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Accounting for Whiteness in Mormon Religion

Sylvester A. Johnson

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

Introduction

THE CRITICAL STUDY OF RACIAL WHITENESS, which is often observed to have begun with the scholarship of W. E. B. Du Bois, has developed in important ways during recent years. Since the 1990s, particularly, scholars have emphasized the dynamic nature of white racial identity. Some present-day populations routinely designated as white, for instance, would have been targets of racism in earlier periods such as the nineteenth century. In addition, the United States government has inconsistently located particular populations (such as Hispanics) within or beyond the boundaries of racial whiteness over time. Among important studies that have stressed this aspect are those by Noel Ignatiev, Matthew Frye Jacobson, and David Roediger.¹

1. Noel Ignatiev, *How the Irish Became White* (New York: Routledge, 2009); Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998); and David R. Roediger, *Working toward Whiteness: How America's Immigrants Became White: The Strange Journey from Ellis Island to the Suburbs* (New York: Basic Books, 2005).

Whereas earlier studies tended to reflect minimal concern, if any, for the role of religion in racialization, scholars have more recently begun attending to the linkage between religion and whiteness. Of major importance here are Susannah Heschel's *The Aryan Jesus*, Edward Blum's *Reforging the White Republic*, Tracy Fessenden's *Culture and Redemption*, Shawn Kelley's *Racializing Jesus*, J. Kameron Carter's *Race: A Theological Account*, Kelly J. Baker's *Gospel According to the Klan*, and Eric Goldstein's *Price of Whiteness*.²

In this context, W. Paul Reeve of the University of Utah, a historian of Mormonism, has written an insightful and potentially game-changing study of race and religion. In *Religion of a Different Color* (a riff on the title of Jacobson's study), Reeve accounts for the marginalization of Mormons during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. His central argument is that Euro-American Mormons³ were racialized on the basis of their religion. This racialization, Reeve claims, made Mormons "racially suspect" and rendered them, in the perspective of a white Protestant majority, as coconspirators with indigenous peoples, as biologically distinct from white Protestants, and as complicit in fomenting racial mixture with blacks and resistance to the regime of racial separatism. Reeve further asserts that Mormons firmly secured whiteness—they became fully white—only during the

2. Susannah Heschel, *The Aryan Jesus: Christian Theologians and the Bible in Nazi Germany* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008); Edward J. Blum, *Reforging the White Republic: Race, Religion, and American Nationalism, 1865–1898*, rev. ed. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2015); Tracy Fessenden, *Culture and Redemption: Religion, the Secular, and American Literature* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007); Shawn Kelley, *Racializing Jesus: Race, Ideology, and the Formation of Modern Biblical Scholarship* (New York: Routledge, 2002); J. Kameron Carter, *Race: A Theological Account* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008); Kelly J. Baker, *Gospel According to the Klan: The KKK's Appeal to Protestant America, 1915–1930* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2011); and Eric L. Goldstein, *The Price of Whiteness: Jews, Race, and American Identity* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006).

3. Throughout this essay, I employ the term *Euro-American Mormons* to designate the population Reeve terms "white Mormons." As I discuss below, referring to these Mormons as racially white becomes problematic given Reeve's claim that Mormons did not achieve whiteness until the twentieth century.

twentieth century, following an arduous struggle for acceptance by a white Protestant majority (pp. 2–4). As a result, he explains, contemporary Euro-American Mormons are soundly ensconced within whiteness and have invested fully in this racial subjectivity.

Nature of the work

In support of this argument, Reeve marshals myriad forms of archival evidence. He draws on political cartoons (the book is richly illustrated with these), literature, government documents, newspapers, travel narratives, magazines, and diaries to capture the history of relations among Mormons, American Indians, blacks, white Protestants, and the US government. The structure of the book, in fact, is largely guided by a focused examination of Mormon relations with several non-white populations. Two chapters are devoted to assessing the history of relations between Euro-American Mormons and Native Americans. Four chapters are devoted to anti-blackness in Mormon religion. Reeve also allots a chapter to examining Euro-American Mormon relations with Asian immigrants. A final chapter examines race and Mormon religion in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

