In September of 1960, newspapers across the Wasatch front published advertisements about the "temporary adoption" of Indian children in Mormon households. The Native youth, who purportedly "had never before lived in houses or ate at tables," would attend the same public schools as the Mormon family's biological children. "How", the blurb worried, will the "backward Indian children react to this new world?"[1] Any initial alienation was sure to be met with great benefits, though—child, tribe and faith were sure to reap the harvest of assimilation. The sensationalist blurb and the article it promoted emphasized Native inferiority and Mormon benevolence, drawing from tropes that would have been familiar (if not beloved) to the desired Latter-day Saint audience in Utah. The ad also emphasized a sense of novelty; a unique program sponsored by a bizarre but well-meaning people.

Though scholars employ more nuanced language, placement histories often endorse the blurb's assessment. We tend to begin our stories of the so-called Indian Student Placement Program with a Navajo named Helen John, who proposed to pitch a tent outside of an influential Mormon family's house in Richfield, Utah. "Hungry" for education, John endured a language barrier and racism in the Richfield community, eventually graduating from a local high school. Afterward, she attended Brigham Young University, which enrolled more indigenous students than any other US university in the 1970s.[2] On the one hand, then, John's tale is an uplifting story that emphasizes Native women's determination in the face of brutal odds. On the other, the sanguine notes that scholars lift from John's story have also concealed many troubling aspects of Mormonism's historic relationship to Native communities.

Helen John's account, useful though it is, presents serious methodological complications when examined in the absence of context. Placement was not without its precedents, and evaluating good intentions are the realm of perspective and politics, not objectivity.[3] For Native people, Placement's early days sparked painfully fresh memories of a time when federal officials still stole Indian children away to off-nation boarding schools.[4] Also, as Margaret Jacobs has pointed out, the

Mormon program resembled those Indian child removal and adoption efforts spearheaded by Catholic, Lutheran, and Jewish groups.[5] Finally, LDS efforts to undermine Native women's political authority seem a mere drop in a sea of intimate settler colonialisms across empires.[6]

And yet the roots of Placement arc still farther back, deep into the soil of the LDS community's own collective memory. When Mormons began informally adopting the children of migrant Navajo farm workers in the 1940s, they drew off Mormon discourses that justified the unfree boarding, indenture, and enslavement of Native people from an earlier era. In both instances, Mormons claimed those they called "Lamanites" as ancestral kin from the Book of Mormon. Faith that the "Day of the Lamanite" would arrive led Mormons to champion their own version of Native uplift through industrious labor and Indians' recognition of the "fullness of the gospel." Mormon discourse on Native people took on racial dimensions, as well. When Indian children went off for placement, the "Lamanites" were seen to become "white and delightsome" in clear fulfillment Mormon prophecy.[7] The "Lamanite" frame simultaneously justified enslavement, indenture, and land theft in the name of improving spiritual and material conditions for Indians.[8]

This paper re-examines the Indian Student Placement Program of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in the context of unfree labor. I argue that a better introduction to Placement should delve into the colonial histories preceding the program, especially Mormon attempts to board Native Americans as unfree laborers in their homes. The similarities between Placement and unfreedom ran so deep that the two become tangled up in each other, bound in a spectrum of coercion and dependency. Both experiences of domination provided Mormons a patriarchal language with which to understand the "Lamanites." Both systems instructed Indian youth in gendered divisions of labor and policed their sexualities. Both enriched LDS economies at the expense of Native families. When Helen John exchanged her tent for a place in a non-Indian household, she joined other Native youth in an unfree legacy of patriarchy and colonialism.

