

FINDING AGENCY IN CAPTIVITY: RESISTANCE, CO-OPTATION, AND REPLICATION AMONG INDENTURED INDIANS, 1847–1900¹

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When Mormon settlers entered the Salt Lake Valley in 1847, they brought with them their institutions and attitudes. These included a perception of Native Americans as fallen Israelites who, the Book of Mormon promised, would someday join Mormons in Zion. Latter-day Saints never quite realized those expectations in New York, nor in Ohio, Missouri, or Illinois, and upon entry into the Great Basin, Mormons once again found Indians largely disinterested. Salvation preached by Brigham Young and others had less effect on local Native Americans than the perpetual encroachment on their lands. Despite a theology that foreshadowed cooperation, Mormon–Indian relations remained heated, particularly during the Walker War (1853–54) and Black Hawk War (1865–68). Historian W. Paul Reeve has noted that “the idealistic spiritual vision sometimes suffered” as the “model of

1. *Dialogue* seeks to follow Gregory Younging’s *Elements of Indigenous Style* in its editorial commitment to respecting Indigenous knowledge and scholarship. The author of this piece has requested to deviate from *Dialogue*’s current house style guide, including using the term “Indian” and not capitalizing the term “indigenous,” both of which reflect the school of thought he is presently engaging.

redeemable Lamanites occasionally devolved into unredeemable.”² Nevertheless, Mormons did not fully abandon their theological obligations to their Lamanite brethren, and a myriad of outreach programs emerged, including missions and demonstration farms, most notably the Washakie Colony on the modern-day Utah–Idaho border. Still, the most far-reaching effort to absorb Native American converts often centered not in converting and transforming adults but rather their children.

Between 1847 and 1900, Mormon households absorbed no fewer than four hundred Native American children as part of a clearly manifest policy to redeem Indians from the “thralls of barbarity” or even eminent death at the hands of rival bands. Justifications aside, hundreds of Native American youth found themselves encompassed by white Mormon society. According to a comprehensive index developed by Richard Kitchen and Michael Bennion, half of these captives were under five years old at the time they joined Mormon families, and the remainder effectively ranged from five to ten years old.³ They grew up in a liminal status, not quite Indian and not quite white, and scholars have sparred over their status as slaves, servants, or adopted family members.⁴ Indeed, that unresolved debate is echoed in this article, and for the purposes of this work I use the term “indentured” to refer to

2. W. Paul Reeve, *Religion of a Different Color: Race and the Mormon Struggle for Whiteness* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 78.

3. Michael Kay Bennion, “Captivity, Adoption, Marriage, and Identity: Native American Children in Mormon Homes, 1847–1900” (PhD diss., University of Nevada, Las Vegas, 2012), 245; Richard D. Kitchen, “Mormon-Indian Relations in Deseret: Intermarriage and Indenture, 1847–1877” (PhD diss., Arizona State University, 2002).

4. Brian Q. Cannon, “Adopted or Indentured, 1850–1870: Native Children in Mormon Households,” in *Nearly Everything Imaginable: The Everyday Life of Utah’s Mormon Pioneers*, edited by Ronald W. Walker and Doris R. Dant (Provo: Brigham Young University Press, 1999), 341–57; Andrés Reséndez, *The*

these Native Americans as an imperfect compromise title in between loved adoptee and chattel slave. In truth, however, a broad spectrum likely existed.

The presence of indentured Indians in nineteenth-century Mormon society is a well-known secret enjoying a recent revival of interest. Trained scholars and lay historians have related these experiences over the past decades, beginning with work by Juanita Brooks, Kate Carter, and the Daughters of Utah Pioneers.⁵ More recently, Brian Cannon revisited the topic in his 2017 presidential address to the Mormon History Association.⁶ Additionally, genealogically-minded Mormons have long traced lineages that included Native American household members and even celebrated their diverse origins, perhaps in part recognizing the fulfilment of LDS theology regarding the blossoming of the Lamanites; such narratives often emphasize the triumph of civilization evidenced by a portrayal of Native American progenitors as clean, industrious, faithful—as redeemed. Consequently, family memoirs may be more informative of colonial ideology than actual experiences of indentured Indians. There is a temptation to categorize these historical actors in either of two tropes: dupe victims or empowered converts. How should twenty-first-century readers authentically understand the

Other Slavery: The Uncovered Story of Indian Enslavement in America (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2016), 266–72.

5. Juanita Brooks, “Indian Relations on the Mormon Frontier,” *Utah Historical Quarterly* 12, nos. 1–2 (1944): 1–48; Kate B. Carter, *Heart Throbs of the West*, 12 vols. (Salt Lake City: Daughters of Utah Pioneers, 1939–1951); Kate B. Carter, *Our Pioneer Heritage*, 20 vols. (Salt Lake City: Daughters of Utah Pioneers, 1958–1977); Kate B. Carter, *Treasures of Pioneer History*, 6 vols. (Salt Lake City: Daughters of Utah Pioneers), 1952–1957).