In the two chapters on Mormon-Indian relations, Reeve explains the role of Mormon scripture in shaping a racial imaginary of American Indians. Mormon missions targeted native peoples to redeem them, and Mormons collaborated with the US government to seize the lands belonging to indigenous nations. What emerges is a decidedly complicated portrait of racial conflict. Euro-American Mormons succeeded in winning many indigenous converts. But the very presence of Native American Mormons among Euro-American members of the church was easy evidence for white Protestants to assert Mormons were agents of race mixing and savagery. More importantly, as the US military continued to wage endless war against native nations to seize their lands, government officials and the populist media of the Anglo-American empire accused Euro-American Mormons of colluding with indigenous militias to rout the invading troops of the white nation-state. In

this sense, Euro-American Mormons were charged with undermining national security.

In his four chapters on Mormons and blacks, Reeve develops a compelling and complex rendering of the racial hierarchy that Euro-American Mormons imposed in the Utah territory that eventually became a state. In the first of these (chapter 4), he explains Euro-American Mormon opposition to so-called racial amalgamation and focuses on the ban against ordaining blacks to the LDS priesthood. Central here are the stories of William McCrary, a black Mormon who was eventually expelled from the church after claiming to be a prophet, and William Appleby, the Euro-American Mormon who challenged Brigham Young to remedy the presence of black priests and interracial marriage involving black Mormons.

Chapter 5 focuses on Brigham Young, the Mormon leader who became governor of the Utah Territory. Reeve discusses Brigham Young's pivotal role in establishing white supremacy by instituting a priesthood ban against blacks in 1852 and legalizing slavery through a "servitude" bill that governed enslaved blacks and white servants. Even more impactful was Young's leadership of a political movement to legalize black slavery in the Utah Territory. Reeve explains how Young rationalized racial purity through a doctrine of racial priesthood and gentile pollution. According to traditional readings of Mormon scripture, blacks were uniquely set apart because they were the cursed descendants of Cain (a villainous character of scriptural myth) and were marked for their impurity by their dark skin. Reeve explains further that Young, drawing on biblical narrative, preached that the biblical Deity had punished Gentiles for racial mixture—intermarriage with other nations. But the saints of the LDS Church were racially pure and needed to maintain their purity from the cursed seed of Cain. By this account, a racial system of government, broadly conceived, was essential to secure Mormon salvation. Mormon redemption thus became dependent on policing racial boundaries and enforcing black inferiority.

Even more striking is the fact that Utah's race laws stipulated that only "free white males" could vote. So it seems clear enough from Reeve's

historical study that racial whiteness was an active, legally inscribed force that Euro-American Mormons deployed to govern populations in the territory. In this significant way, these Mormons were racially white. In this same chapter, Reeve examines the strife that ensued when Orson Pratt publicly acknowledged Mormon polygamy and defended it as free exercise of religion. From there on, a full onslaught of scrutiny and condemnation emerged that frequently defined Mormon polygamy as white slavery.

In chapter 6 Reeve displays the consequences of black Mormon men marrying Euro-American women of the church. This was a rare occurrence, but the very fact that it happened evoked both praise from anti-racists such as the Bishop Henry McNeal Turner of the African Methodist Episcopal Church and, more frequently, devastating condemnation from the nation's racist majority, who exploited the occurrence as evidence that Mormons were breaching the standards of white racial purity. Reeve demonstrates that even the Republican Party took up the issue to undermine Brigham Young's political aspirations, despite the fact that Young promoted anti-black racism unapologetically.

In the next chapter, Reeve tethers his discussion to the Euro-American Mormon Scipio Kenner, who was falsely accused of having black ancestry, and two black Mormons, Elijah Abel and Jane James, who demanded but were denied equal treatment by church leaders. Reeve explains Kenner's success in defending his whiteness from being marred by false accusations of black ancestry. At the same time, he explains how church leaders continually forced Abel and James into a humiliating, inferior status to enforce ecclesiastical boundaries of whiteness. Once again, racial whiteness becomes evident among Mormons.

