



Figure 1. Wovoka (Jack Wilson), Northern Paiute prophet of the Ghost Dance, Yerington, Nevada, ca. 1915. Photo courtesy of the Nevada Historical Society.

WAGE WORK IN THE SACRED CIRCLE: THE GHOST DANCE AS MODERN RELIGION

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The Ghost Dance is commonly understood as a backward-looking rejection of modern life. Yet the teachings of the religion often incorporated exhortations to wage labor and other instructions for good living in the reservation era as necessary measures to precipitate the millennium. In reaching backward and forward simultaneously, the Ghost Dance helped resolve contradictions of Indian identity in the post-conquest world.

ON 18 NOVEMBER 1890, at a meeting of Northern Cheyenne leaders and U.S. negotiators, a man named Porcupine rose to speak in defense of Cheyenne land claims challenged by settlers. At that moment, First Lieutenant J. A. Gaston of the Eighth U.S. Cavalry took the opportunity to ask about another matter. Porcupine was a well-known evangelist of a new religion sweeping the Plains. Known in the press as the “Messiah Craze” or “Ghost Dance,” it had come seemingly out of nowhere to gain a vigorous following at some thirty reservations across the West, including the Northern Cheyenne Reservation at Lama Deer.¹

Gaston’s interest in Porcupine’s beliefs was more strategic than scholarly. The army had been charged with suppressing the religion among Lakotas, or the Western Sioux, old allies of the Northern Cheyenne and frequent visitors from their reservations in

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¹ James Mooney, “The Ghost-Dance Religion and the Sioux Outbreak of 1890,” in *Fourteenth Annual Report of the Bureau of Ethnology to the Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution, 1892–93*, ed. J. W. Powell (Washington, DC: GPO, 1896), 2:926.

South Dakota. Army officers knew that Porcupine recently had been among the Lakota. The previous spring he had traveled with Lakota emissaries somewhere in the West, where they learned the teachings of the new faith from a mysterious prophet.

Now, about one-third of the population of Western Sioux at Pine Ridge, Rosebud, Cheyenne River, and Standing Rock were gripped by what authorities were calling a “dance craze,” a reference to the central ritual of the religion: a ring of people, holding hands and singing while turning in a clockwise direction.² As the dancers gathered speed, some would fall unconscious. The circle ceased moving after a time, and as the entranced awoke, they related their visions of resurrection and renewal—of joyous reunions amidst green hills and tumbling streams, of camps filled with long-gone family feasting on fresh buffalo meat, of meetings with the Father and his Son—and ceremonial leaders proclaimed these happy tidings to the assembled crowd. Some visionaries announced after waking that they could see the returned spirits of departed loved ones in the circle, anticipating the millennium when, as they explained to one white observer, “those who are dead will all be raised, and will again live upon the earth with their people.”³

To most officials who confronted this strange wave of feeling so soon after the end of armed conflicts on the Plains, the Ghost Dance represented a failure of assimilation and a burgeoning crisis, especially because it involved Lakotas. Authorities perceived the circle turning with greater energy among the people who had demolished Custer’s command only fourteen years before, seemingly drawing more believers and multiplying the ranks of visionaries faster than elsewhere and, in their view, threatening violence.⁴

In October the situation had reached a near stalemate, with dancers refusing to forego the ritual and agents refusing to disburse food or clothing—rations necessary for survival—until they did. Late that month, President Benjamin Harrison had empowered the army to seize the Lakota reservations and suppress the dances. By the time Gaston made his inquiries of Porcupine, the army command was planning to invade the reservations, a move they made four days later, kicking off a sequence of events that would culminate in the killing of Sitting Bull in December, the retreat of committed Ghost Dancers—so-called hostiles—to the Badlands, and the horror of the Wounded Knee Massacre at Pine Ridge.

Thus, the urgency of Gaston’s queries to Porcupine: What did the new religion portend? Was it a secret plan to unite the tribes against their white oppressors? With the Northern Plains in upheaval and the threat of violence in the air, the officer

² Rani-Henrik Andersson, *The Lakota Ghost Dance of 1890* (Lincoln, 2008), 76–7, 345n164 and A. T. Lea quoted in James A. Cooper to R. V. Belt, 22 November 1890, reel 1, Special Case 188, Records of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, Record Group 75, National Archives in Washington, DC (NA) (hereafter SC 188).

³ George Bird Grinnell, “Account of the Northern Cheyennes Concerning the Messiah Superstition,” *Journal of American Folklore* 4 (January–March 1891): 66 and Mooney, “Ghost-Dance Religion,” 917.

⁴ Mooney, “Ghost-Dance Religion,” 917.

wondered if Porcupine could tell him about the meaning of this dance. Porcupine happily complied. "If we dance, our gardens will grow nice and we will never get sick or crazy," he began, underscoring the religion's promise of health and well-being. "We must not quarrel or scold each other," he went on, explaining the teachings of peace and brotherhood: "We must love each other. We must love all the world." He added that believers should tell the truth—"I must not tell lies"—and eschew war: "We must not quarrel with the whites or kill them."⁵

So far, Porcupine's account of the teachings matched contemporary press accounts of the religion and the many histories ever since. But he added another exhortation in the middle of his explanation that rang a seemingly discordant note: "We must work; if the white man asks us to work we must say yes and not no."⁶

This article argues that in addition to promising the renewal of the earth and the ascension of all believers to eternal health and prosperity, the Ghost Dance advanced a code of practice that included wage labor and other instructions for survival and good living in the reservation era. Ghost Dance teachings simultaneously reached backward and forward in time, hearkening back to an all-Indian world with abundant land and autonomy and urging followers to take up modern means of survival while awaiting the millennium. The Ghost Dance, in helping believers resolve contradictions that sprang from Indian persistence in the post-conquest era, thus comprised a modern religion.⁷

The difficulty of advancing the Ghost Dance as a modern religion is considerable, given the flow of argument about it since 1890. Shortly after it first appeared, many officials and white observers consigned the religion to the category of "nonprogressive" belief, an exclusively backward-looking, atavistic, and millennial longing that stood in contrast to "progressive" practices encouraged by white assimilationists and the government. Only days before Porcupine related the teachings in Montana, Special Agent E. B. Reynolds, an observer of events at Pine Ridge and Rosebud, summarized the content of the new religion in the terms by which it had already become broadly understood. Reynolds wrote that the new faith promised to Indians "the return to the earth of their forefathers, the buffalo, elk, and all other game, the complete restoration of their ancient habits, customs and power, and the annihilation of the white man."⁸

⁵ "Proceedings of a Council with the Cheyennes on Tongue River, Montana, Nov. 18, 1890," in Redfield Proctor to Secretary of the Interior, 22 December, 1890, reel 1, SC 188.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ The notion of religion as a means of reconciling cultural contradictions is widespread in religious studies. For a useful example, see Anthony A. Lee, "Reconciling the Other: The Baha'i Faith in America as a Successful Synthesis of Christianity and Islam," *Occasional Papers in Shayki, Babi and Baha'i Studies* 7 (March 2003), <http://www.h-net.org/~bahai/bhpapers.htm>.

⁸ E. B. Reynolds to Commissioner of Indian Affairs (CIA), 2 November 1890, reel 1, SC 188. For similar renderings of the Ghost Dance teachings by historians, see Robert M. Utley, *The Last Days of the Sioux Nation* (New Haven, 1963), 60; Heather Cox Richardson, *Wounded Knee: Party Politics and the Road to an American Massacre* (New York, 2010), 15; Andersson, *Lakota Ghost Dance*, 24–9; Jeffrey Ostler, *The Plains Sioux and U.S. Colonialism from Lewis and Clark to Wounded Knee* (New York, 2004), 243–63; and Jerome A. Greene, *American Carnage: Wounded*

The first scholar of the Ghost Dance, ethnologist James Mooney, reached similar conclusions in his classic 1896 study, and many still follow the path he blazed. Mooney situated the religion as one in a long tradition, “well nigh universal among the American tribes,” expressing a common “belief in the coming of a messiah, who should restore them to their original happy condition.” In Mooney’s reckoning, the Ghost Dance continued successive waves of Indian religion—from the Delaware prophet through Tecumseh—expressing this belief.⁹

Since then, histories of the Ghost Dance religion generally describe it as belief in the imminent renewal of the earth along with Indian autonomy and the return of wild game and old ways.¹⁰ As Jerome A. Greene summarizes the consensus, the Ghost Dance sought (in anthropologist Jack Goody’s phrase) to “bend time backward” to recover an ideal past, or alternatively, “to quicken its movement forward” to utopian resolution. Indians performed the Ghost Dance, concludes Greene, to “encourage the anticipated millennium and its promised rejection of white civilization.”¹¹

None of this is incorrect so much as it is incomplete. Assuming that Ghost Dance visions pointed relentlessly backward, contemporary officials often surmised that only the most antiprogressive Indians joined the sacred circle. It remains a truism of Lakota scholarship in particular that Ghost Dance believers hailed from “traditional” or “conservative” factions that eschewed farming and other accommodations to the reservation order.¹²

To be sure, the religion’s reputation for reinforcing traditional religion was one reason it met with such hostility from officials. Although the Ghost Dance represented a strikingly new ritual form among Lakotas and other Plains peoples, in many ways it facilitated restoration or reassertion of practices that had faded on the reservation since the government ban on “heathenish” dances in 1883.¹³ Over time, many Ghost Dancers experienced visions that authorized them to renew or revive older rituals and ceremonies. More generally, the dance circle itself reinscribed a space of Indian unity and identity in defiance of assimilation and thereby helped to energize waves of ceremonial revival. In future years, then, the Ghost Dance emerged as a preeminent marker or sign of cultural traditionalism and Indian identity.

Contrasted with conventional treatments of the Ghost Dance, then and now, the commandment “We must work,” particularly “if the white man asks us,” stands out in

Knee, 1890 (Norman, 2014), 71.

⁹ Mooney, “Ghost-Dance Religion,” 658.

