

The Mormons and the Ghost Dance

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ate in the nineteenth century, thousands of Indians resentful of reservation life gathered in groups to chant and dance themselves into hypnotic trances until they collapsed from exhaustion. Some Plains Indians, while shuffling steps to this native ritual, wore special shirts decorated with symbols to protect them from bullets. These same Indians claimed that the biblical Messiah, allegedly seen by a Nevada Indian prophet, would soon return and cleanse the earth of the white man, restore abundance to the land, and reunite the living and dead Indians. Fearing a native uprising, government officials forcefully suppressed these Ghost Dances, leading to the infamous massacre at Wounded Knee, South Dakota, on a cold December day in 1890.

Some blamed the Mormons for the "Messiah Craze," accusing their missionaries of posing as the Messiah and claiming that the Ghost Shirt was modeled after their temple clothing. Subsequently scholars have not only perpetuated these ideas but have added their own fabrications to this tradition. In actuality, the Ghost Dance religion originated with the native Americans themselves as they tried to revive the life style of a previous generation. Mormon links were peripheral, not central.

HISTORY OF THE GHOST DANCE

The Ghost Dance of the 1890s was not the first adventist movement to spread among the natives of the American west. Twenty years earlier in response to the encroaching Europeans, an Indian prophet named Wodziwob arose among the Paviotso of Walker Lake near Reno, taught a special dance

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and predicted that a supernatural force would soon destroy all white men on this earth, that the Indians' dead ancestors would reappear, and that the stress and strain of this life would then vanish. This sacred dance and these doctrines spread to the Washo, the Paviotso near Pyramid Lake in Nevada, and the Klamath, Modoc, Shasta, Karok, and many other bands in Oregon and California. Some Bannock and Shoshone from Idaho and Oregon as well as some Paiute from Nevada were also touched by the message of this Prophet from Walker Lake in 1870 (Du Bois 1939, 1-4).

As this Ghost Dance spread among the natives of Oregon and California in the early 1870s, many Indians proclaimed their visionary experiences. Some eventually became leaders in their own bands, modified the original doctrines, and formed their own cults (Du Bois 1939, 5-13). One cult stressed the end of the world and built special earthen lodges for protection from this catastrophic event. Another cult emphasized personal visions, dreams, supernatural authority, and life after death using symbols of a flag pole, special clothing, and ceremonial dances (Du Bois 1939, 13-15). Cora Du Bois has carefully traced the evolution of this 1870 Ghost Dance among the Indians in Oregon and California and argues that this religious movement prepared many natives to become converts to the Indian Shakers and the Pentecostal Christian Churches (pp. 135-38).

In the 1870s, some Indians in Nevada, Utah, and Idaho evidently followed this pattern. Many after hearing the prophetic message of Wodziwob had their own dreams, visions, and supernatural experiences telling them to join the Mormon religion. At least five different Indians claimed supernatural visitations telling them to join the Mormons. The experience of one Indian in Skull Valley in the summer of 1872 was typical. He claimed that while he was sitting in his lodge, three strangers who looked like Indians visited him and said the Mormons' God was the true God and the father of the Indians. Find the Mormons and have them baptize you, these strangers said, for "the time was at hand for the Indians to gather, and stop their Indian life, and learn to cultivate the earth and build houses, and live in them." Then the stranger showed him a vision of all the "northern country and Bear River and Malad" where many Indians were growing many fine crops with a few whites showing the Indians how (Hill 1877, 11).

Several hundred Indians accepted these messages as divine and subsequently joined the Mormon faith. Apostle Orson Pratt believed the holy messengers were the Three Nephites mentioned in the Book of Mormon. "We have heard of some fourteen hundred Indians who have been baptized, ask them why they have come so many hundred miles to find Elders of the Church and they will reply — 'Such a person came to us, he spoke in our language, instructed us and told us what to do, and we have come in order to comply with his requirements' " (JD 17:299-300).

