

Separate but Equal? Black Branches, Genesis Groups, or Integrated Wards?

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ALTHOUGH THE CIVIL RIGHTS LAWS of the 1960s outlawed segregation in education, employment, housing, and public services, black Americans and white Americans rarely interact socially and especially religiously. Prior to the 1960s some denominations, for instance the Catholic, did not segregate congregations but reserved special pews for Afro-Americans who were required either to take communion last or, in some cases, not at all (Smithson 1984, 25). In other denominations, such as the Baptist and Methodist, all-black congregations arose in the 1800s because Afro-Americans were excluded from white church services (Adams 1985, 1, 7). Although most of these restrictions have now been removed, “the church hour on Sunday mornings,” according to Richard T. Schaefer’s 1988 study, “still fits Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.’s description as ‘the most segregated hour of the week’” (1988, 147). Afro-Americans who have joined white churches often report that “inclusiveness is a mirage. Inclusiveness is a two way street that is only traveled by Blacks” (Adams 1985, 1, 7). Black churches also persist for the more commendable reason that many blacks regard them as “the major

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vehicle for the preservation and interpretation of the rich heritage of Black Americans" (Baer 1988, 163).

Until 1978 very few blacks belonged to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. However, following the Church's announcement that blacks could hold the priesthood, increased missionary work among Afro-Americans in largely black neighborhoods challenged LDS leaders, especially on the local level, with the same problems confronting other denominations. Should black Americans and white Americans worship separately, a pattern adopted by some LDS ethnic groups in the United States, or should they be integrated into the geographical wards? When a large number of Afro-Americans join in an area, should a ward or branch be set up which will have mostly black members? Do LDS Afro-Americans have cultural needs which are best served by association with other black members? In this article I will use sociological theories to discuss the advantages and disadvantages of maintaining exclusive black groups or branches, on the one hand, and integrated wards and branches, on the other, and then offer some alternative approaches to ethnic groups, especially blacks, within the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Throughout history, race, ethnicity, and religion have regularly created barriers among citizens of nations. Especially where physical and cultural differences were noticeable, one group has typically dominated, and the subordinate group has often been segregated, that is, separated physically "in residence, workplace, and social functions." Attempts to eliminate segregation have taken several alternative routes, including (1) assimilation, "the process by which a subordinate individual or group takes on the characteristics of the dominant group and is eventually accepted as part of the group"; (2) cultural pluralism, "mutual respect between various groups in a society . . . that allow[s] minorities to express their own culture without suffering prejudice or hostility"; and (3) fusion, "a minority and a majority group combining to form a new group." Fusion has taken place on a small scale in some countries, but, according to Schaefer, in the United States, the so-called melting pot, the dominant group has preferred assimilation and at best only tolerated cultural pluralism. Fusion has been a utopian dream (Schaefer 1988, 20, 36, 40, 48, 38-39).

Now that more blacks have joined the Church, Latter-day Saints must also make choices between segregation, assimilation, cultural pluralism, or fusion. They must answer questions such as: Should blacks be segregated into separate wards? Should they be assimilated into the mainstream Church? Should all groups be encouraged to maintain their culture with mutual respect for all? Should members of the Church

work towards a fusion beyond culture, a "Fourth Nephi" or "City of Enoch" society? A description of black groups and branches as well as integrated wards and branches shows how the Church has dealt with these options thus far.

This article is based mainly on oral histories and personal interviews. Despite limitations of memory and personal biases, oral history remains the only way to approach the study because few, if any, records exist. For example, only one sheet of paper in the LDS Church Archives tells of the black Genesis Group set up in Salt Lake City during the early 1970s. Branch and ward records submitted to the Historical Department do not provide enough details about church meetings to answer questions about organization and how blacks participate, much less how they are accepted. Since Church membership records do not include information on race, even the percentage of blacks in a ward or branch is impossible to determine. All such information must be gathered by personal observation or interview. The only published studies of LDS Afro-Americans to date are a few biographies and autobiographies of black members. The more numerous studies of the Church's priesthood restriction policy did not deal with the individual black's experience.

Recognizing this lack of information about black Latter-day Saints, even though there have been black members since the 1830s, the Charles Redd Center for Western Studies at Brigham Young University decided in 1985 to interview LDS Afro-Americans about their experiences in the Church. The Redd Center hoped to explore their unique role in Church history beyond being simply representatives of a priesthood policy. The Center was fortunate to hire Alan Cherry, a black author and humorist, who joined the Church in 1969. The 226 LDS Afro-Americans he interviewed came from all walks of life throughout the United States. They were men and women, young and old, single, married, and divorced. These interviews, along with the few published sources, demonstrate the marked diversity of experience and opinion among LDS Afro-Americans. The Redd Center also sponsored a symposium on the tenth anniversary of the revelation extending the priesthood to blacks and in 1989 completed a survey aimed more specifically at assessing the needs of LDS Afro-Americans.

GENESIS GROUPS

Salt Lake City

The first group of black members was organized in Salt Lake City during the early 1970s. Lamar Williams, who worked for the Church's

missionary department and had encouraged the Church to send missionaries to Africa, brought some of the Salt Lake LDS Afro-Americans together for socials. When asked if they could have a more formal organization, Williams advised them to contact the General Authorities (Williams and Williams 1981, 30-32). Ruffin Bridgeforth, Darius Gray, and Eugene Orr approached Church leaders to “see if there was some way that our people could meet together, such as the Danish and Norwegian branches” (Olsen 1980, 16). As a result, on 19 October 1971 Ruffin Bridgeforth was set apart by Gordon B. Hinckley as president of Genesis with Gray and Orr as counselors.

Although Genesis had no written objectives, some implied goals were to promote missionary work among blacks and to facilitate reactivation and fellowship among the rumored two hundred active and inactive blacks in the Salt Lake area (Olsen 1980, 14; Cherry 1985b; Mauss 1981, 41). The *Church News* announced that the group would be an auxiliary program of the Liberty Stake. Meetings would be “for the benefit and enjoyment of [the black] members, but [they] will attend their respective Sunday . . . meetings in their home wards, where they will retain their membership” (“Salt Lake” 1971, 13).

