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# *Mahana, You Naked!*

## MODESTY, SEXUALITY, AND RACE IN THE MORMON PACIFIC

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IN 1969, BRIGHAM Young University produced *Johnny Lingo*, a short film about a young woman from a small island in the South Pacific who is ridiculed for her ugliness and snarled, unkempt hair.[1] I first remember seeing *Johnny Lingo* at a birthday party when I was eight or nine years old. Likely eating too much cake, I watched as middle-aged women congratulated themselves on the number of cows their husbands had offered for their hand in marriage, and wondered why anyone would pay so much for large, chittering women who were far from the ideals of beauty circulating in the United States. At the end of the movie, the willingness of a skilled trader to pay eight cows—an unprecedented amount—for her bride price transforms Mahana into a beautiful woman. As a child, I nodded uncritically at her transformation.

It wasn't until I watched it again with my friends in graduate school that I began to think about its larger cultural and social meanings. What struck me was how *naked* Johnny Lingo was. Since none of the characters was explicitly marked as Mormon, it had never occurred to me to think about the nakedness of their bodies in the film. As a graduate student, however, I realized that it was a Mormon production and found myself fixated on Lingo's shoulders, chest, and waist. Why was Johnny Lingo allowed to be partially naked in a Mormon film? If he had been a white Mormon man, I would have expected him to appear fully clothed. My discomfort was partially the result of my removal from Mormon culture. Although I am not Mormon, I had been immersed in Mormon culture as a child and had never thought critically about Mormon understandings of modesty. The rules that governed Mormon bodies—deciding which parts of the body should be covered and what could be uncovered—seemed natural. The friends that I made as a graduate student in Ann Arbor, however, did not share the Mormon belief that tanned shoulders

1. *Johnny Lingo*, directed by Judge Whitaker (1969; Provo: Brigham Young University).

and uncovered knees were immodest. Eventually, however, my experiences at the University of Michigan helped me realize that Mormon ideas about the body were embedded in a particular theology and understanding of the world.

Race was also an issue. As a result of graduate school, I had become attuned to the meanings of race in ways that I had not been as a child in southeastern Idaho. I found myself wondering, Why was it okay for Johnny Lingo to be naked from the waist up but not for white Mormon missionaries? How did white Mormon men and women understand the bodies and sexuality of Polynesian members of their church? The answers to these questions lie partially in the unique position that Polynesians occupy within the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Mormon theology creates a sacred genealogy for Polynesians that connects them to the people of Israel. This identification, however, is not unambiguous. In popular Mormon theology, Polynesians are identified as both Nephites and Lamanites. The former group is portrayed as fair-skinned and generally more righteous in the Book of Mormon, while God marked the latter group with dark skin for their transgressions.[2] Mormon scripture, however, also places the Lamanites at the center of God's redemptive plan, promising that they will one day be restored to their place within God's kingdom. Jared Hickman has argued that the Book of Mormon can be read as an "Amerindian apocalypse" that deconstructs American ideas about Manifest Destiny.[3] Native Hawaiian communities decimated by the effects of American imperialism would find much in Hickman's reading of the Book of Mormon to sympathize with. The identification of brown-skinned people as Lamanites, however, has also led to casual racism within the church.

Of course, the Book of Mormon has not been the only source of Mormon ideas about Polynesia. Mormon images of the Pacific are frequently overlaid with the sexualized images of Polynesian men and women that have circulated within wider American culture.[4] According to Jane Desmond, these images create a beguiling, acquiescent vision of Polynesia that belies the existence of American colonialism.[5] They also reduce Pacific Islanders to their

2. Hokulani Aikau, *A Chosen People, A Promised Land: Mormonism and Race in Hawai'i* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012), 43–44.

3. Jared Hickman, "The Book of Mormon as an Amerindian Apocalypse," *American Literature* 86 (September 2014): 429–461.

4. Andrew Grainger, "Rugby Island Style: Paradise, Pacific People, and the Racialisation of Athletic Performance," *Junctures* 9 (June 2009): 46–50.

5. Jane Desmond, *Staging Tourism: Bodies on Display from Waikiki to Sea World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999).

physicality so that they become their bodies, "gleam[ing] like polished bronze," in the words of one 1939 travel book.[6]

This essay explores the tensions that emerged over the portrayal of Polynesians within white Mormon culture in the twentieth century. Native Hawaiian and Polynesian Mormons saw their faith not as a white import but as being firmly grounded in the experiences of their ancestors. In the mid-twentieth century, the emphasis that church leaders like Spencer W. Kimball placed upon the heritage of men and women who could claim to be descended from the people of the Book of Mormon mirrored the understanding that some Native Hawaiians and Polynesians had of their faith. It also connected Polynesians to American Indians and other indigenous Mormons, creating a pan-Lamanite identity. At the same time, however, many white Mormons were uneasy about the possibilities of interracial marriage that this emphasis represented. In Hawai'i, the tensions over the position of Polynesians within the Mormon Church became particularly apparent at the Church College of Hawai'i (renamed Brigham Young University-Hawai'i Campus in 1974) and the Polynesian Cultural Center (PCC). The Church College was opened in 1955 to provide higher education for students throughout the Pacific who had already finished their educations at local institutions.[7] In the mid-twentieth century, however, it became a space where the separation between different races threatened to come undone. Some white Mormons worried about the possibility that young white women who had been unable to find suitable husbands in Utah would marry Polynesian men. Tensions at the Polynesian Cultural Center, on the other hand, centered on the commodification of Polynesian culture and the willingness of the church to display the bodies of Polynesian students to earn money.

In this essay, I argue that tensions at the Polynesian Cultural Center and the Church College of Hawai'i were reflective of a larger ambivalence within Mormon culture about the position of Polynesian men and women that had its roots in the portrayal of the peoples of the Book of Mormon. Hokulani Aikau has argued that white Mormons simultaneously elevate Polynesians as a "chosen people" while discriminating against them within their wards and communities.[8] White Mormons frequently participate in the colonial discourses that have defined the relationship between the Pacific Islands and the

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6. Joseph Walker McSpadden, *Beautiful Hawaii* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1939), quoted in Desmond, *Staging Tourism*, 125.

7. Greg A. Prince, *David O. McKay and the Rise of Modern Mormonism* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2005), 179–180.

8. Aikau, *A Chosen People, A Promised Land*, ix–xii.

United States as a whole. The portrayal of Polynesian men and women within the church has been inflected with sexuality and the possibility of seduction. The emergence of the Church College of Hawai'i and the PCC in the mid-twentieth century coincided with a growing Native Hawaiian activism that demanded recognition of Hawaiian land claims and openly criticized the racist portrayals of Native Hawaiians in American popular culture. The convergence of the growth of this movement and the growth of BYU-Hawai'i and the PCC meant that the latter became highly politicized spaces in which Polynesian Mormons sought to understand the tensions within their identity. White leaders also sought to control the possibility present at these institutions that differences between racial groups would be erased. Although scholars have focused on the PCC as an "ethnic theme (park)" that commodifies the bodies of Polynesian students that work there, the tensions between modesty, religious faith, and racial identity have a much longer history and reach within Mormon culture.[9]

