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# Review of Real Native Genius: How an Ex-Slave and a White Mormon Became Famous Indians, by Angela Pulley Hudson

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Angela Pulley Hudson. *Real Native Genius: How an Ex-Slave and a White Mormon Became Famous Indians*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015.

*Reviewed by Elise Boxer*

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*Real Native Genius: How an Ex-Slave and a White Mormon Became Famous Indians* adds to the growing body of literature that probes the intersection of race, gender, sexuality, and religion in the study of Mormonism. Author Angela Hudson considers how Mormons constructed ideas of “Indianness” and how the reinforcement or subversion of those ideas “influenced nearly every aspect of antebellum culture, often in surprising ways” (p. 3). She uses the lives of “professional Indians” Warner McCary and his wife, Lucy Stanton, as a lens to explore not just how they, as non–Native Americans, accessed indigeneity, but how they constructed and shaped nineteenth-century antebellum notions of Indianness. While Hudson has “tried not to get bogged down in questions of authenticity that emphasize the genuine or spurious nature of individual claims to indigeneity” regarding McCary and Stanton’s claims of Indianness, these important questions within the framework of American Indian studies would have better informed her understanding of “playing Indian.” Hudson fails to problematize how non-Native claims of indigeneity can also be seen as an expression of white privilege and whiteness (pp. 9–10).

The process by which McCary and Stanton become and play Indian is also an expression of how they accessed whiteness. Their adoption of Indian identity was about power, the power to create and define the racialized “other.” McCary and Stanton contributed to the construction

of indigenous identity by playing Indian before audiences. Hudson uses these two performers to complicate how Indianness “was understood and performed by Native and non-Native people during a period of rapid social and economic transformation” (p. 10). Yet, instead of extending her analysis about “playing” Indian, she focuses on the notion of “passing”—that is, passing off as Indian—because it “is almost always seen as indicative of high-stakes, high-risk behavior in which discovery could lead to ostracism, imprisonment, or death” (p. 11). Because of this focus, Hudson does not fully explore the problematic ways in which McCary and Stanton constructed a racialized identity that reinforced widely held stereotypes of American Indian peoples. She also does little to demonstrate how McCary and Stanton’s experiences as “Indians” did not accurately reflect the lived experience of American Indians in the nineteenth century.

Hudson begins her book by introducing the reader to the bustling port city of Natchez, Mississippi, in 1810. A diverse group of people called Natchez home, including American Indians. Natchez bordered the western boundary of Choctaw territory and was seen by migrants as a place of opportunity. Given the rich Choctaw history in Natchez, Hudson examines various possibilities that might account for McCary’s claimed Choctaw heritage, all of which do little to clarify the origins of “Okah Tubbee,” the Choctaw name McCary adopted. In his autobiography, McCary focused on his father’s origin rather than his mother’s because her status determined whether he was free or enslaved. He referred to his mother as “‘the slave woman’ . . . [or] his ‘unnatural mother’” (p. 23). By denying his mother, McCary was denying his own upbringing as an enslaved, black child, enabling him to re-create his own history. His childhood recollections reflected popular Indian captivity narratives during this time period but still helped cement his claims to Choctaw heritage—that is, a Choctaw child stolen and sold into slavery. McCary’s enslaved status could thus be explained away and provide a way in which he could escape slavery by becoming Choctaw. While the question of Okah Tubbee’s Choctaw roots can never be fully and satisfactorily resolved, Hudson observes that McCary’s

complex origins reflect “the role of slavery in the colonization of the American South, intertwining the lives and fates of Native, European, and African-descended people” (p. 22). One major weakness of Hudson’s approach is the neglect to fully consider the enslavement of American Indian peoples and the ways that McCary’s biracial identity complicates notions of indigeneity. McCary’s preference for his Choctaw identity over being black could be useful in exploring internalized colonization and complexities of being mixed-blood in Native communities. Hudson acknowledges the fluidity of Indian identity but does not fully address how being enslaved influenced the way McCary would lay claim to indigeneity.

