

# Mormons brass denies report about blacks

Special to Sentinel-Voice

SALT LAKE CITY— Leaders of the Mormon Church denied a report in Monday's *Los Angeles Times* that said they're preparing to disavow racist statements and doctrines promulgated by past church leaders.

For more than 100 years, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints denied black men the right to be priests.

That changed in 1978 when church leaders claimed a revelation from God granted that right to men of all races.

The *Times* reported Monday that with the anniversary of that event approaching and with church membership growing in Africa, the church's Committee on Public Affairs was reviewing a plan to disavow past doctrine that was interpreted as saying blacks were inferior and their skin color was the biblical mark of Cain.

A statement could be forthcoming as early as next month, the newspaper said.

But church officials Monday called the report "erroneous," adding that "church leaders have

no plans to issue a statement" to mark the 20th anniversary of the revelation.

Later, the First Presidency — consisting of church President Gordon B. Hinckley and his two counselors — issued a statement saying they were "surprised" by the article's contents, and that neither they nor the ruling Quorum of Twelve Apostles had discussed the issue.

"Since the 1978 revelation granting the priesthood to all worthy males, millions of people of all races have embraced the restored gospel of Jesus Christ," the statement said. "The 1978 official declaration continues to speak for itself."

The reported debate comes at a time when church membership is blossoming in Africa and other developing nations. In February, Hinckley completed a five-country tour of Africa, where the church boasts more than 110,000 converts.

More recently, Hinckley addressed a regional conference of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People — a first for leaders of the 10-million member church.

But the *Times* reported that black members

of the church in the United States and Mormon scholars have warned that the "racist legacy" contained in various Mormon documents and authoritative statements risks undermining its mission.

"In the absence of any official corrections, these speculative and pejorative ideas will continue to be perpetuated in the church indefinitely," Mormon scholar Armand L. Mauss wrote in one internal paper prepared for church officials, the *Times* said.

Mauss, president of the Mormon History Association and a professor of sociology and religious studies at Washington State University in Pullman, Wash., did not immediately return calls to his home or office Monday.

Dr. Michael Quinn, a Mormon historian and author of seminal works on early Mormon leaders, said for the church to disavow the teaching would be a surprising move, "but it might be easier than you think."

That's because the church founder, Joseph Smith, was a non-racist who in the 1840s had ordained a black man into the church. Smith

insisted that blacks were not inferior, despite the contrary and overwhelming opinions of the times.

The church also has successfully distanced itself from other controversial statements once deemed doctrine — polygamy in particular, Quinn said.

Smith's egalitarian view of the races, for the most part, died with him when he was murdered in 1844 and the church's history on the issue has been spotty since.

It was Brigham Young, the church's second president and famed pioneer leader, who in 1852 said blacks were inferior and that slavery was a divine necessity.

The problem for church officials who want to distance themselves from past racist statements is how to do so when they were made by people considered prophets and whose statements are weighed as the word of God.

"The challenge isn't about racism," said Elbert Peck, editor of *Sunstone*, a scholarly journal of Mormon thought. "The problem becomes making the brethren look too human."

## Clinton's race panel addresses cops

Special to Sentinel-Voice

WASHINGTON, D.C. — Black motorists are searched four times more often than white drivers by Maryland state troopers.

Blacks account for less than half of violent crime arrests but for 60 percent of prison admissions.

Two-thirds of blacks say police racism is common across the country, and a majority of whites agree.

Such disparities were the focus Tuesday of the Advisory Board to the President's Initiative on Race, where Attorney General Janet Reno addressed a panel of academics and law enforcement officials seeking ways to make law enforcement more colorblind.

Most of the three-hour discussion centered on issues such as criminal profiling and whether race is a legitimate factor for police to use in stopping a citizen for questioning, the disparity between sentences for crack and powder cocaine convictions, and access to good legal counsel.

The meeting, held at George Washington University, was the eighth in a series of race panel gatherings.

One more is scheduled before the group writes its final report for President Clinton late this year.

Randall Kennedy, a Harvard Law School professor, said that all too often, the minority status of a citizen is read by law enforcement officials as a "negative signal" that identifies a person as prone to criminality.

Courts have said that race can be used as a factor in determining whether a suspect should be questioned, but several panelists suggested that can result in discrimination.

"If you are the first person off the plane, you fit the profile of a drug courier."

"But if you are the last person off the plane, you also fit the profile of a drug courier," said Kim Taylor-Thompson, an associate professor at the New York University School of Law.

"If you buy your (airplane) ticket with cash, you fit the profile of a drug courier, but if you use a credit card, you also fit the profile. It makes no sense."

Michael F. Yamamoto, a Los Angeles lawyer and former criminal defense attorney for Los Angeles County, asserted that "using race as part of a profile is racist."

The sole defense of profiling came from Florida International University Professor William Wilbanks, author of a book titled "The Myth of a Racist Criminal Justice System."

Wilbanks said that in jurisdictions where police can seize proceeds from drug arrests, it was "rational" for police to stop young black male motorists rather than elderly white women because young black men are more frequently involved in drug trafficking.

"When they get to seize the proceeds, who do you think they are going to stop?" Wilbanks asked. "You are almost asking them to discriminate."

## Distinguished lawyer digs in for battle on race relations

Special to Sentinel-Voice

According to lawyer Judith Winston, "People have shown us that they want to put their shoulders to the wheel and move this country further towards racial healing. That is why I am here and that is what keeps me going."

Winston is executive director of One America in the 21st Century: The President's Initiative on Race. And though she acknowledged bridging the racial gap will be tremendously challenging and frustrating, she expressed confidence that she can help lead the way.

"All that I have done up to now has prepared me for this unprecedented endeavor," she said.

Since graduating from Howard University in 1966 and earning a law degree from Georgetown University, Winston has worked as a lawyer on a variety of civil rights, race, and gender equity issues. She has served as deputy director of the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law; executive assistant

and legal counsel to the chair of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission; special assistant to the Director of the HEW Office for Civil Rights; Deputy Director for Public Policy at the Women's Legal Defense Fund; and Associate Professor of Law at American University.

Most recently, Winston was the General Counsel and Acting Under Secretary to the U.S. Department of Education, managing a staff of more than 80 attorneys who provided legal services to the Department, before being appointed last year by President Clinton to head his race initiative.

In February, Winston was honored with an alumni award for distinguished post graduate achievement from Howard University.

Winston is optimistic about the initiative's progress.


"If Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. were with us today, he would be pleased with President Bill Clinton's genuine, personal commitment to improving race

relations," she has said, noting that those willing to take a closer look at Clinton's record will see his dedication to this issue by legislating policy changes. "We recognize that you can't legislate people's attitudes, [but we] realize you can influence them," she said.

According to Winston, said public response to Clinton's initiative has been tremendous. Her office receives nearly 100 letters a week from young people and gets ideas from civic-minded individuals and organizations. Currently, her staff is compiling a data base of "promising practices" from all the suggestions flowing in. These ideas are listed on the PIR's website at [www.whitehouse.gov/Initiatives/OneAmerica](http://www.whitehouse.gov/Initiatives/OneAmerica).

Winston urged all concerned citizens to become actively involved in the initiative.

"Skeptics can stand on the sidelines and complain, but moving our nation a step further toward racial reconciliation is not a spectator sport," she said.



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