## *Sons of Mosiah: Mormon Identity in America and the Pacific*

The tensions over religious faith, sexuality, and modesty that became an important part of discussions about the Polynesian Cultural Center did not begin in the 1950s. Indeed, Mormon discussions about Polynesia had coupled concerns about sexuality with recognition of their sacred lineage as early as the nineteenth century. Louisa Barnes Pratt, who served a mission on the island of Tubuai in the mid-nineteenth century with her husband Addison, wrote that "in the principles of chastity," Polynesians "seem[ed] wreckless." Even if a woman was known as "unvirtuous" and "unchaste," she was not "denounced as unworthy of a son or brother in wedlock" as long as she reformed her habits after marriage.[10] In spite of Pratt's concerns about sexual immorality, however, she recognized Polynesians as being descended from the people of the Book of Mormon. When Pratt was asked about the Book of Mormon in the Pacific, she told her listeners that the book was about the Tahitians' "ancient fathers."[11]

The descriptions of Polynesians within Pratt's writing emphasize the tension over the place of Polynesians within Mormon theology. Although Pratt

9. Andrew Ross, *The Chicago Gangster Theory of Life: Nature's Debt to Society* (London: Verso Books, 1994), 43.

10. Louisa Barnes Pratt, *The History of Louisa Barnes Pratt: Mormon Missionary Widow and Pioneer*, ed. Donna Toland Smart (Logan: Utah State University Press, 1998), 167.

11. Ibid., 149.

recognized the divine lineage of Polynesians and other indigenous people, she saw them as fundamentally sinful. The Book of Mormon may have provided her with an explanation for this duplicity. In her diary, Louisa wrote that she felt that the Tubuai could have been "a paradise" if "the people [had] one spark of enterprise." Whatever spark they had once had, however, had been "smothered beneath the rain of ages, and swept away with the knowledge their forefathers once possessed."[12]

In spite of the ambiguous portrayal of the purported ancestors of indigenous people within the Book of Mormon, many Polynesians found a positive identity within its stories. The men and women to whom Pratt ministered adopted a refracted version of the language of white missionaries concerning their ancestors. In the twentieth century, many indigenous Mormons continued to find a positive identity within the Mormon church. They were encouraged to do so by a general effort among the LDS Church hierarchy in the mid-twentieth century to reemphasize the importance of the descendants of the people of the Book of Mormon. Early Mormons saw the Book of Mormon as being a history of indigenous people of the Americas. Mormon missionaries saw themselves as calling forth God's chosen people and rekindling the knowledge that American Indians had once had of their glorious past. Before the Second Coming, American Indians and other indigenous people would be redeemed and made "white" and "delightsome."[13] By the twentieth century, however, conflicts between American Indians and white Mormon settlers had led the church to de-emphasize the role that the redemption of the Lamanites played in Mormon theology and culture.

The 1943 ordination of Spencer W. Kimball, a businessman from Thatcher, Arizona, to the church's Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, led to a revival of interest in the fate of the Lamanites. Kimball felt as though he had been specially called to minister to American Indians and to indigenous people as a whole. On April 6, 1954, he publicly denounced Mormon racism, openly condemning a "Mrs. Anonymous" who had sent him an angry letter claiming she had never thought she would see "an Indian buck appointed a bishop—an Indian squaw to talk in the Ogden Tabernacle—[and] Indians to go through the Salt

12. Ibid., 167.

13. 2 Nephi 30:6; For early Mormon interest in Native Americans, see Ronald Walker, "Seeking the 'Remnant': The Native American during the Joseph Smith Period," *Journal of Mormon History* 19 (Spring 1993): 1–33; Ron Romig, "The Lamanite Mission," *John Whitmer Historical Association Journal* 14:1 (1994): 25–33; Leland Gentry, "Light on the 'Mission to the Lamanites,'" *BYU Studies* 36:2 (1996–1997): 226–232; and Mark Lyman Staker, *Hearken, O Ye People: The Historical Setting of Joseph Smith's Ohio Revelations* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2009), 49–69.

Lake Temple." Kimball fired back, reminding her that she was denigrating the descendants of the Israelites.[14] Referencing specific characters from the Book of Mormon—the "sons of Mosiah," "the great Nephi," and "the children of the Ammonites"—he called his listeners' attention to the connections between indigenous people and the heroes of the Book of Mormon.[15] "Do not prate your power of speech or your fearlessness," he cautioned, "unless you too could stand with the Prophet Samuel on the city wall, dodging stones and spears and arrows while trying to preach the gospel of salvation. The very descendants of this great prophet are with us. They may be Navajos or Cherokees."[16]

Kimball's speech had a powerful effect on its listeners. Eugene England, who had just been called with his wife as a missionary to Samoa, believed that the speech redeemed him and his wife of their "liberal condescension" toward Polynesians. They were "open for the first time to go and learn and to be permanently affected" by those they had been called to serve. Kimball's speech also marked the beginning of the revitalization of the church's efforts to transform the lives of American Indians.[17] Kimball supported the development of the Indian Placement Program, which arranged for thousands of Native American children to temporarily leave their families to live with white Mormon foster parents. Kimball served as a Quorum member until 1973, when he became the president of the LDS Church.

Kimball's presidency occurred at the same time as a movement in Hawai'i and the United States to revitalize and preserve indigenous cultures. Clinton Kanahele, an elementary and high school principal who had served in church leadership, worried that future generations would be unable to speak the Native Hawaiian language. To help preserve the language, he interviewed elderly Native Hawaiian men and women in 1970. What emerged out of the interviews was the deep connection that Kanahele and others felt to an Israelite past.[18] In a conversation that he had with one man, Kanahele cited the

14. Spencer W. Kimball, "The Evil of Intolerance," *Improvement Era*, June 1954, 423.

15. Ibid., 425–426.

16. Ibid., 426.

17. Eugene England, "A Small and Piercing Voice: The Sermons of Spencer W. Kimball," *BYU Studies* 25 (Fall 1985): 78.

18. There is a fascinating and extensive literature on the acceptance of a Lamanite heritage in the Pacific. Much of it, however, focuses not on Hawai'i but on New Zealand. See R. Lanier Britsch, "Maori Traditions and the Mormon Church," *New Era*, June 1981, 37–46; Peter Lineham, "The Mormon Message in the Context of Maori Culture," *Journal of Mormon History* 17 (January 1991): 62–93; Ian Barber, "Between Biculturalism and Assimilation: The Changing Place of Maori Culture in the Twentieth-Century Mormon Church," *New Zealand Journal of History* 29 (October 1995): 142–169; and Grant Underwood, "Mormonism, the Maori, and Cultural Authenticity," *Journal of Pacific History* 35 (September 2000): 133–146.

wailing that occurred when two women met as evidence that Polynesians were descended from Israel. He recalled the women "weeping" as they remembered the past, "not merely showing grief but crying unashamedly" like "the Israelites of old."[19] In another interview, Kanahele connected the Hawaiian custom of circumcising their children with a piece of bamboo to the Israelites. He believed that Native Hawaiians had continued this practice since their ancestors had landed in the islands.[20]

The Mormonism found within Kanahele's interviews was intimately joined to Native Hawaiian culture. Although white missionaries like Joseph F. Smith and Castle Murphy were important figures within the Mormon community in Hawai'i, the oral interviews emphasized the spiritual power of Native Hawaiians. With one man, Kanahele discussed Jonah Wahinepee, a Native Hawaiian Mormon missionary who was "renowned…[for] administering to the sick."[21] Another woman remembered her aunt as an extremely religious woman: "Hawaiians are accustomed from the time of our forefathers to walk with God. My tutu always walked with God. She was always praying. She did not work otherwise. Everything she seemed to know."[22] Kanahele added in one interview, "We Hawaiians are a God-fearing people; we are God observing people."[23] The descriptions that these men and women offered interwove Christianity with the fabric of life in the Native Hawaiian Mormon community. They saw themselves not as a colonized people who had lost their traditional religious customs but as a people who had reclaimed their ancient religious heritage and who were naturally drawn to God. The world of the past, of the first Native Hawaiian converts to Mormonism, had been one that

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19. Gus Kaleohano, interview with Clinton Kanahele, June 11, 1970, 19–20, Clinton Kanahele Collection, Brigham Young University, Hawai'i, Digital Collections and Archives, Lā'ie, Hawai'i, https://library.byuh.edu/sites/library.byuh.edu/files/archives/img/Clinton%20Kanahele%20Interview%20PDFs/Gus%20Kaleohano%20Interview.pdf.

