



# **Making Lamanites: Mormons, Native Americans, and the Indian Student Placement Program, 1947- 2000**

*Matthew Garrett*

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From 1947 to 2000, some 50,000 Native American children left the reservations to live with Mormon foster families. While some dropped out of the Indian Student Placement Program (ISPP), for others the months spent living with LDS families often proved more penetrating than expected.

The ISPP emerged in the mid-twentieth century, championed by Apostle Spencer W. Kimball, aligned with the then national preferences to terminate tribal entities and assimilate indigenous people. But as the paradigm shifted to self-determination, critics labeled the program as crudely assimilationist. Some ISPP students like Navajo George P. Lee fiercely defended the LDS Church before native peers and Congress, contending that it empowered Native people and instilled the *true* Indian identity; meanwhile Red Power activists organized protests in Salt Lake City, denouncing LDS colonization. As a new generation of church leaders quietly undercut the Indian programs, many of its former participants felt a sense of confusion and abandonment as Mormon distinctions for Native people faded in the late twentieth century.

*Making Lamanites* traces this student experience within contested cultural and institutional landscapes to reveal how and why many of these Native youth adopted a new notion of Indianness.

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