The Blood of Father Lehi: Indigenous Americans and the Book of Mormon

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ABSTRACT

Stanley J. Thayne: The Blood of Father Lehi: Indigenous Americans and the Book of Mormon (Under the direction of Laurie F. Maffly-Kipp)

The Book of Mormon, published in New York in 1830, has been described and understood by many Mormons to be a “history of the American Indians.” It tells of a family who left Jerusalem around 600 BCE and migrated to a “Promised Land,” generally understood to be the American continents, and who became the progenitors of Indigenous American peoples. As a text produced by Euroamericans, the Book of Mormon can be situated as part of a larger colonial imaginary that envisions Native peoples as lost Israelites. However, many American Indian people have converted to Mormonism or have grown up in the Mormon faith. For many, the Book of Mormon narrative has become an integral part of their Indigenous identity and subjectivity.

This dissertation is an ethnographic exploration and analysis of how the Book of Mormon informs the Indigenous subjectivities of Indigenous American Latter-day Saints (Mormons). It is based on fieldwork conducted in Catawba, Shoshone, and Confederated Blackfoot nations.
This project began, if beginnings can be pinned down, long before actual fieldwork began. Having been raised in the Mormon faith, as a student at Brigham Young University I became uncomfortable with the way Indigenous peoples are racialized in the Book of Mormon, which describes a curse of a “skin of blackness” that came upon the “Lamanites,” the purported ancestors—or “among the ancestors”—of the Indigenous peoples of the western hemisphere. It was with this nagging problem on my brain, precipitating something like a religious crisis, that I entered the Religious Studies PhD program at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. At UNC I was able to shape my religious dilemma into a productive research question that moved me beyond myself and beyond the formal text of the Book of Mormon, or at least beyond the “text” narrowly conceived (see Introduction). I wanted to know how Indigenous American Latter-day Saints—contemporary peoples who are often referred to as “Lamanites” in Mormon parlance—read and interpret and respond to the Book of Mormon. The Book of Mormon is supposed to be about them—about their ancestors and their skin. How do they read these passages? Do they accept the designation *Lamanite*? Do some of them reject such terms? I expected there would be a variety of answers to these questions, just as there is a wide variety of Indigenous Latter-day Saints (by which I mean American Indian and Pacific Islander peoples affiliated with Mormon faiths, and primarily the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints). I wanted to find out and began envisioning an ethnographic project involving fieldwork among Indigenous American Latter-day Saints.
That project began to take specific shape when a student in a class I was teaching on Mormonism in American history mentioned that the Catawba tribe, located in a part of South Carolina near his home, had converted en masse to Mormonism in the late nineteenth century. I had never heard of this event, or even of the Catawba Indian Nation, but suddenly I found myself with a potential research field site—and one that was close to Chapel Hill—in which to begin pursuing my questions.

Soon after this I enrolled in a course on ethnographic writing being offered by visiting professor Elaine Lawless, from the University of Missouri, and found myself receiving training in the craft—and the politics and problems—of ethnographic writing. Professor Lawless took particular interest in my research question and when it came time to choose a course project, she and others in the class encouraged me to pursue this question through field work in the Catawba Indian Nation. And so I drove the three hours from Chapel Hill and attended church services at the Catawba Ward (an LDS congregation) on Reservation Road on the border of the Catawba Indian Nation. I was greeted enthusiastically and found myself in the midst of an ethnographic project, asking questions and recording interviews focusing on the history of Mormonism among Catawba people and, more specifically, on how Catawba Latter-day Saints read the Book of Mormon.

When it came time to crafting a dissertation project, I decided on a project on religious identity in the Catawba Nation. I had found that many Catawba people attended Baptist, "Red Path," Methodist, or other churches, in addition to Mormonism, and that some practiced what they referred to as "traditional religion," meaning practices marked as Native American. Accordingly, I conceived of a project on religious identity and practice in a

\[1\] Thanks to James Heilpern for bringing this to my attention!
single Indigenous nation, with Mormonism being just one part. But my larger research question kept bringing me back to the Book of Mormon as the central topic, and I realized that in order to address the topic adequately—and to address the topic of Indigeneity—I needed to do research in multiple Indigenous nations. With the help of summer research grants from the Charles Redd Center for Western Studies, the Center for the Study of the American South, BYU’s Religious Education Department, and a Fall Off-Campus Research Grant from the Graduate School at UNC-Chapel Hill, I was able to travel out West multiple times to conduct research among Shoshone, Blackfoot, and Western Catawba Latter-day Saints, as well as others I met along the way. Gradually my research project took shape as an effort to understand and represent articulations of Book of Mormon identity as a form of Indigenous subjectivity when it is expressed as such by Indigenous people who are Latter-day Saints. That is the goal of this project. I share the above reflections in order to situate myself in relation to this project as an ethnographer embedded within the cultural world I participated in during fieldwork, and which I strive to describe and construct in the ethnographic writing that follows.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

My acknowledgments and debts in regard to this project are multiple. First and foremost, I am very grateful to the many people I met over the course of my fieldwork and whose voices are represented below. I hope I have not betrayed or misrepresented any of you. Pseudonyms, or false names, are used to protect the identity of most individuals represented in this study unless express permission and preference was given otherwise (or for public figures or those identified in prior publications, which typically do not represent ethnographic interactions). I forged multiple friendships and meaningful, ongoing relationships over the course of this project, and am grateful to those individuals who were willing to talk to me, many of whom welcomed me into their homes, fed me, and shared their lives with me. I cannot mention all by name, out of respect for privacy, and will doubtless overlook some, but will make an effort below to recognize some who were particularly helpful. In the Catawba Nation Sherri Osborne was very helpful in recruiting individuals at the outset of my study; Billy Anne McKellar, tribal archivist, was very helpful on my multiple visits to the Catawba Cultural Center; Bobby and Betty Blue, Travis Blue, and Roger Trimnall opened their homes to me for overnight stays during my multiple visits; and the Catawba Executive Committee—Chief William Harris and committee members Sammy and Rod Beck, Wayne George, and Jason Harris—made time to meet with me during one of their official meetings in the nation’s longhouse and extended written permission to conduct my project in the nation and among Catawba Indian Nation citizens. In the confederated Blackfoot nations I was very kindly received and housed by the
Crowfoot family, who have become close friends, as well as several others whom I will not name out of respect for privacy and to protect anonymity. In the Northwestern Band of the Shoshone Nation I am particularly indebted to Patty Timbimboo Madsen, tribal librarian and archivist, who met with me on multiple occasions and coordinated my fieldwork there, and to the NWBSN tribal council, who allowed me to present my project proposal at one of their committee meetings and extended permission to conduct my study among band members. Though I cannot name all, I want to thank everyone I met over the course of my fieldwork travels.

I have multiple academic debts and acknowledgements. First and foremost, my advisor Laurie Maffly-Kipp. I could not have asked for a better advisor. She allowed me freedom to explore wherever my curiosity and research took me, provided excellent guidance in the field of American religious history and in the ways of graduate and scholarly life, and was always there to offer feedback, advice, letters—whatever I needed, whenever I needed it. She read and re-read this dissertation in its multiple forms over the course of its development; whatever organizational strengths and clarity it may have achieved is largely due to her many rounds of comments and suggestions for revision. I could not have come to or completed this project in this way without her expert, capable, and personal guidance. Thank you Laurie! My dissertation committee members were also very supportive and helpful. Valerie Lambert offered expert advice in the fields of Anthropology and American Indian and Indigenous Studies. As a citizen of the Choctaw Nation with experience working in the Bureau of Indian Affairs, she offered absolutely invaluable advice speaking from her experience and positionality as an Indigenous person fully invested in many of the themes and issues that are addressed in this dissertation. She
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As mentioned in the preface, visiting professor Elaine Lawless was instrumental in encouraging me to undertake this project and in training me in the art of ethnographic research and writing. Though she was not a formal committee member, she gave feedback and advice and wrote letters throughout the course of the project. She also became a close friend and mentor at a crucial point in my academic development.

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INTRODUCTION

In the spring of 1829 in a farmhouse in Pennsylvania two new American races came into being. They were revealed through a stone that was placed in the hat of a treasure-seeker and soon-to-become Mormon prophet, Joseph Smith. Smith gazed into this seer stone to discern the location of hidden objects and, eventually, to translate ancient records. In 1830 Smith published his revealed translation of one such ancient record, which, he claimed, had been engraved on metal plates by ancient prophets who belonged to a vanished American race. The publication was known as *The Book of Mormon*, and the new races were the Nephites and the Lamanites.

*The Book of Mormon* tells the story of a family led by a man named Lehi who migrated from Jerusalem around 600 BCE and was guided to a “Promised Land,” typically understood by Latter-day Saints as a reference to the Americas. After arriving in this

1 Though several organizations or “restoration traditions” today look to Joseph Smith as their founding prophet, the major body, in terms of numbers, is the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and it is with that church and members that this project is primarily concerned. Though the church as an institution has requested its members and others to use the full and official name of the church whenever possible, church officials and members often continue to use less cumbersome and more widely recognized terms such as a Mormon, Mormonism, the Mormon Church, and the LDS Church. I likewise typically employ these terms. In reference to individual adherents and affiliates of the faith, I use the terms Mormons, Latter-day Saints, and occasionally, Saints, interchangeably.

2 In Joseph Smith’s official history, it states that he translated the Book of Mormon from gold plates using a divinely operated instrument identified as the Urim and Thummim (earlier documents referred to this instrument, composed of two optic stones, as “interpreters”), by way of analogy with visionary objects identified as such in the Bible. However, no real details of the translation method are given. Testimonies of eyewitnesses of the translation state that Smith placed a seer stone, or urim and thummim (though this seems to be a later term), in his hat and would then place his face in the hat to gaze into the stone and translate, often while the plates were either under a cover or in a separate location. See Richard Bushman, *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling* (New York: Knopf, 2005), 71-74.
Promised Land, Lehi’s children split into two factions named after two of his sons, Nephi and Laman. The Nephites were the righteous ones, described as “exceedingly fair and delightsome,” while the wicked Lamanites were cursed with a “skin of blackness” so that the Nephites would not find them “enticing” and would not intermarry with them. Over the course of the tumultuous thousand-year epic history that follows, these factions became racially blurred through the many conversions and apostasies that occurred on each side. Ultimately, Nephite and Lamanite identities came to signify a religious distinction that was presumably racially mixed and ambiguous. However, in most popular tellings and interpretations of the story, racial difference remains a salient feature. The eventual genocide of the Nephites has typically been depicted as the extinction of a white race. And the cursed Lamanites who survived them have typically been understood by Mormons to be (or at least to be “among”) the ancestors of Indigenous Americans.

Lamanite identity, however, has always been an ambiguous signifier. While depicted as fallen and cursed—and marked by “idleness,” “mischief,” and “subtlety”—Lamanite ancestry is also depicted in the Book of Mormon—and in most interpretations that have followed—as a marker of chosenness and of promise. The Book of Mormon prophesies that in the latter days of sacred history the descendants of the Lamanites will be restored to a knowledge of their fathers and to their true identity as children of Israel. They will then be gathered together with a select number of Gentiles (white Euroamericans) to build the New Jerusalem, or City of Zion, on the American continent, ushering in the millennial reign and second coming of Jesus Christ.

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Understandably, a number of scholars have pointed to ways this narrative is part of a larger colonial imaginary (including lost tribes theories and mound-builders narratives) that constitutes an erasure of traditional Indigenous creation narratives and histories.

Some critics have referred to Lamanite identity and to Book of Mormon historical revisionism as a form of “cultural genocide” or “ethnocidal indoctrination.” For example, Angelo Baca, a Navajo-Hopi filmmaker and scholar who was raised Mormon, sees Lamanite identity, and hence the Book of Mormon, as a colonial imposition and fabrication. “This has been another method of displacing and replacing native heritage, history and origins,” Baca

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4 Many European explorers, missionaries, and settlers accounted for human presence in the Western Hemisphere by positing “Lost Tribe” theories that explain the peopling of the Western hemisphere as the result of a dispersion or scattering of the biblical tribes of Israel (thus narrating American Indians as Jews or Israelites). Another common narrative posited the existence of a vanished white race that built the large burial mounds and traces of ancient civilizations so prominent in the Eastern United States during the nineteenth century. See Steven Conn, History’s Shadow: Native Americans and Historical Consciousness in the Nineteenth Century (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2004); Eran Shalev, American Zion: The Old Testament as a Political Text from the Revolution to the Civil War (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013); and Jonathan Boyarin, The Unconverted Self: Jews, Indians, and the Identity of Christian Europe (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009); Curtis Dahl, “Mound-Builders, Mormons, and William Cullen Bryant,” The New England Quarterly 34.2 (June 1961): 178-190; and, most significantly, Matthew Dougherty, “Land of the Jewish Indians: The Hebrew Bible and the Claiming of North America, 1790-1850,” unpublished manuscript. I thank Matt for sharing this with me.


stated. “It’s part of the settler-colonial dynamic, to redefine who we are.” Yet, many Indigenous American people have embraced the LDS faith and, presumably, Lamanite identity, while still maintaining traditional tribal and Indigenous national identities. How do they view the Book of Mormon?

This dissertation addresses that question, of how Indigenous Latter-day Saints understand their history, lineage, and racial and ethnic identities. Do they typically view themselves as “Lamanites”? Do they actively resist that term? Do they think of themselves as literal descendants of Lehi and thus as Israelites? Or is this lineage understood to be symbolic? Is it a positive or a negative identity? (Or is it ambiguous?) How does it gel or conflict with traditional narratives and tribal identifications? How is Lamanite identity racialized and how does it relate to Indigeneity? These questions are important because they point to and elucidate the formation of (and sometimes resistance to) new Indigenous Mormon subjectivities—identities that are the confluence of traditional tribal

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8 Regarding terminology: throughout I use the terms Indigenous, Indigenous American, American Indian, Native American, Native North American, Native, and First Nations, somewhat interchangeably, though at times with noted specificity, in reference to particular contexts. Typically I do not use the term *Indian* except descriptively, to indicate ethnographic or historical usage or specific attitudes or preferences of others. I typically refer to indigenous bodies as *nations*, wherever appropriate, but also as *tribal nations* or occasionally as *tribes* or *communities*, where it seems more descriptively appropriate. In the United States the term *reservation* is often used to refer to trust land set aside as federally (or state) recognized Indigenous territory; in Canada the term *reserve* is used, though I typically prefer to use the term *nation* or *national territory*. When a tribal affiliation is indicated parenthetically by an individual’s name, it indicates the tribal nation with which they are enrolled. When more than one affiliation is indicated, subsequent titles indicate parent-genealogical or marriage-kinship affiliations.

9 I am using the term *subjectivity* here to refer to the complex formation of the Indigenous Mormon subject at the intersection of—and as an entanglement of—multiple discourses stemming from both Mormon and Indigenous (and other) cultural contexts. Though I also use the term *identity*, I prefer the term *subjectivity* in this instance to acknowledge the complex interplay between (and blurring of) individual agency in selecting,
identifications and more recent identifications such as “Lamanite.” To approach these questions I will describe and explore several examples of what I call Indigenous readings of the Book of Mormon: readings and interpretations of the text by Indigenous Latter-day Saints and the Indigenous Mormon identities that are articulated through these readings. In this way my dissertation addresses the question of what it means to be Indigenous and Mormon in a world shaped by and in response to American colonialism.  

Indigenous readings of the Book of Mormon reflect, I argue, the formation of Indigenous subjectivities rooted in both the Book of Mormon and in specific tribal cultures in colonial settings. Such readings constitute an articulation of a form of Indigeneity often referred to using Book-of-Mormon-based terms such as Lamanite, Lehite, children of Lehi, the tribe of Manasseh, and/or descendants of people in the Book of Mormon. In almost all contexts, these appellations coexist with tribal, national, and other Indigenous identifications (e.g., Catawba, Navajo, Siksika, Shoshone, Hawai’ian, etc.). I argue that fashioning, and negotiating one’s identification (say, through conversion or continued affiliation) and determination by external social structures and circumstances.

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10 There are a significant number of LDS-affiliated people among Indigenous nations and groups such as the Navajo/Diné, Southern Paiute, Blackfoot Confederacy, Catawba, Northwestern Shoshone, Shoshone-Bannock, Native Hawaiians, Maori, and many more. The only single work I am aware of that addresses American Indian conversion and affiliation with Mormonism on a general level is Murphy’s dissertation “Imagining Lamanites.” Mauss, All Abraham’s Children, chs. 3-5, also provides a brief general overview. Examples of works focused on individual groups include, Hokulani Aikau, Chosen People, Promised Land: Mormonism and Race in Hawai‘i (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012); Scott R. Christensen, Sagwitch: Shoshone Chieftan, Mormon Elder, 1822-1877 (Logan, UT: Utah State University Press, 1999); Ronald Holt, Beneath These Red Cliffs: An Ethnohistory of the Utah Paiutes (Logan, UT: Utah State University Press, 2006); Robert S. McPherson, Sarah Burbank and Jim Dandy, Navajo Tradition, Mormon Life: The Autobiography and Teachings of Jim Dandy (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2012).

11 This observation runs counter, at least to a degree, to a claim made by Mark Leone that American Indian people who convert to Mormonism inculcate or maintain a sense of inferiority “because they see themselves in Book of Mormon terms and, as Mormons, remain Indian on Mormon terms.” As I hope this dissertation demonstrates, and as Murphy argued in his dissertation, “A closer look at twentieth century Native American Mormon experience...illustrates that Mormon Indians do not automatically accept an inferior status.” Mark Leone, The Roots of Modern Mormonism, 203-4, quoted and discussed in Murphy, “Imagining Lamanites,” 143-44. Thanks to Thomas Murphy for pointing this source out to me and for his discussion of it.
while the Book of Mormon can be understood as part of a larger Euroamerican colonial imaginary—and thus as a Euroamerican representation—“Lamanite” identity has become entangled in the formation of Indigenous subjectivities in North America, South America, and the Pacific Islands. It has, in a sense, been “indigenized” by American Indian Latter-day Saints.\(^\text{12}\)

This dissertation explores ways in which some Indigenous Latter-day Saints have used the Book of Mormon to “read back” against the grain of colonial possession and against racialized narratives of curse or inferiority.\(^\text{13}\) It also, however, considers some of the ways that more negative aspects of Lamanite identity have sometimes been internalized, even as others have been resisted. Further, it explores cases in which some aspects of Lamanite identity are resisted or rejected while others are embraced, as well as outright rejections of Lamanite identity by Indigenous Latter-day Saints. As such, Indigenous readings and Indigenous identities based on or influenced by the Book of Mormon are presented as complex and multivalent. Religious conversion, scriptural hermeneutics, and racialized religious-ethnic identities, I argue, are best understood not simply as “cultural genocide” nor as straightforwardly anti-colonial. They are most

\(^{12}\) On this point, Murphy, “Imagining Lamanites,” 119, states: “The Book of Mormon represents Lamanites as the colonial ‘other,’ the passive objects of Mormon scripture. Yet, when self-identified Lamanites forged their own stories they emerged as active complex subjects, not the passive others of scripture. Some Indian Mormons objected to the label of Lamanite while others embraced it.” See also Murphy, “From Racist Stereotype to Ethnic Identity,” which uses Nahua textual sources to make this point. For comparative examples using Mayan and Ladino sources, see Thomas W. Murphy, “Reinventing Mormonism: Guatemala as Harbinger of the Future?” Dialogue: Journal of Mormon Thought 29.1 (Spring 1996): 177-92.

\(^{13}\) On “reading back”—as a discursive form of resistance that counters colonial narratives of possession and dominion—as it pertains to biblical hermeneutics, see R. S. Sugirtharajah, The Bible and the Third World: Precolonial, Colonial, and Postcolonial Encounters (Cambridge, UK: University of Cambridge Press, 2001). See also Murphy, “Other Histories,” for examples of Nahua individuals who both read and wrote back against white church leadership centered in the U.S., against anthropological narratives that froze Indigenous authenticity in the past, and other forms of colonial control.
helpfully described and situated as what anthropologist Jean Dennison terms a “colonial entanglement,” a creative adaptation that blends traditions of both Indigenous and colonial inheritance in the formation of (often contested) contemporary Indigenous subjectivities. This is not to deny that significant changes might not take place. Some knowledges and practices may become lost in the transformation, or adaptation. But Native peoples do not stop being Native—as Navajo, Shoshone, Catawba, etc.—because some aspects of their cultural practice may changes. Indeed, to change is simply to be human and to survive.

This is a study, then, of Indigenous Mormon hermeneutics and subjectivity—ethnic, racial, colonized, postcolonial, and religious. It examines ways in which an individual’s positionality or situatedness in a social context influences the way they interpret a text such as the Book of Mormon. It is also a study of how the Book of Mormon and Mormon affiliation has influenced articulations of Indigenous pasts, histories, lineages, geographies, and ethnic identities. It will examine how Indigenous Latter-day Saints have engaged the text along with their tribally specific traditions and histories. I argue and hope to demonstrate that the Book of Mormon and related Latter-day Saint cultural products have had a significant influence in the shaping of modern Indigenous subjectivities.

“Reading” The Book of Mormon

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15 On this point, in regard Native Christian hymns, see Lassiter, Ellis, and Kotay, The Jesus Road; and McNally, Ojibwe Singers.
The Book of Mormon is more than a book. LDS children typically learn the stories and themes of the Book of Mormon long before they can read, through song, play, hand motions, visual imagery, coloring books, action figures, and motion pictures, as well as through oral recitation and summary by adults. The Book of Mormon can be thought of as something like a worldview, not in the sense of a uniform way of viewing the world that all Mormons share identically, but as a way of viewing self and “others” that is informed by a participation in cultural narratives influenced by and known collectively as The Book of Mormon. For example, if someone refers to a contemporary person as a Lamanite, or as a descendant of father Lehi—Book of Mormon terms—that person is reading the Book of Mormon—reading it onto others, and reading the world through the “text” of the Book of Mormon. Thus, one does not have to have actually read the book, or even know how to read, in order to participate in the cultural activity of “reading” the Book of Mormon. In this sense, the Book of Mormon “text” can be thought of something much larger, varied, and expansive than the printed authoritative version. From a critical scholarly point of view, the printed text is just one variation among many, one “reading” of the Book of Mormon, and not always the most significant one.

Further, the Book of Mormon had its beginnings not in written or print form, but as an oral recitation in what might be called a performance of revelation. Thus, before it was written and printed—“textual” in the standard sense—the Book of Mormon was oral and performative; it is a revealed text, dictated to a scribe by a prophet-in-the-making through

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16 Folklorist Jeff Todd Titon explains that, while text is most often narrowly thought of as written or printed literature, “broader constructions of text, as is true of any object of interpretation, include the tactile, the oral, the gestural, and so forth.” “Text,” in *Eight Words for the Study of Expressive Culture* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003), 71.
the use of a seer stone. Further, as intimated above, while the “text” was printed and read in a traditional sense by often highly literate Mormons, it has also been embedded within the largely oral “reading” community of Mormonism, blurring the conventionally supposed boundaries between orality and literacy. Mormons read and they talk about what they read, often generating new “readings.” In other words, reading, learning, and imbibing a Mormon worldview involve both oral and literary participation—as well as visual and, in short, embodied participation—in Mormon “textual” culture.

These observations preclude any neat division between Euroamerican literacy and Indigenous orality when considering Indigenous Mormon readings of the Book of Mormon. Not only are Indigenous communities often very literate, as well as oral, but predominately Euroamerican cultures are often much more oral and performative than is often recognized. The Book of Mormon as cultural activity, both in means of its production and in the way it is taught and “read” today, is particularly useful for making this point and blurring these supposed boundaries.17

A text can also mean much more than what it formally is “about.” Book of Mormon scholar Terryl Givens argues in his book By the Hand of Mormon that in early Mormonism the Book of Mormon functioned more as a symbol of restored revelation than it did as an instructional text; that is, what the text signified was more important, or at least more significant to readers of the time, than the content of the book.18 This thesis is easily

17 As Jonathan Boyarin points out, a number of scholars have begun to question the “distinction between oral and literate cultures,” recognizing that “orality and textuality, far from being opposite poles, interact in complex, multidirectional ways.” Jonathan Boyarin, ed., The Ethnography of Reading (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 2-4.

18 Terryl L. Givens, By the Hand of Mormon: The American Scripture that Launched a New World Religion (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002). Givens states that “looking at the Book of Mormon in terms of its early uses and reception, it becomes clear that this American scripture has exerted influence within the church and
overstated, and often has been, as a generalized statement, obscuring the extent to which the content of the Book of Mormon did influence the way early Mormons viewed the world around them—particularly their imagined relationships to Indigenous peoples (as Lamanites) and the United States (Gentiles)—but it is instructive for understanding part of what motivated many early white converts to join the church and by pointing out that a book can signify matter that the substance of the text only points to. This observation—that a book can signify something quite other than its actual content—is pertinent to some of the Indigenous readings I explore below, such as, for example, a Blackfoot woman (chapter 10) who reads the Book of Mormon in order to recover forgotten Blackfoot teachings.

While readings of the Book of Mormon are often significantly unified among Latter-day Saints—due largely to the Church’s correlation program and centralized hierarchical structure—variation does exist; there are many ways to read a “text” such as the Book of Mormon. Reading is a disciplined activity, especially in a hierarchal church with centralized authority, where readings outside of the bounds of orthodoxy can be threatening to the church hierarchy. Yet even within the realm of orthodoxy—which in this context would be

reaction outside the church not primarily by virtue of its substance, but rather its manner of appearing, not on the merits of what it says, but what it enacts. Put slightly differently, the history of the Book of Mormon’s place in Mormonism and American religion generally has always been more connected to its status as a signifier than signified, or its role as a sacred sign rather than its function as a persuasive theology. The Book of Mormon is preeminently a concrete manifestation of sacred utterance, and thus an evidence of divine presence, before it is a repository of theological claims” (63-64). Reviewer Thomas Murphy criticized Givens for ignoring American Indian responses to the Book of Mormon and for continuing “the long-standing Mormon tradition of denying American Indians a voice in the debate.” Thomas W. Murphy, Book Review, Journal of Mormon History 28.2 (Fall 2002): 194. Attention to American Indian reception would consider that the Book of Mormon was generally presented differently to American Indians (as Lamanites) than to potential European or Euroamerican converts (Mormons did not usually—with some early exceptions—seek out African American converts). To American Indian peoples the book was almost always presented as a history of their forefathers. While it was often presented to potential white converts as a “history of the Indians,” this was to a slightly different purpose, and often, as Givens suggests, to signify a restoration of divine presence and revelation, though it may also often have been read out of curiosity about the “former inhabitants” of this continent.
readings by those in good standing in the Church—variation exists. Some of the more significant variations, I argue, are among those for whom the stakes are highest—Indigenous Latter-day Saints whose subjectivities are profoundly influenced by Book of Mormon interpretation and representation.

A Brief Reception History

The Book of Mormon and other revelations and “commandments” issued by Joseph Smith to early Mormon converts (or through him, as they saw it) created and fueled millennial expectations regarding a great gathering of the faithful, the building of the city of Zion, or New Jerusalem, and the imminent return of Jesus Christ. Indigenous American peoples, whom early Mormon converts identified as Lamanites, were to play a vital role in the unfolding of these events. In fact, to the earliest Mormon readers, Indigenous peoples of the Americas were central and white Euroamericans (Gentiles), including early Mormons themselves, were peripheral.  

As historian Grant Underwood has shown, the “restoration of Israel” was the major theme written about or preached upon by early Mormon writers who cited the Book of Mormon, and the descendants of Joseph in the Americas (American Indians) were the primary group referred to. The most popular passages address or constitute a theme I identify as a “Lamanite apocalypse.” The most cited passage in this interpretive

19 Forthcoming work by Matthew Dougherty will complicate this observation.


21 The term is mine, as a shorthand reference to this set of interpretive themes and millennial expectations; it is not a term used by contemporary Saints of the time, that I am aware of. This interpretive theme has been identified by others, including one scholar who identifies it as an “Amerindian apocalypse.” See Ronald
framework comes from the Book of Ether, in the Book of Mormon, which prophesies the building of a New Jerusalem by the descendants of Joseph (whom early Mormons understood to be Indigenous Americans) who would be restored to the “land of their inheritance...no more to be confounded.” The most-cited chapter, 3 Nephi 20 in current editions, prophesies that the “remnants” of the house of Israel (American Indians) who are “scattered abroad” will be gathered together and “brought to a knowledge of the Lord their God, who hath redeemed them.” Following this, they will march through the unrepentant Gentiles (white Euroamericans) “and ye shall be in the midst of them who shall be many; and ye shall be among them as a lion among the flocks of sheep, who, if he goeth through both treadeth down and teareth in pieces, and none can deliver.” Following this apocalyptic war scenario—between American Indian peoples and white, Euroamericans (read: the USA)—God will again establish his people Israel “in this land” in a New Jerusalem, thus fulfilling his ancient covenant with Israel. As the early Saints interpreted these passages, they fully expected that the Book of Mormon would be taken to the American Indian peoples—“Lamanites,” as they referred to them—who would then convert en masse, build the New Jerusalem, and destroy Gentile America, ushering in the second coming of Christ. They, the early Mormon founders and converts, would be the privileged few who would be spared this destruction by being adopted into the House of Israel. This general interpretive framework constitutes what I refer to, generally speaking, as the earliest general reading of the Book of Mormon by early Mormons (1830-31).


The first major mission undertaken by early Mormons was to Indian Country where they anticipated a mass conversion of all the “Lamanites,” followed by an apocalyptic war, the revelation of the site of the New Jerusalem and the building of the City of Zion. The mission was short-lived, however, as the missionaries were evicted by an Indian agent after only a few days in the Indian Territory. Joseph Smith soon thereafter redirected missionary and Zion-building activities so that they effectively took place among and focused primarily on Euroamerican converts. As a result of the failure of these expectations and simultaneous success among Euroamerican populations (such as in the city of Kirtland, Ohio, which effectively became church headquarters), gradually white church members came to see themselves as Israel (see chapter 4) and set about building the city of Zion themselves in the state of Missouri. During this time, many Latter-day Saints continued to express millennial expectations of a “Lamanite apocalypse,” which was one factor in the friction that developed between Mormon settlers and neighboring Missourians who eventually drove them out of the state. After this church leaders began to downplay or divert attention from at least public expressions of these millennial expectations, particularly as they related to the expectation of Indian violence against “Gentiles.”

While expectation of a “Lamanite apocalypse” persisted for some time, though muted, gradually this reading tradition faded from popular Mormon consciousness. Several explanations have been offered to explain why. One explanation is that after the failure of the first “Mission to the Lamanites” in 1830, Joseph Smith shifted attention away from proselytizing to American Indian peoples and tried to tone down the emphasis on the role

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“Lamanite” people would play in the building of Zion and the culmination of sacred history as attention, shifting instead his attention and missionary efforts to white settlers, among whom the movement was finding much more success.24 This idea has been challenged by others who point out that interest in and missionary efforts among American Indian peoples continued in significant measure beyond this first mission but were toned down gradually after the violent expulsion from Missouri, which resulted at least in part due to fears that Mormon settlers were trying to rile up and collude with American Indians in bordering Indian Territory in an all-out war with other settlers (fears that were not entirely unfounded).25 Sociologist Armand Mauss suggests that the violence of frontier settlement in the Great Basin and meager missionary success brought a gradual shift in attitudes toward Indigenous peoples that he sums up as a transition “from Lamanites to Indians,” that is, from being perceived as the covenant seed of Israel and millennial hopefuls to being considered simply as savage impediments and, after being “pacified” and removed to reservations, a remote and, to most, invisible memory.26 And, as John-Charles Duffy convincingly explains, usage of the term (and focus on) “Lamanites” in official LDS discourse greatly declined in the last decade of the twentieth century and the early part of the twenty-first in response to a perceived “need to promote unity in a culturally diverse church, greater investment in a universal Christian message, and shifting social attitudes about race,” all of which “worked to make Lamanite identification a liability in the eyes of

24 Stott, "New Jerusalem Abandoned."
25 Walker, “Seeking the ‘Remnant.’”
Church leaders."²⁷ Probably all of these can be considered as factors in a gradual fading of early readings and interpretation of these passages.

Another factor has been an expansion of the category “Israel” and a contraction of the category “Gentile” in Mormon usage and conceptions. Though the idea that white Americans of primarily European descent could be members of the House of Israel predated Mormonism and may have been present among early Mormons from near the beginning,²⁸ early Mormons seem to have interpreted the passages referring to Gentiles in 3 Nephi 20 as referring primarily to Europeans and Euroamericans (and presumably to Asians and Africans) and Israel as Jews and Lamanites. Gradually, however, due at least in part to the importation of British Israelite theories from missions conducted in England,²⁹ and later the practice of Patriarchal Blessings—which reveal or assign one’s Israelite lineage—Latter-day Saint conceptions of the House of Israel expanded to include basically anyone who converted to the LDS Church—and not only by adoption but by literal descent. White Europeans, particularly those of English descent, came to be associated in particular with the tribe of Ephraim, who was narrated as and generally understood to be the dominant and superior (and typically white) tribe. Though certain Gentile passages in the

Book of Mormon continue to be interpreted as a general reference to European nations, and especially the U.S.—particularly when it places them at advantage or in paternalistic relationships (e.g. 1 Nephi 13; 2 Nephi 10:9)—the “remnant of Israel” passages in texts like


²⁹ See Mauss, All Abraham’s Children, ch. 2.
3 Nephi have broadened to include Ephraim and others and have largely lost their specificity as reference to Indigenous peoples of the Americas, as Lehi’s Israelite seed—at least in predominant readings.

**Historiographical Context**

American Indian and Indigenous studies of Christianity among Indigenous peoples is a topic of interest to many in the field. The fact that so many Indigenous people are affiliated with Christian denominations while also asserting tribal nationalism and sovereignty makes Christianity, for many, an important element in the formation of contemporary Indigenous subjectivities. Past scholarship often has depicted Christian conversion among Indigenous peoples as a form of assimilation. According to assimilationist models, Indigenous people who converted to Christianity were no longer authentically Native. Such models situated Christianity and Indigenous culture in binary opposition, rendering a term such as “Indigenous Christianity” a contradiction in terms. (This also has to do with the universalizing logic of Christianity and the imposition of the Enlightenment category of “natural religion” on Indigenous practice—the two can’t co-exist, according to this logic.) As several scholars have noted, many historical works and popular perceptions continue to portray Native American Christians as inauthentic, seeing Christianity and Indigenous identity as incompatible and portraying conversion as assimilation and thus an erasure of Indigeneity. Taking a different approach, scholars who

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have challenged approaches that figure conversion as assimilation have tended to operate from a model of culture and citizenship that depicts Native culture as what Native people do—and thus portray conversion as a practice of tribal adaption and survivance.\(^3\) Such a model of culture and peoplehood is particularly useful to Indigenous scholars and activists who perceive of Indigeneity as a political identification bound up in issues such as tribal enrollment, governance, nationalism, and sovereignty—not what someone else decides is culturally authentic.

This dissertation aligns itself more with the latter of the above-described models but strives to add greater complexity to the view of Christian conversion as an act of sovereignty by also describing it as a “colonial entanglement.” While perhaps all Indigenous Christian conversion can be considered as such—since Christianity was introduced through colonial encounter—conversion to Mormonism carries with it unique challenges and complexities. Because the Book of Mormon purports to narrate Indigenous origins it has been particularly controversial. I address this controversy by demonstrating how many Indigenous converts to Mormonism as well as second or third generation Indigenous Mormons thoughtfully engage the Book of Mormon textually and in social settings and are often aware of and responsive to the multiple dimensions of Indigenous Mormon

subjectivity. In particular, I demonstrate how Indigenous Latter-day Saints have engaged religious texts and discussions about those texts in Mormon and Indigenous communities. In this way I demonstrate that anxieties about how to best understand and represent Christian conversion among Indigenous peoples is not merely an academic exercise but a topic that Indigenous people (outside of the academy) engage in through their interpretations of scripture.

Much of the scholarship on the Book of Mormon has sought either to vindicate its purported ancient historicity, to dismiss it or explain it away as a nineteenth-century white representation, or to provide reception histories, the last of which typically have focused on published texts. Only fairly recently have scholars begun to treat in a sustained way the reception of the text among Indigenous Mormons. As noted previously, this dissertation demonstrates an understanding of the Book of Mormon as part of a wider colonial imaginary but also argues that Lamanite identity has become entangled in the formation of Indigenous subjectivities. In this way, this dissertation attempts to move the


discussion beyond debates about historicity and address directly the significance of race to textual representation. If this dissertation does not directly participate in debates over the historicity of the text, I do recognize that debates over historicity play a significant role in framing the context in which reading of the Book of Mormon takes place.

This dissertation also contributes to the field of Religious Studies. By considering the stakes of argument over conversion and authenticity both “on the ground” and in the academy (which are not, of course, entirely separate), this dissertation further articulates and refines understandings of both Indigeneity and religion as complex and contested categories. I address the issue of conversion using terminology developed by historian Linford Fisher, who prefers the terms religious engagement and affiliation to conversion.34 Fisher’s model and terminology assists in presenting a more nuanced and less totalizing picture of conversion, one that sees the boundaries between Christian and traditional Native practice as blurry, porous, and overlapping. In most Indigenous scriptural readings I have encountered, narratives are influenced by and often interwoven with elements from traditional tribal or national culture. This project also explores ways in which the interpretive activity of scripture reading—scriptural hermeneutics—is influenced by racial, ethnic, and colonized subjectivities and positionalities, which it also helps to shape. In this way it shifts the focus from dominant or authoritative interpretation and representation of these texts35 to a focus on interpretations by the subaltern “subjects” of these texts. There

34 In his work The Indian Great Awakening: Religion and the Shaping of Native Cultures in Early America (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), Linford Fisher prefers these terms to conversion because of the latter’s tendency to imply a totalizing and wholesale transfer from one set of beliefs and stance toward the world to another. Conversion, as he explains, is much more complex.

are a small number of works that engage this topic along similar lines in regard to Mormonism among Indigenous peoples—in places like Hawai‘i, Mexico, Guatemala, or the Navajo Nation.\(^{36}\) This study focuses on ways that Indigenous North Americans from a variety of national and geographic settings have read and responded to the Book of Mormon, based primarily on ethnographic fieldwork.

**Theoretical Framing and Indigeneity**

A theoretical framework I have found helpful for thinking about the relationship between reading and indigenous subjectivity is what James Clifford calls “articulation theory,” drawing on the works of theorists James Hall and Antonio Gramsci. Clifford uses the term in both the sense of putting something into words, as linguistic/textual expression, and in the sense of joining things together. Some advantages of articulation theory is that it is not an attempt at either an essentialist or universal definition of indigeneity; rather, as Clifford points out, articulation emphasizes the diversity among peoples who identify as Indigenous, but also stresses the points of connection, which may change significantly over time and space. Such change is expected and normal in articulation theory. I find this theory helpful for my own project—situating Indigenous Mormon subjectivity as something that is articulated, often through reading, and also as a narrative identity that connects Indigenous people in disparate locations and

\(^{36}\) There have been a limited number of studies focusing on this issue as part of their studies of Mormonism among specific Indigenous groups or individuals. See for example, Aikau, *Chosen People, Promised Land*; McPherson, *Navajo Tradition, Mormon Life*; Christensen, *Sagwitch*; Murphy, “Other Mormon Histories.” Certain chapters in Murphy’s dissertation, “Imagining Lamanites,” do similar work using textual sources produced by American Indian Latter-day Saints. He has also done ethnographic fieldwork in Antigua and Guatemala in regard to this topic; see Murphy, “Reinventing Mormonism.”
circumstances. In the chapters below, I refer to Lamanite subjectivity as something that is articulated by individuals through speech and as something that connects (articulates) individuals to Indigenous communities and to Indigeneity; both should be read in reference to Clifford’s use of articulation theory in relation to Indigeneity.

Indigeneity is itself, of course, a colonial imaginary, or at least it began as such, as imagined through the term *indios*, and its eventual English counterpart, “the Indian.” Prior to Europe’s (imagined) encounter with the peoples of the so-called “New World,” there was likely no category linking all of the disparate peoples there into a single category. Gradually it became a blanket category used to cover the entire western hemisphere, including the Pacific Islands. It has become, however, in many ways, a counter- or anticolonial formation through the adoption and deployment of the category by peoples who identify as Indigenous in order to assert their sovereignty against that of colonial regimes. But it is

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38 Indigeneity has also “gone global”—and in a sense has always been such—making it increasingly difficult to define or, (gulp), to contain. Accordingly, the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues has not only refrained from providing a universal definition, after early attempts, but has stated that such a definition is not necessary, desirable, or even possible at this time. They do, however, provide a working definition, stressing “continuity with pre-invasion and pre-colonial societies,” occupation of ancestral land, cultural distinctiveness and generational transmission of cultural forms, non-dominance, and “other relevant factors.” However, none are apparently essential characteristics. The qualification of these factors as a “working definition” as opposed to a “formal definition of indigenous peoples that would be adopted by States” seems to be a tacit recognition that a formal definition striving for universal application would inevitably fail to account for the diversity among Indigenous peoples and could not take into account social and cultural specificity and changing circumstances. Further, to do so would be to place definitional power in the hands of an international committee, and in the hands of participating states, rather than in the Indigenous communities themselves. Thus, though it seems to beg the question, a final clause in the working definition “included the right of indigenous peoples themselves to define what and who is indigenous.” This is rather circular reasoning as far as definition goes, but is perhaps necessarily so. As the working definition concludes, “This preserves for these communities the sovereign right and power to decide who belongs to them, without external interference.” In other words, it recognizes the rights of Indigenous peoples to define their own criteria for inclusion or exclusion from their communities; to define them would be to appropriate their sovereign right to define themselves. For the present anyway, the UN “definition” remains open-ended. UNDESA (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs), “The Concept of Indigenous Peoples,” Background paper prepared by the Secretariat of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNCPFII), Workshop on Data Collection and Disaggregation for Indigenous Peoples, New York, 19-21 January, 2004, UN Doc. No. PFII/2004/WS.1/3, pp. 1-3.
always, it seems, in some way an identity defined at least in part by its relationship to the non-Indigenous, and typically the colonial. Though the category has often been used in an essentialist manner, referring to diverse populations assumed to share certain qualities or traits—often imposed and rooted in problematic categories such as purity and corruption—cultural theorists and anthropologists of late have tended to theorize indigeneity according to relational rather than criterial definitions. As James Clifford explains, the term “indigenous” applies to diverse communities but “does not presume cultural similarity or essence but rather refers to comparable experiences of invasion, dispossession, resistance, and survival.” He points out that such a definition makes most sense in places like the Americas, Australia, the Pacific, and the arctic.

In the United States, American Indian is a political category, though a contested one, often associated with or considered equivalent to citizenship in a federally recognized American Indian nation. As George Roth explains,

Federal recognition is not about whether a group is Indian, or has a traditional culture, or can demonstrate Indian ancestry. While these may be the basis of eligibility for various private, state, and even some federal programs, recognition by the federal government means recognition of status as a semisovereign entity, 41

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39 On this point, Marisol de la Cadena and Orin Starn explain that “indigeneity emerges only within larger fields of difference and sameness; it acquires its ‘positive’ meaning not from some essentialist properties of its own, but through its relation to what it is not, to what it exceeds or lacks.” They are careful to point out that “this is not to say that the indigenous condition is somehow derivative or without powerful visions and directions of its own.” It is rather an argument about indigenous becoming, “that indigenous cultural practices, institutions, and politics become such in articulation with what is not considered indigenous within the particular social formation where they exist.” Marisol de la Cadena and Orin Starn, eds. Indigenous Experience Today (Berg Publishers, 2007), 4; see also Sita Venkateswar and Emma Hughes, The Politics of Indigeneity: Dialogues and Reflections on Indigenous Activism (London and New York: Zed Books, 2011), 1-2.

40 For a brief overview of relatively recent “criterial” and “relational” approaches, see Francesca Merlan, “Indigeneity Global and Local,” Current Anthropology 50.3 (June 2009): 304-6. For a treatment that considers indigeneity both in relation to the non-indigenous and based on supposed and actual relations between indigenous peoples and collectives, see also Francesca Merlan, “Indigeneity as Relational Identity: The Construction of Australian Land Rights,” in Indigenous Experience Today, 125-50.

41 Clifford, Returns, 15.
entitled to a government-to-government relationship with the United States and, at least in part, distinct from the state in which the tribe is located.\textsuperscript{42}

Most of the individuals I interviewed during my fieldwork are enrolled members of federally recognized nations, with some noted exceptions. As I explain in chapter two, so-called Western Catawba people are technically descendants and not citizens of the Catawba Nation. I also make reference to a Lumbee individual (chapter four)—a state-recognized North Carolina tribe that is not federally recognized or recognized by some indigenous nations\textsuperscript{43}—to two Hawaiian individuals\textsuperscript{44} (chapter four), and a man who claims to be “part

\textsuperscript{42} George Roth, “Recognition,” in \textit{Indians in Contemporary Society}, ed. Garrick A. Bailey, volume 2 of \textit{Handbook of North American Indians}, ed. William C. Sturtevant (Washington DC: Smithsonian Institution, 2008): 113. While a seemingly cut-and-dried criterion—a group is either recognized or it is not—federal recognition can also be considered “a process; a series of encounters; a structure of power; a set of relationships; a matter of becoming, in short, and not a fixed state of being” (de la Cadena and Starn, \textit{Indigenous Experience}, 11). For one, because of the shifting nature of federal stances on Indian Affairs, even federally recognized nations have gone through periods of flux and change in regard to their status in relation to the U.S. federal government. Assimilationist policies such as allotment and termination have sought periodically to end federal trust relationships and dissolve or abolish tribal nations as such, while policies such as those embodied in the Indian Reorganization Act, tribal restoration, and the policy of self-determination have upheld it. Federal recognition has thus not been a stable enterprise. Further, it is ongoing. The Bureau of Indian Affairs—today staffed almost entirely by American Indian employees—includ an Office of Federal Acknowledgement that continues to receive applications and petitions for federal recognition and, at least potentially, continues to extend federal recognition to existing Indigenous communities who, for whatever reasons, have not been federally acknowledged or have lost federal recognition in the past (see Valerie Lambert, “Choctaw Tribal Sovereignty at the Turn of the 21st Century,” in \textit{Indigenous Experience Today}, 154, 159). Accordingly, indigeneity is in a perpetual state of being and becoming in regard to federal recognition.


\textsuperscript{44} The annexation of Hawaii as a U.S. territory and then state further complicates the category of Indigeneity in an American context. While the proposed Akaka Bill (Native Hawaiian Government Reorganization Act of 2009)—which has passed through various incarnations between 2000-2009—would establish federal recognition of Native Hawaiians similar to that of an American Indian tribal nation, the bill has been opposed on a number of fronts, including by Hawaiian sovereignty advocates who push for secession and restoration of the Hawaiian monarchy or some form of independent Hawaiian national sovereignty. The Hawaiian Home Commission Act of 1920, however, established the legal basis for the Department of Hawaiian Homelands, which regulates the management of some benefits for Native Hawaiians, a political category defined according to blood quantum. Thus, while not technically a national affiliation in terms of citizenship, Native Hawaiian indigeneity is a political identification entangled in race-based criteria for belonging—and it is also an intensely contested identity. See J. Kehaulani Kauanui, \textit{Hawaiian Blood: Colonialism and the Politics of Sovereignty and Indigeneity} (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008).
Cherokee” (chapter nine). In each of these instances, however, I specifically identify the contested political and often racialized—and, in this context, also religious—boundaries surrounding and maintaining the categories of American Indian, Indigenous, Native American, etc. These are issues that American Indian peoples take serious and so do I. By addressing these themes here, I am not seeking to challenge in any way the sovereignty of American Indian nations but rather to uphold it by describing, often in great detail, the processes by which tribal-national citizenship, descent, and like categories are constructed, maintained, debated, contested, and upheld, and specifically how they relate, for self-identifying indigenous Latter-day Saints, to Book of Mormon categories such as Lamanite, Manasseh, children of Father Lehi, and so forth.

This dissertation also addresses the question of how Mormon missionary work and settlement has affected American Indian peoples. From being a persecuted people in flight across the continent in seek of refuge, Mormons became settlers in the West, displacing Ute, Paiute, Goshute, and Shoshone peoples, among others. A colonization pattern brought them into greater contact with Navajo, Hopi, Blackfoot, and other Indigenous peoples throughout the North American West. Missionary work led back into the East and South and in some instances, such as for some Catawba people of the Carolina Piedmont, conversion meant migration westward—a development that had a significant impact on tribal issues such as enrollment and citizenship.

45 Part of the complexity of indigeneity in North America is the fact that it has often been racialized. While tribal affiliation is a political category, it has been fairly standard to determine enrollment qualification based on “blood quantum,” leading to the idea that Indianness adheres in “blood” and the idea that one can be “part Indian.” See Terry P. Wilson, “Blood Quantum: Native American Mixed Bloods,” in Racially Mixed People in America, ed. Maria P. P. Root (Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, 1993), 108-25; see also Dennison, Colonial Entanglement, chapter 2.
This dissertation, then, is an extended reflection on Indigenous subjectivity articulated through readings of the Book of Mormon by Indigenous North American Latter-day Saints. It is based on recorded interviews, field notes, attendance at worship services, and general interactions with Indigenous Latter-day Saints. Fieldwork was conducted primarily in three sites, or groupings of sites, and primarily among practicing Latter-day Saints, and a few non-practicing Saints or former-Saints, living near or in American Indian nations and communities. Fieldwork began in 2011 in the Catawba Nation of the Carolina Piedmont, located today primarily within the boundaries of the state of South Carolina. It then extended in 2014 to include Shoshone peoples of the Great Basin, primarily from the Northwestern Band of the Shoshone Nation living in northern Utah and southern Idaho, but also among Eastern Shoshone people living in or near the Wind River Reservation, within but independent of the state of Wyoming; and finally among citizens of the Siksika, Kainai, Piikuni, and Blackfeet nations, members of the Blackfoot Confederacy, located congruent to the borderlands of northern Montana and southern Alberta. My field work methodology involved conducting recorded interviews, using a digital voice recorder, and hand-written field notes. Quotations below based on ethnographic work are mostly from recorded and transcribed interviews. I also took frequent field notes and draw from my observations in field notebooks as well. Typically I do not place quote marks around direct quotations that are taken from my field notes, unless indicated. In addition to conducting interviews—typically in people’s homes, but also in church buildings and other settings—I also attended church meetings, public events and had other “participant observation” interactions with people in these areas. I have typically employed pseudonyms to protect the identity of individuals I interviewed or interacted with, except where an individual preferred or gave
permission to be identified or if the person is a public figure or is already identified in a published text that I cite as a source. While primarily ethnographic, my methodology also draws on and blends historical and archival research, particularly in chapters one through three.

While people read and interpret texts from specific locations and according to their own specific traditions and circumstances, Indigeneity is a broader hemispheric colonial/anti-colonial category that links all New World Native peoples into one expansive category. Similarly, the category Lamanite, is also a colonial-indigenous identity roughly congruent to Indigeneity. Accordingly, Indigeneity should be considered at (at least) two levels: site/people specific—as Shoshone, Navajo, Maori, Cherokee, etc.—and as a broader, hemispheric (if not global), shared category. I have organized my dissertation into two parts, accordingly. Since Indigenous Mormons as “Lamanites,” if they accept that term, face similar thematic issues, their responses can thus justifiably, I suggest, be placed in conversation with or juxtaposition to each other. Yet they each also have specific histories, and readings, rooted in their own experiences and territories. Accordingly, chapters below

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46 On this point see Murphy, “Imagining Lamanites,” 87-88, which similarly points out the congruence between Indian and Lamanite identities: “The early historical use of the label Lamanite reproduces the problems associated with the European misnomer Indian. When Columbus applied the term Indian to the indigenous people of the Western hemisphere in 1492 he conflated a diverse group of disparate peoples with a wide variety of different cultures into one amalgam. The people that Europeans would label Indian had no prior self-conception as a distinct population. Historically speaking, there were no American Indians prior to 1492. The idea of an Indian emerged in European consciousness, only later to be adopted and used by the people so labeled. Likewise, there were no Lamanites, Lemuelites, or Ishmaelites in the historical record prior to July 1828 when Joseph Smith consulted his seer stone and received a revelation promising to bring the knowledge of the Nephite record (his gold plates) to Lamanites, Lemuelites, and Ishmaelites as a means of facilitating their acquisition of a knowledge of their purported fathers and their glorification through Jesus Christ.” Murphy also recognizes that, just as the term Indian was later adopted by many of the peoples to whom it was applied by Europeans, eventually many Indigenous Mormons came to accept the term Lamanite as the marker of an ethnic identity; see Murphy, “From Racist Stereotype to Ethnic Identity” and “Other Histories.”
are organized both thematically—around issues such as race, place, Indigeneity, practice, and tradition—and by tribal nation and location.

Part I is composed of three case studies that examine the influence of Mormonism in three American Indian and First Nation contexts. In chapter one I narrate the history of the Northwestern Band of the Shoshone Nation, demonstrating how a group that was displaced by Mormon settlement negotiated the challenges of a colonial context through affiliation with the Mormon Church. Rather than being forced onto a reservation, they sought out Mormon help in establishing a church-sponsored Shoshone farming colony, which they named Washakie. There they were basically left alone by the federal government, who considered them a de facto “ward” of the LDS Church. After this relationship came to an end, part of the Washakie settlement land owned by the church was donated to the tribe and placed in trust with the federal government, allowing the modern NWBSN to become a full-fledged tribal nation, resuming their government-to-government relationship with the United States and qualifying for government services. While now the NWBSN is independent of the LDS Church and some members no longer practice Mormonism, many members continue to practice the faith, to identify as Lamanites, and to be identified by others as “those Mormon Indians.”

Chapter two examines the history of Mormonism in the Catawba Indian Nation. Mormon missionaries first entered the nation in the 1880s and by the 1920s Catawba people had converted almost in toto to the LDS Church, with Mormonism providing much of the social organization and group cohesion of the Catawba community. But Mormonism also brought a geographic split to the community when a significant group of Catawbas migrated westward as part of a Mormon migration. This group lost citizenship in the nation
and has been seeking to regain it ever since. This context provides a fruitful site for examining how modern tribal nations are formed and how categories and processes such as citizenship, enrollment, and descent are constructed and maintained as part of an ongoing process of indigenous national sovereignty. While Mormonism has divided the group, it also continues to link many Catawba people, east and west, with a shared, spiritual indigeneity as people of the Book of Mormon.

Chapter three traces a Mormon migration north to the Blackfoot borderlands of southern Alberta, where a group of Latter-day Saint refugees established the colony of Cardston on the southern edge of the Kainai Nation’s Blood Reserve. Subsequently, Mormon settlers found themselves caught up in a territorial dispute between the Kainai Nation (also known as the Blood Tribe) and the Canadian government. Since the Mormon settlers are the ones actually on the territory in dispute, the conflict was in effect expressed and experienced as a conflict between the Mormon settlers of Cardston and the Kainai people. Book of Mormon categories have often been used for articulating the nature of the conflict, and Kainai Latter-day Saints have often found themselves in the complex situation of being located on both sides of this divide. This chapter charts this complex and often fraught terrain, demonstrating how Kanai Latter-day Saints have succeeded in maintaining a sense of community and belonging both within the LDS community of Cardston and the Kainai Nation, though not without significant challenges in both.

Part II is composed of seven chapters organized thematically. Chapters four and five address the issue of Indigenous Mormon subjectivity. Chapter four examines several examples of Native engagement with Book of Mormon categories of Israelite lineage and situates such engagement—which includes a dialectic of acceptance and resistance—as
articulations of indigenous subjectivities. Chapter five looks specifically at how racialized Book of Mormon curse passages are negotiated by Indigenous Latter-day Saints. Chapters six through eight address indigenous readings on issues related to place and seek to contextualize some of the politics within which such reading “take place.” Chapter six situates the Book of Mormon as a migration narrative in a context where articulating migration has significant political implications, pitted against autochthonous creation narratives that root Native presence and origins in North American soil. Chapter seven explores several readings that demonstrate that Indigenous readings take place both on a specific, tribal-national, local level and a hemispheric Indigenous level, as Indigenous peoples belong both to specific, tribal-national, local settings and to the broader category or coalition of hemispheric Indigeneity. Chapter eight looks at the project of Book of Mormon geography—that is, the imaginative mapping of where the events narrated in the Book of Mormon are supposed to have taken place—specifically as a practice engaged in by Indigenous peoples, either as a way of situating themselves in their territories, as a strategy for laying claim to, or reclaiming, a contested Indigeneity, or as resistance to inscription by others. Chapter nine examines tensions that Mormon affiliation brings to participation in and understanding of Native practices such as the Sundance, sweat lodges, and smudging. This chapter considers how categories such as “religion,” belief, and practice pertain to and create complex situations for Indigenous Latter-day Saints, and considers how individuals in different circumstances navigate these challenges. And finally, chapter ten, a short chapter, considers three examples of Indigenous Latter-day Saints for whom Mormon affiliation and indigenous readings of the Book of Mormon have provided recovery, or “restoration,” through “rememory” of identity, wholeness, and stability, which was lost
through the shattering violence of colonial disruption. As this and several of the chapters strive to demonstrate, while Book of Mormon indigenous subjectivity can be understood as a colonial entanglement—like blood quantum, nationalism, or “culture”—Book of Mormon indigeneity can also be understood as a site for indigenous survivance.47

47 The term survivance is a critical term often used in Indigenous Studies and typically attributed to Gerald Vizenor, who explained, “Survivance is an active sense of presence, the continuance of native stories, not a mere reaction, or a survivable name. Native survivance stories are renunciations of dominance, tragedy and victimry.” Gerald Vizenor, Manifest Manners: Narratives on Postindian Survivance (Lincoln: Nebraska, 1999), p. vii. Jacques Derrida also used the term in multiple ways, as Vizenor points out, sometimes to denote a relic of the past, a specter, or sometimes “the surviving of an excess of life which resists annihilation.” Gerald Vizenor, “Aesthetics of Survivance,” in Survivance: Narratives of Native Presence, ed. Gerald Vizenor (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 2008), 21.
Part I. Shoshone, Catawba, Blackfoot
CHAPTER 1. INDIAN MISSIONS AND CHURCH FARMS: THE NORTHWESTERN BAND OF THE SHOSHONE NATION

The Northwestern Band of the Shoshone Nation almost was not. Their ancestors were the survivors of a near-total massacre that occurred on the banks of the Bear River on January 29, 1863. The massacre—originally referred to as a “battle”—was conducted by the typically anti-Mormon colonel Patrick Edward Connor and his California Volunteers, led to the Shoshone encampment by Mormon scout Orin Porter Rockwell. Connor had been stationed in Salt Lake City to keep an eye on the Mormons, as well as “the Indians,” and to protect the overland mail system. Connor sought to make a name for himself by settling, once and for all, the “Indian problem” on his assigned portion of the mail route. And he settled it with gunfire, slaughtering almost an entire encampment of Shoshone men, women, and children on an early winter morning before most of them could even arise. Estimates of the number killed range from almost 300 to over 400, making it the worst recorded massacre, in terms of the number of lives lost, in the United States’ invasion of North America, and setting an awful pattern and precedent for subsequent massacres, such as Sand Creek and Wounded Knee. Following the massacre, Connor’s soldiers, the California Volunteers, were housed and cared for by Mormon settlers in the nearby town of Franklin, some of whom expressed gratitude to them for taking care of such dirty work so they wouldn't have to. Of the estimated 450-500 people camped on the Bear River that day, less than a quarter survived. Among them was Sagwitch, a prominent Shoshone leader
whose band and their descendants, the survivors, became the Northwestern Band of the Shoshone Nation (NWBSN) as it exists today.¹

In the aftermath of the massacre, the Northwestern Shoshones went through several profound transformations. From being a hunter-and-gatherer society, they became farmers. They also became Mormons. This chapter will tell that story, based both on Shoshone oral traditions and historical records. In addition to demonstrating how Mormonism has become a part of the lives and subjectivities of Northwestern Shoshone people, this chapter will provide context for the indigenous readings of the Book of Mormon by Northwestern Shoshone people in Part II of this dissertation.

**Shoshone Peoples and the Mormons**

The Shoshone or Shoshonean peoples who inhabited the northern Great Basin consisted of multiple related and allied groups, families, and bands that were linguistically related and linked through kinship. Eventually, through developments that occurred over the course of the 19th and 20th centuries, they came to be divided and classified as the Eastern Shoshones, now centered around the Wind River Reservation in Wyoming; the Northern Shoshones, centered at Fort Hall in Idaho; the Western Shoshones, in Nevada and parts of Utah, Idaho, and Oregon; and the Northwestern Shoshones of northern Utah and southern Idaho.

¹ NWBSN citizen and tribal council member Darren Parry points out that most estimates are probably low since they fail to account for those who were killed while trying to escape in the river and whose bodies therefore would have been washed downstream (personal interview). On the massacre, see Brigham D. Madsen, *The Shoshoni Frontier and the Bear River Massacre* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1985).
The first Mormon contacts with Shoshone people occurred during the overland trail with those who would come to be known as Eastern Shoshones. (I say more about that contact in chapter 7, below.) After settling in the Great Basin, Mormon settlers and missionaries had significant contact with every one of these Shoshone groupings. In fact, one group of Northern Shoshones settled along the Snake River in what is now northern Idaho came to be known by a Book of Mormon name, as the Lemhi Shoshones, after Mormon missionaries named their mission Fort Lemhi after the Nephite King Limhi in the Book of Mormon. But the closest and most entangled and extensive contact between Mormons and Shoshones was with those who would become known as the Northwestern Band of the Shoshone Nation (NWBSN).

**Mormon Settler Colonialism**

According to family tradition, Sagwitch was chief among the Shoshone delegation that rode out to greet the Mormon wagon trains when they arrived in July of 1847. As former NWBSN chairman Bruce Parry, a descendant of Sagwitch, related to me, regarding that initial exchange:

We’d known the Mormons since they came in 1847. Because the second day they were here we sent a delegation to Salt Lake City and said, 'We don't mind you being here, but how are [you] going to pay the rent, for, you're on our property.' [laughs] And Brigham Young was sick that day, and so Heber C. Kimball was kind of the leader of the meeting, and he said, after the Indians left, he said, 'We're not paying the Indians for land.' He says, 'The land belongs to the Lord and the Lord sent us
here and we’re not paying rent, we’re not going to buy it, we’re just going to live here.” [laughs] So that was that.³

As historian Scott Christensen points out, the early years of Shoshone-Mormon coexistence were generally amicable, despite occasional episodes of conflict. Shoshone people taught Mormon settlers what native plants could be eaten and often brought ducks, geese, and fish to exchange through trade or as gifts. Mormon settlers made gifts of flour and crops and occasionally traded. Shoshone leaders had frequent contact with Brigham Young, who was not only the leader of Mormon settlement but also the appointed

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² The Mormon (mis)interpretation of this conversation should be understood as a conflict of very different ways of thinking about land use and “property.” As several scholars have pointed out, Indigenous “hunter-gatherer” land use conceptions are often closer to what Europeans would call usufruct; that is, the idea that one can obtain rights to use land—for hunting, farming, temporary settlement, etc.—by entering into reciprocal trade agreement, payment, alliance, kinship or treaty relationships with others who also use the land. The idea of a sole owner holding the land as property, in the sense of real estate, probably did not apply or perhaps even exist, the idea being antithetical to sustaining the type of ecology necessary for hunting and gathering herbs, roots, berries, and so forth. See William Cronon, Changes in the Land (New York: Hill and Wang, 1983).