20. Rose Manu and Mary Malo, interview with Clinton Kanahele, July 30, 1970, 18-19, Clinton Kanahele Collection, Brigham Young University, Hawai'i, Digital Collections and Archives, Lā'ie, Hawai'i, https://library.byuh.edu/sites/library.byuh.edu/files/archives/img/Clinton%20Kanahele%20Interview%20PDFs/Rose%20Manu%20&%20Mary%20Malo%20Interview.pdf.

21. Paul and Carrie Eli, interview with Clinton Kanahele, June 27, 1970, part 2, pg. 4, Clinton Kanahele Collection, Brigham Young University, Hawai'i, Digital Collections and Archives, Lā'ie, Hawai'i, https://library.byuh.edu/sites/library.byuh.edu/files/archives/img/Clinton%20Kanahele%20Interview%20PDFs/Paul%20&%20Carrie%20Eli%20Interview.pdf.

22. Luka Kinolau, interview with Clinton Kanahele, June 29, 1970, 26, Clinton Kanahele Collection, Brigham Young University, Hawai'i, Digital Collections and Archives, Lā'ie, Hawai'i, https://library.byuh.edu/sites/library.byuh.edu/files/archives/img/Clinton%20Kanahele%20Interview%20PDFs/Luka%20Kinolau%20Interview.pdf.

23. Rose Manu and Mary Malo, interview with Clinton Kanahele, July 30, 1970, 12.

was infused with the divine. Although Kanahele focused on Native Hawaiians, the faith of other Polynesian men and women was just as strong. Emma Lobendahn, a woman who had lived in Samoa, New Zealand, and Fiji, remembered a time when the members of her branch had fasted to heal her body. One afternoon, the elders of her church came to her house. They refused the food her mother offered and instead knelt down to anoint her with oil. That night, her mother "dreamed of a medicine to cure [her]." Emma knew "it wasn't just a dream," and was cured in two weeks.[24]

The claiming of an Israelite identity by Polynesian men and women allowed them to reconcile their Mormonism with their identity as Pacific Islanders. Although Mormon missionaries were often successful in the Pacific, the faith challenged Polynesian ideas about the family and demonized some of their cultural practices. In Tonga, for example, the Mormon emphasis on the nuclear family sat uneasily with Tongan understandings of kinship. The close, intimate relationships that Mormonism demanded between members of the nuclear family violated the expectation in Tonga that brothers and sisters will remain a respectful distance from each other and that individuals ultimately owe their allegiance not to their individual family but to wider kinship groups.[25] According to Niko Besnier, many of the men and women to whom he described seeing a Mormon brother and sister exercising at a local gym reacted with disgust, "comparing the practice to the behavior of animals."[26] In Hawai'i, native converts to Mormonism asked about polygamy and were interested in the ways in which Mormonism mirrored aspects of their faith that had been denigrated by Protestant Christianity. The men and women who joined the LDS Church in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, however, were marginalized within the Hawaiian Islands. Harassed by their former co-religionists and alienated from their families, they moved to Lā'ie and Lāna'i to escape the abuse they had endured and to help create a physical Zion in the Pacific.[27] The interviews that Kanahele collected paper

24. Debbie Hippoliteatulai Wright, Rosalind Meno Ram, and Kathleen L. Ward with Rowena L.K. Davis, Jessika Lawyeratulai Tora, and Seini Mu'amoholeva, "'*Olelo*': Women of Faith Speak," in Grant Underwood, ed., *Pioneers in the Pacific: Memory, History, and Cultural Identity among the Latter-day Saints* (Provo: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University Press, 2005), 76.

25. Tamar Gordon, *Inventing Mormon Identity in Tonga* (PhD diss., University of California, Berkeley, 1988), 139–163.

26. Niko Besnier, *On the Edge of the Global: Modern Anxieties in a Pacific Island Nation* (Redwood City, CA: Stanford University Press, 2011), 213.

27. R. Lanier Britsch, "The Lanai Colony: A Hawaiian Extension of the Mormon Colonial Idea," *Hawaiian Journal of History* 12:1 (1971): 70–71; R. Lanier Britsch, *Moramona: The Mormons in Hawaii* (Lā'ie: Institute for Polynesian Studies at BYU-Hawai'i, 1989), 37; Matthew Kester, *Remembering Iosepa: History, Place, and Religion in the American West* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 58–67.

over any conflicts between being Mormon *and* Polynesian. Instead, being Mormon becomes integral to their identity as Polynesians. The interviews also attempt to redeem early converts to Mormonism in Polynesia from their marginalized positions, portraying them not as men and women who were forced from their jobs and homes but as people who had the ability to heal the sick and call upon the power of God.

The adoption of a distinctly Mormon identity that denied any conflict between being a member of the LDS Church and cultural authenticity was not unique to Polynesia. Throughout the twentieth century, men and women who had been identified as being descendants of the Book of Mormon claimed that identity as a source of spiritual strength. In the 1930s, Margarito Bautista Valencía used the connection in Mormon theology between Latin America and the Book of Mormon to claim a natural supremacy for indigenous Mexicans. For Bautista, it was Mexican members of the church who represented God's chosen people, not their white co-religionists.[28] Although white members were ambivalent and even dismissive of Bautista's understanding of the Book of Mormon, his understanding of Mormonism as a faith that empowered brown people would have resonated with Polynesian and Native American Mormons who saw in the Book of Mormon a story of their people. Mormonism provided Polynesians, Latinos, and American Indians with a faith that placed their people and their stories at its center. For them, accepting Mormonism was not accepting a white faith; it was accepting a past and history of their people that had been forgotten.

Ultimately, many white Mormons were uncomfortable with constructions of Mormonism that placed "indigeneity" at its center. Unlike Bautista and the men and women that Kanahele interviewed, white Mormons saw the beginnings of their faith in the history of white settlers who colonized Utah and made the desert "blossom as a rose."[29] Although white Mormons intellectually accepted the idea that indigenous people played a prominent role in the Mormon story of ultimate redemption, they were uncomfortable with interracial marriage and shared many of racist assumptions about nonwhite people with other white,

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28. Thomas W. Murphy, "Imagining Lamanites: Native Americans and the Book of Mormon" (PhD diss., University of Washington, 2003), 146–181; Armand L. Mauss, *All Abraham's Children: Changing Mormon Conceptions of Race and Lineage* (Urbana: University of Illinois, 2003), 147–150; Jason H. Dormady, "'Not Just a Better Mexico:' Intentional Religious Community and the Mexican State, 1940–1964" (PhD diss., University of California, Santa Barbara, 2007), 199–218; Elisa Eastwood Pulido, "The Spiritual Evolution of Margarito Bautista: Mexican Mormon Evangelizer, Polygamist Dissident, and Utopian Founder, 1878–1961" (PhD diss., Claremont Graduate University, 2015).

