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# Matthew Kester, *Remembering Iosepa: History, Place, and Religion in the American West*

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Review of Matthew Kester. *Remembering Iosepa: History, Place, and Religion in the American West*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2013. 240 pp., with index. \$49.95 hardcover.

*Reviewed by Hokulani K. Aikau*

*Remembering Iosepa* begins and ends in the contemporary moment. The book opens on a cold November day in Salt Lake City, Utah, as Matthew Kester, author, historian, and North Shore resident, recounts making the acquaintance of the shuttle bus driver, a young Polynesian man who was born and raised in Utah but whose family members in Hawaii are close friends with Kester. This encounter, the reader learns, is not surprising because of the long history of migration that has tied Utah and Hawaii together. The closing pages of the book transport the reader to the Polynesian Cultural Center, in Laie, Hawaii, where a fire hydrant from the Hawaiian Mormon colony of Iosepa—a settlement lovingly named in honor of Joseph F. Smith—and a *wa'a kaulua* (double-hull voyaging canoe), likewise named Iosepa, remind us that migration routes carry people and things in both directions.

In beginning and ending the book this way, Kester illustrates what the late Tongan scholar Epeli Hau'ofa describes as the world-expanding view of Oceanians. “The world of our ancestors,” Hau'ofa writes, “was a large sea full of places to explore, to make their homes in, to breed generations of seafarers like themselves. . . . The world of Oceania may no longer include the heavens and the underworld; but it certainly encompasses the great cities in Australia, New Zealand, the USA, and Canada” (quoted in Kester, *Remembering Iosepa*, p. 5). *Remembering Iosepa* is a historical account of the formation of the “world of our ancestors” as they established “routes that brought Native Hawaiians east and Mormon missionaries west to Hawai'i and laid the foundation for communities that followed” (p. 12).

At the center of a larger tale—one including the rise of the maritime trade; the role of Hawaiians in the whaling, fur, and logging industries; the impact of the gold rush in the history of the American West and in transforming Hawaii's political economy; and the establishment of the

Mormon culture region—is a story of how a relatively small Native Hawaiian Mormon community, established in 1889 in the desolate lands of Skull Valley, Utah, came to have such strong symbolic and cultural significance in both Hawaii and Utah. Although it is a small story relative to the larger story of the settlement of the American West (or, as Kester notes, Hawaii's East), the significance of the Iosepa community cannot be contained or bounded by the dates of its existence (1889–1917). Rather, the lasting significance of this settlement is evidenced by Kester's interaction with the young Polynesian men he met on his research trip to Utah—young men who call Utah home, a result of the migration of hundreds of Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders that began in the early nineteenth century and continues to this day.

In tracing the historical migration patterns of nineteenth-century Pacific Islanders, Kester provides a broad context for understanding contemporary Pacific Islander migrations. What in the nineteenth century was a seemingly small trickle has today become a major political and economic wave of Pacific Islander migrations that reaches well into the interior of the North American continent. These migrations not only had an impact wherever the Pacific Islanders settled, but they also changed Oceania. As Kester explains, “I allowed the story to expand in both directions, so what I have presented here is a narrative that tries to contextualize the history of a small settlement of Pacific Islander Mormons that teetered on the cusp of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries into the larger story of Pacific Islanders in the American West. . . . Iosepa is part of the broader story of Pacific Islanders and their journeys east and of Mormons and their journey west” (p. 166).

Kester masterfully situates the story of nineteenth-century Native Hawaiian Mormon migration within the larger seascape of Native Hawaiian and, later, Pacific Islander migrations. In doing so, he demonstrates that “Native Hawaiians in the ‘Great Basin Kingdom’ of nineteenth-century Mormonism were not . . . a historical anomaly, but rather one of many diasporic communities of Native Hawaiians that included communities in Washington, Oregon, and California” (p. 166). As Kester makes clear, this community is distinct because of the religious motivations behind the migration. However, he does not gloss over the racial

climate within which these migrations took place: “The history of race relations in nineteenth-century Utah, however, is often obscured by the history of a white community divided along religious lines. The struggle between Mormons and non-Mormons did not so much replace the discrimination, inequality, and violence common throughout the West as it has usurped it in the historical imagination” (p. 88). For readers interested in learning more about Native Hawaiian migrations, the book *Leaving Paradise* is an instructive companion to Kester’s *Remembering Iosepa*, for both works explore why *kānaka maoli* (Native Hawaiians) migrated from Hawaii, finding work on whaling ships and with logging and fur-trading companies.<sup>1</sup> Both books also document the racial climate within which nineteenth-century Native Hawaiians lived and worked, and they trace the genealogies of Native Hawaiian men who cohabited with and married Native American and First Nations women, settled on indigenous national lands, and became a part of their communities.