¹⁰ See, for example, Richardson, *Wounded Knee*, 118. For a notable exception, see Gregory E. Smoak, *Ghost Dances and Identity: Prophetic Religion and American Indian Ethnogenesis in the Nineteenth Century* (Berkeley, 2006), 118.

¹¹ Greene, *American Carnage*, 65–6, 71.

¹² See, for example, *ibid.*, 72.

¹³ Clyde Holler, *Black Elk’s Religion: The Sun Dance and Lakota Catholicism* (Syracuse, 1995), 110, 119.

sharp relief. To be sure, Indians were no strangers to hard work. Among Plains peoples, hunting, breaking and training horses, making pemmican, finding and harvesting wild chokecherries and other plants, skinning buffalo and tanning hides, and packing and unpacking family belongings for the long journey between seasonal homesites comprised just a few of the myriad labors that life customarily required. But wage labor, or working for white men, was a relatively new experience. Cutting wood, driving wagons, herding livestock, and other forms of rural work were comparatively tedious, exhausting, and often alienating and poorly paid. As scholars have presented them, Ghost Dance prophecies pointed to the past, to the resurrection of the dead and old ways, not to the present, and certainly not to wage work.

And yet the Ghost Dance commandment to labor was reiterated elsewhere, notably in two versions of the teachings collected one thousand miles to the south and east, in Oklahoma. There, a Southern Arapaho evangelist and Carlisle Indian Industrial School alumnus named Caspar Edson returned from Nevada, having taken notes on a sermon by the prophet Jack Wilson (Wovoka), which he then passed on to Mooney. These notes included instructions to “work for white men.” A Southern Cheyenne account at the same time similarly recorded the prophet’s words: “Do not refuse to work for [the] white man.”¹⁴

But millennial excitement, not eagerness for wage work, dominated believers’ thoughts in 1889–1891. A widely shared enthusiasm for the imminent end of the world and the arrival of a verdant new earth was a genuine and defining characteristic of the religion, and the powerful wave of feeling that engulfed many Ghost Dancers in this period cannot be discounted.¹⁵ In various places, including the Lakota reservations, these millenarian preoccupations held sway for a time, just as they have periodically among Christians, Muslims, and other followers of messianic religions. And yet, even some Lakota evangelists exhorted followers to embrace new forms of work and worship, including farming, education, and Christian church attendance. How do we account for instructions that appear so accommodating of U.S. policy and the demands of assimilationists in the midst of a religion so formative of Indian tradition?

To begin, we must resist the practice of placing the Ghost Dance within the non-progressive/progressive binary that, as many scholars have warned, is a poor tool for understanding Indian motivations. Among its many failings, it divides Indians into two camps: one abjectly refusing all change and purportedly destined to be swept aside, the other supposedly willing to assimilate to the American order and “progress” toward whiteness. In truth, Indians regularly confounded these expectations by combining old and new in novel formulations, mapping out alternate strategies to remain Indians while accomplishing other goals—and nowhere more so than in the Ghost Dance.¹⁶

¹⁴ Mooney, “Ghost-Dance Religion,” 781.

¹⁵ Raymond J. DeMallie, “The Lakota Ghost Dance: An Ethnohistorical Account,” *Pacific Historical Review* 51 (November 1982): 385–405.

¹⁶ It is a mark of the binary’s limits that either choice resulted in Indian vanishment. David

We should also separate Indian traditionalism—a genuine political and cultural force within Indian communities that has shaped Indian identity—from nonprogressivism, which is a specter of resistance in the colonial imagination. Indeed, we must reject altogether the assimilationist dichotomies of nonprogressive and progressive religion in favor of a more complex and contingent understanding of both Indian aspirations and millenarian thought and spirit. Indians on different reservations (including many who would become Ghost Dancers) had integrated wage work and the cash economy into their lives for some time by 1890.¹⁷ In the Ghost Dance, some believers saw modern work and worldly success as akin to the peaceful and loving behavior that would precipitate the millennium, which in turn would bring back old forms of autonomy, prosperity, and health. In this they believed and behaved somewhat like other millenarian believers, including Christians, whose instructions for peacefulness, honesty, and hard work constitute a similar package of behaviors for advancing the world to come. Ghost Dancers were pragmatic people grappling with modern problems, and the Ghost Dance offered powerful tools for navigating day-to-day challenges of the reservation era while awaiting the return of the Messiah. Discovering these dimensions of the new religion means starting not on the Northern Plains, where the army focused its efforts and where the tragic events of Wounded Knee unfolded, but at the religion's beginning some 1,200 miles west, in the place where Porcupine heard the teachings from the prophet himself: the remote and obscure Walker River valley of Nevada.

The epicenter of the Ghost Dance of 1890, which culminated a decades-long movement, was located about seventy miles south of Reno, along the course of the Walker River, which tumbles out of the Sierra Nevada and curves east for some 150 miles before terminating at Walker Lake. Here, Jack Wilson, a Northern Paiute ranch hand, experienced his first visions in the latter 1880s, although accounts differ as to exactly where, when, and how. One rancher reported that Wilson had a vision after falling sick, which he later explained as having died and been to heaven. A Paiute contemporary and believer put the event near the headwaters of the Walker River, in the Pine Grove Hills, where Wilson was cutting wood. He heard “a great noise which appeared to be above him on the mountain.” Laying down his ax, he began

Rich Lewis, “Reservation Leadership and the Progressive-Traditional Dichotomy: William Wash and the Northern Utes, 1865–1928,” *Ethnohistory* 38 (Spring 1991): 124–48; Alexandra Harmon, *Indians in the Making: Ethnic Relations and Indian Identities around Puget Sound* (Berkeley, 1998), 178; and Andrew H. Fisher, *Shadow Tribe: The Making of Columbia River Indian Identity* (Seattle, 2010), 122.

¹⁷ For the fast-growing historiography of Indian work, see William J. Bauer Jr., *We Were All Like Migrant Workers Here: Work, Community, and Memory on California's Round Valley Reservation, 1850–1941* (Chapel Hill, 2009); Brian C. Hosmer, *American Indians in the Marketplace: Persistence and Innovation Among the Menominees and Metlakatlans, 1870–1920* (Lawrence, 1999); Colleen O'Neill, *Working the Navajo Way: Labor and Culture in the Twentieth Century* (Lawrence, 2005); and John Sutton Lutz, *Makúk: A New History of Aboriginal-White Relations* (Vancouver, 2008).

to climb toward the sound when he dropped dead. God swept down and carried him to heaven.¹⁸

On this and a subsequent visit he saw in heaven "the most beautiful country you could imagine," full of game and fish and populated by those who had died but now "were all young . . . again." They danced. They gambled. They played ball and "all kinds of sports." During these visitations, God gave him a dance and told him his people must "meet often and dance five nights in succession and then stop for three months." These gatherings would help manifest this heaven, for this broken world was soon to be destroyed with all the people in it, and then it was to be "made over again; and the people who had been good heretofore were to be made over again and all remain young."¹⁹

Wilson himself dictated his teachings to only two official investigators: the army scout Arthur Chapman, in 1890, and Mooney, in 1892. He told Chapman that God had visited him "many times" since his first vision "and told him what to do." He distilled from his heavenly visits a series of teachings. His people, he said, "must not fight, there must be peace all over the world; the people must not steal from one another, but be good to each other, for they were all brothers." The Indians, he said, "must work all the time and not lie down in idleness."²⁰ The prophet dictated roughly the same set of teachings to Mooney:

God told him he must go back and tell his people they must be good and love one another, have no quarreling, and live in peace with the whites; that they must work, and not lie or steal; that they must put away all the old practices that savored of war; that if they faithfully obeyed his instructions they would at last be reunited with their friends in this other world, where there would be no more death or sickness or old age.²¹

In the latter 1880s, Wovoka began offering these teachings and met with sensational response. A visiting party of Bannock Indians attended a dance at Walker River and brought news of the prophecies to their own Fort Hall Reservation in southeastern Idaho. The good word spread. Emissaries from the Lakota, Cheyenne, and Arapaho soon arrived. They carried the message to Kiowa, Comanche, and others who whirled the sacred circle from Montana to Oklahoma.

What caused all this enthusiasm? While scholars have explored dimensions of ritual resistance to American rule, and almost all writing about the religion interprets it as primitive and nativist, an examination of the 1890 Ghost Dance from its point of origin offers a very different perspective as well as a key to its popularity and persistence. The Ghost Dance was intended to bring on the cosmic overthrow of the American

¹⁸ A. I. Chapman to John Gibbon, 6 December 1890, in *Annual Report of the Secretary of War for the Year 1891* (Washington, DC: GPO, 1892), 1:191.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 191–3 and Mooney, "Ghost-Dance Religion," 771–2.

²⁰ Chapman to Gibbon, 191–3.

²¹ Mooney, "Ghost-Dance Religion," 771–2.

order eventually, but meanwhile, it would assist believers in retaining hard-won toe-holds in the American economy. To Northern Paiutes and other Indians, the Ghost Dance became a kind of evangelical revival, simultaneously galvanizing them for the crushing labor of the modern workplace—all “must work, and not lie or steal”—while promising relief from ecological disaster. It began, then, as a wave of spiritual feeling that invited believers to remake their lives in accordance with new realities and embrace new forms of right living. The Ghost Dance offered believers a path that rejuvenated older forms of Indianness against the withering tide of assimilation while empowering adherents to take up new means of survival in wage work and other modern pursuits.