Throughout the Genesis group’s existence, Bridgeforth served as president; other officers changed as black members moved in and out of the area. Although the group met weekly and sponsored auxiliaries such as Relief Society and Primary (weekday activities during these years), members also attended their local wards. Since the priesthood restriction at that time led to some antagonism from the non-LDS black community and suspicion among the Church membership, Genesis members were encouraged to be “cautiously conservative in their association” and avoid media attention (Cherry 1985b). Helen Kennedy recalls Elder Boyd K. Packer expressing this viewpoint at the first meeting of Genesis: “Things that are young and tender need room to grow, and those who do not belong [should] stand back, give them room. This is not a tourist attraction” (Kennedy 1986, 15).

Ruffin Bridgeforth remembers, “When the group was organized, we didn’t know what was ahead, but we did feel that there would be many problems. We had dissension, and we had people who were dissatisfied. . . . Trying to keep them calm was a constant challenge. We had the General Authorities come and speak. But the dissenters would come and try to create problems. . . . We would have some of our people get up and want to do strange things” (in Olsen 1980, 16). Alan Cherry explains one source of friction: “Having an organization that didn’t have written purposes everyone could read, didn’t have a definite form to follow, didn’t have a means for its members to fully redress their

grievances with the way we were managing our affairs, . . . [made it] difficult for people . . . to effect changes” (1985a).

After the announcement of the June 1978 revelation, black members rejoiced as they contemplated being ordained to the priesthood and attending the temple. Many also wondered if there was any longer a need for Genesis (Garwood 1985, 20-21; Bridgeforth 1985, 21). Attendance dropped sharply, and it was often difficult to predict who would be at the meetings. However, the group continued to meet monthly to share testimonies. In 1987 Genesis discontinued its meetings although it was never officially disbanded (Bridgeforth 1988).

Oakland: Genesis II

When Marva Collins joined the Church in Montana shortly after the announcement of the revelation, she wrote President Spencer W. Kimball asking if there were other black Latter-day Saints and was referred to Genesis. She attended after she moved to Salt Lake City. Sometime later she moved to Oakland, California, where she started Genesis II (Collins 1985, 25). As of 1988, Genesis II was still meeting on the third Saturday of each month. In an August sacrament meeting report, Edgar Whittingham, a member of the Oakland Ninth Branch presidency in charge of Genesis, explained that Genesis meetings were usually socials, including an annual picnic open to missionaries, black members, and anyone from the Oakland Stake.

Washington, D.C., Genesis

In January 1986 black members in the Washington, D.C., area asked through Church channels for permission to organize a Genesis group. According to Cleeretta Smiley, its mission “was to unite the black LDS in the eastern region in valiant brotherhood and sisterhood.” Smiley described Genesis as her “most significant experience in the Church” until her “calling to [a] public communications job.” The D.C. Genesis met for special firesides; Ruffin Bridgeforth and Alan Cherry were among the invited speakers. The group also held missionary workshops and socials. The D.C. Genesis was discontinued in 1987 when a key leader became inactive and, because of other pressing commitments, no one else was willing to assume leadership (Smiley 1988).

Assessment: Genesis Groups

Genesis groups were in many ways similar to other LDS ethnic groups. As Ruffin Bridgeforth pointed out when asking in 1971 for permission to organize, a number of ethnic branches started during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries when new converts typically

immigrated to Utah. Many Swiss families, for instance, settled Cache Valley and the Bear Lake area (Mulder 1957). During this period, ethnic subgroups such as the German-speaking branch in Logan provided an opportunity for those with similar language and culture to worship together. These associations “provided an effective instrument of adjustment in the mother tongue while at the same time the immigrant converts were learning to participate in the life and leadership of their respective wards” (Embry 1988, 228).

In the same way, social contact between black Latter-day Saints helped strengthen their Church ties. George Garwood, who joined the Church in Tooele during the 1970s, attended Genesis. He enjoyed knowing there were other LDS Afro-Americans and meeting with them. After the 1978 revelation he felt Genesis still served an important social function: “I think it is good especially for blacks who are new members of the Church. They need that strength and they need that building up and that encouragement that comes from that group” (1985, 20-21). Ruffin Bridgeforth agreed: “We still need the social contact. I have got a black man out here in a ward. He is the only one. . . . If he has got nobody to talk to, sometimes he will just stay away” (1985, 4). In Washington, D.C., Clara McIlwain noted: “Before [Genesis] I only knew the four [black] people that were in my ward” (1986, 13). Natalie Palmer-Taylor adds: “It is just nice to know that people are all going through the same struggle and you are not alone” (1985, 34). Don Harwell felt that what had been valuable in the Genesis experience had not been changed by the revelation; “If there are good things, they are the same good things,” he observed (1985, 27-28). And others who did not feel a need to socialize with blacks still expressed concern that “perhaps there are other blacks who do need a social support and maybe I could help them there” (Hale 1985, 39).

Genesis groups have also enabled blacks to retain and enjoy their cultural distinctions and have encouraged cultural pluralism within the Church. Annette Reid enjoyed meeting with other black Latter-day Saints because they shared not only the gospel but also common words and lingo. From different geographic locations, black Genesis members all had roots in the South and East (Reid 1985, 30-31). Genesis meetings included “Baptist music [blacks] were brought up with. . . . It is just something to make you feel that you are with your people” (Bridgeforth 1985, 21). As James Sinquefield explained, Genesis gave “black members an opportunity to worship together in the Church.” Its intent “was not to segregate them. I hope that in the future maybe more Genesis groups will be organized within the Church throughout the world so that black members can worship together for culture sake” (1985, 12).

In Washington, D.C., "Negro spirituals" in special programs held by Genesis exposed other LDS members to black music in a Church-sponsored setting (Baltimore 1986).

Another significant benefit of Genesis groups was the plentiful opportunities for blacks to serve as leaders. Before blacks could hold the priesthood, they had few chances to learn organizational expertise. James Sinquefield, for instance, was grateful that Genesis gave him "an opportunity to gain experience in leadership. Brother Bridgeforth needed someone to fill the position of second counselor. I accepted it in faith hoping that I would do the best I could" (1985, 13).