In chapter 8, Reeve examines how Mormons were compared to or associated with populations of Chinese immigrants, Muslims, and Asians broadly. He tells how in 1880 Protestant minister Thomas Talmage welcomed Chinese immigrants while insisting Mormons were intolerable owing to their religious practices—particularly polygamy. He also recounts how Euro-American Mormons themselves sometimes responded to being associated with Asians by celebrating Asian

civilization as superior to that of the West. More frequently, however, Mormons resented being associated with non-white races and repeatedly sought to enforce the distinctions of race through social policy, church teachings, and public propaganda.

In his concluding chapter, Reeve summarizes the twentieth-century shifts through which Euro-American Mormons not only gained mainstream acceptance but at times were even idealized as hardworking, monogamous, self-sufficient exemplars of stereotypical American whiteness. He notes as “ironic” the LDS Church’s strident condemnation of interracial marriage and defense of the US system of legal apartheid at the height of the civil rights movement. By the twenty-first century, during Mitt Romney’s bid for the US presidency, Mormons had become so iconic of whiteness that one pundit suggested Romney was too white for the expediency of the Republican Party. The explicit interracial aesthetics of the church’s “I’m a Mormon” publicity campaign, furthermore, becomes in Reeve’s elucidation a startling parallel to the interracialism that evoked brutal anti-Mormon invective during the 1800s.

Throughout the book, polygamy and the violence of racism and US expansionism are continually at the fore. Reeve thoroughly underscores how polygamy became a pliable, omnipresent target of derision and persecution that enabled racializing tactics against Mormons. It was the eventual basis for military reprisal and disenfranchisement of Mormons under federal government power. Reeve renders the complexity of this history, furthermore, by attending to how Mormons conscientiously participated in the political project of US empire, particularly by helping the Anglo-American state to dispossess Native Americans of their lands and to undermine indigenous sovereignty. Although they remained devoted to religious self-determination at every point, Euro-American Mormons sought to emblazon their common racial status and cause with non-Mormon whites.

Racialized Mormons: white, less white, or non-white?

The book is not without points of frustration. Most notably, despite his central claim that Mormons secured their whiteness only during the twentieth century, Reeve continually refers to Euro-American Mormons of the nineteenth century as “white Mormons,” at times perhaps to distinguish them from Mormons who were racially black, Native, or Asian. He does this, however, while constantly proffering evidence that Mormons were racialized as racially distinct from white Protestants. Moreover, he expresses at the outset that Euro-American Mormons were racialized to be “less white than white” (p. 4), a mystifying claim that he never fully clarifies. Precisely what would it mean, after all, to be less white than white in racial terms? When one considers, moreover, that Reeve constantly describes nineteenth-century Mormons as “white Mormons,” one is led to wonder how to understand his claim that Mormons achieved whiteness only after a long process of being denied that status.

At the heart of this problem, ironically, is the meticulous, evidentiary execution of Reeve’s study, which convincingly demonstrates that Euro-American Mormons were racialized by white Protestants and the US government while simultaneously showing that these same Mormons established a racially stratified society in the Utah Territory (and subsequent state) based on racial whiteness. As mentioned above, Reeve explicates the myriad practices whereby Euro-American Mormons ensured that racial whiteness was a socially realized status that generated liberties and freedoms that were institutionally denied to blacks, American Indians, and Asians through legal, religious, and, more broadly, cultural practices. As further evidence of this complexity, Reeve examines accusations that Euro-American Mormons were guilty of race mixing, specifically as it relates to interracial sex and marriage. A small number of black Mormon men did marry Euro-American Mormon women. He mentions that AME minister Henry McNeal Turner celebrated Mormon support for interracial marriage while condemning their polygamy. Reeve also explicates how racial mixture among Euro-American Mormons and blacks was condemned and was used

to demean Mormons. Members of the Republican Party even staged accusations of interracial sex and marriage against Brigham Young. By Reeve's own account, this mirrored accusations of race mixing against white non-Mormon abolitionists. While this is not necessarily racialization, but rather a means of policing whiteness, it indicates that white Protestants viewed Mormons as racially white; otherwise there would have been no point in accusing them of violating race purity.