Paiutes had become a significant part of Nevada’s working class by 1889. But as the century drew to a close, a convergence of developments threatened them with economic devastation. Nevada lies almost entirely in the Great Basin, the most arid and desolate landscape in North America. With only six inches of rain per year—or less—most of the state could not (and cannot) support agriculture. No place in the United States has less groundwater. Despite these shortcomings, in 1859 California ranchers staked out the Walker River valley, in what was then Utah Territory, for new open-range grazing outfits to provide beef to the argonauts and fresh livestock to overlanders. That very year, prospectors discovered gold and silver ore at Sun Mountain, near the Carson River. The subsequent opening of the Comstock Lode—the nation’s deepest and richest mines—and the founding of Virginia City brought tens of thousands of emigrants to Paiute homelands, allowing Nevada to achieve statehood in 1864.²²

The newcomers seized Indian homes and threatened their survival. Before the American ascendance, Paiutes—or *Numu*, “the People,” as they called themselves—flourished by occupying far-flung rivers, pools, and springs in small kin groups called “outfits” by anthropologists because some consisted of only a half-dozen or so people and were too small to be labeled “bands.” People hunted and gathered a wide array of animals and plants on a seasonal cycle, and they lived near almost every water source for at least part of the year.²³

Of course, Americans seized these same rivers and streams for their own settlements. Despite some astonishing victories in the Paiute War of 1860, Indians failed to dislodge the newcomers from their armed settlements and had to accommodate to the new American order. Ecological change and dispossession marked this regime and increasingly pushed Paiutes into modern work.²⁴

In the experience of Paiutes along Walker River we can see the outlines of the dynamics that drove the Ghost Dance movement everywhere. Increasingly after 1859, woodcutting

²² Richard V. Francaviglia, *Mapping and Imagination in the Great Basin: A Cartographic History* (Reno, 2005), 5; Richard G. Lillard, *Desert Challenge: An Interpretation of Nevada* (New York, 1949), 17–8; Ronald M. James, *The Roar and the Silence: A History of Virginia City and the Comstock Lode* (Reno, 1998); and Robert Neil Chester, “Comstock Creations: An Environmental History of an Industrial Watershed” (PhD diss., University of California, Davis, 2009).

²³ Michael Hittman, *The Yerington Paiute Tribe: A Numu History* (Yerington, NV, 1984), 3–4.

²⁴ Julian H. Steward, *Basin-Plateau Aboriginal Sociopolitical Groups* (Washington, DC: 1938), 7 and Ferol Egan, *Sand in a Whirlwind: The Paiute Indian War of 1860* (Garden City, NY, 1972).

for construction, heating, cooking, and industrial uses left many Paiute outfits short of staple pine nuts at the same time grazing by cattle and horses removed wild bunchgrass seeds, another valuable food source. As ranchers irrigated meadows to grow more hay, they reduced flows into and added silt to the Walker River, diminishing trout and freshwater mussels and causing the river to dry up completely in 1881 and periodically thereafter.²⁵

The same industries that disrupted Paiutes' means of feeding themselves also created a demand for their labor. Gold and silver miners generally excluded Indians from their ranks, but Paiutes could be found in virtually every other kind of regional wage labor, including carpentry, construction, road grading, ranch tasks, and hauling goods. "Many of them are employed as laborers on the farms of white men in all seasons," remarked Nevada's Indian agent in 1866.²⁶

Partly because of the need to pursue work, only one in every four Paiutes lived on a reservation by the late 1880s. The rest resettled on what might be called the river of money: the cash economy that flowed through American settlements. Paiutes became more market oriented and cosmopolitan, moving from natal places for work and society not only in Virginia City but in mining camps, ranch outposts, and small towns. Such dynamics played out along the Walker River, where from the 1860s on, Paiutes survived through a mix of old economy and new. Thus, from boyhood, Jack Wilson lived near the town of Greenfield (later Yerington), joining other Paiutes, including his mother, Tiya, as a laborer for a local rancher named David Wilson.²⁷

Paiutes also supplemented their wages with sales of goods to settlers. Downstream, at the Walker River Reservation, several hundred Paiutes began digging their own irrigation system in the 1870s; by 1890 they had dug more than eight miles of primary ditch to water small vegetable patches and hundreds of acres of alfalfa and barley, much of which they transported to market on the railroad. Where perhaps only 12 percent of Paiutes had been wageworkers in 1870, by 1890 another estimate held that 85 percent of Paiute subsistence at the reservation came from store-bought goods.²⁸

²⁵ *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs*. . . . (Washington, DC: GPO, 1865), 15, 142, 145 (hereafter ARCIA, publication date); Martha C. Knack and Omer C. Stewart, *As Long as the River Shall Run: An Ethnohistory of Pyramid Lake Indian Reservation* (Berkeley, 1984), 85; Saxon E. Sharpe, Mary E. Cablk, and James M. Thomas, *The Walker Basin, Nevada and California: Physical Environment, Hydrology, and Biology* (Reno, 2008), 13; Israel Cook Russell, *Geological History of Lake Lahontan, A Quaternary Lake of Northwestern Nevada* (Washington, DC: GPO, 1895), 46; and "Walker River Chronology," State of Nevada Division of Water Resources, last modified 21 March 2013, <http://water.nv.gov/mapping/chronologies/walker/part2.cfm>.

²⁶ ARCIA, 1867, 115; Hittman, *Yerington Paiute Tribe*, 22; and Martha C. Knack, "Nineteenth-Century Great Basin Wage Labor," in *Native Americans and Wage Labor: Ethnohistorical Perspectives*, ed. Alice Littlefield and Martha C. Knack (Norman, 1996), 144–76.

²⁷ Brad Logan, "The Ghost Dance among the Paiute: An Ethnohistorical View of the Documentary Evidence, 1889–1893," *Ethnohistory* 27 (Summer 1980): 278–9; Knack, "Great Basin Wage Labor"; and Michael Hittman, *Wovoka and the Ghost Dance*, exp. ed. (Lincoln, 1997), 35.

²⁸ Department of the Interior, Census Office, *Report on Indians Taxed and Indians Not Taxed in the United States (except Alaska) at the Eleventh Census: 1890* (Washington, DC, GPO: 1894),

Customary practices also became means of earning cash in Virginia City and other towns. From the marshes of the Carson and the Humboldt, Paiute men ventured to the Comstock Lode to peddle game meat—rabbits, ducks, geese, even the odd rattlesnake.²⁹ Paiutes sold perhaps 75,000 pounds of pine nuts on city streets in 1887; Pyramid Lake Paiutes shipped between 40 and 100 tons of fish to Virginia City each year, and Walker River Numu sent an estimated 20,000 pounds in 1889 alone. All these pursuits became more difficult as rivers declined and forests receded.³⁰

Diminishing wild food and the need for cash drove Paiutes to Virginia City itself, where they joined the global wave of Comstock migrants from as far away as Ireland, Great Britain, and China. Camping in small communities on the city fringes, Paiutes began to treat the city as part of their seasonal round, as a place to gather food and other necessities. Beginning at dawn, Paiute women walked city streets with burlap sacks into which they placed bits of firewood, cast-off fruit, fish heads and tails, and even stray pieces of hay for their thin horses. At virtually any time of day, their husbands, brothers, fathers, and sons could be found on the steep streets sweating every kind of casual labor. They survived on a mix of wages and found food, their rounds of work and foraging an urban version of their customary dispersed hunting and gathering. They bought beans, flour, and coffee with the cash they earned, but they also sifted refuse piles, butchered dead horses and oxen on the streets, begged from other residents, accepted church charity, and scavenged firewood from the town dump and from boxes outside dry goods stores.³¹

The number of Paiutes in Virginia City seems to have been small; the 1880 census counted 127, including 35 women and 44 children. But it became a central node for work, subsistence, trade, and communication. Although Indians from different areas apparently hived into distinctive camps around the city, they worked many of the same jobs and congregated daily to gamble and socialize.³² We cannot know what they said to one another. But city newspaper accounts of assembled Paiutes talking, gesticulating,

392–3 and S. S. Sears to J. D. Atkins, 1 July 1889, no. 18152, box 533, Letters Received 1881–1907, RG 75, NA.

²⁹ Eugene Mitsuru Hattori, “Northern Paiutes on the Comstock: Archaeology and Ethnohistory of an American Indian Population in Virginia City, Nevada,” *Nevada State Museum Occasional Papers* 2 (1975): 17–8 and Martha C. Knack, “The Effects of Nevada State Fishing Laws on the Northern Paiutes of Pyramid Lake,” *Nevada Historical Society Quarterly* 25 (Winter 1982): 255.

³⁰ Henry Yerington to H. Price, 1 May 1882, Special Case 90, RG 75, NA; Edward C. Johnson, *Walker River Paiutes: A Tribal History* (Schurz, NV, 1975), 70; Department of the Interior, *Report on Indians Taxed and Not Taxed*, 392; and Chester, “Comstock Creations,” 164–6, 171–8.

³¹ Eugene M. Hattori, “‘And Some of Them Swear Like Pirates’: Acculturation of American Indian Women in Nineteenth-Century Virginia City,” in *Comstock Women: The Making of a Mining Community*, ed. Ronald M. James and C. Elizabeth Raymond (Reno, 1998), 233; Hattori, “Northern Paiutes,” 14–5, 18–20; and Dan De Quille, *History of the Big Bonanza*. . . . (San Francisco, 1876), 215.

³² Hattori, “Acculturation of American Indian Women,” 242.

and laughing lead us to presume that they exchanged information about work opportunities, family, and events in the hinterland.

In these same years, the ritual that eventually became known as the Ghost Dance first developed as a simple ceremony based on the Paiute Round Dance, motivated by prophecy and accompanied by all-night preaching and singing. Its origins are customarily traced to Walker River, where it made a dramatic appearance in 1869 amidst a series of epidemics, imminent starvation from a poor trout migration, and the prophecies of a Paiute named Wodziwob, otherwise known as Fish Lake Joe. Sources are scant, but they report the prophet foretold the return of Indian dead on a train from the East and the impending disappearance of white people who, he said, would be swallowed up by the earth.³³

Two striking features of these prophecies are worth noting. First, they came from a relative newcomer. Paiutes were a famously local people, with strong networks of kinship that wove them into communities oriented to particular river valleys or, more often, sections of river valleys. They recognized no authority higher than the local “talker,” or headman, who was usually a relative. But the migrations of Paiutes for work and food had fractured and dislocated many of the old outfits. At Walker River, Wodziwob’s nickname evolved from his home in the small Paiute community at Fish Lake, Nevada, some 100 miles south. In moving from there to Walker River sometime before 1870, he joined thousands of other Paiutes who relocated to places where work and food could be had. To a large degree, the Ghost Dance movement served the needs of Indian communities that had been radically reshuffled, becoming more cosmopolitan and often more internally conflicted. In addition to bringing on the millennium, the Ghost Dance provided a ceremonial form—a circle for all, ritual cleansing, and bodily health—that could address the daily challenges of casual laborers thrown among strangers.³⁴

The second feature of these prophecies is that whatever their meaning, they combined imagery from a newly industrializing world—trains and mines (white people disappearing into the earth)—with some very old traditions in order to address the needs of people newly integrated into cash markets. A millennial strain had long characterized belief among Paiutes—a people “less concerned with how it all began,” in the words of one scholar—“than with . . . how it might end.”³⁵ End-of-the-world prophecies, anticipation of the imminent salvation of the virtuous by a benevolent

³³ Cora Du Bois, *The 1870 Ghost Dance* (Berkeley, 1939), 2 and Mooney, “Ghost-Dance Religion,” 702.