29. Isaiah 35:1.

middle-class Americans.[30] The conflict between these two visions of Mormonism was particularly apparent at the Church College of Hawai'i, where administrators continually had to navigate between the fears white Americans had about interracial marriage and their responsibility to their Polynesian students.

## *Race and Sex in the Dorms: Interracial Marriage and the Church College of Hawai'i*

The fears that white Mormons had about interracial marriage were part of a larger discourse in American society about the overt sensuality of the Pacific. The image of Pacific Islanders as sexually permissive, always willing, and beguiling had its origin in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In this period, Polynesia became infamous for its uninhibited sexuality as travelers returned from the Pacific with stories of bare-chested women willing to sell their bodies for iron nails.[31] Although European travel literature portrayed Polynesia as a sexual paradise, it was always a place of danger. Its very seductiveness contained the possibility that white men would be overcome by its charms and would choose to live among Pacific Islanders instead of within the white community.[32] Sexuality was not the only way that Polynesian bodies were portrayed as slightly dangerous. Although white sailors frequently tattooed their bodies in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the practice was viewed as askance by white, middle-class respectable society.[33]

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30. See Jared Farmer, *On Zion's Mount: Mormons, Indians, and the American Landscape* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008).

31. Michael Sturma, *South Sea Maidens: Western Fantasy and Sexual Politics in the South Pacific* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2002), 25. For the sexualization of Pacific Islanders in the eighteenth century, see also Anne Salmond, *Aphrodite's Island: The European Discovery of Tahiti* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009).

32. Emily Manktelow, "Missionary Families and the Formation of the Missionary Enterprise: The London Missionary Society and the Family, 1795–1875" (PhD diss., King's College, 2010), 34–76; Nicolas Thomas, *Islanders: The Pacific in the Age of Empire* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010), 37–40; and Michelle Elleray, "Crossing the Beach: A Victorian Tale Adrift in the Pacific," *Victorian Studies* 47 (Winter 2005): 164–173.

33. There is a large scholarship on the role of tattooing within Polynesian culture. Tattoos, however, were not frequently mentioned in the papers that I examined. This list of books on tattoos is not comprehensive. It is meant to give readers a sense of the wide variety of work on tattooing that is currently being published. See Alfred Gell, *Wrapping in Images: Tattooing in Polynesia* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996); Samuel Otter, *Melville's Anatomies* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 9–49; Robert D. Craig, *Handbook of Polynesian Mythology* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2004), 244–249; Margo DeMello, *Bodies of Inscription: A Cultural History of the Modern Tattoo* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000), 45–48; and Kerstin Knopf, "'An Interminable Cretan Labyrinth': Tattoos as Text in Melville's Sea Fiction," in Caroline Rosenthal and Dirk Vanderbeke, eds., *Probing the Skin: Cultural Representations of our Contact Zone* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2015), 122–159.

Mormon theology, in identifying indigenous people as the people of God, offered an alternative understanding of the Pacific. Mormon missionaries were also more willing to live within indigenous communities in the Pacific than Protestant missionaries. Rather than enmeshing themselves in white, middle-class Victorian families that were meant to protect men from the lures of indigenous women, Mormon missionaries lived and ate in indigenous communities.[34] Brigham Young also encouraged several white Mormon men to marry indigenous women in the United States in hopes that the unions would hasten the redemption of the Lamanites.[35] What is interesting about these marriages is not that Mormon men were having sex with indigenous women, but that the white Mormon community was willing to accept them as legitimate marriages.

By the mid-twentieth century, however, white Mormon leaders had rejected interracial marriage as a possibility. In a 1965 address, Spencer W. Kimball warned students that marriage was "a very difficult thing under any circumstances and the difficulty increases in interracial marriages."[36] A 1982 compilation of his earlier teachings included the statement that he had never intended his admonitions to "accept the Indians" to "encourage intermarriage."[37] Instead, he wrote that the church leadership was "unanimous...in feeling and recommending that Indians marry Indians, and Mexicans marry Mexicans; the Chinese marry Chinese and the Japanese marry Japanese; that the Caucasians marry the Caucasians, and the Arabs marry Arabs."[38] This prohibition was echoed in church statements that its support for the black civil rights movement did not extend to interracial marriage. Although this rhetoric mirrored the feelings of many other white Americans toward interracial marriage, many nonwhite members of the church felt betrayed. Chieko Okazaki, who served in the presidency of the Relief Society, remembered being a student in Hawai'i during World War II. In response to hearing an apostle discourage Japanese women and white servicemen from marrying each other, she found herself wondering, "Why is it that the Church doesn't look upon us, who are of a different race, as [being] worthy to marry a white Mormon man?" Although the likely answer to that

34. Amanda Hendrix-Komoto, "Imperial Zions: Mormons, Polygamy, and the Politics of Domesticity in the Nineteenth Century" (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 2015), 65–102.

35. John Turner, *Brigham Young: Pioneer Prophet* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), 210.

36. "Interracial Marriage Discouraged," *Church News*, June 17, 1978.

37. Spencer W. Kimball, *The Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball*, ed. Edward L. Kimball (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1982), 302.

38. Ibid., 303.

question and the racism that she experienced throughout her life in the church bothered her, she told the historian Greg Prince that she held onto the gospel and the idea "that our Father in Heaven and Jesus Christ would not look at us as any different from white members."[39]

In the mid-twentieth century, Utah was a predominantly white space. According to the 1950 Census, only 1.7 percent of the state's population was nonwhite.[40] Two decades later, the number had only risen to 2.6 percent.[41] Although conversions in Latin America and high membership rates in Polynesia were beginning to change the church as a whole, interracial marriage was still relatively rare. Utah had originally outlawed marriages between white men and women and African Americans. Even in the nineteenth century, however, Utah law had remained silent about the possibility that white men and women might choose to marry Polynesians or Native Americans.[42] White women and men undoubtedly developed forbidden relationships. Those relationships, however, remained illicit. The overturning of anti-miscegenation laws in Utah in the mid-twentieth century opened up the possibility of interracial marriage. As the church leaders' statements against the practice suggest, however, most Mormons continued to imagine Utah as a white space where individuals were protected from the seductive bodies of African Americans, Asians, and other nonwhite people.

This imaginary was not in play in Hawai'i. In the mid-twentieth century, American popular culture depicted Hawai'i as an idyllic space where racial mixing was possible and even beneficial. It was able to do so only by ignoring violence between white soldiers and local communities and the routine sexual harassment of Native Hawaiian women.[43] Jane Desmond has argued that this vision of Hawai'i offered Americans an opportunity to view a racial difference that was exotic, enticing, and far less threatening than the tensions between

39. Greg A. Prince, "'There is Always a Struggle': An Interview with Chieko N. Okazaki," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 45 (Spring 2012): 117.

40. US Census Bureau, "1950 Census of Population," vol. II, part 44, 21, www.census.gov/prod/www/decennial.html.

41. US Census Bureau, "1970 Census of Population," vol. 1, part 46, table 18, 2015, www.census.gov/prod/www/decennial.html.

42. Patrick Q. Mason, "The Prohibition of Interracial Marriage in Utah, 1888–1963," *Utah Historical Quarterly* 76 (Spring 2008): 108–131; Peggy Pascoe, *What Comes Naturally: Miscegenation Law and the Making of Race in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 85–93.