Moreover, despite his claim that early Mormons were universal in their racial outlook, he also shows that their use of the Book of Mormon scripturalized race as both a semiotic system for conceiving social identities and an imperative for political and social order that relegated American Indians to an inferior status of alienated descendants of ancient Israelites and blacks as racially distinct and cursed with dark skin and an evil nature. From the very start, the LDS Church embraced a racial calculus that would remain integral to its theology. More importantly, the Utah Territory was like the rest of the United States insofar as it was a white settler polity, a racial polity. It was established through the violent destruction of American Indian sovereignty and the hegemony of white racial domination. Beyond this, Reeve goes to great lengths to show how the nation's white Protestant majority made a political football of Euro-American Mormon women in polygamous marriages, calling it "white slavery." According to anti-Mormon discourse, Mormon polygamy reduced these women to abject slavery, a condition that the racist majority deemed suitable for only blacks. But of course this invective achieved coherence only because white Protestants viewed these Mormons as racially white. Otherwise there could be no white slavery.

So how should readers assess Reeve's claim that Mormons were racialized in a manner that deprived them of whiteness? Does this mean Euro-American Mormons truly ceased to be white following a bifurcating racialization that split them away from white Protestants? In many ways, this is similar to the problem examined in Edward Blum's *Reforging the White Republic*, an insightful study of religion and racial whiteness during the years following the US Civil War. White northerners, Blum observes, commonly asserted that white southerners were

racially distinct and inferior. The massive violence of the war and the military occupation of the South created a formidable political cleavage that sundered in two what had previously been a single white republican political community united in its racial constitution over and against blacks, American Indians, and Asians. But Blum does not claim that white southerners ceased to be white. He does argue, however, that a veritable racial distinction emerged and divided white northerners and southerners.⁴

Reeve's study can also be compared to how Matthew Frye Jacobson approached the matter in his book *Whiteness of a Different Color*. The fact that some Euro-Americans (white Jews, for instance) were targeted as racial outsiders in the United States, Jacobson claims, does not mean they were not white. He attempts to show, rather, that not all whiteness is created equal. He charts a shifting tapestry of white racial formation in the United States. This ranged from a unified white racial population in the 1790s to myriad white races under Anglo-Saxon hegemony from the 1840s to the 1920s (roughly) and a unitary Caucasian race divided by only ethnicity around the 1940s. But this seems to contravene the very import of racial whiteness as central to conceiving the body politic in a racial state. Even following the period of what Jacobson describes as racial bipolarization—when the black-white racial binary was reasserted to trivialize the distinctions among various European races following the Second World War—not all whites were on exactly equal footing. White Jews particularly, he argues, were white, but they were not *simply* white. Their Jewishness has continued to function to set them apart from other whites.⁵ Among the many evidences of this pattern is the work of Lothrop Stoddard, the Harvard-trained historian who argued that the world's populations consisted of five "primary races" (white, yellow, brown, black, and red), each of which might in turn comprise multiple sets of subordinate races. In the political terms of his own day, the self-avowed white supremacist recognized the fact that

4. Blum, *Reforging the White Republic*, 26–28.

5. Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color*, 7–8, 277–79.

multiple populations of whites have been governed as racially distinct peoples along a hierarchy, yet all remained racially white.⁶

Both Blum and Jacobson thus proffer a hierarchical multiplicity of white races, whereas Reeve conceptualizes a racial population that is fully white (white Protestants) and racialized others who are necessarily less white or non-white. Reeve recognizes, of course, that “white Mormons” were racialized and subjected to extermination campaigns, forced removal, and derision as fundamentally, racially distinct from white Protestants. And yet he also recognizes that these same Mormons asserted racial hegemony over Asians, American Indians, and blacks on the basis of asserting white racial rule. Finally, he wants to maintain that Mormons did not achieve whiteness (as a comfortably ensconced status) until the twentieth century.

So how should racial whiteness be interpreted? Can multiple races of whites exist simultaneously? Or can there be only one “truly” white race at a time? In order to assess which theoretical approach is the more exacting, a more precise account of race is required so that the constitution of whiteness can be assessed apart from racialization per se. This brings us to the aspect of Reeve’s study that will inspire the most debate: his definition of race.