³ Parry’s narrative is likely shaped by Mormon records, or historical writings based on those records, as well as by Shoshone memory; or, rather, Mormon historical writings are among the sources that inform his family and tribal tradition. The Journal History of the Church entry for July 31, 1847, eight days after the Saints arrived in the valley, recounts that “During the day about twenty Shoshone Indians visited” the camp of the Mormon Battalion in order to trade. They had been preceded by a group of Ute Indians and “The Shoshones claimed that they were the owners of the land and that the Utes had come over the line to interfere with their rights. They signified to the [Mormon] brethren by signs that they wanted to sell them the land for powder and lead.” This account states that Brigham Young was present at this July 31 meeting with the Shoshone delegation but was absent due to illness from a Sunday meeting the following day where Heber C. Kimball reported on the Shoshone delegation meeting. Journal History of the Church, July 31 and August 1, 1847, CR 100 137, volume 137, files 120-21, 125, Church History Library, Salt Lake City, Utah. The quote attributed to Heber C. Kimball comes from the journal of Mormon chronicler William Clayton, who recorded the statements of church leaders from a Sunday meeting in Salt Lake City held on August 1, 1847 (based in part on notes by Isaac Bullock). According to Clayton’s notes, Kimball made reference to the meeting with the Shoshone delegation and stated: “I understand they offered to sell the land and we were to buy it of them, the Utahs [Utes] would want pay for it too. The land belongs to our Father in Heaven and we calculate to plow and plant it and no man will have power to sell his inheritance for he cannot remove it; it belongs to the Lord.” William Clayton’s Journal: A Daily Record (Salt Lake City: The Deseret News, 1921), 335. Clayton’s journal became the basis for the entry in the Journal History of the Church (likely redacted by Clayton himself) for August 1, 1847. Due to ambiguity in Clayton’s journal entry, some historians have attributed this quote to Brigham Young rather than Kimball. For example, see Lawrence G. Coates, “Brigham Young and Mormon Indian Policies: The Formative Period, 1836-1851,” BYU Studies 18.3 (Spring 1978): 435, which was used in subsequent sources such as Arrington’s biography of Brigham Young. Other sources, however, have attributed the quote correctly to Kimball while also noting that Young was ill and absent from the Sunday, August 1, meeting.
territorial governor. When U.S. president Buchanan sent troops in 1857 to put down a rumored (and perhaps not totally baseless) Mormon insurrection, Sagwitch reportedly agreed to side with the Mormons if fighting were to occur.  

In the ensuing years, however, Mormon settlement brought multiple hardships for the Shoshone and Ute people who inhabited the northern valleys of the Great Basin. Grazing cattle destroyed the seed-bearing grasses, roots, and herbs the Shoshone people depended on, as did the Mormons’ farming practices of plowing up land and putting in crops to which they claimed exclusive right (even if they did occasionally or routinely pay for use of the land). Cattle grazing, farming, and over-hunting also drove the “game” animals—elk, deer, antelope, and some buffalo—into the mountains or away completely, as in the case of buffalo. Mormon settlers also routinely slaughtered rabbits and other small game that they saw as pests, which Shoshone people also depended on as a food source, and destroyed animals they saw as “destroyers” of their livestock, primarily wolves but also coyotes, bears, foxes, and any other predators.  

The changes these practices brought about were noted by some Mormon leaders, though their concern was typically the implications it had for continued grazing, not the welfare of the Shoshone or Ute people. As Mormon leader Orson Hyde observed in 1865, “I find the longer we live in these valleys that the range is becoming more and more destitute of grass; the grass is not only eaten up by the great amount of stock that feed upon it, but they tramp it out by the very roots; and

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4 Scott R. Christensen, *Sagwitch: Shoshone Chief, Mormon Elder, 1822-1877* (Logan, UT: Utah State University Press, 1999), 18. My construction of the historical background and context for discussing Mormonism in the NWBSN in the early part of this chapter relies largely on Christensen’s book.

where grass once grew luxuriantly, there is now nothing but the desert weed, and hardly a spear of grass is to be seen.” Historian Jared Farmer has referred to this process as the “desertification of Zion,” demonstrating that contrary to the Mormon mythology that the pioneer settlers caused the desert to “blossom as the rose” through irrigation and planting, quite the opposite happened: through land abuse they turned thriving native grasslands and wetlands into fields and hillsides covered in “desert weed.”

The result for the Shoshone people was starvation. As Indian Agent Jacob Forney (Brigham Young’s replacement after the arrival of Johnson’s Army in 1857) predicted, this reduced state inevitably led to conflict. Shoshone people were often reduced to asking for or demanding Mormon payment in beeves, flour, and crops for their use of the land. Despite Kimball’s initial declaration to the contrary, Mormons often did agree to such payments, though not always willingly, often barely producing enough to get by themselves. As tensions mounted, Brigham Young often had to remind the Mormon people that their “Lamanite” neighbors “are the seed of Israel through the loins of Joseph…and belong to the chosen seed,” and that it is the Saints’ duty “to save Israel, not destroy them.”

Still, he often urged them to take a defensive posture and, particularly in his relations with the Ute people to the south, he was not opposed to the use of violence when he deemed it necessary. As Jared Farmer points out, Brigham Young’s famous Indian policy, summarily encapsulated in Mormon memory in the statement “it is cheaper to feed the Indians than to

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8 Christensen, Sagwitch, 21.
fight them,” came as a result of learning, through experience, how expensive and taxing an “Indian war” can be.\(^9\)

The Mormon invasion of Cache Valley, north of the Salt Lake Valley, was particularly devastating to the Shoshone people of that area.\(^10\) As Bruce Parry explained to me:

Tribal members and the church got along pretty well until they started moving into Cache Valley, which was really a great place for food and for grasses. It was just an ideal place. And the hill where the Logan Temple sits today, was a sacred hill to the Indians because that’s where they took their people to heal them. And so Cache Valley was very important to us. And the church started moving cattle up there and other stuff and settling. It was really upsetting to the tribal members. Because all of their food resources were gone. Their cattle ate all of the grasses and they fenced the place and, you know, it just kind of changed their whole life. They had no resources to eat.

Close proximity to the Oregon and California emigrant trails also caused frequent difficulties for Shoshone-settler relations, in Cache and Box Elder valleys in particular, during the 1850s and 1860s. These trails cut right through the heart of the Shoshone homeland. Emigrants passing through often shot at Natives and killed them for trivial

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\(^{10}\) While “invasion” is a strong term, I believe it works for Mormon entrance into and eventual settlement of Cache Valley (and for the Utah Valley among Utes; see Farmer, *On Zion’s Mount*). While it is perhaps too strong a term for Mormon settlement in the Salt Lake Valley—where both Shoshones and Utes seemed interested in having the Mormons as trading partners—their entrance into Cache Valley was strategic and calculated (they wanted it for grazing land) and they were well aware that it was against the wishes of the Shoshone people who relied on the area for their hunter-gatherer livelihood. In fact, in 1859 Agent Forney recommended that Cache Valley be set aside as a reservation for the Shoshone people. It was territory they claimed as part of their domain, it had plenty of water so the U.S. government would not have to construct expensive irrigation projects (they wanted to convert the Shoshones to farming), and there were still relatively few settlers with improvements who would need to be compensated. It was an ideal setting and also the last relatively unsettled valley left in that part of the territory. But it was also too rich, for precisely these reasons, for American settlers to pass up, or “leave” to “Indians.” Forney’s recommendation was ignored and Mormon settlers moved in to establish farms and ranches, causing the entire valley to, as Forney noted, “become impoverished” through destructive grazing and farming practices. Christensen, *Sagwitch*, 24. See also John W. Heaton, “No place to pitch their teepees: Shoshone Adaptation to Mormon Settlers in Cache Valley,” *Utah Historical Quarterly* 63.2 (1995): 158-71.
causes, which brought on a number of retaliatory attacks.\textsuperscript{11} It was this concern more than any other that led Connor on his infamous march of death against the Shoshone people in Cache Valley in January of 1863.\textsuperscript{12}

\textbf{Bear River Massacre}

Sagwitch’s band was just one of those who were camped on the Bear River when Connor and his troops arrived on the morning of January 29. Other band leaders included Bear Hunter, Sanpitch, and the ironically-named Lehi. Bear Hunter and Lehi perished at Bear River, along with nearly everyone else. Some of those who survived did so by jumping into the ice-choked river and swimming downstream. A few escaped on horses. Others, primarily children, hid among the dead and were fortunately overlooked by soldiers who marched through afterward thrusting bayonets through the wounded. Sagwitch’s young son Yeager lay hidden beside his grandmother among the dead and recalls seeing a soldier

\textsuperscript{11} Christensen, \textit{Sagwitch}, 27. Bruce Parry explained to me that the massacre was ordered largely “because they blamed us for all of the depredations that were occurring on the Oregon Trail, further down—which wasn’t us, by the way. It was Chief Pocatello and other Shoshone from Idaho.”

\textsuperscript{12} Another factor that contributed to the pressures put on the situation was the fact that the United States had failed to enter into a treaty with Shoshone peoples until 1863, after the Bear River Massacre. Accordingly, the federal government had never distributed any goods or provided any assistance to the Northwestern bands, something that might have prevented some of the “theft” of cattle and horses from settlers and emigrants and thus the violent conflicts that ensued. The responsibility for such assistance fell completely to the Mormon settlers, who did draw significantly from tithing warehouses, but never enough to satisfy the Shoshone population who could no longer support themselves through hunting and gathering native plants. Recognizing this dire situation, Indian superintendent Duane Doty visited the area in the spring of 1862 and found the Shoshone bands there in a condition of “great suffering.” He purchased and distributed a small amount of flour and clothing, hoping that doing so would prevent a raid on the mail stations in order “to sustain life.” After informing his superiors of the situation, in July 1862 he was instructed by the commissioner of Indian affairs to make a treaty with the Shoshone using a congressional appropriation of $20,000. Tragically, Doty delayed, arguing that it would be best to wait until funds and negotiations could be arranged with the Bannocks and Utes as well, noting how “mixed” these presumably separate groups were. He also argued that, given a recent round of attacks and raids on the emigrant trails, doing so at that moment would send a wrong message to the Shoshones that they would receive rewards “for ‘killing’ the white men.” Accordingly, treaty negotiations were postponed until May 1863, four months after the Bear River Massacre. Christensen, \textit{Sagwitch}, 40.
raise his gun to him and then move on. He later stated that he believed he was protected and spared so that he could bear witness, later, to the horror of the massacre.\textsuperscript{13}

Some of the nearby Mormon settlers who were eyewitness to the slaughter’s aftermath were horrified and disgusted by the scene, not only of so many bloody corpses but also the rape and murder of wounded Shoshone women who had survived the initial onslaught. Others, however, praised the actions of Connor and his men, even going so far as to view it as the “intervention of our heavenly Father.” One Mormon woman referred to it as an “intervention of providence,” stating that “patience had ceased to be a virtue” in their dealings with troublesome Indians. Another man stated, apparently on behalf of the Logan first ward of the LDS Church, “We, the people of Cache Valley, looked upon the movement of Colonel Connor as an intervention of the Almighty.” What they had been delivered from with such violence was the necessity of feeding the Shoshone people, whom they had dispossessed, and guarding their cattle from them in their starving condition.\textsuperscript{14}

While it might seem ironic for Mormon settlers to view the virulently anti-Mormon Patrick Connor as an agent of divine interposition, such instrumental thinking is actually not really out of accord with Mormon scriptural logic. There are multiple examples in the Book of Mormon of the Lord using attacks of the Lamanites to stir the Nephites up to repentance—using the wicked to achieve his purposes, out of regard for this chosen people, even if it meant using violence.\textsuperscript{15} And the Mormons themselves still anticipated the

\textsuperscript{13} Christensen, \textit{Sagwitch}, 53-54.

\textsuperscript{14} Christensen, \textit{Sagwitch}, 58.

\textsuperscript{15} Of course, in this example it is violence against his chosen people, rather than delivery of his chosen, as the Mormons seemed to view the Bear River Massacre. But my point here is the instrumentality of a Providence that uses expendable others—even the wicked—out of regard for his supposedly chosen.
Lord using the Lamanites on their behalf as a “battle axe” against their Gentile enemies (often construed as the United States during this period) in the apocalyptic wrapping up of history. Thus, in a twisted reversal of that logic, Mormon bishop Henry Ballard stated his belief that “the Lord had raised up this foe [Connor] to punish [the Indians] without us having to do it.”16

Mormon sociologist Armand Mauss has characterized the Utah settlement period as a time during which Mormon settlers experienced a shift in their thinking about Indigenous peoples as they moved from being an imagined representation in a book to actual people they encountered on the ground in real life. He characterized this as a shift from thinking about Indigenous people as Lamanites to thinking about them as Indians.17 In other words, the challenges of settlement and the realities of invasion, the failure of their anticipated “Indian apocalypse” or even much success at proselytizing, and other factors led to disillusionment; they largely gave up on their ideals and capitulated to the American stereotype of the troublesome Indian.18 Even if church leaders and missionaries had not totally given up on earlier hopes, Mauss’s thesis seems to be borne out by the Cache Valley Mormon settlers’ response to the massacre. But demonstrating that Mormon settlers must have sensed their own culpability in the event, even while denying it and seeking to


17 This is encapsulated in a chapter titled “From Lamanites to Indians.” See Armand Mauss, All Abraham’s Children: Changing Mormon Conceptions of Race and Lineage (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003), chapter 3.

18 Of course, to some degree most probably never let go of that stereotype, and despite the idea that Lamanites were a chosen people, the stereotype was also basically woven into Lamanite identity already. For example, 2 Nephi 5:24 states, “And because of their cursing which was upon them they did become an idle people, full of mischief and subtlety, and did seek in the wilderness for beasts of prey.” Which is basically a nineteenth-century American stereotype of the “lazy” or “troublesome Indian.”
exonerate themselves, Bishop Peter Maughn of Cache Valley wrote to Brigham Young, “I feel my skirts clear of this blood. They rejected the way of life and salvation which have been pointed out to them from time to time...and thus have perished relying in their own strength and wisdom.” In other words, according to Maughn, they got what was coming to them; they should have listened to the missionaries. In yet another reversal, eventually they did just that.

Mormons and Farmers

There were multiple factors that led Sagwitch and his band to eventually request baptism and to seek settlement assistance from the Mormon Church. According to Shoshone historian and Sagwitch descendent Mae Parry, likely drawing from family tradition, Sagwitch consulted with his cousin John Moemburg who had learned English and acquired farming skills while working for white farmers in Brigham City (he was living there at the time of the massacre at Bear River). Together, they became convinced that the only way they could survive as a people was to take up farming. Accordingly, they travelled to Wellsville in Cache County to enlist the help of Frank Gunnell, a Mormon settler who was a friend of Moemberg. Gunnell agreed to send a letter to Brigham Young on their behalf, requesting help in their new endeavor to become farmers.

Brigham Young, of course, would have been more than happy to see the Shoshone people become farmers. Like many American missionary reformers of the Indians, Brigham Young already had farming in mind as part of his effort to redeem Lamanite Israel. And

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19 Qtd. in Christensen, Sagwitch, 58.

Young was not the only one who wanted to see American Indian people become established as farmers. For example, John Wilson, assigned as Indian agent to the Great Basin prior to the creation of Utah Territory, wrote in 1849 that efforts should be made “to turn their attention to some extent at least to the cultivation of the soil. for...no other employment, will civilize a wild man of the Forest.” Indeed, turning American Indian people into farmers and Christians was the main thrust of the “civilizing” project of many Protestant reformers and many of the federal agencies assigned to Indian Affairs.  

In northern Utah and southern Idaho territories, turning the Northwestern bands into farmers or assigning them to a reservation was a particular concern. In 1870, Utah superintendent J. E. Tourtellotte stated that he hoped a government farm could be established for the Northwestern bands. Their non-sedentary habits made tasks such as distribution of annuities and, essentially, control of them, difficult. Indian agents, assigned to “manage” Indian populations did not like to have to track down “their” Indians and became confused when they kept changing locations or visited their kin (or homes) in their non-assigned reservations or territories. Accordingly, the only two options that seemed palatable to them was either containment on a reservation—where they would preferably stay put—or through sedentary farm practice, where they would also preferably stay put. Settler colonialism cannot abide the unsettled.

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22 Christensen, *Sagwitch*, 74.

23 Between about 1851 to 1860 a federally operated, or at least sanctioned and funded, Indian farm system existed in Utah Territory. It was effectively begun by Brigham Young and continued by others when he was replaced as territorial governor and superintendent of Indian affairs in the territory until it lost the support of governor Alfred Cummings and effectively ceased around 1860. Beeton, “Indian Farms,” 301-14.
In addition to farming, Parry family tradition and Mormon sources cite other, more visionary factors pushing the Northwestern band to Mormonism. As Bruce Parry related to me, “tradition says they were visited [in 1872] when they were camped...by Bear River City. They were visited by three men.” Anytime Mormons hear stories—or tell stories—about three unidentified men who show up, often to deliver a message or to assist someone in need, and then mysteriously disappear, they automatically know exactly who those three strangers likely are. In the Book of Mormon, when Jesus Christ appeared to the Nephites following his resurrection, he granted three of his Nephite disciples a special dispensation similar to that of the apostle John in the New Testament (by some interpretations\textsuperscript{24}), that they “shall never taste of death” but should live until his second coming, with the power to “show themselves unto whatsoever man it seemeth them good” and to perform “great and marvelous works” among the Gentiles, the Jews, and the “the scattered tribes of Israel.”\textsuperscript{25}

While Three Nephites stories are popular throughout Mormonism, they have shown up with particular frequency in stories related by missionaries who have served among American Indian peoples. For example, one missionary who served on the Fort Peck and Blackfeet reservations in Montana believed that the Three Nephites had been laboring among them and teaching them about the Book of Mormon because many he taught reportedly already knew all about the content of their message.\textsuperscript{26} Thus, it is not surprising, as Parry explained, that “a lot of local people speculate it was the Three Nephites” who

\textsuperscript{24} Joseph Smith apparently interpreted John 21:20–23 in the New Testament to mean that the Christian Apostle John did not die but was granted his wish to tarry on earth doing missionary work until Jesus Christ returns. Smith, in fact, dictated a revelation to this effect. See Doctrine and Covenants section 7.


appeared to the Northwestern Shoshone and “taught the tribal members, gave them a Book of Mormon [and] said, ‘Go to Salt Lake City and ask for the missionaries and they will come teach you, and then you can decide what you decide.’” Accordingly, that fall Sagwitch sent his son Yeager and five others to Salt Lake City to request the missionaries only to discover that the missionaries assigned to work with the Natives were “out at Ibapah, on the desert, where the Gosiutes live. So they walked out there and listened and were converted and baptized. So they came back and told Sagwitch, the missionaries are out there, they promised to come in the spring.”

A story with similar features—perhaps a source for the Parry family tradition—was related by the man whom Brigham Young eventually sent to teach the Northwestern Shoshone people how to farm and be Mormons. George Washington Hill had previously been called to labor among tribes in the Salmon River country of northern Idaho, where he had learned the Shoshone language and became well-known among Shoshone peoples.27 According to Hill family tradition (as related by Hill’s son following his father’s death), Sagwitch sought out Hill and requested that he come and baptize his people, explaining that they had been directed to do so because of dreams and visions among his people.28 Hill would have been a natural person for Sagwitch to turn to with such a request, being well-known for having served among the Shoshones for several years both as a missionary and

27 In 1855, Brigham Young called twenty-seven men as missionaries to the Lamanites, including Hill. Their instructions were, as a later chronicler recalled, to “settle among the Flathead, Bannock, or Shoshoni Indians, or anywhere that the tribes would receive them...teach them to cease their savage customs...to cease their roving habits and to settle down; also to teach them how to build houses and homes; in fact, to do all that they could to better the conditions of these fallen people.” John V. Bluth, “The Salmon River Mission,” *Improvement Era* 3 (Sept 1900): 803.

assistant to the Indian agency in the distribution of annuities. Hill, in fact, had been given a Shoshone name, Inkapompy, which means “Man with Red Hair.” He was also apparently reputed to be a healer among the Shoshones for his ability to successfully perform blessings of healing through spiritual power, which apparently gained him the respect of many Shoshone people.29

Hill reports, however, that he turned down Sagwitch’s request since at the time he was not ordained as a missionary, having been released from his mission. Hill recalled explaining “when the Great Spirit visited his prophet [Brigham Young] and the prophet called upon him, then it would be time for him to go out and preach to them and baptize them.” And, of course, this is exactly what happened a short time later, after one more visit and request from Sagwitch in the meantime, according to Hill.30 All of this is remembered in Parry family tradition, which also attests, similar to an account that Hill published himself, that Sagwitch foresaw Hill’s coming and sent tribal members to meet him and assist him.

Hill also recalled, after the Shoshone Indian farm experiment was underway (as related below), that an Indian man named Ech-up-wy (presumably Shoshone) had a vision while in his lodge at Skull Valley during which he was visited by three messengers. As Hill reports this vision:

They told him the ‘Mormons’ God was the true God, and He and the Indians’ Father were one; that he must go to the ‘Mormons,’ and they would tell him what to do, and that he must do it, that he must be baptized, with all his Indians; that the time was at hand for the Indians to gather, and stop their Indian life, and learn to cultivate the earth and build houses, and live in them. They then said to him ‘Look!’ He turned his head, and, although he was sitting in his lodge, he saw all this northern country

29 Christensen, Sagwitch, 84-87.

30 Christensen, Sagwitch, 86-87.
about Bear River and Malad. He saw small farms all over it with grain growing very finely, and small houses dotted here and there all over the land. He saw also that these were Indians’ houses, and that there were a great many Indians at work, and apparently feeling first rate. He noticed also a few white men there showing the Indians how to work, one of whom he recognized as myself.

This vision was told to Hill by Ech-up-wy, who was apparently a part of the early colonizing effort on the Bear River, after the farm colony had already been established. Reportedly while looking over the farm from a certain vantage point, he recalled this vision, which he had not shared with Hill or anyone else prior to this point. This narrative should be read then as a retrospective account of this vision, taken as a confirmation of the decision the Shoshone people made to throw their lot in with the Mormons. Ech-up-wy in particular, Hill recounts, had been unsure about the location chosen for the farm settlement until the recollection of this vision was triggered when he “viewed from an eminence the very scene that was shown him in his vision. After that he was satisfied that he was at work in the right place, and told me of his vision, and his reason for demanding baptism.”

While Hill’s recounting of this vision sounds like a settler-farmer-missionary’s fantasy, and probably is to some degree, it is also not implausible that Ech-up-wy had such a visionary experience and reported it to Hill. This would have occurred right around the time of the Ghost Dance, which, by most accounts, began not far from Skull Valley among Paiute people in what is now northern Nevada with the visionary Wovoka. In reality, Wovoka was only one of many individuals in this area during this time who reported visionary narratives that often fed into each other and cross-pollinated. As I will describe in greater detail shortly, this reported visionary experience also preceded or coincided with a larger movement in which many Shoshone, Paiute, Gosiute, Ute, and Bannock people

sought out baptism, which likely signified something quite different to them at this time than it did to white Mormon settlers and missionaries.\textsuperscript{32}

Thus, while Mae Parry’s published account does not mention anything visionary but depicts the choice to seek out Mormonism as a pragmatic decision Sagwitch and other band members arrived at—realizing that if they were going to survive outside of a reservation, they would have to become farmers—these seemingly conflicting accounts may both be partial explanations that can be reconciled. It is very probable, as Mae Perry suggests, that prior to Hill’s appointment Sagwitch had already arrived at the conclusion that his band needed to become farmers, likely at least in part due to conversations with his cousin, Moemerg, who had worked as a farmer. It is also not at all unlikely that some Shoshone people reported visions like the one Hill attributed to Ech-up-wy. It is very possible, in fact, that these events can be pieced together: Sagwitch and others were already considering taking up farming, that he heard about Ech-up-wy’s or other band members’ visions—during a time when many people were reporting such visions—and that he sought out Hill and when Hill declined, Sagwitch had a letter sent to Brigham Young requesting that he send Hill back to them as a missionary, which he did, not long after Sagwitch’s visit to Hill.\textsuperscript{33}

Over time, the partial accounts of these events cross-pollinated and shaped the Hill and


\textsuperscript{33} While Hill does not depict Young as saying anything about Sagwitch’s letter in his account of his mission call, and instead has Young indicating that this is something he had been thinking about for a long time (of course, both could be true; he had been thinking about it and then the letter came), I wouldn’t put it past Young or Hill to omit reference to the letter, either intentionally or unintentionally. That’s the way memory works; things are forgotten, or things are omitted as memory is crafted, and particularly when memory is crafted according to genres that value foresight and divine revelation (like the apparent coincidence of Sagwitch’s request and Hill’s call, without any apparent connection but inspiration and providentialism).
Parry family traditions about how Hill was sent and how Mormonism came to the Northwestern Shoshone people.

However the call came about, Hill was called once again by Young to return to the Shoshone people with instructions, as Hill recalls, to “find some way of getting the Indians located somewhere where you can establish a central gathering place where they can be taught the art of civilization, where they can be taught to cultivate the soil and become self-supporting.” As to where and how he would do this, Young left that to Hill to figure out on his own.34

Before teaching them to farm, however, Hill preached to them and baptized them, recording the names of 101 Shoshone converts during his first visit. He also noted that they held a council on “temporal affairs,” which may have meant farming but probably was in relation to their starving condition and need of supplies, which he requested in a letter to Brigham Young the next day. When he was called upon the next day to baptize another Shoshone band of about twenty individuals, Hill wrote to Dimick Huntington, the church’s reputed “Indian interpreter” and “patriarch to the Lamanites,” and informed him that “the work is extending like fire in the dry grass.” It was another year, after these initial baptisms, before Hill initiated their first farming experiment, in May of 1874. In the meantime, Hill received a letter from another Shoshone leader who also wanted to learn how to farm and irrigate crops. 35

After two false starts, the Northwestern band finally got a farm going. Hill’s first aborted attempt was at a field near Franklin, Idaho, not far from where the massacre had

34 Christensen, Sagwitch, 89.
35 Christensen, Sagwitch, 91, 96-97; Madsen, Northern Shoshoni, 96.
occurred. Band members were assigned to communal projects, some were hired out as private hands for Mormon farmers (who only sometimes paid them), and set to work digging a canal to irrigate their selected field for crops. They planted potatoes and put up fences. But for unstated reasons, Hill decided to abandon this site and look for another one the following spring, and apparently before they were able to harvest any of the crops they had planted. This came as a double blow since the federal Indian agency apparently decided (with no explanation) that the Northwestern bands who had declined to relocate to a reservation would no longer receive annuities, leaving them once again at the mercy of the church’s tithing office.36

That winter Sagwitch and one of his wives—either Mogogah or Beawoachee—and another Shoshone couple were initiated into the Mormon temple ritual in the Endowment House on temple square in Salt Lake City (the temple itself was still under construction), a sacred ordinance that very few Native people had received. They were also, as Mormon apostle Wilford Woodruff noted, “the first Couple of Lamanites” to be “sealed” (married) to one another for “time & Eternity.”37

The Corinne Scare

The following spring a group of Shoshone converts were back at it with Hill directing them, this time west of Brigham City between the Malad and Bear rivers, north of the Great Salt Lake. They put in crops and fences and set to work on constructing a dam. But this site too was abandoned when Hill realized they would not be able to get the water there in time and that the water was too alkaline anyway. When a local bishop


37 Christensen, *Sagwitch*, 104.
recommended using the communally held Bear River City field they once again abandoned their work and started over again. Though Hill came to view this also as an inferior site—“I do not think they could have selected a poorer peace of land”—the new Shoshone farmers were content with it and finally their crops began to grow.\textsuperscript{38} This farm, however, would end in even greater tragedy than the first two, despite their faith that Book of Mormon promises guaranteed their success. (Such prophecies were also invoked by neighboring Gentiles to roust the military to their “rescue,” as explained below.)

Bear River Field was just five miles from the “Gentile” town of Corinne. Corrine was anti-Mormon and apparently also anti-Indian. (If the local Mormon rhetoric following the Bear River Massacre was appalling, the Corinne newspaper rhetoric celebrating Indian deaths is downright disgusting.\textsuperscript{39} Hill could not have chosen a more potentially explosive time and place to begin an Indian farm. But as things began, it looked like it was going to be a phenomenal success. The Shoshone farmers liked the location and wanted to make it their permanent home. And other Shoshone, Ute, and Bannock people also began to flood in out of interest and a desire to join the farming community. As Christensen notes, Hill became so busy teaching and baptizing he had little time left for farming.\textsuperscript{40} The beginnings of this Indian farm, in fact, coincided with a major movement, akin to the Ghost Dance, of American Indian peoples of the Great Basin who suddenly became very interested in

\textsuperscript{38} Christensen, \textit{Sagwitch}, 105-7.

\textsuperscript{39} See Christensen, \textit{Sagwitch}, 114-15.

\textsuperscript{40} Christensen also explains that Hill taught using as a visual aid an 18”-square sized scroll depicting Nephite prophets and perhaps scenes from the Book of Mormon. As Hill’s daughter-in-law described his method of teaching, “he turned to different characters and told them about their forefathers.” One can only imagine what these images looked like. Given the prominence of the curse (“skin of blackness”) passages and the “white and delightsome” passages from the Book of Mormon at the time (see chapter 4), one can make an educated guess.
seeking Mormon baptism. Dimick Huntington noted that he had baptized 2,000 in Salt Lake City and that he anticipated as many more. “They are coming in by hundreds.” Similar things were occurring throughout the Great Basin. But if such a development was a matter for rejoicing to the Mormons, it was a cause of concern to the agents at Fort Hall and other basin reservations, and it became a source of paranoia at Corinne.

As a railroad town about to be rendered obsolete by a competing line, Corinne was in a state of financial decline, and the townspeople knew it. They also hated the Mormon Church, which seemed (and in many ways did) to have a monopoly on power in multiple ways in the basin. When American Indian people began gathering in large numbers outside of town at the Indian Farm—many of them coming into town on occasion—the town panicked. A situation arose for those at the Indian Farm not unlike that the Mormons had faced in Missouri: the citizens of Corinne feared a Mormon-Indian collusion and an attack on Corinne. Whether the settlers actually feared an attack or used such rhetoric as a pretense for driving out the American Indian people from their farm is unclear. When soldiers were called in to protect the town from possible attack, Hill accused them of simply trying to drum up business with the presence of soldiers who would need to be housed, fed, and entertained at the brothels. But the concern of the Corinne citizens was

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42 See Christensen, Sagwitch, 107-9; Madsen, Northern Shoshoni, 96-97.

expressed in terms similar to those expressed by Indian agents\(^4^4\) and similar to those used in the past to express fear about and opposition to the Mormons. After visiting the farm in May 1875 to see if there were Shoshone people there from the reservations—they had been released from Fort Hall for lack of provisions—the Fort Hall Indian agent wrote to the commissioner: “These Indians are being operated on by the Mormons, many of them Baptized, others taken through the ‘Endowment House’ (whatever that is or means) and then called ‘The Lords Battle Axes.’” The “Battle Axe” rhetoric was employed also in Corinne newspapers, implying a union between Mormons and Indians for the purpose of attacks on non-Mormon settlements. As the Daily Corinne Reporter charged: “There are said to be five hundred Indians encamped across the river, near the Mormon settlements. It is said they have allied themselves with the Danite\(^4^5\) [Mormon] hordes for the coming struggle.” Adding fuel to this fire was the fact that the trial of John D. Lee for his involvement in the infamous Mountain Meadows Massacre—which was an example of Mormon settlers convincing local Paiutes to assist them in slaughtering an Gentile emigrant train—ended in 1875 without a verdict (though Lee was later executed). With this fresh on their minds and feeling that the Mormons had gotten away with it, leaders of the Corinne press used the image of that massacre to incite fear of another at Corinne. The Corinne Daily Mail, for example, reported in bold headlines:

\(^4^4\) For example, the agent at Wind River noted his belief that a number of Shoshone people had been “induced” to leave the reservation to go to Utah where they “were baptized into the Mormon Church, and advised to leave their reservation and drive the Gentiles out of Utah, and take possession of their ranches and property.” Christensen, Sagwitch, 133.

\(^4^5\) The term “Danites” makes reference to the idea of a secret organization of Mormon henchmen assigned to carry out Brigham Young’s awful deeds. While there is substantial evidence of a secret military organization that at times went by this name (see “Danites,” Joseph Smith Papers, http://josephsmithpapers.org/topic/danites), there was also a good deal more inflammatory speculation about them by dissidents and critics.
MORMONS MEDDLING WITH THE INDIANS!
MOUNTAIN MEADOWS TO BE REPEATED!!
CORINNETHIANS TO BE THE VICTIMS!!!

While it is clear that there was no plot being hatched at the Indian Farm in regard to Corinne, much of the rhetoric used to express and promote this fear does point to the apocalyptic aspirations of early readings of the Book of Mormon, and these aspirations, while scaled back and typically held in check, at least in public, had not died out. Church leaders had used the term “Lord’s Battle Axe” to refer to Indigenous peoples who would, they imagined, protect the Saints from attack by the U.S. government—which nearly happened when Buchanan sent Johnston’s Army in 1857—by leading an apocalyptic war against the wicked, typically interpreted as Gentile America. As American Indian people began flooding into Salt Lake City seeking baptism or calling upon G. W. Hill to come to them, one can’t help but imagine that some Mormons may have believed that finally the events they saw prophesied in the Book of Mormon were beginning to come about. And if this movement among American Indian people seeking Mormon baptism—often expressed as a desire to unite the basin tribes and sometimes focused around Hill and Sagwitch’s Indian Farm—can indeed be linked to the Ghost Dance as kin movements, then

46 Christensen, Sagwitch, 117-20; Madsen, Northern Shoshoni, 95-98.

47 As mentioned above, church leaders did ask local Indian leaders, including Sagwitch, to ally with them in the case of an attack from the army.

48 In 1877 Hill was invited by a large gathering of “Northern Indians”—including Ute, Shoshone, Bannock, Walla Walla, Cayuse, Nez Perce, and Flathead peoples—who wanted to meet with him “as far from the white man as they can get easily.” Hill baptized 249 and turned down hundreds of others—“as we were wright under the Agents nose”—many of who desired to join the Indian Farm with the Northwestern Shoshones. Hill had to turn them down at the time, he felt, because crop damage had greatly limited resources at the farm. A short time after this there was an effort among various basin tribal leaders to unite the tribes and they hoped to hold a grand council at the Mormon Indian camp. Christensen, Sagwitch, 151-52.
apocalyptic yearning for reversal may have been a key element.\textsuperscript{49} In fact, while there almost certainly was not any plan to attack Corinne, when the self-styled Corinnethians finally did threaten to drive the gathered American Indian Mormons off their farm by calling in federal troops, according to Mormon sources some of the Indian converts reminded Hill of the Book of Mormon passage, stating that they “should go through as a lion among the beasts of the forest or as a young lion among the flocks of sheep” and they asked him to lead them in a defensive counter attack to protect their farm. They were not about to let all of their hard work go to naught yet again, and the Book of Mormon gave them hope that they could succeed in their defense. Hill apparently considered their request but ultimately decided against it, explaining in a letter to Brigham Young that there were “but a few Indians here, namely old Tsy quitches band of maybe seventy Lodges and they are poorly armed with very Little Ammunition and not prepared for any kind of a fight.” As Christensen explains, “Hill was torn between the realities of the ruined Indian camp and the scriptural challenge to ‘gather the Indians in from their long dispersion and make of them one nation again.’”\textsuperscript{50} Thus, if Hill anticipated the advent of a “Lamanite apocalypse,” its dawning remained a future event for continued millennial longing.

In the end, the Shoshone people and others gathered with them at the farm once again were forced to abandon the fruits of their labors. Corinne’s mayor had successfully requested troops from Fort Douglas to “protect” the city and when two military captains were sent to consult with Hill and “the Indians” they told them they had one day to be off

\textsuperscript{49} One of the elements of similarity between Ghost Dance and Mormonism regards the so-called “Ghost shirts” sometimes associated with the Ghost Dance and Mormon “garments.” See Smoak, \textit{Ghost Dances}, 131.

\textsuperscript{50} Christensen, \textit{Sagwitch}, 130.
the farm or they could expect to be driven off by military force. Left with no other real options and, as indicated above, deciding against relying on the promises they saw in the Book of Mormon, the Shoshone Mormons left their camp that evening, leaving behind all of their crops and most of their belongings. They had experienced what the U.S. army was capable of. The next day the soldiers invaded the camp and, between them and the Corrinethians, destroyed or stole most of what had been left behind. As a result of this disappointment, several Shoshone families gave up on the Mormon farming experiment and moved to Fort Hall.51

Lemuel’s Garden

Despite their losses and bitter disappointment, the next spring Hill and the remaining Shoshone Mormons were back at it again. This time Hill decided to go back to their second failed farm, between the Bear and Malad rivers, putting a little more distance between themselves and Corinne. And, despite one more short-lived “Corinne scare,” this time they had success, yielding return on their crops and establishing a Shoshone Mormon settlement. Hill dubbed the farm Lemuel’s Garden, in reference to the less-celebrated brother and counterpart of Laman in the Book of Mormon, who is also presumably a progenitor of the “Lamanite” people.52

An important development that occurred at Lemuel’s farm was the securing of homesteads for Shoshone settlers there, something that only recently had become possible. As Christensen explains, “In applying for homesteads on behalf of the Shoshone, Hill

51 Christensen, Sagwitch, 122-28; Madsen, Northern Shoshoni, 97.
52 Christensen, Sagwitch, chapter 5.
utilized an 1875 amendment to the 1862 Homestead Act that for the first time allowed Native Americans to be considered as American citizens with the right to file on public lands. The amendment did require that those Indians who successfully homesteaded relinquish forever their tribal affiliations and rights to government annuities."\textsuperscript{53} Initially Hill was able to raise enough money through local and church donations to secure homesteads for four of the Shoshone settlers. Eventually the settlement included homesteads for several other community members as well. By November of 1877, there were forty Shoshone families living there, consisting of about 240 individuals, with three hundred acres under cultivation and eight permanent structures.\textsuperscript{54}

As Hill’s concern for securing homestead titles indicates, he was concerned to prevent any legal difficulties that might jeopardize this attempt at establishing an Indian farm. In accordance with that goal, his focus this time seemed to be more centered on the specific goal of making farmers and settlers out of the few who were gathered there and much less on making this a center for proselytizing to visiting American Indian potential converts.\textsuperscript{55}

While deemed a success, Lemuel’s Garden was not without its challenges. Local non-Mormons (mainly at Corinne) and some Indian agents believed the Northwestern Shoshone belonged on a reservation and exerted pressure on the Shoshone settlers and

\textsuperscript{53} When Sagwitch filed a homestead claim in 1883 he signed a pledge that in part read: “I Tsyguitch...do solemnly swear that I am an Indian, formerly of the Shoshone tribe; I was born in the United States; that I have abandoned my relations with that tribe.”

\textsuperscript{54} Christensen, \textit{Sagwitch}, 141-42, 156-57; Madsen, \textit{Northern Shoshoni}, 98.

\textsuperscript{55} Christensen, \textit{Sagwitch}, 148-51. When Hill received requests from a large number of American Indian people who wanted to join the settlement, he turned down their request, professedly because of lack of resources, though perhaps also due to his experience with Corinne the year before.
Congress to relocate them accordingly. As Bruce Parry explained to me, “They were trying to get us to move to the Fort Hall Reservation. Then after that there was a reservation in Nevada [Carlin Farms Reserve], they tried to get us to go there. They tried to get us to Ute Reservation in eastern Utah. We said no to all those. Because we’d joined the church, in 1873.” When some of the same old allegations arose from Corinne again, including a charge that the Indians there were supposed to be at Fort Hall, Indian agent of Utah Territory J. J. Critchlow went to investigate. After examining the farm and the settlement and consulting with agents at Fort Hall, Critchlow determined that the Northwestern Shoshone gathered at the farm had never been assigned to a reservation and, further, after a second inspection, he determined that the majority of those settled at Lemuel’s Garden—or Indiantown, as it was recognized on official maps—were “sufficiently advanced in civilization to manage their own affairs, support themselves, and entitle them to homesteads.” Though, by this, Critchlow only meant that they “manage their own affairs” so long as they continued under Mormon tutelage and care. With the disclaimer that he is neither a “Jack-Mormon” nor “one of those ‘gentiles’ who believes that everything Mormons do must necessarily be evil,” Critchlow stated his official opinion, as Christensen explains, “that if the Mormons would continue to instruct and care for the Shoshone, he could see ‘no reasonable objection to their doing so, and thus relieve the Gov’t of their care and support.’” It is a telling conclusion: the Shoshones no longer needed government support

56 The Carlin Farms Reserve, located northwest of Elko, Nevada, was "set apart as a reservation for the Northwestern Shoshone Indians" by executive order on May 10, 1877, an action that was cancelled by a subsequent executive order on January 16, 1879, which reverted "said lands" back to their "original status" as part of the public domain. See Charles J. Kappler, ed., Indian Affairs: Laws and Treaties (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1904), 1: 865-66.

57 Brigham D. Madsen, The Northern Shoshoni (Caldwell, ID: Caxton Printers, 1980), 99; Christensen, Sagwitch, 156-62.
because they had the Mormon Church to care for and tutor them. If they were technically no longer wards of the state—having relinquished tribal affiliation and rights through homestead laws—it was only because they were effectively considered wards of the Church.

**The Washakie Settlement**

The Shoshone Mormons eventually left Lemuel’s Garden as well, not because of opposition from outside but because the soil had become unproductive and conditions unfavorable. They requested a site in Cache Valley, which church president John Taylor (Young’s successor) denied, but were offered another site for their “Lamanite farm” north of their current location. The new site, which they eventually named Washakie after the Eastern Shoshone chief, was located four miles south of the town of Portage in Box Elder County, close to the Idaho Territory border, on a farm formerly run by the Brigham City Cooperative. This farm already had some improvements on it and rights to a canal. Isaac Zundel, a former missionary who had been assigned to lead the new settlement when Hill was released in 1877, enthusiastically approved of the site and indicated that the Shoshone settlers were “well satisfied with this place.” One Shoshone woman I visited with in 2014 who had fond memories of her childhood at Washakie was also able to recognize, however, that while it had become productive, it wasn’t the choicest piece of land around. “Washakie...is an odd geographical area,” she recalled, “because right in the middle of that whole valley, where Washakie is...it’s almost desertlike. It’s very, very arid and dry. But further down south, you’ll notice it goes green, further up north it’s green. So... that’s how,

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that's where they ended up living, in a place I guess nobody really wanted, but they ended up there. That's where they built their community.”

The Washakie settlement grew quickly and soon had a number of houses, outbuildings, corrals, a blacksmith shop, co-op store, post office, and school house. Life at the settlement seemed to have many advantages over life at nearby reservations, such as Fort Hall. They supplemented their farm yields with hunting and gathering—something, as Christensen notes, Bishop Zundell allowed them to do as long as it didn’t interfere with the running of the farm, and something Shoshone people living on the reservations often were not “allowed” to do. With this kind of flexibility they were able to keep up traditional food practices such as harvesting at the spring cutthroat trout spawn at Bear Lake and the fall pine nut harvest in the southern Great Basin. They also held traditional Shoshone dances and socials, sometimes lasting several days. Worship services were conducted entirely in the Shoshone language, with the exception of recited sacramental prayers, and singing was reportedly done in traditional Shoshone style. As one visitor noted, “they ‘sang’ in the old time Indian way their chants without words.” They also apparently continued to practice traditional medicinal remedies, though some more prognostic practices Bishop Zundell only grudgingly tolerated, encouraging them to turn to priesthood blessings for healing instead.59

Several community members were called on missions, typically to other Native populations. In 1885, President Taylor recommended sending Shoshone members from Washakie as “unofficial” missionaries to reservations—apparently the only way for the Church to legally reach such populations. But there were also “official” calls along these

59 Christensen, Sagwitch, 165-72.
lines. Frank Timbimboo Warner, for example, served two missions, to the Sioux and Assiniboine people at the Fort Peck Reservation and at Wolf Point in Montana (see chapter 5, below), as well as a mission to his own people at Washakie; Moroni Timbimboo was also called to Fort Peck and Wolf Point and later Jon Warner served in the Northern Indian Mission among Sioux and Cheyenne peoples.60

The community faced challenges as well. Washakie disagreed at times with Bishop Zundell's assumed leadership of all matters in the community. Occasional fires destroyed crops and outbuildings. The community also experienced significant outbreaks of illness and a high infant mortality rate. Over the course of the twentieth-century the population of Washakie gradually declined, due in part to infant mortality but also to out-migration. Some families chose to move to Fort Hall while others took job and educational opportunities elsewhere.61 Developments related to WWII also affected the community. As Mae Parry states, “Many of the younger people became involved in the world war. Older people found employment in the defense industries established to support the war effort. After the war few, if any, moved back, as their opportunities seemed to be better elsewhere. Involvement at the Washakie farm declined to the point that on December 31, 1959, only three Shoshone Indians were working on the project.”62

Accordingly, the LDS Church considered the project effectively closed and in 1960 a church appointee burned the remaining buildings and the church sold the property. These remaining buildings—“shacks” as some Mormon records called them—however, were still

60 It seems to be a very common practice to send Indigenous peoples to other Indigenous peoples. See Catawba chapter.
61 Christensen, Sagwitch, 172, 178-9.
considered home by some of the band members, some of whom were away visiting relatives at the time. Some band members had continued to practice seasonal migration patterns, often spending months away from home, or from one home (Sagwitch, for example, always maintained a home at Bannock Creek at Fort Hall, near a relative there, and spent part of the year there, as well as at Washakie). Thus, for the few who still considered Washakie home, that settlement too ended in tragedy, though this time at the hands of their church.63

The Burning of Washakie

Some of those whose homes were burned at Washakie had understood that the Washakie settlement had been given to the Shoshone Mormon people in perpetuity. They had not abandoned their homes; they simply were away visiting relatives or were making their traditional rounds of their greater Shoshone territory. Many band members had never given up their traditional lifestyle of living in different locations in the Shoshone homeland at different times in the year. For many this now meant spending part of the year with relatives in places like Fort Hall. (Sagwitch, for example, kept a home at Bannock Creek, on the Fort Hall Reservation, near relatives there, in addition to the home he kept at Washakie, and many Shoshone people continued this practice.) For those who were simply away at the time of the burning, they had never “abandoned” their homes, as local church authorities assumed, or chose to believe.

One NWBSN member I talked to recalled how difficult it was for her father, who had served as both tribal chairman and branch president of the church, to navigate his roles as

63 Parry, "Northwestern Shoshone," 58.
church member and tribal member. “He was basically torn between two things,” she explained. “One was to get some kind of justice...for those individuals whose houses were burned, even though they didn’t own the land. And then his duty as being a branch president.” Part of what made it so difficult for him was his mother’s fear that he would be ejected from the church if he upset them. “I remember my mother telling me that my grandmother was terribly, terribly upset, because, it was almost like a...almost like a sin for him to go up there and demand some type of repayment back....in front of the church officials. And she felt like he was going to be excommunicated. And so...she was crying, 'Don't do this, don't do this.' She was afraid for him. But he had a duty, because he was the chairman. It was hard.” A doubling of church and nation dividing one man into two entangled roles.

Bruce Parry, an NWBSN member who was serving as Director of Indian Affairs for the State of Utah at the time, recalled during my interview with him that he received a phone call shortly after the burning occurred from a tribal member whose house was burned. “I remember Lucy Alex called me and said, 'Bruce, they burned our homes but I have a deed to the property, and they shouldn't have burned my house.' And sure enough she had one, signed by [church president] Heber J. Grant.” And so Parry and the tribal chairman, Frank Timbimboo, began to make arrangements to meet with church authorities. Parry explained that the situation was complicated because several NWBSN members held deeds to properties, some of which had been exchanged with the church over the years, but that many of these had never been recorded properly, so that county records showed virtually all of the land held in possession of the church. Parry recalled that the first church representative that they spoke with “didn't believe us very much... He didn't believe our
story about the land swaps and titles missing.” So they pressed for a meeting with Elder Spencer W. Kimball—the “apostle to the Lamanites”—who proved to be much more sympathetic to their case. After meeting with Kimball, a process was set in motion that would eventually lead to partial compensation for those who lost their homes and the purchase of a tract of land for the tribe in the 1980s, a development with significant implications that will be discussed more in the following section.

At some point in this drawn out process, in 1974, a meeting was held between church authorities and those who had lost their homes in order for them to express their feelings and state what sort of compensation they felt they should receive. In her testimony, Geneva Alex Pacheco recalled,

> It was in June and I was scraping my deer hide at my home in Washakie, Utah, when I saw Mr. Lamar Cutler start a fire by Elias Pubigee’s home. The fire was coming toward my mother’s gooseberry patch and toward my home. Mr. Cutler’s fire was coming down the ditch and along the fence line. I asked Mr. Cutler what he was doing and he informed me that he had orders from Stake President Smith to burn all this down. I told him that was too bad, but he was not going to burn my place up. I told him we were paying taxes on this property and it was ours. I further told Mr. Cutler if he wanted to burn something go somewhere else and burn. We exchanged unpleasant words. I also told him not to set foot into my yard as there is a boundary line here. I again told him to go and he said O.K. and moved his fire along the ditch past my place and over towards the canal. A few days later, Mr. Cutler came over and asked me for my mailing address. I gave it to him. About a week later, I received a letter from the church attorney, Mr. McConkie. The letter requested me to get out of my house by the 3rd of June of that year. It also stated for me to take all my lumber and anything else that was mine and move on. I still have the letter I received from Mr. McConkie. I also saw Everett Neaman’s old house burn down. It went up as if it was a gasoline fire.64

Leone Peyope Hasuse also testified:

> We have always lived in Washakie. One summer we went on a visit to Bannock Creek, Idaho. While we were there, my mother got sick and died. Because two of my sisters live at Bannock Creek, my son Richard and I stayed longer ...after my mother’s death. I told my son that we had a home at Washakie and were going back

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soon. Everything we had was in our home... We came back to Washakie and would go back to Bannock Creek for visits. This was our way of life. We lived a few months here and a few months there. Washakie was always our home. We liked the celebrations on the Reservation, so spent the biggest part of each summer at Bannock Creek. When things quieted down, we always came home. During one of our visits at Bannock Creek, I was informed that my house had been burned down...

As soon as I could, we drove to Washakie and viewed our burned home. All my personal papers had gone up in flames. Such things as records of my people, birth certificates, all my church records and other important papers. My blankets, clothing, mattresses, beds, stoves, dishes, cupboard, refrigerator, table and chairs, and even our food was gone. As I stood looking at my burned stove and metal beds and my refrigerator sitting in ashes, I cried. I mean, I cried out loud. I felt real bad. I was never notified by mail or any other way that my place was going to be burned.

We went back to Bannock Creek, Idaho, as there was nothing left for us at Washakie. On the Reservation we are not allowed to hunt or fish [privileges for enrolled Northern Shoshone and Bannock tribal members only; not Northwestern Band]. We are considered as Mormon outsiders. We are like visitors. I would like to say that although the church has done me wrong, I do not hold a grudge against them. I still believe in all the teachings of the church. I still have my faith and it has not been broken... I was raised in the Mormon church and have lived its laws and was not going to give it up just for this. My faith is strong. I am not angry at the church. I am only hurt very deeply... I have been hearing that maybe the church is going to buy us some land for another Washakie. I hope it comes true but I feel I will not live long enough to see this come true. My son Richard may see it come true some day and may even come back to the new Washakie to live.65

The record of testimonies goes on. There are several common themes: many were visiting family at Fort Hall for the summer celebrations; they lost all they owned; they returned to Fort Hall afterward where they are considered “Mormon outsiders”; they received no letters or any indication that their house would be burned; several had unpleasant confrontations with Mr. Cutler before and after he burned their homes; they are not angry at the church and continue to practice and pay tithing, etc. There are of course variations and each account is unique, but these themes surface regularly throughout the testimonies.

The tragic burning of Washakie speaks to different ways of conceiving of property, home, residence, etc. A major thrust of the colonial “civilizing” process was imposing and

enforcing sedentary “settled” living on Indigenous peoples, which often meant disrupting seasonal migration patterns and imposing a foreign lifestyle. This frequently took disciplinary and legal forms. For example, when federal Indian agent J. J. Critchlow was assigned to investigate the Washakie settlement to determine if the “Indians” there were “sufficiently advanced in civilization to manage their own affairs, support themselves, and entitle them to homesteads,” his investigation included determining if they had made and maintained sufficient “improvements” to their properties, if they dwelt in permanent homes with stoves and furniture, bespeaking sedentary living, and if the homes were continuously occupied. Colonial agents, including church authorities—Brigham Young constantly urged American Indian peoples to stop “roving” and settle down—were obsessed with the effort to control indigenous peoples by getting them to remain still, in one place (even as Indian agents, soldiers, and missionaries had the freedom to rove and roam all over the place.) For a time, Bishop Zundell had allowed seasonal migrations when he was living closely with the Shoshone people and could see that it could be made compatible with running the farm. But when the farm effectively closed and there were no longer any church authorities or missionaries living closely enough with the Washakie residents to understand current Shoshone patterns of dwelling—at least in regard to Washakie residents—the homes were presumably assumed to be abandoned and thus were burned. (Or perhaps they did understand but simply did not care, deeming the homes a financial burden and the personal property insignificant or, worse, unfit to be owned.) The LDS church authorities involved apparently felt they had done no wrong because it was, after all, the church’s property, betraying the fact that Washakie was, in effect, basically a church reservation. The Washakie residents had been living on something like
church trust land. With the burning of the settlement and the selling off of the land to private interests, the church-band trust relationship was terminated.

The Northwestern Band of the Shoshone Nation

As Patty Timbimboo Madsen, tribal archivist and librarian, explained to me, the Northwestern Shoshone have been federally recognized as a tribal nation since the Treaty of Fort Bridger in 1863 and subsequently in the Treaty of Fort Bridger in 1868. They never lost that recognition. But as Mae Parry explains, “the relationship of the tribe to the United States government was somewhat dormant for a period following the year 1900.” During this time, she explains, “the Shoshone at Washakie were almost totally ignored by the United States government.” She contrasts this with the experience of “most other tribes [who] were settled on Indian reservations and were more or less governed by agents of the Bureau of Indian Affairs.” But they were still a cohesive group who recognized themselves and were recognized by others as such—as Northwestern Shoshone. While individual Shoshone people who qualified for homestead grants had in the past been required to relinquish their tribal status and rights, as “treaty Indians” the Northwestern Band as a people never lost their status as an American Indian tribal nation who had a documented government-to-government relationship to the United States, even if that relationship had

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66 Though Sagwitch was not present at either of these treaty signings, the Northwestern Shoshone were recognized and included, among other Shoshone bands, as party to the treaty. Sagwitch was actually traveling to the meeting at Box Elder when he was apprehended by a group of California Volunteers and subsequently shot and injured while being held captive.

67 Parry, “Northwestern Shoshone,” 69
lain dormant during the period that they were under the de facto but recognized “wardship” of the LDS Church.

Parry explains that while the concept of “chiefs” gradually faded from the Northwestern Shoshone way of life at Washakie, there were still leaders in the community. For example, in 1930 Willie Ottogary and other community leaders brought a court action on behalf of the Northwestern Band against the United States for the wrongful taking of Indian lands as recognized in the 1863 Treaty of Box Elder. Although the case lost in the U.S. Supreme Court, as Parry points out, the case was instrumental in bringing about the Indian Claims Commission Act in 1946. As a result of that, the Northern and Eastern Shoshones were able to press claims and received a settlement in 1968 that included the Northwestern Band, since they were deemed to be a party to the 1868 Treaty of Fort Bridger.68

The Northwestern Band was threatened with termination of tribal nation status when Utah senator—and prominent Mormon—Arthur V. Watkins, chairman of the Senate Indian Affairs Subcommittee, included the Northwestern Band on his list of five Utah Indian nations that he sought to include in his termination legislation. The NWBSN vigorously opposed this and fortunately was able to resist Watkin’s influence and avoided being terminated.69

While the Northwestern Shoshone never lost tribal recognition and status, the fact that they did not have any trust land, such as a reservation, did preclude them from receiving certain federal aid and services. However, after the LDS Church had disposed of


the Washakie farm and sold it off to private interest, they tried to compensate by purchasing a 184-acre parcel of nearby land, including the Washakie cemetery, which was donated to the NWBSN in 1984 and then placed in federal trust, as Parry explains, “to fulfill the federal requirement enabling residents to receive government aid.” This also provided them with title to the land where the tribal cemetery was located. Though no one lives on this trust land (one Shoshone man lives right next to it), community functions are held there and I have heard at least one Northwestern Band member refer to it as “the Reservation.” As former chairman Bruce Perry explained, “It’s in trust now, so technically it’s a reservation now.” Shortly after, as a result of having trust land, the tribe established a formal working relationship with the BIA in 1987, organized a formal tribal government, and adopted a constitution in 1988. The Northwestern Shoshones were no longer the de facto wards of the LDS Church—indeed, they had not been for quite some time—and became the NWBSN, with, once again, an official and formalized government-to-government relationship with the U.S. federal government through the BIA.

In 2003 the NWBSN created an Economic Development Corporation based on the Harvard Project on American Indian Economic Development in an effort to raise revenues for the tribe. The project began as a collaboration between the tribe and a non-tribal entity, represented by Salt Lake attorney Mike Devine who was appointed as chief operating officer of the project. The project was based on a competitive market business model that functions independently from and is practically immune to tribal politics, and outside of

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70 Parry, “Northwestern Shoshone,” 67; “Shoshone Timeline,” Deseret News, September 14, 2007 (the source for information in this article is cited as the American West Heritage Center).

trust lands. Based on this model, as envisioned by then tribal chairman Bruce Parry, the
goal was not necessarily to provide jobs or income for tribal members—Parry is opposed
to this as he believes it kills incentive—but to raise revenue for tribal development funds
and projects, including land acquisition. With some of the money raised the tribe has been
able to purchase land near the massacre site and at Washakie. As a *Salt Lake Tribune* article
on the project optimistically forecast in 2008, "Washakie could again become the gathering
place for the Northwestern Shoshone, particularly if the tribe creates businesses and builds
homes there." While this seemingly secular economic development model seems a far cry
from the cooperative and church-sponsored Washakie farm project, the Tribune reporter
was able to tease out what could be seen as a similarity. Devine, the lawyer appointed as
chief operating officer, while not appointed by the church, is a Latter-day Saint and views
the project as a possible fulfillment of Book of Mormon prophecy. As the Tribune article
reported:

Devine, like Parry, is LDS and believes spiritual forces are at work in leading
the Shoshone back to Washakie, just as spiritual experiences led the remnants of the
slaughtered bands to the LDS Church.

But he also wonders if their frequent collaboration with other tribes—and
their modeling of a way to achieve economic prosperity—could be a fulfillment of an
LDS prophecy concerning American Indians, referred to as Lamanites in church
scripture.

"We're setting up something much bigger than any one of us," says Devine.
"The Book of Mormon says the Lamanites will flower like the rose."^{72}

In what might be seen as a reflection in microcosm of the wider LDS Church's abandonment
of their earlier cooperative enterprises, often referred to as United Orders, in favor of an
American capitalist business model, the NWBSN—whose Washakie experiment was in

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^{72} Kristen Moulton and Christopher Smart, “Northwestern Shoshone are poised for prosperity,” *Salt Lake
many ways the single most successful and longest-lived example of Mormon cooperative living—has moved to a competitive business model as the means for achieving the Lamanite blossoming prophesied in the Book of Mormon. And while Devine plays a much more modest role than the overseeing figure of a George Washington Hill or an Isaac Zundell, he continues the collaborative tradition of non-Shoshone LDS and Shoshone LDS cooperation in achieving this vision. Mormon farming, in a sense, has been replaced by Mormon business in the NWBSN, on a Harvard-business rather than a Jeffersonian-yeoman-farmer model.

Time will tell how closely the NWBSN continues to be associated with Mormonism. As one indication that some band members have chosen to break with that legacy, at least in terms of religious affiliation, the current tribal chairman, Jason Walker, is affiliated with the Native American Church and not the LDS Church. But several other council members continue to be actively involved in Mormon worship and community. Typically those who do otherwise were raised Mormon and either made a conscious choice to leave it or gradually stopped going. One tribal member I talked to stated that she no longer attends church and has a lot of questions about things she really cannot accept or believe, “like, ‘What are Lamanites?’ and…’Do I really believe the whole story about the whole thing?’” When I asked her if she thinks of herself as a Mormon, however, she paused and then replied, “If you were to ask me I’d probably say yes. But am I practicing, no.” She continues to pay tithing to the church. “I do believe in that.” Tellingly, she associated belief not so much with assent to doctrines or historical occurrences, or with the practice of attending church weekly, but with family connections. “I believe because of my mom. I believe because her faith was so strong and that it’s still within me. Now, whether or not I believe
their teachings, is a totally different thing altogether.” She does remain open to the possibility, however, that Native American people may have descended from the people described in the Book of Mormon. “I think it’s a very great possibility that that part might be really, really true.” But she remains skeptical: “Show me where these things happened. Show me the artifacts. Show me the buildings. Show me something.” “It’s a great little story,” she continued, “but I don’t know. Either that or it’s the biggest scam in the whole wide world!” Either way, it is a story she is a part of. When I asked her if she ever thinks of herself as a Lamanite, she replied, “When you are raised that way, yeah, you do.”