This early Ghost Dance contained all of the ideological and symbolic elements that would reemerge in the 1890 movement, except one: the idea of a returning messiah. The circle dances used in the Ghost Dances were traditional round dances. The idea of shamans going into trances and returning with

messages about the return of the dead had deep roots among many Indians. Nor was the idea of painting the body or clothing with special supernatural markings new. Many Indians in the West used caps, shirts, dresses, and other special clothing for curing the ill or invoking the return of the dead.

Drawing primarily upon his heritage, Wovoka created a ghost dance near Walker Lake in 1889. Unlike the religious movement of the 1870s, this message reached the Plains Indians. Seeking to deal with the frustrations of reservation life, delegates from the Shoshone, Bannock, Arapaho, Caddo, Cheyenne, Ute, and Sioux came to see this new medicine man in the West. Captivated by his magic, they brought this new "medicine" back to their tribes and it inspired their people with new hope for redemption from their poverty (Mooney 1896, 797-901).

About two months before the massacre at Wounded Knee, General Nelson A. Miles, a veteran of the Civil War and many Indian wars, investigated the unrest among the western Indians and reported:

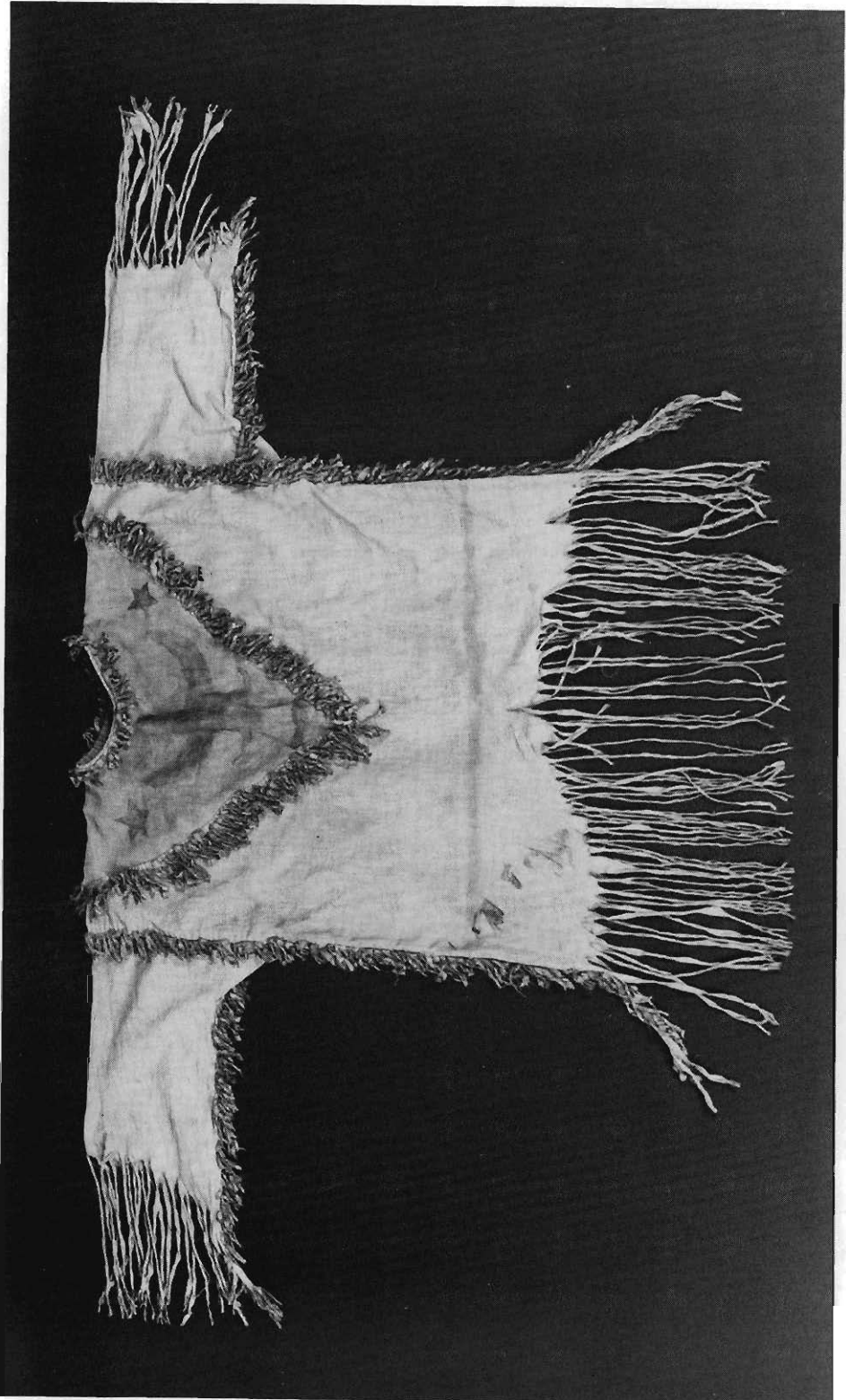
Many nations had gone west to Nevada and had been shown somebody disguised as the Messiah . . . I am inclined to believe that there is more than one person impersonating this Messiah . . . [because] when [the] Sioux have spoken with him, he has replied in the Sioux language, and to Blackfeet he has spoken their tongue, and so on. I cannot say positively, but it is my belief the Mormons are the prime movers in all this. . . . It will [probably not] lead to an outbreak, but when an ignorant race of people become religious fanatics it is hard to tell just what they will do" (*New York Times*, 8 Nov. 1890, *Deseret News*, 7. Nov. 1890).