³⁴ Michael Hittman, “The 1870 Ghost Dance at the Walker River Reservation: A Reconstruction,” *Ethnohistory* 20 (Summer 1973): 265–6; Judith Vander, *Ghost Dance Songs and Religion of a Wind River Shoshone Woman* (Los Angeles, 1986), 13; and Robert Lowie, *Dances and Societies of the Plains Shoshone* (New York, 1915), 817.

³⁵ Sven Liljeblad, “Oral Tradition: Content and Style of Verbal Arts,” in *Great Basin*, vol. 11, ed. Warren D’Azevedo, *Handbook of North American Indians*, ed. William C. Sturtevant (Washington, DC, 1986), 657.

creator, and the need to hasten the event through dancing were associated with the so-called Prophet Dance revivals of the Columbia Plateau—the geographic province north of the Great Basin where Northern Paiute communities dot the southern fringes. Whether because of this tradition or because of the teachings of Christian missionaries or both, a wave of prophecy met the advent of urban life and industrial-era wage work and flowed into the Ghost Dance. In Virginia City, the all-night millenarian preaching of Paiutes (exactly the kind that characterized the Ghost Dance) attracted the occasional attention of outsiders. “They have preachers,” a Virginia City journalist explained, “who preach very good Methodist doctrine. They sometimes begin preaching early in the evening and preach all night—telling the Indians that if they lie, steal, and murder, they are sure to bring up in the great desert . . . when they die.” The allusion to Methodism was ironic, but in fact, Ghost Dancing and Methodism shared certain characteristics. Both flourished in the wake of wage work and industrial capitalism; both served as havens for members of newly created working classes; and both expressed a longing for new forms of religious observance under the control of worshippers.³⁶

The Ghost Dance movement thrived in Virginia City, where Paiute enthusiasm for the teachings was evident in a vast gathering in 1871. A journalist captured the look of the ritual: many Paiutes coming together to sing prayers with great solemnity as they formed themselves into a large circle. With the first notes from the singers, “as a solid mass” the circle of dancers revolved and, “like a huge laboring water wheel, creep[ed] slowly around for hours.”³⁷

Resident Indians set signal fires on Virginia City hilltops to call dancers from Walker River, Pyramid Lake, Carson Valley, and elsewhere.³⁸ Over the next two decades, Paiute dance and religion grew out of this explosive urban center and the countryside of resource extraction that surrounded it—especially in Walker River, a place where cash markets and wage labor had supplanted hunting and gathering in the short space of a decade.

Among Wodziwob’s assistants was a noted shaman named Numutaivo, whose son, Wovoka, was born in 1856. As a boy, Wovoka was doubtless influenced by the wave of religious feeling that his father helped set in motion. Religious revivals flare and fade for reasons that are not always clear, and so it was with the Ghost Dance of 1870 at Walker River. Whether because Wodziwob was caught using trickery in a display of his powers, as one account alleges, or from some other causes, the enthusiasm soon diminished at Walker River. Nevertheless, it captivated wage-earning Indian communities as far afield

³⁶ De Quille, *Big Bonanza*, 209. For Methodism, see E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (New York, 1964), 350–99 and Robert F. Wearmouth, *Methodism and the Working-Class Movements in England, 1800–1850* (1937; repr., Clifton, UK, 1972). For the Prophet Dance, see Smoak, *Ghost Dances and Identity*, 58 and Leslie Spier, *The Prophet Dance of the Northwest and Its Derivatives: The Source of the Ghost Dance* (Menasha, WI, 1935).

³⁷ Journalist quoted in Hattori, “Acculturation of American Indian Women,” 243–4.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 243.

as Oregon, California, and Idaho, where dances to fulfill Wodziwob's vision continued through the 1870s.³⁹

Meanwhile, two broad shifts—one economic and one environmental—rendered the refashioned livelihoods of Paiutes nearly impossible in the last two decades of the nineteenth century, the very years in which Wovoka emerged into adulthood and began to prophesy.

Anthropologists and ethnohistorians have rightly hailed Paiute success in transitioning to the modern workplace; the ability to gather dollars in addition to wild garlic and pine nuts constitutes a remarkable cultural adaptation.⁴⁰ But the boom-and-bust cycles of Gilded Age business rendered wage work an especially precarious way to live. And even as Paiutes looked away from their decimated landscape and embraced the new economy of wage labor, it too began to fail. The Silver State fell on hard times, and by 1889, the year Wilson's prophecies began to propagate, few places were more in need of a redeemer.

The first harbinger of the downturn appeared on the Comstock in the late 1870s, as diminishing returns led to corporate contraction and unemployment. While the decade between 1880 and 1890 saw a 25 percent growth in the U.S. population, the same period marked a 25 percent drop in Nevada's population. By 1890 the state had fewer people than San Francisco. Settler abandonment of the "dying state" preoccupied commentators from Carson City to the U.S. Congress.⁴¹

In other places and times, a declining population might imply labor scarcity and higher returns for workers. But Nevada wages, which had been among the nation's highest prior to 1880, plummeted as the Comstock went quiet.⁴² The only economic sector that improved in Nevada was ranching. Corporate consolidation allowed for more cattle than ever, but for Paiutes, gaining a few jobs as cowboys could not compensate for the corresponding decline of bunchgrasses.⁴³

³⁹ Smoak, *Ghost Dances and Identity*, 113–8 and Hittman, *Wovoka and the Ghost Dance*, 29, 97, 173.

⁴⁰ Knack, "Great Basin Wage Labor."

⁴¹ Department of the Interior, Census Office, *Report on the Population of the United States at the Eleventh Census: 1890* (Washington, DC: GPO, 1895), 1:xiii, 1:235; "A Dying State," *New York Times*, 28 July 1889; William D. Rowley, *Reclaiming the Arid West: The Career of Francis G. Newlands* (Bloomington, IN, 1996), 44; and "Arizona and New Mexico," *Los Angeles Times*, 8 March 1894. For an example of commentary on settler abandonment, see *Territorial Enterprise* (Virginia City, NV) quoted in Michael Hittman, *Corbett Mack: The Life of a Northern Paiute* (Lincoln, 1996), 279.

⁴² Alexander Klein, "Personal Income of U.S. States: Estimates for the Period 1880–1910," 2009, Warwick Economic Research Papers, no. 916, Department of Economics, University of Warwick, <http://ideas.repec.org/p/wrk/warwec/916.html> and Killen Hanson et al., "Per Capita Income in the United States: 1880–1910," Spatial History Project, Center for Spatial and Textual Analysis, Stanford University, accessed 3 October 2012, http://web.stanford.edu/group/spatialhistory/cgi-bin/site/viz.php?id=259&project_id=0.

⁴³ James A. Young and B. Abbot Sparks, *Cattle in the Cold Desert*, exp. ed. (Reno, 2002); Lillard, *Desert Challenge*, 18; and Department of the Interior, Census Office, *Report on Statistics of Agriculture in the United States at the Eleventh Census, 1890* (Washington, DC: GPO, 1895): 108–9.

What we might call Nevada's first Great Depression deepened with the arrival of a terrible drought in 1888, the advent of which marked the second general change that threatened Paiute survival. Precipitation tapered off in the late 1880s and then, in 1888–1889, practically ceased. Wild foods were nearly obliterated and the Walker River ceased flowing halfway along its course, withering Paiutes' hay and barley fields at the reservation.⁴⁴

Paradoxically, both the advance of the mining economy through the 1870s and its retreat from 1880 onward had profound and threatening ramifications for Paiutes. In 1882 Sarah Winnemucca, a chief's daughter and a prominent Paiute advocate in the press, observed that her people could not survive without wages. "If the white people leave us, to go over the mountains to California, as some people tell us," she warned, "we must go over the mountains with them too, or else starve."⁴⁵

Jack Wilson's response to the drought proved key to building the Ghost Dance movement. Claiming that God had given him the ability to change the weather, he fulfilled a promise to bring a series of storms in fall 1889, culminating with seven consecutive days of blizzards that began Nevada's legendary "white winter," a season of epic cold and snow. By New Year's Day, valleys throughout the region were "belly deep to a horse." Deep snow on the railroad tracks stalled cattle shipments for weeks.⁴⁶

Paiutes considered weather making to be a customary expression of spiritual power, but Wovoka's display rocked Indian communities in the region, enhancing the reputation of the charismatic young man who only a few years before, in the words of a white friend, "began to dream," falling into days-long trances from which he awoke with word from heaven and the creator. In February 1890, two hundred Paiutes heard him preach at the Walker River Reservation, in the face of a driving snowstorm. "He claims that he alone is responsible for the storms of this season and they all firmly believe it," wrote Nevada Agency farmer J. O. Gregory.⁴⁷

Storms promised both food and work, and labor was among the goals Wovoka set for his followers. Contemporaries described him as an "honest, hard-working Indian" with "a reputation for industry and reliability." Fitting indeed that he should carry the word of God, "that he must tell the Indians that they must work all the time and not lie down in idleness." In addition to performing the new dance, they must "not lie or steal," must "put

⁴⁴ Young and Sparks, *Cattle in the Cold Desert*, 128–9 and Department of the Interior, Census Office, *Report on Agriculture by Irrigation in the Western Part of the United States at the Eleventh Census: 1890* (Washington, DC, 1894), 184–5.