6. Brian Q. Cannon, “‘To Buy Up the Lamanite Children as Fast as They Could’: Indentured Servitude in Nineteenth-Century Mormon Society” (paper presented at Mormon History Association Annual Conference, St. Louis, Mo., June 3, 2017).

experiences of nineteenth-century indentured Indians? This essay seeks to answer that question to some extent by surveying relevant historical models and comparing them against the experiences of indentured Indians to reveal diverse behavior and agency among those people.

Models for Locating Agency

The difficulty in locating agency among long-marginalized people attracted historical attention several decades ago. The postmodern critique revealed hidden power structures and emphasized subtle choices by historical actors to navigate therein, essentially shifting the focus of history from a triumphant saga to a multiplicity of narratives centered on resistance. Foucault, Derrida, and others deconstructed power systems and led scholars to reconsider longstanding assumptions. When fused with nationalistic manifestos from Fanon to Deloria, a new ideological tide jolted the course of scholarship toward the marginalized. Historical works like Emanuel Ringelblum's *Notes from the Warsaw Ghetto* and Eugene D. Genovese's *Roll, Jordan, Roll* revealed how subjected people forged their own existence despite oppressive circumstances. The 1985 publication of James C. Scott's *Weapons of the Weak* marked the zenith of the disempowered voice, and in 1990 Scott followed up with a global model of discursive resistance hidden both within and away from "the public transcript."⁷ From that position of

7. Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, translated by Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1979); Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, translated by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976); Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978); Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, translated by Constance Farrington (New York: Grove Press, 1963); Vine Deloria Jr., *Custer Died for Your Sins: An Indian Manifesto* (New York: Macmillan, 1969); Emanuel Ringelblum, *Notes from the Warsaw Ghetto*, translated by Jacob Sloan (New York: Schocken, 1974); Eugene D. Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1974); James C. Scott, *Weapons of the*

strength, postcolonial studies advocates drew from subaltern studies to challenge linear historicism, which we see in such works as Dipesh Chakrabarty's *Provincializing Europe*.⁸

These seismic shifts in historiography parallel the emergence of New Indian History that sought out overlooked sources and perspectives to reconsider the indigenous past. Scholars turned to oral histories and ethnohistory to reconstruct narratives with Native people—their motivations and actions—at the center. Detailed recordkeeping surrounding boarding schools drew that topic to the forefront of study where scholars sought ways to highlight indigenous agency. K. Tsianina Lomawaima's watershed history of Chilocco Indian School argued that “no institution is total, no power is all-seeing” and concluded that Native American students at boarding schools “were not passive consumers of an ideology or lifestyle imparted from above” but rather “actively created an ongoing educational and social process. . . . Indian people made Chilocco their own.”⁹ Deconstructionist theory paired with non-traditional sources enriched Native American history and abrogated longstanding Turnerian frontier narratives that portrayed indigenous peoples as little more than exotic foils in conquest epics. These new works not only put Native Americans at the center but sought to do so through methods that challenged Western hermeneutics.

The triumph of New Indian History centered on the once-marginal, but it also stripped the movement of its unifying feature, academic opposition, and this victory created a bit of a quandary for such

Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1985); James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1990).

8. Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2000).

9. K. Tsianina Lomawaima, *They Called It Prairie Light: The Story of Chilocco Indian School* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1994), 164, 167.

practitioners accustomed to challenging the status quo. In the American Historical Association's December 2012 *Perspectives* newsletter, Oxford historian Pekka Hämäläinen pondered on the future of Native American history. He warned that some "fear the field is running out of steam, having exhausted its creative momentum." He further cautioned, "When subfields become new orthodoxies, they tend to stiffen and become reactionary. This is a particular concern for Native American history."¹⁰

While a postcolonial framework is valuable in locating unseen resistance, it also imposes that assumption on the past when it may not exist. It tends to limit the allowable behavior of historical actors to colonizer or resister and obviates the range of subtler attitudes in between. As J. Edward Chamberlin laments, postcolonialism "often fudges the awkward questions." He explains, "It is not all that interested, for example, in the way in which immigrants to the Americas, many of them fleeing colonial regimes of one sort or another, discard their mother tongue in favour of the language . . . of the settler society."¹¹ Postcolonial studies, that is, struggles to articulate anything other than resistance. By virtue of this imposed binary, indigenous people are thereby trapped in a reductionist past that strips them of agency.