43. Christina Klein, *Cold War Orientalism: Asia in the Middlebrow Imagination, 1945–1961* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 249–257.

white and black Americans.[44] Although many Mormons participated in this image of the Hawaiian Islands, individual church administrators sometimes worried about the effects that interracial marriage would have on church members and counseled against it. Members in Hawai'i would have received similar instructions as those elsewhere.

The Church College of Hawai'i, in particular, became a space where the church sought to prevent racial mixing and where the separation between different races threatened to come undone. The church had initially opened the college in 1955 to serve students in Hawai'i and the South Pacific.[45] White students from the mainland sometimes enrolled and dated nonwhite students. White administrators struggled with the possibility of racial intermixing. Other church leaders had echoed Kimball's statements about interracial marriage. Former college president Owen J. Cook told an interviewer that students who were considering attending Church College were sometimes counseled not to out of fears that they would marry outside of their racial group.[46] Cook was somewhat more willing to tolerate such marriages, but ultimately cautioned against them. He confided to the interviewer that marriage to a Polynesian man could provide white girls "who had no dating [experience] on the mainland, because maybe they [were] too big" an opportunity to fulfill expectations that they marry. They "came out here and . . . were popular girls."[47] In addition to denying the possibility that women who conformed to white beauty standards would be attracted to Polynesian men, Cook's statement played upon the association of indigenous people with corpulence. As Amy Erdman Farrell has argued, anthropologists, historians, and sociologists have often focused on the acceptance of fatness in nonwhite cultures without examining how fat shaming became enshrined in white, middle-class identity.[48] Although Cook's assertion was meant to be sympathetic, he cast some of the white girls who decided to attend the Church College of Hawai'i as unattractive and aberrant.

Other church leaders were unwilling to even consider interracial marriage. According to Cook, one told him interracial marriage was "a religious

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44. Desmond, *Staging Tourism*, 68.

45. Prince, *David O. McKay and the Rise of Modern Mormonism*, 179–180.

46. Owen J. Cook, oral history, March 8 and 11, 1980, 32, Polynesian Culture Center, series I, box 2, folder 3, Joseph F. Smith Library Archives and Special Collections, Brigham Young University, Hawai'i, Lā'ie, Hawai'i.

47. Ibid.

48. Amy Erdman Farrell, *Fat Shame: Stigma and the Fat Body in American Culture* (New York: New York University Press, 2011), 59–81.

problem." He paraphrased the man as saying "that if the Lord had wanted that[,] He would have arranged for it from the beginning."[49] Church leaders tried to frame their opposition to interracial marriage broadly, arguing that their concerns grew not out of a need to protect the purity of white girls but out of a desire to minimize cultural conflict in a marriage. Cook noted, however, that concerns about interracial marriage arose only when white girls and boys from Utah and Idaho were involved. "The Brethren were not concerned," he told an interviewer, "if a Tongan married a Maori or a Samoan married a Hawaiian. . . . Those types of marriage did not concern the Brethren, but the Caucasian did."[50] According to Cook, it was the inclusion of white bodies that ultimately made racial crossings undesirable. Marriages that crossed boundaries only between Asian or Polynesian cultures did not evoke the same response in spite of the church leadership's insistence that any marriage between cultures was undesirable. Mormon theology cast Polynesians as being God's chosen people and suggested that the coming of God's kingdom would ultimately depend on the redemption of nonwhite peoples. The church hierarchy and members of college's administration, however, were uneasy about fully embracing Polynesians and American Indians as their brethren if doing also meant accepting mixed raced marriages. It is important to note that the effects of this racism were long-lasting. Although Okazaki felt that most white Mormons did not openly talk about race by the time she was interviewed in 2005, she was certain that "if they had to make a choice in relation to their child or grandchildren marrying into another race, they'd have hard feelings about it and might try to stop it."[51]

## *Mahana's Body: Modesty and Sexuality in the Mormon Pacific*

Much of the scholarly literature concerning the Mormon presence in Hawai'i has focused on the Polynesian Cultural Center. When the center initially opened in 1963, it boasted six Polynesian villages as well as facilities for tourists to buy souvenirs, eat, and refresh themselves.[52] Scholars have criticized the center for presenting an ahistorical, timeless view of Polynesia that denies

49. Owen J. Cook, oral history, March 8 and 11, 1980, 32.

50. Ibid.

51. Prince, "'There is Always a Struggle,'" 116.

52. Vernice Wineera, *Selves and Others: A Study of Reflexivity and the Representation of Culture in Touristic Display at the Polynesian Cultural Center in Lā'ie, Hawai'i* (PhD diss., University of Hawai'i, 2000), 106.

the effects of American colonialism in the Pacific.[53] The continued presence of the United States in the Hawaiian Islands has meant that scholarly work there has political ramifications. Academics such as Haunani-Kay Trask, J. Kēhaulani Kauanui, and Noenoe Silva see themselves as working in a colonial setting in which indigenous peoples are explicitly devalued and sexualized.[54] The popularity of Mormonism within Native Hawaiian and Polynesian communities means that scholars focusing on the religious tradition have had to grapple with its relationship to American colonialism in the Pacific. In many ways, the PCC has become a touchpoint for scholars—a required piece for academics who want to work on Mormonism in the Pacific Islands. While some Mormon scholars have argued that Polynesians occupy a special place within Mormonism, others see the Mormon treatment of Pacific Islanders as racist and paternalistic.

The PCC has always been the center of controversy. In the mid-twentieth century, Charles Barenaba, Lemaefe Galea'i, and other locals worried about the potential effects of the center on the students who would work there and on its ultimate meaning for visitors and students alike. An oral interview with Barenaba highlights the concerns that some in the local community had. Barenaba worried that creating a cultural center where white tourists would watch Polynesian students dance was the equivalent of creating a "human zoo."[55] Although this critique could be leveled at other heritage sites like Colonial Williamsburg or Nauvoo, it was the cultural voyeurism in which white tourists engaged when they visited the PCC that made the accusation particularly salient in Hawai'i. The center's portrayal of Pacific Islanders as carefree papered over the racism, poverty, and sexual harassment that Polynesians routinely encountered in Hawai'i and America's continuing colonial relationship with the region.

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53. Ross, *The Chicago Gangster Theory of Life: Nature's Debt to Society*, 43–86; Hokulani Aikau, *A Chosen People, A Promised Land: Mormonism and Race in Hawai'i*, 109–128; and Christopher Balme, "Staging the Pacific: Framing Authenticity in Performances for Tourists at the Polynesian Cultural Center," *Theatre Journal* 50 (March 1998): 53–70. For Mormon responses to these critiques, see Wineera, *Selves and Others*; and Max E. Stanton, "The Polynesian Cultural Center: A Multi-Ethnic Model of Seven Pacific Cultures," in Valene Smith, ed., *Hosts and Guests: The Anthropology of Tourism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1989), 247–262.

54. Haunani-Kay Trask, *From a Native Daughter: Colonialism and Sovereignty in Hawai'i* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1993); J. Kēhaulani Kauanui, *Hawaiian Blood: Colonialism and the Politics of Sovereignty and Indigeneity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008); and Noenoe Silva, *Aloha Betrayed: Native Hawaiian Resistance to American Colonialism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004).