⁴⁵ Sarah Winnemucca, "The Pah-Ute," *Californian*, September 1882, 256.

⁴⁶ Chapman to Gibbon, 191–2 and *Elko (NV) Independent* quoted in Young and Sparks, *Cattle in the Cold Desert*, 129.

⁴⁷ M. Wilson quoted in Grace Dangberg composition notebook, Grace Dangberg Papers, Nevada Historical Society, Reno, NV (hereafter Dangberg notebook); Edward A. Dyer, "The Jack Wilson Story," n.d., Special Collections, University of Nevada, Reno, 5; Michael Hittman, "The 1890 Ghost Dance in Nevada," *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* 16, no. 4 (1992): 123–6; and J. O. Gregory to Sears, 18 February 1890, box 314, Walker River Agency Press Copy Books, RG 75, National Archives at San Francisco.

away all the old practices that savored of war," and, the prophet emphasized again and again, "must work."⁴⁸

Proscriptions against lying and theft and the exaltation of peace and work were in many ways in keeping with older ideals. But the emphasis on wage work as a key to "right living" marked a considerable innovation. In the Ghost Dance, wage work became an order from God. At the same time, it was a commandment meant only for earthly life, as a path toward the glorious salvation that awaited Indians in the afterlife, where there would be only "dancing, gambling, playing ball and having all kinds of sports."⁴⁹

Sources are unclear on the degree of Christian inspiration for Wilson's own beliefs. Some trace his new religion to Bible readings at the table of David Wilson, the rancher for whom he worked from boyhood (and from whom he took his last name). Methodist "concerts of prayer" may have influenced him. Speculation that Mormons may have had a hand in inventing the prophecies has circulated since 1890. But Nevada's rate of church membership was notoriously low (12.84 percent in the 1890 census); Jack Wilson had only tenuous connections to Mormonism; and it is entirely possible that his millenarian spirit came more out of the Prophet Dance tradition than from Christian teachings.⁵⁰

Whatever the sources of Wilson's visionary theology, the effects of the movement he led in key ways resembled other evangelical revivals of the era. The Ghost Dance religion appealed to followers partly through its ability to reconcile the faithful to the exhaustion, tedium, and danger of the industrial workplace by making diligent work a virtue and a commandment and holding out the promise of an imminent, glorious, and restful millennium.⁵¹

Paiute dependence on wages might seem to make them anomalous, but the exhortation to earn cash also spoke to the concerns of other Indians. This teaching became a key part of the bundle of lessons that Indians took with them as they carried the Ghost Dance to the Great Plains.

In adopting Wovoka's teachings, Lakotas and other Indians also altered and adapted them to suit their own circumstances. But some elements remained consistent, in particular, the exhortation to make money. By 1890 environmental change and territorial dispossession across Indian country compelled a broad shift toward wage work.

⁴⁸ Chapman to Gibbon, 191; Mooney, "Ghost-Dance Religion," 765; Chapman to Gibbon, 193; and Mooney, "Ghost-Dance Religion," 772.

⁴⁹ Chapman to Gibbon, 191.

⁵⁰ Hittman, "1890 Ghost Dance in Nevada," 149–51; Department of the Interior, Census Office, *Report on Statistics of Churches in the United States at the Eleventh Census: 1890* (Washington, DC: GPO, 1894), xx; and Gregory E. Smoak, "The Mormons and the Ghost Dance of 1890," *South Dakota History* 16 (Fall 1986): 269–94.

⁵¹ On the history of religion and wage work, see Paul E. Johnson, *A Shopkeeper's Millennium: Society and Revivals in Rochester, New York, 1815–1837* (New York, 1978); Herbert G. Gutman, "Protestantism and the American Labor Movement: The Christian Spirit in the Gilded Age," *American Historical Review* 72 (October 1966), 74–101; Paul E. Johnson and Sean Wilentz, *The Kingdom of Matthias* (New York, 1994); and Thompson, *Making of the English Working Class*.

The annexation of Plains Indian homelands into the hinterlands of Chicago and St. Louis in the second half of the nineteenth century brought dramatic environmental changes, including the reduction of perhaps 30 million bison to a few hundred animals, the enclosure of vast stretches of land in barbed wire, and the stocking of the newly made "range" with mostly white-owned cattle by 1885. Such complete destruction of the Indian economy meant that by the time the Ghost Dance emerged, the hunt for game and wild plants had basically given way to the hunt for work—or more accurately, the hunt for dollars. As early as 1879, Cheyennes and Arapahos in Indian Territory and Oglala and Brule Lakota men in South Dakota—some of them future Ghost Dancers—acquired wagons and teams and hired themselves out to haul millions of pounds of goods. "The Indians make good freighters," observed the agent at Pine Ridge in 1888. "They like the business and apparently never tire of it."⁵²

Indians also looked to other industries for wages. Among the Southern Cheyenne camps at Darlington, men flocked to building sites in such numbers by the early 1880s that supervisors had to monitor stone hauling, brick making, and lime burning to ensure that all the men on the job had in fact been hired. By the time of Wilson's prophecies, Northern Arapahos at the Wind River Reservation in Wyoming cut wood and hay, hauled coal, dug irrigation ditches for the government, and scrambled for practically any paying job.⁵³

Further impetus in this direction came through the education of Indian children. Indian schools were overwhelmingly vocational, emphasizing tasks like baking, carpentry, and livestock management for boys and laundry, sewing, and cooking for girls. (The Ghost Dance proved popular among former students.)⁵⁴

But for all the eagerness for work, far too little of it existed. Unlike Northern Paiutes, who could live away from reservations and near towns and other work sites, Plains Indians were generally confined to reservations in remote areas. Only a small minority could earn money in traveling Wild West shows. As a consequence, most Plains Indian workers found themselves dependent on government rations promised in return for land cessions and on limited employment at the agencies, in jobs ranging from woodcutting to freighting.

Additionally, acquiescing to American policy initiatives and emulating the comparatively wealthy and powerful Americans they saw around them, Plains Indians made serious, often enthusiastic, efforts at farming. By 1886 Northern Arapaho chiefs

⁵² William Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West* (New York, 1991); Andrew C. Isenberg, *The Destruction of the Bison: An Environmental History, 1750–1920* (New York, 2000); ARCIA, 1888, 50; and George E. Hyde, *A Sioux Chronicle* (Norman, 1956), 22–3.

⁵³ Donald J. Berthrong, *The Cheyenne and Arapaho Ordeal: Reservation Life in the Indian Territory, 1875–1907* (Norman, 1976), 67; ARCIA, 1884, 38; and Loretta Fowler, *Arapahoe Politics, 1851–1978: Symbols in Crises of Authority* (Lincoln, 1982), 88–9.

⁵⁴ Mooney, "Ghost-Dance Religion," 820. On Indian boarding schools, see David Wallace Adams, *Education for Extinction: American Indians and the Boarding School Experience, 1875–1928* (Lawrence, 1995).

operated large fields and gardens that produced hay for market and food for the community. In Oklahoma, officials were so slow in providing plows and harrows that anxious—perhaps desperate—Southern Arapaho cultivators chopped through the prairie with hand axes and worked the soil with their fingers. Lakota teamsters too pushed into farming. They pooled earnings to buy communal farm implements at Rosebud and Pine Ridge, where in 1888 Indian farmers grew 21,000 bushels of corn and 6,000 bushels of potatoes.⁵⁵

But a drying climate devastated all these efforts in the late 1880s. Diminished rainfall in 1886 was followed by patchy rains in 1887 and 1888 and overwhelming drought in 1889. Farmers suffered especially in South Dakota, where the governor observed that had it not been for charity from other settlers and states, “many of our people must have perished during the past winter.” With cuts in rations compounding the damage of the drought, many Indians did just that. According to Red Cloud, 217 people starved to death at Pine Ridge in 1889–1890.⁵⁶

The history of the Ghost Dance on the Plains is, of course, dominated by events at Pine Ridge and the other Western Sioux reservations, where developments severely tested the new religion and its evangelists. Indeed, contemporaries began a long tradition of blaming the dark turn in South Dakota on the Brule and Oglala emissaries who returned from a meeting with Wilson in 1889–1890 and supposedly distorted his teaching into a war cry. “At first, the teaching of the new religion was one of peace,” related General Nelson A. Miles, a month before the Wounded Knee massacre. But “false prophets, medicine men, and disaffected leaders” had altered it to inspire the “savage spirits” of their followers, and the only remedy was to put the Sioux “entirely under military control, and at once.”⁵⁷

A more careful reading of the sources suggests that events ran ahead of the teachings and that blame for the violence lies with Americans. Of the Lakota emissaries, only one, a Brule holy man named Short Bull, left a detailed account of his meeting with the prophet. (See figure 2.) Partly because he dictated his account to a civilian, not a soldier or other official, and partly because it was filed away in a Denver area museum

⁵⁵ Fowler, *Arapahoe Politics*, 84; Berthrong, *Cheyenne and Arapaho Ordeal*, 58–9; Hyde, *Sioux Chronicle*, 23; and ARCIA, 1888, 51.

⁵⁶ Arthur C. Mellette quoted in Gilbert C. Fite, *Farmer's Frontier, 1865–90* (New York, 1966), 108–9; T. A. Bland, *A Brief History of the Late Military Invasion of the Home of the Sioux* (Washington, DC, 1891), 20; Mooney, “Ghost-Dance Religion,” 827–8; and Fowler, *Arapahoe Politics*, 86–90.

⁵⁷ Nelson A. Miles to Adjutant General, 28 November 1890, M-983, 1:283, Record Group 94, NA. Similar contemporary accounts include Nathaniel Phister, “The Indian Messiah,” *American Anthropologist* 4 (April 1891): 105–8 and W. W. N., “The Indian Messiah,” *Journal of American Folklore* 4 (April–June 1891): 106. For historians who follow this approach, see Robert M. Utley, *Frontier Regulars: The United States Army and the Indian, 1866–1891* (New York, 1973), 402–3; Utley, *Last Days of the Sioux Nation*, 87; and Greene, *American Carnage*, 69, 74. Jeffrey Ostler argues that militancy was part of the original teachings. *Plains Sioux and U.S. Colonialism*, 261–2.



