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Book Notice for *Slavery in Zion: A Documentary and Genealogical History of Black Lives and Black Servitude in Utah Territory, 1847–1862* by Amy Tanner Thiriot

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Abstract: Book Notice for *Slavery in Zion: A Documentary and Genealogical History of Black Lives and Black Servitude in Utah Territory, 1847–1862* by Amy Tanner Thiriot. The reviewer notes that: "Thiriot's work goes beyond a mere historical account; it serves as a comprehensive documentation of the lived experiences of Black individuals and their roles in Utah Territory. By combing through a wide array of primary sources—including journals, court records, and personal accounts—the author sheds light on the struggles, resilience, and agency of Black people during this era."



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Slavery in Zion: A Documentary and Genealogical History of Black Lives and Black Servitude in Utah Territory, 1847–1862 by Amy Tanner Thiriot (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2022)

Slavery in Zion: A Documentary and Genealogical History of Black Lives and Black Servitude in Utah Territory, 1847–1862 is an important and carefully researched book by Amy Tanner Thiriot. Delving deep into an often-overlooked and lesser-known aspect of Utah’s history, Thiriot explores the intricate dynamics of slavery and servitude in the region during the period spanning from the Saints’ arrival in the mountain west to 1862. Thiriot is an independent historian and adjunct instructor in the BYU–Idaho Family History Research program.

The introduction describes some of the questions the book attempts to answer: “How did these enslaved men, women, and children come to live in Utah Territory? What were their experiences in the territory? What happened to them after they were freed?” (x–xi). Thiriot describes a subsequent question that her research gave rise to: “How can we best honor the memory of men, women, and children who struggled under the heavy burdens of enslavement?” In response, she writes, “The best way to honor their memory is to tell their stories as completely and honestly as possible” (xi).

Thiriot’s work goes beyond a mere historical account; it serves as a comprehensive documentation of the lived experiences of Black individuals and their roles in Utah Territory. By combing through a wide array of primary sources—including journals, court records, and personal accounts—the author sheds light on the struggles, resilience, and agency of Black people during this era. Readers will learn about early Black pioneers, most commonly

coming to Utah Territory as slaves, such as Cordelia Litchford, Martha Ann Morris Flake, Green Flake, Venice and China, and many more.

The book traces the origins of Black servitude in Utah Territory and examines the intricate—and complicated—web of relationships between Black individuals, white settlers, and Native American communities. Thiriot deftly illuminates the multifaceted aspects of these often-complicated relationships.

Through genealogical research, Thiriot unveils the stories of Black families and their contributions to the development of the territory. She highlights the challenges they faced, their aspirations, and the networks they built within their communities.

Slavery in Zion invites readers to reevaluate and enhance their understanding of Utah’s history. Thiriot’s rigorous research and compelling narrative style make the book an engaging and eye-opening read for both scholars and general readers interested in American and Utah history. As President Dallin H. Oaks declared, “Black lives matter.”¹ By amplifying the voices of those silenced by time, Thiriot brings to light the complexities of Black lives and servitude within Utah Territory, fostering a greater understanding of the region’s past and a path toward a more inclusive future.

—Matthew B. Christensen

Approaching the Tree: Interpreting 1 Nephi 8, edited by Benjamin Keogh, Joseph M. Spencer, and Jennifer Champoux (Provo, Utah: Neal A. Maxwell

1. Dallin H. Oaks, “Racism and Other Challenges” (BYU Devotional, Provo, Utah, October 27, 2020), <https://speeches.byu.edu/talks/dallin-h-oaks/racism-other-challenges/>.