55. Charles Barenaba, oral history interview, 12, Center Series (PCC Series), box 1, folder 3, Joseph F. Smith Library Archives and Special Collections, Brigham Young University-Hawai'i, Lā'ie, Hawai'i.

Instead of portraying a Polynesia in constant contact with the outside world, white tourists paid to see a spectacle in which students performed a "primitive identity" that was increasingly far removed from their actual experiences in Tonga, Samoa, New Zealand, and French Polynesia.

The anthropologist Andrew Ross uses the banter of the Samoan performer Sielu Avea with audiences at the PCC to discuss the types of performance that tourists encounter at the center. Ross describes the act as a kind of "Samoan Borcht Belt shtick" and reproduces part of Avea's monologue. The Samoan man tells visitors that they can use "hammers, knives, screwdrivers, [and] dynamite" to break open a coconut. "A lady from Canada," he laughingly tells the audience, "came here last week and told me that she put a coconut on the ground and ran it over with a lawnmower. A young man from Texas put on his .45 and shot the thing between the eyes, while his mother-in-law was holding the coconut." He then picks up a rock and tells the audience that Samoans use stones to open coconuts. He warns them, however, not to blame him if it doesn't work. He, after all, is "pure Samoan, [and] this is a Hawaiian coconut, made in Taiwan."[56] Ross portrays the PCC as one of the "ethnic theme parks" in which individuals are forced to pretend "to shun money, property, and all of the returns of modernity"—to play the savage—"in exchange for a living wage."[57] As Ross notes, however, Avea's act is not uncomplicated. He plays with the assumptions of his audience. While he encourages tourists to imagine a Pacific where Samoan boys climb coconut trees with their hands and feet, Avea also reveals the way that the image is being manufactured. Guns, factories in Taiwan, and lawnmowers are as much a part of the story he weaves as palm trees and sand.

Of course, the PCC is not the only place where Mormon Polynesian bodies have been displayed. In 1971, Native American students from the Provo campus of BYU began traveling the United States as part of a performance troupe called the Lamanite Generation. It eventually included Polynesians and Latinos as well. The show created an idealized vision of indigenous cultures that mirrored those represented at the PCC.[58] Its elaborate performances in the 1970s occurred at the same time as the members of the American Indian Movement held a protest outside the church's annual conference, demanding that the church donate 1 million dollars a year to Indian social programs for a decade.[59]

56. Ross, *The Chicago Gangster Theory of Life*, 48.

57. Ibid, 43.

58. Mauss, *All Abraham's Children*, 92.

59. Ibid., 101; Amanda Hendrix-Komoto, "Boycotting General Conference 40 Years Ago: The Lamanite Generation, the American Indian Movement, and Temple Square," *Juvenile Instructor* blog, April 12, 2013, www.juvenileinstructor.org/boycotting-general-conference-50-years-ago-the-lamanite-generation-the-american-indian-movement-and-temple-square/.

Polynesian men have also become a fixture on the American football field. A child of Samoan heritage is fifty-six times more likely than any other American to join the NFL, leading CBS to dub the archipelago "Football Island."[60] The article's title elides the fact that American Samoa is actually a group of several islands and atolls. The culture of football in Samoa emphasizes the potential it offers for social mobility. Individuals who travel to the United States to play football are able to enroll in American universities that would otherwise be impossible for them to attend.[61] As Fa'anofo Lisaclaire Uperesa has pointed out, however, the opportunities that American football offers are "highly gendered." Football is a "hypermasculine" and "implicitly (hetero)sexualized" game that is "largely limited to biological males." Individuals are encouraged to "[perform] a dominant masculinity and [repress] any indication of nonnormative heterosexuality."[62] The position of football within Samoa then has been ambiguous. While it offers individuals the opportunity to receive a better education than they otherwise might, it also encourages them to embrace an overt masculinity that forecloses opportunities for others.

It is possible to extend this critique to the Polynesian Cultural Center, which has offered students educations that would have been impossible otherwise but also commodified their bodies. On the one hand, students who worked at the center in the mid- to late-twentieth century worked at a facility that was meant to revive and revitalize the cultures of Polynesia. Many of the students had never participated in the folk arts and dances that they were supposed to demonstrate for tourists. The older men and women who performed at the center taught them how to carve wooden figures into meeting houses, how to dance with fire, and how to climb coconut trees. These efforts coincided with the desire of the church to teach Polynesian students living in Hawai'i their native languages and to reinforce the idea that Polynesians were descended from the people of the Book of Mormon.[63] The association of these customs with the culture of the ancient Israelites meant that working at the PCC could become a religious experience. The first brochures that center produced described it as "drawing together of Polynesians in the bond of the

60. Scott Pelley, "American Samoa: Football Island," *CBS News*, January 17, 2010, www.cbsnews.com/news/american-samoa-football-island-17-09-2010/. See also Mike Sager, "The Samoan Pipeline," *California Sunday Magazine*, https://story.californiasunday.com/samoan-football-pipeline.

61. Fa'anofo Lisaclaire Uperesa, "Seeking New Fields of Labor: Football and Colonial Political Economies in American Samoa," in Alyosha Goldstein, ed., *Formations of United States Colonialism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014), 210–212, 223–224.

62. Ibid., 211.

63. Wineera, *Selves and Others*, 97–98.

spirit."[64] According to the Māori poet and former vice president of the PCC Vernice Wineera, references to "the spirit" at the center can refer religiously to "'the Spirit of God,' 'the Spirit of Christ,' or 'the Spirit of the Gospel,'" or culturally to shared Polynesian values. She argues that often these multiple meanings are combined at the PCC.[65] As a result, work at the PCC is at once meant to deepen a student's appreciation of the gospel and their Mormonness at the same time as it meant to provide them with a deeper access to a Polynesian cultural identity that is seen as endangered and slowly being lost. It can be a place of deep cultural and religious satisfaction.

Critics like Barenaba, however, worried about that students were being asked to commercialize their faith and that the labor they performed had no deeper meaning. In an interview he gave to an oral history researcher interested in the history of the center, Barenaba critiqued the ways in which the center commodified Polynesian culture and engaged students in menial labor. The jobs the center was offering "just didn't seem like [they] would be the kind that would give a fulfilling experience in life. Entertainment six days a week with about the only sane thing going on was church on Sunday and then six more days of entertaining. Whether it's a sive or pese or serving supper, lunch and dinner, frying hamburgers, it's still a catering kind of thing for kupe, (for money) from other strangers."[66] In some ways, the unease that community members felt about the PCC were the result of differing understandings of the meaning of performance. Scholars have argued that Mormons living in the continental United States frequently see performance as a form of missionary work and do not necessarily make the same distinctions between religious faith and entertainment that are evident in some of Barenaba's objections. Rather, entertainment becomes a form of proselytization and a way to participate in the religious life of the community.[67]

This language was present at the PCC, and Barenaba himself hoped that it was reflection of reality. He had doubts, however. Like many Hawaiians, his experience with entertainment probably grew not out of Hill Cumorah Pageant or church performances but out of luaus performed on the Waikiki strip. Church members had long been concerned about the morality of

64. Quoted in ibid, 128.

65. Ibid.

66. Barenaba, oral history interview, 13.

67. See Ellen McHale, "'Witnessing for Christ:' The Hill Cumorah Pageant of Palmyra, New York," *Western Folklore* 44 (January 1985), 34–40; Megan Sanborn Jones, "Imaging a Global Religion, American Style: Mormon Pageantry as a Ritual of Community Formation," in Daniel Belnap, ed., *By Our Rites of Worship: Latter-day Saint Views on Ritual in Scripture, History, and Practice* (Provo: Religious Studies Center, 2013), 317–348.