Another reason Ruffin Bridgeforth was interested in starting a black organization was to share the gospel with nonmember blacks in the Salt Lake Valley (Olsen 1980, 14). A number of the interviewees for the LDS Afro-American Oral History Project worried blacks were not interested in the Church because they assumed priesthood restriction meant blacks were not allowed to be members at all. A black organization would clearly refute that notion. The D.C. Genesis, for example, volunteered with the Shiloh Baptist's family center; this not only provided service but also improved the Church's image in the black community and promoted missionary work (Edwards 1986).

Finally, Genesis also helped in the retention of black members, especially new converts. Carol Edwards, from the D.C. area, explains that many new members "get lost in the shuffle. . . . There is not a net to keep them in . . . long enough to realize what they should be concentrating on. That is why this Genesis Group is so important to us now because as they come in we are going to try to hold them and keep them in" (1986).

In this regard, Genesis has functioned for some as a transitional group much as the special language branches in Utah did earlier in the century. In Genesis groups, black members continued to associate with members of other wards, in addition to attending Genesis. In the special language branches "the old language was a way to teach the gospel until he [the immigrant] learned English" (Mulder 1957, 200). The new immigrants in Logan attended the German-speaking branch because they could not speak English; the next generation did not always learn German so they attended the branch less often. The branch was discontinued during World Wars I and II but recommenced after the wars. It was finally disbanded in 1963 when there were no longer any new immigrants and attendance at monthly meetings had dropped dramatically (Embry 1988, 228, 235).

Similarly, members like George Garwood attended Genesis for a short period of time and then, because of distance and increased ward involve-

ment, stopped going (1985, 20). Genesis' weekly meetings decreased to monthly gatherings after the revelation and then stopped altogether during 1987 for lack of attendance. As Garwood explained, "I felt that I needed to not be tied to that group because there are other people and you need to just get used to going around different people" (1985, 20).

In addition to benefits, Genesis groups also had problems that led to diminished attendance. For one thing, the double allegiances were time consuming. Those involved were expected to meet all the regular demands of their families and wards yet also pay special allegiance to Genesis. Mary Lucile Bankhead, a lifetime member who served as the Relief Society president of Salt Lake Genesis, explained to her friend Beverly Perry how frustrating it was to get people involved because they said they did not have the time (Perry 1988).

Genesis also had no defined purpose. Although there were no clearly stated objectives, there were also no opportunities to air grievances. Darrin Davis, who attended in Salt Lake City occasionally, recalls feeling "a little bit distressed when black people feel that there is a need for special treatment." He advocated a less culture-conscious approach to Church membership: "I think if we just take our role as regular Latter-day Saints and let our daily experiences teach one another, then things will go smoothest. . . . I am not sure why and what the Genesis Group is trying to accomplish." As for "special spiritual needs," he felt unconvinced of their existence. "Perhaps just a fellowshiping general need can be met" (1985, 27). Like Davis, Jerri Hale in 1985 saw some value in Genesis but questioned its goals beyond fellowship: "It depends on my needs at the moment as to how I view the Genesis Group. I think it is great. I wouldn't like to see it disbanded, although sometimes I wonder about its purpose now that the priesthood is here" (p. 39).

Establishing lines of authority was another source of confusion and difficulty. Genesis was set up initially because Bridgeforth, Gray, and Orr spoke to the General Authorities. The Salt Lake Genesis was assigned to a stake and a high council representative. In addition, a General Authority was asked to be a liaison, which appeared to give Genesis official Church sanction. According to Helen Kennedy, Elder Thomas S. Monson affirmed at the first meeting of Genesis, "This is a small beginning. It has the hand of approval from the First Presidency and the Twelve Apostles" (1986, 15). However, even with Church approval, organization and correlation with local wards and stakes was often troublesome. The Genesis groups in Oakland and Washington, D.C., had even more difficulty because they did not have the same close contact with Church headquarters. They were "initiated by local members seeking ecclesiastical assistance . . . [who often found] it difficult to

correlate . . . with church activities without enthusiastic involvement from local church leaders." These organizations were very much on their own to determine their purpose and activities. Since Genesis in Salt Lake City had no records, groups in other states could not look to Salt Lake to set up a new Genesis organization (Cherry 1985a).

One crucial area open to speculation was who should be in charge. Should leaders be called by a Church official? If so, which leaders should issue the calls? How long should leaders serve? All of these questions had only vague answers. In Salt Lake, Ruffin Bridgeforth was set apart by General Authorities as the head of Genesis. Unlike other wards and branches where bishops and branch presidents are rotated, Bridgeforth held that position for as long as Genesis met and in fact had not been released as of June 1988 (Bridgeforth 1988). Genesis in Washington, D.C., was headed by a woman who later became inactive. No directive outlined who should appoint a successor. Cleeretta Smiley was asked to replace her in this demanding leadership position but preferred not to lose her other local ward positions (Smiley 1988). The Oakland Genesis has fared longer and perhaps better because its leadership has varied. Although it was started by Marva Collins, she left the area, and a core of local black Latter-day Saints has championed its cause.

BLACK BRANCHES

Southwest Los Angeles

In addition to segregated Genesis groups, black branches have been an option since the revelation on priesthood. With increased missionary work in black neighborhoods, many Church members felt that if Church branches were located in those neighborhoods, more blacks would be interested in joining. For that reason, California Los Angeles Mission President F. Britton McConkie spearheaded one of the first exclusively black branches in the Watts area. The ninety-two people who attended the first meeting 2 December 1979 sustained Robert L. Lang as branch president. During his six years of service, Lang often served with no counselors and only rarely with two, although most of the auxiliaries were completely staffed (Southwest 1979, 1981). Lang and his wife Delores insisted it was not a black branch; it was the Southwest Los Angeles Branch, which was in a predominantly black area (R. Lang 1985, 13; D. Lang 1985, 2). However, a 1981 interview with Lang revealed that at that time the 109 members were nearly all black, except for several families of mixed race and approximately ten white members (Mauss 1981, 42).