This inflexibility points to a second shortcoming of postcolonial studies: even in focusing on marginalized peoples, decolonization perpetuates the binary structure created by the now-defunct master

10. Pekka Hämäläinen, "The Futures of Native American History in the United States," *Perspectives on History* (Dec. 2012), available at <https://www.historians.org/publications-and-directories/perspectives-on-history/december-2012/the-futures-of-native-american-history-in-the-united-states>.

11. J. Edward Chamberlin, "From Hand to Mouth: The Postcolonial Politics of Oral and Written Traditions," in *Reclaiming Indigenous Voice and Vision*, edited by Marie Battiste (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2009), 133.

narrative. Rather than produce a new model for understanding history, it simply reverses the focus of the old. Scott Richard Lyons explains that postcolonial studies “do not deconstruct binaries so much as flip the script” and essentially leave the colonial structure in place by way of *de-* and *post-* prefixes instead of embracing something new.¹² Such an approach validates Chakrabarty’s critique that colonialism reaches beyond physical occupation to extend into discursive power derived from European structural colonization, which lingered well beyond political decolonization. And equally disturbing, this approach tends to descend into lazy essentializing. Homi Bhabha colorfully explains that such works have “roots stuck in the celebratory romance” erected in opposition to the “homogenizing of the historical present.” He argues that “the real leap consists in introducing invention into existence,” not simply declaring opposition to the old.¹³

12. Scott Richard Lyons, *X-Marks: Native Signatures of Assent* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), 10.

13. Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 8–9. To that end, Bhabha proposes a methodological approach intended “to show how historical agency is transformed through the signifying process” and how historical actors engage “a discourse that is somehow beyond [their] control.” Bhabha moves beyond postcolonial binaries to insist on a third space where the two collide, allowing the disempowered to appropriate both occidental and oriental expectations to produce a unique and self-defined identity able to functionally operate in that unbalanced power structure. Similarly, Manuel Castells proposes three types of identity that function much as a Hegelian dialectic wherein the “legitimizing identity” clashes with the “resistance identity” to produce something new from “whatever cultural materials are available to [historical actors]” and which “redefines their position in society.” This phenomenon, he notes, forces the “transformation of the overall social structure.” That is, the seemingly disempowered are not powerless. Manuel Castells, *The Power of Identity: The Information Age: Economy, Society, and Culture*, vol. 2 (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 1997), 8.

Despite the valuable advances of postcolonial studies, the practical effort of locating identity and agency in long-overlooked peoples continues today. This is especially difficult in populations who left few records and did not always take a predictable role in resisting the more easily recognized system of power. Women's history has long struggled with the same issue, particularly Mormon women's history. Outside scholars have struggled to understand how LDS women could support polygamy or reject the Equal Rights Amendment, and assumptions of coercive patriarchy diminishes the agency of those women. Marnie Anderson has observed the same phenomenon among Japanese women, whose agency is little understood by those who cannot conceive of their leadership in activism.¹⁴ In either case, the obstacle to agency is that people of the past are not behaving as academics would have them act. A singular story of resistance, and the right kind of resistance, dominates the now-preferred narrative.

The dangers of this myopic vision are the focus of a popular TED talk by Nigerian author Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie; she warns of the power exerted by writers who enjoy "the ability not just to tell the story of another person, but to make it the definitive story of that person." The "single story," she explains, reduces individuals, flattens experience, and "robs people of dignity."¹⁵ Her comments echo the warning of Western History Association president David Edmunds, who in 2007 raised alarm about "academics [who] have urged that scholarship conform to a new orthodoxy defined through the rhetoric

14. Marnie S. Anderson, "Women's Agency and the Historical Record: Reflections on Female Activists in Nineteenth-Century Japan," *Journal of Women's History* 23, no. 1 (Spring 2011): 38–55.

15. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, "The Danger of a Single Story," TEDGlobal 2009, July 2009, https://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_adichie_the_danger_of_a_single_story/transcript?language=en#t-1099236.

of post-colonialism.”¹⁶ To be clear, postcolonial studies adds much to our understanding of marginalized peoples, but this model of resistance cannot overshadow the diversity of lived experiences. We ought to remember Adichie’s injunction: “Show a people as one thing over and over and that is what they become.”

This shortcoming of binary and conflict-ridden assumptions in women’s history led Harvard professor Catherine A. Brekus to outline a new model of agency centered on six tenets. First, it should allow for the “reproduction of social structures as well as the transformation of them.” That is, resistance is not the only intentional response; sometimes historical actors willingly participate in a colonized system. Second, a new model must abandon the “implicit association of agency with freedom and emancipation” because individuals often seek subtler goals. Third, intentionality of ordinary people is relevant. Fourth, agency is relational and actions of one require acquiescence of others, even lesser empowered individuals. Fifth, “agency must be understood on a continuum” because “almost everyone has some degree of agency.” Sixth, “agency is shaped by cultural norms and cultural constraints.” And seventh, we must remember that “agency takes place within structures as well as against them.”¹⁷

What Brekus contributes is an understanding that while social relations may include resistance, even subtle “every day forms of resistance,” they may also include replication and manipulation of social structures by ordinary people. The challenge, then, is to read between the lines and discover how historical actors articulated their agency. Certainly, individuals masked passive resistance in illusions of

16. R. David Edmunds, “Blazing New Trails or Burning Bridges: Native American History Comes of Age,” *Western Historical Quarterly* 39, no. 1 (Spring 2008): 14.