Nevertheless, Miles concluded, "those who have seen the impersonator of the Messiah say he is muffled up and disguised . . . but I believe that he is a full-blooded white."¹

The Mormon message had indeed been heard by hundreds of Indians. The Sioux heard it years before through Mary A. Powers who joined the Mormon Church in 1842 and moved with them as far as Council Bluffs, Iowa. In 1852, a French interpreter who had lived among the Sioux asked Mrs. Powers to care for his children, Walter and Isabel, because his Sioux wife had recently left him. Mrs. Powers took the children, sent them to school, and taught them Mormonism. They later returned to Sioux country where both became intimately acquainted with many Sioux leaders including Spotted Tail and Sitting Bull, later a central figure in the Ghost Dance among the Sioux. Isabel married an interpreter (Snow 1884, 407-21; Peirce Diary; Taylor Papers).

During an 1878 visit to Council Bluffs, Isabel was taught the Mormons' special message to the Indians and baptized by Elder E. H. Peirce. Inspired by her new insights regarding the future of the Lamanites and armed with a copy of the Book of Mormon, Isabel returned to her people and shortly wrote to

¹ None of General Miles's letters reveal any significant evidence to support his views. Miles was a prominent military figure during the Civil War, was involved in the Red River Indian War of 1874-75, in the winter campaign which forced the Sioux and Cheyenne to surrender after Custer's death, in the capture of Nez Perce, and in the capture of Geronimo as well as the battle at Wounded Knee.



Mrs. Powers that many Sioux, if not all, "might soon be converted by an elder speaking the Sioux language" (Wheelock 1878).

Evidently, Isabel's message impressed some Sioux. Near the end of his life, Spotted Tail repeated the essence of Joseph Smith's story to Captain G. M. Randall (Dodge 1959, 111–13). But most impressive was Sitting Bull's vision in which the "Great Spirit," standing with some long-dead Sioux warriors and dressed in a beautiful robe, his long hair hanging over his shoulders, said he had once appeared to the whites but they persecuted him. Since the Indians had suffered long enough, he would soon return and save them by having the soil swallow the whites like quicksand. Until that time, Sitting Bull, probably not influenced by the Mormon temple garment but more likely by the protective qualities of the traditional war shirt, created a ghost shirt with the symbols of the thunderbird, stars, and the moon on it. The Indians were to wear it for protection against bullets and to dance a special ritual to ensure that the great herds of buffalo would return and that their dead ancestors would be resurrected.²

