

Title: "These People Shall Be Free:" Native Slavery and the Indian Student Placement Program in Utah (1947-2000)

This paper uses Mormon slaveholding in the Southwest Borderlands to offer a critical reexamination of the Indian Student Placement Program (ISPP), an educational "foster service" run by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The violence of Mormon slaveholding left a legacy of white paternalism that shaped the church's later interactions with Native Americans, especially in the church's Indian education initiatives. While previous scholarship has studied the ISPP without delving deeply into its historical origins, I understand the program as a fragment of the larger story of settler colonialism.

The paper begins with a description of slaveholding in 19th century Mormon communities. Early settlers enslaved Native children while emphasizing their own 'good intentions,' reasoning that purchase would save Native youth from death at the hands of slave traders. Settler diaries indicate that the enslaved children were usually baptized into the church, lived with their master's family, and often performed domestic labor. From these unfree origins, my analysis of the ISPP draws connections between enslavement in the Mormon cultural region and later relocations of Native children in the name of education. Revealingly, the church directed its proselytizing and student recruitment efforts toward the same Indigenous communities that traders had exploited to capture enslaved labor, most notably the Diné, or Navajo people. The ISPP took Native children from their natal communities and placed them into Mormon households, required all students to undergo an LDS baptism, forced students to speak English at the expense of their heritage languages, and sought to assimilate them into white, Anglo society. Oral history interviews featuring both Native and settler participants reveal prejudice in the treatment of program students, including gender-based and sexual violence, unequal access to household property, and, frequently, discordant relationships with both natal and host communities. The goal of this paper is not to present an exhaustive history of enslavement and Placement in the LDS Church; instead, I review examples that situate the ISPP within broader histories of violence in the Southwest.