Although the branch had assigned boundaries, a scarcity of priesthood holders meant leaders had to be recruited. In 1981, for example, Van Floyd, a black member married to a white, served as a member of the branch presidency (Southwest 1981). His daughter Gayla recalled, "We traveled to the branch to go to church rather than just going three blocks over to the Inglewood Ward" (Floyd 1986). The Joseph C. Smith family, a black family converted while stationed with the U.S. armed forces in Germany, in 1986 traveled from Orange County, where Joe worked after graduating from BYU, to attend the branch.

When Lang was released, Paul Divine from Long Beach was called as president. John Phillips, a white stake high councilor who served two years (1984-86) in the branch presidency under both Lang and Divine, remembered only one white member (and she was married to a black) of the approximately sixty to seventy who attended regularly (Phillips 1988).

The Southwest Los Angeles Branch had inherent problems. Members in the black neighborhoods had no transportation to church, and the branch presidency often spent most of their Sunday time between meetings giving rides. At first President McConkie and missionaries attended the branch regularly, which provided priesthood assistance (Phillips 1988; Perry 1985). Later, whites like Phillips and blacks like Floyd and Divine were imported from outside branch boundaries to fill leadership positions. Despite these difficulties, the Torrance California North Stake and later the Lawndale Stake, to which the branch was assigned, were committed to its success. However, in 1987 the branch was transferred to the Downey Stake.

With all of its problems, the branch was like an unwanted stepchild, and the new stake decided to disband it. At the final gathering, members expressed a desire to continue to hold socials, but there was no time available to schedule the meetinghouse (Phillips 1988). Some black members, such as Andrew and Elizabeth Pulley, became inactive, possibly because they felt uncomfortable in their new ward. Others did not know where to attend or were not accepted. John Phillips remembers being called about a black member who had passed away after the branch was disbanded. When he called the member's new ward, the bishop refused to accept responsibility and gave Phillips a list of other people to contact. After making a series of telephone calls, Phillips again called the bishop, this time pointing out that the deceased was a member of his ward. Fortunately, this bishop was the exception. Many members of the Southwest Los Angeles Branch who remained active were readily accepted into their geographical wards (Perry 1988; Lang and Lang 1988; Phillips 1988).

Charlotte, North Carolina

Mission President Ralph Bradley organized a similar branch in Charlotte, North Carolina, to solve transportation problems for the new inner city black members who had no way to travel to a suburban chapel. An inner city branch also eased the tension white and blacks felt while worshipping together. Apparently, some missionaries pursuing high baptismal numbers used welfare approaches in federal housing projects where nearly all the residents were conveniently home all day. They also stretched the mission rule that converts attend at least one sacrament meeting before joining the Church by hastily arranging a meeting before the baptism. Sister missionaries had especially great success, perhaps because many blacks had never experienced such Christian love from white women. These missionary efforts brought a large number of black converts into the new branch.

At first, missionary couples were in charge of the branch, with the husband serving as branch president. Then Robert Ezell, a black, was called to be branch president. A number of white local church leaders believed Ezell to be a former minister, but he had actually been an itinerant preacher who had felt "a calling" but had no formal training or prior administrative positions. Because of Ezell's inexperience in leadership, a white high councilman, Robert Sigg, was eventually called to head the branch. Alan Cherry visited in 1986 when Ezell was president; Duane Cardall from KSL Television visited in 1988 when Sigg was president. Membership quoted on both occasions varied, ranging from 900 to 1,200.¹ Only one to two hundred attended, many of whom were missionaries and other supportive members called to assist from the neighboring wards. As Cherry examined the congregation from Cardall's films in 1988, he recognized very few members who had been there in 1986 (Cherry 1986; Quick 1986; Chisolm 1986, 15; Cardall 1988).

Greensboro, North Carolina

Facing similar problems with transportation and prejudice, General Authorities in the Southeast Area presidency asked Johnnie McKoy, a local black member who had been instrumental in converting nearly all the black members in Greensboro, North Carolina, to help organize a

¹ While Alan Cherry was doing interviews in Charlotte, he stayed with a missionary couple; the husband had served as branch president before Ezell was called. They guessed about how many black members had joined in the area. When Cardall went to Charlotte, President Sigg could also only guess how many members should have been in the branch. The figures quoted in the paper are from Sigg's estimates. They correlate with the figures Alan Cherry heard from the missionary couple in Charlotte.

black branch. At first McKoy urged finding another solution, but when the area presidency countered that there was no time to come up with another plan, he supported the branch concept. When asked to serve as president, he declined, feeling the branch would need a white president who could enlist more assistance from stake leadership. Instead, he was made a counselor and instructed to be involved in all decisions. From this position he played a strategic role in directing the growth of the branch.

In June 1988 the branch was approximately 90 percent black and averaged about four baptisms a month with a 60 percent retention rate. Although only sixty to seventy people attended each week, there were actually 150 active members since many worked swing shifts and could only attend every other Sunday. About 50 percent of the members who had become inactive before the branch was organized had been reactivated. The branch qualified for a new building. According to McKoy in a 1988 interview, after the building's completion, local wards would be realigned so the branch would be about 60 percent black and 40 percent white. He felt many of the prejudice problems had been resolved and looked forward to the new boundaries. He also noted that his service on the high council, a position he held in June 1988, had given whites a chance to observe a black in a leadership position, which helped ease racial tensions (McKoy 1988a). Later that year McKoy was called as president of the black branch.

Assessment: Segregated Branches

As with Genesis groups, separate branches existed for a variety of important reasons—social, missionary, reactivation, and leadership training—but also were beset with a number of troublesome problems. Donna Chisolm decided to go to the Charlotte Sixth Branch because she “wanted to . . . get the black LDS experience” (1986, 13). Many happily settled into activity. As Mason Anderson admitted, “I had the opportunity to be transferred from the Charlotte Sixth Branch because I had moved. . . . [But] I did not want to change.” Blacks in these fledgling branches felt the energy of a new enterprise. “This is really encouraging to me to see people coming in, to be able to start from the beginning, to be able to work themselves up and to be able to take part in the Church. . . . I have liked the fellowship with the Saints that I have met there. I have come to know quite a few of them. . . . We are trying to organize ourselves and to get the Church set up” (Anderson 1986).