Although the Mormons' influence is uncertain, Sitting Bull was certainly more influenced by the Paiute Indian prophet Wovoka of Walker Lake, Nevada. Moved by the great poverty of his people, Wovoka, who had lived with a Protestant named David Wilson, claimed God had instructed him to tell the Indians not to quarrel but to love one another, not to lie or steal, to avoid war, and to live in peace with the whites. If people obeyed these instructions, he said, they would be reunited with their dead ancestors. To ensure that this happy event would occur, the Indians were to perform a dance. Wovoka's message soon became linked with the idea that the return of the Christian Messiah was imminent (Moses and Szasz 1984; Moses 1979). Many Indians including Sitting Bull accepted this message.

Within a few months, the Messiah movement became militant among the Sioux. Frustrated by short rations, distrustful of government agents, and hoping for the advent of the Messiah, some Sioux, under the leadership of Sitting Bull, donned the Ghost Shirt and danced their sacred dance in defiance of the Indian agents. Mrs. James Finley, wife of the postmaster and trader at the Pine Ridge Agency near Wounded Knee, reported a typical Sioux Ghost Dance on 22 November 1890 in the *New York Times*:

[The Indians] cut the tallest tree . . . [and] set it up in the ground [where] four head men stand. The others form a circle and begin to go around and around the tree. [For three days] they do not eat or drink. They keep going round in one direction until they become so dizzy that they can scarcely stand, then [they] turn and go in the other direction and keep it up till they swoon from exhaustion.

. . . When they regain consciousness they tell their experiences to the four wise men under the tree. All their tales end with the same story about the two mountains that are to belch forth mud and bury the white man, and the return of good old Indian times.

² For summaries of Sitting Bull's experiences see *Deseret Evening News*, 8 Nov. 1890; Marcus and Burner 1974, 209–10; Mooney 1896, 772, 788, 789, 791, 798, 823, 831, 846, 869, 878, 915–16, 976, 1072–73.

BLAMING THE MORMONS

Less than a month after the massacre, Nelson Miles, in the *North American Review*, blamed the Indians and three classes of whites for the uprising. Irresponsible Indians were guilty, he said, because rather than settling their wrongs and grievances reasonably, they resorted to savage religious frenzy. Whites who forced the Indians to live on limited tracts of land in deplorable conditions and those who manufactured and sold arms to the natives were also to blame. But whites "who committed the greatest crime," Miles declared, were those who instilled "into the minds of these superstitious and vicious savages the delusion that they have a Messiah among them." Referring to the Mormons, Miles charged this "religious sect of people living on the western slopes of the rocky Mountains" sent emissaries to announce "that the real messiah had appeared." The Sioux, Cheyennes, Arapahos, Shoshone, and other tribes left their reservations, passed through Utah, joined the Bannocks and Paiutes, and met with a large congregation of whites and Indians in Nevada where "men masquerading and impersonating the Christ . . . made these superstitious savages believe that all who had faith in this 'new religion' would occupy the earth, and all who did not would be destroyed." The result, Miles claimed, was that Sitting Bull and others "took advantage of the condition of the Indians to proclaim this doctrine and spread disaffection among the different tribes." The military responded and the fateful result was the massacre at Wounded Knee (Miles 1891, 8-9).

Miles, commander of the Missouri Division, based his opinions on reports from military officers and Indian agents he saw while touring the West in the summer and fall of 1890. He was certainly aware of General Thomas Ruger's report to the Adjutant General in St. Paul, Minnesota, on 25 June 1890 quoting Porcupine, a Cheyenne who visited the Paiute Prophet Wovoka. Porcupine had stayed at Fort Hall in Idaho for several days while traveling "through Mormon country to Walker Lake in Nevada." Porcupine was amazed "the whites and the Indians danced together . . . [and it is] strange the people seemed all good and friendly to one another. No drinking. . . . All the whites and Indian brothers . . . [and] I never knew this before." While the Indians sat in a circle in white men's clothes, the new Christ appeared and showed the scars on his body. Although he was dressed in a white robe with stripes, this Christ looked like an Indian, Porcupine said, but the second time I saw him he "did not look as dark as an Indian but not as light as a white man" (Case 188).