**Conclusion: “Those Mormon Indians”**

“The Northwestern Band of Shoshone…has the dubious distinction of being the only Mormon Indian tribe in the United States,” writes a blogger at the Native and Christian website. That’s not quite accurate; the Catawbas might have fit that description, or nearly so, at points in their history (see chapter 2, below). And not all NWBSN nation members practice or believe in the Mormon faith. Still, it points to the entanglement of Mormonism in the lives and history of Shoshone people who belong to the NWBSN, and it is, apparently, the way they are often perceived by other Indigenous peoples who are familiar with their history. “That’s what they call us when we visit reservations,” commented Bruce Parry, former executive director of the NWBSN and Director of Indian Affairs for Utah—“those Mormon Indians.” 73

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The Northwestern Band can and does cite several firsts in Indigenous American and LDS Church history. Sagwitch and his wife Beawoachee, along with two other band members, were the first “Lamanites” to go through the endowment (temple) ceremony in the LDS Endowment House in Salt Lake City. Yeager Timbimboo was the first Native American to speak in LDS General Conference. Moroni Timbimboo was the first Lamanite bishop, and, along with his counselors Nephi Perdash and Jim John Neaman, constituted the first Lamanite bishopric in the church. These are all statistics several band members I have met can and do recite by memory as points of pride. As one band member put it, “I think that our story is unique and it certainly changes way we look at things, compared to other tribes.” As the names of Moroni Timbimboo and Nephi Perdash attest (Moroni and Nephi are both Book of Mormon prophets), Shoshone and Mormon cultures have become entangled and combined in the NWBSN.

As this chapter has shown, the Northwestern Band of the Shoshone Nation has a long and complex relationship to the Mormon Church and Mormon communities in northern Utah and southern Idaho. Displaced by Mormon settler colonialism, massacred by federal troops who were guided, housed, and cared for by Mormon neighbors—still, they found that their best option for survivance was to throw in their lot with the Mormons, become Mormons and farmers and settlers at Washakie. That’s not where the story ends. The Northwestern Band of the Shoshone Nation is a sovereign modern American Indian nation independent of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. But many of them still practice and identify as Mormon, many articulate an Indigenous Mormon subjectivity, and all of them, whether they currently practice Mormonism or not, have a history and peoplehood entangled and imbued with Mormonism. They may not all be “Mormon
Indians” through current practice and affiliation, but their history is bound up with that of Mormon settlement in the traditional homeland of the Shoshone people—a homeland they have held onto and continue to claim. Despite several attempts by the federal government and white settlers to get them to relocate to a reservation away from their claimed homelands in northern Utah and southern Idaho, they have remained. They are surrounded by newcomers they’ve intermarried with, joined with, and worshiped with, and their relationship to the land has changed in significant ways, but they are still here, in their own land, and are still the Northwestern Band of the Shoshone Nation.
CHAPTER 2. CATAWbas EAST AND WEST: CITIZENSHIP, DESCENT, AND MORMONISM

In 1929 anthropologist Frank Speck declared in a publication on Catawba religious beliefs and customs that “the case of the Catawba” is “unique, so far as available information goes, in the history of evangelical mission labors among Indians of North America.” “The event of a mass conversion of the tribe to the Mormon church is,” Speck felt assured, “one unequaled in the history of Indian missions.” Speck had never heard, apparently, of the Northwestern Band of the Shoshone Nation—also “Mormon Indians”—who were still farming at Washakie at this point (see chapter 1, above), but I suppose we can forgive him for that. The Catawba case did seem rather exceptional. Cautious to not completely overstate the case, he did note that, “As a tribe, almost in entirety, they adopted Mormonism” (emphasis added). He noted that a few, such as Susan Harris Owl, resisted Mormon conversion and “indignantly removed to the Eastern Cherokee,” becoming “a most devout Baptist.”¹ But she and a few others were the exceptions; by and large, the Catawba people converted en masse to Mormonism. By the 1920s, by most counts, over ninety percent of the Catawba people in the Catawba Nation were on the church rolls. And while the same is not exactly true today, nearly all Catawba people are connected in one way or another to Mormonism.

¹ Frank Speck, “Catawba Religious Beliefs, Mortuary Customs, and Dances,” *Primitive Man* 12.2 (April 1939): 24-26. Mrs. Owl, as Speck refers to her, was the first “medium” through whom he made “contact with Catawba ethnology” in 1913. Ten years later he “made contact” again, this time collecting “data” from Margaret Brown, a Mormon Catawba woman who had lived her entire life on the Catawba Reservation. These two contacts offered Speck, he claimed, “two angles of insight” into Catawba “native deistic beliefs.” Of the two, he oddly supposed that Owl was “a less contaminated source.” Apparently being Baptist does not muddle one’s pure Catawba nature as much as Mormonism, at least according to Speck’s reasoning.
Speck seems to have found this situation of Catawba Mormon conversion lamentable. He was there to investigate, discern, and above all collect “native concepts.” The interposition of Mormonism only made his task all the more difficult. How to sift the pure nuggets from the “garbled notions of Christian theology” and the additional layers of Mormonism he found in the Catawba Nation? Speck investigated each of the items he collected with a careful “suspicion of Mormon teachings.” He seemed to long for that time when they had “remained untouched as a group” by Mormonism or “any of the numerous denominational proselyting agencies.” Speck bases his nostalgic quest for “pure” Catawba teachings on an assumption that he paints as prelude to this article: “Until about 1850 we may picture the Catawba as retaining some of the form and content of their original beliefs and rituals.” It is clear that Speck imagines a static state of anthropological purity in place prior to the intervention of European colonialism, after which everything became altered.2

However, if Speck saw Mormonism as continuing this process, he does not identify Mormonism as the primary culprit for this “loss.” In Speck’s view, by the time the Mormons arrived, the damage had already been done.3 He blames this state of affairs on what he calls a “period of dispossession” or an “era of vagrancy.” Following the loss and expulsion of their twenty-five square mile tract of land—recognized in the British Treaty of Augusta—“the Catawba went into social and economic exile, dispersed throughout the counties


3 Because Speck did not find “occurrence of characteristics known elsewhere in the southeastern area,” many of which he thought would have persisted, despite disruptions, “had they existed at all,” Speck comes to the rather surprising (and condescending) conclusion that “the Catawba of old may have had relatively little to lose.” While Speck recognized that collapse and “obliteration from tribal memory” might explain the absence of a ceremonial complex, curative formulas, wampum, war rituals, “and the like,” he chooses to finally regard these “deficiencies” as evidencing a “persistence of former cultural poverty.” Speck, “Catawba Religious Beliefs,” 41-42. I am not advancing Speck’s argument in any way here, but am rather using it as a foil for a model of cultural understanding that not only allows for but assumes and expects change.
adjoining the great river which gave them name and character.” The inevitable consequence of this dispersion, Speck avers, “was to prevent the ancient spiritualistic legacy from being handed down through teaching, practice or imitation.” What the younger generation carried with them from this time was “the poignant memories of poverty and plague,” not the “narratives and rituals of the past.”

There is, of course, some truth to this. This period of dispossession and wandering surely did disrupt ceremonial practice to a significant degree, as had the plagues, diseases, and other challenges that preceded it—including, beyond cultural disruption, the very stark fact of massive population loss. European and American colonialism had dealt a severe blow to the Catawba people. (I have heard several Catawba people make similar points.) But, this qualified truth notwithstanding, Speck’s basic assumptions represent an anthropological fantasy: the “pure native.” By its very nature, such a way of looking at Catawba culture and peoplehood cannot view change and adaptation as anything but corruption, dissolution, or “contamination.” It does not allow the Catawba people to be people. People adapt and change, and to change is not to cease to exist; it is simply to be human. Colonialism and Mormonism both brought profound changes for Catawba people, to be sure, but that did not mean they stopped being Catawba.

Many Catawba people, of course, view the advent of Mormonism among them in rather different terms than Speck, even if they do share a few points in common with his observations. Some Catawba people also view Mormonism as something that came to replace something what was lost. As one Catawba woman explained to me: “We were kind of lookin’, because we had lost our tribal religion—it had been lost early on... And then the

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Mormon missionaries came to the area and they were accepted by the Catawbas.” Some view the arrival of the Mormons as providential, even foretold. Prominent Catawba leader Samuel Taylor Blue is remembered as saying that the missionaries brought a book that was “a direct history of our forefather, which we had no other history of before this book came along.”⁵ In other words, Mormon missionaries restored to them something that was already theirs—their own history, in the Book of Mormon. Some Catawba people believe that, had it not been for the cohesive force of Mormon community and leadership, the Catawba people may not have survived the challenges of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. As a group of Catawbas reportedly told a group of other Christians who proposed to build them a church on the reservation, after the Mormons had come: “We have found what we have been looking for!”⁶

But if Mormonism brought cohesiveness to the Catawba community, it also brought some divisions and challenges. This is particularly true for a group of Catawba people who left the nation in South Carolina as part of a larger Mormon migration out of the South to settle in the American West. Though the developments that ended up dividing them after that initial migration had much more to do with the state of South Carolina, the U.S. government, and the Catawba Indian Nation and community in the South than with the Mormon Church, it is all part of the story. And Mormonism, entangled as it is in Catawba life and history, tends to pop up here and there amidst the controversies. In significant ways, it is something that many Catawba people, east and west, citizens and descendants, still hold


⁶ Columbia South Carolina Stake, Columbia South Carolina Stake Fortieth Anniversary, 199-200, qtd. in Liestman, “We Have Found What We Have Been Looking For!” 235.
in common, in addition to and tangled up in their shared Catawba ancestry and heritage. And there is still a sense, among many in the East as well as the West, that the so-called Western Catawba are still Catawba, even if they are no longer citizens of the nation, included on tribal rolls (as will be explained below). This chapter, then, is only partially about Mormonism among Catawbas; or rather, in order to tell that story, I must tell much more as well. It is a story about what it means to be Catawba, to Catawba people, in terms of ancestry, citizenship, nationhood, descent, longing, diaspora, and, for some, in terms of the Book of Mormon, as a descendant of father Lehi.

The latter half of the nineteenth century, prior to the encounter of the Catawba people with Mormon missionaries, had been a time of great uncertainty and many hardships for the Catawba people. In the 1840 Treaty of Nation Ford the state of South Carolina dissolved the Catawba homeland with a guarantee of an equivalent plot of land in the mountains of North Carolina, away from the encroachment of white settlers. When the state of North Carolina refused to negotiate these terms, however, the Catawba people were left without any title to a territory. Some took up residence with the Eastern Cherokees in western North Carolina; others scattered elsewhere. A few returned to South Carolina and were able to secure a small, one-square mile plot of land, held in trust by the state as a reservation, on which, by most accounts, they were barely able to eke out a subsistence. By the 1870s and 1880s many returned from their sojourn in North Carolina and coalesced around this small area near Rock Hill, South Carolina—the site of the current reservation and Nation headquarters.⁷

The first missionaries we know of to enter the Catawba Nation did so shortly after this, in May of 1883. One of these missionaries noted that “We have been to see a remnant of a tribe of Indians called the Catawba Indians.” The term “remnant” was used frequently in Mormon writings to refer to Indigenous peoples as a remnant of ancient Israel (the Book of Mormon frequently refers to the Lamanites’ descendants as the “remnant” of Israel or of Joseph), but here it seems to refer to the depleted condition of this once populous and powerful nation. Robison, one of the missionaries, wrote that “they are almost run out and badly mixed with the whites” but also noted that “they seem very taken with us.” In October of that year two Mormon elders preached to a crowd of fifty Catawba people who invited them to return. Two weeks later James Patterson was the first Catawba individual to apply for baptism and about a month later four more applied and all were baptized in the Catawba River.\(^8\) Shortly after that more were baptized, including several prominent tribal members, whose example led others to follow suit.\(^9\) Just over a year after the missionaries’ initial arrival, missionary Joseph Willey noted in his journal: “We organized a Branch of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints and set Bro. James Patterson apart to Preside over the Branch... The Saints numbered 31 in all, 25 of the number was Lamanites.”\(^10\) Willey also noted that “The Indians called us there preachers and the white people called us the Indian preachers.”\(^11\)

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\(^8\) According to Willey's diary, the first five to be baptized were Lucy Wats, James Harvey Wats, Mary Jane Wats, James Patterson, and Taylor George. Jerry D. Lee, "A Study of the Influence of the Mormon Church on the Catawba Indians of South Carolina, 1882-1975," MA thesis, Brigham Young University, 1976, 39.

\(^9\) Liestman, "We Have Found What We Have Been Looking For," 229-30.

\(^10\) Liestman, "We Have Found What We Have Been Looking For," 230, citing Lee, 50-52.

As historian Patrick Mason has noted, Mormon missionaries faced violent opposition throughout much of the South during this period, due largely to the Mormon practice of polygamy and the perceived threat it posed to Southern womanhood—or the chivalrous male protection thereof—as well as general nativist distrust of outsiders.\textsuperscript{12} York County, South Carolina—where the Catawba Nation is located—was no different. A memory that has been passed down among many in the Catawba Nation today is that of Catawba individuals hiding missionaries in their homes and helping them hide in the woods and swamps to protect them from mob violence.

The opposition to Mormon missionaries became so violent in the region that in November of 1884 the Rock Hill Branch was temporarily disbanded and the missionaries along with twenty-two Catawba Church members relocated to the farm of Mormon church member James Russell in Spartansburg, South Carolina, about 63 miles west of Rock Hill. According to Liestman, several Catawba converts also migrated to Utah beginning in 1884.\textsuperscript{13} But a few months later most of the Catawba people had returned to their homes, though threats of mob violence against the missionaries did not cease. At its height one missionary was shot and wounded while his companion was captured, stripped, and whipped. Nevertheless, the missionaries continued to have success. On August 2, 1885, missionaries organized the Catawba Nation Branch and set apart Alonzo Canty as branch president. Historian Jerry Lee claims this “was the first Indian Branch of the Church to be


\textsuperscript{13} Liestman, “We Have Found What We Have Been Looking For!” 237.
staffed entirely by Indians.”

I have heard several Catawba Ward members tout the Catawba Ward as the longest continually meeting Lamanite unit in the Church. By 1887 three quarters of the Catawba people reportedly identified with the Mormon Church. In 1885 two Catawba men, Pinkney Head and Alonzo Canty, were sent as missionaries to preach, as Head recorded in his journal, “among the Cherokee Lamintes in North Carolina.” It apparently did not take long for Catawba converts to accept and to implement Mormon terms, such as Lamanite, in reference to themselves and other Indigenous peoples.

All of this occurred while Southern States Mission president John Morgan was leading a mass exodus of Mormon converts out of the South to settle in the San Luis Valley of Colorado. By 1885 Morgan had become aware of the Catawba people and their

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14 This may be true, as most branches established prior to this in the West among American Indian peoples were typically presided over by missionaries or “white” branch presidents. Lee, “Influence of Mormon Church on the Catawba Indians,” 51.

15 Lee also makes this claim, stating that the Catawba Branch/Ward it is the “oldest Indian branch in the church,” by which he presumably means the oldest branch that is still organized as such (though it is now the Catawba First and Second Wards), because he also notes that the Washakie Ward was established in 1877 but closed in 1965. Ibid. This claim thus rests on definitional technicalities by ruling out wards with an earlier claim if they were eventually closed, and presumably not counting wards that were not exclusively Lamanite units (though the Catawba Branch/Ward never has been exclusively Lamanite either). For example, the Papago Ward was organized by 1883, if not earlier, among Tohono O’odham and Maricopa peoples and is still in existence and, as far as I know, has been continually meeting since then (the earliest recorded bishop for this ward was white, but he assigned at least one O’odham-Papago bishopric counselor). Thus, the Papago Ward may beat the Catawba Ward’s claim by at least two years. See D. L. Turner, “Akimel Au-Authm, Xalychidom Piipaash, and the LDS Papago Ward,” Journal of Mormon History 39.1 (Winter 2013): 170.

16 Liestman, “We Have Found What We Have Been Looking For!” 232-36.

17 Quoted in Martin, Genealogy, 88. Mission President John Morgan stated regarding these missionaries: “During our visit two of their number quite intelligent young men, were called and sent on a mission to a remnant of the Cherokee Native in North Carolina, numbering about 1500, and it was trusted that through their acquaintance with the Cherokees, formed in previous visits that access could be obtained to their hearts and confidence, and that in due season Elders could follow after and much good be done in their midst.” John Morgan to Pres. John Taylor, Charlotte, NC, 7 October 1885, in Morgan Papers, Marriott Library Special Collections, University of Utah, Salt Lake City, Utah.
conversion to Mormonism\textsuperscript{18} and began making plans to migrate the entire group as part of the Mormon gathering and settlement in the West. He noted in a letter to Church President John Taylor:

Among those that the Elders have come in contact with are the remanents of the once numerous and powerful Catawha [sic] tribe of Indians now numbering only 93 souls, they live on a reservation, consisting of 660 acres of land, and receive an annuity of $800.00 per annum from the state of South Carolina. He indicated that “about two thirds of the tribe have embraced the Gospel, with very fair prospects of all or nearly all being baptized” and informed him of his plans to relocate the entire tribe to the West: “At the coming session of the Legislature we shall endeavor to secure an act, empowering them to sell their land, with a view of gathering them out to the appointed gathering place.”\textsuperscript{19}

Morgan’s plan to arrange the sale of Catawba land never came to fruition, and neither did his plan to relocate the entire group en masse. But between 1886-1890 five Catawba families migrated away from the nation as part of Morgan’s Southern States Mission exodus. At a time when most estimates put the entire population of Catawba people residing in the Nation at about one hundred, the loss of five families constituted a significant portion of the Catawba community. By most accounts, these were prominent individuals and families in the group. Though quite a few Catawba people today are not even aware of this history, many are, and if current feelings among several of them might

\textsuperscript{18} Morgan noted in his journal entry for October 4, 1885, regarding a visit to the Spartanburg branch: “The greater part of the congregation were Lamanites of the Cauoluba [sic] tribe.” He also noted that he stayed that night “at bro. James Pattersons, a Lamanite, with a wife and eight daughters.” John H. Morgan papers, box 1, fd 8, Marriott Library Special Collections, University of Utah, Salt Lake City, Utah.

\textsuperscript{19} John Morgan to Pres. John Taylor, Charlotte, NC, 7 October 1885, in Morgan Papers, Marriott Library Special Collections, University of Utah, Salt Lake City, Utah,
be used as a gauge, some of those who remained behind may have felt that those who left
abandoned the nation. Possibly. But as historian Mikaela Adams explains, and as I hope to
demonstrate below, the issue is much more complicated and there were several other
factors that would intervene to drive a wedge between the two groups that would come to
be known as the Western Catawba and the Catawba Nation.

The Western Catawbas

Multiple forces drove Catawba people westward: or, to “remove” and “relocate”
them, according to the terminology of the day. As indicated above, the federal government
had discussed removal to Indian Territory in the West—some did “voluntarily” relocate
there and joined the Choctaw Nation—and the state of South Carolina attempted to
remove and relocate them to North Carolina. On the Mormon front, mission president John
Morgan tried to propose legislation that would allow the entire nation to sell their land and
relocate to a western settlement. In practice, such an act does not look too different from
the federal (and often state-motivated) practice of Indian removal. Of course, Mormon
gathering also included non-Indian migration, “removal,” and relocation in western
settlements. Lewis Scaife indicates that “a few” Catawba families relocated to Utah as early

Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2012.

21 “In 1851 a remnant band [of Catawba people] reached the Choctaw Nation, Indian Territory, where they
were later granted citizenship. By 1950 an unknown number were counted among the Choctaw, Creek, and
Cree populations of Oklahoma.” Jon D. May, “Catawba,” Encyclopedia of Oklahoma History and Culture,

22 As I have argued elsewhere, these two practices—Indian removal and Mormon westward migration and
gathering—were ideologically related from the beginning; the former had an orienting and shaping influence
on the latter. See Stan Thayne, “Indian Removal, Zion, and the Westward Orientation of Early Mormonism,” at
as 1884. A Church publication in 1905 indicated that of the seventy-six Catawba people living on the Catawba Reservation, thirty-eight had migrated West. Jerry D. Lee, who is skeptical of these numbers, states that it is impossible to accurately state with any certainty exactly how many Catawba people migrated westward with the Mormon gathering, but it constituted a significant portion of the small nation at the time.

Prior to the arrival of the anticipated Catawba migrants to the San Luis Valley, mission president John Morgan expressed some concern about settling the Catawba Saints in the San Luis Valley, due to its harsh climate. “We feel at some loss where to counsel them to gather,” Morgan wrote to Church president John Taylor seeking advice. “They come from a comparatively warm climate, and this high, cold, valley may not be the most appropriate place for them to come to.” Taylor apparently recommended trying to settle them in Arizona Territory; Morgan replied that “acting on your counsel we have written Pres. H. C. Rogers of Maricopa Stake for information as to the feasibility of locating our Catawba brethren in that section.”

Morgan’s concern regarding climate may have been based on the experience of other southern convert-settlers who preceded the Catawbas into the San Luis Valley. As historian Dana Echo Hawk explains, the southern Saints were not accustomed to the cold climate or high elevation farming and thus faced difficulties getting established. In

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25 Note here his assumption that Catawba people are biologically fitted to the climate in which they reside and might not be able to adapt to a new climate.

26 JM to JT, Manassa, Colo., 10 December 1886; JM to JT, Manassa, Colo., 23 December 1886; JM to JT, SLC, UT, 11 January 1887; JM to JT, 26 January 1887, SLC, UT; Morgan Papers.
response, church leaders sent several Danish families from Utah to assist them and teach them farming techniques they had developed successfully in Utah.\textsuperscript{27}

The plan to move the Catawba emigrants to the Maricopa Stake may also have been motivated by an interest in placing them in close proximity to other Native peoples in Arizona Territory. They would have presumably been close to the Pima Maricopa people, for example. In the same correspondence, Morgan expressed his hope that the Catawba people—assumedly those who remained in the South—“will exercise a salutary influence over the Cherokee Nation, located in North Carolina, of whom there are about 1200, and between whom and the Catawbas there exists quite an amount of intimacy and friendship.”\textsuperscript{28} Perhaps he hoped the same “salutary influence” might be exerted among tribal nations in Arizona Territory. There seemed to be an interest in using Indigenous converts to preach to other Indigenous nations, in hopes, perhaps, of replicating the pattern developing among the Catawba, of mass conversion. There may have been millennial expectations involved as well. In James Patterson’s patriarchal blessing, which he received in 1896 in the Fox Creek Branch, Manassa Ward, in the San Luis Stake of Zion, he was told that he would live to “see your people embrace the Gospel by the tens of thousands”—referring, obviously, to Indigenous Americans as a whole and not just Catawbas (of whom there were not thousands). Patterson’s blessing went on to prophesy that he would also “live to see your race of people subdue this nation and give the power of


\textsuperscript{28} JM to JT, Manassa, Colo., 23 December 1886. Though like in most places, there has been some missionary success among the Eastern Cherokee Band of Indians—including, for a time, a Mormon meetinghouse within the Qualla Boundary, in the town of Cherokee (on what is still called Mormon Rd)—there was never the anticipated and hoped for mass conversion.
government unto the Apostles and Prophets of God,” indicating that the original Mormon anticipation of mass American Indian conversion, apocalyptic war with the United States, and the establishment of a Mormon-led government kingdom had not completely died out by the 1890s. When Joseph Smith sent a group of missionaries to Indian Territory in 1830, they expected to convert all of the gathered American Indian people there and initiate these millennial events. As Patterson’s blessing indicates, Latter-day Saints were still dreaming about mass Lamanite conversion and hoped to use successfully converted American Indians for the conversion of others.

But Morgan’s planned relocation never came to fruition. Morgan received a positive reply from the president of the Maricopa Stake, regarding the settlement of Catawba people there, but the Catawba Saints wanted to go to Colorado. As Morgan indicated in a follow-up letter to Taylor,

We have consulted with our Catawba brethren, relative to their location, and find them very much in favor of going to Colo. in preference to any other location, and find that it will require positive counsel, to cause them to go elsewhere: under the circumstances we deem it prudent to allow those that go with this company to go there, and try it. Should they not be pleased, we can then transfer them to some other locality.

The core group of Catawba emigrants whose descendants have come to be known as the Western Catawbas began with the five families that emigrated with John Morgan’s

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29 Patterson’s blessing is quoted in Martin, Genealogy, 4-5.

30 On these points, see Introduction, herein.

31 See Underwood, Millenarian World of Early Mormonism.

32 JM to JT, Manassa, Colo., 10 December 1886; JM to JT, Manassa, Colo., 23 December 1886; JM to JT, SLC, UT, 11 January 1887; JM to JT, 26 January 1887, SLC, UT; Morgan Papers.

33 JM to JT, Chattanooga, TN, 11 February 1887, Morgan Papers.
Southern States Mission migration to the San Luis Valley in Colorado between 1886 and 1890. They have, in fact, come to be known among many of their descendants as the Five Families—progenitors of mythic proportion in what is, in a sense, the ethnogenesis of the Western Catawbas. These included the families of James and Elizabeth M. White Patterson, Pinkney and Martha Patterson Head, John Alonzo and Georgia H. Patterson Canty, Hillery and Rachel Tims Harris, Alexander and Sarah Head Tims. Catawba genealogist Judy Canty Martin has determined that this group consisted of approximately twenty-six individuals. In addition to these five, at least two other families who subsequently migrated have joined to some extent the network of people who identify or are identified as Western Catawba. Most Western Catawba people can trace their ancestry to one of these individuals, and the names Canty, Head, and Harris continue to be prominent among them.

Most of the Catawba settlers settled first, quite fittingly, in the town of Manassa in the San Luis Valley (one of the other early Mormon settlements was Ephraim). From there many of them ranged out to other settlements in the valley and other parts of the West. Currently some members of the Canty family still reside in Sanford, Colorado, in the San Luis Valley, and some who have left the valley have since returned.

Though these Catawba families had set out to build a new life with the Saints in the West, they continued to maintain ties with the Catawba Nation and the state of South Carolina in significant ways, and they continued to identify as Catawba and as Indigenous. However, as Adams explains, “their geographical distance from the core Catawba

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34 Judy Canty Martin, as western Catawba descendant and genealogist, told me that she has not been able to find any baptism records for Hillery Harris or for his mother, Nancy Harris, and she concludes that these two may not have ever formally joined the church, despite migrating to the Mormon colonies in Colorado.

community in South Carolina eventually called into question their rights as tribal members.” It in fact led to a loss of citizenship in the Catawba Nation. This was not an immediate process, and it was entangled in issues involving the state of South Carolina. After the state had failed to fulfill the obligations of the 1840 treaty, which stated that they would purchase a new reservation in North Carolina, the state determined to pay the tribe six percent interest annually on the funds that had been set aside to purchase the new reservation, in a meager attempt at compensation for lost lands. These annual payments funded services on their small reservation, but also provided per capita payments to tribal members. This of course necessitated tribal roles, to determine who qualified for annual payments. As Adams explains, the Catawba people residing in the nation provided the names for these roles. Accordingly, the issue of state appropriations “created an incentive for Catawbas to consider formally what it meant to belong to the tribe.”

Tribal Enrollment

For the first few years following their settlement in the west, Catawba families in the San Luis Valley continued receiving their pro rata share of state annuities, which was based on tribal membership—which they apparently retained, for the time being—and not on residence in the state. However, as per capita payments began to dwindle, Catawbas residing in the nation (and thus within the state of South Carolina) voiced complaints to state officials. As Adams explains, Catawba people depended on these payments for survival, supplemented by small garden produce, fishing and hunting, and pottery sales.

The state’s solution was to discontinue payment to Catawbas outside of the state, a decision that was formalized in 1892 and eventually affirmed by Catawba citizens residing in the nation. Accordingly, the names of all Catawbas living outside of South Carolina were excluded from subsequent appropriations lists.\(^{38}\) When the Catawba Nation’s status shifted from state to federal recognition in the early 1940s, these appropriations lists were used to compile an official tribal roll, hardening the exclusion of Western Catawbas, who were by that action now technically considered Catawba descendants, and not citizens.

Discontinuance of payments must have come as a hardship to Catawbas in the west.\(^{39}\) In 1896 Pinkney Head and twenty-five other Catawbas living in the San Luis Valley petitioned Congress for permission to join the Northern Utes at the Uintah-Ouray Reservation in northeastern Utah, likely seeking land allotments there and the benefit of federal annuities and protections. Apparently being located in a Mormon community did not override their sense of American Indian identity, and they apparently would have been willing to relocate to a reservation if it meant restoring the benefits of being officially recognized as Indigenous peoples in a relationship to the federal government. As Adams explains, this request unfortunately came shortly after the General Allotment Act had gone into effect, the stated intention of which was abolishing tribal relationships as fast as

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\(^{39}\) There is nothing to indicate that in the 1890s appropriations lists were considered by tribal members in the nation as commensurate with something like a tribal role determining citizenship for the purpose of determining whether someone was Catawba, though they did come to support the exclusion of out-of-state Catawbas for state appropriations. Gradually, for many Catawba people living in the territorial nation, residence or a maintained and recognized connection there became an integral element of tribal citizenship, but that sense was not clearly in place in the 1890s. Further, the Catawba Nation’s dealings were primarily if not exclusively with the state of South Carolina and not the federal government, which makes the issue of tribal citizenship recognition particularly tricky, since state authority to recognize Indigenous nations independent of the federal government remains contested.
possible and settling Indians in exactly the kind of situation the Western Catawbas were in—on individual plots of land held in severalty (though Indian allotments typically had a twenty-five year probationary period during which the land was held in trust by the federal government). Accordingly, their request was denied.\footnote{I have heard from descendants that western Catawbas also applied to the Southern Ute and possibly Ute Mountain Ute tribes as well, though these efforts also came to naught. As Adams explains, “This petition did not reflect a relinquishment of Catawba identity on the part of Pinkney Head and his relatives, but simply showed that these Catawbas were looking for alternative ways to receive benefits in their new western homes.” However, Adams also suggests that an “unintended consequence of this petition was to make both state officials and South Carolina Catawbas believe that Pinkney Head’s group had given up their rights in the Catawba Nation.”\footnote{San Luis Valley and Western Settlement}}

While the Catawba settlers in the San Luis Valley seem to have established themselves on farms successfully, they likely faced challenges too. They initially settled in Manasheh but most of them shortly after moved a few miles north to Sanford, Colorado. One Western Catawba individual recalls, based on research and family tradition, that this “was a pretty contentious place. They had the Danish and the English [Southerners] that didn’t get along, and the church, church members...[laughs].” This individual suggested that for the Catawba settlers, “my Indians, you know, that little twenty-six Indians—they’re really in trouble [laughs], cause they’re not white.” (This memory of conflict between

\footnote{40 Mikaela Adams, “Residency and Enrollment,” 31.}

\footnote{41 Adams, “Who Belongs?” 108-9.}
Danish and Southern States settlers is corroborated by Dana EchoHawk’s study of the settlement of the San Luis Valley.42) Perhaps at least in part due to these circumstances, many of them did not stay but ranged out into other parts of the valley to establish homes.

Gradually some began to leave the valley. In 1903 the family of Pinkney Head and Martha J. (Patterson) Chappel Head left the San Luis Valley on a loaded “prairie schooner” and moved south to New Mexico Territory, where they established a small farm in the recently incorporated town of Farmington, near the Mormon settlement of Kirtland and right on the eastern edge of the Navajo Nation.43 While Head’s earlier attempts at gaining recognition and benefits for his people had failed, he was slightly more successful in New Mexico. Here he was able to make the Dawes General Allotment Act of 1887 work in his favor. Recognized by the federal government as an “Indian of the Catawba tribe or band,” he was able to secure a federal land allotment of one hundred and sixty acres along the San Juan River in 1908. As the certificate of allotment indicates, this was considered federal trust land, “allotted...for the period of twenty-five years, in trust for the sole use and benefit of said Indian,” after which it would be conveyed in fee simple to Head or his legal heirs.44

This was in accordance with the federal policy of allotment, most famously associated though not originating with the Dawes Act of 1887. It is interesting to note that while Head

42 EchoHawk, “Struggling to Find Zion,” 5-6, suggests that conflicts arose between the Danish and Southern settlers because, among other reasons, Danish Saints were placed in leadership positions, yet the Southern converts complained that these Danish leaders to be lax in observing Mormon laws such as the Word of Wisdom (proscribing alcohol and tobacco), they swore, and were difficult to understand. She suggests that Catawba migrants “kindled no similar strife in the already growing communities.”

43 Obituary: “Mrs. Martha Head Dead at Age 102,” clipping in private collection. I thank Dana Echo Hawk for sharing this source with me.

44 The certificate is dated April 23, 1908, and signed by President Theodore Roosevelt. Private Collection. I thank Craig Foutz for sharing a photocopy of this source with me.
was recognized as “an Indian of the Catawba tribe or band,” which apparently qualified him for an “Indian” land allotment, the allotted land was obviously not located on the Catawba reservation or any American Indian reservation for that matter.45 Farmington, incorporated in 1901, is located on the eastern edge of the Navajo Nation, as delineated in 1868, and it is located on land that had been offered to the Jicarilla Apaches as a reservation in 1874, but which they refused in favor of another location, opening the area to white settlement after July of 1876.46 Somehow Pinckney Head was able to obtain an Indian allotment on this land. Several of his and Martha Head’s descendants still live on a small portion of that land—of course now held, presumably, in fee simple title—though they lost most of it, including the portion right along the river. According to family members, Martha Head was also able to secure an allotment of land, which the family still owns and leases for oil, gas, and mineral extraction.

Today only a few Western Catawba families remain in the San Luis Valley. Many live in New Mexico, Utah, Idaho, Montana, and other parts of Colorado, among other places. Many are still actively involved in the Mormon Church, while others have joined other Christian denominations or left organized religion altogether. Some continue to identify with Mormonism without really participating in worship services, sometimes coming and going. They of course intermarried with the white and Latino population, which often

45 A group of Catawba migrants who organized themselves as “The Catawba Indian Association” in Fort Smith, Arkansas, in 1895 also requested land allotments in a petition sent to Washington DC. They also asked if they had rights to tribal lands in South Carolina and whether they could apply for homesteads in their states and territories of residence. The Commissioner of Indian Affairs responded that they should be able to “take up lands in severalty” but did not address the matter of South Carolina lands. Adams states that it is unclear whether they received homestead or, presumably, land allotments. See Adams, “Who Belongs?” 108.

brought challenges. Those who married into Latino families often faced discrimination, not only as Indians but as Mexicans. Some members of the Garcia family, descendants of James and Martha Head Patterson, changed their name to Garce, hoping that would protect them from discrimination. One individual took his mother’s Catawba maiden name Beck to try to avoid the discrimination he felt his Mexican name exposed him to. Even individuals who claim to have no Latino ancestry describe being often confused with and treated as members of the Latino community, which constitutes roughly half of the population demographic in the San Luis Valley and the Southwest more generally. Those who intermarried with white settlers have often found themselves in an ambiguous ethnic position. Judy Canty Martin described this feeling of racial and ethnic ambiguity: “I’m not white enough to be white and I’m not Indian enough to be Indian. [laughs] So, I’m kind of...” Tellingly, she did not complete her sentence; apparently there was not a racial or ethnic category available in the San Luis Valley for her to fit into.

Lamanite, Manasseh, and Western Catawba

If the San Luis Valley lacked a racial category for people like Judy Canty Martin to fit into, and if distance from the nation called Western Catawba identity into question, at least in terms of enrollment, Mormonism provided Indigenous categories she and her Western Catawba relatives could identify with (though Canty Martin’s experience may or may not be representative of those of other Western Catawba youths). When I asked Canty Martin what it means “to be Catawba or not Catawba,” she replied, “My patriarchal blessing says I am of the lineage of Manasseh, so I just took it at that...and I’ve always considered myself Indian.” In chapter 4, below, I explain in greater detail how Manasseh has come to be
associated with and articulated as an Indigenous identity in Mormonism, and particularly in a Western Catawba context. Here I want to make the point that when everything else around her seemed to stop just short of providing a positive and unambiguous Indigenous identity, Canty Martin’s patriarchal blessing provided her with the identity she was seeking. Because she was revealed to be of the lineage of Manasseh, she felt confirmed in her identity as American Indian.

The patriarch who gave Judy Canty Martin the blessing was William “Buck” Canty, a descendant of John Alonzo Canty, one of the original Five Families migrants who settled in the San Luis Valley. As Canty Martin explained, the nickname “Buck” began as a racial slur, but he adopted it and it became how he was generally known. He became a much respected member of San Luis Valley communities and well-known in the LDS Church as the “first Lamanite patriarch.” Patriarch is a priesthood office in the LDS Church, assigned typically to an elderly man in each local area who fulfills the special function of giving “patriarchal blessings,” which, in addition to providing counsel and a basic blueprint for one’s spiritual life, also declares one’s Israelite identity. Patriarchs are typically highly esteemed members of local LDS communities, considered to be spiritually mature individuals who can receive revelation on the behalf of others. In addition to giving over a thousand patriarchal blessings in the San Luis Valley and perhaps beyond, Canty was often invited to speak at “Lamanite Youth Conferences” and other gatherings of Native American Latter-day Saints, urging the young Indians to be proud of their Lamanite heritage.”47 In this way, Canty became a strong and visible symbol of Lamanite presence and leadership in the San Luis Valley and in wider Latter-day Saint Native communities.

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47 “First Lamanite Patriarch,” in Martin, Genealogy of the Western Catawba, 108.
To demonstrate this: in 1978 Canty and his wife toured Europe as “spiritual leaders” with a Native performance group from Brigham Young University known as Lamanite Generation. At some point in connection with this tour, Canty was presented with a Plains Indian-style headdress by John Maestas (Taos Pueblo), director of the BYU Indian Education Department, on behalf of another BYU Indian organization known as the Tribe of Many Feathers. At the conclusion of the tour and after returning home, Canty wore this headdress and “other articles of tribal regalia” during the annual 24th of July pageant (Mormon Pioneer Day) held in his hometown of Sanford, Colorado.48 In doing so, he was continuing a long-standing tradition; pictures of Canty as a young man depict him riding in town parades bedecked in a full-length head dress and Navajo blanket. I have seen similar pictures of other Western Catawba individuals, such as Elbert Garce (Patterson descendant), riding in 4th of July parades decked out in a headdress and Native garb.49 While Western Catawba people of younger generations, often children of interracial marriages, such as Judy Canty Martin, have sometimes faced an uphill battle gaining recognition as Native American, members of their parents’ and grandparents’ generations were much more visibly recognized and celebrated as American Indian people. In the case of William “Buck” Canty, celebration of his status as the first Lamanite patriarch and material symbols of Indianness, such as a Plains-style headdress, mixed and reinforced one another.

48 “Sanford Celebration Holds Memories,” in Martin, Western Catawba Genealogy, 109-a. The 24th of July Pioneer Day celebration commemorate the entrance of Mormon pioneers into the Salt Lake Valley in 1847. In places like Sanford and neighboring towns it also seems to double as a celebration of the Mormon colonization of the San Luis Valley.

Kyle Canty, a direct descendant of William Canty, explained to me that he attributes much of his own awareness of his Catawba identity and heritage, and his San Luis Valley neighbors’ awareness of it, to the high esteem his father and grandfather held in the valley.50 “I am living on the benefits of my dad and my grandpa, and uncle Pete,” individuals who were well-known and generally liked in the valley communities, Canty explained. “We ride the wave on that.” He and other Western Catawba people I have met seem less certain, however, as I interpreted it, about the degree to which riding that wave will be possible for succeeding generations who become increasingly less recognizably Native and generationally more removed from such visual symbols of Lamanite and American Indian identity, such as Buck Canty and Elbert Garce.

Nationhood and Enrollment

Of course, the major factor contributing to this sense of vulnerability regarding the future state of Western Catawba identity is the issue of tribal-national enrollment. While, as demonstrated above, Western Catawba individuals had made multiple failed attempts51 over the course of the twentieth century to gain enrollment, the watershed moment in the lived experience and memories of Western Catawbas today was their much hoped for attempt at enrollment in connection with the 1993 settlement (explained below). For the thirty or so years prior to that, tribal enrollment was practically a moot point, since the Catawba Nation had been “terminated,” at least in the eyes of the federal government, as a

50 Kyle Canty also sees his identity as tribe of Manasseh as deeply significant. See chapter 4.

51 There are two exceptions. In the late 1930s, Ben and Guy Garcia traveled to the Catawba Nation and married Catawba women and were subsequently enrolled. See Adams, “Residency and Enrollment,” 39. (Elbert Garce also went with them but did not successfully marry into the tribe.)
result of the federal “termination policy” enacted primarily through House Concurrent Resolution 108. This act “terminated” federal jurisdiction over and responsibilities to selected American Indian nations by, in essence, abolishing their government-to-government relationship with the USA. Between 1954 and 1963 one hundred and nine tribal nations were “terminated” and jurisdiction was handed over to the states in which they resided. The strongest proponent of the termination policy was a Mormon, Utah senator Arthur V. Watkins. (When I pointed out to one Catawba man that Watkins was a Mormon, he replied, laughing but serious: “Religion doesn’t make you a good person, does it?”) As Catawba citizen Fred Sanders explains, “By 1959, Catawba had been coerced into accepting the fate of termination. However, the tribe would only accept termination of the federal relationship. Catawba remained a state-recognized tribe and continued to govern by customs and tradition.” Accordingly, Catawba lands held in trust federally were allotted to individuals—some of whom still live on these plots, while others were lost or sold—while they retained their small state reservation, which many typically refer to as the “old reservation.” In 1973 a group of Catawbas in South Carolina, organized as a non-profit organization, filed a petition for federal recognition, resulting in a twenty-year lawsuit. The tribe argued that the 1840 Treaty of Nation Ford between the state of South Carolina and the Catawba Nation, which dissolved the Catawba homeland, was


53 E. Fred Sanders, “Catawba Indian Nation,” 3, unpublished paper written in July 2000. A copy of this paper was shared with me by Fred Sanders.

unconstitutional because the federal government never ratified it. (According to the
commerce clause, as typically interpreted, American Indian nations are to deal exclusively
with the federal government, not the states, on a nation-to-nation basis. The drawn-out
lawsuit became a nightmare for real estate and development in the contested area, and
finally in 1993, after significant opposition from the state, the Catawbas settled by dropping
their land claim in exchange for federal recognition and fifty million dollars “for economic
development, education, social services, and land purchases.”

As part of this restoration of federal recognition, the newly reconstituted Catawba
Indian Nation had to compile a new membership roll. To Catawba descendants in the West,
this was their chance to finally reconnect in an official way with the nation and people of
their ancestry. And some citizens of the Catawba Nation do not seem to have been opposed
to the idea, including the chief at the time, Gilbert Blue. In fact, when the Head family
hosted a “Western Catawba” reunion in Farmington, New Mexico, in July of 1995, Chief Blue
flew out to attend the event. “This is the first time any tribal leader have acknowledged us,”
stated one reunion attendee. Beverly Head, wife of Harry Head—grandson of Pinkney
Head—wrote a short play and a series of songs chronicling the Western Catawba pageant.
“Reunion-goers watched, listened and learned about their heritage as family members
performed the tale of a treaty gone wrong, a journey west, overcoming hardships and
establishing roots,” a Farmington newspaper reported. This article reported that “Chief
Gilbert Blue said he supports the Western Catawbas in their quest,” though he is also

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55 This is a very complex issue that involves much more than the commerce clause. See Gregory Ablavsky,

quoted as recognizing “that there is opposition from other tribal members.” One Western Catawba reunion attendee commented that, “It is a big honor to have Chief Blue here.” She felt confident that “we will be on the rolls.”57 When I visited Farmington in the summer of 2013—also, coincidentally, during a Head family reunion—I talked to one family member who still had very fond memories of Chief Blue’s visit. In her memory of the event, his role as chief of the Catawba Nation and his membership in the LDS Church blended; she described how lovely it was to have the Catawba chief who is also a respected Mormon priesthood leader there to leave a blessing on their family reunion. This sort of surprised me as Chief Blue had later changed his mind on the enrollment issue and sided with other nation members who did not want to amend the roll requirements to include Western Catawbas, leaving many Western Catawba descendants feeling as though they had been betrayed. But she didn’t seem to be aware that his visit had anything to do with the enrollment issue and, as I continued talking with her, it became clear that she was under the impression that they were on the rolls—that her grandfather had taken care of that when he sent all of his children and grandchildren’s records in to the tribe for their records. (I didn’t have the heart to tell her otherwise.) Of course, her case is exceptional; every other Western Catawba descendent I talked to was very aware of the fact that they are not enrolled.

Chief Blue and other Catawba citizens apparently recommended that the Western Catawbas organize their own band or tribe and petition the BIA for recognition as something like the Western Band. In this way, the two Catawba nations would potentially

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57 “Catawbas Seek Recognition,” July 8, 1995, newspaper clipping from a Farmington, New Mexico, newspaper, private collection. I thank the Head family for sharing a photocopy of this article with me.
be sort of like a reverse model of the Cherokee Nation in Oklahoma, who were removed from the Southeast and relocated in Indian Territory, now Oklahoma, and the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians, those who remained behind after removal. Such a concept as a “western band” of Catawbas was around before that suggestion was made. David Garce explained that when his father “wanted to get formal, he’d say that.” He recalls his father using several titles: Catawbas, the Western Catawbas, the Western Band of the Catawba Indian Nation, the Western Band, or the Five Families. But Garce recognized that such usage was “not anything official.” When the Western Catawba descendants were denied a place on the rolls after the 1993 settlement, Garce explains that they thought about trying to organize as their own group, as a “Western Band,” and that that was suggested to them by people in the Catawba Nation. “[They] said, ‘Hey, you know, why do you need to be Eastern Catawbas? Just form your own thing.’ And we said, ‘Well, we don’t want to do that. We’re from—we’re you, we’re part of you. We don’t want to be us. We want to be all of us.’” Garce also pointed out that “we don’t have a land base... Our history goes back to South Carolina. It doesn’t start in San Luis Valley.” In regard to organizing as a Western Band, that issue, of not having a land base, is probably the rub. Unlike the Cherokee Nation, the Western Catawbas were not removed by an act of the federal government and then provided with a reservation. They “voluntarily” relocated (never mind the circumstances and conditions that may have prompted their move). And, unlike the experience of the Northwestern Band of the Shoshone Nation at the Washakie settlement in northern Utah, the LDS Church did not give the Catawbas in San Luis Valley an “Indian farm,” a portion of which could later be turned into trust land (see chapter 1). The only trust land any Western Catawba has ever held, so far as I am aware, was Pinkney Head’s Indian allotment on the
San Juan River in Farmington, and that became fee simple title after twenty-five years.

Without trust land, such an effort to gain recognition as a Western Band would be a hard sell.

**Western Catawba Homelands**

But if, as Garce states, the San Luis Valley is not a land base in terms of trust land, or collectively held territory, it is still a powerful symbolic center and, in multiple ways, a literal gathering place for Western Catawba families. He recalls that when he was young and living in Utah, they would drive back to the San Luis Valley two or three times each year to visit family. Shortly after that they moved closer and went to visit “all the time.” It is a place he is intimately familiar with, as are most Western Catawba people I met. The San Luis Valley and the Head farm in Farmington seem to be the two centers of Western Catawba families.

But if the San Luis Valley serves as a literal gathering place for family functions, and both the valley and the Head property for Western Catawba reunions, as Garce stated above, “Our history goes back to South Carolina. It doesn’t start in San Luis Valley.” Accordingly, several Western Catawba descendants I talked to spoke longingly of returning to visit the nation. Shirley Roberts, one of Pinkney Head’s granddaughters, spoke very longingly of the Catawba Nation and her desire to go there, to see it before she dies, and meet her relatives there, hopefully next year.
David Garce very articulately described his felt connection to the Catawba Nation in the Southeast:

I always think of South Carolina as my homeland, even though I’ve never lived there. I was always aware of the sparkle that my dad would get in his eye when he would talk about the Nation, and he never lived there. He was born in southern Colorado. But his mother and his aunts and uncles lived there. And they would always want to go back and be part of it. ...there’s something that draws me back to that center place of where my identity kind of comes from.”

David’s son Aaron agrees and likewise expresses a feeling of connection: “It's weird how much it kind of pulls at you, to want to go back there,” Aaron explained. Unlike England, where his mother's family comes from, the Nation is “such an easy place to go and see where this big part of your life for generations lived, and where that all came from. ... I always think of my homeland as South Carolina. I’ve been back there once. ...that’s just where the people are from. That’s where it all goes back to.”

Garce identifies this as a multi-generational feeling of connection that has been passed down to him from his grandparents and his father and uncles and aunts.

over the,..let’s say last 125 years since Granddad Patterson and the Five Families came out—They came out for certain reason, and—maybe it was a combination of two or three reasons: religion, economy,... getting away from persecution. ... But there's always been, for some reason, ...starting from my dad’s generation, who were the grandsons of Jim Patterson—[a motivation] to always go back. Their families did, including, now, me, the third generation from Jim Patterson, and Aaron, the fourth generation. There’s no economic reason for us to go back. I think, for me, ...it’s like, it kind of like, pulls you back there, that that's your historic roots of where

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58 I noticed that Western Catawba descendants generally refer to the Catawba Indian Nation reservation as “the nation,” whereas I had grown accustomed to hearing Catawba citizens speak of the “old rez” and the “new rez.” I asked David Garce about this, if it was a conscious decision to refer to “the nation” instead of “the reservation”—I thought perhaps he was following Vine Deloria’s call to ”say we’re nations”—but he explained, “No, that’s how I grew up hearing it... I heard all my uncles and aunts, and my grandma said that. I was just a little kid when she died, but I remember her, and I remember hearing her voice and talking about ‘The Nation.” Catawba citizen Brooke Bauer, a graduate student at UNC-Chapel Hill, has noted that early American documents refer to Catawba land as “the nation,” whereas today Catawba citizens tend to refer to the reservation or “the old rez” and “new rez” (personal conversations). I have wondered if the older usage had preserved among the Western Catawbas since they left before this new usage developed, and, really before the Catawbas had had much of a “reservation.”
you go. I mean, I don’t go back there to go to church—although I do go to church when I’m back there. I don’t go back there to make money. But there’s something that draws me back to that center place of where my identity kind of comes from.

Not all Western Catawba people feel this way. One Western Catawba woman I spoke with stated that she does not feel any desire to return to South Carolina. This may be to some degree a result of her experience during the 1993 settlement during which time she unsuccessfully fought for inclusion of Western Catawbas on the Nation’s rolls. But it may also speak to a wider experience of many Western Catawbas who do not feel quite the connection the Garce and Garcia families feel. One Catawba descendant I met did not know he was Catawba and did not know much, if anything, about them until Judy Canty Martin discovered his ancestry through her genealogical work and told him (they happened to be in the same ward or stake). Another Catawba descendant I talked to in New Mexico explained that even while his family history is meaningful to him, he has never thought of himself as an Indian—he was actually quite mocking of the idea—and when I asked him if he’d ever thought of himself as a Lamanite, he said the idea had never occurred to him. He was interested in enrollment so he could apply for contracts with the Navajo Nation as an Indigenous person and so his children could check the Native American box for scholarships. Still, of the many Catawba descendants I talked to in the West, these were the only two exceptions. Everyone else I met expressed a deep and very meaningful connection to their Catawba ancestry, identity, and felt Indigeneity, and an awareness of it typically extending to their childhood.
Citizenship and Descent

This sense of connection to Catawba heritage expressed by many Western Catawbas is recognized by some Catawba citizens in the nation. One Catawba citizen I talked to, who feels that Western Catawbas have justifiably been excluded from the rolls since they have not been there to be a part of the nation, also mentioned to me that he feels like Catawba identity, in some ways, means more to Western Catawbas. As a citizen, his Catawba identity is something he can take for granted, as a natural given. For Western Catawbas, it is something they have to fight for. Another Catawba citizen I met indicated that Western Catawba people clearly are Catawba—that was not the issue being called into question—but they are not a part of the nation. To her, the issue of being Catawba and being a part of the nation are two separate things. In technical language, it is the difference between descent and citizenship. While one may clearly be a descendant, such a designation does not necessarily entail citizenship in the nation, which is a matter not only of lineal descent but also of enrollment.

Some Catawba citizens feel that the Western Catawbas, or at least many of them, should be included on the rolls. Catawba elder Fred Sanders told me that he feels the Catawba Nation has dealt the Western Catawba descendants an injustice by refusing to include them on the rolls after their lineal descent was made clear. He feels the nation failed to exercise their sovereign right to amend the rolls and include them; they needn’t be bound by the federal rolls (which form a basis for current Catawba rolls, more or less), they can make their own rolls however they want; it is their sovereign right. Mikaela Adams, a professor of American Indian history, on the other hand, asserts that the Catawba nation’s decision to exclude Western Catawbas from the rolls is an exercise of sovereignty.
“Distinctions between citizens and non-citizens are a necessary defense for any sovereign entity, particularly one with limited land and resources,” Adams writes. “Tribes like the Catawbas develop ideas of belonging in a historical context and make decisions on membership for reasons specific to their tribe. These decisions...reflect tribes’ exercise of their sovereign powers in response to their changing circumstances over time.” In reality, both Sanders and Adams are correct. Because the Catawba Nation sets their own standards for enrollment and also has the power to amend those criteria, either deciding to enroll or to not enroll Western Catawbas is an exercise of sovereign power. By the same token, petitioning or applying to the nation for inclusion on its rolls, on the part of Western Catawba descendants, is a recognition of that sovereignty.

The Catawba Nation

Among those who remained in the Catawba Nation in the Southeast, affiliation with Mormonism continued to grow. By 1900 there were approximately 125 members of the Catawba Nation LDS Branch and by 1912 there were 166 baptized members, the majority of whom were citizens of the Catawba Nation (the branch has probably always included

59 Adams, “Residency and Enrollment,” 49.

60 I feel comfortable saying that Sanders is correct because he is a Catawba citizen—and in particular one who was very active in tribal government at times—who is free to criticize the decisions of other tribal citizens and leaders.

61 My use of the term affiliation is intentional; as Liestman points out, scholars such as Speck, James Merrell, and Tom Blumer question whether Catawba people had really “converted” to Mormonism, maintaining, rather, that, as Liestman summarizes their position, “the Catawba have a syncretic belief system combining their traditional beliefs with Mormonism.” Liestman, "We Have Found What We Have Been Looking For!" 242. A term such as affiliation of course allows for such hybridity and obviates the need of total adherence and the elimination of all other ideological commitment. Of course, such a model of conversion does not really apply to most humans, who are typically influenced by multiple ideological formations—religion, science, health, etc—at one time. On religious affiliation and engagement see Linford Fisher, The Indian Great Awakening (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).
some non-Catawba people). This constituted about three-fourths of the tribe at the time. Missionary instruction, in typical Protestant fashion, also included education. The missionaries began teaching reading and spelling to Catawba children as early as 1888, and in 1890 the Church assigned full-time teaching missionaries as teachers. Though they did face some competition from others—including a Presbyterian school led by one Mrs. R. Eli Dunlap from 1896-1905—Mormons for the most part conducted the formal schooling of many Catawba children until 1943 when the Bureau of Indian Affairs established a school for Catawba Children. Today most Catawba children attend public school, including a Head Start elementary school located within the Catawba Nation.

The Five Families who migrated to Colorado in the 1890s and others who migrated before that were not the only ones to migrate west. Several nation members relocated to the West as well. If they left after their family names were recorded on the 1943 roll, they were able to retain citizenship in the nation. For example, in 1956, just after being released as branch president of the Catwaba LDS Ward, William Watts moved his family to Salt Lake City, and his children and grandchildren continue to reside in Utah and the West as enrolled members of the nation. John Beck, also an enrolled Catawba citizen, lives in Salt Lake Valley as well and is a director of LDS Institute courses in Salt Lake City. In 1961, as indicated by the final termination roll, there were fourteen enrolled Catawba citizens living in Utah and five in Colorado. That number has fluctuated and generally increased since

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63 Liestman, “We Have Found What We Have Been Looking For,” 240-41.

64 LDS Institutes of Religion are local, church-run organization that provide religious education for college-age young adults between ages 18-30.
then, as Catawba citizens have moved to Utah to attend Brigham Young University, the LDS Business College, or for other opportunities. While for many this is a temporary move, several Catawba families have opted to stay there. And while motivations for leaving are varied, the LDS Church has been a major factor motivating travel and relocation of many Catawba people to Utah and other parts of the West. Even among those who stay in the South, many have family, business, or personal connections to Utah. But a core has always remained in close proximity to the nation’s territorial land base. Today there are Catawba nation citizens throughout the United States. Still, the vast majority are located in York County, South Carolina, and surrounding counties, within what is referred to as the nation’s “service area,” for whom the benefits of full tribal services are available.

The nation expanded its tribal land base in 1943 when the state of South Carolina allocated $75,000 for the purchase of additional tax-exempt lands. The expansion, which included a 3,482.8-acre tract of land, became known as the “New Reservation,” which was placed in federal trust and administered by the BIA. This section was broken up into allotments and either assigned to tribal members in severalty or sold when the tribe terminated in 1962—at the instigation of Utah senator and prominent Mormon Arthur Watkins (“God rest his soul,” one Catawba man said of him). A 135-acre parcel was placed in trust of the Mormon Church for the Catawba Ward and a ward farm. The 630-acred “Old Reservation,” however, continued to be held in trust by the state of South Carolina and administered as a state reservation.65

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Explaining Catawba Conversion

Several explanations have been put forward to explain why the Catawba people embraced Mormonism, both by Catawbas themselves and by observers. Anthropologist Charles Hudson suggested that at least in part, Catawbas converted to “bolster...their distinctiveness” after “their culture was almost defunct.” Hudson believes that Mormonism provided them with “a source of alternative values” and racial distinction. “At a time when they were becoming physically and culturally like whites,” Hudson explains, Mormonism “set them apart from whites, mestizos, and Negroes and made them feel they were in some sense a chosen people.” Based on his fieldwork, Hudson constructed four “dominant themes in the Catawba view of their own history”: “(1) the belief that they are descended from ‘Lamanites’; (2) the belief that they were too friendly toward the white colonists; (3) the belief that Mormon missionaries were the first Christians who helped them; and (4) the belief that they have progressed” (as opposed to the dominant outside local belief that they have declined). Hudson suggested that conversion to Mormonism repositioned their more diffuse relationship of conflict with neighboring whites in terms of religious conflict, which, he points out, is socially acceptable as “part of the ideological fabric of American society.” He points out that Mormon affiliation and Lamanite identity served to bolster claims of distinctiveness from African Americans. Hudson noted a strong denial, during his fieldwork in the late 1950s and early ’60s, of any intermarriage or sexual “admixture” with African Americans. In the context of the early- and mid-twentieth century South, where being categorized as “colored” or “Negro” brought significant political and social disadvantages, the strategic reasons for articulating such a distinction are obvious. While these motivations stand outside of Mormonism, Church teachings served to bolster this
distinction and antipathy toward the idea of intermarriage with African American people, as has been noted by others and is reflected in early twentieth century church publications. Related to each of these formative influences, Hudson states that in Catawba “folk history,” the coming of the Mormon missionaries “is perhaps the most crucial single event in their past.”

In my fieldwork I frequently heard people recount the coming of the first Mormon missionaries, the persecution they faced, and the Catawba efforts to protect them from their violent neighbors by hiding them and helping them sneak in and out of the nation. In a sense, this inaugural moment in modern Catawba history and collective memory seems to serve as something of an ethnogenesis narrative: this is how we, as Mormon Catawbas, came to be. There are other narratives. The river, for example, is a strong symbol of ethnogenesis. The Catawba people are, in their own tongue, the Iswa, the “people of the river.” Catawba pottery, shaped from clay dug from the banks of the river, shaped by the people of the river, and burned in Catawba soil, is also a strong symbol of Catawba identity. But when I came among them, asking about Mormonism in the Catawba nation, the story typically began with passed-down memories of Catawba ancestors hiding Mormon missionaries in their homes to protect them from their angry and violent neighbors. Many people have grandparents who hid the missionaries or gave them their bed to sleep in. (For example, Travis Blue remembers learning that his grandfather gave the missionaries his bed as he went out into the woods to sleep.) As far as Mormonism in Catawba is concerned, that is where the story begins.

But if the coming-of-the-missionaries might be read, in a limited sense, as a moment of Catawba Mormon ethnogenesis, it is also narrated as a compensation or restoration of something lost through the Catawba encounter and experience of colonialism. As one Catawba woman told me, “We were kind of lookin’, because we had lost our tribal religion—it had been lost early on... And then the Mormon missionaries came to the area and they were accepted by the Catawbas.” She pointed out similarities between Catwaba traditional beliefs and practices and Mormonism, practices such as prayer and blessing by the laying on of hands. “We believe in giving blessings. That was one thing, I think, that the people were looking for—something that was similar to what they believed in. And so they found it in the Latter-day Saints.” Similarly, respected Catawba elder Sarah Ayers is quoted as saying that “The early Catawbas were ‘just waiting for the true Church before they were baptized,’” and that “’The Church is just a way of life for us.’”

The Book of Mormon is often pointed to as a major reason for Catawba acceptance of the missionaries’ message. According to a local reporter in 1985, “Bishop [Carson] Blue said the Indians’ gravitation toward the Mormon faith is natural. ‘It’s the only church that tells the Indians where they come from and who they are,’ he said. ‘For the Indians, it just tells the truth about themselves.’” Former Chief Donald Rodgers explained to me that the Book of Mormon told the Catawba people where they came from, which was different from anthropological theories that told them they came across a land bridge. He explained that they began to see how the Book of Mormon was similar to and worked with their own

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67 From a newspaper article, probably Church News, included in Judy Canty Martin, My Father’s People: A Complete Genealogy of the Catawba Nation (self published, 1999), photocopy of article preceding p. 136.

traditions. When I attended Sunday School in the Catawba 1st Ward in September of 2013, the teacher, a Catawba woman, mentioned at the end of her lesson on pioneers that Chief Sam Blue was a “pioneer in our own area.” She explained how Chief Blue told the Catawba people to embrace the Book of Mormon as a record of their ancestors. An audience member raised her hand and commented that at this time everyone disrespected Indians and called them savages, but heavenly father was aware of them and knew who they were. The implication seemed to be that the Book of Mormon gave the Catawba people a venerable identity, one that their neighbors were ignorant of and disrespected, but God knew who they were and revealed it to them through the Book of Mormon.

**Church and Tribe**

Charles Hudson, who conducted his fieldwork immediately following termination in the early 1960s, stated, “At the time of my field work the two things that still served to hold the Catawbas together—albeit tenuously—were the Old Reservation and the Mormon church.” The Old Reservation, which refers to the 630-acre state reservation, provided several tribal members with a place to live and provided others with a place of security. (It also provided them with state trust land and the maintenance of state recognition.) The church, he explained, provided an “important social bond,” though even then it was not as strong as it once had been, since the ward had been split.\(^{69}\) As one Catawba citizen told me, he doesn’t believe the nation could have survived the challenges of the late nineteenth and the twentieth centuries without the cohesive strength of the Mormon Church holding the people together.

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\(^{69}\) Hudson, *Catawba Nation*, 103.
The close correlation between church and tribe in the Catawba Nation is demonstrated well, I’d suggest, by the corrected slips between the two in the language of people I interviewed. Kathryn Ellis (pseud.), for example, made such a slip, and correction, when she stated that her father “served as bishop for the tribe, or—for the tribe—for the church...” And Ryan Thomas (pseud.) described how his grandfather’s role as chief gave Ryan a “sense of pride that I’m a member of the church—or member of the tribe, and the church.” Since often the same person can and often does serve in both roles, as a religious leader and tribal leader, over the course of their life or even simultaneously, it can be hard to keep the two cognitively separate. Through linguistic slip, the two are often articulated together.