17. Catherine A. Brekus, “Mormon Women and the Problem of Historical Agency,” *Journal of Mormon History* 37, no. 2 (Spring 2011): 78–85.

obsequiousness, deference, compliance, or flattery, but so too could those be genuine manifestations of authentic ideological support. We may not be able to delve into the mind of a person who authored no text and is known only by the sanitized and hagiographic presentation of others, but we ought not to assume anything, and the “critical fabulation” now threatening ethnic studies deserves no place in historical narratives.¹⁸

The Mormon–Indian Context

In applying this model to nineteenth-century indentured Indians in Mormon society, an assortment of behaviors gain legitimacy as indicators of agency. Some indeed resisted, and they did so in a multiplicity of ways. Others strove to comply with the all-surrounding culture and advance therein, with mixed success. Despite bumping up against the limits of integration, these Native Americans who found themselves in Mormon communities acted out behaviors that should not be viewed simply as products of colonization or failures to uphold some anticipated response. Rather, as Brekus indicates, they illustrate conscious decisions that must be accepted as their own. But the first step in exploring these potentialities is to examine the context and constraints that produced this unique institution in Utah.

Though eventually interpreted as a means to redeem Indians, Mormons’ entry into the Indian slave trade began with reluctance. The longstanding Spanish slave trade drew indigenous laborers to mines and missions by way of Navajo and Ute middlemen. These equestrian Natives raided deep into Goshute, Paiute, and Shoshone lands and seized captives from rival bands. A lucrative triangle trade developed

18. As defined by its chief advocate, “critical fabulation,” is a self-reflexive device whereby historians “imagine what might have happened or might have been said or might have been done.” Saidiya Hartman, “Venus in Two Acts,” *Small Axe* 12, no. 2 (June 2008): 11.

between Santa Fe, San Diego, and modern-day northern Mexico. Male captives sold sometimes for double the price of female captives, though the latter could also be useful as domestic workers for Spanish estates.¹⁹ Traveler T. J. Farnham passed through the Southwest and observed, “The New Mexicans capture the Paiutes for slaves; the neighboring Indians do the same, and even the bold and usually high-handed old beaver-hunter sometimes descends from his legitimate behavior among the mountain men streams for this mean traffic.”²⁰ By July of 1847, enslaved people constituted a full third of New Mexico’s twenty thousand recorded residents.²¹

Mormon invasion of the valley escalated the practices as the Saints further strained indigenous resources and thereby exacerbated slave trafficking. Competition for resources promoted Ute raids but also the outright surrender of Paiute children to European traders who offered food and supplies in return. Paiutes and Goshutes faced a hard existence on a dry bleak landscape surviving on a diet of nuts, roots, insects, and small game. Their near-starved condition made them easy prey for mounted raiders and seemingly bountiful traders who acquired children through both coercive and voluntary exchanges.²²

19. Daniel Webster Jones, *Forty Years Among the Indians: A True Yet Thrilling Narrative of the Author’s Experiences Among the Natives* (Salt Lake City: Juvenile Instructor Office, 1890), 50; LeRoy R. Hafen and Ann W. Hafen, *Old Spanish Trail: Santa Fe to Los Angeles* (Glendale, Calif.: Arthur H. Clark, 1954), 260.

20. T. J. Farnham, *Life, Adventures, and Travels in California* (New York: Cornish, Lamport & Co., 1852), 377.

21. Sondra Jones, *The Trial of Don Pedro León Luján: The Attack Against Indian Slavery and Mexican Traders in Utah* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2000), 48.

22. Stephen P. Van Hoak, “And Who Shall Have the Children? The Indian Slave Trade in the Southern Great Basin, 1800–1865,” *Nevada Historical Society Quarterly* 41, no. 1 (1998): 4–6.