What Kester does very well throughout the book is present the history in vivid color. The reader is drawn into the story through vignettes about individual Native Hawaiian Latter-day Saints who make a conscious decision to emigrate from their beloved homelands to participate in the gathering of Zion. These personal stories frame Native Hawaiians not as pawns of history but as active participants in the social, political, and economic worlds in which they lived. For example, Kauleinamoku of Hawaii immigrated to Salt Lake City, Utah, in 1875. He married a Hawaiian woman (who also had migrated to Utah) and served a mission to New Zealand from 1887 to 1889. Along the way, “he [had] purchased a lot and built a home in the Warm Springs district in Salt Lake City” (p. 80). Returning from his mission, he saw that the Native Hawaiian community had grown, as had racial tensions between the new immigrants and white Mormon settlers. Kauleinamoku was one of the Native Hawaiian representatives chosen to secure a site for a colony. Subsequently, he relocated his family to Iosepa, where he lived until his death in 1899. In recounting the brief details of Kauleinamoku’s life, Kester tells a compelling story of

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1. Jean Barman and Bruce McIntyre Watson, *Leaving Paradise: Indigenous Hawaiians in the Pacific Northwest, 1787–1898* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2006).

a faithful Latter-day Saint man steadfastly dedicated to a religious ideology that called him to help build the kingdom of God on earth. Having internalized the religious narrative of the house of Israel gathering to Zion, he and his fellow Native Hawaiian coreligionists were able to withstand discrimination and ostracism in the service of their God and their church.

As a Native Hawaiian who was raised in Utah, I recognize in these stories echoes of the historical narrative I was raised with—a narrative intended to help me understand my place in the LDS Church. While the reader is given to understand how the faith and testimony of Native Hawaiian Mormons led them to accept the call to gather despite severe challenges, Kester does not allow the reader to evade the ways in which *haole* (white American) Latter-day Saints were the source of this ostracism and discrimination. He is critical of dominant historical narratives because they deflect attention from the racialization of Native Hawaiian Mormons as “Other.” It is this racialization that provided the rationale for Native Hawaiians’ removal to an isolated and desolate ranch some seventy-five miles southeast of Salt Lake City. In being attentive to how racial categories and ideologies operated in the LDS Church, in Utah, and in the American West, the reader is presented with a complex, contentious, and at times contradictory historical landscape that challenges popular conceptions of the American West and Hawaii. On a personal level, the way Kester crafted this story more accurately reflects my understanding of the place of Native Hawaiians in the LDS Church, the reasons we have been traveling between Utah and Hawaii for nearly 140 years, and our experiences as indigenous settlers.

*Remembering Iosepa* is beautifully written and accessible to a general and academic audience. I would recommend this book to my mother, who is an avid reader of Mormon and American history but is not academically trained. I would also recommend the book for adoption in undergraduate and graduate courses on the settlement of the American West; sociology and anthropology courses on migration, ethnicity, and race; and courses focused on comparative ethnic studies. For a course focused on Native Hawaiian migration, I recommend pairing this book with the aforementioned book *Leaving Paradise* and Rona Halualani’s *In*

*the Name of Hawaiians*.<sup>2</sup> One aspect of the story that Kester was not able to tell, yet one that does not diminish the overall significance of this book, is the impact of Mormon settlement on the indigenous nations in what is now Utah. For additional reading on this topic, I recommend Ned Blackhawk's *Violence over the Land: Indians and Empires in the Early American West*.<sup>3</sup>

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Review of Armand L. Mauss. *Shifting Borders and a Tattered Passport: Intellectual Journeys of a Mormon Academic*. Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2012. 280 pp. \$25.00 hardcover.

*Reviewed by David E. Campbell*

In *Shifting Borders and a Tattered Passport: Intellectual Journeys of a Mormon Academic*, Armand Mauss details how he has spent his lengthy career crossing the borders between Mormonism and the secular academy, suffering slings and arrows from both sides along the way. As a sociologist, perhaps his major accomplishment is a highly compelling theory to explain the dynamism found within Mormonism. With his theory, he has managed to (1) show social scientists why they should care about Mormonism and (2) demonstrate to Mormons why they should care

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2. Rona Tamiko Halualani, *In the Name of Hawaiians: Native Identities and Cultural Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002).

3. Ned Blackhawk, *Violence over the Land: Indians and Empires in the Early American West* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006).