Another element that demonstrates the entanglement of church and tribe are the prayers that open tribal meetings and other official functions. During one of my trips to the nation I attended a tribal council meeting demonstration held for a group of Catawba children at the Catawba Cultural Center. One of the executive committee members, whom I recognized from the Catawba LDS Ward, was called upon to open the meeting by offering an opening prayer. The prayer sounded very much like one you would hear at church, addressed to Heavenly Father and closed “in the name of Jesus Christ,” though also with reference to paths laid down by others and paths for little ones to follow. While sometimes these prayers vary, depending on who gives them, the prevalence of Latter-day Saints in the tribe means that the prayers often sound like prayers one would hear in LDS worship services.70

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70 Mormon prayer language is distinctive and marked by several stylistic features children learn when they are young, both through hearing others and through actual instruction. For a prescriptive example of such instruction, see Dallin H. Oaks, “The Special Language of Prayer,” *New Era* (January 2006).
Tribal leaders are often prominent church members and leaders as well. As Jerry Lee points out, every Catawba chief from William George (1877-1886), who was chief at the time the missionaries first came, until Albert Sanders, who was chief at termination, were members of the LDS Church. When the tribe was restored after the settlement, Chief Gilbert Blue was the grandson of Samuel Taylor Blue and was a prominent church member. He was followed by Donald Rodgers, also an active Mormon. Current Chief William Harris was reportedly raised Mormon but his involvement in the LDS church is not apparent to me or most I talked to on the matter.

**Chief Samuel Taylor Blue**

For many Catawba people, Chief Samuel Taylor Blue (c.1872-1959)—often referred to as Chief Sam Blue or simply as Chief Blue—looms large as a symbol of the relationship between the Catawba Nation and the Mormon Church. So large, in fact, that some people I have talked to remembered him as being chief at the time the first Mormon missionaries came—an impressive feat since he would have been about ten years old at the time. But he was old enough to remember when the first missionaries came and he reportedly told stories about helping missionaries sneak in and out of the nation when he was a child and young man. One church publication recalled that “during the days of persecution, he had carried the missionaries across the river on his back to protect them from the mobs.”\(^{71}\)

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\(^{71}\) Lucile C. Tate, *LeGrand Richards: Beloved Apostle* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1982), 169.
Blue became chief of the Catawba Nation in the early 1930s and served during most of that decade and intermittently in that capacity several times over the course of his life. He also served as president of the Catawba Branch and as a respected elder and leader both in the church and the Catawba nation, which were not easily distinguishable to many. While he has not always been regarded in quite the same light by all nation members, he is probably the most prominent single figure in the history of the modern Catawba Nation and is highly esteemed by his descendants and many other nation members to this day. He was also quite well known outside of the Catawba Nation among the local community and in the church, and continues to be to a significant extent. This is particularly true in the LDS Church. In 1950 he and his wife Louisa traveled to Salt Lake City to attend General Conference and to be sealed in the temple. While there Blue was spontaneously called upon to speak in the conference before the general body of the church—an event that is not only remembered but still held in digital copy by some of his descendants. During my fieldwork I watched a recording of Chief Blue’s talk at the home of Travis Blue, a great grandson.

A good example of Chief Blue’s legacy among his descendants and in the LDS Church is the way his great-great grandson, Matt Burris, describes him. “When it comes to the tribe and the church,” Burris explained, “I always think of him...because he was a very good example, as a member of the church and a member of the tribe.” In Burris’s memory of the Catawba past, from the stories he’s been told, the years that his great-great grandfather served as chief were something like a golden era of Catawba history. “During his time he was chief, ninety-nine or even a hundred percent of the tribe were members of the

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church.... and at the time,” Burris shared his opinion, “there was kind of a big happiness in the tribe, there weren’t any problems or things like that.” Burris tied this period of perfect church attendance to a scripture in the book of Enos in the Book of Mormon about the Lamanite people: “there was a promise that if they obeyed the commandments they would blossom like a rose into a beautiful—beautiful people. And...at the time when my great-great grandpa was chief, the people were following the commandments and doing what they were supposed to, and they were a beautiful people.” Burris contrasted this with the present. “Now, very sadly, it’s the opposite. The majority of the tribe aren’t members, and if they are members they don’t come to church. There’s a very big problem with inactive members in the tribe right now.” Burris also seemed to imply that the tribe is also politically less united than he imagines it was then. He spoke of conflicts and divisions within the tribe and of his own extended family’s withdrawal from politics after his grandfather and other relatives resigned from their positions in tribal leadership. While several members of the Blue family have withdrawn from formal politics, they remain active in the LDS Church and find family solidarity there.

Burris in fact carried his great-great grandfather’s legacy with him on his LDS mission to Chile. He also found that, much to his surprise, parts of that legacy were already there, and he also, quite literally, carried part of it back home with him. There is a story about Chief Blue that has achieved some level of prominence and familiarity among church members by being included in a number of church publications.73 Burris carried a copy of

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73 The story relates an incident that occurred in the Catawba Nation when Chief Blue’s son was shot, ostensibly by accident, by two tribal members who were reportedly known to be his political opponents. Chief Blue felt an urge to revenge his son’s death but instead knelt in prayer and plead for the power to forgive them until he was able to. The story was included in Marion G. Romney, *The Power of God unto Salvation*, Brigham Young University Speeches of the Year, Provo, 3 Feb. 1960, pp. 6–7, and has been reproduced in a number of church publications and talks since then, often citing that source. Its inclusion, for
the story with him on his mission and used it in his teachings, only to discover that his mission president was already familiar with it. Burris described feeling shocked that this man who had spent his entire life in Argentina had heard of Catawbas and of Chief Blue. The mission president had the story translated into Spanish, distributed it to the mission, and referred to it in his talks. Thus, Chief Blue and Catawba Mormonism became part of the Mormon missionary curriculum in Chile. Further, Burris described connecting with Indigenous peoples in Chile when they discovered that he was Native American; he said that many Chileans, particularly those of the Mapuche tribe, identified as Lamanites, an Indigenous Mormon identity that also linked them, since Burris identifies the Catawba people as Lamanites. Before leaving the mission he had a special leather case made for his scriptures with two images burned into it, based on prints he had brought with him. On one side is a depiction of the Book of Mormon character Enos, known for his long and soul-wrenching prayer for the descendants of the Lamanite people. On the other side is, of course, an image of his great-great grandfather, Chief Blue. Thus, holding together his scriptures, like two bookends, is a Nephite prophet praying for the welfare of the future Lamanites, and the latter-day Lamanite Catawba Chief Samuel Taylor Blue, quite literally now a part of the Book of Mormon, burned into the cover of his great-great grandson’s missionary scriptures.

example, in the church’s Family Home Evening Resource Book (1997), under the topic “Forgiving,” means that the story is likely recited as part of family home evening lessons in Mormon homes throughout the world.
Catawba “Pride Cycle”: Reading Catawba History through the Book of Mormon

A cycle emerges from the Book of Mormon that has become popularly known as “the pride cycle.” Though that phrase does not appear in the Book of Mormon, it was popularized through a church video made in 1995 and shown as part of the standard curriculum in church seminary and Sunday School classes, and probably predates that. It has become part of the standard Mormon parlance. A diagram illustrating this cycle, published as an appendix to the church-produced Book of Mormon Student Manual, reveals five stages of that cycle: 1. blessings and prosperity are followed by 2. pride and wickedness which leads to 3. warning by prophecy which, when rejected, leads to 4. destruction and suffering, resulting in 5. humility and repentance, which leads back to number one. The manual describes this as “a recurring cycle that underlies the rise and fall of nations as well as individuals,” revealed by the Book of Mormon. Ultimately, as the Book of Mormon teaches, it was pride—like hubris, the tragic flaw of the classic Greek hero—that led to the overthrow of the Nephites, a fact reiterated by Joseph Smith’s later revelations and by more recent prophets who quote the warning: “beware of pride, lest ye become as the Nephites of old.”74

I have talked to more than one Catawba person who felt they could see a “pride cycle” at play in the history of the Catawba people. For example, Kathryn Ellis explained that her father felt that

when you see the pride cycle that’s referred to in the Book of Mormon, of people getting closer to Heavenly Father when things are maybe not going so great, and then when things do start going well then they allow themselves to have other influences enter in because they feel like things are going well now—he really likened that to the tribe and how, through the ups and downs of the tribe,

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74 Doctrine and Covenants 38:39. This verse is perhaps most associated with church president Ezra Taft Benson’s landmark address “Beware of Pride,” Ensign, May 1989.
throughout its history, there were times when things weren’t going well and the people really pulled together and came closer to heavenly father and closer to the church, had more attending church and a better feeling at church; and then when things were going well, then other things entered in like jealousy and money and greed, and it affected how people lived their lives and it affected the spirituality of the people as a whole, and some even fell away from church because of things they saw other church members doing within the tribe. The tribal government itself. So he always felt like the history of the church correlated. Or he could see a lot of that pride cycle in the people here.

Ellis was hesitant to say she saw that cycle clearly at play, explaining that it is harder to really pin down now because there are a lot of tribal members attending other churches, if they even attend church. She identifies this as a fairly new development, even within her own life. As she explained, “it used to be a lot more centralized where...all the tribal members that were church members were all going to Catawba Ward, for the most part.” However, as more Latter-day Saints have moved into the surrounding area, wards and meetinghouses have proliferated and the geographical boundaries have shrunk. As more and more people have moved out from the reservation and immediate vicinity, it now means they attend different wards on those communities. The Catawba Ward has also been split and is now attended by as many or more non-Catawbas as Catawbas. I have talked to a few Catawba people who used to attend and still recall those good old days when it was the entire Catawba community, and only them, that gathered on Sunday for meetings. Church meeting was a tribal gathering then. However, as the ward has split, non-tribal members have moved in, and many Catawba people have begun attending other wards, the de facto Catawba-Mormon congregation became fragmented, and as a result many stopped attending. When the church body no longer correlated with the tribal body, it seems to have lost its appeal for many Catawba people.
But if Ellis was hesitant to really impose the pride cycle onto Catawba history as a model with perfect explanatory force, she did identify the events surrounding the 1993 settlement as a moment when the pride cycle seemed to come into play, or had explanatory power for understanding that political climate. She explained that in the late 1970s “the tribe had kind of come together...especially the ones that felt they wanted to regain the federal recognition.” That was the period of struggle and unity. However, when they were successful, and “once we received the settlement in 1993, there was a lot of money that came with that.” And so, naturally, with prosperity there came divisions. “You have this group of people who kind of have control over this fifty million dollars, and how it's spent, and then you have these people that are on the outside who think they know how the money should be spent or not spent, and it just...there became a lot of fighting between the two groups.” She explained that “there were people in both of those groups who were church members, so, it affected a lot of things, not just for the tribe but at church.” Some people stopped attending church. “So it really affected a lot of people, and from what I understand, it’s even caused some barriers for missionaries even until today, because...they’ll say, 'Well, I’m not going there because so-and-so spent all the tribe’s money.'...after all these years, it’s still causing barriers to getting people to come back to church.” While she felt it’s still too early to tell if the settlement was a watershed moment for defining church affiliations in the tribe, she did state that “I do feel like it was a little bit of a turning point, from what I can see at this point in our history.”

I interviewed one other person who made reference to the pride cycle and other Book of Mormon references specifically in reference to tribal politics. “Every time around elections the pride gets way up here [reaches above his head]. Everybody’s better than
everybody else. It's sad.... It's like you live among the Gadianton Robbers.” Even this he explained as a possible fulfillment of the Book of Mormon, which states “that there's opposition in all things.” “Maybe that’s a part of the scriptures that some of these people held to.” Though he also feels like the Book of Mormon provide an antidote: “But, I think that it’s just, they need to partake of the blessings of the Book of Mormon. Because if they don’t, then they see what happens. They see they are led away, led astray, and they don't live by the things that they need to do.”

With the pride cycle reading by Catawba people, it becomes clear that the Book of Mormon is not just a narrative read onto Indigenous peoples by white Mormons. Some Catawba people read their own history and community through the Book of Mormon and through Book of Mormon inspired narrative models such as the pride cycle. The Book of Mormon is read onto Catawba history and Catawba history is read through the Book of Mormon. Not only, then, is the Book of Mormon taken to be a “history of the American Indians,” but the history of the Catawba people is read to be an ongoing narrative extension of the Book of Mormon. Political factions become, in effect, the Nephites and the Lamanites. Periods of conflict are the natural result of straying from the God of the Book of Mormon. Catawbas are, in some readings at least, quite literally, a people of the book.

Conclusion: Linking East and West

So I will tell you a little of the oral history that has been passed down. And again I don’t know about the truth of it, but it is what it is. It's as accurate as I remember it. So, Granddad Patterson, the story goes that Granddad Patterson had a mule. And he was in the fields plowing, and this must have been in the 1870s. So he was plowing his fields and, um, he stopped his mule to rest and he went to sit under a tree. And as he was sitting there he saw two men approaching him, off in the distance. And he waited and waited, and he looked at him. And finally they got to him and they said,
'We want to show you that we have a history of your people.' And it was the Book of Mormon. And he said, he threw open his arms and he said, 'Where have you been? We knew you were coming. We've been waiting for you.' And so, he received the missionaries, and received the lessons, and he wasn’t the first Catawba to be baptized. I think it was either one of his sons-in-laws. Probably Alonzo Canty was the first one. But Granddad Patterson was the first elder in the church. So, when the missionaries were there, there was a lot of persecution from other religious sects. And Granddad Patterson hid the missionaries in his cabin multiple times, and fed them, and one time there was a mob that was coming for the missionaries, and he got the missionaries out and took them into the woods and told them where to hide, and that kind of thing. But the first LDS services were held in his cabin, there on the land. So, I don’t know if it was, uh, you know, if it was any kind of a premonition for Granddad Patterson to join the church and then to migrate to Utah to be—or to Southern Colorado—to be closer to the headquarters of the church—or not. But I know they didn’t have anything in South Carolina [at that time], so they—probably with religious freedom, and acceptance for being Lamanites, and then being part of the church probably helped them direct their migration movement to Colorado.

I begin this concluding section with this passage from an interview with David Garce, a Western Catawba descendent, because it encapsulates several themes I have heard from both Western Catawba descendants and citizens of the Catawba Nation: passed-memories of the persecuted first Mormon missionaries to visit the Catawba, or, rather, of Catawba ancestors hiding these missionaries from their persecutors. In this version their coming is not a surprise but something anticipated by Catawba leaders. In this Western Catawba version it is Granddad Patterson. In the Catawba Nation it is often Chief Blue who is remembered in a similar position, as escort and protector of the missionaries. The above passage also seeks to explain why the Western Catawbas left, but it begins with the coming of the missionaries. If, as I suggest above, we can think of this as a pivotal moment in Catawba collective memory—as Lamanites, as Mormons, as a church-tribe entanglement that not every Catawba person totally agrees with today, but every one of them feels the effect of—then this is something shared by both citizens and descendants alike, east and west. Both have passed down stories about the early missionaries who came and changed
the way they think about who they are—brought them a book to teach them (or remind them, some would say) of who they are. It is a book many of them continue to read, believe in, and use to articulate what it means to be Catawba and to be Indigenous.

For some Western Catawba people, being a Catawba descendent and being a descendant of Book of Mormon peoples becomes entangled and inseparable. When I asked Thomas Croasman, a retired professor at Brigham Young University–Idaho and a Western Catawba descendant, what it means to be Catawba, he replied, “Oh, it just means that that’s our heritage, you know—the blood of father Lehi flowing in my veins, and I’m glad for that.” That answer is twofold. On the one hand, it is heritage. “Some people are glad that they’re Italian, or glad that they’re from England, or Ireland, or whatever, and that’s fine. They should be. And we’re just proud to be Catawba.” For Croasman, Catawba descent is a national heritage, much like that of migrants from other nations overseas (you might say he’s Catawba-American). It is also something he carries in his veins: “the blood of father Lehi.”

David Garce, a Western Catawba descendant of James Patterson, also sees Book of Mormon identity as a more expansive category to which Catawba people, east and west, do or can belong. When I asked him how Mormonism fits into the story of the Western Catawbas, he replied,

It sure fits in with Book of Mormon promises. And certainly the Catawbas were Lamanites, or descendants of Lamanites, and, as we know, the Book of Mormon was written for the Lamanites, and... it’s a story of our people... Catawbas back in the Nation have done wonderful things as members of the church. And they’re doing Christian things. And it’s great. And I think, there’s not a conflict, but there’s a parallel track between what we’re doing out here and they’re doing back there. I think the religious part of it has something to do with our heritage, in that we can, we can almost claim blessings from the Book of Mormon, and our faithfulness to the gospel principles that are taught in the Book of Mormon. ...but they seem to be not, not so much parallel with being Catawba, but rather being Lamanite. I don’t know if
that makes any sense or not. ...So you can be a Catawba, for sure, and have all kinds of squabbles and disagreements and everything, but you can also be a Latter-day Saint who is a Lamanite and claim those blessings, and the pride of knowing that you are a descendant of Father Lehi, and all of the prophets that have come down from him.

This idea of a parallel track—that is, the idea that Eastern and Western Catawbas have had a similar experience in their respective locations (South Carolina and southern Colorado)—is one I have heard from a number of Catawba people I have spoken to. And while the Western Catawba descendants, in diaspora, may face a very difficult task in trying to gain enrollment or recognition as a Western Band, Lamanite identity is something that, in the minds of many Catawbas, links all of them to a much larger Indigeneity. A spiritualized Indigeneity that is still, nonetheless, located in the blood: “the blood of Father Lehi.” If geography, nationalism, and politics divide them, Indigeneity and the “blood of Father Lehi” is still something that many of them, on both sides, believe they share. And while this is not a narrative that all Catawba people agree upon, for many it is a powerful and expansive shared Indigenous identity. For Thomas Croasman, to be Catawba is to have the blood of father Lehi in your veins. Similarly, Sarah Ayers, late Catawba elder and master potter remembered by many in the Catawba nation today, also felt the presence of father Lehi. Speaking of her pottery she said, “I know who I’m representing with my work. I was once blessed that Father Lehi would help me in all endeavors that stand for the tribe in honor of our heritage.”75 Clay from the Catawba River shaped by hands guided by Father Lehi. The people of the river are a people of the book. They shape and are shaped by both.

75 From a newspaper article, probably Church News, included in Judy Canty Martin, My Father’s People: A Complete Genealogy of the Catawba Nation (self published, 1999), photocopy of article preceding p. 136.
Of course, again, not all Catawba people see it that way. As one Catawba man who has left Mormonism—or has been trying to leave it—told me, quite adamantly: I am not a Lamanite and I am not from the tribe of Manasseh. But the fact that he had to declare this in an effort to break that link suggests just how strong the association is connecting Catawba people to the Book of Mormon.
CHAPTER 3. BLACKFOOT BORDERLANDS: THE MORMON SETTLEMENT OF CARDSTON AND THE KAINAI NATION

When Charles Ora Card was travelling through southern Canada on an exploratory mission to find a place for a Mormon settlement, he and his companions paused for a testimony meeting while camped on an “Indian farm” near the Kettle River in British Columbia. As he noted in his journal, during the meeting “I said I believed that our little mission here would open the door of the Gospel to the seed of Joseph in these parts and yet before our mission was completed here some of these Lamanites would know us by vision or dream and give us a hearty welcome.”¹ Two weeks later he found himself “in the heart of an indian country” in southern Alberta near the Blood (Kainai) and Peigan (or Piikuni) reserves, members of the Blackfoot Confederacy. “Here would be a good place to establish a mission among the Lamanites,” he wrote, “who in these parts seem to be of rather lighter complected than we usially find them and seem intelligent for an uncivilized race.”² When they reached the Kootenay (Waterton) River near Stand Off, he and his companion “kneeled down and dedicated the Land to the Lord for the benefit of Israel both red and white.”³

Opening the door of the gospel to the “seed of Joseph,” or “Lamanites,” was only part of Card’s objective in his travels. He was also looking for a place for refuge where Latter-


² *Diaries of Charles Ora Card*, entry for October 22, 1886, pp. 18.

³ *Diaries of Charles Ora Card*, entry for October 23, 1886, pp. 16-17.
day Saints who were being legally persecuted in Utah for engaging in the Mormon practice of polygamy would have a place to settle free from such harassment. In the same testimony meeting on the Kettle River “Indian Farm,” Card “invoked the blessings of God upon the Land and water that it yet would be a resting place for the afflicted oppressed of the sts [Saints].” The site Card and his companions settled on was Lee’s Creek, on what they apparently believed was the southern border of the Blood Reserve. There they established the Mormon town of Cardston.

Fast-forward about a hundred years: a Kainai man leading a demonstration not far from Lee’s Creek on the northern boundary of Cardston, protesting a century of Mormon occupation of Kainai land, holds up a sign that reads “MORMONS / TIME FOR / U-2 LEAVE / NOW!” Clearly, the past century of Mormon-Kanai relations had not gone quite as Card had hoped it would. However, while the Kainai and larger Blackfoot Confederacy response to Mormonism has not been anything like that of the Northwestern Shoshone or the Catawba Nation, a significant number of Kainai and confederated Siksika and Piikuni people have joined the LDS Church. While Mormonism spread to Siksika and Piikuni peoples basically through missionary work, in a manner similar to its spread in other areas outside of the “Mormon corridor” of settlement (Utah, Idaho, northern Arizona), the Kainai people have found themselves in a situation where they are directly impacted by Mormon settlement, with very this-worldly concerns such as the loss of claimed, but contested, territory. Though this conflict involves the Canadian state as much as it does the Mormon settlers of Cardston, the conflict is often experienced as a Mormon-Kainai division, and is

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4 The Diaries of Charles Ora Card, entry for October 3, 1886, pp. 13-14.

5 The Blood Land Dispute, 11.
often articulated with reference to the Book of Mormon. In this chapter I will seek to explain how Kainai categories for relating to land and Mormon and Canadian settler colonial categories have come into conflict, how the Book of Mormon has been drawn into Kainai criticism of racism in Cardston, and how Kainai Latter-day Saints have used the Mormon pulpit to express both Mormon belonging and Blackfoot ways of relating to land.

**Blackfoot Territory and the Kainai “Big Claim”**

Traditional Blackfoot territory extends from the Yellowstone River in the south to the North Saskatchewan River in the north, and from the Rocky Mountains in the west to the Cypress Hills of Saskatchewan to the east. This is the homeland claimed by the confederated Blackfoot peoples: the Siksika, or Blackfoot; the Kainaiwa, or Blood; and the Piikuni, who are split into the northern Piikuni, located north of the international boundary, and the southern Piikuni or Blackfeet Nation, located south of the border within the state of Montana.

The Siksika, Kainaiwa, and Northern Piikuni peoples are all located within the territory now claimed by the nation state of Canada, and within the province of Alberta. In the late nineteenth century, in response to settler demands for more land and as part of their push to establish a rail line linking Canada east and west, the Dominion of Canada established a number of treaties with Indigenous First Nations that delineated reserve boundaries for recognized First Nations. In 1877, Treaty 7 designated a joint reserve along the Bow River to be shared by the Siksika, Kainai, and Sarcee peoples. However, the Kainai

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people never moved onto this reserve. Instead it was surrendered and a new reserve near
Fort Kipp, closer to the Kainai people’s home base, was designated. This new reserve was
surveyed twice: once in 1882 and again in 1883, both times by Dominion Land Surveyor
John Nelson. The 1882 survey set aside a 650 square-mile reserve, bounded by the Belly
and St. Mary’s rivers with a southern boundary located nine miles north of the
international border. The 1883 survey moved the southern boundary further north,
reducing the size of the reserve to 547.5 square miles. The 102.5 square miles of land lying
south of the 1883 survey’s southern boundary, between the Belly and St. Mary’s river, is
part of what is at stake in what the Kainai Nation refers to as its “Big Claim” (the entire Big
Claim extends to the international border and is thus larger than the 1882 survey). The
town of Cardston, and surrounding Mormon settlements, are located within the boundaries
of the reserve as surveyed in 1882 but not within the 1883 survey.

According to historian Hugh Dempsey, Chief Red Crow was in Montana when the
reserve was surveyed in 1883. He believed that the reserve included everything between
the Belly and St. Mary’s rivers to the Rocky Mountains in the south. Four years later, in
1887, he learned of a group of white settlers who pitched their tents near the St. Mary’s
River. Taking an interpreter, Red Crow found them encamped on Lee’s Creek intending to
settle there. The group was, of course, the Mormon settlers under the leadership of
Charles Ora Card. In his diary, Card mentions a meeting with Red Crow on May 3, 1887.

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7 The Kainaiwa home base is located between the Kootenay (Waterton) River and the St. Mary River,
9 Dempsey may be relying on Kainai oral history for this.
While camped by a pond about eight miles south of the RCMP post on the St. Mary River, Card notes, they were approached by “one of the Blood Indian chiefs by the name of Red Crow with his wife, family and relatives to the number of 10 or 12. I had him sit up and take supper and had quite a friendly chat with them in their way. As the chief’s son James could speak a few words of broken English I took the occasion to learn all I could from them.” Interestingly, Card does not relate anything of the substance of their conversation.

Over the years though, in both Mormon and Kainai oral tradition, the conversation hinged on the issue of the boundaries of Kainai land. As one Mormon settler recalled many years later: “They advised us that we were on their land. President Card had assured himself that we were not, and showed the Indians a stake which he told them was on the southern boundary of the Blood Reservation. The quarter section the town was laid out on, adjoined the reservation.” According to records from the Blood Indian Agency at the time, the issue of whether the Mormons were or were not on Blood territory was a matter of great concern to Red Crow. At some point in 1887 or at least by January of 1888, Red Crow took the issue to Indian Agent William Pocklington who wrote to the federal Indian commissioner for direction. A copy of Nelson’s 1883 report was sent to Pocklington, which suggested that the Mormons were not on Blood land. Pocklington, however, aware of the Blood people’s understanding of their territorial boundaries, wrote to the commissioner that “Red Crow has always claimed the whole of the lands lying between the Belly & St.

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11 Diaries of Charles Ora Card, 53.

12 John Woolf, “Story of Cardston’s First M.L.A.,” Lethbridge Herald, June 19, 1937, qtd. in Dempsey, Red Crow, 215. This source, of course, should be taken as a summation of how this event was remembered fifty years later, not as contemporary documentation.
Marys river from their junction at old Fort Kipp clear back to the mountains,” and, further, that Red Crow “wished to know why, when the survey was being made he was not asked to go and see it as he would not have accepted any Reserve that did not run back to the mountains.”

As Dempsey explains, the Blood people were accustomed to natural landmarks as territorial boundary markers: rivers, mountains, or some other geographical feature. In this way, the arbitrary southern boundary markings of the 1883 survey—in stark contrast to the east and west boundaries, which are both rivers—is strikingly similar to the nearby international border, which runs along the 49th parallel: an entirely arbitrary political boundary that is not marked by any natural features and instead bisects open plains, bodies of water, mountains, and cultural/ethnic groups, such as the confederated Blackfoot peoples. Such an arbitrary and abstract boundary—one that makes no ecological or geographic sense—would thus have been foreign and nonsensical to the Kainaiwa people.

The discrepancy between the square mileages in the two surveys was apparently related to fluctuations in Blood population size. Treaty 7 stipulated that the Blood people

13 William Pocklington to commissioner, January 31, 1888, qtd. in Dempsey, Red Crow, 216.


15 Dempsey draws this comparison and states that the Blood people considered the international boundary a “magical line. They could not understand,” Dempsey continues, “how there could be an imaginary barrier on the open prairies beyond which the Mounted Police could not ride south, or the American cavalry north.” Dempsey, Red Crow, 216. The idea, however, that First Nations peoples considered the 49th parallel a magical “Medicine Line” has been challenged by more recent cultural geographers. See the introduction to Sterling Evans, ed., The Borderlands of the American and Canadian Wests: Essays on Regional History of the Forty-ninth Parallel (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2006).

16 Surveyor John Nelson apparently understood this, and wrote in 1883: “I found these Indians had no idea of an artificial boundary, such as a line of mounds, their method of defining a tract of land being by means of natural boundaries...and they seemed to be unable to understand any other.” Qtd. in Russell Oughtred (Herald Staff Writer), "Bloods seek cash, land in treaty claim" Feb 1976, from newspaper clippings collection in Cardston Courthouse Museum.
would receive one square mile of reserve land for every five people. But it does not stipulate which date’s population should be used to determine reserve boundaries. In 1883 there were about 500 fewer people living within the reserve at the time of the survey (this may have been related to annual migration practices), which is presumably why Nelson reduced the size of the reserve. This was not what Red Crow or the Blood People believed they had agreed to, however. In February 1888, Red Crow and a number of other Blood leaders held a meeting with members of the Mounted Police. Red Crow explained his understanding that the Dominion of Canada had agreed to the boundaries they described; he is recorded as stating that “we said at that time that we wanted the country where the mountains and timber were. The Government said they would be good to us. We took what the government offered us.” White Calf declared that “the whites are cutting the reserve off and we know nothing of it. We claim between the two rivers up to the mountains.” And Bull Horn complained that “the Surveyors ran the lines without telling the Indians where they were going to put them.” It is clear from each of these statements that the Blood People believed they had been promised the land they stipulated: everything between the two rivers up to the mountains. Since it was Pocklington’s opinion, however, that the Blood people already had more land than they were entitled to, which he stated to Red Crow, he affirmed the present boundaries. Further, Pocklington summoned John Nelson to return to the reserve and relocate the survey mounds from the 1883 survey, so that Red Crow could see the boundary for himself. At that time Pocklington explained to Red Crow and other


Blood leaders “how the size of the reserve had been determined, and then warned them that ‘the area of land allotted them is in excess of what their number called for according to the stipulations of the original treaty at Blackfoot Crossing,’” a statement which, Dempsey points out, could have been interpreted as a threat: a resurvey of the land could actually reduce the size of the reserve yet again. Thus, Red Crow’s eventual “agreement” to the 1883 boundary line may have been more of an acquiescence to the realities of settler-colonial force than a satisfactory settlement.\textsuperscript{20} As far as Canada’s Department of Indian Affairs was concerned, the issue was resolved, and in 1888 Crown grants were issued to Mormon settlers for the lands they had settled. The following year an Order in Council confirmed the boundaries of the Blood Indian Reserve as surveyed in 1882 and amended in 1883.\textsuperscript{21} But as Dempsey points out, the majority of Blood people have never really accepted the southern line. “There was an angry feeling among many Bloods that they had been victimized out of their rightful land.” \textsuperscript{22} The boundaries of the reserve as Red Crow and his contemporaries understood have never been forgotten by the Kainawa people. This larger territory, including everything between the Kootenay (Waterton) River and the St. Mary River from their confluence to the Rocky Mountains at the International border, is what Kainai people often refer to as the “Big Claim.” \textsuperscript{23}

\textsuperscript{20} Dempsey, \textit{Red Crow}, 217-19.

\textsuperscript{21} ICC, “Big Claim Inquiry,” 3, 9, 58.

\textsuperscript{22} Dempsey, \textit{Red Crow}, 217-19.

\textsuperscript{23} ICC, “Big Claim Inquiry,” 13. The Big Claim includes and is larger than the land included in both the 1882 and 1883 surveys. The Kainaiwa Council has stated that if Big Claim is not recognized, as it should be, then at the very least the 1882 survey should be, which would place the southern boundary further south than it currently is located. Incidentally, at the time of this writing, the “Big Claim” is being addressed by Federal Court Action, the first phase of which was commenced on May 2, 2016. During the month of May, Elder Evidence will be heard and collected in a court room set up in the Kainai Multipurpose Building in Standoff, Kanai Nation. This will be followed by two more phases, on “substantive issues” and a “hearing on damages.”
The Mormon Migration

The Mormon people who settled Cardston and surrounding settlements in the late 1880s and early 1890s did so for the express reason that the area was outside of the boundaries of the United States. During the late nineteenth century the Mormon Church, or, more officially, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, found itself embroiled in a drawn-out legal struggle with the United States government over the Mormon practice of plural marriage, or polygamy. When a series of court decisions criminalized the practice and threatened disincorporation of the church, confiscation of church properties, and forced polygamist Mormon males into hiding on the “Mormon underground,” Church leaders sent colonists to establish settlements in northern Mexico in the 1880s and later into Canada, hoping they could continue the practice there.24

The Mormons entered Canada seeking refuge at a time when the state of Canada was eagerly looking for immigrants. “Under the National Policy, the federal government vigorously promoted immigration into western Canada to establish a market for eastern manufactured goods and to secure the West for Canada.”25 Thus, government officials and politicians were eager and willing to welcome Mormon settlement of the region, despite popular prejudice against the Mormons. Federal officials were, however, opposed to permitting the practice of polygamy to take place on Canadian-claimed soil but were still


willing to permit Mormon settlement with the stipulation that polygamy would not be practiced there.\textsuperscript{26}

If religious difference posed a challenge—though clearly not an insurmountable or even particularly difficult one—race was a category that lent an advantage to Mormons settlers. Mormon settlers’ whiteness, or the fact that they were of European descent, appealed to a nation-state and society that was anxious about immigration of Jews, Chinese and other racialized “others” into the region.\textsuperscript{27} The fact that Mormon settlers came as farmers was also attractive to many government officials and local interests.\textsuperscript{28}

In accordance with these interests, when Card and his companions travelled through southern Canada during their initial scouting mission, they sought a location with good soil for farming, preferably a site with lumber nearby for building. When they reached Lee’s Creek on a subsequent trip, Card was reportedly told by other homesteaders in the area that a lease had just expired there and he apparently believed it was not a part of the Blood Reserve—though this is contested by Kainai oral tradition, which contends that a 99-year lease was entered into between the Mormons and Red Crow.

**Kainai Oral Tradition and the 99-year Lease**

According to Kainai oral tradition, Mormon settlers agreed to a ninety-nine year lease of Kanai land. Red Crow is often remembered as the Kainai party in this agreement.

\textsuperscript{26} See Sarah Carter, *The Importance of Being Monogamous: Marriage and Nation Building in Western Canada to 1915* (Edmonton: The University of Alberta Press, 2008).


\textsuperscript{28} Palmer 109-10 and McManus, *The Line Which Separates*. 

Sometimes this is remembered as a failing or betrayal on the part of Red Crow. One Blood woman stated, “I knew Red Crow. I never liked him. He and the Mormons got together and made a deal for 99 years. He never got with any of the other chiefs, he just did it himself. There were rumors that he got presents from the Mormons for doing it.”29 Others remembered the lease as being a temporary measure, as far as Red Crow was concerned, and not intended to allow permanent settlement. As Kainai Elder Pete Standing Alone recounts:

What I heard was that they journeyed from Salt Lake, Utah. And by the time they got to where they are today, they – it was getting late, towards winter, in the fall, and they were in bad shape. And I guess they wanted to talk to the leader which is Red Crow, and they did. And what I heard, you know, after, that they were headed for the Peace River country. That’s where they were going to. But they couldn’t go any further that year because they were exhausted, the animals and themselves. So they asked Red Crow to spend the winter there, and Red Crow agreed. And the 99-year lease, that’s where it came about. And Red Crow did not know it was a 99-year lease. He thought it was just for that one winter and they’ll be on their way to Peace River country.30

Similarly, Kainai Elder Mary Louise Oka, recalled this from oral tradition:

Many Wives, which are the Mormons, came from the south to this area. They were tired... They asked to see the leader. They met with Red Crow. They asked if they could rest there until summer. They promised to move and they never did. They are still there. Later on, people from the government came to meet with Red Crow, and they asked if the Mormons would be able to temporarily stay there, to lease the area for 99 years. Red Crow only knew that they asked to stay temporarily. He did not know what a 99-year lease was.31

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29 Interview with Mrs. Rosie Davis, August 1, 1977, qtd in Dempsey, Red Crow, 220.
30 ICC, “Big Claim Inquiry,” 54.
The idea and practice of a 99-year lease originates within English common-law land practice and has been transported to many lands subjected to English settler colonialism.\(^{32}\) It is not always necessarily meant to be taken literally, as a lease of exactly 99 years (though sometimes in practice it is exactly that), but as a long-term residential lease, a perpetual lease, or a lease for an indefinite period, often with the option of renewal. The stipulated 99-year term is typically meant to signify a lease that will extend beyond the lifetime of a single lessee or lessor. But the term has been used in a variety of ways, including, presumably, as shorthand for an indefinite lease in settlement negotiations. It is thus entirely plausible that predominantly Anglo-American settlers seeking to establish a settlement on what they recognized as British territory would seek to negotiate their settlement under such terms. (Though whether or not the Mormon settlers did so is hotly debated.) It is also likely, and almost certain, that an Indigenous person such as Red Crow would not have been familiar with such practices or the nuances of such terminology. Hence the feeling within Kainai oral tradition—which posits that such a lease took place—that Red Crow was tricked into something he did not understand himself to be agreeing to. Such a perception is evident in Kainai Elder Pete Standing Alone’s recollection: “I also heard that this guy from Montana was the witness of that transaction. And at his death bed, he confessed that he did crooked work for the Mormons as interpreter or whatever. That’s what I heard.”\(^{33}\) As far as temporary settlement goes, it is true that Card believed the settlement in Canada would be temporary—at least as far as he was concerned—and that

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33 ICC, “Big Claim Inquiry,” 54.
he would return to Utah as soon as the issue of polygamy was settled. (Church leaders in Utah had other ideas, though, and other motivations for maintaining a permanent Mormon colony in Canada.)

Kainai oral tradition does not necessarily assert that the 99-year lease was a written document, as it is often represented by others. But there is often ambiguity on this point. As Kainai Elder Mary Louise Oka stated: “I never heard of Red Crow signing a piece of paper or signing a 99-year lease. All I heard was that later on there was a document with Red Crow’s mark on it, the X that indicated his mark was very neat.” Thus, according to this instantiation of oral tradition, there may or may not have been an actual document associated with the lease, but even if there was, it may not represent Red Crow’s intent in the negotiation. (Further, if the Mormons did enter into any such negotiations, it may have likely been viewed by them as a way to appease the Kainai leaders and not as legally binding or ultimately relevant, since they recognized the Dominion of Canada as the regnant power; they were concerned with obtaining title or grants to the land from the Dominion, not from the Kainai Nation, recognizing, as they did, the claims of the English Crown to these lands.)

While oral tradition can be read as a resource for historical information, or at least possibilities, oral tradition can also be read as a gauge of contemporary perspectives and feelings. One way to read the oral tradition of the 99-year lease is that it represents a feeling among Kainai people that the term of legitimate settler-colonial land tenure (if there ever was such a thing) on contested lands has come to a close. A well-known contemporary example of this was the expiration of the United Kingdom’s 99-year lease of Hong Kong.

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from China in 1997. This landmark event could not have escaped the attention of Indigenous peoples also subject to English or English-inspired colonial rule. In an age of decolonization and territorial returns, the expiration of a 99-year lease could be read as a demand for the rolling back of colonial powers and practices and the restoration of territories to those who formerly controlled them—and to the honoring of treaty obligations as they, a supposedly equal party in the negotiations, understood them. Particularly given what Kainai people see as the true intent and meaning of Treaty 7, including the Kainaiwa Big Claim, it was now time, they believed, for a return or handover to occur here as well.35

What is clear amid all of this ambiguity, is that the Big Claim area was the understanding of Blood Reserve boundaries held by Red Crow and other Kainai people from his time, as well as succeeding generations, many of whom have never accepted the legitimacy of the surveys which diminished what they understood as their agreed-upon territorial holdings. Thus, the nation-state of Canada’s refusal to recognize and honor this understanding represents their view that Canada is the dominant power and ultimate authority in such negotiations. The Kainai Nation is forced into the position of appealing and contesting a case over which Canadian courts and government claim to be the ultimate authority.

The Blockade

All of this came to a head in the protest cited above (in which a Kainai man held up a sign telling the Mormons it is time for them to leave). On July 21, 1980, more than thirty demonstrators from the Blood Reserve formed a blockade just off Highway 5 near the town of Cardston by placing two large earth-moving tractors at the entrance to the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) yards, blocking access to four private businesses. After consulting with town officials in Cardston, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) moved in to break up the blockade. According to one newspaper account, the police gave the protestors a five-minute warning to remove the blockade and disperse. When the protestors stood their ground, the RCMP moved in. Seventeen people were arrested on the charge of blocking access to a public road and the police removed the blockade. The arrested individuals were released that afternoon.36

But the protest did not end there. The following day the Blood Council expressed their full support of protestors’ plans to re-erect the blockade and continue their protest until the Department of Indian Affairs agreed to a meeting to discuss their still unresolved land claim settlement. The Blood Council sent a request to the local RCMP, asking them to stay away from the site during the protest. As a precautionary measure, tribal police were sent to monitor the event.37

On July 23, Jack Tully, director general from the regional DIA office in Edmonton, arrived on the scene to hear the demands of the protestors on behalf of the Blood Tribe.

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37 Ibid.
Tully relayed the demands to Indian Affairs Minister John Munro in Ottawa, who replied by Telex on July 24th and agreed to an August 4 meeting to discuss the land claim and other issues. Munro sent another Telex on July 25th, stating that documentation regarding land surrenders to the CPR and other entities was en route from Ottawa to Blood Tribal Offices, and that he was willing to establish a joint task force in conjunction with the Blood Council concerning the issue of contested land claims and the surrendered lands in question.38

On July 26, after nearly a week of protest, the RCMP told protestors they must remove the blockade and vacate the area by 2:00 pm. When the protestors maintained their position, the police moved in and arrested 32 Kainai First Nation citizens on charges of unlawful assembly. Several injuries were reported in the scuffle that ensued during the arrests, including an eighty-year old man, Dan Chief Moon, who was kicked in the side and sustained three broken ribs. Some protestors continued to maintain the blockade and five more were arrested the following morning.39

On July 27 the Blood Council called an emergency meeting to discuss the town of Cardston’s response to their protest. Cardston town officials had requested RCMP intervention in the affair, and many Cardston citizens had expressed opposition to the protest. In response, the Blood Council called for a complete boycott of all Cardston businesses on the part of Kainai First Nation citizens. Since the Blood population makes up a significant percentage of the customer base for Cardston businesses, this loss of patronage reportedly had such a negative economic impact that some town businesses

38 Ibid.
39 Ibid.
were forced to close. Protestors continued to picket the area of the protest from July 29 until the August 4 meeting with the Minister of Indian Affairs.40

Though the expressed goal of the protest was to force the issue of the Kanai Nation’s unsettled land claim with the Canadian government, because Cardston is a predominantly Mormon town and historically part of a larger Mormon settlement in the area, the protest was also interpreted by many and has largely been remembered as a confrontation between Mormons and Bloods. It was, in many ways, about much more than the contested land but also a century-long relationship between unwilling neighbors.

At the time that the blockade occurred, however, several members of the Kainai LDS Branch were out of town. The Cardston LDS Temple was under renovation at the time and, as one Kainai Latter-day Saint explained to me, a group of Kainai Latter-day Saints and non-Kainai Saints from Cardston had traveled to Idaho Falls, Idaho—the nearest place to Cardston with an operational temple at the time—in order to attend the temple there. The Kainai members of this group only heard about the blockade on their return. Apparently a non-Kainai editor of a local newspaper asked one Kainai Latter-day Saint to write a newspaper article juxtaposing this shared spiritual experience between Kainai and non-Kainai Latter-day Saints in the Idaho Falls LDS temple with the confrontation that occurred in Cardston while they were gone, though the article never materialized.

**Racism in Cardston area**

Prior to the blockade in 1980, racism was already a problem in Cardston. In 1974, the *Lethbridge Herald*, from the nearby city of Lethbridge, ran an article titled “The

40 Ibid.
Cardston Indian Debate.” The “debate” was between Cardston residents and Kainai people over whether racism exists in Cardston. “Claims that residents here are treating Indians as second-class citizens have sparked a hot reaction from community leaders in town,” the article begins. The reaction of town officials interviewed for the article was denial, justification, dismissal, and defensiveness. One town spokesman claimed that “most of the claims of racism are made by Indians just over-reacting to normal situations” and he claimed that “Indians” from the Blood Reserve are treated better in Cardston than other Indians elsewhere. The president of the town Chamber of Congress (and former mayor) admitted that business owners in Cardston are reluctant to hire Kainai people as employees, but he claims this is because “as a general rule, they’re not too dependable” (a generalization that apparently did not constitute racism). He further justified such discrimination by pointing out that most businesses are small family operations.41

Naturally, the article came to focus on Mormonism. The local stake president, who presided over all of the Mormon congregations in the area, explained that since Cardston is about 65-70 percent Mormon, “The attitude of the church would be the general town attitude, with some exceptions, and maybe those exceptions are the ones getting us into trouble.” The implication seems to be that the Church attitude is not racist and any racism is a deviation from the “attitude of the church.” In line with this understanding, Dennis Burt, the Chamber of Commerce president and former mayor cited above, claimed dogmatically that no people treat Indians better than Mormons. However, others, including several Kainai people who feel discriminated against, claim that Mormon teachings often

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add to, if not lie at the heart of, racist attitudes toward Kainai and other First Nations and American Indian peoples. Kainai citizen Everett Soop, a cartoonist for the Kainai News, feels that Mormons are biased because of and not in spite of the teachings of their church. He describes the paternalist attitude of many Cardston residents who treat Blood people like children, and he also points to the discrepancy created by the church's missionary impulse: “People in Cardston are so darned nice trying to get you into the church and when you don't join, they act worse than they did before.” Soop attributes this attitude not only to Mormonism, however, but also to whiteness. As the journalist summarized him, “Whites feel it is their God-given right to take care of Indians but native people were taking care of themselves before the whites came.” Recognizing that paternalist attitudes are a result of both a position of assumed racial superiority (whiteness) as well as Mormon Christianity, a Blood social worker explained that “racism toward minority students exists in all communities, not just Cardston, but that it’s worse in this community because of the large number of Mormons.”

The curse narrative in the Book of Mormon, described above, was one element the article focused on to explain how “the attitude of the church” may contribute to the racism Kainai people feel directed toward them in Cardston. “The church believes that Indians were cursed with a dark skin because they refused to follow God’s teachings,” the article reports. “When Indians again accept God’s way, they will lose their dark skin and become white.” A sidebar to the article titled “Cursed with a Dark Skin” encapsulates the teaching and also explains, quoting a local Mormon leader, the Church stance that “Indian” people

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42 Caragata, “The Cardston Indian Debate.” In addition to these voices, a host of Kainai students and others all voiced a feeling of discrimination and condescension from Cardston residents.
have a “special status”—especially in comparison to women and blacks, who are denied priesthood ordination—as well as a “special destiny” as Israelites and children of promise. “We want Indians to stand on their own feet and be as good as anyone else, he says, and the church at least has the responsibility to offer the Mormon religion to them.” The sidebar concludes by citing the experience of one Kainai woman who converted to Mormonism as an adult and feels joy in her worship. She also expressed lament that few Kainai people who become members of the Mormon Church continue to practice very long after joining.43

In my own fieldwork in Cardston, conducted in 2014, I found that many of the problems and tensions described in this 1974 article are still very much present in Cardston. Most of the Kainai people I met described some element of discrimination or paternalism in their experience. One Kainai Latter-day Saint woman I interviewed said she feels like people are nice to her at Church, but when she sees them in town during the week it is often as though they don’t even recognize her; she’s just another Indian, not a fellow Latter-day Saint.

The Big Claim is of course still a point of tension that can cause racist sentiments to flare. When I asked a volunteer archivist at the Cardston County Museum if Cardston is on Treaty 7 land, she declared, Absolutely not! She followed this exclamation of absolute certainty by asserting that this is a recent issue44 and it has only been in the last fifteen years that some of those “young bucks” out there [motions toward the Blood Reserve] decided they want to take the land back over and put up blockades. “They want to take over

43 Caragata, “The Cardston Indian Debate.”

44 Historical research by Hugh Dempsey, cited above, and Kainaiwa oral tradition both suggest otherwise. Red Crow and others contested the borders as set by the surveys (see above).
“Cardston!” she exclaimed with a disbelieving laugh. As her response indicates, the Big Claim is still a contested issue, and sometimes in harsh and dismissive terms.

At other times possible disagreement on the Big Claim is more stifled yet still present. At a gathering of Kainai Latter-day Saint family and friends that included a few non-Kainai Latter-day Saints, I asked if Cardston had been built on treaty land. I sensed that the Kainai people in the room became silent and deferred to a non-Kainai man in the group, who stated that he didn’t think so. When a Kainai person mentioned the ninety-nine year lease, the non-Kainai man stated his position that there was no ninety-nine-year lease and he referred to the extensive research that had been done by Cardston citizens on the topic. He also explained that the original survey line would have included the town of Cardston within the reserve but when the government of Canada did another population count and refigured the reserve acreage the line was moved northward to where it is now—and this occurred before the Mormons arrived. He reiterated this point—and a Kainai family member backed him up on this—that it was the government of Canada who set the line twice and the Mormons had nothing to do with it—it had already been moved when they arrived. When I asked if Treaty 7 had stipulated that the reserve boundary would be fluid based on population change, most seemed to indicate no. One Kainai member of the group pointed out, however, that the current Kainai population is over 12,000, so if the reserve acreage could decrease with population loss, then why couldn’t it expand when population increases? “Unless they thought we’d just keep getting smaller and eventually disappear.” Her reasoning simultaneously exposes both the fallacy of the myth of the vanishing Indian and the logic of settler colonialism, which anthropologist Patrick Wolfe calls a “logic of

45 These quotes are from my field notes, recorded in longhand during the conversation.
elimination”: acreage is only adjusted when doing so is in the best interest of the Canadian state and white settlers.46

The blockade and memory of the blockade are also points where racist feelings between Mormons and Bloods flared and continue to fester. Sometimes this led to divisions within supposed ranks. Two Blackfoot Latter-day Saints I met during my fieldwork remembered hearing about a Kainai Latter-day Saint man who verbally chastised the protestors by telling them that if they joined the church and lived righteously they would become white and delightsome like him. They disapproved of this man using Mormon scriptures in this way (they read the Book of Mormon’s curse narrative as figurative and not racial). They also pointed out that this man had a skin condition that made him lighter than usual, implying that it was not his supposed righteousness that made him appear “white and delightsome.” As this example demonstrates, loyalties can be complex for Kainai and Blackfoot Latter-day Saints; they do not all view these issues in the same way. Conversion can pit some Kainai or Blackfoot people against others, as the rumored man who shouted at the protestors demonstrates, yet conversion also does not cancel out loyalties felt between many confederated Blackfoot peoples, such as Kanai and Blackfoot Latter-day Saints who may feel solidarity with the claims of the protestors and the Kainai Nation.

Indian Student Placement Program

While the LDS Church never operated boarding schools for Kainai children, as the Catholics and Anglicans did, there was a church-wide and church-sponsored foster program called the Indian Student Placement Program that separated several Kainai and Blackfoot children and young adults from their families during school years. A former Cardston mayor mentioned this as a positive example of Mormon care for Native peoples, stating that it seeks to “teach them a better way of life, a more advanced way of life.” Of course the mayor’s comments are exactly the sort of paternalism some Kainai people have criticized as an assumption of superiority. While different in many respects from the boarding school experience, in effect the Placement Program also separated children from their families and their ethnic-cultural community with the goal and effect of disrupting Kainai lifestyle by acculturating students to a supposedly “more advanced way of life.”

The program placed First Nations and American Indian students in the homes of Latter-day Saints (typically white), often in cities quite distant from their home communities. Students have reported very different experiences. Many people describe the Placement Program as a very positive experience; they became very close with their host families and are grateful for the love, care, and educational (and often recreational) experiences they received. For many, it gave them access to an economically affluent lifestyle they otherwise would not have had access to. But many also have reported feelings of dissatisfaction, loneliness, and sometimes abuse. One Siksika man I spoke to ran away and made his way back home several times while on the program, though he also credits the program with his eventual educational and business success. Thus, the Placement

47 Caragata, “The Cardston Indian Debate.”
Program was a mixed bag. While it offered educational advantages to many, it also came at the cost of disrupting Indigenous families and cultures. Many students who went on Placement lost any fluency they had or might have had in Indigenous languages, such as Blackfoot or Navajo. Many also describe feelings of alienation when they returned home.48

One Kainai woman I interviewed went on the Placement Program in fourth grade. All of her siblings were also in the program at that time. She spent a year in Edmonton on Placement and then three years in the United States with the same family (though these years technically were no longer sponsored by the Placement Program but were based on a private agreement between her parents and the LDS family, it was still in effect de facto LDS placement). While she had a largely positive experience, some of her siblings did not. Some of them were passed around to multiple homes and some experienced abuse. One of them had a nervous breakdown during the experience. And despite this woman's positive experience, at the age of twelve she decided not to return to live with her placement family, even though she had grown to love them. It was a hard decision for her, because she had many opportunities as a placement student and had grown close to her foster family, but she just felt it was time to return to her own family and people. The transition back was difficult. “It was just a total different experience coming back here,” she explained. Many people who knew her family did not recognize her. She was constantly re-introducing herself and explaining who she was. She also found that she no longer fit in. “We weren’t accepted out there because we were members of the church, out on the Reserve, and we

weren’t accepted in Cardston because we were Native.” Of the two places, she said she felt more accepted on the Reserve, “but you had to kind of live their lifestyle,” which she didn’t, so instead she “kind of went into a shell and lived my own little life.”

As her comments point out, Kainai people who join the Mormon Church often experience something like a divided self, or a self that no longer completely fits on either side of a divided world. This didn’t always seem to be the case with everyone I talked to—or at least, not everyone was open about it. People each have their own and different experiences. But it did seem to be a common theme among many people I spoke to or read about in my research. One individual I spoke with was working for the Kainai Nation at the time but confided that they sometimes worried about job security, since some members of tribal administration are not really fans of Mormonism.

The Kainai Branch

Of the twelve LDS congregations that meet in the four LDS meetinghouses in Cardston, one of these is the Kainai Branch. The branch is composed completely of Kainai Latter-day Saints and non-Kainai people who have married into Kainai families, though occasionally some leadership positions have been filled by non-Kainai people and non-Kainai Latter-day Saints sometime attend as visitors. My first visit to the branch happened to be on July 1, 2012, which, unbeknownst to me (dumb American), was Canada Day. For the opening hymn, the congregation stood and sang “O Canada,” which was pasted into the back of the hymnal. I noticed that there was one family in attendance, seated to the side

49 A typical LDS congregational unit is a ward (cf. parish), which is a subunit of a larger stake (cf. diocese). A branch is a congregation that is too small to quite constitute a ward and has some administrative differences.
near the front, that did not appear to be Kainai (an impression that was confirmed as the meeting commenced). The first Sunday of every month is “fast and testimony meeting,” which means that rather than having assigned speakers, anyone in the congregation can voluntarily stand and speak extemporaneously, sharing their “testimony.” The first to stand and share their testimony was the mother of this non-Kainai family. She made reference to a part of the Book of Mormon where Jesus Christ visits the Americas and then shared her conviction that the Book of Mormon was written for your people, those who are of the original house of Israel—and the Gentiles are just lucky to be adopted into your family.50

While perhaps paternalistic (she is telling them who they are), her words do attempt to place Kainai people in a special position as “original Israelites”—a step above adopted Gentiles (whites). (Of course, again, she does so with Christian and Mormon categories rather than traditional Blackfoot ones.) To emphasize her point, she slightly revised the narrative and pointed out that when the Lord came to North America he didn’t come to the Nephites, he got rid of those; he came to the Lamanites.51 More than once she emphasized her deep respect “for you and your people and your deep faith.” It was clear from the continuation of this meeting, that this family had built many friendships within the Kainai LDS community. Several Kainai people referenced her and her husband in their own testimonies and expressed thanks for service they had rendered and experiences they had together. It was clear that, despite paternalism and romanticizing praise, as well as

50 I am constructing her comments from field notes I took during and immediately after the service.

51 Field notes. This could be cited as a creative misreading of the text, as the Book of Mormon does indicate that it was a group of Nephites to whom the resurrected Jesus Christ appeared, though Nephites at this time included many converted Lamanites, who became Nephites.
economic and political disparities, some Kainai people and Cardstonites have forged
genuine friendships, and this was surely only one example among many.

What also struck me about this meeting was the fact that, while testimonies are
often very formulaic, many of the Kainai Latter-day Saints’ testimonies seemed to address
Blackfoot themes. One woman spoke much about her ancestors and her extended family.
This is not odd in a Mormon setting which also places great emphasis on ancestry, but she
spoke of them in a way that struck me as perhaps more Blackfoot than Mormon—or rather,
in a Blackfoot Mormon way—when she commented that sometimes we can become so
focused on our own family that we forget about our extended family, which struck me as a
critique of the nuclear model of the family which has often been imposed over more
expansive Indigenous ways for figuring kinship.

One Kainai woman also took the opportunity testimony meeting gave her to place a
claim on Blackfoot territory—and this from the Mormon pulpit. She did not identify the Big
Claim by name and in fact did not reference at all the local issue of reserve boundaries,
though her more expansive geographical vision covered these issues. Instead she made
reference to the much larger traditional Blackfoot homeland. She stated that she is grateful
to be placed in this land, and she used a Blackfoot name for it, which stretches from the
Yellowstone clear up to the Saskatchewan (rivers). We don’t need borders or boundaries,
she testified, to tell us where our Blackfoot land is. I found it particularly fitting that this
testimony was pronounced from a Mormon pulpit, in Cardston, on Canada Day.

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52 I didn’t catch the term at the time—and do not know Blackfoot—but it was likely Nitawahsin-nanni,
Blackfoot for “our land.” See “Our Land” at Blackfoot Crossing Historical Park,
Headdress Gift Ceremony

When I returned to Cardston in 2014 to conduct field work, I happened to be in town during a headdress gift ceremony, in which the Blood Tribe gifted a historic headdress to the town of Cardston. The headdress that was at the center of the exchange is believed to have been given to Joseph Young Card, son of Charles Ora Card, in the 1920s by Blood Tribe member Charlie Pantherbone, a gesture that suggests that, despite tensions, forms of exchange honoring friendship have taken place and continue to take place between Kainai and Cardston citizens. In 2009 Joseph Card’s daughter, Ruth Card Ashby, returned a headdress, which the family believes to be the headdress given to Card by Pantherbone, to the Blood Tribe, who was now gifting it to the town of Cardston.

I took my seat right behind a group of people whom the town mayor identified as members of the Card family, some of who lived locally, in Lethbridge and Edmonton, and others who had traveled to Cardston from Utah to attend the event (a fitting geographic triangulation that reveals much about Cardston’s history). She also recognized the present descendants of Charlie Panther Bone and Fred Weasel Fat, close friends of Joseph Young Card. (I was attending the event with a member of the Panther Bone family.) After demonstration dances by members of the Blood Tribe, a representative of the Blood Tribal Council delivered remarks, explaining to the audience that the story of this headdress

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53 A representative of the Kainai Nation was careful to establish that this was a headdress gift ceremony and not a transfer ceremony, which transfers special knowledge, authority, and prestige upon a person, as well as ceremonial items. The original gifting of the headdress to Card should be interpreted as a gesture of friendship and not as the bestowal of honorary Kainai chieftainship.

54 As one Blood Tribe member explained to me, when the Blood Tribe received the headdress they could not determine that it was the actual headdress in question, since it did not appear to be of Blackfoot origin or quality. Card family descendants explained that it had been repaired (and apparently altered), which might explain why it did not look like it was of Blackfoot make.
“unravels a history of how we have become neighbors. We have a long history together.”

After several comments about the headdress itself—the significance of its creation, history, and symbolism—he addressed the people of the city of Cardston:

We have a neighboring relationship that we take for granted. Do the children today understand how Cardston came to be? The boundary is not that street. It is further down, in Wyoming. It is a story we don’t understand... How is it that two people are so close, and yet so far apart? How is it the word racism is so evident? In a headdress, the words racism, discrimination, are all gone. You don’t give a headdress to just anyone. Especially a non-tribal member. Such a strong relationship—long ago, probably forgotten—but it is right here, in this headdress... That relationship between us has to be re-examined, perhaps strengthened.55

A speech by a member of the Card family followed and then came the gifting ceremony. Two members of the Panther Bone family were called to the stage (both of whom I recognized from the Kainai LDS Branch) as well as a member of the Card family and the mayor of Cardston. The Kainai representative gifted the headdress to the Panther Bone descendants, who gifted it back to the Card family, who then gifted it to the mayor of Cardston. The mayor explained that the town was in the process of determining an appropriate location to house the headdress, but it was “now back in possession of the citizens.” She closed her remarks by stating, “We hope that it will help restore our relationships.”56

55 This speech is reproduced based on longhand notes I took in my field notes during the event. I have supplied some articles to flesh out the quotation. In his speech he referred to a feasibility study that established the extent to which the town of Cardston is economically dependent upon business patronage from Kainai people. He stated: That helps you, feeds your families. And these things go unrecognized.