The purchase of Native American slaves required Mormons to consider the status of such children; what would be their place in society? In February 1852, the Utah Territory legislature legalized slavery in typical paternalist language. The following month, the legislature passed an Indian-specific law that likewise required that masters provide proper food and clothing but further mandated the education of Indians purchased from captivity and raised in Mormon homes. And unlike the prior law intended for African slaves, the Indian-specific legislation defined Indians as “prisoners” prior to purchase and “indentures” thereafter, contracted for no more than twenty years (effectively released them in young adulthood, as would be an apprentice).²³ Much as other religious groups who sought to “civilize” Native Americans, Mormons hoped this lengthy tenure would allow ample time for sufficient acculturation into American culture. When Governor Brigham Young addressed the legislature, he characterized the policy as “purchasing them into freedom, instead of slavery” that otherwise awaited them in Mexico.²⁴ The difference between these laws suggests a tiered notion of subjected peoples in which Mormons prohibited the integration of African slaves while in theory tolerating or even encouraging the eventual amalgamation of Native Americans. Indeed, the African slavery law outright forbade miscegenation, while no such clause existed for indentured Indians.

Despite a codified receptivity to indigenous people, the status of indentured Indians in Mormon society remained complex. Both Mormon theology and legislation allowed and anticipated their incorporation into LDS communities. However, sporadic violence and

23. *An Act for the Relief of Indian Slaves and Prisoners*, as quoted in L. R. Bailey, *Indian Slave Trade in the Southwest: A Study of Slave-Taking and the Traffic in Indian Captives* (Los Angeles: Westernlore Press, 1966), 209–12.

24. Journal History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, June 9, 1851, microfilm, BYU Archives.

longstanding American ethnocentric biases also shaped Mormon perspectives of Indians and surely minimized cooperative relationships. According to Kitchen and Bennion's index, only a fraction ever enjoyed marriage and fewer still received culturally valued ordinance work (e.g., baptism, temple rites, etc.) extended to Mormons in good standing.²⁵ But to portray indentured Indians in Mormon communities merely as victims, or passively acted upon by external circumstances, underestimates their agency and neglects their own meaningful decisions. Despite restrictions imposed by a power structure largely beyond their control, Native Americans raised in Mormon homes made daily choices about how they would engage that structure. Even those who sought assimilation into Mormon society faced obstacles. In the context of their physical and cultural location, indentured Indians exhibited a variety of ways, ranging from active resistance to sincere adoption and internalization of that system, and even the co-optation and replication of the culture and theology for their own purposes.

Agency Among Indentured Indians in Utah

As one might expect, outright resistance against a power structure emerges as the most recognizable form of agency. In the case of indentured Indians, some simply fled their new captors. One pioneer family recalled that "Susie's sister," purchased at age five, frequently cried for her native home and routinely attempted to escape to a nearby Indian community.²⁶ Paiute Nellie Judd successfully fled after a sibling warned that "the food of the white folks would kill the Indians if they eat it."²⁷ Those who could not escape countered in other ways, using what James

25. Bennion, "Captivity, Adoption, Marriage, and Identity," 252.

26. Brooks, "Indian Relations on the Mormon Frontier," 46.

27. Mary Minerva Dart Judd Autobiography," typescript. Harold B. Lee Library, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Provo, UT, 28.

C. Scott termed as “everyday forms of resistance.”²⁸ Shem Parkinson survived the Bear River Massacre only to be taken captive by Mormons. Their family memories indicate that the child “pulled a knife on his foster father” until “neighbors restrained him.” The twentieth-century recollection faults “deep-seated hostility the boy felt” toward “white men.”²⁹ Less dramatic resistance surely played out in other ways. Betsy Hancock recalled that her Indian sister intentionally irritated her until it escalated to violence, and ultimately, she ran away.³⁰

Indentured Indians also employed more passive resistance like that described in Eugene Genovese’s work. Wilford Woodruff took custody of a Paiute boy, Sarakeet, at age thirteen. Woodruff recounted that the child exhibited “saucy” moments, stole money, and repeatedly attempted to run away. When sent to cut wood in the nearby grove, the seventeen-year-old failed to return home until a search party located him meandering the canyon. On another occasion, he abandoned his position at the molasses mill, which resulted in significant injury for Woodruff’s five-year-old son.³¹

Even as some indentured Indians sought to resist, openly or covertly, others seemed to adopt Mormon values and strive for normative cultural aspirations. Most dutifully attended school, half received baptism, and just over one-third entered into marriage, most often with a spouse of European descent. Low overall rates of marriage expose exclusionary racial attitudes held by some Mormons but also reflect the

28. Term coined by Scott, *Weapons of the Weak*, 36.

29. Lester Parkinson Taylor, *Samuel Rose Parkinson: Portrait of a Pioneer* (Provo: Claymont Co., 1977), 70–71.

30. Melva Shurtliff Green, “Betsy Jane Hancock Shurtliff,” in *Chronicles of Courage*, compiled by Lesson Committee (Salt Lake City: Daughters of Utah Pioneers, 1990), 56.

