

Book Reviews

Matthew W. Dougherty. *Lost Tribes Found: Israelite Indians and Religious Nationalism in Early America*. University of Oklahoma Press, 2021. Pp. 250.

Lost Tribes Found is an important historical analysis of discourses surrounding the Indigenous people of Turtle Island and their purported connection to the biblical Israelites. Rather than focusing on the accuracy of such claims, Matthew W. Dougherty does the arguably more important work of showcasing how Turtle Island Israelite stories play a distinct role in the settler colonial political contexts in which they appear. Chapter 1 begins with Protestant conceptions of Turtle Island Israelite stories and why they became popular within this tradition. Dougherty argues that Protestants circulated these stories for two main reasons: to justify missionary activity and advocate for a slower pace of settler colonial expansion to allow time for conversions (24). Christian Protestants believed such stories worked to sanctify settler colonial expansion, a process they envisioned as culminating in the relocation of Indigenous Turtle Islanders to Israel once settlement was complete (44–45).

Chapter 2 focuses on Turtle Island Israelite stories circulated among members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS). Preferring the word “Lamanites” to “Indians,” LDS Turtle Island Israelite stories were designed to subvert the conventional expansion of the US empire. The LDS Church saw Indigenous nations as an army of God destined to take back control of Indigenous land. However, rather than reinstating their own sovereignty, Indigenous nations were expected to consolidate power in LDS hands in the “kingdom of God” (64). Chapter 3 follows Mordecai M. Noah, a Jewish American, and William Apress, an Indigenous person. Both used Turtle Island Israelite stories to reimagine their communities’ places on the continent and reinforce their distinct political agendas (86). While Noah tried his best to balance claims of Jewish indigeneity to Turtle Island and claims of Jewish whiteness, Apress focused on making Judaeian theological claims for Indigenous sovereignty (76–77, 94).

Although I find the content of this chapter insightful, Dougherty’s organizational choice to put Apress and Noah in the same chapter seems to imply that their struggles to find a place in the American empire are similar. Despite the inclusion of much-needed distinctions between the two within the chapter, including the acknowledgement of Noah’s status as a settler who desired Indigenous dispossession, the decision to place the two sections in the same chapter remains problematic. Due to the average North American’s association of Jewish and Indigenous identities as both minority groups, I fear it may be too easy for the reader to blur the distinction between colonizer and colonized in this context. More should have been done to associate Noah with the LDS in Chapter 2 and Apress with the Cherokee Nation in Chapter 4. That said, the sections dedicated to Noah and Apress are well done.

Chapter 4 follows the Cherokee Nation before and after the Trail of Tears, showing how they perpetuated Turtle Island Israelite stories to support their own claims of sovereignty in the face of removal (105). Finally, Chapter 5 makes the argument that Turtle Island Israelite stories fell out of fashion as US western expansion became more aggressive. Dougherty claims that, rather than appealing to “God’s will” as justification for the taking of Indigenous lands, the narrative shifted to viewing the colonial project as “natural” (142). Dougherty’s project is not only important in the never-ending quest to document the psychological landscape in which the American empire was justified – he also writes with commendable attention to detail. For example, Dougherty prefaces his fourth chapter on Cherokee Turtle Island Israelite stories with important caveats about how these stories were recorded and by whom they were collected (111). Furthermore, his detailed explanation of how the term “religion” works in the colonial context provides much-needed background for anyone not well-versed in the anticolonial study of religion (12–13).

In addition to the minor critique of Chapter 3, I have two more substantial critiques of how the book frames “nationhood” and the Doctrine of Discovery.

Firstly, Dougherty’s definition of nationhood is a bit lacking when understood from the perspective of many Indigenous communities. Dougherty writes,

I use the term “nation” for political communities that imagined themselves as autonomous, bounded, and unified by a structuring commonality such as language, religion, or ethnicity. Nationhood, I argue, was about collective imagination and practice as much as it was about official legal recognition (11).

Although this definition is inclusive of many different social structures that might not be thought of as a nation by the average American, it does not fully account for Indigenous understandings of nationhood as rooted in relationships to land and resistance to settler colonialism. For example, representatives of the Yurok, Diné, and Lakota Nations argue that land and the experience of colonialism are essential to Indigenous nationhood. Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, a member of the Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg Nation, similarly emphasizes the inseparability of Indigenous nationhood and resistance to settler colonialism:

[T]he idea of Indigenous nationhood is a concept still very misunderstood by Canadians [...] my nationhood, by its very nature calls into question this system of settler colonialism, a system that is such an overwhelming, violent, normalized, and dishonest reality in Canada and so many other places. It is the force that has removed me from my land, it has erased me from my history and from contemporary life, and it is the reason we currently have thousands of missing and murdered Indigenous women and Two Spirit/queer people in Canada.¹

As this quotation indicates, for many Indigenous peoples, “nationhood” is a revolutionary concept. Attention to such details would not only make Dougherty’s definition of nationhood feel less centred in colonial thinking, but also create much-needed context as to why the Cherokee Nation and other Indigenous peoples would resist colonization in the ways they did and still do.

Second, in the fifth chapter, Dougherty makes the assertion that justifications for US western expansion have shifted from the religious to the secular. One of the examples he gives is a shift from using the Doctrine of Discovery – which states that “the first Christian nation to lay claim to an area obtained title to the entire watershed” (146) – to a justification based on manifest destiny, the belief that the United States has the natural right to colonize the West. His evidence for this claim rests on John O’Sullivan, a Democratic newspaper editor writing in the context of debates over the Oregon Territory and Texas (146). The American relationship with the Doctrine of Discovery goes far deeper than the words of one journalist, though, and it remains a legal precedent to this day.

Johnson v. McIntosh (1823), which held that the United States has the right to all Indigenous territory based on the Doctrine of Discovery, is still the undisputed foundation for all United States property law.² In addition, it is important to note that *Johnson v. McIntosh* serves as the foundational case for all United States federal Indian law. Even if Dougherty is right about the Doctrine of Discovery falling out of

1. Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, *As We Have Always Done: Indigenous Freedom through Radical Resistance* (University of Minnesota Press, 2017), 6–7.

2. Peter P. d’Errico, *Federal Anti-Indian Law: The Legal Entrapment of Indigenous Peoples* (Bloomsbury, 2024), 43–44.

fashion in casual discourse, we need to consider its place in the US colonial machine. Nevertheless, this book has a lot to offer any student in terms of understanding colonial discourse.

Prior to reading this book, I was unfamiliar with Turtle Island Israelite stories and the ways in which they have often been used. Dougherty's work is a must-read for anyone researching discourses related to religion and colonialism. I will find myself coming back to this book when trying to comprehend how religion permeates political discourse, especially when discussing the United States. Another book I would recommend pairing with this one is Steven Newcomb's *Pagans in the Promised Land: Decoding the Doctrine of Christian Discovery* (Fulcrum Publishing, 2008). Newcomb and Dougherty cover similar topics, and in my opinion Newcomb's use of cognitive theory can provide additional insight into Turtle Island Israelite stories.

– Nethaniel Belmont, *University of Colorado*