A Part of History Overlooked


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**How do non-Mormons feel about living in Utah?** *Missing Stories* answers many such questions. These are the people’s words and not interpretation. As Helen Papanikolas explains in the introduction, “This is not a book of scholarly history. It is a book of voices, voices of speakers who desperately want us to know how life was for them and their forbears in Utah” (1).

In 1982 the Oral History Institute received a small Utah Humanities Council grant to conduct interviews. From a modest beginning, the project grew to 729 interviews, including photographs, with Utes, African Americans, Jews, Chinese, Italians, Japanese, Greeks, and Chicano-Hispanos. Each section includes an introduction by a member of the ethnic group or a knowledgeable scholar, followed by eight to ten interview excerpts. The book is beautifully illustrated with the narrators’ photographs.

I applaud the Oral History Institute for collecting and preserving these stories. I can only imagine the problems of transcribing and translating the stories of first-generation Japanese. I enjoy the variety of people represented. Chiyo Matsumiya was a picture bride who came from Japan to marry; Jim Yoshiho Tazoi was born in Garland, Utah, and fought in Europe during World War II. Many interviewees have now passed away, and I am thrilled their stories were preserved.

Most interviewees describe their lives in their own communities. A few mention their interactions with Mormons. Their complaints about Latter-day Saints hurt me. I want to scream, “That’s not true.” But then I calm down and realize the people are telling their stories. I learn how a non-Mormon sees me. Vito Bonacci, an Italian immigrant and union organizer, explains, “Utah was a rough state to organize in because Mormons were against it. And in this state, if you ain’t got them behind you, you ain’t going to get nowhere. ... I [still] don’t know why they don’t believe in it. But I work[ed] for a lot of strong Mormons. And they were always trying to tell me they were better than we were.” Bonacci befriended a Mormon bishop at work, “but every time we argued about something, he said, ‘You’re in the minority. We are [the] real Americans’” (274).

*Missing Stories,* however, is not without shortcomings. For example, it is difficult to read. Oral historians debate on how to transfer the spoken word into a written text. Some tran-