

# blacks the mormon priesthood setting the record straight

## Blacks and the Mormon Priesthood: Setting the Record Straight

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS Church), often referred to as the Mormon Church, has a complex history regarding race, particularly concerning the priesthood and the role of Black individuals within the faith. This article aims to provide a clear understanding of the historical context, the evolution of church policies, and the current stance of the LDS Church regarding race and the priesthood.

## Historical Context

The history of Blacks in the Mormon Church is a multifaceted narrative that has evolved over the years. To understand the current policies and beliefs, it is important to look at the historical context:

### The Early Years

1. Joseph Smith and Early Doctrine: Joseph Smith, the founder of the LDS Church, was known for his inclusive approach. He had a diverse set of followers, including Black individuals. In fact, during the early years of the church, some Black men were ordained to the priesthood.
2. The 1830s and 1840s: Smith's teachings suggested that all individuals, regardless of race, could have access to the priesthood. However, this inclusive stance began to shift after his death in 1844.

### Brigham Young's Influence

1. The Restriction: Under Brigham Young's leadership in the 1850s, the LDS Church implemented a policy that restricted Black individuals from receiving the priesthood. Young articulated beliefs that were influenced by prevailing societal attitudes toward race and slavery. This marked a significant shift in church doctrine.
2. Theological Justifications: Young and other church leaders provided various theological justifications for the ban, which were often rooted in interpretations of biblical texts, as well as the idea of the "curse of Cain."

# The Impact of the Ban

The ban on Black priesthood holders had profound effects on the Church and its members:

## Social and Cultural Ramifications

1. Exclusion from Leadership: The priesthood ban meant that Black members could not hold leadership positions within the church, limiting their roles and contributions.
2. Community Division: The ban contributed to divisions within the church community, as Black members often faced discrimination and exclusion from certain social and religious activities.

## Global Perceptions

1. International Growth: As the LDS Church expanded globally, the ban on Black priesthood holders affected its missionary efforts in Africa and among Black populations elsewhere. Many felt alienated from a faith that did not fully accept them.
2. Criticism and Controversy: The ban drew criticism from both within and outside the church, leading to questions about the church's commitment to the principles of equality and divine revelation.

## Changes in Church Policy

The turning point for the LDS Church regarding the priesthood and race came in the late 20th century:

## The Revelation of 1978

1. President Spencer W. Kimball: In June 1978, President Kimball announced a revelation that lifted the ban on Black men receiving the priesthood. This revelation marked a significant change in church policy and was seen as a divine intervention.
2. Impact of the Revelation: The announcement allowed thousands of Black men to receive the priesthood and participate fully in church activities for the first time in over a century. This shift also had a ripple effect on the church's global approach and its efforts to reach out to diverse populations.

## **Continued Reflection and Apologies**

1. **Acknowledgment of Past Mistakes:** In the years following the 1978 revelation, church leaders have acknowledged the painful history of racism within the church. They have expressed regret for the suffering that the priesthood ban caused.
2. **Official Statements:** The church has made several official statements denouncing racism and affirming the belief that all individuals are equal in the eyes of God. Leaders have emphasized the importance of unity and inclusion within the faith.

## **Current Stance on Race and the Priesthood**

Today, the LDS Church actively promotes messages of inclusion and equality:

### **Modern Leadership and Outreach**

1. **Diversity in Leadership:** The church has made strides towards diversifying its leadership and ensuring that individuals from various backgrounds have opportunities to serve in significant roles.
2. **Community Initiatives:** Various initiatives have been launched to foster understanding and collaboration among different racial and ethnic groups within the church community.

### **Education and Awareness**

1. **Historical Education:** The church has encouraged members to learn about its history, including the complexities surrounding race and the priesthood. Educational resources have been made available to help members understand this critical aspect of their faith.
2. **Combating Racism:** The church has taken a public stance against racism, encouraging members to combat prejudice in all forms, and promoting the idea that all individuals are children of God deserving of respect and dignity.

## **Conclusion**

The history of Blacks in the Mormon Church, particularly concerning the priesthood, is a narrative of struggle, change, and growth. While the church's past includes troubling policies and practices, significant progress

has been made in recent decades. The 1978 revelation marked a turning point, leading to a renewed commitment to inclusion and equality.

As the LDS Church continues to navigate its history, it is essential for members and leaders alike to embrace the lessons learned from the past. By fostering understanding, promoting diversity, and actively working against racism, the church can move forward while honoring the experiences of its members. The journey toward inclusivity and equality is ongoing, but it is one that the LDS Church is actively pursuing.

## **Frequently Asked Questions**

### **What was the historical stance of the LDS Church regarding Blacks and the priesthood?**

Historically, the LDS Church had a policy that prohibited Black men from being ordained to the priesthood, a practice that was officially ended in 1978 with a revelation received by church leaders.

### **What prompted the change in the LDS Church's policy on Blacks receiving the priesthood?**

The change in policy was influenced by various social factors, including the civil rights movement and a growing recognition of racial equality, culminating in a revelation that led to the 1978 declaration allowing Black men to hold the priesthood.

### **How do current LDS Church leaders address the church's past racial policies?**

Current LDS Church leaders acknowledge the past racial restrictions and emphasize a commitment to inclusivity, stating that all individuals, regardless of race, are equal in the eyes of God.

### **What resources are available for understanding the history of Blacks and the priesthood in the LDS Church?**

The LDS Church has published essays and resources on its official website, including a detailed essay titled 'Race and the Priesthood,' which outlines the church's historical views and the eventual change in policy.

### **How has the LDS Church's view on race evolved since**

## 1978?

Since 1978, the LDS Church has made efforts to promote racial equality and inclusivity, encouraging members to engage in discussions about race and fostering a more diverse and welcoming community.

## What impact did the 1978 revelation have on Black members of the LDS Church?

The 1978 revelation was a significant moment for Black members, as it allowed them full participation in church ordinances and leadership roles, fostering a sense of belonging and equality within the church community.

## Are there ongoing discussions within the LDS Church about race and inclusion?

Yes, ongoing discussions about race and inclusion continue within the LDS Church, with leaders and members encouraged to engage in dialogue and education on issues of race, equity, and justice.

## What role do Black members play in the LDS Church today?

Today, Black members of the LDS Church serve in various leadership positions and callings, contributing to the church's mission and community while advocating for greater representation and inclusion.

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