

Review: Book Review: Blackman, Oklahoma's Indian New Deal, by Tanis C. Thorne

Reviewed Work(s): Oklahoma's Indian New Deal by Jon S. Blackman

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historical and cultural bonds that link the western United States to all of the Pacific Islands in Oceania.

Kester approaches Iosepa as a starting point to examine the complicated issues of racial minorities within Mormonism. He documents the ways that Pacific Islanders were subjected to discrimination and marginalization, and he also considers how residents of Iosepa and other Hawaiians accepted doctrinal racism as they tried to earn their own salvation. These insights contribute to fuller understanding of the impacts of racial doctrines that are part of the shifting contours of both Mormonism and, implicitly, other American faiths. His discussions of race, however, fail to trace the ways that earlier doctrines and practices continue to have an enduring impact on Utah's Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders, who represent the second highest concentration of those minorities in the continental United States. They comprise over 2 percent of the population in Salt Lake City, where almost a quarter of them live below the national poverty line and are substantially overrepresented among the chronically ill.

Kester begins the task of incorporating Iosepa, its residents, and their legacies into a fuller history of the American West. He emphasizes the importance of collective memory and the ways that Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders continue to develop narratives about their experiences as diasporic communities. However, he does not fully deal with the racism that is intimately tied to Mormon colonization and the ways that centuries of oppression have shaped different standpoints and collective memories about Iosepa and its meanings. Despite this, Kester's well-written, engrossing book is an important contribution to the story of the American West and the roles of religion and race in its development.

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MARION GOLDMAN

*Oklahoma's Indian New Deal.* By Jon S. Blackman. (Norman, University of Oklahoma Press, 2013. ix + 225 pp. \$24.95 paper)

*Oklahoma's Indian New Deal* promises insights into the Oklahoma Indian Welfare Act (OIWA) of 1936, its "origins, enactment, implementation, [and] impact (p. 4). Why were Oklahoma Indians exempted from major provisions of the Indian Reorganization Act (IRA) in 1934, only to be awarded "virtually everything contained in the IRA and then some" (p. 6) with passage of the OIWA two years later? Senator Elmer Thomas (D-Okla) seemingly reversed his position on the New Deal when he chose to cooperate with John Collier

and to cosponsor the Thomas-Rogers bill; overhauled, this bill was enacted into law as the OIWA. The “then some” is the chartering of local cooperative associations, composed of ten or more Indians (Sections 4 and 5). The overall impact of the OIWA in providing economic relief was “dismal at best” (p. 157), but Jon Blackman concludes that the OIWA is significant because it put Oklahoma Indians back on the path to self-rule.

The book is more successful as a general overview of the Indian New Deal than as a monograph on the OIWA. The most original material is in Chapter 4, “Oklahoma’s Newer New Deal,” where he presents an insightful variety of Indian perspectives on the New Deal drawn from hearings held in 1935 at the instigation of Senator Thomas. Thomas’s motives as a reformer—and why and how they changed from 1934 to 1936—are superficially researched and unconvincingly interpreted. A more focused and methodical analysis of similarities and differences between the IRA, the Thomas-Rogers bill, and the OIWA (full texts of which are in the appendices) would have increased the book’s value. The Oklahoma congressional delegation’s long-standing resentment of federal carpetbagging drove its opposition to the IRA as well as the Thomas-Rogers bill. Thomas no doubt shared this resentment as a southern Democrat, but he clearly was no cats-paw to the cadre of businessmen and lawyers who stripped the Five Civilized Tribes of their assets after the legislation called the “Crime of 1908.” Included in the Thomas-Rogers bill was a key provision, which transferred jurisdiction over probate matters from the Oklahoma county courts to the Department of the Interior. This provision was not included in the OIWA. Understandably, Oklahoma Indians were ambivalent about the New Deal because they were “suspended between two evils, the crookedness of the county court, and the incompetency of the Indian Office” (p. 97), as Choctaw Grady Lewis explained.

The book is very readable but flawed. Blackman errs when he states that the concept of blood quantum was absent from the IRA (p. 91); Section 19 uses blood quantum in its definition of who is an Indian. Oklahoma Congressman William Hastings is alternately identified as a Choctaw (p. 48) and as a Cherokee (p. 75). Blackman asserts he will shun labels like “traditional” or “progressive” as overly simplistic and misleading (p. 19), but he repeatedly uses such terms without qualification (pp. 18, 75, 80, 82, 144). The footnoting and the index leave much to be desired.

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