When Mormons entered the Salt Lake Valley, they did not settle in a "no man's land." Instead, the lands were occupied by several bands of Neme, Soshonean-speaking peoples who appear to have also to have claimed some kinship with and maintained contact with the Timpanogos Utes living along Utah Lake. Even though the Salt Lake valley seemed ripe for settlement to the Saints, who had travelled thousands of miles on dangerous and disease-ridden trails, the Wasatch Range's largest valley paled in comparison to the riverine abundance that Timpanogos people enjoyed in the Utah Lake valley. There, Native people held gatherings in the rich fisheries along the Provo river, developing ceremonial senses of embededness not just within their lands but along the rivers and lakes that fed them. When the Saints entered the valley (which the settlers later named Provo) in search of more arable soil for livestock and agriculture, they entered a water world.[9]

The Mormons arrived in Utah with a set of ready-made theological framings for Native people, many adopted from the Book of Mormon or Joseph Smith's early teachings. The Book of Mormon teaches that Israelites travelled from Europe to the Americas under the guidance of God. There, the dark-skinned Lamanites waged war against their lighter-skinned cousins the Nephites, ultimately exterminating them. Thus, as the only surviving descendants of Israelites, early Mormon theology considered Native Americans to be a sacred group. Early interpretations of the Book of Mormon imagined Native peoples as central to the project of (re)building God's Kingdom in the Americas—as leaders without whom the Euro-American "Gentiles" would fail to achieve true salvation. Euro-Americans could help to achieve this goal, Smith sometimes argued, but Native Americans would have to lead the way. Contrary to other Christian faiths practiced during the Second Great Awakening, then, early Mormons seem not to have preached to Native Americans solely in the interest of "redeeming a fallen people." Missionaries also wanted to co-opt their spiritual labors to bring about the end of days.[10]

As Mormon control over lands, lakes, and rivers expanded, the valley's indigenous inhabitants found themselves increasingly enmeshed in a system of unequal obligations with white

settlers. Despite Parley P. Pratt's advice to "feed, clothe, and instruct the Indians" and Brigham Young's oft-repeated mantra "it is easier to feed the Indians than to fight them," intermountain Numic communities faced scarcity and starvation caused by settler land expropriation almost from the colonial git-go.[11] Shrinking access to ceremonially important fisheries and the lake-strangling irrigation of once-abundant rivers drove Timpanogos Utes, who called themselves the "fish-eaters," to starvation.[12] Beleaguered by scarcity and rapid changes in the accessibility of ritually important lands and waters, Native peoples increasingly had to modify their trade practices to satisfy Mormon appetites, since the Saints held many of the resources that indigenous communities had previously relied upon for spiritual and physical sustenance. At the same time, Mormons did not merely recreate their pre-existing understandings of Lamanites and bondage in the Great Basin, instead, they had to accommodate pre-existing patterns of enslavement in order to survive, physically and spiritually.

Still, Mormon settlers took it upon themselves to regulate Intermountain slave trades. Ironically, Mormon efforts at restriction merely pulled Native children from the jaws of one unfreedom in order to ensnare them in another.[13] Mormons favored the use of familial and patriarchal metaphors to characterize the purchase of Indigenous people, and some scholars have followed suit. In such terms, Saints who purchased children from equestrian Ute, New Mexican, and Mormon traffickers were seen to merely "adopt" those children into the family. Buyers' adoption metaphors implied that these children would not be expected to carry out any labors that the family would not assign to its own biological children. Nor, according to the 1852 "Act for the Relief of Indian Slaves and Prisoners," were such laborers to be held in bondage for more than twenty years.[14] They also assigned laborers gender-specific tasks, which can acquire especially traumatic meanings when we consider that such obligations may not have matched the kind of work that unfree laborers could have expected to perform in their natal communities, further reinforcing the social alienation of the unfree. As K. Tsianina Lomawaima has argued in the case of assimilationist labor 'education'

at American Indian boarding schools, culturally-defined notions of women's domesticity rendered them vulnerable to much higher degrees of white surveillance than their masculine peers.[15] The same seems to have been the case among the predominantly female unfree laborers in Mormon country.

