

A Bit of Utah's Urban History

Ari Romo

03/17/2020

A Bit of Utah's Urban History, with Dr. Lawrence Culver

<iframe src="https://open.spotify.com/embed-podcast/episode/4WUeRPrBSqjYJBa4g649IT" width="100%" height="232" frameborder="0" allowtransparency="true" allow="encrypted-media"></iframe>

Dr. Lawrence Culver is an assistant professor of History at Utah State University with research in the United States' southwest borderlands; the American West; cultural, environmental and urban history. Culver has gained recognition as the country's top historian by the history news network in 2007, Carson prize for best dissertation in environmental history in 2005, and various USU recognitions, and publications including *The Frontier of Leisure: Southern California and the Shaping of Modern America* (2010), "Seeing Climate through Culture" in *Environmental History* (April 2014), "Confluences of Nature and Culture: Cities in Environmental History," and book *Manifest Disaster: Climate and the Making of America*. If there is any takeaway from this episode, it's that "If you have basic content knowledge of history then you can start looking at larger patterns and asking much bigger questions". Some of these patterns Culver explains includes: *How does society respond to economic crisis? How do they respond to increased immigration and diversity? What political systems are more or less resilient over time? How does technology or culture change society over time?*

In this episode Culver lays down some knowledge on the west, starting with the man we named Lake Powell after. John Wesley Powell, head of U.S geological survey back in the 1800s, led the first expedition from Colorado River into the Grand Canyon. During this trek Powell realized that what worked in the Midwest would not work in the West; and that the Homestead Act had some issues. The *Homestead Act* "encouraged Western migration by providing settlers 160 acres of public land." The issue was

that the government had not yet realized how arid the west really was. Powell proposed to the federal government that in order for the west to thrive they were going to have to pursue large-scale irrigation projects (Powell used Mormon pioneers' communal irrigation system as a model), that landowners would need much larger tracts of land, and that landowners should use the land for ranching as opposed to agriculture. As we see in this modern age, the government eventually got on board, but Powell may have still pleaded on deaf ears.

Now, on to Utah. Utah was founded in a moment of crisis from people fleeing persecution. The Mormon pioneer settlers arrived on the scene and an output of irrigation systems, wide roads, and optimistic spirits came into the state. Over time Utah's economy became heavily dependent on mining and agriculture until it was demolished by the great depression. Today's focus is more towards tourism and recreation, although mining and agriculture are still precedent. Unique to Utah's economy, and due to the settlement history, is the role the dominant religion plays into the state. "State's history of being primarily one religion means by definition response to crisis has been more organized/hierarchical than a typical American state." Going forward into current times, Culver talks about how Utah has grown more diverse in its' religion, its' people, and its' economy. Listen in on this episode of *Instead* and hear what Dr. Culver's insights are on the rest of these topics.