56 The sequence of events is reconstructed based on my field notes and a program of the event.
Red Crow and Charles Ora Card: Bloods and Mormons

In downtown Cardston there is a restored cabin representing the first cabin of Charles Ora Card. Next to the cabin, on the side of a building that abuts the lot, is a large mural. The central image in the mural is a line of covered wagons pulled by oxen, led by a pioneer man, presumably Card. In the right-hand lower corner a pioneer woman stands with a child next to her, presumably Zina Card and her son Joseph Young Card. The landscape is recognizable: in the background are the peaks of Canadian Rockies and to the far left is the iconic Chief Mountain, renowned in the area as a sacred mountain to the Blood people and a symbol central to the identity of Cardston as well (it can be seen from most points in the town). Lee’s Creek flows through the center of the scene of rolling plains, hills, and trees. In the far left corner, just below and left of Chief Mountain, is a small scene, peripheral to everything else in the mural: four tipis, presumably Blackfoot lodges, a fire with tripod and steaming calabash, and three Indian figures, two seated and one standing. The attention of all three are directed toward the dominant and approaching pioneers. The standing figure, adorned in a red robe and bone breastplate, is holding one hand above their brow, shielding the sun to get a better view of the approaching wagon train. The mural represents how many view Cardston history. The Mormon pioneer story dominates the scene. The Blood people are peripheral; one might not even see them with a passing glance. The mural visualizes the Mormon settlers’ claim to the area of Lee’s Creek. The Blood people in the image are aware of their arrival and do not appear to dispute the claim, but rather stand as distant and curious onlookers, peripheral to the center of action claimed by the Mormon settlers.
Across the street from this mural, painted on the side of a building, is another mural which tells a slightly different story. In this image, Chief Red Crow is the dominant figure. He stands just slightly left of center, the largest figure in the image. Below him, under his outstretched arm, is a group of interracial children and young adults. To the viewer’s right, slightly behind Red Crow and approaching him is a bearded pioneer man, clearly a representation of Charles Ora Card, leading a young girl in dress and bonnet. Behind him is a woman, presumably Zina, in dress and bonnet, and a covered wagon with horses. The scene is split down the middle by Lee’s Creek. To one side, the viewer’s right, are the Mormon pioneers with the Cardston temple towering over them. To the viewer’s left are two Kainai lodges with Chief Mountain looming above them, representing Blood and larger Blackfoot Territory. There is a clear division and symmetry to the painting. Between Red Crow and Card is depicted a red heart with three white handprints on it, and a parchment scroll with the following text:

One of seven Blackfoot Confederacy Chiefs, Chief Red Crow-Kainai Nation (1830-1900) faced challenging decisions as settlers began moving into Southern Alberta. In careful consultation with his clan and government officials, Red Crow allowed the settlers to move into what is now called the Town of Cardston. The negotiations included terms founded in the vision of peace and understanding of both cultures. We too can see each other as people to be valued, to be learned from, and lived with in peace. This is a land of many hands and many minds. Working together we can become a community that celebrates unity within our diversity. We can be of one heart. c1877

As the wording of the text implies, Red Crow’s vision of unity is something yet to be achieved in Cardston: “...we too can see each other as people to be valued... we can become a community...we can be of one heart.” The message is clear: many in Cardston do not yet see others in this way; Cardston is not yet a community of one heart. But the mural depicts a Red Crow who has already realized this ideal, with an interracial assemblage of young
people gathered under his gentle embrace and care. Card approaches from the background, a newcomer who is coming to learn from the wise Red Crow, symbol of a pluralistic future, symbolized by the group of children in modern dress and of every shade on the racial spectrum. The Mormon newcomers in Cardston have not yet realized this ideal, but the image and text indicate that they can. As such, the mural is at the same time a pointed critique and an invitation to “unity within our diversity.” It reverses the roles as depicted in the mural across the street by making Red Crow central and dominant, but it does not marginalize the Mormons. They are actors in the scene—not merely passive like the Indians in the other mural. The Mormon settlers are depicted as newcomers who have yet to learn how to live in complete unity and harmony with their neighbors, something they can learn by approaching Red Crow’s example. Red Crow is depicted as the symbol of an aspiration—a vision of racial inclusiveness to be aspired to. Something the two communities can become.

The mural was created as part of the One Heart Alberta Project, a three-year collaborative project sponsored by the Shinah House Foundation, a registered charity centered in southern Alberta, and the Blood Tribe, funded by the Alberta Government Human Rights Education and Multiculturalism Fund and other organizations. While the Shinah Foundation is not a Mormon-affiliated project, I did meet a Mormon woman in Utah who had recently moved from Cardston who had been involved in the project and who indicated how much healing is needed there.

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**Day of Prayer**

One place where Kainai and non-Kainai people do occasionally come together is during a declared “day of prayer.” These events have been held both by the Kainai Nation and by Cardston LDS congregations. At one Day of Prayer event held on the Blood Reserve, and sponsored by the Kainai Nation, the branch president of the Kainai LDS Branch was invited to speak at the event and another branch member performed a musical number. Reciprocally, when the Cardston LDS Stake held an interfaith Day of Prayer event, clergy and elders from the Blood Reserve were invited to attend. As one Kainai Latter-day Saint explained to me, the current Kainai Chief Charles Weaselhead and his wife have attended Kainai LDS Branch services in the past, where he has spoken openly about Kainai-Cardston relations, expressing his hope for understanding, mutual respect, and friendship to abound between the town of Cardston and the Kainai Nation. Other points of cooperation have included community service projects and an annual powwow held for both communities in Cardston.

**Blackfoot Borderlands**

Thomas King’s short story “Borders” depicts a Blackfoot woman who attempts to cross the international border from Canada in order to visit her daughter in the United States. When the U.S. border guards ask for her citizenship, she declares “Blackfoot.” When he asks if she is from the Canada or U.S. side, she states that she is from the Blackfoot side. After being refused entrance in the U.S. for her refusal to countenance settler demands, she is sent back to the Canada station and has a similar experience. After two days of shuttling between border stations, stranded in the liminal space between, she is finally let through
after news teams come to cover the story of this “Indian without a country.” The daughter in this story, whom this Blackfoot woman goes to visit, is located not only in the United States, but, more specifically, in Salt Lake City, Utah. Though the Mormon Church is not explicitly referenced, its influence is clearly implied. The Blackfoot girl, Lititia, was convinced to move to Salt Lake City by descriptions of life in the city by two friends, at least one of whom is also Blackfoot and had attended a technical college in Salt Lake City. For her, Utah represented a chance to escape what she describes as the boredom of life on the Reserve. This causes a tension between Lititia and her mother, who does not want her to leave the Reserve (what do they have in Utah that we don’t already have here?). In the story, Mormonism, as a Utah-based church, is entangled if not conflated with the United States and represents a divisive force in the Blackfoot community, drawing young people south across an imagined and enforced boundary line that already divides Blackfoot solidarity.

King had clearly done his homework and was familiar enough with Blackfoot communities to understand the link Mormonism has made between the Cardston area and Utah. As Mormon centers, Salt Lake City and Provo, Utah—home to the Church’s Brigham Young University—draw both Blackfoot and non-Blackfoot Cardston-area residents away from southern Alberta. Dean R. Louder notes a “dilemma” faced by Canadian Latter-day Saints “whose roots and primary symbolic resource field lies south of the border.” Some of their elite church leaders have been called to Salt Lake City to fulfill church callings there, and many young Canadian Latter-day Saints have moved to Utah to attend school or for marriage prospects and then stay there, often becoming U.S. citizens. “Canadian Mormons

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who wish to affirm a separate national identity face a special set of circumstances and a
challenge even greater than that of other Canadians.”59 Except, perhaps, for Indigenous
peoples residing within territories claimed by the Canadian nation state. This problem is
particularly thick for Blackfoot peoples living in southern Alberta. Further, for many First
Nations Latter-day Saints, there was also the Indian Student Placement Program, which
also drew Blackfoot children away from their communities and separated them from their
families.60

The boundary between Cardston and the Blood Reserve is an arbitrary line, marked
off by a Dominion survey and enforced by a settler state. Though arbitrary and artificial, it
has become a political fact, though a sharply contested one. The town of Cardston, a refuge
for Mormon settlers granted by the Dominion of Canada, and the Big Claim of the Kainai
Nation are two territorial claims to the same land. The line that divides this claim is bound
to become a point of contention. That division is deepened by the racism Kainai people face
in Cardston, by the anxiety Mormon people feel for the land they have settled and for the
spot where their sacred temple now stands, and by the mutual distrust between two
competing sovereignties. Yet points of cooperation do exist, as exemplified by the
headdress transfer ceremony described above. But even such points as these become sites
for airing grievances, or for recognizing problems to be worked out. Some people manage
to bridge this divide, not only through cooperation but by inhabiting both spaces. This is
particularly true of Kainai Latter-day Saints, many of whom live in Cardston, and others


60 See Barbara Jones Brown, “‘Integrating Them Into Our Lives’: Progressivism, Paternalism, and the Indian
Student Placement Program in Canada, 1964-67,” unpublished paper presented at the Mormon History
Association Annual Conference, Calgary, Alberta, Canada, June 29, 2012.
who live on the Kainai Reserve, though it is not always clear whether this is always an example of bridging two cultures or of a divided self. It is often both: people with homes and a sense of belonging in both places, and yet, often feeling not quite at home, completely, in either place. The Kainai-Cardston-U.S.-Canadian-Blackfoot borderlands is an incredibly complex site of multiple convergences: a site of settler-state force and regulation, religious settlement and conversion, and Indigenous survivance. This complexity is often articulated as a Mormon-Blood conflict, often using Book of Mormon terms to express this divide. This situation places Kainai Latter-day Saints in a particularly complex situation. Yet Kainai Latter-day Saints can also use Mormon categories and venues to express their Kainaiwah identity and sense of belonging. Despite the polarities that boundaries can highlight, one can be both. As one Kainai Latter-day Saint, whose Kainai authenticity had been challenged, emphatically stated, “I am Mormon, and I am Kainai.” If borders can divide, they can also be crossed, and dual citizenship is possible, though not easy.

61 The term survivance is a critical term often used in Indigenous Studies and typically attributed to Gerald Vizenor, who explained, “Survivance is an active sense of presence, the continuance of native stories, not a mere reaction, or a survivable name. Native survivance stories are renunciations of dominance, tragedy and victimry.” Gerald Vizenor, Manifest Manners: Narratives on Postindian Survivance (Lincoln: Nebraska, 1999), p. vii. Jacques Derrida also used the term in multiple ways, as Vizenor points out, sometimes to denote a relic of the past, a specter, or sometimes “the surviving of an excess of life which resists annihilation.” Gerald Vizenor, “Aesthetics of Survivance,” in Survivance: Narratives of Native Presence, ed. Gerald Vizenor (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 2008), 21.
PART II. INDIGENOUS READINGS
Though the earliest Mormons were very interested in converting Indigenous American peoples—in accordance with their understanding of Book of Mormon prophecy and the role latter-day Lamanites were expected to play in the anticipated millennial drama—we have very few ethnographic observations recorded by Mormon missionaries regarding Native responses to the Book of Mormon during the nineteenth century. One of the first missionary assignments was to the federally designated “Indian Territory,” a mission which came to be known as “the Lamanite Mission.” Though the mission was a failure in terms of their immediate objectives—the missionaries were kicked out of the territory by the Indian agent because they did not have a permit to be there—the missionaries did contact and leave copies of the Book of Mormon with Seneca, Wyandot, and Delaware peoples. The missionaries typically presented the Book of Mormon to these people as a record of their forefathers, but we know very little beyond that of how these people responded to the missionaries’ teaching or how they perceived the Book of Mormon.

We do have a little more to go on for a few subsequent contacts. In the winter of 1846-47, when the Saints were crossing the Great Plains, a group of Mormon migrants found refuge among the Ponca people and one of them, William Staines, claimed to have learned the Ponca language well enough to teach them about the Book of Mormon. Staines relates that when he was leaving the Ponca nation to migrate west,

the chief with whom I stayed asked me for the Book of Mormon, and told me he would keep it as long as he lived, and his son would keep it after him; for he wanted to have the book that would give the history of their fathers—always with them. I handed it to him, and he thanked me, kissing the book, and saying it would be good
medicine for his people, for he should feel as though his fathers were with them when he had the book.

Though of course the Ponca chief’s words are filtered imperfectly through the mediation of Staines’s memory and imperfect Ponca, it appears from this passage that this Ponca leader interpreted the book’s significance through Native categories: the book would be *good medicine* for his people, and it would provide a sense of ancestral presence: he would feel as though his fathers were with him, presumably referring to his immediate ancestors and the genealogies he had knowledge of. ¹

Another interesting example of an Indigenous response to the Book of Mormon comes from the reminiscences of Mormon missionary James Brown who was called in 1853 to labor among the Eastern Shoshone people who eventually came to reside at the Wind River Reservation. In his memoirs he particularly focuses on his interactions with Chief Washakie of the Shoshone people. Since Brown wrote this dialogue from memory many years after the fact, it is impossible to know what Washakie really said or thought about the Book of Mormon, but Brown recalls a comment that apparently stuck with him. “The chief,” Brown recalls, “said the wolves had written that book when they were men, but had since been turned into wolves; that being an ancient tradition among the Shoshones.” Here we very possibly have recorded, though imperfectly, a trace of a very early Indigenous reading of the text according to Indigenous categories. Washakie seems to be embedding the Book of Mormon within cultural categories he and other Shoshone people could understand. The people who wrote the Book of Mormon—whom the Mormon missionaries likely identified as the Shoshone people’s ancestors—were the people from Shoshone stories who had

turned into wolves. Yet, because Brown did not follow up on this reading and interpretation, that is all we know about it.²

In the early twentieth century, we have a little more to go by. Some Native individuals such as Northwestern Shoshone citizen Frank Warner (see chapters 1 and 5) kept journals and wrote their own experiences and interpretations. But even such accounts as these are few and far between. The historical record of Indigenous American interpretations of the Book of Mormon, particularly for earlier periods of Mormon history, remains fairly sparse. By the late twentieth century, sources become more available. An LDS Native American Oral History Project conducted by and housed in the Charles Redd Center at Brigham Young University contains a significant collection of oral history interviews with Native American peoples, many of which address the Book of Mormon. There have been a few other compilations as well.³ Still, for documenting something like “Indigenous readings of the Book of Mormon,” ethnography proves, I would argue, to be the most effective route (at least for a non-Indigenous person). What follows is my attempt to document, correlate, and analyze several Indigenous readings of the Book of Mormon that I have encountered, noted, recorded, and transcribed during my ethnographic field work. They are organized according to themes below.

² James S. Brown, Life of a Pioneer: Being the Autobiography of James S. Brown (Salt Lake City, UT: Geo. Q. Cannon & Sons Co., 1900 [AMS reprint, 1971]), 357-60. I did not encounter anything like this in my limited field work among Eastern Shoshone people and was not aware of this source at that time and so did not ask about it. It could be a fruitful avenue to follow up on, to see if there is any narrative memory of this story and how it might be related to the Book of Mormon.

³ See, for example, Dale and Margene Shumway, The Blossoming: Dramatic Accounts in the Lives of Native Americans (n.p., 2002) and The Blossoming II (2007), which provide several chapters drawn primarily from interviews with American Indian Latter-day involved in the Indian Student Placement Program and other church-related Indian programs. For other sources on the topic, see footnotes in the introduction above.
CHAPTER 4. CHILDREN OF LEHI, LAMAN, JOSEPH, AND MANASSEH: INDIGENOUS MORMON SUBJECTIVITY

I think we are all born out of darkness and we kind of come to the light of our consciousness gradually over time. But when we talk about Lehi and Sariah, and when we talk about Joseph of Egypt, there’s something deep inside me that says they are mine—they are my family. And I can’t explain why I have that feeling, I just have that feeling. –Ellen Cook Crowfoot (Mohawk/Oneida, Blackfoot)

When I asked Ellen Crowfoot if she grew up thinking of herself as a descendant of Lehi, she responded, “Yes, I did. I always did.” However, she also told me that she was more connected to her father and his tradition than to Lehi as a child. “Basically, we were his children. And he was his father’s child. And his father was Mohawk, and a convert to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.” Her understanding of herself as Mohawk came first (her mother is Oneida) and her understanding of herself as a descendant of Lehi came later, though she attributes this as well to her father and her grandfather, who cultivated that awareness in her, though indirectly. “It wasn’t like either one of them sat me down and said, ’This is who you are,’ you know. They would just—they would sing songs, they would tell stories, and then I learned the rest by association.”

Ellen Cook was raised LDS, first living in Ithaca, New York, then Orange County, California, among other places. She met Strater Crowfoot (Blackfoot/Siksika) when they were sixteen attending the last All-Church Lamanite Youth Conference in Salt Lake City in 1971. Following his mission they met again while attending Brigham Young University in Provo, Utah. They were both involved in the Tribe of Many Feathers, Lamanite Generation—a performance group composed of Indigenous American LDS students at
BYU—and other “Lamanite” programs at BYU.\(^1\) After they married she and her husband moved to Edmonton and then to a tiny hamlet called Arrowwood, located near the Siksika Nation in southern Alberta, southeast of Calgary.

Prior to Strater’s 1980 graduation, Ellen had an experience that had a significant impact on her. They were invited to dinner by Byron and Jennie Vance who had served as missionaries in the Blackfoot Reservation and knew of the Crowfoot family; they told them they had something important to tell them before they moved back to Canada. While this couple had served as missionaries during the 1960s on Strater’s reservation, Mormon apostle Spencer W. Kimball, who was well known for his focus on Lamanite people, visited the area and explained to the missionaries that they had been called to befriend and strengthen families there. They were told not to be discouraged, that these people’s suffering would be like those of the early Saints who suffered persecution by locals and opposition of adversarial spirits; this “because they were a people of great promise.” Kimball also told them, as Ellen recalls, that “Moroni walked and dedicated these lands,” presumably meaning Blackfoot lands, and Kimball also prophesied that there would one day be a temple there.

After hearing this, something clicked for Ellen. She explained that prior to marrying Strater she had been preparing to serve an LDS mission but she had the impression that marrying Strater and raising a family was her mission. She also explained that she had been nervous about moving to Canada, to the Siksika Reserve, but when this couple told them

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\(^1\) During part of the 1970s and early 80s, due largely to the efforts of apostle and then president Spencer W. Kimball, Brigham Young University had the highest enrollment of Native students of any university in the United States, and included several programs focused on the education and “uplift” of American Indian and Indigenous American peoples. See Armand Mauss, *All Abraham’s Children: Changing Mormon Conceptions of Race and Lineage* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003), 89.
these things and that they “were witness to that prophesy,” she said, “it just hit me, and other things I had been told by my grandfather and others who had given me blessings clicked”: if she desired, this would be part of her life’s mission.

The Book of Mormon, then, served as a connection for Ellen to the Blackfoot lands, rendering her safe in them. When she learned that beloved Mormon “apostle to the Lamanites” Spencer W. Kimball had prophesied that Moroni had and dedicated much of Alberta, and that there would be a Mormon temple there someday, then to see the fulfilment of this prophecy and to assist in strengthening the people of promise there became one of Ellen’s strongest desires. Book of Mormon prophecy helped her to feel at home with a strong sense of purpose in a land that may have otherwise been foreign to her.

The Indigenous identity that links Strater and Ellen together is constantly mediated through Book of Mormon and LDS terms and categories. They met at a Lamanite youth conference, and again at Brigham Young University, where they were both involved in Lamanite Generation, and she agreed to make a life with him in Canada because of its connection to Mormon narratives—narratives she was familiar with. (Before the above-related conversation, she would have rather returned east to upstate New York or Wisconsin where her mother was raised.) Though both of them were already linked by the colonial category of Indigeneity—American Indian/First Nations /aboriginal/ Indigenous—it was their spiritual witness of the Book of Mormon that they held in common and held them together through many difficult years. As Strater told me in my interview with him, “If it wasn't for the Church, if it wasn't for the teachings of the Book of Mormon, I don't think I’d be here today. I don't think we’d be married. I’d have a whole
different life.” Mormon Indigenous narratives—such as Lamanite subjectivity—in other words, led them to one another and has held them together.

This is something they are passing onto their children, quite literally. Two of their sons share names with Book of Mormon prophets or missionaries: Samuel, commonly known as Samuel the Lamanite, and Ammon, the Nephite missionary to the Lamanites. Both of these are fairly common names, as I have found, among Indigenous Latter-day Saints. But as Ellen explained, their son Samuel is actually named after the biblical “boy prophet” Samuel who heard the voice of the Lord. She explained, however, that, despite her intentions, her son “really liked the story of Samuel the Lamanite better” and probably connected more with him. Her son Ammon, she explained, is named after the people of Ammon in the Book of Mormon, a group of Lamanite people who converted to the Lord due to the preaching of the Nephite prophet Ammon, and who then buried their weapons of war and made a covenant of peace. She wanted her son “to have that kind of faith,” exemplified by a people who would “lay down their weapons and their lust for bloodshed to be true to the covenants that they made.” As reflected in the naming of their son, the Crowfoot family feels and articulates a special connection to the people of Ammon. And it is apparently known to other Latter-day Saints. When Mormon artist Del Parson wanted to do a painting depicting a mother and son from among the people of Ammon—depicting a famous scene from the Book of Mormon—he asked Ellen and her son Nathan to pose as models for the piece, which he titled “Farewell My Stripling Warrior.” Thus, quite literally, in oil and canvas—and through digital reproduction—they have become widely recognizable as Book of Mormon people: the people of Ammon.
Ammon’s middle name, Joseph, also connects him to both the Book of Mormon and to the Bible, as well as to his Blackfoot family. As Ellen explained, Strater’s middle name is also Joseph and “it’s been used every generation since Joe Crowfoot.” But she also felt that, since the Book of Mormon speaks of Native people as “being of the tribe of Joseph, I thought that it would be good for this child to remember his ancient ancestor Joseph who was sold into Egypt.” Joseph is significant in the Book of Mormon since, as Ellen indicates above, Lehi is identified in the Book of Mormon as a descendant of Joseph through his eldest son Manasseh. Native peoples have thus commonly been identified by Latter-day Saints as descendants of Manasseh, or as belonging to the tribe of Manasseh. Joseph Smith was also remembered to have taught, after the Book of Mormon had been published, that Ishmael, who had traveled with Lehi’s family to the Promised Land so Lehi’s sons would have wives, was of the tribe of Ephraim. Thus, both of the biblical Joseph’s two sons—Ephraim and Manasseh—were present, as tribes of Israel, in the Book of Mormon Americas.

In accordance with this dual presence, Ellen indicated that “half of our kids are Ephraim and half are Manasseh.” She is referring to a prophetic assignment most Latter-day Saints receive during their late adolescence when they receive a patriarchal blessing. A standard element of the blessing is an assignment, or a revelation, of the tribe of Israel to which that individual belongs. The vast majority of Latter-day Saints are assigned, or revealed to belong to, either the tribe of Ephraim or of Manasseh. And of those two,

2 In 1882, almost forty years after Smith’s death, Mormon apostle Erastus Snow stated that Joseph Smith taught that the lost original 116 manuscript pages of the Book of Mormon stated that Ishmael was of the tribe of Ephraim. “Discourse by Apostle Erastus Snow,” at Logan, Utah, May 6, 1882, in Journal of Discourses 23: 184-85.

3 “Patriarch” is a priesthood office in the church, assigned typically to an elderly man in each local area, who fulfills the special function of giving “patriarchal blessings,” which, in addition to providing counsel and a basic blueprint for one’s spiritual life, also declares one’s Israelite identity.
Ephraim is the dominant majority. In many cases, these “tribal” latter-day Israelite identities have been racialized or ethnicized; that is, they align with the racial or ethnic categorization of the individual receiving the blessing. While a significant number of individuals who identify or are identified as Indigenous to the western hemisphere belong to Ephraim, very few non-Indigenous people of (primarily) European descent—“white people”—as a general rule, are assigned or belong to Manasseh. And perhaps a slight majority of those identifiable as Indigenous are assigned to, or belong to, the tribe of Manasseh, probably because Lehi is identified in the Book of Mormon as being “a descendant of Manasseh, who was the son of Joseph who was sold into Egypt.”

While Ellen does not claim to know much about how people are characterized or assigned to Israelite tribes beyond her own family’s identifications, she is attuned to differences in how the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh are esteemed in Mormon culture and scriptural narrative interpretation. “There’s a lot written about Ephraim,” she recognized. “Not much about Manasseh.” In the biblical narrative, “Manasseh was the elder brother,” yet Ephraim, at least as the blessing is construed in Latter-day Saint exegesis, “was blessed with the privilege of gathering Israel in the last days.” These are blessings Manasseh shares, but Ellen, wondering why such distinctions were pronounced, asked her mother, who is Manasseh—her father is Ephraim—if it ever bothered her that Manasseh is

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4 Since patriarchal blessings are largely kept private and, as a rule, are not published, there are no available numbers on this, but it is so generally known in Mormon vernacular culture as to be deemed general knowledge. My field work observations, as I will explain below, bear this out.

5 Alma 10:3, Book of Mormon.

6 A perusal of the titles of books on Israelite lineage in the religion section of the BYU library bears this out. Several titles such as The Tribe of Ephraim: Covenant and Bloodline and Ephraim: Chosen of the Lord stand out. I didn’t notice any titles on Manasseh on the shelves, though a catalog search did pull up one title in Special Collections titled, fittingly, Ephraim and Manasseh.

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positioned secondarily, almost as an afterthought or concession—“Oh, you’re in there too.”

Her mother confessed, as she recalls, “Yeah, it kind of bothered me in the early years of my conversion.” However, she continued, as Ellen recalls:

“But...I thought about it, and I remembered Lehi was a visionary man and he was from Manasseh. Both Manasseh and Ephraim came through Joseph—Joseph was a visionary man and a doer of the word of God, so perhaps Ephraim’s greater talent is in leadership and making things happen, while Manasseh’s greater talent is in testimony and understanding; but they still share those blessings and are entitled to inherited gifts of the spirit.” And she said, “think of it in terms of keeping the home-fires burning, the home-fires of faith and family connectedness—perhaps that is the role of Manasseh.”

Thus, in this formulation, while Ephraim is to conduct the work of gathering Israel—typically construed as missionary work, though it could also involve church leadership—Manasseh is there to “keep the home fires burning”; or, as Ellen later put it, “to see and understand what has been and what is coming and by wisdom (not ambition) see that the home fires of faith and family are kept burning.” Thus, Ephraim takes the dominant role but Manasseh shares in those blessings. It is no surprise then that Ephraim, even if it does contain some Indigenous peoples within its designation—half of the Crowfoot family, for example—is often associated with white church members of European descent—originally adopted Gentiles—while Manasseh is associated with Indigeneity. As Ellen explained on this point, “The spiritual sensitivity of Indigenous cultures are widely recognized for their connection to creation and matters of the heart.”

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7 In Genesis 48, in the Bible, when Jacob (Israel) blesses his grandsons, Ephraim and Manasseh, Ephraim is set before Manasseh. Manasseh is told that “he shall also be great” but Ephraim “shall be greater than he, and his seed shall become a multitude of nations.” Genesis 48:19-20 (KJV). I cite the King James Version because it is the official version used by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.
The categories Ellen Crowfoot describes above are ones that articulate and are articulated by numerous Indigenous Latter-day Saints I have met. Below I will address Indigenous Mormon engagement with scriptural categories of identity as Manasseh, as Lamanite, and as Israelite. While Ellen Crowfoot also mentions the biblical Joseph of Egypt above—a figure who is mentioned frequently in the Book of Mormon and early Mormon discourse in reference to the descendants of Lehi (the “seed” or “remnant of Joseph”)—I found that among most people, reference to Ephraim and Manasseh has largely replaced references to Joseph. I will also include sections on Indians as Jews and on an alternative way of reading the Book of Mormon that eschews the idea of literal descent while still connecting to Lamanites as another group of Indigenous people. Before jumping into Indigenous readings, however, I will provide an overview of how Israelite and Gentile lineage categories are used in the Book of Mormon and how dominant reading traditions of Book of Mormon categories by predominately Euroamerican Latter-day Saints has shifted over time, since understanding that is important for understanding Indigenous readings of Israelite identity.

The Book of Mormon and Israelite Lineage

The title page of the Book of Mormon states that the book was “Written to the Lamanites, who are a remnant of the house of Israel; and also to Jew and Gentile.” Further, it explains that the book was “Written and sealed up, and hid up unto the Lord...to come

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8 I am alluding to James Clifford’s use of articulation theory in regard to indigeneity, as described in the introduction, which is something that both articulates indigenous peoples to ideas, places, and to each other—in the sense of joining or connecting—and as an identity that people articulate through words, images, and embodiment. See introduction, above.
forth in due time by the way of the Gentile.” Early Mormons typically took that last reference to the Book of Mormon coming forth “by way of the Gentile” as a reference to themselves, as Americans of European descent. They were the “Gentiles” who had been chosen to bring this work to light in the latter days and carry it forth to the Lamanites, as well as, secondarily, to the Jews and to some fellow Gentiles.9 Later in the narrative (in 2 Nephi 29-30 in the current version), the prophet Nephi is depicted as prophesying that in the last days, many of the Gentiles would reject the Book of Mormon, yet some would accept it. “For behold...as many of the Gentiles as will repent are the covenant people of the Lord.” These, it was typically understood, would be adopted into Israel, or at least be allowed to join with them and thus survive the violent apocalypse that would precede the coming of the millennium.10 A few verses later, Nephi prophesies concerning the role of the Gentiles in bringing his words (the Book of Mormon) forth to his “seed,” understood by early Mormons to be Native Americans.

And now, I would prophesy somewhat more concerning the Jews and the Gentiles. For after the book of which I have spoken [the Book of Mormon] shall come forth, and be written unto the Gentiles, and sealed up again unto the Lord, there shall be many which shall believe the words which are written; and they shall carry them forth unto the remnant of our seed. And then shall the remnant or our seed know concerning us, how we came out from Jerusalem, and that they are descendants of the Jews. And the gospel of Jesus Christ shall be declared among them; wherefore, they shall be restored unto the knowledge of their fathers, and also to the knowledge of Jesus Christ, which was had among their fathers. And then shall they rejoice; for they shall know that it is a blessing unto them from the hand of God; and their scales of darkness shall begin to fall from their eyes; and many generations shall not pass away before they shall be a white and delightsome people.

9 The phrase “Jew and Gentile” could be taken to be basically a reference to “everyone else,” but each term also had specific valences, which would become more developed later on, as Mormonism developed. 10 See Grant Underwood, The Millenarian World of Early Mormonism (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999).
This clear dichotomy between Gentiles and Israel—variously identified as Lamanites, Jews, or the remnant of the seed of Jacob/Joseph/house of Israel—soon became blurred. Even prior to the publication of the Book of Mormon Joseph Smith may have thought of himself as a descendant of the biblical Joseph of Egypt, and thus of Israel. Such thinking was not unique to Smith. A group of New Englanders organized in the 1790s as the “New Israelites” believed themselves to be literal descendants of the Lost Ten Tribes of Israel. This belief had its counterpart in a popular dispersionist theory often referred to as British Israelism: the concept that select peoples of Great Britain, in particular Anglo-Saxons, were descendants of members of the Lost 10 Tribes, typically associated with the tribe of Ephraim, Joseph’s favored son (the title Ephraim has often been used in reference to the biblical Northern Kingdom of Israel). Proponents of these theories often articulated Israelite descent as racial categories, according to which Israelite lineage adhered or resided in the “blood.” British Israelism thus dovetailed with Anglo-Saxon triumphalism in a racial narrative that associated Ephraim with whiteness and narrated Anglo-Saxon Ephraimites as a superior Israelite race. As Mormon sociologist Armand Mauss explains, such ideas were familiar to many early Mormons and may explain why Mormon missionaries were sent to England in 1837—a mission that probably increased the

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11 A passage in 2 Nephi 3:6-15 depicts the biblical Joseph prophesying and receiving a promise that in the last days the Lord would raise up a “seer” from his own lineage who would bring forth the word of the Lord “unto the seed of my loins,” and that this seer “shall be called after me [Joseph]; and...after he name of his father.” These verses are typically interpreted by Mormons to be a reference to Joseph Smith, who is thus taken to be a literal descendant of the biblical Joseph and thus if the House of Israel.


strength of this narrative, carried across the Atlantic with a flood of English converts and developed in response to the success of that mission.⁴

As a result of the failed expectations of early Mormons who anticipated an immediate mass conversion of Lamanite Israel, the success of missionary work among English and Anglo-Americans, combined with the context and importation of British-American Israelism, white Mormon converts gradually came to view themselves as Israelites, and particularly as members of the tribe of Ephraim. This view became standardized as the practice of declaring Israelite identity (interpreted either as lineage or adoption, but typically as lineage) became a standard part of patriarchal blessings, which all upstanding young Latter-day Saints were eventually expected to receive as a matter of routine practice. Thus, as Mormon Israelite identity expanded to include white Euroamericans, it also became racialized. Ephraim became associated with whiteness, and Manasseh, since Lehi was identified to be of that lineage, became a marker of indigeneity.

Ephraim and Manasseh

_They represent the people of Ephraim, and we are of Manasseh. They are to teach us._⁵

In an 1856 July 24th Pioneer Day celebration eleven Shoshone men marched in a parade carrying a banner prepared for them by Mormon settlers reading, “The Ten Thousands of Manessah.” On the same day at Fort Supply, twenty-four Native youth marched in another parade, also carrying a banner prepared for them reading, “We shall

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⁴ Mauss, _All Abraham’s Children_, chapter 2.

⁵ This is a statement I heard from a Northwestern Shoshone individual and recorded in my field notes.
yet become a white and delightsome people.”

Taken together, these two banners, quite literally super-scripted over and onto Indigenous peoples, demonstrate the strong association between the Israelite tribe of Mannaseh and Indigeneity and the racialization of that Israelite identity.

For Judy Canty Martin, her identification as Manasseh confirms an Indigenous identity that is otherwise called into question. Canty Martin is a descendant of Catawba people who migrated from the Catawba Nation in the American South and settled in southern Colorado in the late 1880s. As a result of this migration and the distance that it put between them and the Catawba national homeland, the “Western Catawba” people lost their place on the rolls of the modern Catawba Nation (see chapter 2, above). Thus, Canty Martin, along with other Western Catawba people, is a non-enrolled Indian (technically a descendant), an apparent contradiction in terms. Further, since her father is white and she has a fairly light complexion, she does not match the phenotypic expectations of “Indianness.”

“I’m obviously not white,” she stated, “But I’m not white enough to be white and I’m not Indian enough to be Indian.” In this racially and nationally ambiguous state, her patriarchal blessing came to her as a confirmation of her otherwise contested Indigeneity. When I asked her how Catawba lineage is determined, or what it means “to be Catawba or not Catawba,” she replied, “My patriarchal blessing says I am of the lineage of Manasseh, so

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17 I occasionally use the term “Indianness” to refer to markers that correlate to the cultural assumptions or expectations that lie behind social constructions of popular images of American Indian, or “Indian,” identity—things like headdresses, phenotype, wearing feathers—which may or may not correlate with the actual experiences of Native peoples. See Philip Deloria, Indians in Unexpected Places (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2004); and S. Elizabeth Bird, Dressing in Feathers: The Construction of the Indian in American Popular Culture (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1996).
I just took it at that...and I’ve always considered myself Indian.” She is Indian because she is of the lineage of Manasseh; or, rather, her felt Indigeneity is confirmed by revelation as belonging to the tribe of Manasseh. Others might not recognize her as such by her appearance, and the tribal nation she claims as her own does not recognize her as a citizen, but her Indigeneity was revealed through a Mormon Patriarch—in fact a “Lamanite Patriarch”—and thus, she’s always known that she’s Indian. If others won’t take her or recognize her, the tribe of Manasseh will.

The patriarch who gave her blessing was William “Buck” Canty, a name which, she explained “started out as a slam,” but which he adopted (unlike Canty Martin, “Buck” was easily and widely recognized as an Indian by those around him). A photograph of Canty, picturing him in a Plains Indian-style headdress bearing the caption “‘Buck’ Canty / 1st Lamanite Patriarch of the Church / Presentation of Headdress by BYU Lamanite Generation” was published in the Church News and hangs in a historical society museum in the San Luis Valley. That designation, as the “first Lamanite patriarch,” is something I have often heard in reference to him among his descendants and relatives among the Western Catawbas and in period local and Church publications. In the LDS Church, “patriarch” is a priesthood office held typically by one man in each “stake”—an ecclesiastical unit—whose assignment is to provide “patriarchal blessings.” These blessing are something individual Latter-day Saints are encouraged to seek out and receive, typically in their teenage years or in young adulthood—though it can be received any time after early adolescence. Typically patriarchs are seen as spiritually mature, often elderly, highly esteemed members of the community. The blessing is seen as a form of revelation directed specifically to an individual as a guide for their life. An essential element of the blessing is the revelation of
the tribe of Israel to which an individual belongs or is assigned. (There is some ambiguity and variance of opinion on this matter; sometimes the designation of Israelite tribal identity is seen as an assigned identity—one inherits the blessings and responsibilities associated with that tribe at the time of the blessing but the designation is, in a sense, symbolic—while others view it as a revelation of actual lineal and biological descent.)

Canty Martin’s husband was also blessed by Patriarch Buck Canty. Her husband “was white,” she explained, and, according to the blessing, he “was adopted into Ephraim,” a phrase that struck her as “kind of strange.” Typically, one is revealed to be “of” Ephraim or Manasseh, etc. The language of adoption, however, is reminiscent of early Mormonism, during which many white members were viewed as Gentiles who were adopted into Israel rather than revealed to be literally and biologically of Israelite descent. While this view came to be largely replaced by literal or at least spiritual-literal descent, it evidently is not gone altogether. (And it seems relevant that here it was remembered by a “Lamanite” patriarch.) Canty Martin’s children, however, were blessed after Patriarch Canty had died. They were, accordingly, blessed by another, non-Lamanite patriarch. And her children, she explained, “are both Ephraim and Manasseh”—that is, they each individually belong to both tribes—which, she felt, “is also kind of strange.” She went on to explain, “So, my husband’s uncle was the patriarch. And he, he gave my daughter hers, and he said he couldn’t decide which one it was, so he gave her Ephraim, and she was mad. He said Manasseh’s so strong in her that” it could have gone either way. “By the time my son came along and got his,” she explained, “he had learned that they could have both lineages.” In other words, her daughter was revealed to be of Ephraim and this upset her, presumably because she wanted the same kind of confirmation her mother received, of her Indigeneity, which
Manasseh would provide, and her uncle had failed to acknowledge this Indigeneity with his blessing. Upon further explanation, her uncle explained that both are equally strong in her (she is Indian and white), but he felt he had to choose one, so he went with Ephraim (the dominant tribe in Mormon culture). By the time her son’s blessing time came along, the uncle-patriarch had learned his lesson and assigned him to, or revealed him to be of, both tribes: Ephraim and Manasseh.

In one of the Blackfoot nations I met an individual who shared a part of their patriarchal blessing with me. The blessing declared that they had the true blood of Israel in their veins through the lineage of Ephraim, mingled with the blood of Manasseh through Joseph. The blessing stated that this was a great advantage because the tribe of Ephraim is the chosen seed of all Israel. This person felt it was very significant and special to be of both tribes, since everyone else they know is only of one tribe. Yet, significantly, Ephraim is explicitly ranked higher that Manasseh in terms of chosenness in this blessing, even if they mingle together as Joseph.

I encountered a similar situation in a Montana border town located near the Blackfeet Nation, not with a Blackfeet citizen but a man I will call Robert Timothy (pseudonym), who described himself as ¼ Hawaiian. Timothy acknowledged that you would not guess this by looking at him; he does not match the phenotypic expectations of “Hawaiianness.” As someone with a ¼ blood quantum, he does not qualify as Native Hawaiian according to the criteria of the Department of Hawaiian Home Lands, and thus cannot apply for Native Hawaiian benefits or homestead on Hawaiian Home Lands, which are reserved for Native Hawaiians. He is technically a Hawaiian descendant. His father, however, does qualify as Native Hawaiian, since he has a blood quantum measurement of
fifty percent.\(^\text{18}\) Our conversation led to the topic of Indigenous Mormon identity and he explained that his father was disappointed when each of his children was declared to be of Ephraim in their patriarchal blessings. His father is of the tribe of Manasseh and feels this is very meaningful because of the part in the Book of Mormon where Lehi learns from reading the brass plates\(^\text{19}\) (the Hebrew Scriptures and then some) that he can trace his lineage back through Manasseh. In response to his father’s disappointment, Timothy explained that when he teaches Native people in church about the blessings associated with Indigenous Israelite descent, he likes to refer to the blessings of Joseph, or of Joseph’s blessing to his children. The tacit point, as I took it, is that by focusing on Joseph, rather than on one of his two sons, Ephraim or Manasseh, he is able to include both Ephraim and Manasseh. Joseph is a more inclusive identity. By doing so he self-reflexively acknowledges both the dominant European and the recessive and thus non-recognized (¼) Indigenous blood he carries within him. Joseph is thus a more inclusive category, as he uses it, one that can potentially acknowledge the hybridity of Indigenous identity, both recognized and non-recognizable (until declared). Joseph can cover both the European and the Indigenous, the citizen and the descendant of a measured Indigeneity.\(^\text{20}\)

In stark contrast to this, I incidentally also met another individual in the same LDS branch who also introduced herself as a Hawaiian descendant, whom I will call Martha


\(^\text{19}\) In 1 Nephi in the Book of Mormon, after Lehi leads his family into the desert he sends his sons back to Jerusalem to obtain “the record of the Jews and also a genealogy of my forefathers” that were “engraven upon plates of brass” (1 Nephi 3:3).

\(^\text{20}\) When this topic came up later in another conversation, he said that it never really mattered to him what lineage he belonged to. Only that you are a Latter-day Saint. The same blessings pertain to all if they live righteously.
Davis. Her mother was ½ Hawaiian, she explained, but had intentionally left Hawaiian culture behind and married a white man. In contrast to Timothy’s father (in the previous paragraphs), Davis’s mother was upset that she was declared to be of Manasseh and wanted to be of Ephraim (her husband and children are of Ephraim). Davis explained that her mother was proud, however, to be of Lamanite descent because, as she put it, it allowed her to skip over her bad Hawaiian fathers right back to Lehi. (The woman described the Hawaiian concept of *kapu* as “Hawaiian black magic.”) Thus, for this woman, Lamanite descent allowed her to bypass a Hawaiian Indigeneity for a Mormon one.

But this seemed to be an exceptional case. If Manasseh identity represents a curse to some, or at least to one, it seems to be a very meaningful identity for many Latter-day Saints who claim an Indigenous identity, either through citizenship or descent. It is important to the Canty family of Sanford, Colorado, one of the few remaining Western Catawba families in the San Luis Valley. I actually first met members of the Canty family, quite fittingly, in the town of Manassa, Colorado, during the 24th of July celebration there. Several of the Canty boys were riding in the town rodeo (I figured out who they were with the help of the rodeo announcer). Manassa was originally, and still primarily is, a Mormon settlement in the San Luis Valley, and it is the town where the original Five Families of the Western Catawba first settled (see chapter 2). The 24th of July celebrations in the San Luis Valley commemorate the arrival of the Mormon pioneers in the Salt Lake Valley, but they also seem to double as a celebration of the Mormon migration and settlement of the San Luis Valley. The town of Manassa, despite the slight variation in spelling, is named after the

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biblical patriarch Manasseh. (There was also a town named Ephraim settled in the valley just a short time after Manassa was settled.)

When I interviewed John Canty, eldest living member of the Canty family, I asked if he grew up making a connection between his family’s history and the Book of Mormon. He replied, “Yeah, and the Bible,” and then went on to explain his immediate family’s Israelite identities: “I’m from the tribe of Manasseh. My patriarchal blessing says I’m Manasseh. Kyle is a Manasseh. Brock’s a Manasseh. And all the other kids are Ephraim.” It struck me how very conscious he was of these identities: he knew exactly who was of Manasseh and that all of the others are of Ephraim. His father was William “Buck” Canty (described above), “first Lamanite Patriarch in the Church.” During our interview, Canty explained that he was going to pass down his father’s headdress, the one bestowed on him by the American Indian students in the “Lamanite Generation” at BYU, to his son Kyle, presumably because he is the oldest, though he also happens to be of Manasseh. He is passing down his father’s beaded necklace, which he also received from the Lamanite Generation, to one of his granddaughters, because, he explained, “from her patriarchal blessing, she is from Manasseh too, so I just wanted her to have that.” The inheritances layer onto each other so that Manasseh is clearly marked as Indigenous, now with material manifestations of American Indian identity.

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22 A plaque on a stone monument in the town square of Manassa, erected in 1963 by the State Historical Society of Colorado and the Daughters of LDS Pioneers, reads: “Mormon Pioneers / In 1878, Mormon pioneers came from the Southern States and Utah, settling first at Los Cerritos. In 1879, they organized the town of Manassa, built homes, a school house, and place of worship from native logs. Settlements of Ephraim (1879) and Richfield (1881) and others having been made, the San Luis Stake was organized June 9, 1883.”

As I shared lunch with the Canty family in their home, John Canty also let me in on a family joke—that those of Manasseh in the family are protected from fleas! The joke makes reference to family anecdote: he had a successful elk hunt and brought home the carcass, not realizing that the hide was full of fleas (he was of Manasseh, so it didn’t bother him). When he got the carcass home, several family members were attacked by the fleas while others were not. The fact that they later were able to identify and differentiate those who were thus afflicted from those who weren’t according to Israelite identity speaks to how conscious they are of it; jokes only work in a context that everyone is sufficiently familiar with. When I met with Kyle Canty, I asked him if fleas bother him and he laughed, “No. Isn’t that funny. They get the other ones.” He said that it’s a nice protection to have, though unfortunately “mosquitos still eat you.” When I asked him if his family interpreted Manasseh as an Indigenous identity, he replied that he does, though he also acknowledged that Ephraim can also be Indigenous, though that tribe is in large measure associated with European ancestry. He was quick to point out, after this recognition: “I mean, not like I’m more Indian than [my siblings]—we don’t see it that way. But, for me, that’s a big deal. I’m happy to have that heritage. It’s a good thing…and I think there’s a connection there.” Careful not to disparage the other side of his family, he recognized that “we’re just as pleased with our gringo heritage on the other side too.” “It’s who you are,” he explained, emphasizing that it has “always been a pretty special thing to be identified as a Catawba. We like that. People recognize us that way. It’s kind of unique.”

Manasseh, Indian, Ephraim, gringo, Catawba. The identities swirl together. Some are revealed to be more prominent in some family members than others, through patriarchal blessing. But they all culminate in the family’s shared American Indian identity, recognized
by others in the valley. Kyle returned to the topic of Manasseh later in our interview. He explained that he and his wife had recently taken a trip to Egypt and Israel with his father-in-law. “Of all the places I saw there,” he explained, “those places around the Sea of Galilee, and up around that part—I liked that, and I liked that before I knew enough about it.” He couldn’t quite put a finger on why these places seemed to stand out to him more than others, he explained, “until later on when our guide said, ‘This is land that traditionally Manasseh came from.’” Then he understood why those places spoke to him: “That was where Manasseh had settled. The tribe of Manasseh. And of those places, that was the one that I liked the best.” He suddenly found himself, in a sense, in his ancestral homeland, a place he felt “an identity a little more” than in other places he visited. From the San Luis Valley in Colorado to the Catawba Nation in the American South to the Manasseh settlements at the Sea of Galilee: ancestral homelands multiply, with migrations remembered and revealed.24

Lamanites

*Lamanite! I am not a Lamanite. They are a wicked people. I am not a wicked person.*25
– Albert H. Harris (Northern Ute, Mormon)

*I am a Lamanite. I have never resented, nor do I now resent, the term. Those who do resent the label seem to be so few that nobody else should give it a second thought... it identifies me as one for whom the most perfect book in the world was written.*26
- Arturo De Hoyos, response to Albert H. Harris

24 See chapter 2 above for more on the relationship between the Catawba Nation and the San Luis Valley.


As these juxtaposed quotations indicate, there are a range of responses from Indigenous Latter-day Saints on the topic of designating contemporary Indigenous peoples as Lamanites. For many, it is a personal issue. The negativity associated with Lamanites in the Book of Mormon makes it an undesirable referent. But, as a marked people of promise, there is also reason for many to identify with the designation Lamanite, as a sacred and revealed Indigeneity “for whom the most perfect book in the world was written.” Below I will consider several examples of people who have reflected thoughtfully on this term and express a range of attitudes in regard to it.

When I asked a prominent Catawba individual who has held leadership positions in both the tribe and the church if, in his experience, Catawba people generally identify as descendants of people in the Book of Mormon, he replied with a short discourse on Lamanite identity:

Oh yeah; yeah, there’s no doubt now. There was a time when they were told this, but it didn’t sink in and they didn’t have a deep enough understanding to really appreciate that. But now days, testimony meetings that you hear, and from talks given, and just from general conversations, people know...that we are Lamanites, and we came from Lehi’s people, down through Laman and Lemuel, and...I think we have... I’ve been all around the world, and I’ve spent some time in Mexico, and of course they’re Lamanites the same as we are...and a lot of the people from the Islands...when I was in Hawaii, met a lot of the Hawaiian people who are the same way that we are, as far as traditions and coming up, and being from the lineage of Laman and Lemuel and through Lehi. So, yeah I think people have a greater sense of where they came from because of the church and because of the Book of Mormon. And I can see that, and now they recognize, Yeah, we are Lamanites. And they hold that more proudly than they used to. It’s not that we flaunt it, or not that we say that we are better than anybody. It’s just that we have a great heritage.

I had intentionally not used the term Lamanite in my question because I knew that to many people, it is not a particularly nice term. Some scholars have noted a significant decline in usage of the term “Lamanite” in reference to contemporary Indigenous peoples.
But this individual seemed to be using the term here quite naturally and to regard it as unproblematic. So I asked him about it.

So you used the term Lamanite... Is that a positive thing?

Yeah, it's a positive thing. Because, when we talk about being a Lamanite—of course, we always think about Laman and Lemuel, and how disruptive they were with their brother Nephi. But we also know that eventually, before the end of the Book of Mormon came down, for those who have read it and know a little bit about the church history, the Nephites became more wicked than the Lamanites in the final end. And then...we've been given the promise that the Lamanites would become a delightsome people because of the gospel. They recognize that, and so, because of that I think it kind of makes them feel better about being a Lamanite.

While implicitly recognizing why some people might feel opposed to identification with disruptive Laman and Lemuel, by recognizing the role reversals and the promises associated with latter-day Lamanites, this Catawba man settled on Lamanite identity as a very positive identification.

Not all Native Latter-day Saints, of course, view this in quite the same way. For example, Albert H. Harris, the Northern Ute man quoted at the beginning of this section. Yet Harris's rejection does not seem to represent a rejection of the church (Harris served in significant local leadership positions in the LDS Church), nor does it seem to represent rejection of the Book of Mormon or descent from Book of Mormon peoples. In fact, quite a few Indigenous American Latter-day Saints reject designation as “Lamanite” while still upholding belief in the Book of Mormon and decent from Lehi, and sometimes even Laman.

For example, Edith Green, another Catawba citizen, stated in my interview with her: “People call me a Lamanite, and I say, ‘I’m not a Lamanite,’ ‘cause, when you’re converted to the gospel, you’re no longer Lamanite.” For Green, the distinction between Lamanite and Nephite is one of belief or disbelief. A Lamanite is a disbeliever. She is not a disbeliever. But
if Green does not refer to herself as Lamanite, and prefers that others do not either, plenty of Latter-day Saints still do. “The church calls us Lamanites,” she explained to me. I asked if that is still the case (since others have noted a decline in the usage of the term in official church rhetoric\(^27\)). “Yeah, you hear it in conference from Salt Lake,” she said, and, gesturing toward a magazine on a table by the couch she added, “You read it in there too, in the *Ensign*; they refer to us as Lamanites.”\(^28\) Both of these references point to official rhetoric, from the highest church leaders and from church-endorsed publications. I asked Edith how she feels when people refer to Catawbas, or other Native people, as Lamanites. “Oh,” she replied, “they are either not listening to the spirit or they are uneducated. [laughs] Even though they’ve been to a university—they’re uneducated!” I asked if there is another term she prefers. “Well... I prefer, you know, to be referred to as Catawba. But then people have to be familiar with the names of all the tribes, so Native American is fine. But I don’t like being called an Indian, because I’m not from India. Of course, Columbus didn’t know where he was, or what he was talking about, but people now days...should know the difference and not keep it up.” I thought it was interesting that she equated both Indian and Lamanite as misnomers and terms of opprobrium that people who should know better continue to use out of willful ignorance.

When I met with a group of Kainai and non-Kainai Latter-day Saints, members of the Blackfoot Confederacy, living in southern Alberta, I found a range of attitudes regarding Book of Mormon Israelite terminology. When I asked them about the term Lamanite, group


\(^{28}\) This may reflect, to some degree, primarily her experience as a Latter-day Saint in the twentieth century, but probably also points to continued usage of the term.
attention turned to one individual, whom I will call Rita, and another member of the group explained for her and the group that she is not a Lamanite, and she is not a Jew. Apparently her opposition to these terms was so well known that it had become something of a family joke. Rita defended her nomenclatural preference, explaining that Lamanites did not believe in Christ, therefore she is not a Lamanite. A non-Kainai group member pointed out that the Book of Mormon prophet Jacob said the Lamanites were more righteous than the Nephites. (Wasn’t that in 3 Nephi? another person asked. No, replied another, Jacob—I was just reading it this morning.) One Kainai group member pointed out that the People of Ammon were Lamanites and they were righteous, which Rita countered by pointing out that they no longer went by the name Lamanite after their conversion but became known as the People of Ammon. The contender conceded her point, recognizing that they had also taken on the name Anti-Nephi-Lehis after converting, dropping identification as Lamanites. Rita brought the matter to a close—or so she wished—by stating that she prefers to be identified as a child of God or a child of Father Lehi. But the matter was not closed, and another Kainai member, speaking for herself, said that whatever people want to call her is fine; if they refer to her as a Lamanite, that’s fine, but first and foremost she is a child of God and a Latter-day Saint. She said that even the term Mormon is one they are not supposed to use anymore, but if someone identifies her as that because that is all they know, that is fine. Her brother felt that First Nations is probably the best term to use because people outside of the church don’t know the term Lamanite, and Indian, that could mean someone from India, and Native—anyone could be native to an area, even white people—and Native

29 Church leaders have periodically requested that church members refrain from referring to the church as the “Mormon Church” but to use the official name, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.
American, well, we’re not from America. Colonial nomenclature had clearly produced a lot of -ites and -isms, all with different and various shades of appropriateness or not, and indigenous people hold a variety of attitudes toward such terminology.

The issue of Rita’s opposition to being identified as a Jew had not been resolved, however, so I asked her about that. She explained that Lehi was from Joseph—the implication being that he was not of the tribe of Judah, and thus was not a Jew. Another family member pointed out, however, that the Mulekites (a group described in the Book of Mormon who migrated to the Promised Land shortly after Lehi’s family) were from Judah, with the implication that the lineage of Judah was mixed in among the Israelite inheritance of indigenous American peoples. But Rita insisted that she is not a Jew, an insistence that earned her the teasing of a non-Kainai member of the group who referred to her as “the Jew”—or “you’re just a Jew”—for the remainder of the evening. When I mentioned a man I met in Montana whose response to this topic struck me as anti-Semitic, they seemed surprised and unaware of any obvious anti-Semitism in southern Alberta, or of the idea

30 This last point could, of course, mean several things: an assertion of something like Turtle Island, rejecting “America” as a European name; conflation of America with the USA, while they are north of the border, in “Canada”; a distinction between First Nations lands and “America,” etc.

31 The Book of Mormon makes reference to a group of people who left Jerusalem after Lehi’s group, around “the time that Zedekiah, king of Judah, was carried away captive into Babylon” (Omni 1:15), led by one Mulek, a son of the biblical King Zedekiah (Helaman 6:10). The text refers to them as the people of Zarahemla, but chapter introductions, added later, identify this group as the Mulekites, which has become a common way to refer to them. Though the Book of Mormon itself does not specify that Mulek is a descendant of Judah, since he is purportedly the son of a King of Judah it is simply assumed. As one Mormon apostle taught in 1896, since Mulek and his people landed in the Americas and joined with “the descendants of Joseph,” “We have in this land in the natives, the descendants of Ephraim, of Manasseh, and of Judah combined.” “Discourse by Elder Franklin D. Richards,” *Millennial Star* 58.8 (February 20, 1896): 117. More recently, an official *Book of Mormon Student Manual*, published by the church in 1989 explains: “Mulek, and possibly all of the Mulekites, were Jews of the tribe of Judah,” and accordingly, “there is also a blood relationship to the tribe of Judah among the modern Lamanites.” A few pages later the issue is raised again; in reference to the intermixing of the Mulekites with the Nephites and Lamanites: “Thus, to the seed of Manasseh through Lehi...and the seed of Ephraim through Ishmael...was added the seed of Judah.” *Book of Mormon Student Manual* (Salt Lake City: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1989), 41, 51.
that opposition to Jewish identity in particular, as opposed to being from Joseph, might be considered part of a broader, largely unexamined assumption of anti-Semitic prejudice in the region.

Rita was not the only person I met in Blackfoot country who expressed some opposition, or at least initial difficulty, with being identified as Jewish. A Siksika man I met at the LDS chapel in Gleichen, Alberta, explained to me that it was hard for him to accept the idea that he comes from the House of Israel. He recalled learning in the Catholic Church on the Reserve that it was the Jews who killed Christ. He did not hate them for this, he explained, but why should he want to come from them? He did not know anything, really, about them. So why them? But he came to accept it and viewed his former resistance to the idea as pride he had to overcome. This man’s difficulty with Jewish identity seemed to be more examined. He specifically identified the Catholic residential schools of his youth as the source of his (forced) anti-Semitic indoctrination. Further, while Catholic teachings did center on hate of “the Jews,” he expressed his initial opposition not as resistance to Jewish—as specifically “Judahite”—identity in favor of another Israelite identity (like Joseph), but as resistance to the effort of others who sought to redefine his indigeneity from being essentially Blackfoot to being more originally, and thus essentially, something else: Jewish, a migrant group he’d been taught to think of in a negative light. He did not hate them, but why should he want to come from them? Why them? It was, at the very least, an idea that took some getting used to.

Thus, if this man’s opposition can be read as resistance to redefinition, he seemed very aware that a larger climate he was exposed to may have predisposed him to find

32 Field notes, June 17, 2013.
Jewish identity in particular hard to accept. Southern Alberta is not far from the white supremacist enclaves of northern Idaho and northwestern Montana, and while those organizations may be exceptional in the explicitness of their hate, they apparently share some basic assumptions with others in the area. While I was doing field work in the Blackfeet Nation, which is “within” the state of Montana, I talked to a non-Indian LDS man, referenced above, who struck me as more explicitly anti-Semitic, or at least as someone who simply assumes an anti-Semitic stance as natural and widely shared. When I told him that I was interested to find out if Blackfeet Latter-day Saints thought of their ancestors as coming from Jerusalem (as per the Book of Mormon), he replied, Oh, I don’t think they’d accept that. When I asked why not, he replied, Because it’s not popular, and then after a pause he said, Well, put yourself in their shoes. How would you like to be called a Jew? Or to be associated with dirty Laman? You wouldn’t want that, would you? Or would you want to be associated with Nephi? When I asked who would be associated with Nephi he replied that they’d all been wiped out, though his wife pointed out that some dissented and went over to the Lamanites. Well, yeah, he continued, but they became Lamanites by mingling with them and intermarrying… But no one wants to be associated with dirty Laman or be called a Jew. Now Samuel the Lamanite, he continued, some of them really identify with him, because he was righteous, but Laman and Lemuel—they should have been left in Jerusalem. We don’t need them ornery… and he mumbled something I could not understand. Later in our conversation he assured me that he likes Blackfoot people, as far
as living by them—as much as or better than whites—but that it would take something drastic to convert them to the gospel.\textsuperscript{33} It was easy to see why.

While this man’s attitude is not at all representative, as far as I am aware, of broader Latter-day Saint views of Jews—which is often characterized by a romanticized Judeophilia (also problematic, if less overtly offensive)—and not exactly representative of most Latter-day Saints’ views on Native peoples, it does represent one reason why an imposition of Israelite descent could be challenging in some parts of the country (like northern Idaho, Montana, and southern Alberta). It also demonstrates how aware people are of the shades of difference in how different aspects of Israelite lineage—different sub-lineages within the broader umbrella of Israelite lineage—are esteemed, valued, and apportioned power in Latter-day Saint and North American cultures.

One final example (for this section) of engagement with Book of Mormon Indigeneity. After I delivered a presentation on the Book of Mormon and indigeneity in May 2015 at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, I received a phone call from a woman who identified herself as a founding member of a non-profit organization centered in Robeson County, North Carolina, that was dedicated to improving circumstances for North Carolina state-recognized Indian tribes. She wondered if I could come and speak to her church group. Since Robeson County is an area strongly associated with the Lumbee Tribe of North Carolina—a state-recognized but not federally recognized tribe—I asked her if she is Lumbee.\textsuperscript{34} She responded that Lumbee is a term others have given to her people.

\textsuperscript{33} These are not direct quotes from a recording but are taken from my field notes, recorded immediately following our conversation. September 8, 2014.

She identified herself (as far as my scribbled notes indicate) as Iroquois, Algonquin, and Siouan, and stated that her people are also recognized as Cherokee and Tuscarora at times, and are part of the Pamunkey Tribe as well. (I am not presenting her view as representative; I know quite a few Lumbee tribal members who use and seem to prefer the term *Lumbee* as a term of self-identity.) But she indicated, she would like to be known as a “good Nephite.”

She invoked the Book of Mormon as narrating an analogous situation to her Lumbee dilemma: It’s just like it was in the Book of Mormon, with the Anti-Nephi-Lehis, etc. She seemed to imply that the term *Lumbee* was like the term *Lamanite*, an umbrella term that covers up a more complicated mix or layering of indigenous identities. She also invoked the Book of Mormon to explain why there is dissension, disagreement, and conflict within and between some Native groups—a particularly salient issue for a group who has been trying to gain federal recognition and more general social recognition as authentically indigenous and has faced opposition from the BIA and some federally recognized nations.

“The Book of Mormon is powerful,” she explained to me, “because I see my people in it. I see them in the Bible too, but the Book of Mormon contains the spirits of the ancestors, the spirit of this land.” As a strong symbolic terrain for indigenous identity, the Book of Mormon does not so much solve as mirror the problems of indigenous identification in a colonial setting, with problematic “umbrella” terms like Indian or Native American, or, for this woman, Lumbee. The name *Lamanite* is prone to similar problems, or even her

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35 I had assumed she was Baptist when she identified herself as someone with a church group in Robeson County—since Baptists are the dominant religious group there and since she didn’t use the Mormon term *ward*—and thus thought maybe she was inviting me to an anti-cult meeting, but she was clearly a Latter-day Saint.


37 Quotations are taken from my field notes, recorded during our phone conversation.
preference, “a good Nephite” (see chapter 5). But, such problems aside, for many
indigenous Latter-day Saints—or for people seeking to lay claim to a contested
indigeneity—the Book of Mormon is a rich source for indigenous articulation, and for
discussing what it means to be indigenous.

**A Different Tribe**

Ronald Williams also rejects Lamanite identity while still practicing the LDS faith
and still believing in the Book of Mormon, but his rejection is different from those cited
above. He is opposed to the term not because of its negative connotation, per se, because he
rejects the idea that he necessarily descends from Laman or Lemuel, or even Lehi for that
matter. He still believes in the Book of Mormon, believes that it happened as described, but
he believes that the people described in the Book of Mormon were a separate group that
lived a long time ago and either died out or blended into other groups. Lamanite or Nephite
identity, then, simply does not make sense, Williams believes, in reference to any
contemporary peoples.

Williams is an enrolled member of the Pima, or Akimel O’odham, nation and is
married to an Eastern Shoshone woman and lives in Fort Washakie on the Wind River
Reservation. He was raised in Kingman and Phoenix, Arizona, the Hualapai Nation, the Salt
River Pima-Maricopa Indian Community, and California, by his mother, his aunts, and his
grandfather, who is Hidatsa from the North Dakota Balkans region. His mother, who is
Hualapai, converted to the LDS Church when Ronald was a child and he was baptized at the
age of eight and raised in the LDS Church. He has been enrolled at different points in his
life, with the Hidatsa, Hualapai, and Akimel O’odham nations.
In my interview with him, Williams explained that he has never thought of himself as a descendant of the people described in the Book of Mormon. “I knew of them as the same color as me,” Williams explained, “but in my mother’s teaching, she said they were of another group, but they were the same color as us.” In other words, Williams explained, they are not the ancestors of his father’s or his mother’s tribes. (He also noted, parenthetically, that “supposedly the Nephites were the same color as the non-Indian people”—meaning white people—an idea he would complicate and reject later in our interview.)