Other patriarchal metaphors abounded before the end of the 18th century. These, too, could become enshrined in LDS law, though some almost certainly escaped the historical ledger's purview. Sexual relationships between captive Native girls and Mormon patriarchs at least thrice their age were formalized in "marriages," and historians have continued this nomenclatural tradition, implicitly reinforcing the view that captive children wholeheartedly agreed to such unions. Though the lack of existing documentary evidence suggests that we should seek more information before labeling such clearly power-laden relationships 'slavery,' we should also unquestionably criticize settlers' claims and historians' insinuations that such intermarriages were always 'free.' Because Native captives appear to have been concentrated in the households of fairly elite Mormons, patriarchs who took Native women as brides frequently did so in a context of polygamy, where a man's wealth and status correlated to pre-existing marriages with many white women.

The archival absence of Native women who faced such abuse is no accident. In understanding the scope of Indian women's sexual unfreedom in Mormon households, we must remember that many women came to LDS communities after their own were destroyed, sometimes by Native equestrians, sometimes by Mormon settlers. Such episodes of violence sometimes entailed the 'extirpation' of all adult men and most women.[16] Thus, Native people experiencing potential sexual unfreedom found themselves in a system of dependency that might lay at the crossroads of genocide, the trauma of their parents' deaths, and sexual violence among Latter-day Saints.

For Young and other members of the church hierarchy, controlling Native, 'gentile,' and Saint trading patterns was also about expressing their colonial dominance over lands they constructed as a "New Jerusalem," and over the peoples they sought to subordinate to their

categorical roles in the Book of Mormon. Perhaps forcing a "Lamanite" child to live in their homes could subdue momentarily the crushing realization that Native peoples were not the servile leaders Mormons had envisioned them to be. If Native communities had failed to live up to Smith's prophecies for them—if they fought back and were too successful at resisting Mormon colonialism—then enslaved and indentured youth offered another road to salvation, or at least the hope that the next generation of "Lamanites" might "blossom as the rose."

"I'll always remember how terribly pained Helen was when she looked at herself without her hair. That was I'm sure a traumatic experience for her, because in her culture that was something to be prized."[17] So noted Golden Buchanan after his wife Thelma cut Helen's long hair and bathed her to prepare her for placement.[18] Enslavers, captive-takers, kidnappers, and other Mormon agents of unfreedom performed similar rituals on their servants, especially those procured through church laws. When a child arrived "in a Mormon home fresh from capture," Mormons cut or shaved the child's hair off, burned their old clothes, and scrubbed the child down.[19] Some historians contend that these practices were primarily for the sake of 'hygiene,' but the purchasers's indoctrination rituals were also intended to distance the child from looking Indian.[20] Legal rituals abounded as well. The "Act for the further relief of Indian Slaves and Prisoners" required all Mormons who had procured enslaved women and children "by purchase or otherwise" to go declare the bondage to a probate judge.[21] If the judge deemed the captor "a suitable person, and properly qualified" to "retain and educate said Indian prisoner," then the "indenture" could proceed. The "indenture" ritual was said to be voluntary, where an infant who had not yet learned to speak could be allowed to legally bind themselves to a white captor. Even in the marginal number of cases where the captive was an adult, an imbalance of power insured that this ritual could be both unfree and deeply traumatic.

It's worth reminding the reader that Placement was usually voluntary—at least, in the sense that at least one of the child's parents signed a consent form. Yet unofficial placements conducted by missionaries instead of social workers haunted much at least the program's first few years. The primary child remover during that time, Miles Jensen, recalls operating in clandestine ways to avoid detection from federal and tribal authorities. Once, a Native woman halted Jensen's bus—full of removed children—asking to see the so-called social worker's papers to take the children off the reservation. Jensen told her to jump into the Colorado River.[22]

Because the church sought to reduce placement's costs for tithe-paying members, they cut corners by hiring a handful of caseworkers to oversee large numbers of children. Similarly, Mormon captors who skirted the law by informally 'adopting' captives usually went unpunished, because authorities charged with carrying out the law appear not to have enforced it on the purchasing end.[23] The placement program would transfer children to another host family with little consideration for a child's welfare (one student recounts switching Placement homes 14 times in 6 years), just as Utah settlers sold their servants for further economic enrichment.[24] In both cases, the lack of church oversight left Native youth vulnerable. Placement and indenture in LDS homes created an environment where dependent Indian youth could be overworked, exploited, and sexually assaulted.[25]