participating in tourist culture. In an oral interview, Verdetta Kekuaokalani described her experience working for a company that provided leis to tourists when they disembarked their aircraft. When she married her husband, however, she no longer worked for the company and maintained her respectability. "I was getting old," she explained to the interviewer, "too old to stand outside on the airport runway and give laies.... My husband was working for Pan American so we both worked at the airport at the time and it wasn't all that terrific, you know, his wife was out there giving laies to strangers, let alone kissing them."[68] Although young Hawaiian women frequently worked within the tourist industry, Kekuaokalani's marriage meant that the propriety of her doing so was suspect. Her attentions were to be focused on her husband, not on white tourists or visiting businessmen. Some Polynesian Mormons worried about the possibility that the PCC would provide students with an entry into the Hawaiian tourist industry. According to Ken Baldridge, a historian and former professor at BYU-Hawai'i, some of the people living in the towns that surrounded the PCC worried about the effect that the center would have on their children. They feared they would "end up in the Waikiki strip." In the same sentence, he admitted, "some of that has happened."[69]

The relative nakedness of bodies at the PCC heightened concerns about the center's propriety. Since the late nineteenth century, Mormons living in Hawai'i had been told about the importance of participating in Mormon temple worship and of wearing sacramental undergarments afterward to remind them of the covenants they had made. The outfits that students were expected to wear at the PCC made it impossible for them to wear garments while they were performing. For critics of the PCC, this was a moral compromise. "We always thought the people had to wear their garments all the way through," Barenaba told an interviewer. "You only took them off when you go to take a bath, then you'd put them back on. There's no time that you separate yourself [from] the garment."[70] When David O. McKay traveled to the Pacific in the mid-1950s, he expressed concerns about the appropriateness of the clothing that Tahitian dancers typically wore for Mormon women. A Tahitian labor missionary at the PCC explained that the girls who danced for McKay had been wearing just a "bra." Instead of watching the performance, McKay averted his eyes and refused to look at the young women. When the

68. Verdetta Kekuaokalani, oral history interview, 14, Robin Kay Oral History Collection, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah.

69. Ken Baldridge, oral history interview, 13, PCC Series, box 1, folder 2.

70. Charles Barenaba, oral history interview, 14, Center Series (PCC Series), box 1, folder 3.

performance was over, McKay talked to the people assembled about why the dances were inappropriate. The labor missionary's father had initially opposed the dances. As McKay spoke to the congregation, the man's father cried.[71] At the center, Mormon Polynesians who performed this dance covered their stomachs in concession to the faith's ideas about modesty. The increased modesty of the dresses, however, did not completely allay concerns about the displays of women's bodies. Individuals like Barenaba were concerned that the outfits frequently violated the expectations at Church College's expectations for modesty. His concerns were likely deepened by changing understandings of modesty within the Mormon Church itself.

The development of the PCC occurred at the same time as the mid-century tightening of modesty codes in Utah. Mormon ideas about modesty in the twentieth century had initially emphasized speech, self-respect, and conduct in addition to the length of hemlines and the presence of cap sleeves on dresses.[72] In the 1950s, Kimball delivered a speech at BYU admonishing young women for adopting immodest styles to be fashionable.[73] "Unchastity is the great demon of the day!" he announced. The "immodest clothes" that Mormon girls and their mothers had adopted was "contribut[ing] directly and indirectly to the immorality of this age." They wore "short skirts and body-revealing blouses and sweaters," "flaunting [temptation] before young men" and "talk[ing] about sex as freely as they talk about cars."[74] Other church leaders echoed this emphasis on women's clothing. In 1969, Mark E. Petersen cited reports that sex crimes had doubled in Tokyo because of the increase in women wearing miniskirts.[75]

This emphasis upon clothing reduced ideas about modesty and chastity to the types of clothing that women wore and focused the surveillance of the morals of Mormon girls upon their bodies. In the theology that Kimball and others espoused, a girl's respect for her parents and her acceptance of the gospel were visible in the clothes that she chose to wear. A girl who succumbed to fashion and wore tight sweaters and short skirts gave away what was "most

71. Wineera, *Selves and Others*, 211–212.

72. Katie Blakesley, "'A Style of Our Own': Modesty and Mormon Women, 1951–2008," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 42 (Summer 2009): 20.

73. Ibid., 21.

74. I originally encountered Kimball's speech in Blakesley, "'A Style of Our Own,'" 20–21, but also read the original speech from which I drew these quotations. Spencer W. Kimball, "A Style of Our Own: Modesty in Dress and in Relationship to the Church," *An Apostle Speaks to Youth* (Provo: Brigham Young University Press, 1951).

75. Mark E. Petersen, *Way to Peace* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1969), 249.

dear and precious above all things."[76] This emphasis upon modesty was part of set of larger concerns about the potential influence of the feminist movement and youth counterculture upon Mormon youth.[77] The development of a dress code at BYU and the emphasis of the church hierarchy for women attempted to separate Mormon women from feminists who had adopted a more liberal view of sexuality and women's roles. Requiring Mormon women to wear clothing that covered their shoulders and knees at a time when sleeveless dresses and form-fitting clothing was popular made the differences between Mormon women and other women visible. It inscribed difference upon women's bodies and made modest clothing a requirement of the gospel. After Kimball's speech, young women "kimballized" their dresses, sewing sleeves onto their formal attire and putting away sweaters that were too tight to meet the new requirements.[78]

Although the Hawaiian Islands were physically removed from the Wasatch Front, Mormon women there received many of the same messages about the importance of the family and modesty as women living in Utah. Kapua Sproat had attended Oregon State University before transferring to Church College. She was teaching there when she heard a talk about the importance of women staying within the home. "Although I was only teaching half time," she told the interviewer, "I...realized...they meant me too. And so I stayed home."[79] Sproat's interview also emphasized the importance of women embracing their femininity. She felt that the feminists she met when attending the International Women's Year Conference in Houston were overly "militant" and masculine. "If you closed your eyes," she said, "you wouldn't think they were women."[80] The language that she used demonstrates the degree to which many Mormons living in Hawai'i had internalized the same ideas about femininity as Mormons living in the continental United States. When the Mormons delegates for the International Woman's Year Conference from Hawai'i arrived in Houston, they found that their ideas about the family more

76. Spencer W. Kimball, *Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1982), 265. The scriptural reference for Kimball's quote is Moroni 9:9.

77. Blakesley, "'A Style of Our Own,'" 24; Martha Sonntag Bradley, *Pedestals and Podiums: Utah Women, Religious Authority, and Equal Rights* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2005), 69–76, 82–92.

78. Blakesley, "'A Style of Our Own,'" 3.

79. Kapua Sproat, oral history interview, 15, Robin Kay Oral History Collection, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah.

80. Ibid., 15.

closely aligned them with other Mormons rather than with the other, more liberal women like Patsy Mink who represented the islands.