But if Williams has not ever thought of himself as a Lamanite or even as a descendant of Lehi, others have made that association for him. He described an encounter he had with a Latter-day Saint man from Utah (presumably white), who approached him and said, as Williams recalls, “I always did like you Lamanites,” to which Williams replied, “Yeah, I always liked you Nephites.” When the man looked confused, Williams explained, “But we both got to understand, they’re both extinct... There are no Lamanites or Nephites anymore.” This really threw the man for a loop. “He just couldn’t understand it,” Williams explained. “Well, I’m not a Lamanite.’ I said, ‘That’s like me calling you a Nephite. Or should I call you a Gentile? Would you like me calling you a Gentile?’ See, some people don’t like being called that either.” The man was disturbed by Williams's logic, but Williams was not surprised. “Most people from Utah think that way, for some odd reason,” Williams explained. “I don’t know why.”

Williams's rejection of Lamanite identity is not a rejection of Lamanite existence or Book of Mormon historicity. He accepts the Book of Mormon as a historical record. But the term “Lamanite” only makes sense as a referent for people of the past—those described
within the temporal framework of the Book of Mormon narrative. “They were a people that are within the Book of Mormon, but, just like the Nephites, their issues of being here aren’t anymore.” There may be descendants of those people living today, but “someone would need to research that and find out exactly which tribes are.” And Williams seemed to imply that even for their descendants, the term Lamanites still wouldn’t make sense. “I think there are no Lamanites.”

But if Williams rejects Lamanite identity and personal and tribal descent from Book of Mormon peoples, he is still able to find connections to the text. “I think our relationship is the fact that these individuals who are part of the Book of Mormon had gone through the same issues that we’re going through.” To illustrate this, he compared the Gadianton Robbers—villains from the Book of Mormon narrative—to modern-day individuals “who make money off of war.” In this sense, the we in Williams’s statement—those who can relate to Book of Mormon people—is an ambiguous referent. In an inclusive sense, it might apply to any or all Latter-day Saints and perhaps even universally to all people (with the exception of the war-mongering robbers), regardless of race, ethnicity, or lineage. Anyone today can relate to the people in the Book of Mormon through analogous experience.

And yet, one cannot also but help think of Williams’s positionality as an Indigenous person and thus as someone who belongs to a group of people who historically have been severely impacted by the violence of U.S. colonization and territorial expansion—making profit off of war. In that sense, Williams’s reading of certain individuals—including some very high profile government officials, if not the federal government itself—as Gadianton Robbers could be viewed as the turning of a colonial text back against the colonizers. But Williams is also a U.S. citizen and a retired member of the U.S. Armed Forces. His own
complex and polyvalent subjectivity precludes any single or straightforward interpretation. Even so, it is difficult not to see his Indigeneity as present and relevant at nearly every level. As has often been noted, a significant proportion of Native American people have served in the U.S. Armed Services and have taken the brunt for it as veterans, Ira Hayes—coincidently also Pima—being only the most famous example.

To cite another example, when I asked Williams about passages in the Book of Mormon (3 Nephi 27) that refer to the “remnant” of Lehi’s seed being gathered together in the last days and marching through the Gentiles like lions among sheep, and building the New Jerusalem, he connected the passage—without referring to Indigenous peoples directly—to a condition many Indigenous peoples find themselves in: economic marginalization and poverty. And he contrasted this with (Gentile?) affluence.

Well, I do believe that when you have a people who may or may not be influenced by material things, and that they have that spiritual understanding of where they should be at... I think, if you were to call upon them to do anything in the service of the Lord, they would do it without hesitation. But if you get an individual who has a $500,000 home sitting on the side of a hill, and is very wealthy, very used to the material things of the world, and call upon them to go and build the New Jerusalem, they’re not going to go. So who would you depend on? It’s the ones who live in the hut, who have barely enough to eat but they have that, that faith and that spirituality of where they shall be at that time, because the meek shall inherit.

While Williams does not identify Indigenous people directly, it was difficult for me not to interpret these words in terms of the immediate setting and my previous location. I had traveled to the Wind River Reservation from Utah’s Wasatch Front, where many a $500,000 home adorns the foothills of the mountains, to the much more humble abodes of

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38 To anyone familiar with what some cultural geographers have called the “Mormon Culture Region,” one cannot help but picture the Salt Lake and Utah Valleys here (the Wasatch Front), and perhaps parts of Arizona and other parts of the Intermountain West.
the Shoshone and Arapahoe (and O’odham) people of Wind River. I also could not help but contrast more generally the typical affluence of much of white suburbia with the iconic image of poverty at Pine Ridge. Williams’s reading then, suggested to me at least, a first-shall-be-last-and-last-shall-be-first narrative in which economically marginalized (Indigenous?) peoples are the elect who shall inherit the earth and build the New Jerusalem while the wealthy and materialistic are left behind.

It is also interesting to note that Williams makes a connection to the Lamanite people of the book of Mormon in terms of skin color. “I knew of them as the same color as me. ...They were of another group, but they were the same color as us.” And he makes this connection not only with Lamanites but with Nephites and with ancient and modern-day Israelites as well. In my interview with him, Williams recalled his mother critiquing illustrations of Jesus in the Book of Mormon. “They would have a picture of Jesus in there,” Williams explained,

and my mom, she knew the bible and everything, and she would tell us, ‘Well, he’s not—he’s not really that color. He’s—he’s Jewish, and they are almost the same color as us—they’re dark brown, they’re not white.’ And I’m like, ‘What?’ And she says, ‘Well, they’re people of color; they’re Indigenous people too.’ And she’s like, ‘They’re not blonde, blue-eyed.’ And so I said, ‘Wow. Where did they get that from then? And I was like, ‘Geez, what a mix-up.’

Accordingly, the Nephites could not logically be “white and delightsome” as the Book of Mormon describes them and as Mormon art depicts them. “I don’t know how they would have differentiated themselves,” Williams recalls his mother teaching him, “because the people who came over with Lehi were medium-to-dark olive, dark-skinned individuals, so when the darkening of the skin happened, it wasn’t that much of a difference.” In fact, the mark placed upon the people might not have been a change in skin color at all. “She said there had to have been another mark to make them different. Not the color of their skin.
See? She said that there had to have been another mark that we don’t understand, but that the issue of the color of skin—there really was no difference if you really look at it.”

Thus, if Williams and his mother, as he recalls her teachings, do not necessarily reject the idea of a curse on Lamanite people, they do reject the idea that it was marked by a change in skin color. And this rejection is achieved by drawing Nephite and by extension Israelite people within the fold of a dark-skinned Indigeneity. “‘They’re people of color; they’re Indigenous people too.’” Williams extends this associative inclusiveness to contemporary Israelites. “If you look at the Jewish people now, there are no blonde-haired, blue-eyed, unless you come to America, but when you go to Jerusalem, they’re dark-haired, dark-skinned... My grandson, there, could easily fit in as an Israelite or a Jewish person.”

In keeping with this inclusiveness, Williams’s experience as a person of color also creates a link between himself and African American people, as well as a global sense of Indigeneity. When I asked him if people ever used the Book of Mormon to explain racial difference between Euroamerican and Indigenous peoples, he said he did not know but that he and his wife had “had issues with some members who still had problems with African American people being in the Church.” When I asked him about the prophecy in the Book of Mormon that states that one day the descendants of the Book of Mormon people would “blossom as the rose,” he explained,

I think that was more of a generalization of South America and those Indigenous people all over the world. It didn’t mean just Native people of North America. And they have blossomed as the rose, in the sense of all of the Indigenous people of color.

39 A similarly expressed conception of Jews as non-white is expressed in this opening anecdote from Eric Cheyfitz, Poetics of Imperialism: Translation and Colonization from The Tempest to Tarzan, expanded ed. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997), xviii: “When I was twenty, I went out for a while with a black woman, who lived with her mother and sisters in a housing project in Washington, D.C. One night, after I had been seeing her for a while, her mother asked me if I was Jewish. I said, simply, that I was. Her mother replied: I knew you weren’t white.”
It makes up a lot of the population of LDS members now. And that could be anybody from Africa to South America. And if somebody saw them, they would think, ‘Oh, they’re African American.’ No, they’re Brazilian. Or they’re from Peru, they’re from Cuba or Colombia.

Thus, as he articulated it to me, Ronald Williams’s resistance to inscription as Lamanite by white Latter-day Saints is expressed here as solidarity with all Indigenous people of color. But he also expressed it as an inclusiveness with other Latter-day Saints by reaching across the color line. Regarding the tendency of prominent Church leaders such as Spencer W. Kimball and others who referred to American Indian peoples as Lamanites, Williams explained,

Yeah, I remember that. But I started to think about it; I started to research in my mind on that issue: Do I want to classify myself as a Lamanite? And I said, No, I’m a Latter-day Saint... I think Lamanite is a term of people in the Book of Mormon. But I think we are all Latter-day Saints. You know. And I think if we move that way, I think people who are trying to understand the Book of Mormon would understand it better.

Perhaps we could call this better way a decolonizing of the Book of Mormon. That is not to say that it is not still a colonial entanglement, but it is to recognize that Lamanite identity is not simply inscribed upon Indigenous peoples without any agency and counter-reading on their part. In the case of Ronald Williams, reading back does not necessarily entail rejection of the book as scripture and as a historical account. But it can mean reading against racism, reading against colonization, and reading against control. Though all reading operates within constraints, individuals can move textual signifiers around in ways to make them work better for themselves and, they hope, for others. Better readings. When

40 I use the gerund form, *decolonizing*, intentionally to suggest an ongoing process rather than a total and final state of decolonization.
I asked Ronald Williams if he ever finds others coming around to his way of reading of the Book of Mormon, he explained,

> It may take a while to think through it, you know, because it’s embedded in people’s minds that Lamanites are our ancestors—and it’s a good pitch, it was a good pitch at the time: these are your ancestors. Well, I don’t know that. But I think maybe they could have said something more to the effect that this was a certain tribe located in a certain area, and this is what they went through. And you being a tribal member, do you go through these certain things also? They could have used it that way too.

Williams’s reading is also decolonizing in the sense that it resists a universalizing, in the sense of homogenizing (imperial), impulse. By rejecting Lamanite identity Williams rejects a monolithic ethnogenesis explanation of Indigenous peoples. Indigenous origins are not traced to a single point of explanation. Williams expresses connections and sympathy with other Indigenous peoples as solidarity, but for Williams Indigeneity is not a category of explanatory control. By unhinging Indigeneity from Lamanite identity, and by not putting forth another monolithic origin story in its place (like a land bridge crossing or evolution), the Indigeneity that Williams articulates is pluralistic and diverse, allowing room for hybridity (one can be Pima-Hualapai-Hidatsa-American-Mormon-Indigenous and presumably most any other combination—though not, intriguingly, Lamanite, Nephite, or Gentile).

One more note on Ronald’s non-imperialist, if colonially entangled, subjectivity. When I asked Williams if there are any O’odham or Hualapi or Hidatsa creation or migration stories, he replied, “Yeah, there’s a lot of them.” These stories help, Ronald explained. “It gives you a sense of who you are... But that doesn’t mean that it needs to be projected to other tribes. Because all tribes have different creation stories. And I think that helps each tribe to understand who they are.”
[page break]
CHAPTER 5. CURSED WITH A SKIN OF BLACKNESS? READING AND EMBODYING RACE AND MORMON PROPHECY

For we are going to the land of Laman
To plant the Gospel standard there,
To bring them out from degradation
To a people, white and fair.¹

In 1855, a young Mormon man assigned as a missionary to the Lemhi² Shoshone people near Salmon River, Idaho, penned the above-quoted lines of verse to express his zeal to go and convert the “Lamanites.” The following year in a 24th of July parade—commemorating the Mormons’ entrance into the Salt Lake Valley nine years before—a group of twenty-four Native American youth (presumably Shoshone and possibly Ute, Paiute, and Goshute) marched in a parade carrying a banner prepared for them, reading, “We shall yet become a white and delightsome people.”³ It did not take the Mormon settlers long, after entering the valley, to begin placing their scripted racial aspirations upon—and, as they imagined it, in the mouths of—the Native peoples of the Great Basin. But with time and with proselyting success, white church members reportedly did not have to just imagine these words in the mouths of Natives through banner superscription. In May 1949 the church’s Deseret News reported from Anadarko, Oklahoma, under the headline “Nine Newly Baptized Indians Bear Testimony of the Gospel,” that “At the time of their baptism and confirmation they bore testimony that God lives and that he has given them a

¹ Christensen, Sagwitch, 22.

² This is a Book of Mormon name; see chapter 1.

knowledge of the Gospel and that they know the prophecy will be fulfilled that promises
them they will become a white and delightsome people."⁴ Since that time many Latter-day
Saints, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, have found less literal and ostensibly less racist
ways to view this Book of Mormon prophecy. But it is apparent that it has been internalized
by some Indigenous Latter-day Saints.

Both of these are references to an idea taught in the Book of Mormon that the
Lamanites, who had originally been a “fair and delightsome” people like their brethren the
Nephites, had been cursed with a “skin of blackness” for their wickedness and that in some
future day, their descendants would convert to the gospel of Jesus Christ (Mormonism) and
once again become a “white and delightsome people.” Below I explore examples of
Indigenous American readings of this Book of Mormon curse and prophecy and related
issues.

**Embodying Prophecy**

As noted above, Edith Green does not like to be called a Lamanite. “People call me a
Lamanite, and I say, ‘I’m not a Lamanite,’ ’cause, when you’re converted to the gospel,
you’re no longer Lamanite.” In her formulation, Green associates Lamanite identity with
disbelief. This is in accordance with the Book of Mormon narrative, in which the followers
of Laman and his brother Lemuel are marked because of disbelief, or because of their
rejection of the traditions of their fathers (the gospel of Jesus Christ). But if the distinction
is one of belief, it is marked by race.

In the Book of Mormon narrative, when Lehi and his family arrived in the Promised Land (somewhere in the Americas, by almost all readings⁵) there presumably was not yet a racial distinction between his sons and their families—though a future racial distinction had been alluded to in a vision narrated by Lehi’s favored and (self-narrated) son, Nephi. In the vision, Nephi sees a group of future Gentiles (almost universally interpreted to be Euroamericans) scatter the seed of his brethren and “obtain the land [the Americas] for their inheritance”—and he describes these Gentiles as “white, and exceedingly fair and beautiful, like unto my people before they were slain” (1 Nephi 13:15). The categories of Nephite and Lamanite become racially marked a short time later after Father Lehi’s death when the narrator, Nephi, describes a rift between himself (with those who follow him) and his brothers, Laman and Lemuel, and their families. After Nephi’s brothers become violent toward him, Nephi and his people, the “Nephites,” depart during the night and establish their own settlements, apart from their wicked brethren, who become known as “Lamanites.” Nephi teaches his people to be industrious and to “labor with their hands,” whereas the Lamanites are cursed “because of their iniquity” and become “an idle people, full of mischief and subtlety… seek[ing] in the wilderness for beasts of prey.” In order to prevent comingling between the two feuding family groups (soon to become separate races), God allows a cursing to come upon the Lamanites, which would presumably prevent the Nephites from wanting to intermarry or have sexual relations with them. “Wherefore, as they [the Lamanites] were white, and exceedingly delightsome, that they might not be

⁵ There are a few exceptions; Embaye Melekin, *The African Bible: The Record of the Abyssinian Prophets* (Bloomington, IN: Authorhouse, 2011) claims that the events described in the Book of Mormon took place in Africa; and Ralph A. Olsen, “A Malay Site For Book Of Mormon Events,” *Sunstone* (March 2004): 30-34, proposes that the Malay Peninsula may be a more likely site for Book of Mormon events to have taken place.
enticing unto my people [the Nephites] the Lord God did cause a skin of blackness to come upon them. And thus saith the Lord God: I will cause that they shall become loathsome unto thy people, save they shall repent of their iniquities. And cursed shall be the seed of him who mixeth with their seed; for they shall be cursed even with the same cursing." (2 Nephi 5:20-24). A case of divine anti-miscegenation, or at least a God who is willing exploit the anti-miscegenationist attitudes of the Nephites—which are presented in the text as simply natural—to fulfill his purposes; according to Nephi.

In most popular readings of the Book of Mormon, this racialized Lamanite-Nephite distinction is maintained throughout the narrative, despite conversions, apostasies, and movement between both sides, and a 200-year period of unity that was supposed to have dissolved all distinctions between both peoples (and all other -ites mentioned in the text; there are quite a few). Despite this apparent melding and mingling of the -ites, in the end, the distinctions are reconfigured and reified as the Lamanites destroy the Nephites in complete genocide, leaving Indigenous peoples as descendants solely of the Lamanite survivors—and thus, presumably, of Laman and Lemuel. However, some close readers of the text have sought to complicate this reading. For example, Sidney B. Sperry, a professor

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6 While early Mormons seemed to quite universally interpret this literally as a divinely imposed racial distinction, beginning in the latter half of the twentieth century (i.e. the onset of The Long Civil Rights Movement), many Latter-day Saints began posing alternative, less literal ways to interpret these passages. (Arising surely from discomfort from the obvious racism of these passages, but also, as I’ve observed, in an effort to defend or work out the text’s historicity in spite of its apparent irrationality and racism.) As I have observed through fieldwork and by growing up in LDS communities, this has typically been achieved, or attempted, by describing the skin-color distinction as symbolic (God didn’t really change their skin color—it’s just a metaphor) and by spiritualizing the curse (they became spiritually darkened). Many Indigenous Latter-day Saints I have spoken to interpret the passages along these lines. Others have tried to explain these passages away, or divert attention from them, by pointing out other, more inclusive and universalist passages (such as 2 Nephi 26:33; on this point see Mauss, All Abraham’s Children, 276), and by making the point that by the end of the story the Nepite-Lamanite people have become so intermingled through conversions, apostasies, etc, that they are presumably no longer racial distinctions but categories to describe faith/righteousness vs. wickedness/apostasy. For a critique and complication of this latter explanation, see Hickman, Amerindian Apocalypse.
at BYU from 1932-1971, explained that “our present day Indians are descendants of the people who were united during the Golden Era of Nephite history, rather than direct descendants of Laman and Lemuel and their immediate followers.” From this observation, and recognizing popular usage among Latter-day Saints to refer to American Indian people as (present-day) Lamanites, Sperry suggested that “Latter-day Saints have concluded too readily that the Lamanites [Indigenous Americas] are direct descendants of Laman and Lemuel. Actually much Nephite blood flows in their veins.”

Edith Green articulates a similar understanding of Book of Mormon anthropology and Indigenous descent: “All Native Americans are descendants of the Lamanites and the Nephites—the ones that mingled together,” a seeming allusion to the “Golden era of Nephite history” Sperry references above, as narrated in the book of 4th Nephi. I wondered, then, why she didn’t use the term *Nephite* to refer to herself and to Indigenous peoples (you will recall that she had already told me she does not like to be referred to as a Lamanite). In response to my question on the matter, Edith explained,

I think nowadays the term Nephite would not be appropriate, because, um, when they were called Nephites, it was because they were white-skinned. The difference was between the dark-skinned and the white-skinned. The Gentiles—anybody that’s not Native American is a Gentile—they couldn’t be called Nephites because you have all other races in there: Japanese and Korean, and Russian—Russian’s still white-skinned—and Africans. All those other people in there—they’re dark-skinned... So you couldn’t just say Nephites. But yet when you join the church, it’s like you are adopted into the House of Israel. So, then you could, if you wanted to, be a Nephite. When you join the church, you’re a Nephite... But people wouldn’t recognize you, by the color of your skin.

In other words, it would be appropriate, hypothetically speaking, for any dark-skinned Gentile (or Israelite) who converts to Mormonism to identify as Nephite—just as

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appropriate as it is for adopted light-skinned Gentiles to identify as Israel. But it wouldn’t work in practice. The term is too strongly associated with whiteness. “People wouldn’t recognize you.” It is telling that the reason Gentiles cannot identify as Nephite, according to the logic expressed here (which is not to assume that she wouldn’t express it differently later), is not because they don’t descend from Nephi, but because the category of Gentile includes non-whites. In a textual analysis of “The Book of Mormon as Amerindian Apocalypse,” literary scholar Jared Hickman explains that, due to seemingly “inescapable limits” set in place by the logic of the text, the category of “a black ‘Nephite,’” that is, a practitioner of righteous ‘Nephite’ traditions who simply happens to be nonwhite—proves an unthinkable proposition.” Edith Green’s reading seems to bear this out.

But if Nephites are inescapably marked with whiteness (with the possible exception of Pacific Islanders; see previous footnote), Lamanite “blackness” is mutable. Some Book of Mormon passages narrate past changes in Lamanite skin color: “And it came to pass that those Lamanites who had united with the Nephites were numbered among the Nephites; And their curse was taken from them, and their skin became white like unto the Nephites”

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8 Since the term is associated with the imagined white beginnings of American civilization (cf. Mound Builder theories), the term typically is not used for contemporary “white” (i.e. Euroamerican) peoples. I have, however, heard some slippage in interviews I have conducted, where Euroamericans are at least comparatively referred to as Nephites.

(3 Nephi 2:14-15). But by far the most widely recognized passages asserting this mutability are those that forecast it as a prophesied future event. This idea is expressed at several points in the text, the most oft-cited and alluded to of which is 2 Nephi 30:6. In this passage Nephi explains to his brethren that in the last days the “remnant of our seed” (typically interpreted as Indigenous Americans) will be converted to the Gospel of Jesus Christ (i.e. Mormonism) through the instrumentality of Nephite writings (the Book of Mormon) which would be brought forth to them by repentant Gentiles (Mormon missionaries) and, further, that in that day “they shall be restored unto the knowledge of their fathers...and their scales of darkness shall begin to fall from their eyes; and many generations shall not pass away among them, save they shall become a white and delightsome people” (2 Nephi 30:5-6).

This is a point many people disagree on. I have met a number of Indigenous Latter-day Saints—perhaps the majority of those I have interviewed—who do not think that their skin, or that of any other Indigenous person, is going to turn white someday as the result of divine intervention. (This is a very common view among many post-Civil Rights-era Latter-day Saints who interpret these passages—facilitated by editorial changes to the passage [see footnote 10]—as a symbolic or spiritual change rather than a literal change in skin color.) But for many Latter-day Saints, this is precisely what the text implies, and quite a

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10 One of the reasons this passage is so often cited is because the word white in this passage was changed to pure in the current official 1981 edition, published by the LDS Church. (So that instead of becoming “white and delightsome,” Lamanite converts would become “pure and delightsome,” facilitating, presumably, less racialized and literalist readings of the text.) Editorial changes in the 1981 edition were made, as a “brief explanation” in the front of the book explains, “to bring the material into conformity with prepublication manuscripts and early editions edited by the Prophet Joseph Smith.” In this case, the latter provision does apply, as Joseph Smith made this editorial change to the 1840 Edition—a change that was not reflected, due to a publication oversight, in most subsequent editions prior to 1981. See Douglas Campbell, “‘White’ or ‘Pure’: Five Vignettes.” Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought 29, no. 4 (Winter 1996): 119-135.
few people hold to a literalist and racialized interpretation, including Edith Green—though not without some ambivalence—as indicated by the following conversation:

ST: So there are passages in the Book of Mormon that talk about the skin, the dark skin, or a skin of blackness, I think it says, being placed on the Lamanite people...

EG: Yeah, because Laman and Lemuel were cursed. So they put that dark skin on them, to differentiate, so they'd be different from the Nephites, so you could tell the difference. The same as Cain. That's why he received the dark skin, so that the people would know that he was a Canaanite.11

ST: Huh. Okay.

EG: And it says we're not, we were told we're not supposed to, the house of Israel, they were not to intermix with the Canaanites. So that's why the Lord had, drove the Canaanites out, before Moses could take the house of Israel in there. Because—of course they had to stay in the wilderness for forty years for being naughty—but he didn't want them mixing with the Canaanites either.

ST: Uh huh. So...was the curse that was placed on the Lamanites for a similar reason?

EG: Yes

ST: And do you interpret that literally? That there was a literal change of skin color?

EG: Oh yeah... I do. But, people always say I'm not dark. But my brother is dark. And my sister, she's darker than I am. I guess my younger brother—he and I were the light-colored ones in the family, because when we were babies and just small children, my grandpa,...he always called us the two white kids on the reservation, because we had blonde hair and blue eyes. See my mom is half white, and my grandpa, he was half white. So somewhere along the line, some of that had to come out in some of us [laughs]. And there's a lot of Catawbas now—they don't look

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11 A widely held and commonly taught belief in Mormonism is that God cursed the biblical figure Cain and placed a mark of a black skin on him. This view has often been conflated with the wider Judeo-Christian myth that Canaan, the son of Ham, was marked by a similar curse. Note the slippage between and conflation of the two narratives above. These teachings have often been expressed as the rationale for a racial priesthood restriction that was lifted in 1978. Since that time, many Latter-day Saints have rejected the Cain/Ham curse narratives, and the LDS Church posted a presumably official article in the Gospel Topics section of the official LDS website stating that “the Church disavows the theories advanced in the past that black skin is a sign of divine disfavor or curse” (though this disavowal presumably does not apply to the Book of Mormon passages in 2 Nephi 5, which are conspicuously absent from the discussion). “Race and the Priesthood”<https://www.lds.org/topics/race-and-the-priesthood?lang=eng#24>. Many Latter-day Saints, however, continue to hold to and express belief in the Cain/Ham curse narrative, while others await a clear and vocal renunciation of it from the pulpit. For an overview of LDS teachings on the subject, see Mauss, All Abraham's Children, chs. 8-9.
ST: Yeah? They’re going to go...

EG: Along with Jackson! [laughs] They’re going to go down there with that bad man [laughs].

Again, I found it interesting how our conversation about Mormon racial categories flowed almost seamlessly into commentary on the (racialized) issue of Indigeneity and citizenship in American Indian nations. Rhetoric about authenticity and legitimacy for American Indian people is often tied to “blood” and, though less officially, to phenotype. I have heard more than one Catawba person express a desire to be darker (and thus more recognizably Native) than they are. (“I’d rather be darker than what I am,” one Catawba woman told a folklorist in the 1980s.12) Many tribal nations in North America prescribe a “blood quantum” requirement for enrollment, following an enrollment requirement, for the purposes of treaty rights and annuities, originally imposed by the U.S. federal government.13 Because Catawba people have such an early and extensive history of colonial contact and intermarriage with European and subsequent Euroamerican settlers, blood quantum figures are often so low among members of the community that they have opted for a lineal descent requirement, requiring new enrollees to prove lineal descent from an enrolled member, regardless of blood quantum. Still, being Catawba is, for some, as Edith’s

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comments above indicate, tied to blood, regardless of what the rolls or tribal government (or the BIA) may say.  

Similarly, among Western Catawba descendants who have been excluded from tribal roles, associations between skin color and Native identity are also often part of a conscious anxiety relative to Indigenous identity. One Western Catawba, Kyle Canty, also expressed feeling a desire to be darker-skinned and thus more recognizably Native when he was younger, while also being quite aware of the “white and delightsome” passages in the Book of Mormon. His grandfather, William “Buck” Canty, was a prominent patriarch in the church and a respected member of his community, and he was also rather dark-skinned, Daniel explained, and thus recognizably Native American. “Of course, politically, there’s a big deal about places in the Book of Mormon that talk about becoming a ‘white and delightsome people,’” Canty explained. He recalls discussing these passages with his grandfather and coming to the conclusion “that ‘white and delightsome’ is more inside.” And, despite the value such verses seem to place on whiteness, “if anything...one thing that I wanted was a darker skin, to be more like grandpa.” Canty has come to accept who he is, he explained, and is happy with who he is. But what struck me was that, despite language in the Book of Mormon that seems to place a more positive valuation on whiteness over darkness, the lived experience of a dark-skinned-but-righteous and much respected

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15 Kyle explained that when he was young he never got a sense from his grandfather that he had ever been subject to racism because of his dark skin, but when he found an audio recording of his grandfather speaking to American Indian students at Brigham Young University, “he talks to them about that. He says, ‘I understand sometimes you are judged by the color of your skin, and I’ve been judged by the color of my skin, but, you go on. You have to overcome those kinds of things and go forward.’ So, from that I know that there were times that he had trouble that way.”
grandfather ("dark and delightsome," one might say) deconstructed any literal readings of
the Book of Mormon that equates whiteness with righteousness in terms of skin color.
Canty aspires to be like his grandfather, the Lamanite patriarch who, he explained
"understood those things" in the Book of Mormon very well. "He believed—and I believe
too—that that book is our people."

But if dark-skinned elders often are figures of veneration among younger Catawba
peoples for, among other reasons, their more recognizably Native features,\(^16\) the lived
reality for many Catawba people is a lighter complexion than that of their Catawba
forebears. This phenotypic "lightening" of many Catawba people has been noted by some of
their fellow Mormons. One non-Catawba Latter-day Saint man I met in the Catawba LDS
Ward noted the light skins of so many Catawba people and asked me if I thought this might
be fulfillment of Book of Mormon prophecy. Some Catawba Latter-day Saints may accept
this narrative and may also perpetuate it; at least, some have been depicted as doing so,
through the pens of others. In a church article titled "Modern 'Samuel, the Lamanite': Book
of Mormon Promises to Indians Coming True, Says Chief," former Catawba chief Samuel
Taylor Blue reportedly told a congregation of Latter-day Saint youth at Winston-Salem
"that the 'Book of Mormon' promise to the Indians is coming true and that the younger
generation of Indians are now very light."\(^17\) Chief Blue's understanding of this prophecy
likely came from other Latter-day Saints (he was reportedly illiterate and learned the

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\(^{16}\) One Catawba man I met pointed out rather covetously that, in addition to darker skin, his grandfather also
does not have any chest hair and does not have to shave, something he finds in common among many
Catawbas of that older generation. When I talked to a non-Catawba professor who attended the funeral of a
Catawba elder, he recalled that one of her grandchildren referred to her darker skin.

\(^{17}\) Stanley Kimball, "Modern 'Samuel, the Lamanite': Book of Mormon Promises to Indians Coming True, Says
Chief," unidentified and undated clipping in Biographical File: Blue, Chief Samuel "Thunder Bird", Catawba
Cultural Preservation Project Archives, Catawba Indian Nation.
scriptures orally). Indeed, this mythology of whitening among Catawbas as embodiment of fulfilled prophecy spread to Salt Lake City and was broadcast out from there. In a volume titled *Answers to Gospel Questions*, after explaining that “the Lord has promised to remove the dark skin” of Indigenous people who repent and convert to the church, apostle Joseph Fielding Smith speculated that “perhaps there are some Lamanites today who are losing the dark pigment. Many of the members of the Church among the Catawba Indians of the South could readily pass as of the white race; also in other parts of the South.”  

Other Indigenous people have also been read by church leaders and other Latter-day Saints in this way. In a 1960 General Conference address, Spencer W. Kimball observed that, to his view, “The children in the home placement program in Utah are often lighter than their brothers and sisters in the hogans on the reservation,” with the implication that this was at least a partial fulfillment of 2 Nephi 30:6. Again, Indigenous converts’ bodies are read as proof-texts for fulfillment of Book of Mormon prophecy and a racialized self-assurance.

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20 While each of these examples have been concerned with finding fulfillment of 2 Nephi 30:6 as a future or contemporary whitening of Indigenous skins (becoming white), LDS writer, researcher, and general authority Milton R. Hunter went on a hemispheric research excursion (largely during travel for church business) searching out “white Indians” to prove Nephite persistence. That is, the idea that some Nephite people had not been wiped out by the Lamanite (and somehow their ancestors are still white). He inferred this persistence by combining a promise made by the Lord to Lehi’s son Joseph in 2 Nephi 3:3—“for they seed shall not utterly be destroyed”—with a prophecy found in Alma 45:13-14, stating that, as he summarizes it, “following the destruction of the Nephite nation, those who remained “shall be numbered among the Lamanites.” To document and thus prove the verity of these verses—and thereby vindicate the Book of Mormon against archaeological experts, the Smithsonian Institution, and other skeptics, he amasses two volumes-worth of photographic and archaeological “evidence” to prove the existence of white Indians from ancient times to the presence. In addition to white Haida, white Amazonians, white Indians of Peru, Venezuela, Darien (with photos drawn from Richard Oglesby Marsh’s oddly similar expedition to find white Indians for other, colonial purposes), Lacandon, Quiche, Yaqui, and others, Hunter concludes his photographic essay with a section on “White Catawba Indians of South Carolina” and a photo of Chief Blue and his wife, Louisa. Milton R. Hunter, *Archaeology and the Book of Mormon*, 2 vols. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1956), 1:278-9.
As one might imagine (especially in light of the comment above by the Catawba woman who wished she was darker), not all Catawba people have been congenial toward this interpretation of Mormon scripture. Some have offered alternative explanations. For example, one Catawba man told me that “there has been a change in skin color simply because there is so much intermarriage going on.” He went on to explain:

I think there was a time when someone misconstrued that scripture or that saying that was written and said it said the Lamanites would become a white and delightsome people, but that’s not what it said. It had nothing to do with being white. It just said that they would become a delightsome people. And all that was saying was they would become... there was another word they used, it wasn’t white... I’m trying to think of what the word was... Anyway, it meant a more understanding, a more spiritual person. And that’s what it really amounted to.

However, the comments that followed this refutation of whiteness as prophecy might evince some uncertainty or ambivalence on the issue, or the difficulty one faces in trying to elide the racism of the text:

Of course, they had no way of knowing back when that was said that there would be so much intermarriages and that the skin color of the Native American or Lamanite people would change that much. And of course you know out west and on some of the big reservations it isn’t... The dark skin still prevails out there.

I don’t want to read too much into this statement, but I wondered if that last comment evinced some envy of Indian people “out west and on some of the big reservations” where “the dark skin prevails” (cf. earlier statements by a Catawba woman who wished she were darker). As I was leaving this man’s home, he joked that Catawbas have been too trusting and have intermarried too much with the whiteman. While he did

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21 See note above, on the change of “white and delightsome” to “pure and delightsome” in 2 Nephi 30:6.

22 Of course this operates from his faith assumption that the Book of Mormon is an ancient document (600 BCE-400 CE), translated rather than produced in the late 1820s, when, of course, the effects of intermarriage with Europeans would have been perfectly apparent.
seem to open a little to the possibility of intermarriage as prophetic fulfillment—"Of course, they had no way of knowing back when that was said that there would be so much intermarriages..."—he clearly wanted to believe and assert that the prophecy had "had nothing to do with being white."

But Edith Green was much more amenable to a racialized interpretation of this prophecy; she also feels that a lighter skin among Catawbas has come because of intermarriage, but she situates intermarriage as the means by which the prophecy is fulfilled. And at the same time that she recognizes it as a fulfilment of prophecy, she does not really want to lose her pigmentation.

ST: So, is there something in the Book of Mormon about becoming, about that curse being undone?

EG: Yes, it says when we become a righteous people that the curse will be lifted from us.

ST: Okay; what does that mean?

EG: It means that our skin will no longer be dark... We'd be a white and delightful people. When I heard one of the general authorities say that, I said, "Oh no, who wants to be white? We'll all look like anemics!" [laughs]...

ST: Do you think that that will happen?

EG: Oh yeah. And they used to say, Chief Blue, when he joined the church, he became white. But Chief Blue was white before he joined the church, because he was half white. Because [his mother], she was always dark. She was just as righteous, if not more righteous, than [he] was.

ST: Sure. So do you think that has happened to some degree? Or do people read that as happening?

EG. I think that, if there had not been intermarriage, when we become a righteous people, we would, heavenly father would have made our skin become white. But I think the way he's doing it is through intermarriage.

ST. Okay. So does that suggest that a lighter skin... I mean you pointed out that a lighter skinned person is not necessarily more righteous than a darker skinned...
EG. Oh definitely not!

ST. Do some people interpret it that way?

EG. I’m sure the white people do. They think they’re better than everybody else. Some of them do.

ST: What about, though, you mentioned that some people would point out that Chief Blue, Samuel Taylor Blue...had become white or something. So are they...

EG. I think they are going by what’s in the Book of Mormon: “they’ll become a white and delightsome people.”

ST: And they see that happening through...

EG: They see that happening, just because they were looking for it. I mean if you look at a rose for beauty, you’re gonna see it, but if you look at a rose bush for thorns you’re going to find them. So...

ST: Okay. So do you think that there has been a change, to some degree, because of this Book of Mormon prophecy? Or is that yet to come?

EG. I think it’s come, like I said, through intermarriage.

You will note that Edith sees intermarriage as the means by which the prophecy is being fulfilled, but she also rejects assertions by non-Native Latter-day Saints who claim to see this change reflected in individual bodies, like that of Samuel Taylor Blue—particularly when it is suggested that an individual actually gets whiter as a result of conversion, or by becoming more righteous. Further, as her comment about looking like “anemics” reveals, she doesn’t necessarily desire, for herself or other Native people, to become white-skinned. And she absolutely rejects the idea that a white skin reflects a higher degree of righteousness. Still, she considers her own (relatively) dark skin and that of other Native peoples as the remnant of an ancient, divinely imposed curse, which, she believes, will be removed through a process of gradual lightening, either through intermarriage or, potentially, by an act of God—and this is linked to becoming a righteous and delightsome
people. This seems to be something she just accepts. She also told me, though, that “if you are a member of the church it doesn’t matter what the color of your skin is.” That seems like a nice ideal, and a good principle to live by, but as the above quotes and the text itself seem to indicate, racial embodiment of Book of Mormon prophecy is anything but insignificant in the lived experience of Indigenous Latter-day Saints.

The Curse is Figurative

As Edith Green’s brother demonstrates above, not all Indigenous Latter-day Saints interpret the curse passages as literally relating to a change in skin color. Ellen Crowfoot (Mohawk), for example, interprets the curse figuratively. “Well the skin of blackness, I think was more of a description. And it’s not so much the skin. I think it was an attempt to describe more one’s spiritual shroud of perhaps bitterness, frustration, anger, pride, impatient ignorance, self-serving ambition, etc… And so when it talks about the skin of blackness, it’s more of mood, state of mind, you know; especially anger.” She cross-referenced another verse in the Book of Mormon that refers to “scales of darkness,” which she sees as an analogous phrase. Speaking of the restoration of latter-day Israel—that is, the conversion of Indigenous peoples to their identity as Israelites and to the Mormon faith—in 2 Nephi 30:6 the Book of Mormon prophet Nephi states,

And then shall they rejoice; for they shall know that it is a blessing unto them from the hand of God; and their scales of darkness shall begin to fall from their eyes; and many generations shall not pass away among them, save they shall be a pure and a delightsome people.

In this verse the possibility of interpreting “darkness” as figurative, or spiritual, is much more apparent—particularly after a single word change in the latter part of the verse. The
phrase “pure and delightsome” originally read “white and delightsome.” The change to “pure” was originally made by Joseph Smith in his revised 1840 edition, but it dropped out of all subsequent editions until 1981 when the change was re-implemented.23 Thus, for the vast majority of Latter-day Saint history the phrase “white and delightsome” has appeared and a literal interpretation of a change in skin color seemed to predominate. The editorial change in 1981 has made it much easier for many Latter-day Saints to interpret the curse language as figurative rather than literal. You will recall that for Edith Green’s brother, in fact, the change completely wiped out any prior existence of the prior reference to whiteness.

I think there was a time when someone misconstrued that scripture or that saying that was written and said it said the Lamanites would become a white and delightsome people, but that’s not what it said. It had nothing to do with being

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23 See Douglas Campbell, “‘White’ or ‘Pure’: Five Vignettes,” Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought 29.4 (Winter 1996): 119-35. Though Joseph Smith made this change to his 1840 Nauvoo edition, the typesetter for an 1841 edition printed in England, which became the basis for subsequent editions, used an 1837 edition of the text, not Joseph Smith’s 1840 revised edition. Thus, Smith’s revision escaped publication in subsequent editions until an appointed scriptural committee became aware of this discrepancy and restored Smith’s 1840 revision to the 1981 edition and subsequent LDS printings. In the RLDS tradition (the Reorganized LDS Church, now the Community of Christ), the 1840 revision appeared in all editions until the 1908 edition, based on the 1830 Printer’s Manuscript of the text, restored the earlier “white” reading. See Royal Skousen, Volume 4 of the Critical Text of the Book of Mormon: Analysis of Textual Variants of the Book of Mormon, Part Two: 2 Nephi 11 – Mosiah 16, 2nd ed. (Provo, UT: Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, 2005), 895. Skousen suggests that the term “white” was changed to “pure” because of a perceived difficulty with the reading. The verse is referring to Nephi’s seed, who presumably are already “white.” Skousen recognizes that the reference to Nephi’s seed could be interpreted as a broader reference to all of Lehi’s descendants, and, further, they would become indistinguishable from the Lamanites over the course of the narrative anyway, rendering the original term, “white,” logically consistent (interpreted racially or figuratively). Still, he contends that the change to pure “avoids all of this complex reasoning, especially the need to interpret the remnant of the Nephites being dark skinned” (which Hickman, above, referred to a seemingly unthinkable proposition, given the racial logic of the text). Pointing out that “there never has been any attempt to emend any of the passages that directly comment on the dark skin of the Lamanites,” Skousen concludes that “the editing change to pure may represent a conscious attempt at avoiding what was perceived as a difficult reading (the Nephites are supposed to be light skinned), which therefore explains why the change from white to pure was made here—and only here—in 2 Nephi 30:6.” There are at least five verses that refer to Lamanites as having a dark or black skin. Skousen also points out that when the Book of Mormon refers to light skin, it consistently uses the term white collocating with fair, whereas verses referring to purity or cleanliness consistently use white collocating with pure. Skousen, Analysis of Textual Variants, Part Two, 895-99. Thus, while according to Skousen’s close textual reasoning, the emendation may have been an effort to clear up a perceived complex reading on the part of Smith, the change lends itself much more readily to a figurative reading.
white. It just said that they would become a delightsome people. And all that was saying was they would become... there was another word they used, it wasn't white... I'm trying to think of what the word was.... Anyway, it meant a more understanding, a more spiritual person. And that's what it really amounted to.

For this Catawba man, the revision was retroactive, cancelling out the possibility that the scripture ever referred to skin color, even metaphorically. The change had to do with understanding and spirituality, not skin color. (The fact that he could not recall the term pure—with the binary implication of impurity—might be taken to suggest that even that term was not a completely palatable term for contrasting prior Indigenous condition.)

Ellen Crowfoot, however, is quite aware and conscious of the editorial change, as well as the earlier reading. “Every Lamanite who has spent any amount of time in lessons reading about the promises of the Lamanites,” Crowfoot stated, “will never forget about how their skin was purported to turn white.” But she refers to this as “the old version.” “Of course, now we know through scholarly research that Joseph never intended it to come out quite like that.” To account for this apparent error in holy writ, she cited a verse from the Book of Mormon, told in the voice of Moroni, to the effect that any faults in the Book of Mormon are the faults of men, and not of God. In other words, while the record is of divine origin, it is mediated through human beings and is thus prone to some error. “And so, in translation, whether it was Oliver or whether it was when it went to press...somehow it got in there.” (She speculated that perhaps Joseph Smith, when he became aware of the error, may have thought, “Ouch! how did THAT happen?”) In other words, it was simply an error that has been fixed. As she indicated above, though, she remembers very well learning about it. “So, you’re sitting there, in Sunday School,” Crowfoot recalled a typical

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24 Oliver Cowdery was Joseph Smith’s scribe during much of the translation process.
scenario, “you’re with your peers, and, ‘Yeah, did you know your skin’s gonna turn white—if you’re righteous?’” Crowfoot resented these lessons “because, you know, I knew that we were pretty good people.” She knew that “when I step out in the sun, I turn dark, right away,” but what did that have to do with righteousness, or the lack thereof? When this was taught in classes she attended, her peers “would sit there and they would look at me like, ‘Are you okay with this?’” to which she would shrug her shoulders, “I don’t know.” “It was kind of weird,” Ellen commented, “the quest for purity, yet everyone was outside trying to get a tan!”

As she grew older, however, and after the 1981 editorial change from “white” to “pure” in 2 Nephi 30:6, she did eventually begin to speak out on the matter when it arose in church lessons. She described sitting in a Gospel Doctrine class as late as 1996 when a sister referred to an Indigenous man—presumably a Blood from Cardston—whom her parents had reported was “lightening up because he was living more righteously.” Ellen was hesitant to respond, thinking to herself, “Do I really have to say anything?” but realizing this sister taught her children in seminary, she knew she had to speak up.

I said, ‘I'm sorry but that's false doctrine,' and...there was just a hush [in the room], a deafening hush; and the sister got all red, and she said, 'Explain it to me,' and I said, 'That's false doctrine; our skin does not lighten up because we live righteous lives. If our skin lightens up it's because we are sitting in endless meetings [classroom bursts out in laughter] and we're not outside anymore! ... I spoke to the issue of “faults of men” and Joseph Smith’s original translation.25 Later, several members of the ward thanked me, saying they had never felt comfortable with that passage of scripture and to forgive this good sister for being a victim of “false tradition.”

25 Ellen explained that she “had worked as a TA for Jeff Simons [probably at BYU] who was working with John Maestes on a book, covering prophesies of latter-day prophets regarding the descendants of Lehi,” which presumably contextualized some of these issues. Unfortunately the book was never published.
Crowfoot cited this example as evidence that, despite the change to the scriptures that had been made several years before this, it takes “a while to filter through the congregations.”

Crowfoot’s interpretation of the verse as figurative is informed by her own personal study, and, as she put it, through “pondering, prayer and peace.” One of the sources she referred to was the Genesis Group, an organization that began as a support group in Utah in the 1970s for African American Latter-day Saints, during a time period when men of African descent were denied priesthood ordination. The group disbanded when priesthood ordination was extended to all males regardless of race in 1978, but they reorganized in the 1990s with the purpose both to provide support and affiliation for black members and to educate others on issues related to the place of people of color in Mormon communities and in Mormon teachings. The Genesis Group’s “Blacks in the Scriptures” educational series—which consists of a series of lectures available on DVD, podcast, or online through their website—includes a lecture by group member Marvin Perkins titled “Skin Color & Curses.” Though the lecture, like the group itself, is focused primarily on African American Mormons—Native peoples were not mentioned at all in his lecture—since the Lamanite curse described in 2 Nephi 5: 21 uses the phrase “skin of blackness,” and cites dark skin as the result of a curse, it becomes an issue for African American Latter-day Saints as well. Perkins described getting stuck on that passage when he was first investigating the church, but through his study he has arrived at a figurative reading of the passage. By comparing the Book of Mormon skin color references to apparently

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26 In the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, only men are ordained to the priesthood. In the Community of Christ, formerly RLDS, another Restoration Tradition tracing its lineage back to Joseph Smith as founder (the second largest but significantly smaller organization), priesthood ordination was extended to women in 1985.
metaphorical references to black skins in the Bible, by examining Joseph Smith’s editorial change of white to pure, and by following inspired cross-references added to the LDS scriptures in 1981, which point from the term skin in one verse to scales in another to a topical guide entry for “darkness, spiritual,” Perkins determines that “to me it indicates that they are talking about spiritual darkness and not a literal changing of the skin color.” And since “the reference to skin is spiritual and not literal,” the verse is apparently not about race, and the verse is not racist.27 While the Genesis Group is mainly aimed at assisting African American Latter-day Saints and educating white Saints about black Saints, as Crowfoot demonstrates, American Indian Latter-day Saints have taken notice and also find comfort and reassurance in these interpretive strategies that provide ostensibly less racist readings of the curse passages in the Book of Mormon.

But that is not the only non- or de-racializing strategy she offered for dealing with these verses. There is also a line of reasoning that does take skins to be a literal reference, not just figurative (or rather, literal-figurative), but to a different kind of skin. “You have to remember too,” Crowfoot explained, “that skins can be not literally your skin but your garments. The skins that you wear.” This is a line of reasoning that has been suggested by others as well, in Book of Mormon commentaries and articles in church-related (though not officially sponsored) publications, many of which are available online, such as the Journal of Book of Mormon Studies.28 According to this line of reasoning, the curse is still figurative (at


28 For example, see the commentary on 2 Nephi 25:21 in volume 2 of Alan C. Miner, Step by Step Through the Book of Mormon 7 vols. (Springville, UT: Cedar Fort, 1996), available online at http://stepbystep.alancminer.com/home (accessed April 23, 2016). For the most recent and most fully
least, I do not think most proponents are suggesting the Lamanites actually began wearing
darker clothing) and the dark animal-skin garment is a metaphor. The curse of
unrighteousness is something that adorns the cursed like a shroud of blackness.

As these publications and Crowfoot’s reference to the Genesis Group indicate,
Indigenous Latter-day Saints are not the only ones who prefer to read these verses
figuratively. Black Latter-day Saints also often prefer to de-racialize curse passages—at
least in terms of literal skin change (race, of course, includes much more than melanin
levels)—and many white Latter-day Saints also prefer figurative readings. This is
epecially true of Latter-day Saints who came of age after during the long (ongoing) Civil
Rights Movement (recall that Crowfoot’s non-Indigenous peers were also uncomfortable
with their BYU professors’ teachings on the matter). Accordingly, my point here is not that
Indigenous Latter-day Saints tend to read the verses figuratively while other Latter-day
Saints do not. Rather, the point is that the positionality of being Indigenous raises the
stakes of interpretation. It is Indigenous peoples’ skins, whether literal or figurative, that
are being referred to and scrutinized. It is Indigenous people who are caught up in the
dialectic between literal and figurative readings. In navigating interpretations of these
verses, Indigenous Latter-day Saints are shaping their own subjectivities as Indigenous
Latter-day Saints—as Lamanites, if they accept that term, or, as Ellen Crowfoot put it, the
“aboriginal, indigenous, Lamanite people.”

devolved example of this line of reasoning see Ethan Sproat, “Skin as Garments in the Book of Mormon: A

29 See, for example, Brant A. Gardner, Second Witness: Analytical and Contextual Commentary on the Book of
But if Crowfoot interprets the curse passages figuratively, she does believe that there was a curse involving Laman and his descendants. “I think the light was taken from them,” she explained. “And anger will do that. Sometimes people get so angry they can’t see straight... I’ve been so angry I can’t see straight.” This was a theme she addressed earlier in our conversation, interpreting the darkness or blackness referred to in these verses as anger rather than skin color. In the example she cited, she related this to Indian peoples, among others. “I don’t know if you’ve ever been in a room full of angry Indians—or any group of angry citizen—but it is just dark. And sometimes it’s so dark it’s just black.” Book of Mormon curses, it seems, keep coming back to Indian peoples. But, as I indicated earlier, Book of Mormon prophecy is ambiguous and ambivalent. If the curses are continually applied to Native peoples, so are the promises, many of which are also described by Ellen Crowfoot, as we saw in the previous chapter.

I Like to Discount Those Things

When I asked Frank Munro (Shoshone) whether the term Lamanite was a positive or a negative term, he responded, “Yeah, you know, it’s correct, but it’s not the most correct.” He explained this by pointing out—similar to Edith Green—that toward the end of the Book of Mormon narrative, “the Nephites and the Lamanites became one people, and there weren’t any kind of –ites.” In other words, “they intermarried, and so what happens to the dark skin? It goes away. So that wouldn’t be an accurate description at all of our people.” Yet, despite the obviousness of this fact to Frank—“that’s what it says in the Book of Mormon”—there “are some racist people in the church and they like to hang onto the ‘dark and loathsome people’” rhetoric, believing, as Frank characterized their attitude
toward Native peoples, "they were sinful and dirty and that's why they are so dark skinned." To Frank Munro, "that's just pure nonsense" held onto by "just really racist and ignorant bigots." And, unfortunately, he's known a few of them.

Yet, these racist readings—and I have to agree with his characterization of them as racist and bigoted—don't come from nowhere. The curse language is in the text, and it is strong language and difficult to read as non-racist. The simplest reading—though arguably not the best reading—is simply to interpret it literally, as the vast majority of Latter-day Saints have done until fairly recently. So I asked Frank about "this language about a curse and about a 'skin of blackness,' or this original whiteness, or a return to the 'white and delightful'..." And despite my inability to finish a sentence or complete a thought, Frank responded:

Well, you know... I have such a strong testimony of the Book of Mormon that I like to discount those things. And I think you can. If it’s figurative, if that language is figurative, then, I mean, I don't care, you could take the blackest person on earth, and if they have a pleasant countenance, and if they have a strong spirit, to me that's brightness. And there's an aura about that kind of person, where their spirit shines so bright. Where the color of their skin is not even a factor. You know. And so that’s the way I discount it. If it’s figurative language, if someone is wicked and evil, and they are ugly and mean, they have a spirit of darkness about them. So, that’s how I discount it. But some people would say, you can't ignore the exact wording: dark skin. But, I mean, even then, you can take someone such as yourself who is fairly light skinned, and you go get sunburned pretty good, you’re going to be pretty dark. You know. So I think you can discount it any way.

Once again, in a series of interpretive moves, Frank is able to have it both ways—literal or figurative—and refuse to eat either one. If it is figurative, then skin color is not a factor. If it is literal, well race is relative and arbitrary anyway—even a white guy can be characterized as dark-skinned—so the term doesn’t carry any significant meaning that cannot be
summarily dismissed. Thus, under Munro’s critical exegesis, there should be no basis for racism or discrimination through reference to these passages in the Book of Mormon.

Still, when I confessed to Frank that these are passages I had struggled with in the past, as a practicing Latter-day Saint, Frank conceded that, “yeah, that bothers me too.” He continued:

I mean, it bothers me because I believe in the book, you know. I believe it’s true. There are some other things in there... some of it’s really powerful. Because it was revelation that came to pass, you know, where our people would be scattered to and fro. And they were. But other people would say, “Well, Joseph Smith already knew that, because it happened before the book was written.” But... you can’t deny the spirit. You know what I mean? You can’t. If the spirit speaks to you, then that’s, you know, that should be the truth. And if there are mistakes, then they are the mistakes of man... That’s what it says in the scripture.

A book that narrates Indigenous peoples as a cursed people of promise. A flawed volume of holy writ, containing the “mistakes of man,” yet still deemed scripture. Canon. But “if the spirit speaks to you, then...that should be the truth” because “you can’t deny the spirit.” As a colonial entanglement, the Book of Mormon can be read back against the colonizer, but not without significant effort and resistance. While narrated as a chosen people of promise, because of the curse passages, Indigenous Latter-day Saints still have to work against racism and discrimination in the church, as well as in other sectors of American society. Thus, while esteemed as an inspired and inspirational volume of sacred scripture, often described as the most correct book of any on earth—and perhaps especially so because it is esteemed as such—the Book of Mormon is also something some Native Latter-day Saints have to wrestle with as they live with it.
Curses and Blessings in the Northwestern Band of the Shoshone Nation

Given the experience of suffering, struggle, and impoverishment of his people, it probably was not difficult for Frank Timbimboo Warner to think of Native people as cursed. Warner, originally named Beshup, was the son of Chief Sagwitch and Dadabaychee and was a child survivor of the Bear River Massacre (see chapter 1). He was two years old at the time and was found by family members afterward “wandering over the battlefield in a dazed condition, still clutching a bowl of frozen pinenut gravy.” He received seven wounds from soldier gunfire that he carried with him the rest of his life, along with a memory of the awful scene.30 A short time after the battle, as Sagwitch was out trying to secure food and supplies, he left Beshup in the care of his brother-in-law who traded him to a Mormon family named Warner “for a quilt, a bag of beans, a sheep, and a sack of flour.”31 Sagwitch was apparently very upset when he found out, but decided the child could be better cared for with the Warner family than with their impoverished and literally diminished band. Given the name Frank Warner, he was raised in the LDS Church, learned English, graduated from the old Brigham Young College in Logan, Utah, and served three missions for the Church, two to the Sioux and Assiniboine peoples of Fort Peck and Wolf Point in Montana.32

From his journal entries about his missionary work at Fort Peck, it appears that the idea of the Lamanite people as cursed was a major theme he taught. From his entry for

30 Scott R. Christensen, Sagwitch: Shoshone Chieftan, Mormon Elder, 1822-1887 (Logan, UT: Utah State University Press, 1999), 54. Warner claims to remember the traumatic scene, even though he was only two at the time.

31 Mae Parry, “The Northwestern Shoshone,” in A History of Utah's American Indians, ed. Forrest S. Cuch (Salt Lake City: Utah State Division of Indian Affairs, 2000), 44.

32 Christensen, Sagwitch, 34, 54, 191-93.
December 4, 1914: “I visited a house of Lamanites... I talked to them on the Book of Mormon...showed them their fallen condition, and how the dark skin came upon them, and they must do in order they may that dark skin may fall from, & I told them the great blessings in store for them.” On December 14 the theme arises again: “While at the agency I got in conversation with a graduate from Carlile Penn he was an Indian. I talked to him on the evidence of the Book of Mormon... I also made it clear to him in regard to Lehi and his travels, and the disobedience of Laman & Lemuel and the cause of the curse that now follows us in the Indian race.”

Indeed, Warner was convinced that the Book of Mormon was a record of his people and of all American Indian people and this was part of the message he taught to others. “I told them if they would read it with full purpose of heart,” he wrote of a conversation he had with a house full of “Lamanites,” that “they would be convinced that it was true, and a history of the American Indians.” Regarding his work at Fork Peck, he recalled, “We show them that it is a book of their own race and history.” He reported that the book appealed to many he taught and “seems to bring some kind of recollection to them of their forefathers.” Apparently one of those recollections (at least as interpreted and recorded by Warner) also has to do with the original whiteness of Indigenous peoples, which Warned depicts as an articulation of a Native tradition independent of the Book of Mormon: “We were told by one Lamanite that there is history handed down by them that hundreds of years ago their great forefather were white people.”

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33 Frank Warner, Journal 1914-1915, Church History Library, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah. I thank Ardis Parshall and David Grua for pointing this source out to me and making their transcriptions available.

baptism or was convinced of the Book of Mormon’s truthfulness, but he seems rather to record it as a confirmation of his own faith and his hope for redemption from the curse he believed had befallen his people.

Nearly a century later, NWBSN citizen Daniel Boyd (pseudonym), also finds these passages in the Book of Mormon significant. When I asked him if he thought of Shoshone people as descendants of people in the Book of Mormon, he explained, “you know, there are certain points in the Book of Mormon where it mentions that, in the latter days, the Lamanites would become, I think it says, ‘a light and delightsome people.’ So, I kind of always looked at that and, seeing the story of our tribe, how most of our tribe was baptized in the church...I kind of think of that as prophecy partially being fulfilled from the Book of Mormon.” Daniel does not take the reference to “light and delightsome,” as he recalls the wording, as a literal reference to white skin. As he explained the passage in 2nd Nephi, the significance is “how it was prophesied the Lamanites’ descendants would receive the gospel through the Gentiles, and...I’ve seen that in the history of my tribe, when they were all baptized.” But he came back to the whiteness passage, aware that is has been interpreted racially and stating that he thinks “it’s kind of funny, more a joke about the color of our skin, because... my family is a bunch of white Indians.”

Daniel is “1/8 blood quantum,” he explained to me, “which is the lowest you can be” to qualify for citizenship on tribal rolls. “So I’m as white as you can be and be an Indian.” When he was a child his friends didn’t believe him when he told them he was an Indian—a common experience among Native people who don’t match phenotypic expectations of

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35 On the experiences of the NWBSN and the Mormon Church, see chapter 7 below.
“Indianness.” Since he married a non-Shoshone woman, his children do not meet minimum blood quantum requirements and are not tribal members. “And they won’t be unless the tribe lowers the blood quantum,” he explained, which is apparently something they have been talking about doing for some time. “We’re a small tribe and it’s only gonna get a lot smaller if we don’t change that.” I asked if they have considered going to lineal descent instead of blood quantum as criteria and he thinks they will probably first “lower the blood quantum just from 1/8 to 1/16, and then I think after that they will switch to lineal descent.”

But if the “white and delightsome” passages are something some Shoshone families can joke about—perhaps as a way to make light of more serious issues such as blood quantum and enrollment, in order to deal with them—race is not always a laughing matter for other members of the Northwestern Shoshone community. When I asked one Shoshone woman if she had any thoughts about the curse passages in the Book of Mormon she responded, “Yeah. In fact, I think it’s what drove my grandmother... I always felt like she had favorites.” She went on to explain that she felt like her grandmother was more proud of certain grandchildren than others, and liked to show some off to other people, but only some of them. “It wasn’t anybody else but them. Did she show favoritism? Yeah. Did we notice it? Yeah. So, what can I say? Except that you remember it.” When I asked if she felt this preferential treatment was related to those passages in the Book of Mormon, she replied with an emphatic and drawn out, “Yessss. Yes. Because they were half white and half

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36 On this point see Eva Marie Garroutte, Real Indians: Identity and the Survival of Native America (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), chapter 2, which is titled, “If He Gets a Nosebleed, He’ll Turn into a White Man: Biology.”
Indian. And they were fulfilling a prophecy.” I asked which prophecy (though of course I knew), and she replied, “The one that they would turn white and delightsome.”

As a result of this, she explained, “I never really, really felt any closeness to her, the way a kid would feel, I mean, you know, how you feel about your grandparents…. I always felt like she didn’t really care for us because we were Indian. I mean, one hundred percent. And that we could never, we could never be anything but that, because, this is our mom and dad. Hello, I'm sorry, we can't be anything other than this.” While obviously connecting this feeling of racialized valuation, or simply racism, to a reading of the Book of Mormon, she also contextualized it as part of a time period (though she also recognized that she didn’t feel that at all from her other grandmother). She felt it was “probably the feelings...in the 1950s and maybe even into the mid-sixties. Then everything changed. Attitudes changed. There was a feeling of Native pride. Alcatraz. Wounded Knee. Then everybody became Indian. [laughs] It was a pride that happened, that, you know—‘Hey, I'm full blood. You're not. You're only part.’ It flipped around.” A great reversal. As someone with fairly dark skin—apparently a “full-blood”—race was now in her favor.

This Shoshone woman, then, is able to contextualize her grandmother’s reading practice within the more general feelings of the 1950s and early 1960s. It was the Book of Mormon that “drove her”—and drove a wedge between her and her granddaughter—but she was also reading within a wider American context that valued whiteness over darkness—a valuation that was obviously internalized by some Native peoples. But then things changed. The American Indian Movement happened. Red Power and an awakening. “It flipped around.” Still a racialized conundrum, as she recognizes (she critically evaluates both): “Hey, I'm full blood. You're not. You're only part.” It thus was not a movement away
from racism, but simply racism directed the other way. But it was a change that brought
pride in being Native over and against racial assimilation in terms of whiteness, an
assimilation which, in a Mormon context, is drenched in prophecy, joking or otherwise.