Other similarities between the ISPP and the above systems of unfreedom exist. Both Placement and servitude in early settler homes involved the performance of Euro-American gender roles in all labor obligations. Of this work, although it seems clear that servants found themselves in far more unequal positions with respect to their labor, Mormon families in the ISPP had similar expectations that Indian students would perform the 'same' amount and kind of labor as their biological children. The commitment to forcing Native students to work in gendered ways, even when they were underage, caused the deaths of several male students exposed to dangerous working environments.[26]

Placement and labor might seem strange companions from a contemporary perspective. But it made sense for Mormon urbanites and farmers who relied on their children's labor to make ends meet. Indeed, there appear to be cases where Native and non-native children shared similar responsibilities, but even this ideal case seems problematic from a more holistic perspective. In such cases, children still had to be removed from their Native families, where they would perform labor that enriched their their natal communities. A church-produced film recognized how great a sacrifice giving up even one child could be for Native parents: "naturally we wonder," the film's narrator muses, "if our children go on placement, who will tend our sheep, or help with the chores?"[27] In less ideal circumstances, the connection between labor and exploitation becomes clearer still. Sometimes women placement students tended to be much older than the host family's children, and therefore expected to perform childcare entailing much more work than would be expected of the younger children.[28] In any case, child labor contributed to the economic enrichment of LDS families. Typically, then, Native students would contribute at least as much (and at least sometimes a great deal more) labor than their non-Indian peers, but would not share equally in reaping the benefits of their work.[29]

Finally, and perhaps most critically, Mormons' experiences with unfree Native servants in their homes provides a vital lens into the ISPP because these early experiments in unfreedom scripted how they would understand later encounters with Indians. Out of captivity and indenture emerged an elaborate discourse on "Lamanites" and "adoption" that rendered both unfreedom and Placement possible. In both cases, before paving the road to Hell, Mormons first had to convince themselves of their own innocence. After all, they had come to Zion with only the best of intentions.

[1] "Mormon Families 'Adopt' Indian Children." *Vernal Express,* September 15, 1960. "Mormon Families 'Adopt' Indian Children." *Times Independent*, September 15, 1960. "Mormon Families 'Adopt' Indian Children." *Salt Lake Times,* September 16, 1960.

[2] Jared Farmer, *On Zion's Mount: Mormons, Indians, and the American Landscape,* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009), 367.

[3] This history's Saints appear less well-intentioned when we move beyond individual aspirations in favor of a more systemic reckoning of community acts. Failing to situate Helen John's story among a broader history of injustice emphasizes a host family's 'good' intentions while minimizing settlers' unbroken commitment to violence. To ensure that I stay within the 15-minute RMIHC time limit, I have cut as much historiography as possible from the paper's body. In case the audience would like to hear more about this varied and contradicting body of placement literature, I will have an extra slide standing by to go through the historiography during the question and answer period.

[4] In his book, George P. Lee recalls his father hiding them from the "white man's religion." Not the same as hiding from a threat of removal, certainly, but that the father hid the children as well instead of simply making himself scarce reveals a preoccupation with allowing children to be near missionaries. See George P. Lee, *Silent Courage: An Indian Story: the Autobiography of George P. Lee, a Navajo*, (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1987), 100-101.

[5] Margaret D. Jacobs, "Entangled Histories: The Mormon Church and Indigenous Child Removal from 1850 to 2000," *Journal of Mormon History* 42, no. 2 (2016): 35. See also Jacobs, *A Generation Removed : The Fostering and Adoption of Indigenous Children in the Postwar World,* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2014).