31. Scott G. Kenney, ed., *Wilford Woodruff’s Journals, 1833–1898* (Midvale, Utah: Garland Publishing, 1976), 6:159, 411–12.

horrific impact of disease, which extinguished half of these indentured Indians by the common age of marriage. Still, the fact that so many entered mixed-race marriages at a rate far above the general Anglo-European population suggests divided attitudes, and treatment surely ranged from repulsion to acceptance to even adoration.³²

Regardless of limitations faced by Indians among Mormons, many embraced their surrounding culture. One family memoir recalls the purchase of Minnie Viroca, whom they “raised as their own.” She received an education, secured steady paid work in domestic services, and mothered four children. Another family record recalls the addition of a young girl, Sylvia, during the Black Hawk War. Her family recalled, “She easily adopted the way of the white man. She was obedient and trustworthy.”³³ Ida Ann Rice, the darling of the Daughters of Utah Pioneers, similarly is recorded as a compliant and industrious woman who developed domestic arts, served others, married a white man, bore children, and dutifully practiced her Mormon faith.³⁴ While we might apply some skepticism to these sources, we cannot simply ignore them.

What are we to make of these Native Americans and their actions: masking, begrudged obsequiousness, pragmatic resignation, or active and sincere conversion? James C. Scott insists that compliant behavior under the watchful eyes of a dominant society should not be understood

32. In Bennion’s impressive study, he found that 45 percent of Indian women married, mostly to European men, but only 28 percent of Indian men married. In his index, women accounted for 86 percent of known marriages. This may reflect a gendered rate of acceptance, the ease of adding peripheral spouses in a polygamous society, or some other fact. Bennion, “Captivity, Adoption, Marriage, and Identity,” 155–56, 245, 247, 251, 252.

33. Carter, *Heart Throbs of the West*, 1:159.

34. Lesson Committee, comp., *Chronicles of Courage*, vol. 5 (Salt Lake City: Daughters of Utah Pioneers, 1994), 402. See also Carole Gates Sorensen, *Ida Ann: Beloved Bannock Papoose* (Las Vegas: Copa Publishing, 1997).

to imply “ideological support, even from the most apparently faithful compliance.” Still, “no social context is entirely free from power relations,” and so we are left in a bit of a historical quagmire: how do we determine the mind and intent of past actors?³⁵ Scott might tell us to find the hidden transcript, but without sufficient record produced by these Native Americans, we are left to the family traditions, which are likely skewed by their own motivations. Troubled as these sources may be, they suggest that Brekus’s assertion of intentionality in acquiescence may at times be more appropriate than a postcolonial model of resistance, which is unsubstantiated by the limited sources. Resistance likely occurred in some instances, but it should be conceivable that some indentured Indians might have alternatively chosen to internalize cultural expectation and even perpetuate the system, thereby finding a place for themselves therein.

Other examples more clearly point to the possibility that Native Americans internalized Mormon values and structures. Jacob Hamblin’s adoptive son, Albert, not only converted and labored on his father’s behalf but also expressed unique spiritual experiences. He related visions and dreams of ministering among his own people. Hamblin wrote, “Sometime before his death he had a vision in which he saw himself preaching the gospel to a multitude of people. He believed that this vision would be realized in the world of spirits. He referred to this when he said that he should die before my return home.”³⁶ Paiute Mennorrow, renamed Anna, lived an exemplary Mormon adult life: she attended Relief Society, dutifully conducted genealogy work, and attended the temple. Ironically, this Native American woman even served in the Daughters of Utah Pioneers, suggesting she adopted an

35. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak*, 325–26.

36. Carter, *Heart Throbs of the West*, 1:163.

unearned nostalgia perpetuated by that organization.³⁷ Her experience suggests that despite limitations, Native Americans may have enjoyed an ability to participate in and benefit within the cultural constraints.

A Navajo woman named Janet personified an extreme example of how Native Americans might harness LDS power structures to reproduce Mormon social structures. When she rejected a potential suitor, her adoptive parents took issue with her choice. She countered, “There is only one man that I have ever seen that I would like to marry . . . and that man is Dudley Leavitt.” Family lore described Leavitt as “twenty-nine years old, a perfect physical specimen, with a shock of brown hair, clear blue eyes, and a sense of fun.” But Leavitt never considered the young woman in such a way, and he already had three wives, one he had wed only six months prior. Undeterred, Janet’s family turned to apostle George A. Smith, who pressured Leavitt to take Janet as a fourth wife, promising “in the name of the Lord that you will be blessed.” Leavitt capitulated, and Janet secured her preferred mate.³⁸ In this way, young Janet mobilized the power structure for her purposes, turning down one and securing another who seemed unavailable.

