

The Shifting Skin

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An analysis of the LDS Church's evolving doctrine on race and the Book of Mormon.

Probably not at all what it sounds like.



“Based on the best scholarship we have, Lamanite skin of blackness is probably not at all what it sounds like... there are several things that the skin of blackness could be that aren’t skin.”

Jasmin Rappleye, Scripture Central

Scripture Central is an apologetic organization that has received direct funding from The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints through the More Good Foundation.

The Weight of the Curse

“...your consciousness knows that your dark skin is a sign of a curse that was given to your ancestors and that you’re never going to be as good or as righteous as the white people in Salt Lake.”

Herardo, former member from Mexico

A “White and Delightful” People



“Brigham Young advised the people to buy up the Lamanite children as fast as they could and educate them and teach them the gospel, so that not many generations would pass ere they would become a white and delightful people.”

Brigham Young

Prophet & President of the Church, May 12, 1851

Removing the “Curse of their Color”



“We will show them that in consequence of their transgressions a curse has been inflicted upon them in the **darkness of their skins...** By these means it is the will of the Lord that the **curse of their color shall be removed** and they restored to their pristine beauty.”

Brigham Young, 1852

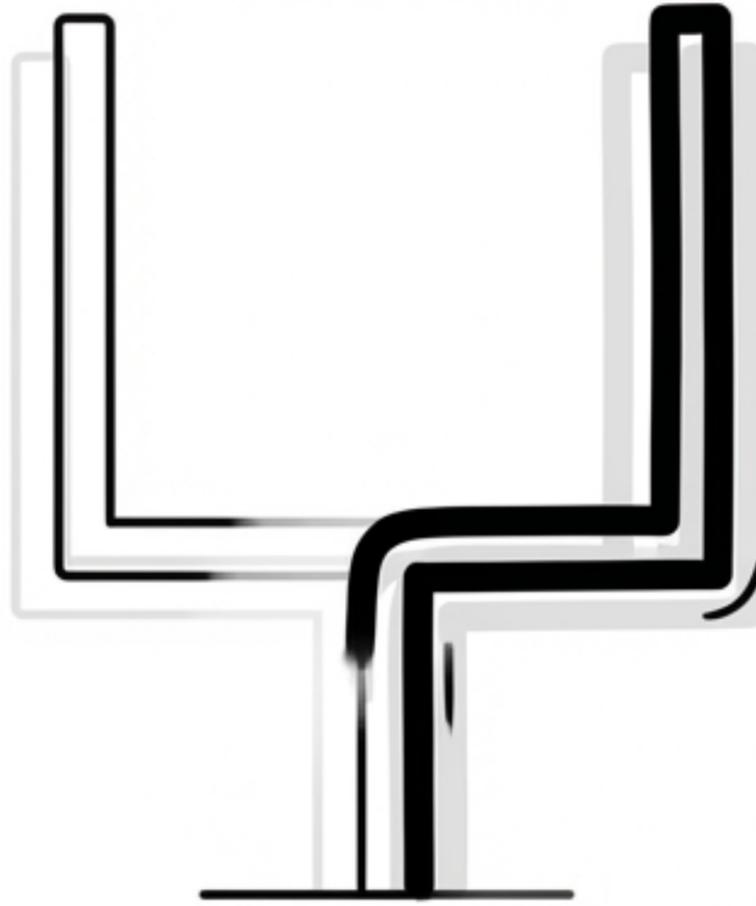
Darkened in Their Skin



“The Lamanites now a down-trodden people are a remnant of the House of Israel. The Curse of God has followed them as it has done the Jews, though the Jews have not been **darkened in their skin** as have the Lamanites.”

Wilford Woodruff

Prophet & President of the Church, 1881,
Journal of Discourses



The 20th Century: Doctrine Becomes Dogma

Throughout the 20th century, the literal interpretation of the curse was not abandoned. Instead, it was reinforced by apostles, institutionalized in church-wide programs, and taught as scientific fact.

Several Shades Lighter



“several shades lighter”

- The day of the Lamanites is nigh... they are now becoming white and delightsome.”
- The children in the home placement program... are often lighter than their brothers and sisters... a 16-year-old daughter... it was evident she was several shades lighter than her parents... subject to the same sun and wind and weather.
- These young members of the church are changing to whiteness and delightsomeness.

