



# **Chosen People, a Promised Land: Mormonism and Race in Hawai'i (First Peoples: New Directions in Indigenous Studies)**

*Hokulani K. Aikau*

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Christianity figured prominently in the imperial and colonial exploitation and dispossession of indigenous peoples worldwide, yet many indigenous people embrace Christian faith as part of their cultural and ethnic identities. *A Chosen People, a Promised Land* gets to the heart of this contradiction by exploring how Native Hawaiian members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (more commonly known as Mormons) understand and negotiate their place in this quintessentially American religion.

Mormon missionaries arrived in Hawai'i in 1850, a mere twenty years after Joseph Smith founded the church. Hokulani K. Aikau traces how Native Hawaiians became integrated into the religious doctrine of the church as a "chosen people"—even at a time when exclusionary racial policies regarding black members of the church were being codified. Aikau shows how Hawaiians and other Polynesian saints came to be considered chosen and how they were able to use their venerated status toward their own spiritual, cultural, and pragmatic ends.

Using the words of Native Hawaiian Latter-Day Saints to illuminate the intersections of race, colonization, and religion, *A Chosen People, a Promised Land* examines Polynesian Mormon articulations of faith and identity within a larger political context of self-determination.

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