On this point, another NWBSN citizen, who might be located somewhere between
“full-blood” and “white Indian” as far as phenotype and cultural practice are concerned,
took a defensive tone when he described being criticized by other American Indians,
including some band members, for “assimilating.” He brought up a term many Native
people are familiar with: “apple.” “They say I’m red on the outside and white on the inside.”
That is, he may still look Native (though he and his descendants could largely “pass”37), but
inside he has become a “whiteman.” “Well, good. So what,” he replied. “What you are saying
is that I portray myself to be Native, which I am, and I respect and honor that, but I am not
going to apologize because I went to school and got my bachelors degree and tried to make
a difference.” To this man, “assimilating,” if one means by that gaining a college education
and excelling in business, might be the best thing one can do for one’s own people; in this
case, for the NWBSN. “We need to remember who we are and who our ancestors were, but
we need to make an impact in today’s society. And the best way to do that is to almost play
the game, you know, do what makes you successful, and do the things that will best help
you help your people.” He credits the LDS church, largely, with providing him and other
band members access to higher education and for helping them to become successful in
“today’s society.” “And so if that means we assimilate, so what; so I’ve assimilated.” This

37 On racial passing in an African-American context, see Allyson Hobbs, A Chosen Exile: A History of Racial
Passing in American Life (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014); for a more general treatment,
though focusing primarily on African Americans and Jews, see Marcia Alesan Dawkins, Clearly Invisible: Racial
Passing and the Color of Cultural Identity (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2012).
does not mean he stops being Native or Shoshone. But still, for some band members who “go out into the world” and achieve educational and occupational success, doing so entails actually just that: they often tend to marry outside of the tribe (with approximately 536 members, it’s hard not to) and their children increasingly cannot meet blood quantum requirements. In addition, younger generations increasingly cannot speak Shoshone and have not learned the stories or practices associated with “traditional” Shoshone “culture.”

With something gained, there also comes a sense that something is lost. Tribal funds and energy are invested in cultural preservation and “revitalization” projects, but as many recognize, particularly in regard to language, they are fighting an uphill battle with “assimilation.” Thus, like so many indigenous peoples, members of the NWBSN find themselves caught up in ongoing and contested narratives about authenticity measured in blood, phenotype, and culture.38

Thus, while joking about racial prophecy may be a way to deal with these complex issues Native Latter-day Saints find themselves caught up in, for better or worse, it does not mean that they are taken lightly or shrugged off. One tribal council member I spoke with was very much aware of the challenges blood quantum measurement poses for the growth of the tribe, and for his own grandchildren, but he also explained that he is hesitant to simply abandon it in favor of lineal descent (not that he could do so alone; it requires an amendment to the constitution which requires a 2/3 majority vote of the entire tribe). “I don’t have a crystal ball,” he explained, “and I can’t look two generations away to see what that might do.” One real-world concern, he explained, is to ensure that they can have adequate funding to meet tribal needs, though he is not comfortable citing that as a sole

38 On these points, see Dennison, Colonial Entanglement.
criterion for such decisions. But he does not want to do anything that could bind future
generations or create unforeseen, adverse conditions. “I’d like to maybe take it just one
more generation [by dropping the requirement to 1/16 blood quantum] and then let tribal
councils down the road another generation removed make a decision based on current
times, and what it looks like then, and if it’s advantageous to do so.”

Thus, race and whiteness are something that American Indian Latter-day Saints are
confronted with and wrestle with on multiple fronts: in their scriptures and in their tribal
constitutions, among themselves and in “society.” Colonial entanglements all. While
whiteness may carry certain valuations and privileges at certain historical (and
contemporary) junctures and situations, in other situations the roles are reversed and
phenotypically “white” or overly “white”-blooded Indians find themselves being excluded,
from enrollment and perceptions of “authenticity.” Both the whiteness prophecy in the
Book of Mormon and blood quantum measurements are rooted, at least interpretively, in
colonial ideas about gradual, racial, and supposedly inevitable “assimilation” into “white”
American culture and society. And yet, indigenous nations and peoples persist and survive
in the face of these assimilative forces, amending constitutions and reading scriptures
figuratively, against the grain of hegemonic interpretive traditions. Race is fluid, and so is
nationality. While nationality may be a political category, so long as it is defined by
something like blood quantum, it is bound up in the category of race. While “lightness” and
“darkness” in the Book of Mormon may be read figuratively, the weight of a long racial
interpretive tradition and the power of racial discourse in America brings the curses and
blessings continually back to a conversation about race. Citizenship and prophecy are
measured and evaluated in skin and “blood.” Thus, indigenous Latter-day Saints find
themselves joking or not joking, enrolling or not enrolling, fulfilling prophecies or reinterpreting them, getting ahead or being left out, loving and evaluating each other in a world bound up and entangled in racial categories such as “full blood” and “white and delightsome.” It is the inheritance of indigenous nations in the context of settler colonialism, with a Mormon twist.
In his controversial book *Red Earth, White Lies*, Native scholar and activist Vine Deloria famously denounced the anthropological model of the Bering Land Bridge crossing as a “white lie” designed to narrate American Indians as simply earlier migrants to the Americas who can thus be justifiably displaced by later migrants (i.e., white settlers). Deloria instead promotes autochthonous Native creation stories that root Native peoples on American soil from their very beginnings, creating, Deloria argues, an inherent and inalienable rootedness in their traditional homelands, which is where the Creator put them.¹ Some Native people, however, have been more amenable to the possibility of a Land Bridge Crossing. Native scholar and activist Roger Echo Hawk, for example, has suggested that oral Pawnee migration stories, which have been handed down for centuries, may represent the preserved memory of the Bering Land Bridge crossing—thus validating both Pawnee oral tradition and the Bering Land Bridge model at the same time. Echo Hawk does not, however, assert that this is necessarily true for all Indigenous people.²


As a migration narrative that also narrates a racialized ethnogenesis, of sorts, of Indigenous peoples, the Book of Mormon also cannot escape similar sorts of negotiations in the readings of American Indian Latter-day Saints. This chapter will consider examples from my fieldwork of Indigenous readings where migration and creation narratives of Indigenous peoples came into tension with Book of Mormon narratives—a tension that is sometimes resolved and sometimes not.

**Remaining Unsettled**

Jeremy Davis, a man in his early forties and a citizen of the Catawba Indian Nation, has his own way of reading the *Book of Mormon* narrative in relation to his Catawba setting and history—a method that resists making certain connections as much as it involves making others. Davis is called upon often to give presentations on Catawba culture at local schools. He takes these presentations as an opportunity to assert Catawba Indigenous presence and as a preemptive strike against migration narratives as counter-explanation, which students will likely encounter later in life. He described for me the typical explanation he gives to schoolchildren:

Now, when you get older, you’re going to be taking some classes, probably in science and things: they’re going to start talking about land bridges and stuff. That doesn’t fit in our story... My people have always been here. And we’re always gonna be here.

As Jeremy’s comments indicate, the Bering Strait land bridge crossing theory as an explanation for migration of Native American peoples from Asia is a contentious issue for many in Indian Country. I wondered if his opposition to land-bridge theory fell along lines
similar to those expressed by Vine Deloria, as described above. But I was even more curious as to how Jeremy squared his insistence that “My people have always been here” with the nautical migration story in the *Book of Mormon*, and the common assumption by many Latter-day Saints that all Native North American peoples can trace their origins to the *Book of Mormon* peoples, who, according to the narrative, migrated from Jerusalem around 600 BCE (along with a few other migrations).

So I asked Jeremy: “So, do you feel like you’ve ever connected the *Book of Mormon* story to Indigenous identity as…” I was going to saw “Catawba” or “Native American,” or something like that, but before I finished my sentence, Jeremy responded:

That part—I don’t see that correlating very well. We don’t have room for a boat in the [Catawba] River, that size. And our origin comes from the river, according to our legends. So I don’t see that connection—that specific mode of travel, as you know. We have canoes, but not large boats [laughs], you know. And certainly not ones that you could completely seal up. And, so, that doesn’t fit in there.”

I was intrigued. I could tell Jeremy’s response was somewhat comical, as he often is when we visit, but nonetheless serious. I knew that Jeremy was an active member of his LDS congregation, and that he held multiple callings, including a significant leadership position, so I assumed this was probably not a denial of the Book of Mormon’s historicity, but it did seem to refute an ancestral connection between the Book of Mormon and Catawba people. I knew that “limited geography” models of the Book of Mormon were becoming increasingly popular among many Latter-day Saints—models which suggest that only some Indigenous people, and probably only a very small minority, actually descend

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3 When I later asked him about it, Jeremy indicated that he had not read and was not familiar with Vine Deloria’s stance on the issue.

4 This seems to be a reference to the enclosed Jaredite barges or vessels described in the book of Ether in the *Book of Mormon*. 
from Book of Mormon peoples. In fact, changes to the official wording of the Introduction to the Book of Mormon reflect this change in thinking; this shrinkage, as it were.\(^5\) But that didn’t seem to be where Jeremy was going with this.

I may have evinced a quizzical expression because Jeremy went on to explain:

> When it comes to anything that I don’t understand about the scriptures, or the Gospel, as I try to gain greater understanding, or if it’s something that may conflict, I just decide, that’s not something I am going to understand at this point in my existence. It may be that those are questions I may have to ask on the other side of the veil.

For the time being, the matter was left at that, but later in our conversation, I brought it up again:

> ST: So, Catawbas, or Indian people, always being here... Book of Mormon: kind of boat migration... So, do those things just kind of coexist then for you?
> JD: Yeah.
> ST: They’re not—they don’t have to be settled?

> “Yeah,” Jeremy responded, “because I don’t have an active, um—an active portrayal of the origin story going on in my life, as it were. I don’t have to say, Oh, no, no, no, no—that’s not where our people [came from]; our people didn’t come across a land bridge, and they didn’t come on a boat from Jerusalem. I don’t have that.”

This seemed like backpedaling from what Jeremy had said before, about what he tells elementary school children in his presentations and about his not being able to see how boat migration fits the Catawba story. But I took it as another layer of interpretational thickness, and as an ethnographic lesson that one cannot take the matter of reading and

\(^5\) The wording of the Introduction to the Book of Mormon was changed in 2007 from reading that the Lamanites are “the principal ancestors of the American Indians” to reading that they are “among the ancestors of the American Indians.”
interpretation lightly, or assume that a first articulation of a reading is, on the face of things, straightforward and univalent.

Jeremy continued the conversation by moving to source criticism. He is quite well versed in Catawba history and typically knows, through his own research, which anthropologist or missionary or amateur historian recorded which story and when. Such is the case with the Catawba origin story. It, or at least one articulation of “it,” was recorded by an amateur historian who supposedly heard it from a Catawba person and then wrote it down. But it is suspect. The story was not passed down through Catawba oral tradition. Like much of their earlier knowledge and traditions, the Catawba origin story, as oral tradition, did not survive the violence of European contact. “That’s not something that passed down,” Jeremy explained,

so I don’t feel a loss for that. I’m okay with the story of the Book of Mormon, with, you know, the people coming here, and all of that happening. Does it all fit in my brain, as far as the chronology of it all? Not exactly. I have to sort that out from time to time. But I’m okay with that. I can accept that.

Again, that seemed to settle the matter, but I still wanted to know how he made this work, if he did, with his earlier statement that Catawba people had always been here. So as I formed my next question, I went with a line of reasoning that some Book of Mormon apologists have used to explain population growth as depicted in the Book of Mormon, and to explain why DNA studies don’t bear out a Middle Eastern origin (from 600 BCE). That is, the idea that there were already people here when Lehi and his family landed. This might be a way he would reconcile Catawbas always being here with the Book of Mormon narrative. But I did not want to assume that he would go this route, so I asked:
ST: So, do you find yourself then thinking, there were already people here when they arrived? Or do you just...
JD: It’s a gray area to me. It’s a gray area to me. Could people have been here? Certainly. Certainly. And maybe that’s how it was. Other sheep I have which are not of this fold... How long were the sheep there? How’d the sheep get here? [pause] Not pertinent to my salvation [laughs] right now [laughs].

And that seemed to end the matter. It is not pertinent to his salvation, so leave it alone. But I couldn’t leave it alone and in a subsequent visit I brought the matter up again (the apparent contradiction between the two assertions, of always being here and also migrating here on a boat). Jeremy explained that he doesn’t feel any need to settle the matter one way or the other. “When it comes down to it, we do have the right to remain silent,” he said. When he has been pressed on the issue in the past, with the expectation that he acknowledge a contradiction or choose one narrative over the other, it has felt, he explained, like someone was out to get him. I can’t think of a better way to express the politics and the stakes of interpretation.

A Many-Storied People

Other Indigenous Latter-day Saints, who also express an awareness of the stakes of interpretation, have found ways to reconcile an autochthonous creation narrative with a

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6 An allusion to John 10:16 in New Testament (KJV): “And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd.” This verse is quoted and referenced in the Book of Mormon, attributed to the resurrected Jesus Christ, with the explanation that the “other sheep” was a reference to “the other tribes of the house of Israel, whom the Father hath led away out of the land” (3 Nephi 15:15), such as Lehi’s family and their descendants, as well as others. (See 3 Nephi 15:11-24 in the Book of Mormon.)

7 This is a common narrative strategy, among Mormons, for setting aside unanswerable questions or scriptural or theological problems. It’s is often articulated as the necessity for sticking with the basics, which are often summarized as the four principles and ordinances of the gospel: faith, repentance, baptism, and the gift of the Holy Ghost. (See Article of Faith 4.)

nautical migration from somewhere else. For example, Frank Munro, a citizen of the Eastern Shoshone Nation who lives in the Wind River Shoshone-Arapaho Reservation, is open to the possibility of a land-bridge crossing, but not as a totalizing narrative, applicable to all Indigenous people. And he recognizes it as a whiteman’s story.

“You know, it’s interesting,” Frank explained to me,

because every tribe has their creation stories. And of course the whiteman has to have his story for us. You know: Where did these people come from? Of course the most common theory is the land bridge—the ice, the Bering Strait. And I believe that’s true, but not for everyone. I mean, if you look at all the research, there’s no way all of us came from there. We’re so different. And if you look at the migration routes, where certain tribes have been, where they came from and how they’ve migrated from place to place, there’s no way we all came from the same place. I mean you have tribes migrating from Argentina, from the South Pole, and you have other tribes migrating from the North Pole. And you have some tribes that have always been in the same place.

By articulating a model of multiple migrations, Frank Munro remains open to the veracity and the possibility of both autochthonous creation narratives and multiple migration narratives. He grounds this openness in an Indigenous setting, citing the diversity of creation narratives among Indigenous peoples in the Americas. “And so the creation stories are interesting, he explained,

because every tribe has their own story, and some of them are similar. Some of them, you know, we come from the earth. Some of them come from the sky. Some of them come from the water. Some of them, you know, come from the ice and the snow. And so, to me that tells you that we are all different. And it also tells me, that some of us have always been here, some of us came across the land bridge, you know, the Bering Strait; some of us came on boats.

Frank’s comments indicate both a sense of variety among Indigenous peoples, each of whom have their own stories—“some of them...come from the earth... some of them come from the sky[,] some of them come from the water”—while also expressing a sense of shared Indigeneity with other Indigenous American peoples, as indicated by the shift from
a third-person pronoun, *them*, to the first-person inclusive pronouns *we* and *us*: “*we* are all different...some of us have always been here, some of us came across the land bridge,... some of us came on boats.” All different, and yet *we, us*, linked by a common Indigeneity: an active *presence* on this continent prior to and after the coming of the whiteman, independent of his narratives yet also, as his comments show, entangled within them. Some have always been here, and some have come from somewhere else. “*We* are all different,” yet all Indigenous: *us*.

Frank went on, however, to express Shoshone specificity as autochthonous creation:

> But the creation story of the Shoshone is... we come from the earth. Which tells me that we've always been here. So, it's not from the water. So we didn't come here on boats. And it's not from the ice and snow, so we didn't come here over the Bering Strait. We come from the earth. So I believe we've always been here.”

Thus, while expressing solidarity with other Indigenous people and also remaining open to whiteman’s migration narratives—and thus to science, anthropology, and religion—Frank is able to express Shoshone rootedness in the land as an inalienable Indigenous presence. “*We* come from the earth...*we've* always been here...*we* didn't come here on boats...*we* come from the earth...*we've* always been here.”

Frank seems, then, to remain open to nautical migration and land bridge narratives, but only for other Indigenous peoples. Some of them may have migrated by boat or over the land bridge, but not Shoshone people. “*We've* always been here.” This seems like an a priori rejection of Shoshone descent from Laman and Lemuel, and thus from Lehi and

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9 Frank went onto explain that archaeological evidence supports this oral tradition, referring to the alpine villages of the Sheep-eater people as ancestors of the Shoshone people: “You know, the artifacts, and the archaeological digs, and that research, would back my theory. I mean, like I mentioned before, the alpine villages; you know there's eighteen of them in the Wind Rivers, more than any place on earth.... And those are our people, you know, that have been here for thousands of years. So to me that's proof, you know. What more proof do you want?”
Israel: from Jerusalem. I was curious, then, if Frank might express an adoption model of Israelite identity—that is, that Shoshone converts are adopted into the House of Israel (similar to how early Mormons interpreted Gentile adoption into Israel)—or if he rejects Israelite and Book of Mormon descent altogether, for Shoshone people. Later in our interview I asked him about it again and found that, upon further explanation, Frank holds a more complex and less monolithic view of both Shoshone and Book of Mormon identity—or that he can be pushed to articulate one (I am not assuming that the ideas one expresses are already all completely formed prior to being articulated). The exchange merits citation at length:

ST: So I was interested when you were talking about the different creation stories, because early Latter-day Saints typically thought of all American Indian people as being descendants of Lehi...

FM: Right.

ST: So I wondered how that understanding, or that typical interpretation works with the idea of a...

FM: Well, even in the Book of Mormon, though, you had the people coming to America at different times. I mean look at the Jaredites, you know, long before anyone. Who’s to say they didn’t survive? And then you had Nephites, and then you had Lamanites, and then you had when they intermarried, and then you had, in other periods in the Book of Mormon, where there was prosperity and happiness and righteousness where everyone became one people. But that’s not to say that there were still small pockets of people other places. So that would explain the diversity. Where we weren’t, I mean, even according to the Book of Mormon we weren’t always one people, you know.

ST: So do you think of Shoshone people then as being literal descendants from Lehi... or, or not necessarily?

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10 The Jaredites refers to another group in the Book of Mormon whose migration to the Promised Land preceded that of Lehi’s family, around the biblical time of the confounding of tongues at the Tower of Babel, as narrated in the Book of Genesis. The Jaredites destroyed themselves through civil war just prior to the arrival of Lehi’s family. See the Book of Ether in the Book of Mormon.

11 Probably reference to 4th Nephi “golden era.” See also below.
FM: Well, ...even in our culture there are stories where the Shoshones were always here, but some of the Shoshones came from another place. And if you look at our linguistic stock, the language that we speak is Uto-Aztecan linguistic stock. And the Comanches speak the same language. And the Aztecs, speak the same language. So that's proof right there that, that some of our people came from Central America. And so, I believe that we are descendants of Laman. You know, that's my personal belief. But, then again, I'm not 100% Shoshone either. You know. But, like I say, maybe our people have always been here too. Stories are told in our tribe of both, you know, that we were always here, and that some of our people came from another place.

ST. Wow. So there's a group of people who have always been here, and then others merge that come from somewhere else.

FM. Which helps us hang onto our stories, because there are historians that try to disclaim everything. [laughs] You know. And there are people in the church...my sister met some missionaries and she tried to tell them what she believed, and he said, “That's not true,” and he had some crazy theory: “You're not even descendants of Laman.” ...But, when you have two different stories, it's like: “Okay, if you shut down this one, well, we still got this one.” [laughs] You know. But, I believe that maybe a part of our people have always been here, and then the other part probably did come from Laman.

With multiple interpretive moves Frank complicates any monolithic understanding of Indigenous peoples, whether through reading the Book of Mormon or through traditional Shoshone storytelling. He draws on linguistics, oral traditions, and close textual reading to complicate monolithic models of Indigenous peoplehood. “Even according to the Book of Mormon we weren't always one people.” Through close reading, Frank is able to turn the text back against those who would use it to control interpretation, or to impose any single, overarching narrative of explanation on Shoshone people. He also expresses an awareness of the stakes of interpretation. A resilient peoplehood is one that is composed of multiple stories, almost like a stash of anti-colonial weapons, including narratives taken

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12 Munro is operating from a common assumption among many Latter-day Saints that the Book of Mormon narrative describes events that occurred, at least in part, in Central America. On Book of Mormon geography, see chapter 8, herein.
over from the colonizer and put to their own purposes. By being open to more than one
story, Frank is able to integrate a Mormon identity with a Shoshone narrative identity.
Narrative flexibility is a strategy of survivance. As a multi-storied people, Shoshone people
can “hang onto our stories” in the face of competing (controlling) explanations from
historians and missionaries: “Okay, if you shut down this one, well, we still got this one.”
[laughs]

Old Stories and New Stories

When I asked John Wolf Leg—a Siksika (Blackfoot) elder living in the Siksiska
Nation in southern Alberta—if there are traditional Blackfoot stories about where the
Siksika people come from, he explained that he did hear such stories while growing up, but
he also expressed some skepticism, or critique of one in particular. “I think it's influenced
by the biblical story of creation,” he explained; “it's much the same story.” This wasn't
necessarily a dismissal of the story, even if it was not exactly acceptance either. He related
to me this story of an original family, a man and wife with two sons. The woman was
unfaithful to her husband and began visiting the cave of a salamander or snake man. When
the father found out about this he captured the snake man and cut off his arms, legs, ears,
and nose, and slit his tongue, and then he left the area. Prior to this he had prepared his two
sons with magical items: a rock, a twig, some dirt, and peat moss. He had instructed them
that when their mother saw what he had done to the snake man she would be angry and
would come after them. They were to run from her and then throw these articles behind
them. Doing so brought about the physical features that define traditional Blackfoot
territory and the surrounding landscape: the rolling plains, the great forests, the Rocky
Mountains, and the Pacific Ocean, the last of which then separated the two boys from their mother. Later one of the brothers—the darker and rougher of the two—asked his wiser and holier brother to build him a boat so he could sail back across the water to where they had come from. And so he sailed back and his mother forgave him and perhaps that is how the land was re-peopled, Wolf Leg explained, “I don’t know.” The story ends there, with the returned son, who seems to represent the Blackfoot and perhaps all Indigenous American peoples, expecting the return of his wiser brother. “And when the first white people came, they thought, that must be him.”

It is a complex story: a creation narrative in the sense of explaining how the landscape was formed, and a migration story of sorts, but one that begins on the American continent, departs, and then returns. It is also a story that accounts for a separated but related humanity marked by racial difference. I wasn’t sure to make of it or where Wolf Leg might be going with it, but he explained that it “is a story about this North-South America. That’s why there’s Indians. And they don’t know where they came from. Only when the Bible was opened to them, then they know.” However, he also pointed out that some Blackfoot people do not accept this or any other migration story, taking a Deloriaesque position and perceiving of migration narratives as a threat to Native claims to the land. “But some of them still stubbornly say, ‘No, it doesn’t apply to us. We were here from when... This is our land; we were born here.’” Thus Blackfoot people find themselves entangled in a complex politics of place, expressed through competing narratives of creation and migration.

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13 I wondered here if Wolf Leg’s own telling of this story wasn’t influenced by the Book of Mormon.
To Wolf Leg, however, a Book of Mormon migration narrative does not necessarily undercut or preclude a Native claim to the land. It might, in fact, enhance it. “The Book of Mormon really opens your eyes along that line,” Wolf Leg explained. “It tells us...why we ended up here. Because...God prepared this place for his people.” And again: “From the Book of Mormon, I understand from that that Joseph promised, or Christ said that this land is running with milk and honey, And so...it seems to say, ‘This is my favorite, this is where I am going to put my people.’” But there is some ambiguity on this point. When Wolf Leg first read the Book of Mormon, it was not exactly clear to him who were God's people in the narrative. “When I first read it, I was angry,” he explained, because of the “bad names” that are used to describe the Lamanite (and by extension Indigenous) people: “dark and loathsome, eating raw meat, and all that.” It seemed to him that the Nephites were God’s people, not the Lamanites. This made him angry so he walked away from the religion, but later he was reconciled and it was explained to him that “Laman disobeyed God while his brother Nephi did everything God told him.” Accordingly, Wolf Leg told me, “they thrive and they succeeded in this land, and still succeed.” I was intrigued by this last statement; in most readings of the text the Nephites were destroyed through total genocide. Here it seemed he was suggesting contemporary Nephite presence and probably, I assumed, conflating them with white Euroamericans (a quite natural conflation). So I asked him:

So you are saying the Nephites are still succeeding, in this land?
Yeah.
And who would you identify them as?
The Nephites? Well, the white people.

I have found a similar tendency to conflate Nephites with white (post-Columbus) Euroamericans among other people I met and interviewed. For example, a Western
Catawba man I met explained that sometimes, when he is in discussions with non-Indian people and “we get into the thing about the scalping, ...I always tell ’em, ‘Well the darn Nephites are the ones that started scalping first. It wasn’t the Lamanites.’ When you get into the battles in there [in the Book of Mormon] where they lop their, took their scalps off—it wasn’t the others. So I tell them, ‘Yeah, it wasn’t the Indians that started the scalping, it was you darn... you darn Gentiles.’”14 Lamanites and Nephites become Indians and Gentiles (white folks). The whiteness of the Nephites and the strength of the white vs. Indian battle narrative make it an easy conflation. You’ll notice that this Western Catawba man paused before identifying the Nephites as Gentiles. He seemed to be about to correct himself, but he didn’t. The urge to conflate Nephites with contemporary white folks (Gentiles) overcomes the historical details of the narrative. Nephite violence against Lamanites is white, Euroamerican, Gentile violence against Indians. (Interestingly, the “Lamanite apocalypse” described in the Introduction would carry the parallel forward, predicting a fate for the Gentiles similar to that of the Nephites.)

I also found a similar tendency to equate Lamanite-Nephite conflict with white-Indian conflict, as least by way of comparison, if not conflation, among some non-Indigenous Latter-day Saints I met. I asked a white, non-Indian woman who lives on the Blackfeet Reservation in Montana if she views Blackfeet people as Lamanites. She replied, “Yeah, I view them as Lamanites—ornery, just like Laman!” I guess she thought I would laugh and when I didn’t she quickly assured me, “Now I’m not prejudiced,” but, she continued, “Laman’s skin was turned black because he was ornery, and I guess Nephi was

white, and Laman hated him, and I guess it's still the same way.” She feels there is hatred against white people among the Blackfeet (of course, she is living on a large cattle ranch of thousands of acres right in the middle of the Blackfeet Reservation and pays all of her taxes to the state of Montana—not to the Blackfeet Nation—due to some past U.S. land grab), which she felt was especially pronounced in Cardston, Alberta, where she grew up (see chapter 3 on racism in Cardston). Thus, while Wolf Leg conflates Nephites with white Europeans in a story of dominance, she likewise but on the flipside reads herself into an extended or analogous Nephite-Lamanite narrative as the white victim of Indian hatred—while living on thousands of acres of Blackfeet land in the heart of the Blackfeet Nation.

After Wolf Leg conflated Nephites with contemporary “white people,” he seemed to waver between wanting to correct himself—recalling that the Nephites were destroyed—while also wanting to maintain the parallel, or conflation, between Nephites and contemporary white Euroamericans.

Yeah. I don't know if they are... No, they were... they weren't really wiped out, but the Lamanites wiped them out in that last great battle. But, not all of them were in all completely wiped out.

Here Wolf Leg’s reading seems to be overwhelmed by the racial power disparities that structure the world around him. It is as if he cannot help but see the white Nephites as white Euroamericans who are succeeding in dominating the continent (blessed for their righteousness with economic prosperity?). But if one follows the arc of that narrative, such dominance cannot last forever, just as Nephite dominance did not. This time, however, the catastrophe of genocide might be more total, including all. “And that’s why some of us,”

15 These are not direct quotes from a recording but from field notes I took immediately following my conversation with her, back in my car. Our conversation was not recorded.
Wolf Leg explained, “are now turning to the white people and saying, look, if you don’t take care of this river, this lake...you know, you’re going to kill us all. Pollution... And that’s why they’re trying to stop that pipeline, the Native people.” Here the Native people seem to be fulfilling an instrumental role not unlike that the Lamanites played in regard to the Nephites in the Book of Mormon—to stir them up in remembrance of their duty to serve God—though through pleading instead of violence. “God says that...this is our promised land,” Wolf Leg explained, “And the only condition he puts in there is that, if you want to live here, obey me, believe in me, and serve me. If you are not going to serve me, well [gesture: sweep of the hand], you will be washed to the sea.”

I say more about the slipperiness of whiteness in regard to Nephites and Lamanites in chapter 3 (demonstrating that Wolf Leg’s conflation of Nephites and Euroamericans is a rather natural slip to make). My point here is that reading the Book of Mormon from Indian Country, or from First Nations positionality, is an activity that is entangled in issues such as right to the land and control of resources. While the Nephites/white people seem to be succeeding, the First Peoples are still here to remind them that improper living—oil pipelines, tar sands—could threaten to wipe all humans off of the face of the continent.

In an earlier meeting with Wolf Leg—in an interview that I did not record—he articulated a rejection of the land bridge theory as a totalizing narrative to explain all Indigenous presence. He mentioned learning it in the residential schools on the Reserve. He believes it might be true in regard to the Eskimos and Inuit people who came from Asia, but not the Cree, the Blackfoot people, or many other Indigenous people. He does not believe they came from Asia. He also rejects Darwinism and does not, as he put it, believe we came from apes. He cited the Blackfoot traditions that say they came from here—not just the
earth but North and South America. I took this to possibly be an a priori rejection of Book of Mormon migration but later he expressed his belief that Blackfoot people descend from the Lamanites and are also connected to the Nephites by a thin thread. He insisted that there is only one creation story (meaning, presumably, only one true story) and it is in the Bible, and he reiterated the story related above. He drew a comparison between the story and the Book of Mormon.16

I wondered if, like Jeremy Davis, above, Wolf Leg simply allowed these two seemingly irreconcilable accounts of autochthonous creation and nautical migration (as implied by the Book of Mormon) to coexist. But I also recalled that Joseph Smith taught that the Garden of Eden was located on the American Continent, at or near the state of Missouri, and that is where Adam and Eve had lived. Some Latter-day Saints have thus reasoned that humanity began, was created, in the Americas and then migrated away (sometimes Noah’s flood is used to account for this) and thus Lehi’s voyage and other Book of Mormon migrations were a return to the place of humanity’s origins. Interestingly, however, neither Wolf Leg nor other Indigenous people I have talked to have made this connection, perhaps because the idea is not found in the Book of Mormon but comes from Joseph Smith’s later teachings.17 For the most part, the Book of Mormon is taken as a migration narrative, stating that Indigenous peoples migrated to the Americas from somewhere else.

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16 This paragraph is constructed from field notes I recorded immediately following our conversation on June 17, 2013. Unfortunately I could not recall how he connected this story with the Book of Mormon.

17 Joseph Smith’s teaching that the Garden of Eden was located near Missouri is fairly well-known among Latter-day Saints, but I have only encountered a few sources that then bother to account for humanity’s migration away from and return to the Americas.
Conclusion

As these three examples demonstrate, there is a politics of place involved in reading the Book of Mormon in Indigenous settings. This is often expressed as a competing discourse between migration and creation narratives. Narrating indigenous peoples as migrants can be a political strategy for undercutting essentialized claims to native territories. However, being open to migration and creation stories can open up new discourses, possibilities, and communities. As a migration narrative that seeks to explain Indigenous origins, the Book of Mormon inevitably becomes entangled in these debates. As these three examples demonstrate, Indigenous peoples read and navigate this political terrain in a number of ways.

These are just a few examples and may not be representative of how other Indigenous peoples read the Book of Mormon (there is no “representative” Indigenous reading). But they do give a sense, I hope, of some of the political issues involved in reading in a colonial setting. To demonstrate that these sorts of debates do not always pit creation against migration—that Indigenous readings are diverse and cannot be essentialized—I will share one more example, also from the Blackfoot Confederacy, but a little further south in the city of Lethbridge, just east of the Blood Reserve of the Kainai Nation. A Kainai Latter-day Saint student was in a course at a local college and her professor, a citizen of one of the Blackfoot nations, told the students that the Indigenous peoples of the America had all migrated to the Americas across the Bering Land Bridge. She raised her hand to disagree. She had read the Book of Mormon.
CHAPTER 7. READING IN PLACE: LOCAL AND INDIGENOUS READINGS

Individuals read texts from a particular place, geographically and ethnically. Where we are (from) and who we are (from) influences the way we approach and interpret texts—how we “read.” Simultaneously, our readings and interpretations of texts influence how we inhabit and relate to those spaces. For Indigenous peoples of the Americas, reading the Book of Mormon is always a political act. Since the book is purportedly about the peopling of the Americas and the destiny of Indigenous peoples, to read and interpret the text is to engage in a politics of place. This is not to suggest or imply an essentialized Indigeneity; Indigenous readers do not all read or respond to the text the same way but interpret the text in a variety of different ways, share readings with non-Indigenous readers, and are not determined by their Indigeneity. Further, non-Indigenous readers also participate in debate, often polemical, over where Book of Mormon events took place, to whom prophecies apply, or how they should be interpreted—and these readings are often politically motivated. But I would argue, and hope to demonstrate, that the stakes are significantly higher for Indigenous peoples. Since nations such as the U.S. and Canada assert plenary power over the territory they claim—including Indigenous territories—then to be Indigenous in America is to inhabit, and to read from, a colonized space. This does not mean that every reading of the text by an Indigenous Latter-day Saint is an entirely “colonized reading,” trapped within what some scholars have termed a “colonization of the
mind.”¹ It is possible to “read back”—against the empire, or against colonization.² But often there are limits imposed by the text and by the reading community, especially in a hierarchical church where belonging entails some degree of agreement on or assent to certain ideas and teachings.

“We’re going to take our land back over”

Edith Green’s reading of the Book of Mormon stems both from her particular place, as/at Catawba, and from a broader identification with all other Native peoples in the Americas. Thus, Edith Green’s reading is both local and hemispheric. She is Catawba and she is Indigenous. This is demonstrated by her reading of certain passages in the Book of Mormon, which she, with many other Latter-day Saints, reads as a prophecy regarding a future gathering of Latter-day Saints to the land of Missouri, where, based on prophecies by Joseph Smith, they anticipate the building of the city of Zion, or the New Jerusalem. In Edith Green’s reading, Indigenous peoples will play a special role in this gathering. Further, a driving point of the initial gathering will be an Indigenous reclaiming of stolen land.

“All Native Americans are descendants of the Lamanites and the Nephites [Book of Mormon peoples],” Edith explained, “the ones that mingled together.”

¹ Terms such as “colonization of the mind” typically refers to the idea that colonized subjects often become complicit in, or trapped within, their own oppression or colonization by accepting the terms, ideas, racial categories, hierarchies, etc., imposed on them by the colonizer. Prominent writers on this topic include Frantz Fanon, Toni Mitchell, and Alice Walker. In regard to Indigenous peoples, and on the topic of “decolonization,” an oft-cited source is Linda Tuhiwai Smith, Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples (Otago University Press, 2012); see also Waziyatwin Angela Wilson and Michael Yellow Bird, eds., For Indigenous Eyes Only: A Decolonization Handbook (School of American Research, 2005).

And, um, and South America—all those Indians down there are. And then when they started coming up here, migrating up here, I told my husband, I said, It’s getting towards the end of time, because the Lord says—I think it’s in 2nd Nephi, or no 3rd Nephi, I believe it’s 3rd Nephi—he is going to remember us, and that this is the land of our inheritance, that he gave us, and he is going to call us all together, and we’re going to take our land back over, and he says we’re going to be like wolves among the sheep: when he gives us the word, we’re going to rise up and slaughter all of ’em.

The verses Edith is referencing, regarding the destruction that is going to occur at the time of the gathering, is found in 3 Nephi chapters 20-21. In these chapters, Jesus, as a resurrected being visiting the Americas, explains to the gathered Nephite/Lamanite people that in the last days the scattered “remnants” of their people will be “gathered in” from all parts of the earth.

And the Father hath commanded me [Jesus explains] that I should give unto you this land, for your inheritance. And I say unto you, that if the Gentiles do not repent after the blessing which they shall receive, after they have scattered my people—Then shall ye, who are a remnant of the house of Jacob, go forth among them; and ye shall be in the midst of them who shall be many; and ye shall be among them as a lion among the beasts of the forest, and as a young lion among the flocks of sheep, who, if he goeth through both treadeth down and teareth in pieces, and none can deliver.3

Edith’s reading of these verses is remarkably similar to the way many of the earliest members of the Church of Christ (the original name of the Mormon Church) read the Book of Mormon, as what I refer to above as a “Lamanite Apocalypse.”4 It was, in fact, the dominant reading of the early 1830s.5 When early Mormons read those passages, the


5 Gradually this interpretation of the text faded (see “Brief Reception History” in Introduction above).
“scattered remnants” of the house of Jacob, or Israel, referred to in the text, was taken as a clear reference to American Indian peoples. And the Gentiles referred to in these passages were Europeans and their Euroamerican descendants who settled in the Americas—the “Promised Land” of Lehi’s seed. While this reading of the text has become much less prevalent, or dominant, it has persisted and surfaced from time to time, particularly in Indigenous contexts.

An important part of Edith Green’s reading of 3 Nephi and other parts of the Book of Mormon, and one shared with the earliest reading tradition, is the idea that Native converts to Mormonism—the “remnants” of Israel in America—will take the lead in building the city of New Jerusalem in Jackson County, Missouri, the revealed site of Zion, following the great war in the last days. This reading also is derived from passages in 3 Nephi, among others. 3 Nephi 20:22 states: “And behold, this people will I establish in this land, unto the fulfilling of the covenant which I made with your father Jacob; and it shall be a New Jerusalem. And the powers of heaven shall be in the midst of this people; yea, even I shall be in the midst of you.” Further on, 3 Nephi 21 explains that any Gentiles who do not believe and accept this covenant (typically interpreted as joining the Mormon Church) will be cut off and destroyed, presumably at the hand of the gathered remnant of Jacob, “as a young lion among the flocks of sheep.” But those Gentiles who repent (that is, join the Mormon movement)

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shall come into the covenant and be numbered among this the remnant of Jacob, unto whom I have given this land for their inheritance; And they [the repentant Gentiles] shall assist my people, the remnant of Jacob, and also as many of the house of Israel as shall come, that they may build a city, which shall be called the New Jerusalem. And they shall assist my people that they may be gathered in, who are scattered upon all the face of the land, in unto the New Jerusalem. (3 Nephi 21: 12-14, 22-24; emphasis added)

Again, to early Mormon readers, the “remnant of Jacob” in these passages refers to American Indian people and they themselves were the Gentiles who would be adopted in—white settlers who will merely assist in building Zion, presumably in a subordinate role.8

Edith Green’s reading is again remarkably similar. In reference to these passages Edith explained, “I think it’s referring to the Native Americans. And it’s going to be before the coming of the Savior. And I think it’s referring to a war that’s going to be here, between the Native Americans and the rest of the people. And it’s before we build a temple, in Jackson... Because you’ve got to clean it up before you build it up!” Further, she explained that “the Native Americans will build the temple. That is my understanding. But, what would you call the Gentiles will assist them.” And a “Gentile,” she explained, is “anyone who is not Native American.”

Thus, Indigenous Americans will take the leading role while Gentiles will assist. To support this idea, she referenced a verse in the Book of Mormon, drawn from Isaiah, which states, as Edith paraphrased it, “they [the Gentiles] should carry them [the Lamanites] up on their shoulders.”9 This verse has typically been used by white Mormons to explain and


9 The allusion is to Isaiah 49:22, which is quoted or alluded to multiple times in the Book of Mormon, applied to a future “Lamanite” context. For example, 1 Nephi 22:8: “And after our seed is scattered the Lord God will proceed to do a marvelous work among the Gentiles, which shall be of great worth unto our seed; wherefore, it is likened unto their being nourished by the Gentiles and being carried in their arms and upon their shoulders.” The reference to Gentiles in this and similar verses is typically interpreted to mean either the LDS
Edith seemed to be using the verse for just the reverse, to suggest that the verse means white members will merely assist and not lead, though, as if catching herself, she added some qualifying considerations (dominant usage does, after all, exert weight): “A lot of them [Gentiles],” Edith explained, “will probably have more knowledge about building the temple than most of us Lamanites will. So they will have to be kind of like in a, a supervisory, maybe, situation there. And there could be quite a few Lamanites, Native Americans, that know how to do that. But then, they may need more people than that.” Here, the dominant position of white “Ephraim” as Gentile in later readings of the text seems to rupture and even threaten to reverse Edith’s reading, pulling it more in line with dominant and “authoritative” readings of the past century, by placing white Mormons (Ephraim) in supervisory roles. This is counterbalanced, however, by her consideration that “there could be quite a few Lamanites, Native Americans, that know how to do that.” Whatever else it is, interpretation of Zionist prophecy is an ordering of power relationships. In Edith’s reading, the great gathering will bring about a great reversal in that relationship, though even that is not entirely secure.

Edith expects the fulfillment of these prophetic Zionist events to occur within her own lifetime. Indeed, she anticipates a call from her bishop or stake president any day, announcing the gathering to Zion. While she seems to be excited about this possibility, she is concerned, however, about her age. “Now how in the world am I going to [go to Missouri]?” Edith asked, rhetorically. “I’m so old, with arthritis and everything. I can’t carry

Church or the U.S.A. (or both). For example, see Monte S. Nyman, “I Have a Question,” Ensign, August 1994. See also discussion on U.S. government and Indian Removal herein.
anything. I’m sure there won’t be any highways or gas for our cars to ride on. And probably the roads will all be torn up or something—who knows.” She seems to have it figured out, however. “Well, I’ve got one of those carts that you pull along…. And then, you know these little things they hook onto the backs of bicycles, pull kids and so forth? I thought, ‘I’ll get one of those and hook up to my bicycle. I can do that too!’ So, I’ve been thinking all about that. I’ve got about three pairs of sneakers ready to go!”

These, of course, are concerns Edith Green might share with a number of her non-Indigenous Latter-day Saint friends, who also anticipate gathering in similar circumstances. However, what followed these remarks points to Edith’s position as someone reading specifically from Catawba. As we continued our conversation, her narrative naturally flowed from this anticipated migration to a previous one. Regarding the gathering to Zion, Edith said: “I just hope it’s not in the winter, because when the government put the Catawbas with the Cherokees on the Trail of Tears, it was in the winter time. Moved us out to Oklahoma and all those places over there.”

Edith Green’s location in the American Southeast makes the movement to Zion roughly approximate to the route covered by the Cherokee Trail of Tears. Her Indigenous identification with other Indigenous peoples, in this case Cherokees, and with white domination of Indigenous peoples, makes the link a natural one. (Catawbas and Cherokees have historically occupied contiguous territories, and the current Catawba Reservation is approximately 175 miles from the Quallah Boundary of the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians.) Green’s inclusion of Catawbas in the Cherokee Trail of Tears speaks to the power of that event as an iconic representation of the land loss, removal, and suffering shared by
many American Indian peoples, and particularly those from the American Southeast. After the 1840 Treaty of Nation Ford divested the Catawba people of their homeland, with a never-realized promise of a new reservation in North Carolina, the Catawba people found themselves in a scattered condition. Many relocated for a time and lived with the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians in North Carolina. Though a core group returned to a much smaller state reservation, several others migrated away. During the 1850s some Catawba people migrated to the federal Indian Territories and settled with the Choctaw people. In the 1890s, five Catawba families migrated to the San Luis Valley of Colorado as part of a larger Mormon migration from the Southern States Mission. For Edith Green, the Trail of Tears serves as a powerful symbol of the forces that have combined to coerce, force, or otherwise draw Catawba people away from their homeland and reduce their numbers, whether it be federal force, settler pressure, economic circumstances, religious colonization, local persecution, or a combination of these factors.

More salient to the topic at hand—her reading of the Book of Mormon—is the narrative flow between Edith Green’s anticipation of the migration to Zion and the painful

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10 Though some historians may characterize Edith Green’s inclusion of Catawbas in the Cherokee Trail of Tears as an appropriation of a well-known historical event in order to express the much less visible Catawba experience of loss and suffering, as anthropologist Charles Hudson explains, up to half of the Catawba population were living with the Cherokees in North Carolina during the 1830s, prior to Cherokee removal. See Charles M. Hudson, “The Catawba Indians of South Carolina,” in Southeastern Indians Since the Removal Era, ed. Walter M. Williams [Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1979], 114. And though they are typically described as territorial enemies prior to the early nineteenth century, there were a significant number of intermarriages between Catawba and Cherokee peoples. It is thus entirely plausible that some Catawba people were included in the 1838-9 forced removal and relocation known as the Trail of Tears.


13 See Echohawk, “Struggling to Find Zion.”

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social memory of the Trail of Tears. While seemingly coincidental events—in the sense that they both ply, or potentially would ply, virtually the same route—I suggest that the two are actually linked in significant ways that a historicized reading of Edith Green’s reading of the Book of Mormon makes manifest. Edith Green’s narrative flow from her anticipated return to Zion to the Trail of Tears is not simply a coincidence of location but speaks to the historical connection between the first mission to the Lamanites and the federal policy/force of Indian Removal. The latter charted the course for the former. The first Mormon “mission to the Lamanites” in 1830—the same year the Indian Removal Act was signed into law by Andrew Jackson—consisted of missionaries sent by Joseph Smith to Indian Territory, to teach and convert them and build Zion there because presumably all Indian people were being gathered there. Thus, Edith Green’s anticipated march to Zion and the Trail of Tears bear roughly the same relation to each other as the first Mission to the Lamanites and the prior Indian removal and the Indian Removal Act, or, rather, the ideology behind that act. The Mormon movements are, in essence, reflections of (as charted by) the federally coerced removal-migrations. Some early Mormons lauded the federal policy of Indian Removal and President Jackson for carrying out what they saw as the Lord’s purposes, even if federal officials did not understand, as these early Mormons saw it, the true purpose of the gathering.\footnote{For example, as the editor of the church periodical Star wrote in the December 1832 edition, “Last week about 400, out of 700 of the Shawnees from Ohio, passed this place for their inheritance a few miles west, and the scene was at once calculated to refer the mind to the prophesies concerning the gathering of Israel in the last days.” Qtd in Underwood, Millenarian World, 82. See also W. W. Phelps, “The Indians, “ Latter-day Saints’ Messenger and Advocate 2.4 (January 1836):245-48; and Parley P. Pratt, A Voice of Warning (New York: W. Sanford, 1837), 191.} Which makes it ironically fitting (if discomfiting) that the location of the anticipated Mormon Zion is not, as originally anticipated, in the Indian Territory, which was broken up and largely overwhelmed by territorial expansion and the
processes of statehood, but in Jackson County, which Edith Green sometimes refers to simply as Jackson, and which is, in fact, named after none other than Andrew Jackson—a name, she told me, that Catawba people are not even supposed to say.¹⁵

Edith Green of course did not make—at least explicitly or consciously—this connection between Jackson County, Missouri, and Andrew Jackson. This is my reading of her reading and of Mormon history. For Edith Green, the anticipated return to Zion is a liberating event, associated with but not marked by the forces of Indian Removal. In a poetic twist of apocalyptic fate, it is the time during which the Lord is going to remember his covenant and a time when, as Edith Green narrates it, speaking for all Indigenous peoples of the Americas: “we’re going to take our land back over.”

**The Gold Plates in the Wind Rivers**

Frank Munro’s reading of the Book of Mormon, as I focus on it below, intertwines Shoshone and Mormon history. Munro’s reading is very much influenced by his surroundings—the Wind River mountains—and by his Shoshone family history. Munro is a citizen of the Eastern Shoshone Tribe who lives at Fort Washakie on the Wind River Shoshone-Arapaho Reservation. He is a descendant of Chief Washakie, whom he describes as “a very powerful presence” and the “last chief of the Eastern Shoshone tribe,” a man who “lived in three different centuries,” from 1798 to 1901 and “reigned over the Shoshone tribe for over fifty years.” An important part of what Washakie did during his time as chief

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¹⁵ Green is much less sanguine in her estimation of Andrew Jackson than early Mormons such as W. W. Phelps were. Regarding Jackson and Catawba people, she told me, “We always say, ‘We know one person that’s going to hell.’” Further, she explained (in exasperation): “and Jackson was raised by Catawbas right over here in Waxhaw!“ (twenty minutes’ drive from the Catawba Nation).
of the Shoshone people, as remembered in family tradition, was to assist and protect the Latter-day Saints who passed through Shoshone territory on the Mormon Trail. “I believe that through his inspiration and through his spirituality that he was able to help the Saints,” Frank explained to me. “As you know, the Mormon trail and the Oregon Trail went right through the heart of Shoshone country. And he was in charge at the time.” Indeed, Munro stated his belief, as that of his family, that Washakie was called not only to lead his people but also to provide protection to the Latter-day Saints. “We believe that he was called, it was his destiny to lead our people, and to protect the Saints.”

The way this calling or destiny devolved upon Washakie, as articulated by Frank and as remembered in his family’s oral tradition, bears striking similarity to the initiation of Joseph Smith’s ministry in Latter-day Saint oral tradition, as someone prepared from his youth with visionary experiences and a special calling to lead.

It was told, Washakie, from the very beginning. He was a young boy, and he was called, just like we find in the Scriptures: “many are called but few are chosen.” And we believe that he was called; it was his destiny to lead our people, and to protect the Saints. That’s my personal belief. And he was blessed with many great gifts, to help him in that calling. From the very beginning... His mother was Flathead. And they were traveling through what is now northern Idaho, or southwest Montana, and they were traveling from one place to another, like they often did, whether it was to pick berries or to harvest the roots. And they were attacked, by the enemy; most probable, the Blackfeet. They were fierce enemies. And [they were] decimated. Just wiped out. Obliterated. And he was the lone survivor of that attack. And he told his story: he was near death and a bright light appeared to him, and told him that...it wasn’t his day to die. And that he would live for a long time. And that he had many great things to do. And, of course, this was Heavenly Father, or Jesus Christ. We’re

16 In describing this family tradition, Frank explained that he is five generations away from Washakie biologically, but four by way of oral tradition, because his mother was raised by her grandmother. As he put it: “A lot of the stories are passed down from generation to generation, and so, um, it’s five generations but it skips a generation and makes it four, because my mom was raised by her grandmother. And to tell you, just to give you an idea of how close we are to Washakie: Washakie had a son,...one of his sons was named Frank Washakie. That’s who I’m named after. And he married.... And grandma...raised my mother. So that’s how close it is.”
not sure. But it was a bright, white personage, and told him of the things that were to come. And they told him, you know, “You're going to lead your people.”

The term “personage” in particular marks this narrative incident as one influenced, if not to some degree shaped, by familiarity with Latter-day Saint scripture. In “Joseph Smith—History,” part of the LDS canon, Smith narrates a visionary experience that has become known, in Latter-day Saint culture, as “the first vision.” According to this narrative, Smith was visited while still a child by “two Personages, whose brightness and glory defy all description,” identified as Heavenly Father and his son, Jesus Christ. In another visionary experience, described a short time later in the same text, Smith is visited by the angel Moroni, whom he described as a resurrected being and ancient American prophet. Smith described Moroni also as a “personage” adorned in a “loose robe of most exquisite whiteness” whose “whole person was glorious beyond description, and his countenance truly like lightning.” Munro’s description of Washakie’s vision of Heavenly Father or Jesus Christ as a “bright, white personage” seems to be narrating him into a prophetic role similar to that of Joseph Smith—as leader and prophet of his people.

But if Munro’s narrative is marked by Latter-day Saint rhetoric, it is also a Shoshone story, rooted in a specific location, “what is now northern Idaho, or southwest Montana,” involving an individual of a mixed Indigenous lineage, Flathead and Shoshone, attacked by traditional enemies, the Blackfeet.

In family tradition, as narrated by Frank, Washakie was also told in advance, during this visionary experience, about the coming of the Mormons. This prepared him so that he was able to recognize the missionaries and the Book of Mormon when they arrived, and to form a strong alliance and friendship with Brigham Young. “He became real close friends of
Brigham Young,” Frank explained, “and that’s why he protected the Saints coming through.”

To demonstrate the sagacity this foreknowledge gave Washakie, Frank related an encounter Washakie and his sub chiefs had with a group of Mormon missionaries led by Amos Wright. This story, Frank explained, is preserved in “the church archives and it was written in the Ensign magazine,” the church’s official periodical, but it has also been passed down through family oral tradition. As Frank related:

Amos Wright tells his story of how at the time it was against the law to preach to the Natives. And so he had to sneak through the Wind River mountain range to the Shoshones. And he baptized over a hundred of them, close to two hundred. And...sometime before that...the missionaries brought the Book of Mormon into the council.... They were sitting in a teepee, in the lodge for council. And Washakie was the head chief. But he had sub-chiefs. And as many as twelve at times would sit in that congregation and discuss the things, the direction of the people: the things that they should do...for their protection and for their sustenance and for their survival. And the book was presented. And in these meetings, whenever the white man met with Shoshones, and with the leaders, it was always discussed, you know, “What can we do for you? What will you do for us?” And so the book was passed around the circle. You know, faces were made, and they sneered and jeered. “A book? We don't need a book. We need guns. We need food. We need hospitals. We need schools for our kids. We don't need a book.” And they threw it aside. And Washakie picked it up, and he said, “You are all fools.” He said, “The guns are good, the school is good, the food is good, the hospitals are good. Those things can take care of our people today, here and now. But what’s in this book is forever.” So he already knew that and he already understood that. And he said, “These men have good hearts. Good minds. They speak not with a forked tongue. They speak the truth. They speak the words of the Creator.”

In addition to demonstrating the sagacity of Chief Washakie, this story might also be told by Shoshone Latter-day Saints (and also non-Shoshone local Latter-day Saints) to provide an

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17 To demonstrate how close the friendship of these two men were, Frank told the following humorous story: One funny story, as a side note..., just to give you an idea of their friendship and how close they were: Brigham Young came into Washakie's camp and was looking around. “You have many beautiful women, here in your camp. I would very much like to take my pick. And take them back to Salt Lake with me.” And Washakie said, “That’s good my friend. That is a good request. I like your request. As long as I can go to Salt Lake and do the same.” [laughs] So, just in fun, and joking around.

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explanation for the low rates of conversion among Shoshone people to Mormonism. Currently, there are only a handful of Shoshone people who attend the LDS Church in Lander, Wyoming. While most of the other “sub-chiefs” were too short-sighted to see the value of the Book of Mormon, Chief Washakie—like his descendants, and the Munro family in particular—saw otherwise. The fact that this story is remembered and told in this way might be taken as evidence that many Shoshone people reject the Book of Mormon, failing to see any value in the book.

As related in chapter 6, above, Frank Munro holds a complex view of the Shoshone people as both descendants and non-descendants of the Lamanite people. A core group of the Shoshone had always been here, and they were joined later by a group who descended from the Lamanites. To support his belief that Shoshone people have always been here, he mentioned the “alpine villages.” “There’s eighteen of them in the Wind Rivers,” he explained, “more than any place on earth... And those are our people, you know, that have been here for thousands of years.” He described these alpine villages as the abode of the Mountain Shoshone, the Sheepeaters. He described these as “the mystic Shoshones, the ones that are powerful, and they are close to our heavenly father, and they are spiritual, strength is beyond comparison.” Evidence of these Mountain Shoshones, or Sheepeaters, is found not only in the alpine villages but also in the sheep traps they left behind, still preserved in the Wind Rivers. They also left behind rock art, carved into cliff walls, and ram skulls that had been tied to trees that then grew around them. “It’s our understanding that

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18 Shortly prior to my visit, the Wind River Branch, held in an LDS meetinghouse on the Wind River Reservation, was closed by local leaders and members were told to attend the ward in Lander or the ward in Pavillion (a non-Indian town within the reservation). As a result, attendance by Shoshone people dropped dramatically.
this was an altar,” Frank explained, “where thanks was given or where prayers were offered, prior to the hunt...and following the hunt. You know: ‘Give us the strength, give us the wisdom, help us find our brother the sheep so that we might live.’” Frank explained that there are three theories to explain what happened to the Sheepeaters: one is that they were wiped out by smallpox; another is that they came down out of the mountains and became part of the Eastern Shoshone; and finally, “the third theory is, they are still there, and they are so mystic that they are not easily seen.”

While Frank viewed these alpine villages as evidence of deep, historical Shoshone presence in the Wind Rivers, demonstrating again his narrative flexibility, the day prior to this conversation, as Frank and I were sharing a bite to eat, he shared a speculation of his that perhaps the alpine villages were not really alpine villages at all. There are verses in the Book of Mormon that describe great destruction, earthquakes, and storms which changed “the whole face of the land,” causing some cities to sink away into the sea while others were “carried up” on high mountains. Citing these verses, Frank speculated—“just a theory, you know”—that “maybe those alpine villages—eighteen-plus, more than any place on earth, over 10,000 feet in elevation—maybe they weren’t 10,000 feet... Maybe during the Book of Mormon, maybe during one of those earthquakes, the mountains rose. Quite possibly.” Just a theory, Frank assured me, “we don’t really know,” but I was intrigued by his tendency to read the Book of Mormon onto the land around him, or to read the land through the Book of Mormon, particularly as this coexisted with Shoshone legends, such as that of the Sheepeaters. Under Frank Munro’s storied gaze, the Wind Rivers are a palimpsest, with layers of writing both Mormon and Shoshone.

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19 This is described in 3 Nephi chapter 8 in the Book of Mormon.
You know, another interesting fact that I failed to mention, was, there’s hundreds of caves in the Wind Rivers,” Frank continued. “And some people believe that Washakie and Brigham Young had such a close relationship that there are Mormon treasures buried in the Wind Rivers.” This legend intrigued me. In the Uinta Mountains of Utah, southwest of the Wind Rivers, there are legends among Mormon settlers of Spanish and Ute treasure hidden in lost mines in the mountains. Frank’s suggestion seemed to be a reversal of those legends: here it was Mormon treasures placed in the safe keeping of the Shoshone people. And then Frank carried his speculation to a new level: “So, you know, maybe—this is just pure speculation—but maybe, maybe they exchanged, some people say, even the gold plates.” This speculation floored me. In Joseph Smith’s narrative about the plates, when he finished his translation he gave them back to the angel Moroni—the ancient (Native) American prophet who engraved a portion of them and then hid them up in the Hill Cumorah in upstate New York, where they were later revealed to Smith. Now Frank Munro was unearthing them—or pulling them down out of the heavens—and placing them in the Wind Rivers. “You know,…if the plates weren’t taken back, weren’t transformed and taken back to the heavens—what better place than the Wind Rivers? [laughs] When you think about it, right? [laughs] But other people say, ‘There’s archives.’ Well, it’s a fact that the church has archives, caves, or huge safes, locked away. But maybe Brigham Young had a debt to pay. [laughs] And maybe Washakie hid them away in the Wind Rivers.”

Thus, if Washakie was called to his position of leadership in a similar manner to Joseph Smith through visionary visitations of heavenly personages, he seems to have concluded it by fulfilling the role of Moroni, as keeper of the golden plates of the Book of Mormon, hidden away in the Wind Rivers. The Wind Rivers thus become the Sacred
Grove—where Joseph Smith had his first visionary experience—and the Hill Cumorah, where the plates were buried, while still remaining the home of the ancient Shoshones who have always been there. Perhaps someday Washakie may return like Moroni and reveal the location of the plates to a future prophet. In the meantime, the Wind Rivers remain home to both the mystic Mountain Shoshone with their rock art and sheep skull altars, and the gold plates of the Book of Mormon.

**Conclusion**

Reading is rooted in place. The reading subject is always located somewhere, reading from some space she occupies spatially, ethnically, racially, Indigenously, and so forth. For Indigenous peoples reading a text like the Book of Mormon, about a land of promise, reading is almost inescapably bound up in different but often related politics of place. Is this text about North America or South America? Who can claim these blessings? Who are the Nephites and who are the “mean Lamanites”? Will the Nephites/Gentiles/white people always dominate this land? Will they destroy it? Or are Indigenous peoples going to eventually unite and take their land back? The Book of Mormon says all of these things, and more, depending on who reads it and from where. In the next chapter, I continue this theme on the topic of Book of Mormon geography.
CHAPTER 8. MAP IS TERRITORY: BOOK OF MORMON GEOGRAPHY

...In that Empire, the Art of Cartography attained such Perfection that the map of a single Province occupied the entirety of a City, and the map of the Empire, the entirety of a Province. In time, those Unconscionable Maps no longer satisfied, and the Cartographers Guilds struck a Map of the Empire whose size was that of the Empire, and which coincided point for point with it. The following Generations, who were not so fond of the Study of Cartography as their Forebears had been, saw that that vast Map was Useless, and not without some Pitilessness was it, that they delivered it up to the Inclemencies of Sun and Winters. In the Deserts of the West, still today, there are Tattered Ruins of that Map, inhabited by Animals and Beggars; in all the Land there is no other Relic of the Disciplines of Geography. —Suarez Miranda, Viajes devarones prudentes, Libro IV, Cap. XLV, Lerida, 1658, trans. Jorge Luis Borges

The simulacrum is never that which conceals the truth—it is the truth which conceals that there is none. The simulacrum is true. – Ecclesiastes, Jean Baudrillard

Translation

We say the map is different from the territory. But what is the territory? ...as you push the question back, what you find is an infinite regress, an infinite series of maps...maps of maps, ad infinitum. - Gregory Bateson, "Form, Substance and Difference"

It is difficult to see how Alfred Korzybski's observation that "a map is not the territory" applies when one is mapping something like the imagined terrain of the Book of Mormon. Indeed, the act of mapping produces the terrain, or continues the production.

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And doubly so, since mapping the Book of Mormon has always proven to be a political act—whether the mapper was aware of it or not—and often a polemical one. Accordingly, like Borges’ second-generation imperialists, though for strategically political and PR reasons, church leaders have almost completely backed off of engaging in or endorsing in any official way any efforts to identify actual geographical locations or artifacts as Book of Mormon lands, beyond simply recognizing that it occurred in the Americas. But the effort to map the Book of Mormon onto the American landscape cartographically is continued by independent scholars, hobbyists, bloggers, and cottage geography industries. While their concerns and motivations often seem to be their own fights amongst each other, or an effort to vindicate the Book of Mormon, or to prop up their own brand of politics (like American exceptionalism)—or to make money—their mapping has real consequences for Native peoples, or at least significance, as a factor in shaping indigenous subjectivities. Who one is is largely a product of where one imagines oneself and one’s ancestors to be and to have been. Mapping the correct location of the Promised Land can be a fraught enterprise, particularly for indigenous peoples. Connections are made and broken, depending on where one maps. Through the act of mapping, homelands are created, claimed, reclaimed, and taken.