Spencer W. Kimball, Apostle
General Conference Address, 1960

Institutionalizing the Narrative

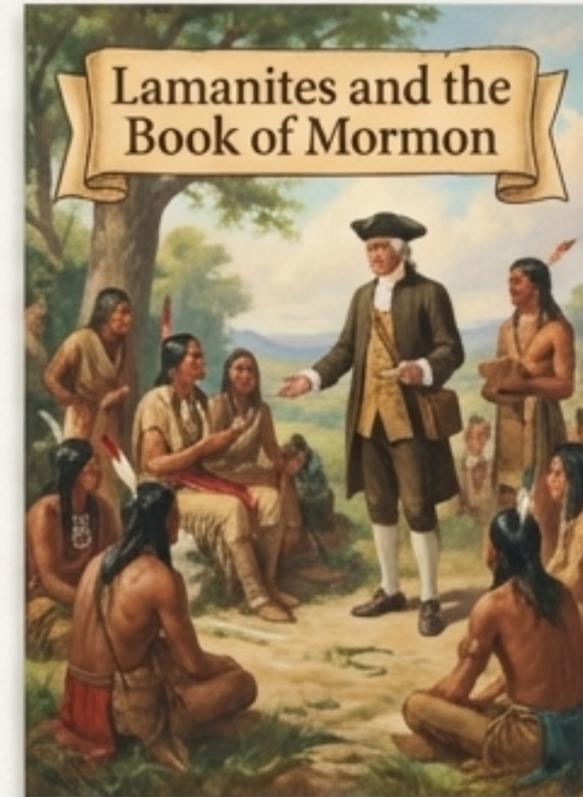
Program: Indian Student Placement

Publication: Missionary Pamphlet

Years Active: 1954-2000

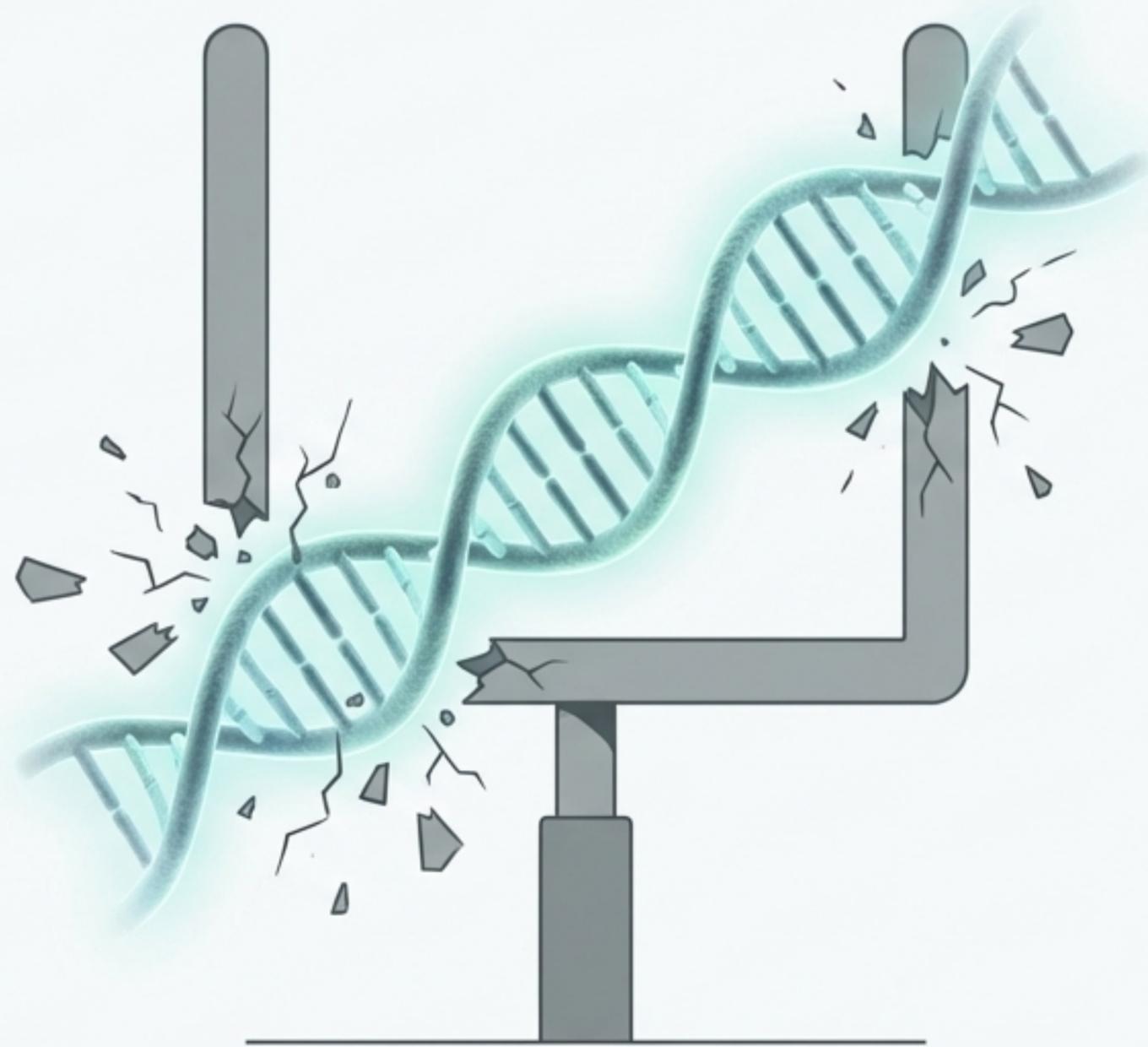
Participants: Approx. 50,000 Native American children