Miles must also have been aware of the opinions of E. R. Kellog, post commander at Fort Washakie in Wyoming, who had written on 27 October 1890 to the assistant adjutant general at Omaha, Nebraska, that he believed the Mormons were behind the Messiah craze on the Wind River Reserve:

There seems to be no unusual excitement in either [the Shoshone or Arapaho] tribe, although emissaries of the Indian "Christ" have been among them; but not, I think, recently. This Indian "Christ" is, I am led to believe, one "Bannack Jim," a Mormon, and it is not unreasonable to suppose that his attempts to stir up strife have been instigated by Mormons. I think "Bannack Jim" is, I believe at the Lemhi or the Fort Hall Agency (Case 188).

Officer J. B. Randolph, chief of the Correspondence Division in the Office of Secretary of War, also referred to "Bannack Jim" as the "Indian Christ" in his letter of 27 October 1890 to R. V. Belt, who he thought was acting Commissioner of Indian Affairs (Case 188).

These were not the only sources which may have convinced Miles that the Mormons were behind the movement. William J. Plumb, agent for the Western Shoshone in Nevada, told Thomas Jefferson Morgan, Commissioner of Indian Affairs on 8 November 1890 that so many Indians in Nevada, Montana, and the Dakotas were saying the same things about this Messiah that "I cannot think but some designing white man or men are at the bottom of the whole matter" (Case 188). Miles also gathered information from an Arapaho interpreter in Wyoming named Henry Reed, a Sioux and son of Medicine Cow, who claimed some knowledge about the Indian Messiah. William T. Selwyn, an interpreter on the Yankton Agency in North Dakota, told Indian agent Colonel E. W. Foster on 25 November 1890 that he had interviewed many of the Plains Indians who claimed to have visited the "Christ" at the "foot of the Rock Mountains." He "has clothed himself in [a] wonderful garment [with a] scar in the palms of hands, feet and also on one side, and scars on the forehead, [and] claiming that he was the son of the great spirit who has been killed by the civilized people once. . . . He can make two horses talk or birds talk to each other . . . [and do] things that no man can do in this world." These Plains Indians claimed he had promised in the spring to wipe the white people from the earth and restore the Indians to their lands. "In my opinion," Selwyn concluded, "this whole business is started or originated by the spies or missionaries of the Mormons because some of the visitors told me themselves that this new Messiah had told them that the plural wives is no sin; from this I think that this man or messiah is a Mormon with practice of slide-hand [sleight-of-hand] performer and ventriliquist."³ Selwyn also said he had been reading letters from the Sioux and Cheyenne which convinced him they were making secret plans for "a general Indian war in the spring."

Other reports circulated about the Mormons and the Messiah craze which Nelson Miles may or may not have heard. Special Agent S. Saloman wrote to the Secretary of the Interior on 26 November 1890, "I feel convinced if the Secret Service would be set to work, they would find that the Mormons are the instigators of the Messiah Craze among the Indians, as it is well known fact that the Indians never heard any Messiah in former years." Saloman reached these conclusions after listening to "Cannon and Roberts" speak in the Salt Lake City tabernacle and "abuse this country in an outrageous manner." A Mrs. S. A. Crandal from Columbia, South Dakota, reported in a 27 November 1890 letter to U.S. President Benjamin Harrison that a woman in Council Bluffs told her that the cause of the Indian troubles was the Mormons. "A half