Despite Janet’s success, indentured Indians surely faced limitations they could not circumvent. When Tony Tillohash returned home from a stint at Carlisle Indian Industrial School, he revisited his adoptive home intent on courting a childhood acquaintance. He suffered rejection with instruction that he “marry among his own people,” and he did just that.³⁹ Similarly, when Lucy Meeks’s relationship with John McCleve culminated in a pregnancy, he denounced her announcement of their wedding plans as “a cursed lie” and promptly committed suicide

37. Carter, *Our Pioneer Heritage*, 1:207–08.

38. Juanita L. Brooks, *Dudley Leavitt, Pioneer to Southern Utah* (1942), 45–47.

39. Brooks, “Indian Relations on the Mormon Frontier,” 47.

rather than face the prospect of marrying an Indian.⁴⁰ Lucy Meeks's experience suggests that racism frequently prevented Native Americans from accessing or influencing the Mormon power structures.

The overall low rate of marriage suggests that Native American men and women often struggled to find suitable spouses, and that inability surely took on particular significance in a culture concerned with large families and progeny, and where motherhood largely defined womanhood. Still, as in other ways, Native Americans accessed and employed those values to replicate their version of those ideals. Susie Leavitt, a captive young woman purchased by the aforementioned Janet and Dudley Leavitt, found marriage unavailable in adulthood and bore children out of wedlock. Church authorities summoned her to defend her behavior, where she testified that "I have a right to children." She continued, "No white man will marry me." She explained that she could not return to her tribe, and left in this liminal status she defiantly claimed her rights of womanhood. She concluded, "I have them because I want them. God meant that a woman should have children."⁴¹ Like her adoptive Native American mother, Susie learned to harness shared cultural institutions—in this case motherhood—to her advantage, while simultaneously reproducing it on her own terms: without marriage. The historical record suggests she was, thereafter, accepted within the community. Her example demonstrates how Native American actors not only internalized and adapted Mormon values but possibly also

40. Priddy Meeks (1879–1882) "Journal," BYU Library 1937 Typescript, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Provo, UT., 36; Brooks, "Indian Relations on the Mormon Frontier," 37. As W. Paul Reeve has illustrated, parallel to Mormon visions of Indian uplift and personal empowerment through marriage to Native Americans, Mormons also knew and at times perhaps even subscribed to the national narrative that viewed such unions as foul symptoms of "racial regression and civilization's decline." Reeve, *Religion of a Different Color*, 86.

41. Brooks, "Indian Relations on the Mormon Frontier," 45.

tweaked the larger structure to allow for their modification. By claiming an element of Mormon culture through unconventional means, Susie Leavitt challenged the orthodoxy of nineteenth-century Mormons as well as that of twenty-first century scholars who only see shades of resistance without recognizing her embrace of Mormon culture.

Susie's is just one example of how formerly indentured Indians faced rejections and other cultural limitations but also worked to elude them to some degree. Paiute Alma Shock Brown won favor in the community for rescuing white Mormons from Indian depredations, but when his adoptive father remarried, his new stepmother would not tolerate him. He told his father, "I must leave now, but with you I could live forever." Though he found refuge with another family, the repudiation of this grown child by his adoptive father remains heart-wrenching. When Native American Cora Keate's white husband abandoned her, she secured a divorce and steady work in the Silver Reef mining camp for a "very satisfactory salary." There she met and married widower Albert Hartman, who had previously adopted three Indian children.⁴² Though not always successful, Native Americans clearly proved resourceful in maneuvering the cultural constraints of Mormon society.

With that power, limited as it was, Native Americans shaped much of their own experiences. Perhaps Shoshone Frank Warner best exemplifies the height within Mormon society to which such an Indian could rise. At two years old, Warner survived the Bear River Massacre. His adoption provided him an education up through college, he served several missions, served as a bishop, and married twice, both to white Mormon women. While on his mission to the Fort Hall Reservation, he recorded his vigorous efforts—well outside the reach of his adoptive family or culture—to convert reservation-bound Native Americans. His writing exhibits a deep conviction in the Book of Mormon as a literal history of Native Americans. He preached that it chronicled a

42. Carter, *Heart Throbs of the West*, 1: 157, 160.

historic era of “harmony” drowned out in apostasy and a “curse that now follows us as an Indian Race.” To others he preached “of the great blessing” that awaited Native Americans who joined his cause.⁴³

Warner’s devout faith in Mormonism cannot be discarded as mere acquiescence; he, and surely others, embraced LDS theology. And what are we to make of such examples? These historical actors cannot be robbed of their agency and discarded as simply unauthentic to suffice present-day agendas. Just as those who resisted or co-opted Mormon values deserve recognition as genuine, so too do the actions of Warner and others who embraced cultural and theological precepts of Mormonism. Native Americans must be permitted to adopt, integrate, and replicate foreign structures without threat of surrendering some quintessential Indianness. Scott Lyons explains, “indigenous communities are and have always been composed of human beings who possess reason, rationality, individuality, an ability to think and to question, a suspicion toward religious dogma or political authoritarianism, a desire to improve their lot and the futures of their progeny, and a wish to play some part in the larger world. Surely, these characteristics are not the exclusive property of ‘white’ people or the ‘West.’”⁴⁴ And this is why a postcolonial approach centered on binary conflict is moribund; it cannot address the complex operation of cultural adaption in the continuum where humans operate. We may not always understand motives and intentions, and undoubtedly power structures limit choices and shape manifestations, but historians should tread carefully when making assumptions about the motives of past actors.