They Pushed Us Up Here

To Edith Green (Catawba), an accurate understanding of Book of Mormon geography—where the story took place—is integral to correct interpretation. In Edith Green’s mental geography—one she shares with many other Latter-day Saints—the majority of the story takes place in “the southern part of the Americas,” in South and
Central America. Only toward the end of the narrative do the people move into North America. Though the Book of Mormon text does not make reference to any geographical landmarks that can be easily identified by contemporary place names, references to the “land southward” and “land northward” separated by a “narrow neck of land” have traditionally been interpreted by many Mormons to be references to North and South America, separated by the Isthmus of Darien/Panama, or Central America more generally. It narrates a gradual migration of the Nephite people (and some Lamanite converts) from the “land southward,” pushed by warring and marauding Lamanites, into the “land northward.”

Book of Mormon geography has, however, been an ever-morphing and politically fraught venture. During the 1970s and ’80s, BYU Anthropology professor John L. Sorenson promoted and popularized a “limited geography” model of the Book of Mormon, suggesting that the entire Book of Mormon narrative takes place somewhere near the Yucatan Peninsula in Central America, and that Book of Mormon people in reality made up only a small percentage of a much larger Indigenous population. More recently, Rod L. Meldrum has popularized a North American “heartland theory,” placing the entire narrative of the Book of Mormon within the Great Lakes Region (with the “narrow neck of land” running between Lake Ontario and Lake Erie). These “limited geography” and limited population

5 For an overview of how early Mormons tended to read this narrative geography onto the Americans, see Dan Vogel, Indian Origins and the Book of Mormon (Salt Lake City: Signature Book, 1986), 30-31.

6 Sorenson was prolific on the topic; a popular and representative work is John L. Sorenson, An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon (Provo, UT: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 1985).

7 Rod L. Meldrum has likewise been prolific and has reached a wide audience with his DVD series and web presence as well as his published books. For a list of his works, see his web page, Book of Mormon Evidence, at <http://www.bookofmormonevidence.org/index.php>.
models have grown in popularity in response to DNA research,\(^8\) which has not typically borne out a Middle Eastern provenance for the vast majority of Indigenous Americans, and due to the political leanings, at least for the “heartland model,” of proponents.\(^9\) Others have proposed a number of other theories and models (including one that argues for a since-sunken landmass in the Gulf of Mexico with Florida as the “narrow neck of land”). Church leaders have been hesitant to take a stance on the issue and many members have followed suit, satisfied, as Sorenson put it (despite his specificity elsewhere), that “the Book of Mormon account did take place somewhere.”\(^10\) Many Latter-day Saints continue to hold to, or simply assume, a hemispheric model like early Saints did.

Edith Green seems to locate most of the Book of Mormon events as taking place in Mesoamerica. She explained this to me in the context of her anthropological coursework as an Archaeology major in college.

I majored in archaeology, but you have to take three classes in every field in anthropology, regardless of what field you go into. ...In cultural anthropology, ...they gave me India...[and] Africa. And then I got one in South America. I didn't mind that because I wanted the part in Mesoamerica. So that South American one was all right with me.


\(^9\) “Heartland Model” promoters often cite Book of Mormon prophesies referring to the Promised Land as a prophesied “land of liberty,” and argue that such a description does not fit South or Central America and must refer to the United States. See, for example, Rod L. Meldrum, “The Scriptural Basis for the Heartland Model,” at The FIRM Foundation, <http://www.firmlds.org/feature.php?id=18>.

I asked her later why she wanted to study Mesoamerica and she explained—as though it should be perfectly obvious to me—“Because...that's Book of Mormon land!”

Edith’s description of her anthropology coursework, and her subsequent engagement with anthropological and archaeological narratives of Indigenous migration, brought out certain tensions between the sometimes competing but mutually constitutive narratives that inform her subjectivity. This tension at times demonstrates how closely intertwined her Catawba narrative identity and her sense of Book of Mormon lineage have become, both formed in conversation with historical, linguistic anthropological, and archaeological discourse. For example, when I asked her where Catawba people come from, she replied

EG: Well, we’re supposed to be branch of the Sioux. Our language is a Sioux dialect language. And, um, I guess probably we came—just my opinion again—from the snake mounds in the Missouri. You’ve heard of the snake mounds up there? I think we may have come, branched off from there and come down here.

ST: Okay. What about before that?
EG: Well, we came from South America! We came from Mesoamerica with those mean Lamanites behind us! [laughs]

This comment also seems to suggest that for Edith, Book of Mormon lineage and identity is a hemispheric Indigenous identity, focused on the Americas. It strikes me as significant that her anthropological and archaeological interests drew her to Mesoamerica and not to Jerusalem—to “Book of Mormon Land” rather than the Holy Land. It would seem implicit in her acceptance of Book of Mormon lineage that she would consider her ancestry to extend from Jerusalem, where the Book of Mormon narrative begins, and if questioned on this

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11 When I asked her if she had been to Mesoamerica, she replied: “I’d love to go down there. I’d love to be the one to find the cave where all those Book of Mormon records are [breathes in excitedly]—wouldn't that be sum'in? Find the brass plates in there... [sighs] I guess we—and I wonder sometimes, are we gonna get those before the millennium? We might not get 'em until the millennium. Cause it’s close. I have a feeling: it’s close. But, um, that would really—I’d love to be able to read those...”
matter, I assume she would likely acknowledge this. But she did not voluntarily make this connection in my conversations with her. Her focus and emphasis was on South and Central America and the gradual migration into North America. As far as one could gather from my conversations with her, the story begins in South America. Coupled with her reading, depicted above, of contemporary Mexican and South American migration into the U.S. as a prophesied Indigenous gathering—“He’s getting ready for us to get together”—Edith Green’s conception of Book of Mormon descent and identity seems to be basically equivalent to a hemispheric Indigenous identity. Thus, while the Book of Mormon is technically a migration narrative, narrating Nephite/Lamanites as Israelites from Jerusalem, since Edith Green’s reading (insofar as it can be represented by my interviews with her) tacitly downplays a Near-Eastern diffusionist narrative (by silence, at least), it might functionally be more closely aligned with autochthonous creation or emergence narratives, though on a hemispheric-Indigenous rather than a particular-tribal level.

Edith Green’s rejection or modification of certain archaeological and anthropological narratives also demonstrates how closely she identifies her Indigenous identity with Book of Mormon peoples. Speaking of archaeologists and anthropologists she encountered in college, she said:

EG: Well they think that because the women couldn’t raise food anymore that they migrated up this way. That’s the way anthropologists think. But, you know, as members of the church, we know that they were—we were fightin’ the war and we came up this way. And then, I guess the majority of them stayed out west. Maybe they were tired of marching. But, those were the Lamanites that were forcing us out, because they were behind us. So those are the mean ones out there! [laughs] ST: Out where?
EG: Out west! [laughs]

The corrective shift from “they were” to “we were” in the paragraph quoted above demonstrates how closely Edith Green identifies with the people in the Book of Mormon.
Not only are they her distant ancestors, but they are we: "we were fightin' the war and came up this way." Her differentiation of that we from "those mean Lamanites" who forced them out of the land southward further illustrates that she identifies specifically with a select group of Book of Mormon people—those being driven northward by the "Lamanites," the "means ones," the majority of whom, she states, stayed "out west."12

Her identification of western tribes, jokingly, as "mean ones" (and as the descendants of the Lamanites) is intriguing. As several Indigenous scholars have pointed out, American Indians of the Southeast have had to fight an uphill battle in gaining recognition as authentically Indigenous peoples.13 As Vine Deloria points out, since the most prominent Southeastern Tribes were removed (though not totally) from the Southeast, they have largely disappeared from American mainstream consciousness, perhaps willingly so.14 According to this popular narrative "real Indians,"—those who look like Indians (i.e., match the phenotypic and material expectations of most Americans)—are located out West, and especially in the desert of the Southwest, the "wild West."15 This juxtaposition of recognition/authenticity (of western tribes) and invisibility/inauthenticity (for southeastern tribes) may sometimes lead to envy of western tribes. Edith Green's

12 This East-West divide between "us" and "the mean ones out there"/"Lamanites" is intriguing. As she quipped elsewhere: "it was the bad brethren that chased us good ones up here. And naturally I'm going to put myself in with the good ones [laughs]. ...Of course I believe that the best ones are the Catawbas" [laughs].


dualistic positioning of Southeastern vs. Western Indians incorporates both groups within a Book of Mormon anthropology, but affords Southeastern tribes a more positive position, by associating Western tribes with “Lamanites.” This might also reflect her own experience spending the majority of her adult life out West, as someone who presumably had to fight for recognition as an authentic Native American—in a place where most people have never heard of Catawba Indians—and her decision, in her retirement, to move back to Catawba. I do not want to make too much of this point, however, as Green assured me, on follow up, that she does not think western tribes are mean. She was simply teasing. She has many friends there.

“It’s here”: Reclaiming North America

Carolyn Foote (pseudonym) would not agree with Edith Green’s reading of Book of Mormon geography. Not completely. There are parts both of them probably would agree on, but to Foote, the events described in the Book of Mormon all occurred in North America, and specifically in the land we now call the United States, or simply America: “the land of the free.” It could not have taken place in South America. None of it. “The Book of Mormon is America—here. Not South America. It’s the American Indians.”

Foote came to this realization through her study of Rod Meldrum’s “heartland theory,” referenced briefly above. Foote and her husband watch one of Meldrum’s several DVDs—all 4.5 hours of it—at least once a year on Superbowl Sunday instead of watching the Superbowl. She is very excited about them. She had grown up thinking of the Book of Mormon events as all taking place in South America, since that is the way it is depicted in most Book of Mormon artwork and it is an idea promoted by many LDS scholars. But
Meldrum’s heartland theory completely changed the way she reads the text. “When you watch these, you would never look at your Book of Mormon in the same light,” she explained. But the main point she wanted to make, and the greatest realization this geographic model brought to her, had to do with her ancestors. “And to me, when I heard that,” she said, referring to Meldrum’s model, “it’s like, that’s why the Catawbas converted. Because they knew—they saw that as their ancestors... They are part of that people.”

Carolyn Foote is a descendant of one of the five Catawba families who migrated away from the Catawba Nation after joining the Mormon Church. Though many of these migrants were prominent members of the Catawba Nation, events that occurred after they left the nation precluded them or their descendants from being included on tribal rolls when the Catawba people gained federal recognition as a modern American Indian nation in 1943 (as discussed in chapter 2). This is not something Carolyn Foote or many other Western Catawba people agree with, but my point here is to contextualize Carolyn Foote’s reading of Book of Mormon geography. The heartland model helped her to connect the Book of Mormon to Catawba people, to her people, as she sees it. To her people who, as she also sees it, rejected her. Yet, even as it offers her such a connection, the heartland model, in turn, takes the Book of Mormon away from South America, from those Indigenous people. It takes it back, placing the emphasis on Native North Americans, where it began. And, perhaps in a sense, it gives Carolyn Foote a people she can belong to. But taking back is to also take away. For example, some North-America-Only models speculate that the Nephite character Hagoth—whom many Pacific Islanders articulate as their link to Book of Mormon
indigeneity and Israelite lineage—actually set sail in one of the Great Lakes, not the Pacific Ocean, thus robbing Pacific Islanders of their connection to Nephite-Israelite identity.\textsuperscript{16}

Meldrum does not place Book of Mormon events exactly in the Catawba homeland. But it is apparently close enough. His model is centered in “the Ohios,” as Foote explained (using nineteenth-century diction reminiscent of something Joseph Smith might say, and probably echoing Meldrum), and, unsurprisingly, on “the mound people of the Ohios.”\textsuperscript{17} “In the Book of Mormon they built these big mounds for protection,” Carolyn’s father chimed in (he was also in the room). But some of the evidence Meldrum cites is found further south. At more than one point in our conversation she came back to a “temple foundation” uncovered in Tennessee, one that is very similar in its layout, apparently, to Solomon’s Temple (much more so than the pyramids of South America). That gets things a little closer to home.

Meldrum claims, as Foote explained to me, that the Smithsonian has intentionally tried to cover up some of this Book of Mormon evidence. As Foote interpreted this, she believes that the Smithsonian “wanted to be able to disprove the fact that the Indians were smart... They wanted to keep them as dumb Indians, you know. And so they covered up a


\textsuperscript{17} Nineteenth-century “moundbuilder” narratives demonstrate several similarities to the Book of Mormon, attributing the mound civilizations to a vanished white race that was destroyed by dark-skinned savages. In fact, some have classified The Book of Mormon as a long and developed example of a moundbuilder narrative. See Curtis Dahl, “Mound-Builders, Mormons, and William Cullen Bryant,” The New England Quarterly 34.2 (June 1961): 178-90.
lot of things.” Thus the Book of Mormon and particularly Book of Mormon archaeology, as Foote sees it, vindicates American Indian people by showing that they had ingenuity.

Of course, Meldrum’s motivation in expressing the heartland theory is largely patriotic; that is, it is politically conservative and celebratory of American freedom. One of the reasons he cites for placing the Book of Mormon in a U.S. land context is because of verses in the Book of Mormon referring to Promised Land as a free land. Some of this came through too in my conversation with the Foote family. Reiterating one of Meldrum’s reasons for placing the Book of Mormon where he does, Foote stated, “this is the land of the free. They came to a free land, you know. And...when you read the Book of Mormon, after you’ve seen his stuff it’s like, yeah, it’s here, it’s not South America.” A point proponents of the North-America-Only camp sometimes use to exclude South America is the fact that so much socialist revolution has occurred there, rendering it, to Americans on the political Right, an unfree land. While the Footes did not put it quite like that, this point was hinted at in the following joint monologue between Carolyn (A) and her mother (B):

A: The freedoms that we have—you know, the Book of Mormon came to the land of the free. This is the only land that has truly been free.


A: They are part of, but, the United States of America... You know, yes, a lot of people put Canada [in]; they are our brothers and, you know, they're next door neighbors; and, yes, South America is to a point too. But this is the land of the free. This is where...they came, to the Promised Land.

B: And that's what this land is called, not South America.

A: Yeah, this is the Promised Land.

Thus, the Foote family’s reading of the heartland model is every bit as patriotic as Meldrum’s. And though his theory is ostensibly based on exhaustive “evidence”—which
Foote frequently cited—the motivation is clearly ideological and political as well. Perhaps becoming conscious of the exclusionary tone of such rhetoric, however, Foote also stated that she was quite certain that Christ also visited South America.\textsuperscript{18} “When Christ came,” she explained, “he said there’s other sheep I have. And so I’m sure that he went to South America. You know, there’s other places that he went. He didn’t just come here. He had other sheep that he went to go and administer unto them. And so I have no doubt that he went to South America. But as far as the landing and where Nephi and Lehi went, after you know this information,...it fits a lot better.”\textsuperscript{19}

Thus, the heartland model brings the Book of Mormon back home, to North America, to the “land of the free,” where it all began. “When Joseph Smith told the missionaries to go out,” Foote explained, referring to the first mission to the Lamanites, “who did he tell to go teach? He didn’t tell them to go to South America and teach the South Americans. Yes, eventually they did. He said, ‘You go teach the Lamanite people. You go teach the Indians of their people.’ And so they went to the Indians and started teaching them of the Book of Mormon.”

Foote is not the first to note that Mormon focus on Lamanites began in Native North America and then shifted southward, seeming to forget Native North Americans in their

\textsuperscript{18} This topic came up after our conversation had moved to the mythology of a “great white god”—supposedly believed in by Indigenous peoples, often equated with Quetzalcoatl, and used to explain why the Incas purportedly thought Cortez was a god. I mentioned how that purported legend has often been used by Mormons as evidence for a South American setting for the Book of Mormon, as a place where Jesus Christ—the “great white god”—appeared, since that is a scene depicted in the Book of Mormon. Thus, Foote’s explanation could be at least in part a response to that argument for a South American setting.

\textsuperscript{19} Foote’s language just following these observations demonstrates just how preoccupied heartland model articulations can be with nation-state politics: “I have no doubt that Christ appeared to other countries” (emphasis mine). This came just after her admission that she had once thought of Argentines as Lamanites, but does not any longer.
focus on South Americans. As Ida Yellowman (Navajo), stated: “I thought at one time the Native Americans were the Lamanites, and that all it was. All the sudden today there’s Polynesians, there’s Hispanics, some I don’t even know what they are. So, are we more confused today? And not sure who we are? All the sudden everybody’s a Lamanite because everybody’s dark-skinned?” As sociologist Armand Mauss points out, the phenomenal success of church growth among “Lamanite” peoples in South and Central America, and church leaders’ disappointment in their relatively unfulfilled expectations among Native North Americans, gradually shifted the attention of church leaders and the allocation of resources toward Lamanite peoples in those southern lands and away from Native North Americans, a process Mauss calls the “seeming eclipse” of the day of the Lamanite in North America. This was attended, he argues, by a concurrent shift in thinking about where the remnants of Israel spoken of in the Book of Mormon—inheritors of the promises prophesied therein—were located. This included mapping, both in terms of cartography and visual representation in artwork, illustrations, animated Book of Mormon films for children, and so forth. Increasingly, Indigenous peoples in South and Central America and in the Pacific Islands became the Lamanites of Book of Mormon prophecy.

And so for some Native North American Latter-day Saints, or those who want to lay claim to a contested indigenous identity, North-America-Only models like Meldrum’s heartland model provide a resource for reclaiming, for re-establishing a connection, and for articulating a Book of Mormon Indigeneity.

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20 Yellowman was interviewed and filmed in the documentary film In Laman’s Terms: Looking at Lamanite Identity, directed by Navajo-Diné filmmaker Angelo Baca, Taking It Back Productions, University of Washington, Native Voices, 2008.

21 Mauss, All Abraham’s Children, 95-98, chapter 5.
“Not so much with the Northern Tribes”

If Foote wants to reclaim Lamanite identity for North America, other North American Indigenous people don’t think it quite fits. Ernst Jones (pseudonym) is a citizen of the Spokane Tribe of Indians, though I met him in the Blackfeet Nation. He was raised as a Latter-day Saint in the Spokane Indian Reservation, located within the boundaries of the state of Washington—a community with a very small LDS population, he explained. He explained that he “always liked the story of Nephi, and Lehi... That was one of my earliest childhood hero favorites.” I asked him if it was ever presented to him as a history of American Indian people. “Yes, definitely,” he replied. But when I asked him how that set with him, there was a pause and then he replied, “I personally could never make the correlation.” And then he proceeded to do exactly the opposite of what Carolyn Foote did. “I’m kind of a history buff,” he explained, “and I’ve explored, you know, the Maya and the Inca, the Aztec... I can see the correlation there, I guess, but not so much with the northern tribes.” Thus, despite an ostensibly shared Indigeneity that is supposed to link all Indigenous peoples of the western hemisphere—according to a colonial (or counter-colonial) narrative—when Jones reads the Book of Mormon, he is not reading about people he connects to as his ancestors; he is reading about the ancestors of the exotic other: the Maya, the Inca, the Aztec. The Indigenous peoples of South and Central America. An unfamiliar history he can imagine and explore. But that is not the only history in which he is interested. There is also history in the ground. Of the other others. Like the early Saints unearthing the skeletal remains of an Indigenous person that Joseph Smith identified as
Zelph, the “white Lamanite,” Jones is also interested in “the bog people…the highly industrialized Caucasians that were found in the bogs…somewhere down south, Georgia or something” (he learned about them on the Discovery Channel). He recognizes that “there are questions” about these people. “I kind of question, hey, were those something out of the Book of Mormon…” (Interestingly, he didn’t say anything about Kennewick Man, who might have struck a little too close to home.23)

But if Jones shares with many Latter-day Saints a reflex to look southward to see Nephites and Lamanites—at least in part because of the “large disconnect between modern Native American cultures” and those he reads about in the Book of Mormon (something white Mormons cannot feel quite as personally as he does)—he still does interpret some of the promises and blessings described in the Book of Mormon as pertaining to Native North American peoples. Jones described how he felt he and his wife were led by prayer in their decision to move to the Blackfeet Nation, where he had previously declined a job offer. He described having a feeling that there was something he needed to do there. After moving, he prayed to know what he should do and then read “the prelude to the Book of Mormon” where it talks about how “from the non-Indians to the Indians would come the doctrine to the people.” As he drove around the nation and saw “the poverty and the misery and pain that’s every day here” he felt very keenly “how this place really, sorely needs the gospel. I

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22 In June of 1834 Joseph Smith and a group of Latter-day Saints unearthed a skeleton from mound in Illinois, which Smith identified as a Lamanite warrior named Zelph and stated that “The curse was taken from him.” Multiple journal accounts from those who attended him record Smith as saying that Zelph was a white Lamanite, while Ezra Booth remembered his saying he was a Nephite. See “History, 1838-1856, Volume A-1 [23 December 1805-30 August 1834],” Joseph Smith Papers; and Reuben McBride reminiscence, undated, Church History Library, Salt Lake City, Utah. See also Dougherty, “Land of the Jewish Indians,” chapter 4.

mean, plain and simple. You know, programs and monies and dollars for this, that, and the other things—when it comes right down to it, that’s not it. They need their families rebuilt, they need structure, they need...the gospel. And I think that is the only thing that is going to change this land.” Thus, if he did not connect with the cultures imagined and described in the Book of Mormon, he felt keenly the needed blessings that are promised to people who had been reduced by Euroamerican colonialism (which is, of course, also prophesied in the Book of Mormon).

Thus, if Jones tends to read the ancient history as occurring “down south,” he does so for slightly different reasons than other Latter-day Saints who shifted their attention southward out of their disappointment at the failure of their expectations for the Native North Americans to, as the Book of Mormon puts it, “blossom as the rose.” For many Mormons, including some church leaders, this dashed expectation suggested that perhaps they were looking at the wrong Lamanites. Perhaps the Book of Mormon promises referred to and applied to those peoples where the book took place—in South and Central America. For Jones, while he felt a “large disconnect” between his own people and the people described as Lamanites, he felt keenly the need for those promised blessings. He has, accordingly, as president of the Cutbank Branch, taken mission presidents to task for neglecting reservation communities, for dumping problem missionaries there, and for closing the Browning Branch on the reservation for long periods of time in the past. He wants those blessings for the Blackfeet people and is determined to claim them. It is perhaps with these desires in mind—for the best interests of the Blackfeet people—that he is open to the possibility that maybe they are descendants of the Nephites and Lamanites.

24 See Mauss, All Abraham’s Children, chapter 4; and introduction, above.
after all. "It wouldn't surprise me at all if they ever made a historical link between the Native American tribes of the North and the South," he said, "you know, Central America, Book of Mormon type things, because, in the later stories the Nephites and the Lamanites both migrated north, and there's remnants of tribes that were pretty technologically advanced...that came north, but now there's no remnant of them at all... So, to eventually find out that the Blackfeet...or even some of the Salish tribes like where I'm from, have some kind of connection there, wouldn't surprise me at all." Thus, if the colonial imaginary of Lamanites and Nephites, as described, doesn't quite correlate with the northern tribes, there is that final migration north, which just might carry those blessings and promises to a people hit hard by colonial rule who, in Jones's view, could definitely use a blessing.

Conclusion

Just as none of us is outside or beyond geography, none of us is completely free from the struggle over geography. That struggle is complex and interesting because it is not only about soldiers and cannons but also about ideas, about forms, about images and imaginings. –Edward Said, Culture and Imperialism

If imaginative geographies can be tools used by imperial powers to construct an imperial and active self against a passive, colonized other—to appropriate a line from the Book of Mormon prophet Lehi: things to act and things to be acted upon (2 Nephi 2:13)—the colonized others do not remain simply passive as they were imagined. They read back and imagine geographies on and of their own for their own purposes. While Book of Mormon geographers have not always been actively involved in the colonizing of those they imagine—though at times they have—and may have been more concerned with

vindicating the historicity of their sacred text, Book of Mormon mapping is never apolitical or without real-world effects for those whose lands—and Indigeneity—are mapped. Church leaders have found it advantageous to refrain from engaging actively in the fraught terrain of Book of Mormon cartography and have instead allowed the map to be ambiguous, mobile, and thus expansive; in short, equivalent in scale to the hemispheric empire itself (it moves wherever people will take it and, for the most part, they let it go there—with a few exceptions). But despite these larger and varied motivations, Indigenous peoples have mapped and read for their own purposes, though these have not always been wholly separate from those of other, non-Indigenous mappers. For Edith Green, Book of Mormon geography enables the articulation of a hemispheric Indigeneity, linking North and South America in an effectively autochthonous, eschatological drama of a triumphant indigeneity. It has provided a flexible resource for both resistance to and engagement with other anthropological models.

For Carolyn Foote, a more exclusive North-America-Only geography provides her with grounds for reclaiming an Indigeneity that had migrated southward and been lost to North Americans, she feels, while simultaneously providing, she believes, a connection to the tribe that both recognizes her as kin and rejects her as citizen. Her reading is not free from the patriotic American politics of cottage-industry Heartland mappers such as Rod Meldrum—an entanglement—and a denigration of South America and Mexico as “unfree” and thus not “promised land” material spaces. However, her utilization of Meldrum’s model

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26 When mapping involves the production of new scripture and the assumption of a prophetic stance, church leaders have been less amenable, though these have also sometimes been strategically ignored. See Matthew Bowman, "Matthew Philip Gill and Joseph Smith: the Dynamics of Mormon Schism," *Nova Religio* (February 2011): 42–63; and Nemanhah Band, *The Mentinah Records* (Orem, UT: Mentinah Publishing, 2006).
to lay claim to a North American Israelite indigeneity and to articulate Catawbas as Book of Mormon people, while participating in Meldrum and company’s project(s), strikes me as a separate project in its own right, one concerned specifically with an intense desire to articulate and inhabit a recognized Indigeneity.

Sometimes the maps don’t quite line up. For Ernst Jones, as a northern Spokane, the descriptions of Lamanites and Nephites never quite lined up with his own lived experience or sense of his people’s history. Imagining exotic locations and peoples, such as Aztecs, Incas, and Mayan peoples, or the discoveries of ostensibly white indigenes, such as the “Bog People,” proves to be a more natural mapping. Lamanites and Nephites are the exotic other, in books and in the ground and on the Discovery Channel. And yet, when it comes to Book of Mormon promises, then the map becomes a little more flexible. Maybe we did migrate up here from “down there.” When articulating a Book of Mormon indigeneity might promise much needed resources for promoting the well-being of the people—as Jace Weaver put it, “that the people might live”—then Book of Mormon mapping, at least as possibility, adjusts accordingly. Articulation is an ongoing project—or, as James Clifford described Indigeneity, a work in progress27—linking up peoples, spaces, categories, and promised blessings often, as in the case of Jones, in an effort to consolidate the sovereignty and well-being of Indigenous peoples.


The gospel gives us identity. It answers for us the slippery questions that still perplex so many of my people: What am I? An Indian? An Aborigine? An indigenous person? a grassroots person? First Nation? The Church, through its prophets and scriptures, answers these questions.

The above quote is taken from an essay titled “Plucked from the Ashes,” printed first in the journal Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought, and later anthologized in James Treat’s Native and Christian: Indigenous Voices on Religious Identity in the United States and Canada. It is an autobiographical piece, told in first-person voice and attributed to Clem Bear Chief as author—though as I learned from Bear Chief, it was probably recorded, transcribed, and edited by someone else. It tells the story of Bear Chief’s conversion to the Mormon Church, a church he had despised from his youth, as he explains in the piece. His life had fallen apart; he had succumbed to alcoholism, had driven his family away, had spent all of his money, and he wanted to die. He knelt before a crucifix (he attended a Catholic residential school for part of his youth) and pled for comfort. In his despair he remembered his grandmother addressing an “unseen being” as Nin’non. And so, as a last resort, he prayed to Nin’non and promised that if he returned his family, he would try his
best to be a good father and a good person. He also asked Nin’non to “send us one of your churches so we can join it without question this time.”

Soon after, his wife and children returned. He and his wife, Theresa, “agreed that we needed God in our marriage and in our personal lives. We wanted to join a church which would truly help us better ourselves.” They had in mind the Four-Square Gospel Church, the Jehovah’s Witnesses, the United Church, the Bahai faith or the Pentecostals because all of these churches had shown interest in them before, but they “resolved to join, without hesitation, the first church that sent representatives to our door.” Of course, those representatives were the Mormon missionaries, and despite Bear Chief’s recalled antipathy for Mormon missionaries, he allowed them in and eventually he and his family accepted baptism and became members of the LDS, or Mormon, Church. He recalls a rocky beginning to their membership, filled with significant trials, but by the time of the essay’s publication he had been ordained as a high priest and served as the leader of a Mormon congregation.

From a life in ruins, an individual is “plucked from the ashes” and finds stability and wholeness through conversion to or affiliation with a church. It is a common narrative in Mormonism, and doubtless in other faiths. This brief chapter will consider four narrative examples of individuals who have expressed a sense of loss or brokenness—often as a result of challenges introduced by colonialism—but also a sense of recovery and wholeness, or hope of a better future, achieved through Mormon narrative identities. The first two examples relate the narratives of two individuals who find hope in the promise

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that eventually Native American peoples will “blossom as the rose.” The third example explores that ways a Shoshone man uses the Book of Mormon to make sense of colonial violence. And the final example examines how a Blackfoot woman finds traces of a lost and cherished past through her reading of the Book of Mormon.

“Blossom as the Rose”

In a revelation Joseph Smith dictated in May of 1831, he told a group of missionaries who were being redirected from missionary work among American Indians to a mission among a group of Shakers, that, nonetheless, “before the great day of the Lord shall come, Jacob shall flourish in the wilderness, and the Lamanites shall blossom as the rose.” This metaphor has become a strong image in the hearts and minds of many American Indian Latter-day Saints, signifying a great rising or flourishing of Native American people in the latter days of sacred history. Though the phrase appears in one of Joseph Smith’s revelations dictated after the publication of the Book of Mormon, due to the fact that it is expressed in Book of Mormon language, it has typically been remembered, appropriately, as a Book of Mormon prophecy or promise, or as a promise in the Book of Mormon. For many Indigenous Latter-day Saints, it is a source of great inspiration and hope. For some, it comes as a hope for restoration of something that was taken or lost, or as the hope for something much better than the present condition many Native peoples find themselves in.

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3 This revelation is now published as Doctrine and Covenants section 49.
Blossoming, part I: “We Lost Our Identity”

Similar to Clement Bear Chief, above, Suzanne Bevans (Shoshone) also felt she had lost her identity, though for Bevans it was the result of being placed in white foster homes and white schools throughout her childhood. “Being Native and then being placed in Caucasian homes, it was hard because we kind of lost our identity, because we were brown and we were thrown into the white world, and taught to be a white person, learn like a white person, but yet our skins told differently.” She described how she and her siblings experiencing constant verbal abuse from her classmates at schools in a predominantly LDS area in Utah. “We didn’t really have any friends, and so it was kind of hard.” Yet, if her Mormon classmates made her life difficult through verbal abuse, she felt that the promises in the Book of Mormon gave her and her brother "inner strength” and “it helped us have the courage and strength to be able to withstand all of that.”

Suzanne’s life narrative juxtaposes and contrasts an experience of verbal abuse and discrimination in white institutions from predominantly white Mormon neighbors with the strengthening motivation she felt from the promises of the gospel. Mormon culture, then, both stripped her down and built her up. “We had to become white, in heart and mind,” she explained, “and...it was hard for me to understand that I had an identity, because I lost it.” She sees a similar situation among many Native American people who currently are, as a general rule, in a weak state. “There’s a lot of suicides, there’s a lot of alcoholism, there’s a lot of drug abuse. Especially on the reservations.” She believes that, “if they were taught the gospel, they would have a better understanding of where they are.”

In addition to the gospel and the Book of Mormon, Bevans also feels that getting to know Shoshone culture and community has helped to restore a sense of identity. After a
dysfunctional first marriage ended, she married a man who “insisted that I learn and become close to my people, the traditions, so that I could finally find myself, find my own identity.” She became active in the tribe, learned about Shoshone culture at the tribe’s cultural center and from other tribal members, and even served a term on the tribal council, all of which helped her “to become more Native than I was before.” She described this as an “eye-awakening” experience and a “neat journey.” It gave her a “niche in life” and helped her “to realize that I’m just as unique and special as everybody else.” “I can be who I am supposed to be instead of pretend I’m somebody that I’m not.”

Thus, to Bevans, recovering from the trauma of being culturally white-washed as a child and stripped of her identity and sense of self, has come from gaining a sense of her Shoshone culture and tribal belonging, and from the promises in the Book of Mormon. “The Book of Mormon has a lot of special meaning to us and our people and promises if we live worthy,” she explained. Her understanding of these promises can be traced back to a seminary teacher who took an interest in her when she was young, when she was living in a foster home in a small Utah town and attending public school (including either release-time or early-morning seminary for religious instruction). “He made the Book of Mormon come alive,” she explained, “and helped me to understand better the scriptures, and how it related to us.” She thinks back to these lessons often, she explained, and in particular the promise that “We will blossom as a rose in the latter days.”

Later on in her life, when Suzanne was making her own regalia, this passage came back to her. She became emotional when she described it to me and had to pause for a moment, indicating how special and meaningful the symbol and the experience were to her: “And so, when I made my regalia, I was inspired to have white buckskin with roses
embroidered on it. And it signified that we would blossom as the rose. That’s the spiritual meaning I have to my regalia. And so, when I wear it, it is very sacred and special to me...knowing that we are promised that we will...we will be blessed.” The regalia is a fitting material metaphor of the sources of her own recovered identity, as described above: of getting to know and be a part of a Shoshone identity and community, while also finding hope in the promises of the Book of Mormon.

But if Bevans found the image of the blossoming rose to be a meaningful promise, she also discovered over the course of her life experience that the Book of Mormon could contain some thorns as well. She described at times feeling ashamed of who she was, as the Lamanites in the Book of Mormon are the majority of the time described in very negative terms. She also described feeling subtle racism at times in her experience in the church, such as when she was called to leadership positions that placed her as a teacher or leader over white sisters who didn’t seem very comfortable with such a reversal of typical power relationships. Yet, despite the negative images of Lamanites or her experiences of racism, she also felt that the stories in the Book of Mormon helped her “realize there are special people...in our race.” That point may point to a serious lack or deficiency in the public education she and her classmates received in the public schools in Utah (though this is hardly a problem unique to Utah) which did not provide historical examples of American Indian peoples she could relate to or look up to. And so she found her examples, for better or worse, in the Book of Mormon. In short, her experience with the Book of Mormon seemed to reflect the experiences of her life, by inspiring both feelings of inferiority and hope in the promise that someday soon, things will get much better, when she and her people will blossom as the rose.
Blossoming, part II: Igniting the Nations

The image of a blossoming rose as the promise of a future flourishing among Native American peoples also inspires Ernest Marceau. When I met Marceau in the Museum of the Plains Indian in the town of Browning in the Blackfeet Nation, he gave me a copy of his business card which has the image of a rose printed on it—an image he designed himself—which signifies, he explained to me, the promise in the Book of Mormon that “Native Americans will blossom like the rose.” Marceau is an artist and a citizen of the Blackfeet Nation, and he is a man with an expansive vision of the future of Native America, inspired by his reading of the Book of Mormon. He also has a vision of the role his own artwork will play in bringing about the spark that will ignite the nations through the Book of Mormon.

Marceau was raised Catholic in the Blackfeet Nation. He was exposed to some Blackfeet traditions and practice as a child; he knew a man who had a beaver bundle, which was very strong medicine, he explained. And there were other traditional beliefs and practices amongst the people when he was young, but Catholicism and Christian churches largely replaced that. When he was about eleven he encountered a Mormon missionary couple from Utah. They showed him the Book of Mormon and explained that “your ancestors wrote this book,” though this only confused him since the pictures in it looked like they were from the Middle East—there were no bundles, pipes, or headdresses—and, in reference to the ancestors he knew about, “I’d never known my great grandpas [or] any Native Americans to write a book... If we wrote anything, we wrote like pictograms on buffalo hides.” Accordingly, he “just totally disbelieved that,” but after a friend of his converted to Mormonism and after many long conversations and arguments back and forth, he began to gain a vision of just what the Book of Mormon could entail for Native
people. He came to believe that the Book of Mormon could provide direction to a people who have largely given up hope, and, further, “if we would take heed to the Book of Mormon...I think it would take care of all our hurts, all our pains, all our sorrow, and all our pointing at the Europeans and hating them, you know, all our confusion and hate and anger.”

With words that are eerily similar to those used by both Bear Chief and Bevans above, Marceau explained that “our identity got lost when the Europeans came here.” “We were labeled as this or that,” he explained, and “it sort of got lost in the shuffle. But,” he believes, “the Book of Mormon, it clears everything up. Clears it out of the way, and it brings the truth forth to you as a Native American... It heals the spirit, because Native people, like I’ve seen, definitely have a broken spirit.” Marceau described his sense that “a lot of Native Americans today, they are always trying to find something to heal that spirit, or something to get back at the Europeans, or something like that. To get more power, in a sense.” An example of this, Marceau explained, was the ledger art of Plains Indian people who were held as prisoners in the early twentieth century. Using paper given them by their captors, “They’d draw over the paper to try to get power over the Europeans or the soldiers.” Marceau used this as a metaphor for a continual effort of Native people to get over Europeans, “because you guys really gave us a bad deal. You did this and that. And today you guys ignore our reservations, you don’t really have interest in us other than the land underneath our feet.” Some Native people turn to religion in an effort to gain power to get over Europeans. Someone might start up their own church because doing so gives them a sense of power. “We’re always searching for power.” But this splintering of directions and narratives only leaves the people spent and confused. “It’s like you’re getting beat up, and,
after you got beat up, it's like, well, what's the truth? ...you may go on and try to dullen your spirit with alcohol or something else, but, you know, you are just going to continue doing that, because you have a broken spirit.” The only solution, he has come to believe, the only possibility for wholeness and healing, is a new revelation of Native American people’s true identity. Interestingly, he also finds this source of direction or potential power on paper given to him by “Europeans,” or, as he put it, “written in stone,” in the form of a book. “As Native Americans, if you so desire to really want the truth, and at the same time let things go completely, and know your identity, well then you read the Book of Mormon, and then you’ll know your true, true identity.” He compared this to piecing together a puzzle. “As Native Americans, we all live in tribes, but when you read the Book of Mormon, it puts all the tribes together...pieces them together like a puzzle. Everybody's putting pieces together, next thing you got a complete puzzle, and it’s the Book of Mormon. It's complete. There’s no piece missing. You know, that’s the truth. The solid truth.” “Just open it,” Marceau rhetorically exhorts the nations, “open it and connect with the Book of Mormon, because, the Book of Mormon is our identity.”

Marceau believes and sincerely hopes that something will come along that will ignite the nations to a realization of this identity. And his greatest hope is that his own artwork might play a role in that conflagration. “I like to dream sometimes,” Marceau explained, “that all the sudden, I became a superstar in the art world... I would like to build a really nice studio and get a life-size canvas...maybe ten feet by thirty feet...and I'd like to paint the Last Supper in the Americas, with the Twelve Nephites and Christ at the center...To me that's my most precious masterpiece that I'll ever do upon this earth... Leonardo Da Vinci did the Last Supper with Christ and his apostles in a European setting.
But I want to do this, this Last Supper setting in the Americas.” The purpose of the painting will not be self-aggrandizement, Marceau explained. As people gather around it to admire the captivating image, they will realize that it is a scene from the Book of Mormon, and Native Americans will realize that “we’re right in there. Look, look—we’re part of it. And it’s going to ignite that fuel for Native Americans.” Marceau imagines the message of the Book of Mormon spreading like fire among the nations, awakening them and bringing them together in a shared vision, not unlike—though he did not make this comparison—the Ghost Dances of the late nineteenth century. Rather than a return of the buffalo and of the dead and the world the people had known before the coming of the Europeans, this vision would carry the people forward to a utopian and millennial future with no more pain and suffering and anger and hopelessness and hate.

That’s the Book of Mormon, the light, in Native Country, because I feel like Native reservations are kind of like in a sense in the dark. There’s religion here, but the whole entire people, are like in a sense in the dark without the truth. But if they flip the switch and turn the Book of Mormon on, the light, and gather to it and understand it and feel the glow and the warmth of it and understand the truth, it’s going to better their spirits and make them stronger people. It’s like what’s written in the Book of Mormon: before the great day shall come, the Lamanites shall blossom like a rose. And to me, that’s what really made me a firm believer. That’s what really put the icing on the cake when I read the Book of Mormon. When the Heavenly Father, you know, how it’s written in there, it’s like: he never forgot about us, he never dis-included us. He has a plan always, the father always has a plan for his children. And that plan is, you know, it’s written in stone, that the Native Americans will blossom as the rose before Christ comes back. Because Christ had come to the Americas, which is written in the Book of Mormon, but he will be back again for the entire world. And he may start here, I don’t know. Because this is the chosen people, this is where the gospel was, this is where Christ’s church has brought back on earth—it’s all right here in the Americas, the land of liberty. And you know, that’s my firm belief, it’s just that spark of interest that’s got to come along...

4 In the book of 3 Nephi (chapter 18 in the current version), the resurrected Jesus Christ institutes the Lord’s Supper, or sacrament, among his Nephite disciples in a Last Supper setting reminiscent of that in the New Testament.
Marceau’s vision is expansive and fast-paced and it rolls on and on, surging in cyclical movements, repeating choice phrases and tropes: the prophecies of the Book of Mormon are “written in stone,” they will “ignite the nations,” “flip on the light,” and the Native American people will “blossom like the rose.” While Marceau’s vision conjures up a utopian dream of restoration and a perfect future, he also has a very material goal in bringing his vision about, and since his career as an artist is going well, he very well could paint his Last Supper in the Americas masterpiece.

But what I want to focus on here is that Marceau’s vision of the Book of Mormon is a Native vision, an Indigenous one. His major concern is not his own salvation or the growth of the Church, per se, or dreams about a heavenly kingdom beyond this life but the welfare of Native American peoples here and now on their reservations. He wants to see a spark spread to flame and cover all of Indian Country in a movement that improves the lives of Native American peoples, ends the pain and suffering that he sees so prevalent in Browning and other Indigenous nations he has visited. The Book of Mormon, to him, holds out the dream and promise of Native flourishing. “I always thought about that saying in the Book of Mormon: before the great day, the Lamanites shall blossom like a rose. It’s like it’s always been on my mind, ever since I’ve been reading the Book of Mormon—that’s always been the whole thing for me.” “I really truly believe the Book of Mormon. And I believe what the Father says about the Lamanites: they’ll blossom like the rose.”
Rememory and the Book of Mormon

For thinking about these last two narratives, I use Toni Morrison’s concept of “rememory,” from her novel Beloved. As Caroline Rody explains, “Rememory...functions in Morrison’s 'history' as a trope for the reimagination of one's heritage.” It is “the imaginative act that makes it possible to realize one’s latent, abiding connection to the past.” In Beloved, rememory is often related to traumatic loss and a blurring of the natural and the supernatural in the realization of a “collective memory.” Similarly, in the final two examples below, the encounter with the Book of Mormon can serve as a site for survivance and “rememory” in the face of incredible loss.

“That battle was written in the Book of Mormon”: Rememoring the Bear River Massacre

Carlos Montoya (pseudonym) is a citizen of the Northwestern Band of the Shoshone Nation and a descendent of the survivors of the Bear River Massacre (see chapter 1). At a public talk on Shoshone-Mormon history, Montoya made reference to the massacre and then stated something that got my attention: “That battle was written in the Book of Mormon.” I was intrigued. The Book of Mormon narrative, of course, is supposed to end around 400 CE, and the Bear River Massacre occurred in 1863, almost a millennium-and-a-half later and thirty years after the Book of Mormon was published, so obviously his observation here was symbolic, but the direction of the allegorical motion (if that’s what it

5 Caroline Rody, The Daughter’s Return: African-American and Caribbean Women’s Fictions of History (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 28. I recognize that “rememory” may not be a perfect fit, and that “rememory” is doing many things in Beloved that might not be pertinent here. However, I have taken the license to adapt the term for use here, for what it might highlight, and for the resonance that I do see.
is intriguing: the present, or near past, is cast backward and read into the ancient past. He continued, “The Book of Mormon is a record of my people... My people’s life was in the Book of Mormon, because they were those people whose life [was] given... The battle is something that our people know [and] will always carry with them.”

I felt I knew the Book of Mormon pretty well, from growing up with it and later studying it academically, if not religiously, but I still had no idea what event in the Book of Mormon he might be referring to, or how he might be reading it. So during the Q&A I raised my hand and asked him. As I recorded his response in my program booklet, he explained that the “battle in the Book of Mormon where people laid down and did not fight back, that battle represents what happened at Bear River.”

He is referring to a well-known story in the Book of Mormon—I knew it the moment he described it—about a group of converted Lamanites, also known as the Anti-Nephi-Lehis or “people of Ammon,” who made a covenant of peace and buried their “weapons of war,” vowing that they would never again shed blood. When they were later attacked by a group of non-converted Lamanites, instead of fighting back they lay down and began praying, allowing themselves to be slain rather than break their covenant. The similarities between the two stories are obvious: a group is attacked and slaughtered without putting up resistance (for the Shoshones it was a surprise attack in the early morning). There are of course differences, but the point here is not how well the story fits allegorically but the fact

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6 Quotations are taken from my field notes.

7 Another member of the panel of speakers, an employee of the Church History Library in Salt Lake City, provided a reference to the story as being contained in Alma 28 of the Book of Mormon.

8 The story is found in Alma 24 in the Book of Mormon. The group of converted Lamanites took upon themselves the name Anti-Nephi-Lehis after conversion and are also often referred to as “the people of Ammon.”
that he is reading a traumatic and defining moment in Shoshone memory into the Book of Mormon, making the story of the Anti-Nephi-Lehis about the Bear River Massacre.

Previously I referred to this movement as reading the present, or recent past, into the ancient past. But of course, that is probably imposing or normativizing a linear historical timeline onto memory. There seems to be much more going on here in the way Montoya reads this text and these events and thinks of them in relation to God, Shoshone people, etc. At another point in his talk, he made the following comment, which I recorded in my notes: “The Book of Mormon is the life of each one of us in this room. As we read it with the right heart, [we] can see our lives unfold.” It would seem, then, from Montoya’s reading, that the Book of Mormon provides something like a blueprint of our lives. We can see our own life in it. In this sense, the Book of Mormon is written to each one of us individually as well as collectively (as Latter-day Saints, perhaps, or perhaps, in the case of Montoya, as Shoshone or Indigenous or Lamanite people).

This method of reading is not unfamiliar to most Mormons. In the Book of Mormon the prophet Nephi encourages his people to “liken all scriptures unto us,” and this is something Mormon seminary and Sunday school teachers frequently instruct their students to do.\(^9\) Further, the Book of Mormon is basically structured this way—drawing material from the Bible as reference to Book of Mormon events—and Joseph Smith and other early Mormons frequently described themselves as fulfillment of specific bible verses they read as prophecies of events to occur in the future.\(^10\) I have also met Mormon people

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\(^9\) 1 Nephi 19:23 in the Book of Mormon. Mormon seminary refers to weekday religious classes for Mormon youth during grades 9-12.

\(^{10}\) An example of this: when one of Joseph Smith’s early scribes and financial contributors to the publication of the Book of Mormon took an early manuscript page of Book of Mormon characters to a college professor at Columbia University for verification of their authenticity and failed to return home with a certificate (Harris
who read the narrative of the Book of Mormon as an allegorical historical timeline for the
history of the United States, generally locating the present right about at the rise of the
“secret combinations” of the “Gadianton Robbers,” finding any contemporary group they
are politically opposed to—usually things like Communism and leftist agendas—as
examples of contemporary “secret combinations.”

But there is something different and more going on here. Montoya is not drawing a
lesson from the past or drawing principles out of the scriptures, and he is not finding a
cryptic phrase to make the massacre a fulfillment of scripture and sacred history, and he is
not constructing a conspiracy theory. He is connecting his people to those of the Book of
Mormon, the Bear River Massacre to the slaughter of converted Lamanites, and he connects
them so closely that upon close reading it is not entirely clear just who it is he is claiming as
his people: “The Book of Mormon is a record of my people”—the Northwestern Shoshone
or the Lamanites or all Indigenous peoples?—“My people’s life was in the Book of Mormon,
because they were those people whose life [was] given”—the Shoshones at Bear River or
the people of Ammon?—“The battle is something that our people know [and] will always
carry with them”—which battle? Both? It seems to be the only choice we are left with. The
language resists allegory. To Montoya, his people are in the Book of Mormon. It is a book
about them. It is a history of his people. The massacre at Bear River and the slaughter of the
Anti-Nephi-Lehis are not exactly one and the same—they both retain their historical
specificity—but they effectively become so. They are both his people. And thus, his people
are in the Book of Mormon. “That battle is written in the Book of Mormon.”

claims the professor wrote one and then tore it up), they looked to the book of Isaiah in the Bible and found
the whole event prophesied right there. See Givens, By the Hand of Mormon, 28-30.
In a sense, one could say that the comparison gives the Bear River Massacre the status of martyrdom for those that died. It also renders it, as traumatic as it was, still somehow a part of God’s plan, and as an event with precedent. It connects the small Northwestern Band, the unlikely survivors of unspeakable loss and trauma, to something larger: to a chosen Indigeneity that is under God’s watchful eye. That is, perhaps, part of what is going on here. The complexity of Montoya’s reading exceeds my grasp: it is always saying more than I can quite pin down. When I asked him, later, about his statement about the Bear River Massacre being in the Book of Mormon, he explained, “It was as though it was written before it ever happened. So, it’s kind of like your life unfolding. The Book of Mormon, to Indian people, hopefully is a story of their lives [from] before…Christ came to…the next time he comes. So your life is always in the same pattern.” Thus, despite unspeakable loss and violence, such a reading makes possible the comforting assurance that there is a divinely intentioned pattern to things, even events as horrific as the Bear River Massacre, which otherwise could only be seen as the incomprehensible madness of colonialism.

“That’s my grandfather”: the Book of Mormon as Ancestral Presence

Rachel Many Heads Casper believes that understanding the Blackfoot language helps her to understand the Book of Mormon, and to see that it contains, she explained, the old teachings of the Blackfoot religion. Those members of the tribe who criticize the Book of Mormon, she claims, are often among those who do not know the language well enough.
to see this. "The language is the people," she explained, "is the religion." Many of those who did not "live in the old ways" do not have the language and thus cannot see, she claims, the resonance between Blackfoot traditions and the Book of Mormon. As Rachel Many Heads Casper lives the teachings of the Book of Mormon—things like loving your neighbor and helping each other—the teachings from her childhood come back to her—"hey, I heard this before." It "just makes me feel real good," she continued, "you know, that the scripture is talking—my grandfather is talking to me." She imagined a scenario in which someone throws away a Book of Mormon. "I’d say, ‘Oh, that’s my grandfather, you know, that’s my grandfather.’"

Rachel’s grandfather seems to represent, in my conversation with her, the true Blackfoot teachings of her youth: the "old ways." She recalled that when she was young she was sometimes at home when a visitor came to visit her grandfather—often staying for weeks or months—and they would speak about traditional Blackfoot knowledge so that she could hear them speaking. "It was a library, in a sense. I was hearing things that I don’t hear outside, you know." She was told by her grandfather and his visitor to keep these teachings to herself: “You don’t say anything about this...but remember this; remember this iss-sok-sik’; that means, in the future. ‘You are going to see, you are going to hear, you will learn.’"

That knowledge and learning was cut short, however, by Rachel’s forced removal from home and placement in a residential school at the age of six. Shortly after this her

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11 Elsewhere she stated, “The language is the culture and the religion of the First Nations. When you lose it, you have lost something.”
grandfather died. "But I had enough to remember it," she explained, and the Book of Mormon helps her to remember.

It’s strange how it is. What you learn when you are very little, it comes back to you in your old age, and you say, ‘Oh, I heard that,’ you know. ‘I heard that.’ Especially when I read the Book of Mormon. Sometimes this brings tears to you, because, ‘Oh, I miss—I miss my grandparents. I miss that life. You know, it was good, protective, and everything.’

The Book of Mormon helps Rachel Many Heads to recover, she believes, a portion—an echo, a trace, a distant memory—of incredible loss. It comes to her as the memory of her lost ancestors and the teachings they imparted to her. It comes as a memory of what was taken from her, cut short by the violence of the residential schools.

Interestingly it is not Nephi or Alma that comes through to her, at least as she expressed it to me (though they might too, in other contexts). It is not the teachings of ancient Israel. It is her grandfather. It is Blackfoot teachings. “It don’t have all the little details,” she explained, referring to the Book of Mormon and the recovery of Blackfoot teachings it facilitates, but the Book of Mormon, she believes, provides her with something of or very similar to the old teachings.

At one point in our interview Rachel did reference Nephi and other Book of Mormon and contemporary LDS prophets. Interestingly, however, it was also in association with the term ‘grandfather,’ in Blackfoot. “We can refer to him as our grandfather,” she explained, referring to the LDS prophet, and she used the Blackfoot word, na-ahks’, which is also a term for chief. “He knows things,” she said in reference to the LDS prophet. “And when he says things, that’s what you do... just like in the Book of Mormon: King Noah, Nephi—they became leaders because they were the chiefs.” Nephi was a prophet because before that, he was a chief. Na-ahks’.
Thus, one might gather that Rachel embraces the Book of Mormon, in part at least, because doing so allows her to imagine that she is recovering a portion of what was lost. A portion of what her grandfather taught her. To embrace the Book of Mormon is, in a sense, to embrace her grandfather. “Oh, that’s my grandfather,” she said in reference to the Book of Mormon. She could not dismiss it or throw it away any more than she could do so to the teachings of her grandfather. In her expression, at least as she explained it to me, they have become one and the same; or, rather, the Book of Mormon has come to compensate for the loss of Blackfoot language, religion, and traditions, as embodied in the teachings of her grandfather. “The true [Blackfoot] religion is gone,” she explained, “but if you want to read about it, the Book of Mormon has it.”

Rachel seems to be using something like the Mormon concepts of apostasy and dispensationalism\(^\text{12}\) to explain this: the Blackfoot religion was a pure and true religion, but it is lost. It has been restored to them through the Book of Mormon, which recorded it, or parts of it. In this way it is not too different from Wolf Leg’s supersessionist view of the relationship between the Mormon gospel and the Okan (see chapter 9), but perhaps “restoration” is a better term—also a Mormon term. Blackfoot religion is restored through the Book of Mormon. However, it is a partial restoration, one of similarity and recovery of small bits here and there that come back to her. It is a site for triggering memory. It is also a site for survivance. In my interview with her, she referenced several younger Blackfoot people, many of them Mormon, who are succeeding in life, educationally and

\(^{12}\) In Mormonism *apostasy* is the idea that Jesus Christ’s true church and gospel was taken from the earth due to human wickedness, later to be *restored* through Mormonism. *Dispensationalism* in Mormonism is the idea that there has been a pattern of apostasies and restorations stretching back to Adam, with several dispensation heads, such as Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Peter, Joseph Smith. See Richard E. Wentz, *American Religious Traditions: The Shaping of Religion in the United States* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003).
occupationally. She refers to them as Blackfoot warriors. They have to go out in to the world, leaving their community, but they retain a knowledge and consciousness of who they are. While not all of these young Blackfoot warriors are Mormon, she does see Mormonism as one factor that has helped some of them to be strong in terms of success in the world. And while for some going out into the world as a Blackfoot warrior might mean joining the military or going to college, it can also mean, and often does mean, serving an LDS mission, attending Brigham Young University, or taking a job in Utah. While these things take them away from the Blackfoot community, they can also make them stronger, just like warriors who go out into the world and then come back home to Siksika.

In Rachel Many Heads’s expansive sense of Blackfoot survivance through Mormonism, even my own project was pulled within what she sees as a larger purpose. To her, the purpose of my coming to interview her, as a young anthropologist-ethnographer in training, was not simply to serve my own dissertation-writing purposes. It was to serve a higher purpose, even if I failed to grasp this. If nothing else, it was to serve as a nudge to her of the things she needs to do. “So whatever you have,” she explained, in reference to the research I had conducted, has got me really thinking I am going to have to do something now. Because here comes a little whiteman, boy, na-api sko-mapi—‘doing that I need to do’—for my people. To put it together. Just like the Book of Mormon is in the Egyptian form language, and then...in English now. They come together. So what you’re doing, you’re spearheading something that’s awakened those nations that you went to. They might not know it. But those that are members, they will have a little idea. But those who are really into the old ways, that grew up with it, just like myself and Clement—you know, it’s it, this is it [the Book of Mormon]. You can die with it, without any, any... just like when Abinidai was burned. I mean, there’s no way you can say, ‘No, it’s not...’ It is. You know, this is the truth. I can be burned for it because it is the truth. You can’t get away from it, you know... It’s gonna happen.

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13 This is a reference to a Book of Mormon character who has burned to death for prophesying against an iniquitous king. Mosiah 11-17 in the Book of Mormon.
Similarly with Joseph Smith, whom she described as a farm boy who took the Book of Mormon from the ground “and translated it for us.” While little whitemen like Smith and myself may have other purposes in mind with our books that are supposedly about Indigenous peoples, written for our own purposes and probably saying more about us than about them, to Many Heads, neither of those purposes quite capture the real purpose.

Smith is a conduit. I am a messenger on an errand I probably do not understand. The Book of Mormon and my fieldwork belong to them, the Blackfoot and Indigenous peoples. The purpose is to “awaken...those nations” and restore what was lost: the teachings of their ancestors, the teachings of Rachel Many Heads’s grandfather—“‘Oh, that is my grandfather,’ you know, ‘that is my grandfather’”—and to preserve Rachel Many Heads’s own words for her nieces and nephews and future generations of Blackfoot warriors. It is to persist in the face of continuous colonialism. Entangled, yes; Mormon, but also Indigenous. Still here, still Blackfoot.
CONCLUSION

I hope that it is clear by now that Lamanite, or Book of Mormon, identity, is a colonial identity. But it is also an Indigenous one. The apparent irony of this duality largely dissolves with the recognition that Indigeneity itself is a colonial category. Prior to European colonization, it is doubtful that there was any meaningful category lumping together Catawba and Shoshone and Blackfoot peoples, let alone Native American, Pacific Islander, First Nations, and the Native peoples of South America and elsewhere. It is the encounter with European colonialism that creates these categories. Similarly, the category Lamanite, which is basically if not exactly congruous with a New World Indigeneity.

However, those people who became Indigenous through the encounter with European colonialism were not simply trapped within a colonial imposition. Assertions of Indigenous identity today, by the Indigenous, are often anti- or counter-colonial acts—what cultural theorist and historian James Clifford calls indigènitude: “a vision of liberation and cultural difference that challenges, or at least redirects, the modernizing agendas of nation-states and transnational capitalism...less a coherent ideology than a concatenation of sources and projects [that] operates at multiple scales,” sustained through conceptual images that “express a transformative renewal of attachments to culture and place.”¹ By that definition, as ironic as it might seem, colonially entangled Indigenous reading of the Book of Mormon might qualify as assertions of indigènitude. Edith Green’s assertion that

¹ Clifford, Returns, 15-16.
“we are going to take our land back over,” Frank Munro’s many-storied stash of anti-colonial weapons and narrative flexibility, John Wolf Leg’s Native identity, the Crowfoot family’s complex of biblical-Israelite-Book of Mormon-Indigenous names, the survivance of the Northwestern Band of the Shoshone Nation and the Catawbas in the face of so many uncertainties, and Kainai Mormon pulpit claims to traditional Blackfoot territories—all of these are assertions of Indigeneity tangled up in Book of Mormon names, categories, and narratives. As the title to a collection of American Indian poetry aptly puts it, “changing is not vanishing.”² Indigenous Latter-day Saints are here and they are Indigenous. This does not mean that Mormonism might not pose some challenges to indigeneity and to Indigenous peoples. In an authoritarian and white-dominated church, Native peoples often find themselves subordinated to Ephraim, facing criticism for participation in Native ceremonies if they occur on Sundays, working against (or accepting) tropes that narrate their skin as the relic of an ancient curse. Yet, those situations are not too different and have their counterparts in struggles of Indigenous peoples in other, including secular spheres (which of course overlap and aren’t really separate), and in efforts to exert sovereignty in the context of U.S. politics. Blood quantum ideologies fade into and overlap with Book of Mormon prophetic whiteness, for example. But, as Jean Dennison demonstrates, to be entangled in colonialism is part of what it is to be Indigenous.³ What people make of that entanglement is Indigeneity. In that sense, then, the blood of Father

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³ Dennison, Colonial Entanglement.
Lehi is an Indigenous identity when it is articulated as such by citizens of Indigenous nations.

As I hope I have shown through these examples, Indigenous Latter-day Saints have not all simply accepted the colonial imposition of Lamanite identity. Rather, they engage the identity thoughtfully, often resisting some instantiations of it, and they value their ability to shape it to their own purposes. Native people do exert agency in colonial situations, even if not always, as Marx famously observed, within conditions of their own choosing. There are limits set in place by the logics of the text, flexible though they may be. Indigenized colonial categories both limit and enable. Such is the case with the Book of Mormon and the subjectivities that intersect with it and are informed by it.

As a study of Indigenous readings of the Book of Mormon, this dissertation has sought to contribute to the ethnography of reading. By focusing on how the text is received, read, engaged, negotiated, interpreted, and lived among and by Indigenous Latter-day Saints, this study moves beyond formal analysis of the printed text to consider how the Book of Mormon is actually “read” (and lived) by Indigenous Latter-day Saints. This is more than a reception history but an ethnography of reading as something that informs and, substantially, is a form of Indigenous subjectivity. For many Indigenous Latter-day Saints, to read the Book of Mormon is to articulate an Indigenous identity and subjectivity.

As anthropologist Thomas Murphy has pointed out, far too much of the scholarship on the Book of Mormon has failed to include and has often ignored Native voices, responses to, and readings of the Book of Mormon. Given the fact that the Book of Mormon purports

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to be about Indigenous American peoples, this would seem to be an obvious line of research. Given that it has so often been overlooked speaks to the somewhat insular concerns of much Book of Mormon scholarship. Murphy’s work, and that of Indigenous scholars such as Hokulani Aikau, Elise Boxer, and Farina King, seeks to remedy this neglect. This work joins with these others in an effort to not only include but to center the responses, viewpoints, and voices of Indigenous people. It is, after all, as Rachel Many Heads Casper points out, their book, even if it was brought forth as and has largely been dominated by white, Euroamerican representation. To recognize it as a book belonging to Indigenous Latter-day Saints is to take seriously the entanglement that is Indigenous Mormon subjectivity. Examining Book of Mormon identity as an emergent Indigenous subjectivity elucidates the larger fact that Indigeneity, and, in fact all subjectivity, is ever emergent in a perpetually new world.

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