Many new black members who had stopped attending integrated wards because of black and white prejudice returned to activity. According to Johnnie McKoy, there were in Greensboro about four hundred blacks in the Church, many of them inactive. When the black

branch was formed, approximately seventy-five came back to the Church immediately. The branch “gave them opportunities to grow, to experience the gospel more deeply, more fully . . . because it was a close knit branch” (McKoy 1988a). Beverly Perry recalls attending the Southwest Los Angeles Branch when it was first organized. She felt a special spirit there because everyone was working hard for a common goal. Some people’s attendance represented great sacrifice, and a compelling love for the gospel could be felt in these young, struggling branches (Perry 1985). As McKoy observed in Greensboro, “When everyone is involved, it brings a closeness” (1988a).

Furthermore, a neighborhood branch would encourage more blacks to attend. The question black investigators all over Greensboro asked—“Are there blacks in the Church?”—would be answered when they saw other black members at Church meetings (McKoy 1988a). In California, John Phillips dreamed that the Southwest Los Angeles Branch would establish a physical presence of the Church in Watts, a beginning from which wards and then stakes would grow (1988). As Robert Lang explained, “The [Southwest Los Angeles] branch has done wonders for blacks and whites to come and visit with us to see that there is a group of black people that are heading in the right direction. They belong to the Church” (1985, 18). Lidge Johnson, a stake presidency member in Virginia, wanted to form a branch in Petersburg, traditionally a black community, so that the people living there would not have to attend church in Colonial Heights, a basically white community. Johnson hoped meetings in Petersburg would spur whole congregations of blacks to join the Church (1988).

Black branches also provided valuable opportunities for LDS Afro-Americans to hold a variety of positions new converts might not be called to in large wards. As Robert Lang, president of the Southwest Los Angeles Branch, argued, “A black man gets baptized into a ward with another race of people. What is the chance of this particular black person getting a calling in order to learn leadership? It is kind of slim” (1985, 12). Elizabeth Pulley explained, “I have the opportunity to teach mother education and social relations classes in Relief Society. I have worked in the Primary” (1985, 15). Mason Anderson elected to attend the Charlotte branch because “I felt if I went into a church that was already established, I would not be able to do hardly anything. Rather than being on the fight for the Lord, I might be pushed out and not have the opportunity and might just sit cold over in another church. . . . I might not have the opportunity to be a worker or be active there as I am here. . . . To be able to work is really helping me in my growth in the . . . Church” (1986).

This strength also proved a weakness when new converts fairly frequently misunderstood Church procedure and had problems in leadership positions. Beverly Perry commented in 1985, "Some good has come out of the [Southwest Los Angeles] branch . . . but I think the leadership needs to be reinforced. In the beginning I was telling everyone, 'Go because it is neat.' But now I do not think I would tell anyone to go because they are so disorganized." In North Carolina, members of the Charlotte Sixth Branch soon recognized Robert Ezell's inexperience with Church organization. Melonie Quick recalls that as the new branch president, Ezell commenced speaking every Sunday, but "when he speaks, he is mostly reading out of one of the [Church] books. . . . It's kind of difficult to sit and listen to someone when they really don't understand what they are saying" (1986). Donna Chisolm, also from the Charlotte Sixth, "noticed just last Sunday we had some time . . . in between speakers. Right before the last speaker [the leaders] decided all of a sudden that they were going to ask somebody to come up and sing a song right there in the middle of sacrament [meeting]. It hadn't been arranged prior to that time. Nobody volunteered, but still I thought, 'They are not supposed to do that'" (1986, 16).

Having all new members led to some confusion about Church organization as well as procedures. Gladys Brown, a convert from Charlotte, remembers asking once if the leaders could "take fifteen minutes . . . and explain to the people what [Relief Society] is all about." She also had questions about the temple, which no one seemed to have time to answer (1986). Perhaps they simply lacked the information. Knowledge about procedures was also spotty. According to Donna Chisolm, after opening exercises the Relief Society president would announce who was going to give the lesson, but often the person would not be there. The president eventually asked Chisolm, who was there regularly, to take over the job but never had the call issued through the branch presidency (1986, 15-16).

Not knowing exactly how the Church should operate, new black members sometimes turned to former religious experiences as guidelines. Leaders who knew better were often frustrated. "The problem is unlearning all of the things that blacks learned in their Baptist churches" (R. Lang 1985, 15). Complained Benjamin Washington from the Charlotte Sixth Branch, "They just want to get up there and sing. I do not think there is any harm in singing good songs on Sunday, but all of that whooping and hollering . . . that fire and brimstone stuff is their biggest problem" (1986, 17). The wife of the branch president in Charlotte recalled a high council sacrament meeting speaker repeating the familiar Church platitude that the Church was the same wherever

he went. From the back row one of the members responded fervently, "Amen, Brother!" (Cardall 1988)

Before Alan Cherry went to Charlotte to conduct interviews for the Redd Center, he scheduled all interviews in advance. Since this procedure had worked well in other communities and since he was interviewing current and former branch leaders, he was confident all would proceed as planned. However, of fourteen appointments, eleven cancelled and he was forced to reschedule almost all the interviews. Since many branch members came from "backgrounds steeped in poor communication and organizational skills," according to Cherry, they "did not seem to understand the necessity for accurate records, deadlines, accountability, and so many other typical expectations of Latter-day Saint activity." One woman asked him to tell the branch to remove her name from the Church records because she was going back to her former church, where she enjoyed the music. He also learned the Relief Society president had submitted her resignation, rather than counseling with the branch president about her concerns and desire for a release, revealing a regrettable misunderstanding of Church procedure. "With so many new members, many were overwhelmed by what the Church expected and this led to feelings of inferiority, organizational problems, and inactivity" (Cherry 1986).

Another drawback of black branches was that segregation of Afro-Americans from others in some cases prolonged racial tensions. According to Darlene Bowden from Charlotte, "There are not a whole lot of whites going to the black church, and there are not a whole lot of blacks going to the white church. There is still that uncomfortable racial feeling. It is leaning in there like a thick smog" (1986). Myths some blacks had about whites, such as "all white Latter-day Saints are prejudiced," persisted.

