The text, which promised “Not many moons shall pass away, before The curse of darkness from your skin shall flee” pleaded with God the “Great Chieftain” to “hear the Indian’s cry” and save the “red man” “from the pale-faced foe!”<sup>72</sup> Like “O Stop and Tell Me, Red Man,” the Book of Mormon’s “curse of darkness” in “Great Spirit, Listen to the Red Man’s Wail” was explicitly associated with the “red skin” of Native Americans.<sup>73</sup>

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71. W. W. Phelps, “O Stop and Tell Me, Red Man,” *A Collection of Sacred Hymns for the Church of Latter Day Saints* (Kirtland, OH: F.G. Williams, 1835), 83–84. In the same serial in which “O Stop and Tell Me, Red Man” first appeared, Phelps spoke of the curse upon Native Americans as “a sample of marking with blackness for rebellion against God’s holy word and holy order.” He argued that “in time” all people who disobeyed God would inherit “black skin” as the Book of Mormon had described. Despite specifically tying the Lamanite curse to “blackness,” Phelps consistently referred to modern Native Americans as “red men.” See *Latter Day Saints’ Messenger and Advocate*, October 1834: 34, 50, 82.

72. Charles W. Penrose, “Great Spirit, Listen to the Red Man’s Wail,” in *Sacred Hymns and Spiritual Songs, for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, ed. George Q. Cannon (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Office, the Church Book Depot, 1871), 371–73.

73. Latter-day Saints also commonly visualized the trek west as a journey through red territory into former Lamanite lands. Another hymn authored by Penrose mentioned the trip to Zion over prairies of “waving grass Where the red man roams in his pride” (Charles W. Penrose, “O Wouldst Thou from Bondage,” in *The Mountain Warbler, Being a Collection of Original Songs and Recitations*, ed. William Willes [Salt Lake City: Deseret News Book and Job Establishment, 1872], 97). Likewise, the hymn, “For the Strength of the Hills,” present in the modern Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints hymnal, once contained a reference to the Great Plains as where “red untutored Indian Seeks here his rude delights” (Edward L. Sloan, “For the Strength of the Hills,” in *Sacred Hymns and Spiritual Songs*, ed. Cannon, 93). Outside official channels, the story is much the same. In one popular folk song, sights along the Mormon trail included antelope, deer, elk, buffalo, and the “the bloody redskins” (“Root, Hog, or Die,” in *The Mormon*

Imagery portraying modern Native Americans as the offspring of red Lamanites permeated literature as well. George Reynolds, combining scientific theories about the genesis of racial diversity typical of the time with his unwavering belief in the Book of Mormon, wrote a series of articles for the *Juvenile Instructor* entitled “Man and His Varieties,” attempting to describe how the “red-” skinned Native Americans came to be.<sup>74</sup> Cursed by God, Reynolds wrote that this “once a white and beautiful people” fell “from their beauty and strength” into the “copper colored” people “we see they are to-day.”<sup>75</sup> Decades later, Latter-day Saints reached the same conclusion. A lesson supplement in the *Young Woman’s Journal* included an extensive list of questions answered by the Book of Mormon. Reading the Book of Mormon promised to not only solve the issue of “Who are the American Indians?” but also, the supplement claimed, “Why have they a red skin?”<sup>76</sup>

This prevalent, and incorrect, reading of the Book of Mormon that depicted Lamanites descendants as red was not exclusive to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. A pamphlet titled, *Whence Came the Red Man* distributed by the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints recapitulated the Book of Mormon story as such:

For many years the [Indians] remembered the gentle teachings of the Son of God and all lived together in peace, prospering greatly,

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*Pioneer Songbook*, ed. William Kaufman [Bryn Mawr, PA: Theodore Presser, 1980], 14). Another tune similarly recalled “bands of redskin beggars” encountered along the way (“The Ox-Team Trail,” in *Mormon Songs from the Rocky Mountains: A Compilation of Mormon Folksong*, ed. Thomas E. Cheney [Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1981], 53).

74. George Reynolds, “Man and His Varieties,” *Juvenile Instructor*, November 1, 1868: 165. While at times he referenced the three races of “black, white or red,” Reynolds believed there were in reality five distinct races: “fair” Caucasians, “the Negro Race” with “black” skin, Asians with a “yellowish” complexion, the “brown” Malayan race, and the “copper colored” Native Americans. See Reynolds, “Man and His Varieties,” *Juvenile Instructor*, November 1, 1868: 165; “Man and His Varieties,” *Juvenile Instructor*, September 15, 1868: 141–42.