From the Church's official website:
The program enabled host families... to fellowship and assist American Indians whom they understood at the time to be descendants of the Lamanites.



“The Lamanites were marked by the Lord with a darker skin.”

The Tipping Point: DNA Evidence



In the early 2000s, genetic science presented an existential threat to the church's narrative. DNA evidence demonstrated that the ancestors of Native Americans originated from Siberia, not the Middle East.

Moving the Goalposts

1981 Book of Mormon Introduction

...the Lamanites... and they are the **principal** ancestors of the American Indians.

2007 Book of Mormon Introduction

...the Lamanites... and they are **among** the ancestors of the American Indians.

This change was made quietly in 2007, without any formal announcement from church leadership. It followed the publication of DNA studies by Thomas Murphy (2002) and former LDS Bishop Simon Southerton (2004) that contradicted the “principal ancestors” claim.

Redacting the Prophet

From the 2020 *Come Follow Me* manual, quoting Joseph Fielding Smith

INITIAL VIEW

“The dark skin was the sign of the curse. The curse was the withdrawal of the Spirit of the Lord . . . is no longer to be considered a sign of the curse.”

“The dark skin was the sign of the curse. The curse was the withdrawal of the Spirit of the Lord **and the Lamanites becoming a loathsome and filthy people, full of idleness and all manner of abominations.** The dark skin **of those who have come into the Church** is no longer to be considered a sign of the curse.”

REVEAL VIEW

The redaction deliberately inverted the prophet’s original meaning.

Official Ambiguity, Visual Certainty

The nature and appearance of this mark are not fully understood.

Prophets affirm in our day that dark skin is not a sign of divine disfavor or cursing.

Source: *Come Follow Me*, current online edition.



High-fidelity is painting by Scott M. Snow, the 2024 *Come Follow Me* manual.

While the church's text now claims ambiguity, its official art continues to teach the 150-year-old racial distinction.

Two Narratives. One History.

Modern Theory

The “skin of blackness” was symbolic, or perhaps referred to face paint, animal skins, or temporary markings.
It was never about literal skin color.

The Historical Record

- Prophets for 150+ years taught it was a literal curse of dark skin.
- They advocated intermarriage specifically to make Lamanites ‘white’.
- Church programs and manuals institutionalized this literal belief.
- Scriptural introductions were altered only after DNA evidence emerged.
- Modern church art continues to depict a literal, racial difference.

The Source of the Curse

And he had caused the cursing to come upon them, yea, even a sore cursing, because of their iniquity... wherefore, as they were white, and exceedingly fair and delightsome, that they might not be enticing unto my people the Lord God did cause a skin of blackness to come upon them.

2 Nephi 5:21, The Book of Mormon