Figure 2. Short Bull, Lakota Sioux evangelist of the Ghost Dance, Pine Ridge, Nevada, ca. 1892. Note the work gloves. Photo courtesy of the Buechel Memorial Lakota Museum.

rather than in Washington, researchers long overlooked it. Only in recent years have historians paid it serious attention.⁵⁸

A key figure in the dispersion of the Ghost Dance, Short Bull led the flight into the Badlands and was the last of the new religion's leaders to come to the agency in January 1891. Shortly thereafter he became one of nearly two dozen Ghost Dance leaders taken into government custody. Subsequently, he went with most of the others to Europe with Buffalo Bill's Wild West show. Probably that same year he dictated his memoir of the Ghost Dance to the show's interpreter.⁵⁹

An accomplished warrior who fought the Crows and the Americans, Short Bull had distinguished himself as a stalwart defender of the old religion, in which he had become a *wicasa wakan*, or holy man. Short Bull was about forty-two years old in fall 1889 and working as a teamster, hauling goods from the railroad depot to the Lakota reservations, when a messenger approached him with a letter and instructed him to carry it to the chiefs' council at Rosebud. Short Bull did so. The letter announced the arrival of a "Messiah" in the West, and the council selected Short Bull and several others to journey to Nevada to assess this news.⁶⁰

Traveling by railroad and wagon, Short Bull and perhaps eleven other Lakota emissaries arrived in Nevada with thirty-two other Indians (including Porcupine) and joined a crowd of 1,600 people waiting to hear the prophet. When Wilson finally addressed them, his words were translated from Paiute to English, and then into Plains sign language. It is hard to believe the translation did not change his meaning, but his teachings, as related by Short Bull, were remarkably consistent with his instructions to others. To the Sioux, they seemed providential in part because they spoke to Lakota concerns about wage work, farming, church attendance, and reservation life: "Have your people work the ground so they do not get idle, help your agents, and get farms to live on." Just as important: "Educate your children. Send them to schools." Lakotas should ignore denominational disputes (they were pressured to join both Catholic and Episcopal churches): "When you get back, go to church. All these churches are mine." He warned them to keep the peace: "I want no more fighting. . . . [W]henever you do anything that is bad something will happen to you. I mean fights between Indians and whites." Before very long, Wilson promised, "all nations will talk one tongue," but until then, "all over the world one should be like the other and no distinction made."⁶¹

⁵⁸ As best I have been able to determine, the first historical study to incorporate the account was William S. E. Coleman, *Voices of Wounded Knee* (Lincoln, 2000).

⁵⁹ Sam A. Madder, *Hostiles? The Lakota Ghost Dance and Buffalo Bill's Wild West* (Norman, 2006), 35–8.

⁶⁰ Ronald McCoy, "Short Bull: Lakota Visionary, Historian and Artist," *American Indian Art Magazine* 17 (Summer 1992): 55; Wilhelm Wildhage, "Material on Short Bull," *European Review of Native American Studies* 4, no. 1 (1990): 35–42; and George Crager, trans., "As Narrated by Short Bull," n.d., Buffalo Bill Museum and Grave, Golden, CO. For a published copy of the Short Bull narrative, see Madder, *Hostiles?*, 192–205.

⁶¹ Crager, "Narrated by Short Bull," 7.

The gospel according to Short Bull is so peaceful that when he repeated it in future years, some critics alleged he made it up to exonerate himself from his Badlands militancy.⁶² It appears to address contemporary Lakota concerns so directly as to suggest he misheard or altered the prophet's words. Farms, churches, and schools were seemingly more appropriate subjects for Lakotas—urged to accept allotments for cultivation, pressured to choose between Catholic and Episcopal missions, and forced to send their children to reservation day schools—than for Walker River Paiutes, who had little arable land, almost no missionaries, and prior to 1890, only one school.

But evidence for the authenticity of these teachings weighs heavily in Short Bull's favor. First, the key exhortations of his version of the teachings—farm, go to church, send your children to school, remain at peace, and love one another—closely approximate what Wovoka preached to others. If the injunction to work seems to have been absorbed as “work the ground” and “get yourself farms to live on,” it may be that Wovoka actually did include farming as a category of virtuous work. He was, after all, speaking at the reservation on Walker River, where his audience included those very Northern Paiutes who had excavated eight miles of irrigation ditch and turned themselves into commercial farmers. So, too, his call to education would have resonated among Paiutes: a boarding school in Carson City had been authorized since 1888; after it opened in 1890, Wilson sent his own children there and urged others to do the same.⁶³

Finally, since other evangelists—notably Porcupine—recounted instructions very similar to Short Bull's, it seems likely that the prophet himself composed them, perhaps in part to address the needs of his Plains followers. His religious movement had become pan-Indian, and by 1890 Wovoka self-consciously sought political power. Only weeks before his sermon at Walker River, the rainmaker had dictated a letter to President Harrison offering him a deal. In return for a small monthly stipend and political authority over the West, he could promise to bring regular rain and weekly news from heaven. As he later explained his vision to Mooney, when God gave him power as a weather maker, he also “appointed him his deputy to take charge of affairs in the [W]est, while ‘Governor Harrison’ would attend to matters in the [E]ast, and he, God, would look after the world above.”⁶⁴

However the teachings came about, in the spring of 1890, Short Bull took away from Nevada a set of instructions that addressed head-on the seemingly insurmountable challenges facing Lakotas. The Ghost Dance would have many attractions

⁶² See, for example, the remark of an unknown interpreter: Short Bull “wants to prove that he was not the cause of the trouble of 1890–91.” Quoted in James R. Walker, *Lakota Belief and Ritual*, ed. Raymond J. DeMallie and Elaine A. Jahner (Lincoln, 1980), 142.

⁶³ Chapman to Gibbon, 191–2; “Stewart Indian School History,” Stewart Indian School, accessed 1 September 2014, <http://www.stewartindianschool.com/stewart-history.html>; and Omer C. Stewart, “Contemporary Document on Wovoka (Jack Wilson) Prophet of the Ghost Dance in 1890,” *Ethnohistory* 24 (Summer 1977): 222.

⁶⁴ Gregory to Sears and Mooney, “Ghost-Dance Religion,” 772.

for the Western Sioux, including the reconstituting of a ceremonial circle that had been destroyed by the government ban on ritual dances, particularly the Sun Dance, in 1883. In the words of the holy man and chief Little Wound, a leader of the new religion at Pine Ridge, the Ghost Dance would enable Lakotas "to be Indians" again.⁶⁵

The attractions were especially great given the profound crisis in which Lakotas found themselves. The forced cession of lands in the Sioux Act of 1889, the looming prospect of allotment, the confrontations with the army, the drought, and a severe cut in rations that reduced many Lakotas to starvation pushed many to the brink of despair. In this context, the millenarian promise of the new religion found an eager audience. The promise of earthly renewal through prayer and dancing resonated with Lakota traditions and inspired immense hope.⁶⁶

How did Wilson's teachings fare in this environment? The history of the Lakota Ghost Dance and the relentless march to the massacre is rife with speculation and so-called firsthand accounts of dubious provenance, among them various incendiary remarks attributed to Short Bull. Much of the writing on these events is preoccupied with "Ghost Shirts," sacred garments alleged by some to be bulletproof and supposed evidence of the hostile intentions behind the Ghost Dance.⁶⁷ Official documents reveal almost no reference to exhortations to work, school, or church.

But sacred garments and other talismans to ward off physical harm were ubiquitous in the period and across cultures (one wonders how many troopers at Pine Ridge wore Saint Christopher medals).⁶⁸ And whatever else Short Bull may have said, seemingly irrefutable evidence shows that at Pine Ridge and Rosebud, he and other evangelists did preach the message of farming, work, education, and Christian churchgoing.

Documentation comes from January 1891. One month after the massacre at Wounded Knee, and only two weeks after Short Bull and his militants had ceased to dance and returned from the Badlands, a newspaper reporter interviewed Lakota leaders and transcribed the teachings as explained to him by an Oglala believer named Big Road. Big Road was no novice. A holy man and a leader of the Ghost Dance at Wounded Knee Creek, that fall he allegedly told his followers that he "intended to keep up the dance all winter, or fight."⁶⁹

⁶⁵ Holler, *Black Elk's Religion*, 110 and D. F. Royer to T. J. Morgan, 8 November, 1890, M-983, 1:62–6, RG 94, NA.

⁶⁶ DeMallie, "Lakota Ghost Dance."

⁶⁷ The most commonly cited remarks include a sermon published by the *Chicago Tribune* in October 1890 in which Short Bull reportedly ordered all Ghost Dancers to strip naked and "kill all the soldiers." Except for the article itself, there is no documentary evidence that such a sermon was ever delivered. Ostler, *Plains Sioux and U.S. Colonialism*, 295–7.

⁶⁸ Michael Adas, *Prophets of Rebellion: Millenarian Protest Movements against the European Colonial Order* (Chapel Hill, 1979), 151.

⁶⁹ "The Indians' Side," *Washington (DC) Evening Star*, 28 January 1891 and Lea quoted in Cooper to Belt.