William McCary’s professed Indian heritage would eventually lead him to marry Lucy Stanton and convert to Mormonism. Daniel Stanton, Lucy’s father, converted to the faith in 1830, shortly after Mormon missionaries arrived in Ohio. His five daughters, including Lucy, eventually converted and became active within the Mormon religious movement. Unlike other religious movements, Mormonism welcomed everyone, including people of color, to not just convert but to develop and express their faith via “exuberant and even ecstatic exclamations of feeling, speaking in tongues, and trancelike states of possession” (p. 48). Stanton distinguished herself from other converts by “‘getting the power’ during prayer meetings . . . [by] practicing spontaneous tongue-speaking and other forms of enthusiastic worship” (p. 49). It was not clear whether she had any meaningful interactions with Native peoples or simply borrowed popular culture representations of American Indian peoples that were simultaneously reinforced by Mormon religious doctrine.

Stanton’s desire to claim Indianness was very similar to McCary’s claims of Choctaw identity. She questioned her father’s identity and believed that both her Anglo-American parents were actually of Mohawk and Delaware heritage. Stanton played Indian when she spoke “Injun” during her spiritual expressions of faith (p. 49). Stanton’s preoccupation with American Indians echoed Mormon religious beliefs that Lamanites, or American Indians, must be saved through conversion to Mormonism. Mormons “accorded them [American Indians] special

status within their religion and hung their hopes on Indian millenarianism, even as they participated in the displacement of these peoples from their homelands” (p. 49).

Hudson would have done well to interrogate how Mormons, including Stanton, were part of a larger process of American Indian removal and dispossession. Instead, she is concerned with how Stanton became “Indian.” For example, Stanton’s spiritual gift of healing, like her ability to speak “Injun,” could be explained by her claims of Indianness and shown to fit with her belief that Lamanites must be saved. Early Mormons believed that the Book of Mormon was a history of American Indian peoples whose salvation was central to God’s plan. Stanton’s marriage to McCary, a professed Indian, fulfilled not just her own personal mission of Lamanite salvation but also Mormon religious rhetoric that called upon adherents to save “‘fallen’ Lamanites” (p. 67). The marriage also gave her access to power in the Mormon church that grew increasingly restrictive toward women.

While Hudson attempts to engage American Indian history, her argument could have benefited from attention to settler colonialism theory. Patrick Wolfe’s study “Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native” is helpful here inasmuch as it provides a necessary framework for interrogating indigenous identity and removal, or what he terms “the logic of elimination.”<sup>1</sup> Wolfe argues that the “restrictive racial classification of Indians straightforwardly furthered the logic of elimination. . . . [Race] is made in the targeting.”<sup>2</sup> McCary and Stanton’s passing as Indians is problematic not just because it can be seen as erasing the lived experiences of American Indian peoples in the nineteenth century, but also because it contributes to a very limited notion of Indianness as a performance that must be palatable for public consumption.

“Indianness mattered,” Hudson’s book concludes, “but it mattered (and still matters) to different people in different, overlapping, and sometimes contradictory ways, depending on the contexts in which it

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1. Patrick Wolfe, “Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native,” *Journal of Genocide Research* 8/4 (2006): 387.

2. Wolfe, “Settler Colonialism,” 388.

is expressed and received.” In its exploration of how Indianness mattered in the nineteenth century to two people who crossed religious and racial boundaries, *Real Native Genius* illuminates how Mormons viewed and constructed notions of antebellum Indianness. In broader terms, the book also contributes to the growing body of Mormon studies informed by serious attention to intersecting issues of race, gender, sexuality, and religion.

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Shinji Takagi. *The Trek East: Mormonism Meets Japan, 1901–1968*. Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2016.

*Reviewed by Emily Anderson*

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SHINJI TAKAGI’S *The Trek East: Mormonism Meets Japan, 1901–1968* is a sweeping and detailed account of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints’ struggle to establish and sustain a mission in Japan. Organized both chronologically and thematically, it recounts the hardships and frustrations endured by the first group of missionaries who ventured to Japan between 1901 and 1924—the first attempt at establishing the Japan Mission—and the more successful second attempt initiated during the Allied occupation of Japan and further reinforced during a particularly dynamic period of leadership and activity in the 1960s. While earlier studies of Mormonism in Japan have tended to focus