The all-black composition also provided an opportunity to express "black woes," including how Afro-Americans were being mistreated in the Church. Other blacks, including Beverly Perry in the Southwest Los Angeles Branch, objected to this attitude: "Being members of the Church we usually are talking about more elevated things, things that enlighten and not things that are dark and gloomy. . . . We don't have time for the negative" (1985). Unfortunately, a number of black Latter-day Saints cried for separation from whites because they felt uncomfortable worshipping with them. After observing the Southwest Los Angeles Branch, Alan Cherry noted, "An unintentional result [of the branch] might be the emergence of weakness as the common denominator. More capable Latter-day Saints will leave it to learn and grow while weaker ones will stay, further institutionalizing their belief they do not fit into the geographical church they might describe as a 'white' church" (Cherry 1985a).

Equally destructive were the conclusions white members drew about blacks from the exclusively black branches. Rather than viewing a branch as a collection of individuals, many erroneously generalized that all blacks have the same easily identifiable problems. They seemed to believe all blacks come "from the land of homogeneity" (Cherry 1988). For example, one couple in Charlotte confidently stated all blacks were unwilling to make commitments. This damaging pronouncement arose from their work with inactive blacks in the inner city. They called members by the wrong names, evidently assuming all blacks looked alike. Because some blacks in Charlotte were regularly late to meetings, this couple joked about "Black Time" being even later than "Mormon Standard Time." The mission president also fostered stereotypes by discussing the "black nation" with missionaries in his charge as if blacks somehow occupied a separate part of the United States (Cardall 1988). In Greensboro, while some white members accepted Johnnie McKoy as a member of the high council and recognized his value as a Church leader, they continued to believe that other blacks had no potential leadership abilities and were noticeably reluctant to accept other blacks as openly as they had learned to accept McKoy (McKoy 1988a).

Like Genesis groups, black branches also experienced leadership problems. With a small pool of priesthood holders to draw from, leaders were either called for an overly long period of time or from outside branch boundaries. For local black leaders, who were frequently used to the black minister model, being released from a calling, especially after a long period of time, was often seen as a kind of reproach rather than a normal Church procedure. Outside white leaders, while very committed to the calling, sometimes continued to promote stereotypes. Even worse, importing leaders sent the message to the black communities that the Church did not feel blacks were capable of running the Church.

Creating black branches also sends mixed messages to the black community. Questioned about the possibility of black branches in Chicago, Catherine Stokes, Relief Society president in an integrated Chicago ward, commented, "As far as Chicago, Illinois, and most of America, that would be a public relations nightmare for the Church. It would tend to confirm what most people think about the Church, that it is racist" (1988a). Black branches and even Genesis groups may falsely communicate a message that blacks really were not wanted in the Church or that they needed to stay in their place. Jerri Hale summarized the dilemma: "There are some blacks who need [them]. They feel that in the cases where they are the only black in their ward or stake [a black organization] would serve as a support to them. . . . [But] then you would have the other side saying that the Church segregates you" (1985, 39-40).

INTEGRATED WARDS

The integrated wards and branches have, of course, also had their share of both successes and failures. In areas with only a few black members they, of course, simply became part of local wards and branches. In other places, larger numbers of blacks were part of integrated geographical wards. Many viewed this as preferable to a temporary special branch or ward for blacks. Don Harwell, for instance, argued, "I think one problem we have as black people is we always feel like we need to be clustered together in numbers. Instead I think we need to do exactly what the Church has got us doing, keep us separated and keep us filling in wards. . . . I think it's nice there is Genesis, and I enjoy Genesis. It is nice to get together with black people once in a while, but I do not think we should look for a special branch. We need to fit into the mainstream" (1985, 26).

Charlotte First Ward

The Charlotte First Ward went out of its way to meet the needs of blacks. With approximately 5 percent black members, the ward exerted itself to make sure home teachers and visiting teachers were assigned who could also provide transportation and fellowshipping to the new members. The bishop's son gave his scriptures to a new young black member, and the deacons' quorum raised funds to buy the convert camping equipment. The bishop urged that special needs be spread through existing wards and branches; seemingly large problems might appear small if they were not all centered in one place (Cardall 1988).

Oakland: Virginia Street Services

The number of blacks joining the Church in the Oakland area made a separate branch for blacks seem logical since there were already a number of special wards for Tongans, Samoans, Chinese, Vietnamese, and even "families . . . with a head of household over 45 years old and no children living at home" (Larsen and Larsen 1987, 38-39). Anyone living in Oakland and not in one of these special groups was a member of the Oakland First Ward, which included the exclusive Piedmont area as well as the inner city. According to several sources, the new black members felt uncomfortable attending the "big" ward with the "rich" people from Piedmont. Investigators and new members were staying away from church. In March 1986, the mission set up the Virginia Street Services, which included sacrament meeting and Sunday school. The Virginia Street chapel, the first LDS chapel in Oakland, had been abandoned because the neighborhood had changed to a largely black

and Latino area, and many whites were afraid to go there. Now the Church decided to remodel it. Until the remodeling was completed, the "Virginia Street Services" were held in the stake center near the Oakland Temple.

At first the Virginia Street Services appeared to be a black branch since those attending were either Afro-American, married to an Afro-American, or missionaries—even though the missionaries and a member of the high council insisted that this was a geographical division. By 1988 the planned division of the Oakland First Ward was clear. Using Interstate 580 as a dividing line separating Piedmont from the inner city, the Virginia Street Services were now called the Oakland Ninth Branch. When I attended a service on 14 August 1988, approximately half of the congregation was black. One white member commented that although she had been reluctant to attend the branch at first, implying concerns about the economic and racial mix, she now did not want to be anywhere else. She felt a special spirit there. Two men from Piedmont have served as branch presidents; the counselors in August 1988 were black members. Other than the imported branch presidents, the leadership seemed to come from within the branch boundaries (Carey 1986; J. Sorensen 1986; N. Sorensen 1986; Missionaries 1986).