In the group interview, Big Road's articulation of the religion so impressed other Ghost Dancers in the room that they could not help affirming its truthfulness. Little Wound—according to his agent, the “high priest over all the ghost dances”—prefaced his own remarks with the statement “I want to say that Big Road has talked straight about the dance.” According to Crow Dog, another believer who had been in the Badlands with Short Bull, “Big Road told the truth about the dance. . . . Big Road talked straight.”⁷⁰

And what did Big Road say? His account of the teachings is too similar to Short Bull's to leave any doubt about the consistency of Wovoka's message in the Badlands and across the Lakota reservations:

I want to say something about the ghost dance. Many people do not understand it because the truth has not been told them. Most of the Indians here belong to the [Christian] church; we have many church houses. This dance was like religion; it was religion. Those who brought the dance here from the west said that to dance was the same as going to church. . . . We danced and prayed that we might live forever; that everything we planted might grow up to give us plenty and happiness. There was no harm in the dance. *The Messiah told us to send our children to school, to work on our farms all the time and to do the best we could. He also told us not to drop our church.* We and our children could dance and go to church, too; that would be like going to two churches. I never heard that the Messiah had promised that the Indians should be supreme or that the white men should be destroyed. We never prayed for anything but happiness.⁷¹

And if Big Road's remarkable testimony is not enough, further evidence shows that such teachings circulated among those who made the journey with Short Bull. According to an account by George Sword, chief of the Indian police at Pine Ridge, Wilson told the emissary Good Thunder, “My grandchildren, when you get home, go to farming and send all your children to school.” And as we have seen, such messages went beyond the Lakota. Porcupine's injunction to work, and perhaps to farm (thus the reference to gardens that “will grow nice”), was echoed in the teachings Southern Arapaho and Southern Cheyenne believers gave to James Mooney after they visited the prophet in 1891. As we have seen, according to these accounts, in addition to instructions not to lie and to conduct the dance at regular intervals, Wilson told his followers to “work for white men.”⁷²

The teachings that Short Bull and the others brought to South Dakota offered both the promise of transforming society and the earth, which would return Indian

⁷⁰ Little Wound's agent quoted in Royer to Morgan. Little Wound and Crow Dog quoted in “Indians' Side,” *Washington (DC) Evening Star*.

⁷¹ “Indians' Side,” *Washington (DC) Evening Star* (emphasis added).

⁷² Mooney, “Ghost-Dance Religion,” 797, 781.

autonomy and buffalo, and individual redemption through right living (i.e., working, school, and church). That lessons in right living could remain a feature of the religion even at the height of millenarian fervor for transformation suggests their power for some believers.⁷³

Officials and white observers, obsessed with fears of resurgent primitives, mostly failed to hear such teachings. But their appeal stretched across divisions between so-called traditional and progressive camps. Despite contemporary assertions that only nonprogressives joined the circle, so too, did some educated Lakotas and Christian converts. Among the most alarming features of the Ghost Dance was that it laid bare the porosity of nonprogressive and progressive categories and called assimilation into question. Thus, agent James McLaughlin wrote in mid-October that at Standing Rock, the religion “now includes some of the Indians who were formerly numbered with the progressive and more intelligent” and that instead of denouncing the faith, “many of our very best Indians appear ‘dazed’ and undecided when talking of it.” At Pine Ridge, Ghost Dancers included farmers who owned modern machinery, and one observer would lament the “converted and educated Indians who have become infected with the craze, and have been swept by it back into pristine barbarism.” An Episcopalian missionary reported seeing “quite a number of Christian Indians among the dancers” on the Cheyenne River Reservation, and agent Perain Palmer acknowledged that some of his anti-Ghost Dance Christians had actually joined the dances, although he claimed they did so merely “out of curiosity.”⁷⁴

Lakota Christians who joined the Ghost Dance probably understood themselves not to be rejecting Christianity but rather combining the teachings of missionaries with those of Short Bull and other Ghost Dance evangelists. Lakota religion is fundamentally nondoctrinal, leaving people generally free to adopt spiritual practices in accordance with their own visions and experience. Something in the Ghost Dance spoke to the hearts of some who had been attending Christian services. A number of Lakotas, including no less an eminence than Black Elk, reported having “seen the son of the Great Spirit himself” in their Ghost Dance visions. It may be that for some believers it represented a kind of Christianity that spoke to Indian needs. And in appealing to both Christian converts and followers of the old religion, the Ghost Dance also held out the promise of religious unity, something that had proved ever more elusive in these early decades of the reservation era.⁷⁵

⁷³ For transformative and redemptive social movements, see David F. Aberle, *The Peyote Religion among the Navaho* (1966; repr., Chicago, 1982), 316–7 and Smoak, *Ghost Dances and Identity*, 200–1.

⁷⁴ James McLaughlin to Morgan, 17 October 1890, reel 1 and F. S. Kingsbury to CIA, 24 February 1891, reel 2, both SC 188; [Warren K. Moorhead], “The Red Christ,” *Illustrated American*, 13 December 1890, 8; and Perain Palmer to Morgan, 10 November 1890 and Palmer to Morgan, 9 December 1890, both reel 1, SC 188.

⁷⁵ Raymond J. DeMallie, ed., *The Sixth Grandfather: Black Elk’s Teachings Given to John G. Neihardt* (Lincoln, 1984), 266. For one believer’s view on the Ghost Dance as resistance to

But government persecution foreclosed any promise of unity and peace. Lakota divisions over the new religion became entrenched as the army cracked down, and many Christian Lakotas denounced the Ghost Dance as the threat of violence mounted. Still, prior to that, when the fate of the dances had not yet been sealed, something had drawn many erstwhile “progressives” to the circle. Whatever that was, it is suggestive that Wilson’s teachings validated the efforts of those Lakotas who were educating their children in the new reservation schools, attending church, and trying to farm. What may have become of their religious experiment, whether it might have become a Christian church or some other, we will never know.

While many popular accounts insist that the new religion died at Wounded Knee, the remarkable survival and expansion of the Ghost Dance after 1890, as well as its development of new rituals that in some cases replaced dancing, has long been noted. Amidst these changes, it is not easy to discover the continuing role of Wilson’s teachings about good living. The religion continued underground at Pine Ridge and other Lakota reservations. Kicking Bear, one of the evangelists who traveled with Short Bull, took the teachings to Montana in 1902. He and other adherents continued to meet with Wilson in Nevada at least through 1906.⁷⁶

The Ghost Dance revived at Standing Rock among the Yanktonai in 1897, and from there it went to Saskatchewan, Canada, where the central rituals became feasting and prayer, in what was known as the New Tidings Congregation. It proved most enduring among Santee Sioux refugees from the Dakota Uprising of 1862, who had become wageworkers and dryland farmers, much praised for their “judgment and industry,” as noted by one inspector. As late as the 1960s, some Santee yet professed the faith.⁷⁷

Beginning in 1905, Wovoka himself made repeated journeys to the Southern Plains, where the religion spread among Southern Arapahos at least into the 1910s. By the 1920s, Caddos had turned the Ghost Dance into a central tribal event around which other activities were organized. Kiowas carried on devotions derived from the Ghost Dance until around 1920, while in the same years, Kiowa Apaches attended the “Ghost Dance Church”—Sunday lodge meetings where women painted their faces with crosses and prayed to God and Jesus. Pawnees sent a delegation to hear Wilson in 1904 and continued to practice the religion and new ceremonies connected with it at least into the 1930s.⁷⁸

sectarianism, see Henrik-Andersson, *Lakota Ghost Dance*, 169.

⁷⁶ Gunard Solberg, *Tales of Wovoka* (Reno, 2012), 76; Grace Dangberg, “Wovoka,” *Nevada Historical Society Quarterly* 11 (Summer 1968): 34, 49; Maddra, *Hostiles?*, 187; and Hittman, *Wovoka and the Ghost Dance*, 265.

⁷⁷ Richmond Clow, “The Lakota Ghost Dance After 1890,” *South Dakota History* 20 (Winter 1990): 332–3; Thomas H. Lewis, *The Medicine Men: Oglala Sioux Ceremony and Healing* (Lincoln, 1990), 112–3; James H. Howard, *The Canadian Sioux* (Lincoln, 1984), 174–5, 182; and Alice Beck Kehoe, *The Ghost Dance: Ethnohistory and Revitalization* (Fort Worth, 1989), 50. Canadian Sioux inspector quoted in Roy W. Meyer, “The Canadian Sioux: Refugees from Minnesota,” *Minnesota History* 41 (Spring 1968): 20.

⁷⁸ Solberg, *Tales of Wovoka*, 87; Mooney, “Ghost-Dance Religion,” 903; Dayna Bowker Lee,

As the Ghost Dance continued to develop, it became ever more identified with traditionalism, in part because of the hostility of agents, who repeatedly sought to ban it in the early decades of the twentieth century. The harder the government pushed against the new religion, the more dancing and other elements of ritual became, of necessity, gestures of opposition to the government; the more officials tried to push Ghost Dancers to become something else, the more Ghost Dancing came to represent those elements of tribal cultures the government wanted to obliterate. In this way, for some believers, the ritual of the Ghost Dance itself developed into a more traditionalist, anti-assimilationist expression. In 1916 anthropologist Clark Wissler observed that since 1890, the Ghost Dance had been central to a broad reworking of ritual and dance traditions that had occurred across the Plains. Among different peoples, Ghost Dance believers experienced trance visions in which they encountered spirits who instructed them how to revive and reintroduce older traditions and ceremonies that had vanished or faded. The result was a florescence of new and revived ceremonial forms.⁷⁹ Between its spiritual power and the allure of the dance circle itself as an expression of Indianness, the Ghost Dance offered a portal to cultural renewal and became a key component of what is conventionally known as religious traditionalism.