³ Case 188. Selwyn, a full-blood son of Medicine Cow, was fairly well educated and had lived for some time in the home of John Welch in Philadelphia. Selwyn returned to the reservation about 1 July 1890, and was hired as an assistant farmer. However, he was assigned to interview Ku-wa-pi, a Rosebud Indian, who "was a partial believer in the New Messiah." Selwyn said most Indians ridiculed these revelations. For details see E. W. Foster to Morgan, 25 Nov. 1890, in Case 188.

breed . . . whose mother was Sioux . . . had shown [a lawyer] . . . a letter from the Sioux . . . [which] said 'the Mormons was inciting the Indian on and was sending them arms [and] ammunition.'” Mrs. Crandal explained she could not reveal the name of the lawyer who had seen the letter for fear of endangering him, asserted her important social connections, and concluded, “I can vouch for the truth of the information” (Case 188).

All Miles’s evidence was hearsay. The mysterious “Bannack Jim” from either the Limhi or Fort Hall agency was reportedly a Mormon. William T. Selwyn made a Mormon connection through the Messiah’s saying polygamy was not a sin; Saloman’s conviction was based on speeches he heard in the Salt Lake Tabernacle; and Mrs. S. A. Crandal’s views rested on a letter which she had not seen.

In the absence of facts, conspiracy theories often conveniently explain difficult and complex situations. Nelson Miles, no doubt influenced by the intense anti-Mormon attitudes of this period, believed that the Mormons were involved in plots of various kinds. In his *Personal Recollections and Observations* he wrote, “They live under a system of perfect discipline [and] for a long time allowed no intruders in the country. . . . Anyone who was troublesome disappeared very promptly.” Miles added as evidence, “The Mountain Meadow massacre will forever be a blot upon the history of the Mormons” (Miles 1896, 370).

Miles blended this “Danite image” with that of the Mormon prophets as subversive despots. He claimed that Brigham Young led the Saints into the Mexican Territory to secure a vast region for himself and his followers to “revel in polygamy and indulge in all the doctrines declared to be part of their faith.” When the United States took this region from Mexico, the Mormon prophet seized “nearly every arable acre of soil in the Territory . . . and the authority of the church, through its great high priest was extended in all directions. Not an acre of land should ever be in such condition as to be converted to the use or benefit of the Gentile element” (1896, 365).

Miles claimed Mormon prophets exerted power over their members by presenting their dreams and visions as the “will of the Lord.” Brigham Young used this method not only to select settlements but also to keep the Saints subservient. During one extremely hard winter, Miles said, President Young went south for the winter. When the warm breezes began blowing, he hurried back to Salt Lake and “proclaimed that the Lord was about to put an end to the terrible winter. . . . There would be an early spring . . . [and] the face of the Lord was again turned toward his chosen people.” Naturally the prediction came true. When claims to miracles were impossible, Brigham relied on shrewdness. Miles reported that, when asked to restore an amputated leg, Brigham replied, “I can perform miracles . . . [but] what is lost in this world will be restored to us in the next . . . and if I give you another now you will have to go through eternity on three legs.” The man not only accepted this logic, but “he went away a more fervent believer in Brigham than ever” (1896, 367).

Years after the massacre at Wounded Knee, many continued to hold the Mormons responsible. On 11 November 1893 H. G. Webb wrote to the Secre-

tary of Indian Affairs, "I feel perfectly confident I have traced the 'Messiah Craze,' and its [results] in the Sioux rebellion of three years ago to the Mormons of Utah" (Case 188). Nearly five years later on 21 January 1898, Henry P. Ewing, of the Hualapai Day school in Arizona, said he could link the Mormons to the Ghost Dancing craze that was making a comeback among the Hualapai Indians of Hackberry, Arizona. Based on the reports of Panamite, who was purportedly a Paiute from St. George, Ewing said that a mystical being named Ka-that-Ka-na-va would

return to the earth and with him resurrect all animal life that is desirable and at the same time destroy all the white people, and every thing not desirable. The earth is to be transformed into a paradise. . . . And the grass is always green, and the cactus bears its fruits all the year around. Perpetual youth and beauty will be . . . [given to] all Indians, who believe and follow the directions of this new faith. . . . As soon as Kathat Kanave comes back the oldest, most rheumatic old Indian, the most hideous old woman will immediately be transformed into young and beautiful creatures.