Explaining race

Reeve clearly charts his understanding of what race entails in the introduction to his study. He explains that during the nineteenth century, “race operated as a hierarchical system designed to create order and superiority out of the perceived disorder of the confluence of peoples in America. Race could be variously marked by language, national origin, religion, laws and government, marital relationships, and a variety of cultural characteristics” (pp. 3–4). He also observes that the term *race*, as employed during the 1800s, “sometimes referred to nationality more

6. Lothrop Stoddard, *The Rising Tide of Color Against White World-Supremacy* (New York: Scribner, 1969), 3–12.

than skin color” (p. 4). He continues: “In defining a group identity for Mormons, outsiders frequently conflated believers with other marginal groups to imagine them as more red, black, yellow, or less white than white. Race, then, was a socially invented category and not a biological reality. It was employed by the white Protestant majority to situate Mormons at various distances away from the top of a racial hierarchy and thereby justify discriminatory policies against them” (p. 4).

Because Reeve recognizes that racial terminology was dynamic and inconsistent, his argument and analysis concerning race are not based strictly or exclusively on attempts to locate uses of the term *race* in the period under question, although he includes explicit racial grammars in his discussion. Instead, Reeve aims for a more complex approach, elucidating the numerous and repeated instances of white Protestants expelling Euro-American Mormons from towns, ordering their extermination, publicly deriding them as a threat to the nation’s political interest, and continually associating them with American Indians, blacks, and Asians in order to underscore claims that Mormons were not to be embraced as legitimate peoples of the United States. Of equal importance is his attention to anti-Mormon state practices at multiple levels, particularly that of the sovereign nation-state.

Reeve’s study, by design, will upend or formidably challenge the way many scholars think of race. Because religion is not a phenotype, and because Reeves is arguing that Mormon religion was racialized, his book will without doubt meet with some initial skepticism from readers who think race is strictly somatic. The compelling case that Reeve makes, however, should subdue any reticence among those willing to assess his argument on the basis of evidence and a more complex account of race.

The colonial matrix of race

Reeve’s explication of race, despite his meticulous analysis, is nevertheless divorced from any explicit engagement with colonialism. As we shall see, this produces a lack of theoretical precision in his definition

of race. This is an analytical pattern that has characterized the way most scholars approach the study of race. There are hints of colonialism in Reeve's study, particularly when he describes how Euro-American Mormons were positioned with respect to the US empire and its aggressive, militarized expansion into the sovereign lands of indigenous nations and of the Mexican Republic. Thus it is patent that Reeve has colonialism on the radar for a narrative account of anti-Mormon racism. It is, nevertheless, equally evident that Reeve's account of race renders no direct connection between colonialism and racial formation.

It is essential to recognize that race is constituted through the governing practices of colonialism. Although she does not theorize race herself, the historian Penny M. Von Eschen, most notably, has lucidly observed that colonialism has continually been the crucible for racism, and she has elegantly detailed the political history whereby state and nonstate actors of the twentieth century explicitly manufactured a counternarrative of race to elide the role of colonialism in generating racism, thereby undermining anticolonial activism. In consequence, race was repackaged as a psychological condition or even as a disease-like epidemic.⁷

As the political theorist Barnor Hesse has persuasively demonstrated, moreover, the elision of colonialism as the matrix of race extends beyond state practices of repressing anticolonial activism during the Cold War era. The problem was also exacerbated by scholars of the early twentieth century who desired to critique the racism of the German state under Nazi rule while affirming or shielding from criticism European colonization of non-white peoples throughout Asia, Africa, and Latin America. Although rightly lauded for condemning racism on empirical and ethical grounds, scholars such as Franz Boaz, Ashley Montagu, and Margaret Mead focused not on colonial administrations of race governance but on intellectual, academic, and scientific practices such as craniometry, phrenology, and especially anthropological studies aiming to demonstrate fundamental racial differences. In

7. Penny M. Von Eschen, *Race against Empire: Black Americans and Anticolonialism, 1937–1957* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997).

these terms, racism was rendered largely as a problem of thinking—a cerebral, intellectual fiction—as opposed to the material, governing practices of European colonialism.⁸