Chicago: Hyde Park

Another example of an integrated ward is Chicago's Hyde Park. A decade ago Hyde Park was a white student branch near the University of Chicago. After the 1978 revelation, however, blacks started joining in the area, amounting to a 300 percent increase in ward membership. Since the ward has outgrown its converted building, ward members have been holding fund-raising activities to finance a new chapel. Of the 500,000 people who lived within ward boundaries as of 1988, 97 percent were black. These boundaries included not only the west side of Chicago "known more for its street gangs and basketball players," but also the University of Chicago and an upper class neighborhood ("Blacks" 1989). Ward members consisted of transient University of Chicago graduate students and a more stable population which included professors from the University of Chicago, local residents, a number of whom were black, and deaf members from throughout the Chicago area (Stokes 1988a).

Assessment: Integrated Wards

One major advantage of an integrated ward is the training new members receive simply by watching how other members conduct themselves in church and perform in their church callings. There is a lot to

learn. As Emanuel Reid pointed out in the 1988 LDS Afro-American Symposium:

When you visit a black Baptist church like I have on many occasions, generally the preacher, his deacons, and those who have various callings take care of everything. All you have to do is come and sit and say amen. When the tray is passed around, put your money in. . . . After the sermon is over, you get up and go home. You don't have the opportunities to conduct a lot of classes, to conduct meetings, and to do things of that nature. As blacks coming into the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, there is a great need that they learn those organizational skills. They can only come through someone taking the time [to explain] or through their observation.

Johnnie McKoy recalled that when he first joined the Church, "I was a little reluctant to really get involved. . . . I knew I had a strong testimony of the gospel and eventually got to do something. . . . I finally worked up to where they thought I was qualified to become the ward mission leader" (1988c). Based on his experience watching other new members, he commented that he did not want black leaders in the Greensboro branch unless they had organizational skills. Instead, he suggested, skilled leaders should call new members as counselors to train them about Church operations. By observation and discussion with members, converts will learn about Church organizations and procedures (1988a).

John Phillips, serving in 1988 as a bishop of a multi-cultural ward in the Los Angeles area, recalled how some Tongans in his ward had originally been reluctant to attend. After he visited in their homes and extended love and fellowship, they accepted him as their bishop and attended the ward. While they did not have the knowledge to be called as auxiliary presidents, he encouraged other ward members to accept them as counselors so they could learn Church procedure (1988).

Integrated wards also diminished the sense of difference between blacks and whites as they worked together for a common cause and shared values. A member of the Hyde Park Ward told Cathy Stokes that the Church was the only place where he could sit down with someone from another race and talk about what was important in each of their lives. It was also the only place where "Come, Come Ye Saints" and "Lift Up Your Voice and Sing," the NAACP theme often referred to as the black national anthem, were sung in the same meeting. Hearing them together, he was made acutely aware of the common struggles of all people (Stokes 1988b). Phillip Webb from Chicago said,

Within the Church, I've had the sense that maybe the whites are more relaxed around the black members because they do see blacks for what they really can be and not as stereotypes. I think that's how the relationships within the Church are developed because they're seeing blacks as human beings rather than as

some threat out on the public streets. With more and more blacks becoming members of the Church lately, . . . I think [white] people will learn to accept black people as just another human being and not precast them as some kind of a problem. (1988)

As Nathleen Albright urged, "The ward should accept them as individuals, not as black members" (1985, 19).

Catherine Stokes pointed out that the civil rights advocates died for full participation, and the gospel message is also that we should be together (1988b). Contact comes not only at church but also through home teaching and visiting teaching. Susan Walker from Chicago recalled the closeness she felt with her home teacher. He had just moved and she explained, "I really miss him." He came every month to visit and took her to meetings (1988, 12). Linda Williams, pregnant when she joined the Church, was deeply moved when one of her visiting teachers volunteered to be with her through labor. "It was just the time and effort she took on her part to go out of her way and do something for me. I think that was another important reason for me becoming faithful in the Church" (1988, 6). But contact and concern were not restricted to formal Church assignments. Susan Walker recalled young graduate students in her ward who went out of their way to make sure she made it to church and other meetings (1988, 12).

However, not all blacks and whites in their integrated wards and branches rose above the long history of segregation, discrimination, and prejudice in the United States. Johnnie McKoy reports that blacks attending the Greensboro Second Ward were told in private that they were not wanted. He also recalled that one white ward member, whom he home taught, continued to phone him regularly because she was lonely and he was willing to listen. Yet when local leaders were organizing the black branch, she called McKoy to tell him blacks could not have a branch because they have no leadership skills, completely forgetting that she was speaking to a black (1988a).

Prejudice was, of course, not limited to the South. Elizabeth Pulley recalled how the whites in her southern California ward seemed to be very friendly but were rude behind her back. She said one sister kissed her, and then afterwards she saw the same sister in the restroom washing her lips (1985, 10-11). Eva Willis from St. Louis said that while her husband has not felt any discrimination, "I have had some problems. Of course, women are different than men. I have sisters today that won't speak to me as I go down the hall. I have sisters who teach the classes on Sunday in Relief Society that will not call on me if I raise my hand. I have sisters that if I walk up to them and start talking to them they completely ignore me" (1988).

Janis Parker from Chicago said that one sister she was assigned to visit teach would never talk directly to her. "I would be sitting there like a shadow and virtually be ignored. At first I thought maybe it was because she knew my visiting teaching companion better because they live in the same area basically. Then it dawned on me that she comes from a small town in Utah. She doesn't know a thing about black people. Maybe she doesn't know how to talk to me or maybe I don't count in her eyes because I'm black" (1988, 24). Johnnie McKoy recalled a visiting high councilor who walked out of his way when he came to visit the branch so he would not have to shake McKoy's hand (1988a).

While some of these experiences were clearly cases of prejudice, McKoy recognized that others may have been simply individuals not going out of their way to be friendly. He remarked, "I guess the Latter-day Saints that have been in the Church a long time take most everything for granted. Blacks have a special need. Coming into a situation like this, they need to feel that they are wanted. They [white Latter-day Saints] need to place a little more emphasis in letting them [new black converts] know that they recognize they are there and appreciate them coming in. This is not being done" (1986, 13-14).