A final vignette conveys this complexity in not only using but co-opting discursive power structures. One indentured Indian, raised by Mormons from age five, recalled that she did all she could to meet

43. Frank W. Warner, (Missionary Journal Dec. 1914,” MS 14428, LDS Church History Library, Salt Lake City, UT. Accessed June 14, 2017. <https://eadview.lds.org/dcbrowser/000253117/>.

44. Lyons, *X-Marks*, 12–13.

Mormon expectations. "I kept myself clean and careful, and I learned everything I could." However, "When I was grown up, I wanted a man. No white man would marry me." She eventually married a Native man, Jim, and moved in with him and his mother in his Moapa village. Even still, her white acculturation proved troublesome, and Jim's mother frequently pointed out her inadequacies. When her husband sent her to the store for groceries, she earned her mother-in-law's scorn as she also purchased a new pair of corsets and material to sew new dresses. She recalled that "I just couldn't get along without corsets. . . . I had been trained to wear them and my back ached so if I left them off. Besides, I didn't look nice without them." The rigidity of corsets well symbolizes the white culture she had been shaped by, unable to return to Native roots and even preferring the imposed structure and appearance. Her mother-in-law "made such a fuss" that the wife told her husband he must choose between his marriage and his tribe. When he chose the latter, the corset-wearing wife departed. What options remained for a woman too Indian for Mormons and too Mormon for Indians? She considered returning to white society as a domestic worker but worried she might become an "old maid" or bear children out of wedlock. Instead, she relocated to the Santa Clara reservation in search of a spouse.⁴⁵

Empowered as she may have been, her options existed on a limited continuum, constrained at times by an imposed structure that many indentured Indians adopted as their own. She and other Native Americans shared a difficult experience, so much so that one such Native American, Lucy, who seemed to very much embrace Mormonism later concluded that it was a "mistake" to have "ever supposed she could be a white girl." She concluded, "Indian children should be left with their own people where they could be happy; when they were raised in white homes they did not belong anywhere."⁴⁶ The experience of Native

45. Brooks, "Indian Relations on the Mormon Frontier," 46–47.

46. Brooks, "Indian Relations on the Mormon Frontier," 38.

Americans in nineteenth-century white Mormon society is peculiar and diverse, but each had to reconcile inevitable cultural boundaries attached to their observable differences, and yet for most it became the only culture they knew.



Much as these experiences exemplify, Hokulani Aikau's recent study of Mormon Polynesia found that ethnic and religious identities "had been knotted together" in a way too complex to simply decolonize, as she had initially intended. As Aikau explained, "the story is not that simple." She found that indigenous people played an active role in navigating power structures and used their mixed identity as a means to "meet their own cultural, familial, and communal needs."⁴⁷ To restrict victims of settler colonialism to resistance-only foils in the twenty-first century narrative is to colonize them yet again.

Aikau and other scholars are beginning to complicate Mormon–Indian relations in a way that moves beyond simplistic binaries to find how individuals operated within an imbalanced power structure.⁴⁸ This more thoughtful approach is already manifesting in a few works beyond the scope of Mormon–Indian relations and is a much-needed reform in this field.⁴⁹ This article likewise adds to that literature by

47. Hokulani K. Aikau, *A Chosen People, a Promised Land: Mormonism and Race in Hawai'i* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012), 185–86.

48. See also Matthew Garrett, *Making Lamanites: Mormons, Native Americans, and the Indian Student Placement Program, 1947–2000* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2016).

49. For example, several works on Indigenous religiosity and cultural change in New England stand out as exemplars. See Linford D. Fisher, *The Indian Great Awakening: Religion and the Shaping of Native Cultures in Early America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012); and David J. Silverman, *Red Brethren: The Brothertown and Stockbridge Indians and the Problem of Race in Early America* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2010).

way of nineteenth-century Native Americans raised in Mormon homes. In seeking their own self-interests, these youths employed a variety of strategies, which certainly include, but cannot be limited to, resistance. Native American actors must also be permitted to consciously appropriate, recreate, adapt and co-opt, and even embrace and replicate elements of a foreign culture, even when engaged within a framework of colonization. These indentured Indians well exhibited the diverse power dynamics that weighed on each of them, as well as a full spectrum of responses to secure their own self-interests.

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