Despite the lucid scholarship of theorists such as W. E. B Du Bois, Frantz Fanon, Aníbal Quijano, Edward Said, and Sylvia Wynter, which has richly demonstrated that colonialism creates racialization, most of the contemporary scholarship on race remains fundamentally disengaged from a clear apprehension of how colonialism functions as the structural, generative matrix for race. The elision of colonialism's role in racialization, thus, is not a simple oversight. It is a historical development rooted in ambivalent modes of anti-racist scholarship *as well as* overt political, state projects devoted to preserving Western colonial control over non-white peoples in an age when white supremacism had ceased to be politically correct.⁹

So how does colonialism make race? Colonialism is a specific form of political power constituted when a given state governs populations in a manner that differentiates their respective relationship with the political community (body politic) of the governing state. Under this system of governing, some populations are people of that state, while others are relegated to the status of aliens, foreign to the body politic. This is especially true of the nation-state (versus the monarchical state, for instance). As a caveat, it is important to observe that colonialism is achieved through a power differential, not a spatial one. Colonized

8. Barnor Hesse, "Im/plausible Deniability: Racism's Conceptual Double Bind," *Social Identities* 10/1 (January 1, 2004): 9–29; Franz Boas, *Race, Language, and Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982); Ashley Montagu, *Man's Most Dangerous Myth: The Fallacy of Race* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1942); and Margaret Mead, "The Methodology of Racial Testing: Its Significance for Sociology," *American Journal of Sociology* 31/5 (March 1926): 657–67.

9. William E. B. Du Bois, *Color and Democracy: Colonies and Peace* (Millwood, NY: Kraus-Thomson, 1975); Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979); Sylvia Wynter, "Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom: Towards the Human, After Man, Its Overrepresentation—An Argument," *CR: The New Centennial Review* 3/3 (2003): 257–337; Aníbal Quijano, "Colonialidad del Poder, Cultura y Conocimiento en América Latina," *Dispositio* 24/51 (January 1999): 137–48; and Frantz Fanon, *Les damnés de la terre* (Paris: F. Maspero, 1961).

populations might reside in proximity to the metropolitan center of the imperial state. As the British historian Bernard Porter has emphasized, the saltwater fallacy—the notion that real colonialism exists only when a colony is governed from far away across a sea or ocean—has functioned to enable imperial governments such as the United States to deny their actual status as such.¹⁰ Because the governing practices of colonialism are fundamentally rooted in creating differential statuses—varying degrees of rights and privileges—based on the political standing of human populations, the colonial exercise of social power has continually provided the architecture for racializing populations.

Not every instance of colonialism, however, automatically equates to race governance. Political tactics of colonial rule have become racial governance only at the point that imperial states are structured as *racial states*. In this political domain, the differential mechanisms of colonial governance that structure a hierarchy of privileges, freedom, and unfreedoms are applied to render populations as perpetually alien to the nation's political community, regardless of the passage of time or the homogenization of cultures. So despite the fact that a given population might exist within an empire-state for generations—even centuries—the material, ideological, and governing mechanisms of that state continually deny the experience of a pristine relationship between the body politic and those populations deemed alien. Settler colonialism produces the most extreme form of this problem. Not incidentally, white settler polities—the United States writ large and the Utah Territory, more specifically—are not merely linked to the racialization Reeve describes. They actually constitute the political architecture of race.

Multiple white races

Through the governing practices of controlling some populations as alien to a state's political community, colonialism constitutes race. This

10. Bernard Porter, *Empire and Superempire: Britain, America and the World* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2006), 79.

is politics, not phenotype. And it is why the Euro-American Mormons in Reeve's study became racialized as political enemies of a white republic despite having "white" skin and other stereotypically Anglo-Saxon physical features. At the point when Mormons were treated as a threat to the political community of the United States (the racial nation), they were racially split apart from the dominant white race (whom Jacobson terms "Anglo-Saxons"). The means of this racial fission has been lucidly analyzed by Michel Foucault in his theoretical study of the racial state. Perhaps as an unwitting consequence of his entrenched Eurocentrism, Foucault began his account of the racial state with a nonracialized population of Europeans (no blacks, American Indians, or Asians figure in Foucault's assessment). Given this starting point, he attempted to explain how race emerged as a Western state practice. This was achieved by conceiving of the political community of European states not through the political body of a monarch but, rather, through the political body of a mass population—a nation. This was, in other words, the rise of popular sovereignty, corresponding to what he also theorized as the birth of the population. The emergence of Western republican democracy required the creation of a different political body—a collective one as opposed to a solitary, monarchical figure. The nation-state thus became both legible and dominant in contrast to the monarchical state.¹¹