The reactions of these women to the dress and the behavior of the women around them suggests how thoroughly they had accepted the teachings of the LDS Church surrounding modesty, sexuality, and the roles of women. For some individuals living near the center, the PCC represented a challenge to the ideals that they had adopted as members of the Mormon faith. They objected to some of the practices of the PCC. The outfits that students wore at the PCC were often less modest than the clothing that they were expected to wear at the BYU-Hawai'i or in Sunday meetings in spite of concessions to Mormon ideas about modesty. Through General Conference, church publications, and local leaders, Polynesian students were told that their bodies were to be covered, that they were to wear skirts that came to their knees, that they shouldn't expose their shoulders, or bare their stomachs. At the cultural center, however, Polynesian students were asked to expose their bodies to promote their culture and earn scholarship money. For some community members, the PCC raised questions about how Polynesian bodies were valued. Why was the church willing to ask Polynesian students to display their bodies in ways that would be unacceptable for white students? Other Polynesian Mormons supported the PCC but wondered whether the uncovering of Polynesian bodies as part of a tourist performance was sending the right message about what it meant to be Mormon and Polynesian.

## *Conclusion*

For most of this essay, I have focused on the conflicting visions of modesty that Mormon Polynesians received in the mid-twentieth century. Although LDS Church leaders emphasized the importance of covering the body in conference talks and articles for the *Ensign*, the Church College of Hawai'i and the PCC asked the students who worked there to uncover parts of their bodies in a belief that in doing so they better embodied Polynesian culture. It is important, however, not to end this essay without situating Mormon portrayals of the Pacific within larger conversations about American colonialism. The discomfort that some Polynesians felt with the Polynesian Cultural Center grew partially out of recognition of the congruence between American and Mormon discourses about the Pacific. In the mid-twentieth century, American popular culture depicted Hawai'i as an idyllic space where racial mixing was possible and even beneficial.[81] It was able to do so only by ignoring the routine

81. Klein, *Cold War Orientalism*, 249–250; Desmond, *Staging Tourism*, 7.

violence white soldiers inflicted upon local communities. In addition to nuclear testing, Pacific Islanders have also experienced violence focused on the bodies of individual women. Although members of the LDS Church condemned sexualized violence, the images that the PCC promoted of happy, welcoming Polynesian students, untouched by American civilization and existing in some sort of "traditional" state, played into the images of Polynesia so common in American culture. When students performed on stage, they were asked to embody a welcoming, beguiling vision of Polynesia removed from the specifics of time and place.

The congruence between Mormon portrayals of the Pacific and American colonial discourses has meant that the critiques made of the PCC in the mid-twentieth century have remained salient. In 2009, for example, a professor at the University of Hawai'i named Vernadette V. Gonzalez wrote an article accusing the Polynesian Cultural Center of trying to contain the sexuality of Tahitian dancing while simultaneously playing upon it. She describes a young woman beginning to dance in the Tahitian village at the PCC, "shaking her hips slowly at first" and "then speeding up to a hypnotic frenzy."[82] Gonzalez argues that the focus is on the woman's "gendered, native body." "Even as she remains modestly clothed in a strapless form-fitting dress and a grass skirt that further focuses attention on her swiveling hips," she writes, "the sheer physical demands of the dance emphasize her corporeality and the sensual, sexual aspect of the dance."[83]

Mormon scholars such as Gina Colvin have echoed Gonzalez's analysis. Colvin is a Māori woman who identifies as Mormon and has been an important critical voice within the community. In describing her experiences working at the PCC during a Mormon podcast, she claimed that she felt "demeaned" by her experience as a student worker. She portrays the process of getting dressed to work in the Māori village at the PCC as a kind of "strip[ping]" in which she was asked to exchange her long shorts for "stringy...strappy things" that never would have been allowed just a few yards away at BYU-Hawai'i.[84]

Gonzalez and Colvin's critiques resonate with those made earlier. They occur, however, in a very different cultural context. In the mid-twentieth century, the idea that Polynesians, American Indians, and other indigenous people had a special position within the LDS Church as a result of their status

82. Vernadette V. Gonzalez, "Consuming 'Polynesia': Visual Spectacles of Native Bodies in Hawaiian Tourism," in Norman K. Denzin, ed., *Studies in Symbolic Interaction*, vol. 33, (United Kingdom (Blingley, UK: Howard House, 2009): 208–209.

83. Ibid., 209.

84. Gina Colvin, 'Anapesi Ka'ili, Luana Uluave, Joanna Brooks, and Dan Witherspoon, *Pacific Island Mormon Identities Podcast* 87, podcast audio, Mormon Matters, April 5, 2012, 2014, http://mormonmatters.org/2012/04/05/87-88-pacific-island-mormon-identities.

as Lamanites was in its ascendancy. In the last third of the twentieth century, that idea underwent a rapid decline. Beginning in the 1970s, the LDS Church began to shift its emphasis away from programs designed to aid American Indians, Polynesians, and other indigenous people toward a more general emphasis on the Book of Mormon. By the late 1980s, an American Indian man who had been ordained to the Quorum of the Seventy found that the church's General Authorities directly challenged his claims that the church should be focused on the descendants of the people of the Book of Mormon.[85]

In recent years, scholars have also begun to question the possibility that Polynesians and American Indians are of Israelite descendant. In a 2002 essay, Thomas Murphy argued that DNA evidence suggested that American Indians originated not in a group of Israelites who escaped the destruction of Jerusalem around 600 BCE, but in northeastern Siberia.[86] Just two years later, Simon Southerton echoed his findings, publicly decrying the suggestion that American Indians and Polynesians were of Israelite origin.[87] The challenges that scholars like Murphy and Southerton have made to claims that Polynesians are descended from the people of the Book of Mormon have made leaders even more unwilling to emphasize the importance of the idea of "the Lamanite" to Mormon theology and culture. The continued salience of the critiques of the PCC suggests the degree to which questions of sexuality and modesty have defined discussions about the position of Polynesians within Mormon popular culture and theology.

Although Spencer W. Kimball's leadership in the mid-twentieth century led to an increased emphasis on the place of indigenous people in Mormon theology, concerns about the intersections of race, sexuality, and modesty persisted in the Pacific. The presence of white students at the Church College of Hawai'i raised concerns about interracial marriage and the possibility that young white women would be attracted to the bodies of Polynesian men. For some Polynesians and nonwhite members of the church, the concerns of white Mormon parents about interracial marriage suggested that they occupied a secondary place within the church that was incommensurate with Mormon theology. The church's administration seemed concerned about protecting the sexuality of white women at the same moment that it was willing to display the bodies of Polynesian students.

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85. David Grua, "Elder George P. Lee and the New Jerusalem: A Reception History of 3 Nephi 21: 22–23," *Juvenile Instructor* blog, August 27, 2013, www.juvenileinstructor.org/elder-george-p-lee-and-the-reception-history-of-3-nephi-2122-23/.

86. Murphy, "Imagining Lamanites," 230.

87. Simon G. Southerton, *Losing a Lost Tribe: Mormons, DNA, and the Mormon Church* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2004).

In recent years, white Americans have become increasingly accepting of interracial marriage. Concerns about sexuality and modesty, however, have continued to be an important part of discussions about the status of Pacific Islanders within the LDS Church. Although few white parents would be willing to write a letter to college administrators bemoaning the possibility that their daughter would fall in love with a Polynesian man, expectations for white and indigenous bodies have remained incongruous. The association of Polynesian culture with savagery has allowed church officials to display the bodies of Polynesian students in a way that would be impossible if the students were white. It is this incongruity that has inspired Mormon Polynesians to critique the center. Although questions about sexuality, racial identity, and religious faith have long been a part of the Mormon experience in the Pacific, the popularity of the PCC has made it a lightning rod for these discussions.