[6] This is a reformulation of an argument advanced in AnCita Benally's brilliant PhD dissertation, "Diné Binahat'á', Navajo Government" (PhD diss., Arizona State University, 2006). My ongoing master's thesis project studies in greater detail how LDS efforts and the Indian Student Placement Program built upon broader Anglo efforts to undermine Native women's authority. For an exploration of how settler colonialism constructs imperial intimacies, see Ann Laura Stoler, ed., *Haunted By Empire: Geographies of Intimacy in North American History,* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006).

[7] Elise Boxer's article gives a thoughtful, nuanced, and highly useable explanation of the racial, political, and religious ramifications of the Lamanite frame. See Boxer, "'The Lamanites Shall Blossom as the Rose": The Indian Student Placement Program, Mormon Whiteness, and Indigenous Identity," *Journal of Mormon History* 41, no. 4 (2015): 132-76.

[8] Thomas W. Murphy, "Imagining Lamanites: Native Americans and the Book of Mormon" (PhD diss., University of Washington, 2003).

[9] Farmer, *On Zion's Mount,* 2009.

[10] Matthew Garrett, *Making Lamanites: Mormons, Native Americans, and the Indian Student Placement Program, 1947-2000,* (Salt Lake City: The University of Utah Press, 2016), 15-16.

[11] For the Pratt quote, see Garrett, *Making Lamanites,* 32.

[12] Farmer, *On Zion's Mount,* 2009.

[13] For a comparative history of the New Mexican and Mormon slaveries in the Southwest, see Sondra Jones, *The Trial of Don Pedro Leon Luján: The Attack against Indian Slavery and the Mexican Traders in Utah,* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2000).

[14] "A Preamble and an Act for the further relief of Indian Slaves and Prisoners," from "Utah Laws Against Slavery," *Utah Historical Quarterly* 2, no. (1929): 212-214. Accessed from https://issuu.com/utah10/docs/volume_2_1929/87 on September 1, 2019.

[15] K. Tsianina Lomawaima, *They Called it Prairie Light: the Story of Chilocco Indian School,* (Omaha: University of Nebraska Press, 1995).

[16] Brian Q. Cannon, ""To Buy Up the Lamanite Children as Fast as They Could": Indentured Servitude and Its Legacy in Mormon Society," *Journal of Mormon History* 44, no. 2 (2018): 1-35.

[17] Golden R. Buchanan, Oral History, 13, obtained from Elise Boxer, ""The Lamanites Shall Blossom as the Rose": The Indian Student Placement Program, Mormon Whiteness, and Indigenous Identity," *Journal of Mormon History* 41, no. 4 (2015): 132-76.

[18] Neil J. Birch, "Helen John: the Beginnings of Indian Placement," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 18, no. 4 (1985): 119-129.

[19] Cannon, "To Buy Up the Lamanite Children," 15.

[20] Boxer, "The Lamanites Shall Blossom as the Rose," 147.

[21] "A Preamble and an Act for the further relief of Indian Slaves and Prisoners," 213.

[22] Miles Herbert Jensen Dictation, 1973, typescript, p. 7-8, the James Moyle Oral History Program, Archives, Historical Department of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah.

[23] Jones, *The Trial of Don Pedro Leon Luján.*

[24] Vanessa Smith-Tso Oral History, interviewed by Matthew K. Heiss, 1997, typescript, p. 3, the James Moyle Oral History Program, Archives, Historical Department of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah.

[25] Lynette A. Riggs, "The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints' Indian Placement Service: A History" (PhD diss., Utah State University, 2008).

[26] As an example, see Upalco Youth Killed in Chute Accident," *Vernal Express,* February 12, 1970.

[27] "We are Rich: Indian Student Placement Service" (promotional film for the Indian Student Placement Program), 1980, Archives, Historical Department of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah.

[28] For examples, see Robert Gottlieb and Peter Wiley, "The Kids Go Out Navaho and Come Back Donny and Marie: the Mormons' Controversial Save-Our-Indians Program," *Los Angeles Magazine*, December, 1979.

[29] A small equivocation here. Sometimes host families did help foot the bill for a Native student's college tuition, or help them to become employed in lucrative work.