75. Reynolds, “Man and His Varieties,” *Juvenile Instructor*, August 15, 1868: 124.

76. “Lesson XXXVI,” *Young Woman’s Journal* 13/7 (July 1902): 334.

but at last they divided into two great camps and began to quarrel bitterly among themselves. Part of them became the color of fine copper and the red brethren fought against the white.<sup>77</sup>

Distorting the actual descriptions in the Book of Mormon, red replaced black in order for the story to make sense for an American audience.

Twentieth-century commentaries on the Book of Mormon were equally not immune from the pitfalls of conflating red and black skin. Fawn Brodie, in her brief synopsis of the book in *No Man Knows My History*, described in her chapter on the “Red Sons of Israel” how “Laman and Lemuel were evil-tempered, sinful youths who so incurred the wrath of God that He cursed them and all their descendants with a red skin.”<sup>78</sup> Even famed Brigham Young University professor Sidney B. Sperry, normally careful in his observations about the Book of Mormon, once claimed that the modern Native Americans received their pigmentation from their Lamanite ancestors who “were cursed with a red skin.”<sup>79</sup> Likewise, Leslie Rumble, an Australian scholar writing during the 1950s, summarized how the Book of Mormon told how the “American Indians” were “cursed by God with red skins.”<sup>80</sup> Though the Book of Mormon was explicit that the Lamanite’s skin color was changed to black, persistent attitudes about Indians as red influenced interpretations of the book well into the middle part of the twentieth century.

Even in modern times, as the racialized language of Indians as red has fallen out of favor, the confusion of black and red skin continues, especially in critical treatments of the Book of Mormon. Eager to discredit Joseph Smith, such works often employ language of red Lamanites

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77. The Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, *Whence Came the Red Man* (Independence, MO: Ensign Publishing House, 1920), 4.

78. Brodie, *No Man Knows My History*, 43.

79. Sidney B. Sperry, *Our Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Stevens & Wallis, 1947), 40.

80. Leslie Rumble, “The Book of Mormon I,” *Homiletic and Pastoral Review* 60/3 (1959): 228; Leslie Rumble, “The Book of Mormon II,” *Homiletic and Pastoral Review* 60/4 (1960): 338.

to argue against his explanation of its origins. Accordingly, Sally Denton has concluded that the curse of “red skin” proved definitively “the saga of the Nephites and Lamanites” was nothing more than “an expansion and explanation of the most common theories of [Smith’s] day.”<sup>81</sup> The cartoon *South Park* took a similar position. Satirizing an imagined conversation between Joseph Smith and the Angel Moroni in which the deceased Nephite prophet explained how “as punishment, God turned [the Lamanites’] skin red,” a chorus of singers immediately lampoons: “Dumb dumb dumb dumb dumb.”<sup>82</sup> Blurring the distinction between red and black, these critics have rather ironically become like the early believers in the Book of Mormon who first twisted the text by misappropriating the Book of Mormon’s actual description of Native American skin color to meet their own preconceptions.

## Conclusion

The racial worldview of the Book of Mormon is a historical anomaly in that it envisioned Native Americans as either black or white when nearly everyone else identified Indians as red. As it turns out, this radically departed from the personal views of Joseph Smith and his nineteenth-century culture. The description of Native Americans as red, which one should expect to find in the Book of Mormon, simply is not there. At the time, antebellum America abounded with images of Amerindians as “red men” or “red skins,” making frequent mention of their unmistakable “copper” complexions. Though certainly offensive to today’s sensibilities, no one would have batted an eye at the time of the Book of Mormon’s publication in 1830 if it had represented Native Americans this way. Instead, somewhat paradoxically, the Book of Mormon exhibited a peculiar perspective, portraying the ancient Americans as either black or white. This fact, however, seemed to have been lost

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81. Sally Denton, *American Massacre: The Tragedy at Mountain Meadows, September 1857* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2003), 8.

82. *South Park*, “All about Mormons,” season 7, episode 12, Comedy Central, November 19, 2003, written and directed by Trey Parker.

on most readers. Members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Community of Christ commentators, scholars, and critics of the Restoration alike, all understood the Book of Mormon as a history of the “red man.” Rather than adopt the black- and white-skinned schema presented in the Book of Mormon, ingrained American attitudes about racial coloration as it related to Native American skin color held sway.<sup>83</sup> Borrowing a stereotype from their own culture, they imagined Indians as red all over.

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83. In a similar way to the process by which the doctrinal content of the Book of Mormon was believed as true while never becoming the source of theology and praxis, the same can be said for the attitudes of early Latter-day Saints related to skin color. See Philip L. Barlow, *Mormons and the Bible: The Place of the Latter-day Saints in American Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 44; Terryl Givens, *By the Hand of Mormon: The American Scripture That Launched a New World Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 85.