It seems possible that, in this context, exhortations to labor, school, and church dropped out of Ghost Dance teachings. And yet, at least in the beginning, education and wage work were intimately bound up in these developments. Many of the leading evangelists among the Southern Arapahos in Oklahoma were returned students from boarding schools. Grant Left Hand, Paul Boynton, Smith Curley, Arnold Woolworth, Cleaver Warden, and Caspar Edson all could read and speak English; some worked in the agency or as interpreters (for James Mooney and others). Most assumed leading roles as evangelists or emissaries in the Ghost Dance. Edson and Woolworth journeyed to Nevada to meet the prophet, and Edson recorded one version of the teachings that Mooney collected, including the injunction to “work for white men.” As Mooney himself concluded, “the Ghost dance [sic] could never have become so widespread, and would probably have died out within a year of its inception, had it not been for the efficient aid it received from the returned pupils of various eastern government schools.” Many Ghost Dance teachings were transmitted by letter, and it was these believers who “conducted the sacred correspondence for their friends at the different agencies, acted as

“A Social History of Caddoan Peoples: Cultural Adaptation and Persistence in a Native American Community” (PhD diss., University of Oklahoma, 1998), 260–4; Elsie Clews Parsons, *Notes on the Caddo* (Menasha, WI, 1941), 47–8; Benjamin R. Kracht, “The Kiowa Ghost Dance, 1894–1916: An Unheralded Revitalization Movement,” *Ethnohistory* 39 (Autumn 1992): 452–77; Louise Saddleblanket, interview, 27 June 1967, Doris Duke Collection, Western History Collections, University of Oklahoma; Alexander Lesser, *The Pawnee Ghost Dance Hand Game: Ghost Dance Revival and Ethnic Identity* (1933; repr., Lincoln, 1996), 61, 64, 77; and James R. Murie, *Pawnee Indian Societies* (New York, 1914), 635.

⁷⁹ Clark Wissler, *General Discussion of Shamanistic and Dancing Societies* (New York, 1916), 868–71. Alexander Lesser would document this phenomenon more fully in 1933 in *Pawnee Ghost Dance Hand Game*.

interpreters for the delegates to the messiah, and in various ways assumed the leadership and conduct of the dance.” The motivations of these students prove elusive in the documentary record, but the religion might have offered spiritual sanction for their own years-long efforts to gain education and paying work at the same time it connected them to ancestral traditions of dance and ceremony. Indeed, because of their success as ritual leaders in the Ghost Dance, some of them advanced to positions of religious authority that had, until this time, remained beyond their reach.⁸⁰

The attraction of the Ghost Dance as a path for merging Indian identity, ecstatic visions, and modern living is also suggested in its ties to two other contemporary religious developments. Scholars, starting with Mooney himself, have noted that the Ghost Dance propagated alongside the Peyote religion—another wave of Indian ceremony that introduced radically new means of vision seeking. Peyote ceremony drew on ancient antecedents, but it assumed modern form in the 1880s. It began in Oklahoma and was prevalent (although not universal) among Ghost Dancers there. Peyote devotions were oriented toward frugality, health, and prosperity, and acolytes—many of whom were boarding school graduates—were often younger men who grew up in a cash economy and sought both to succeed in it and establish moral guidelines for generosity and community well-being. Like the Ghost Dance, Peyote was a pan-Indian religion that invited devotees to join a ceremonial circle and once again “be Indians,” in the words of Ghost Dance leader Little Wound.⁸¹ The Ghost Dance and peyote both authorized a shift to the river of money but in ways that maintained Indian identity and Indian community. Building on its pragmatic appeal and its power to provide visionary and moral guidance, with some key advice from Mooney himself, ritual leaders of the Peyote religion founded the Native American Church, an institution chartered in Oklahoma in 1918. Many Ghost Dancers became lifelong adherents.⁸²

Ghost Dancers’ search for a means of integrating Indian spirit into modern work and life also extended to forms of Christian expression. Pentecostalism, the radical, fundamentalist evangelical Protestantism that arose after the Azusa Street revival in 1906, was heralded several decades before by the Holiness movement. Holiness was characterized by faith healing, speaking in tongues, and ecstatic bodily seizures

⁸⁰ Mooney, “Ghost-Dance Religion,” 820; James Mooney, “The Indian Ghost Dance,” *Collections of the Nebraska State Historical Society* 16 (1911): 171; and Loretta Fowler, *Wives and Husbands: Gender and Age in Southern Arapaho History* (Norman, 2010), 162.

⁸¹ Åke Hultrantz, *Belief and Worship in Native North America*, ed. Christopher Vecsey (Syracuse, 1981), 291 and Royer to Belt, 30 October 1890, reel 1, SC 188.

⁸² Omer C. Stewart, *Peyote Religion: A History* (Norman, 1987), 3–53 and Thomas C. Maroukis, *The Peyote Road: Religious Freedom and the Native American Church* (Norman, 2010), 24–58. The peyote ceremony takes no more than twenty-four hours, much shorter than days-long customary rituals, and is more easily adapted to the modern work week. Alfred L. Kroeber, *The Arapaho* (New York, 1901), 398–9 and Roderick Sweezy, personal communication to author, 8 November 2013. Peyote’s most renowned ritual leader, Quanah Parker, was not only chief of the Comanches but the most successful Indian rancher in Oklahoma. Stewart, *Peyote Religion*, 68–79.

(thus the term *holy rollers* to describe followers). Influential Holiness revivals were contemporaneous with the Ghost Dance; possibly some Indians were exposed to both.⁸³

At first glance, these other ways of believing seem unrelated and opposed. Whites (and many Holiness followers) rejected Ghost Dancers and Peyotists as anti-Christian. And could any believers be more distinctive from Ghost Dancers than Pentecostals, many of whom, after all, do not dance?

But in their simultaneous devotion to ecstatic spirit, clean living, and hard work, they had much in common. The broad cultural developments that drove many Americans into Pentecostalism also moved Indians toward the Ghost Dance. Americans who took up Holiness sought to free the spirit by lifting the heavy hand of scientific rationalism and engaging emotionally with Christ. None were more burdened by scientific rationalism than Indians, who were regularly counted, weighed, measured with calipers, and pronounced biologically inferior. None were more straitjacketed by codes of Victorian propriety and elite rejection of the belief that spirit could infuse and embrace the individual body.

Not surprisingly, then, Ghost Dancing and holy rolling often attracted the same people. As early as 1939, anthropologist Cora Du Bois, in her study of the 1870 Ghost Dance, noted that leaders of the ritual in Northern California frequently became leaders of Pentecostal and Four Square Gospel churches, often ministering to both Indians and whites. "Their influence" on the Ghost Dance, she concluded, "has made possible the introduction and acceptance of the many marginal Christian sects which now flourish among the Indians of this region."⁸⁴

On the Southern Plains, Indians noted the similarities between the ecstatic visions of Pentecostals and Ghost Dancers, with trances, bodily contortions, rolling on the ground, and shaking all common to both. Kiowa Apache women in the "Ghost Dance Church" behaved "just like Holy Rolly," according to Louise Saddleblanket. A Caddo believer explained to anthropologist Elsie Clews Parsons that government opposition had taken a toll on the Ghost Dance, but that it "might come back through the influence of 'Roly Rollers [sic]," whose beliefs were "just the same as [the] Ghost dance."⁸⁵

In 1890 the preeminent Ghost Dance evangelist on the Southern Plains was a young Southern Arapaho named Sitting Bull (no relation to the famed Hunkpapa

⁸³ My understanding of holiness and Pentecostalism has been informed by William G. McLoughlin, *Revivals, Awakenings, and Reform: An Essay on Religion and Social Change in America, 1607–1977* (Chicago, 1978), 156; Grant Wacker, *Heaven Below: Early Pentecostals and American Culture* (Cambridge, MA, 2001), 1–17; Vinson Synan, *The Holiness-Pentecostal Tradition: Charismatic Movements in the Twentieth Century*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, 1997), 22–66; Randall J. Stephens, *The Fire Spreads: Holiness and Pentecostalism in the American South* (Cambridge, MA, 2008); and Jonathan R. Baer, "Redeemed Bodies: The Functions of Divine Healing in Incipient Pentecostalism," *Church History* 70 (December 2001): 735–71.

⁸⁴ Du Bois, *1870 Ghost Dance*, 2.

⁸⁵ Saddleblanket interview and Parsons, *Notes on the Caddo*, 49–50. For similar remarks by Kiowa Christians, see Kracht, "Kiowa Ghost Dance," 470–1.

Lakota holy man of the same name). In 1967 his granddaughter, Myrtle Lincoln, herself a Ghost Dancer, explained that Ghost Dancers behaved “just like this Pentecostal way” and recounted how her own son had become a Pentecostal minister in the 1930s. At one of his services, a white woman fell to the ground, seized by the Holy Spirit. When she rose, she implored God, “Father in heaven, give us a blessing here. Bless our Indians. Show them the way.” None of that would have been unusual at a Pentecostal service—except that the woman was speaking fluent Arapaho.⁸⁶

For Lincoln, the Ghost Dance and Pentecostalism flowed together in a tradition of personal visions and a dream of a world in which “all nations will talk one tongue,” just as Jack Wilson had taught Short Bull and the other evangelists decades before. For all the differences between Pentecostalism and Ghost Dancing, both religions encouraged an intimate bond with the creator, including ecstatic bodily movements and trance visions. In both religions, exhortations to live a clean life and work hard accompanied utopian dreams of a world renewed and its old racial and tribal animosities vanquished. The modernity of such beliefs and their utility for living a twentieth-century life perhaps help to explain why the Ghost Dance endured long after Wounded Knee.

In his study of the Ghost Dance among Shoshones and Bannocks, Gregory E. Smoak observes that a wide range of meanings might be attributed to the religion among different peoples and that it endured in part because “it could be interpreted variously as militant resistance and measured accommodation.”⁸⁷ Whatever happened to the teachings about work, education, and churchgoing as the Ghost Dance developed (at times into militant resistance) should not distract us from their presence in the early teachings, both in Nevada and across the Great Plains. The Ghost Dance sought to “bend time backwards,” to be sure, but it simultaneously authorized believers to engage the present. It facilitated the restoration of traditional ceremony and dance, reinforcing Indian identity, and encouraged believers to seek success in work and school. The Ghost Dance, then, was a modern religion that offered believers a means to reconcile the seeming contradictions of Indian identity and twentieth-century survival. Belief is an affair of the heart, but it is hard to imagine a more sensible, rational, and spiritually authentic response to the challenges of the reservation era.

⁸⁶ Myrtle Lincoln, interview by Julia A. Jordan, 30 July 1970, Doris Duke Collection, Western History Collections, University of Oklahoma, accessed 23 December 2013, <http://digital.libraries.ou.edu/whc/duke/transcripts/T-613.pdf>.

⁸⁷ Smoak, *Ghost Dances and Identity*, 118.