Most importantly, Foucault explained that it was through politics that a nonracialized political population was transformed into a *battle-ground of races*. For instance, whereas political histories that recounted the mighty deeds of the state had formerly fixated on the monarch, official court (i.e., royal) histories became increasingly concerned with the character and spirit of the population of a given state. Not every inhabitant of a given state, however, was perceived to be in possession of the putative national character. Political divisions and disputes among myriad nonracial groups were rendered as a fundamental struggle for control of the society waged by two or more political populations. Those

11. Michel Foucault et al., *"Society Must Be Defended": Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975–1976* (Macmillan, 2003); and David Theo Goldberg, *The Racial State* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2002).

who gained the upper hand fiercely devoted themselves to defending their society from others *inhabiting the same society*. Inverting the axiom of war as politics by other means, made famous by Carl Philipp Gottfried von Clausewitz, Foucault claimed that politics is war by other means. More specifically, race is war waged through politics (governing) to defend a given society from being controlled by intimate enemies, from those *living in* the state yet governed as ultimate *adversaries of* the state. Foucault termed this dynamic an instance of “internal colonialism,” standing in contrast to the colonial projects that Europeans pursued outside of Europe.¹²

By attending to the scholarship explicating the colonial account of race, we can resolve the earlier question of what to make of Reeve’s claim that “white Mormons” were racialized and “less than white,” despite being recognized by white Protestants as “white slaves,” establishing a white racial territory, and otherwise asserting the possession of racial whiteness. Like many other Euro-Americans of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Euro-American Mormons did not stop being white after being racialized as enemies of the racial nation-state, nor did they become “less white” (an imprecise if not meaningless designation). They were, however, forced into being governed as a racial threat to the nation’s body politic—this was colonial governance, and it further explains why the United States would go to war against Mormons *as* Mormons. As part of this process, they were deemed racially inferior while remaining racially white. Just as Irish colonial subjects were governed as racially inferior and as political enemies by the British Empire—or, closer to home, just as white northerners (in Blum’s study) were racially divided from white southerners or Irish, Italian, and Polish immigrants (in Jacobson’s study) were racially divided from America’s Anglo-Saxons—so also were Mormons engaged by the US government and by Anglo-Saxon (including white Protestant) nationalists who, by Reeve’s own account, continued to recognize these racially distinct Mormons as nonetheless white. This accounts for how it was possible for

12. Foucault, “*Society Must Be Defended*.”

racialized Mormons to have been victims of state practices of racism while simultaneously establishing a (fully) white settler polity (the Utah Territory) to produce (fully) white racial domination over American Indians, blacks, and Asians.

With this vibrant study of Mormon religion and race, Reeve has recalibrated the high-water mark of denominational history. He demonstrates the complex formation and reformation of racial whiteness. His book persuasively evidences the importance that studying religion (and not merely labor or immigration history) bears for understanding race and settler history in North America. Reeve exposes the layered constitution of racial whiteness as a historical formation. He also issues a solid demonstration of how Mormons, as white victims of racism, were nonetheless integral to and complicit in structuring the governing practices of white racial rule throughout a long arc of struggle for status within the body politic of the United States.

Religion of a Different Color should stand as an exceptional and transformative study of race and American religion. It is a rich and unique contribution to scholarship on Mormon religion that is equally a well-crafted study of race. It should certainly serve to inspire intellectually generative debate and further research on the constitution of racial whiteness for many years to come.

Sylvester A. Johnson (PhD, Union Theological Seminary, 2002) is associate professor of African American studies and religious studies at Northwestern University. He recently authored *African American Religions, 1500–2000: Colonialism, Democracy, and Freedom* (Cambridge University Press, 2015). Johnson is a founding coeditor of the *Journal of Africana Religions*. He is currently writing a monograph on religion and US empire and is coediting (with Steven Weitzman) a book on religion and the FBI.