Janis Parker, for instance, felt very close to a young couple in the ward but learned only through the grapevine that they had had their baby. "I felt hurt that I didn't know when I found out that everybody else in the ward knew. [I thought they were saying], 'You're not a part of our lives. You are black. You don't count.' . . . All of a sudden I *became* black because I don't think of myself as a black person. I only think of myself as a person, and all of a sudden it dawned on me that I'm black." As she thought about the experience more, however, she realized the problems that the young couple with their first child were probably having and understood their neglect was probably not related to her being black (1988, 25).

Susan Walker said when she first went to the Hyde Park Ward, "It was a little bit hard because I knew not a soul, nobody but the missionaries. Nobody spoke to me. It was quite some time before they did" (1988, 11). Sarah Gripper, the only black member in her Springfield, Illinois, ward, viewed the Relief Society sisters as "cliquey" and felt she didn't fit in because she was the only black member. She had difficulties with callings and asked to be released from them. She explained, "I fell into a valley. This is totally honest. I have never ever used being black as an excuse for not fitting in anywhere. I am using that now. . . . Even though I know the word is true and that's why I joined the Church, I just feel like I should go back to my parents' church because I won't have the pressure. I would feel like I fit in." Only a precariously small support system was

keeping her in the Church at that time (1988).

Melvin McCoy from Barberton, Ohio, regarded one Church member who did not speak to him before he joined as prejudiced. Yet once McCoy met him at church, he was quite the opposite. "He's been very open and very friendly" (1988). Arthur Preston in Chicago concluded that being ordained to the priesthood in the bishop's office and the unequal number of blacks and whites in the circles when babies were blessed were signs of prejudice (1988). In nearly every one of these cases, the white Church members probably did not know that the black members were interpreting their behaviors as signs of prejudice. Both blacks and whites did not completely live the Golden Rule: the whites were not friendly; the blacks saw any lack of attention as prejudice.

Along with possible prejudice, even some well-meaning people could not seem to quit stereotyping. Cathy Stokes recalled being asked once, "Tell us how to approach black people." Her response was, naturally, "Which ones?" since "the approach with the black university professor is much different than the person who is marginally making a living. I think we need to recognize that there is not a cookie cutter stamp . . . for black people that you can just apply universally" (1988a). Victor Soil recalls the graduate students in the Hyde Park Ward automatically talked down to him assuming he had little or no education, based on their stereotypes. He felt affronted that he should have to advertise that he had college degrees to be treated as an intellectual equal. He also remembers that when he first joined the Church some members felt that "they were keeping black people as pets. But they're not pets," he emphasizes. "They're people that can be taught and can be of service to other people and the Lord. They're not people just to be kept around to make you feel better" (1988, 10). Those in integrated wards who were unable to shed the old stereotypes may have turned blacks away from the Church just as certainly as those who were openly prejudiced.

Both segregation or assimilation, then, have some substantial benefits as well as some frustrating detriments. Yet there remain at least two other approaches to be attempted, namely: cultural pluralism and fusion. As William E. B. DuBois points out, a black "simply wishes to make it possible to be both a Negro and an American, without being cursed and spit upon by his fellows, without having the door of opportunity closed roughly in his face" (in Schaefer 1988, 247-48). Cultural pluralism would require Church members to accept all cultures as equally valuable, recognizing that we all need to learn to validate and enjoy each other's differences. Hattie Soil recalls a talk she gave in church where she explained, "I wasn't raised around white people either," implying she also needed to learn to accept white people and their cultural style (1988, 12).

CONCLUSION

In the early days of the Church, even up until World War II, the Church was so small that it was considered a virtue to accept the dominant culture. According to historian Stephen McCracken, LDS immigrants to Utah were encouraged to “adopt the manners and customs of the American people, fit themselves to become good and loyal citizens of this country, and by their good works show that they are true and faithful Latter-day Saints” (1986, 107). However, the Church has grown so rapidly throughout the world since 1951 it is no longer practical, even were it desirable, for all members to become walking replications of Utah/Idaho Mormons. Blacks, as well as Italians, Hispanics, Tongans, and Vietnamese, all have cultural goods to offer the Church. As Annette Reid explained, “I think there should be more of an integral sharing of cultures among all people within the Church. Let somebody sing a hymn that is not in the hymnbook, so to speak, that may be traditionally called a Baptist hymn or a Negro spiritual or let someone sing a Korean song in sacrament meeting. We are a church of many people and many cultures. I think what we do should reflect that” (1985, 29).

The Logan Tenth Ward successfully welcomed the Swiss immigrants in ways Reid might have been suggesting. Swiss culture was not limited to expression in the German-speaking branch. Occasionally choirs sang in German in the Logan Tenth Ward, members often bore their testimonies in German or Swiss, and ward parties included polkas and Swiss food. Non Swiss-German ward members enjoyed the testimonies, music, dancing, and food, and some even learned a few German words (Embry 1988, 222-35). While it might be argued that that approach will not work where a ward is integrating only a few blacks, plenty of luaus are held throughout the Church where there are no Polynesians in the ward. Just after I began working for BYU, I recall that my home teacher, Joke Kokkonen, a convert and graduate student, always prayed in Finnish when he visited me. I could cite other examples of non-American cultures being shared in wards.

However, according to LDS doctrine, respect for all cultures will not be the final answer to the misunderstandings between people. Latter-day Saints believe that there will eventually be a society like that of the city of Enoch or the one described in 4 Nephi:

And it came to pass that there was no contention in the land, because of the love of God which did dwell in the hearts of the people. And there were no envyings, nor strifes, nor tumults, nor whoredoms, nor lyings, nor murders, nor any manner of lasciviousness; and surely there could not be a happier people among all the people who had been created by the hand of God. There were no robbers, nor

murderers, neither were there Lamanites, nor any manner of -ites, but they were in one, children of Christ, and heirs to the kingdom of God. (1:15-17)

Although the Church has not reached that ideal by any means, our best chance is to learn to grow side by side, bearing one another's burdens and sharing one another's joys. There may be moments of considerable discomfort if whites and blacks, Tongans and Samoans, Japanese and Koreans, and other cultures with historical conflicts are asked to worship together. But as we approach the last days, we need to strive for a new culture where we will be one. As Jerri Hale Harwell envisioned, she looks forward to the day when she will not be seen as a black Latter-day Saint, but simply as a child of God (1988).

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