According to Ewing, "it will be easy to trace this religeon to it source. . . . It is simply a combination of the religeon of the Mormons, mingled with that of the Indians. The resurrection, messiah, paradise, and immunity from harm, the destruction of all living things that are not desireable are from the religeon of the Mormons, who have tried to Christianize the Pah-Utes or Piutes, as the name is often improperly spelled. . . . The slaughter at wounded Knee was the direct result of this craze."

Meanwhile, James Mooney, from the Smithsonian Institution of Bureau of American Ethnology, wrote his classic study, *The Ghost-Dance Religion and the Sioux Outbreak of 1890*. After a careful field investigation and an examination of the correspondence from the War Department and the Bureau of Indian Affairs, he declared that the founder and the doctrines of the Ghost Dance religion had "become subjects of ignorant misrepresentation and deliberate falsification. Different writers have made him a Paiute, a half-blood, and a Mormon white man."

Mooney credited Wovoka as the founder (1896, 765) but linked Mormonism and the Ghost Dance in another way: "The idea of an invulnerable sacred garment [was] not original with the Indians, but . . . may have been suggested by the 'endowment robe' of the Mormons, a seamless garment of white muslin adorned with symbolic figures, which is worn by their initiates as the most sacred 'badge of their faith.'" Many Mormons, he added, who believe the garment with symbolic figures renders "the wearer invulnerable," have special interest in the Indians, "whom they regard as Lamanites of their sacred writings." He added that the Saints had baptized a large number of Utes, Paiute, Bannock, Shoshone and had "invested [them] with the endowment robe." These Shoshone converts had shared the same reservation with the northern Arapaho, who "were great apostles of the Ghost Dance." Mooney concluded that "it is easy to see how an idea borrowed by the Shoshone from the Mormons could find its way through the Arapaho first to the Sioux and Cheyenne and afterward to remote tribes" (1896, 789-91).

THE GHOST SHIRT

Mooney was not immune to the prejudices of the period. He based his idea that the Mormons were the “probable” source for the idea of a protective garment on two anti-Mormon documents. Ironically, one document criticized the Mormons for abandoning polygamy while the other one condemned them for practicing it. An anonymous pamphlet, “The Mormons have stepped down and out of Celestial Government — The American Indians have stepped up and into Celestial Government” branded Wilford Woodruff a fallen prophet for announcing the Mormons would no longer teach or practice plural marriage. Quoting numerous Mormon scriptures, this author claimed that God had turned to the American Indians to fulfill his purposes. The Three Nephites had worked to prepare the Indians for the coming of the Messiah, then on the appointed day, hundreds of Indians had assembled at Walker or Pyramid Lake where the Hebrew Messiah appeared and declared, “I am God; I made the world; when I visited my children many hundred years ago they treated me badly.” After showing the scars in his hands and side and saying the Indians were “His little flock, His rock, or His church,” this Messiah ordained twelve Indians as his new apostles and He instructed them, “each in his own tongue as on the day of Pentecost” (Anonymous 1892).

In addition to quoting two pages — half of — this anonymous pamphlet in an appendix, Mooney said, “We made some extracts for the light they give on the Mormon attitude toward the Indian” (1896, 1108). Mooney evidently thought this pamphlet represented the ideas of most Mormons on this Indian movement but apparently did not understand Mormon doctrine on the return of Christ nor the difference between “temple robes” and temple garments. His source about the “endowment robe” is Fanny Stenhouse’s chapter, “Mysteries of the Endowment House,” in *Tell it All: The Tyranny of Mormonism or an Englishwoman in Utah* (Mooney 1896, 790, 1109; Stenhouse 1874). Her description of the temple robe as “a long, loose, flowing garment, made of white linen or bleached muslin, reaching to the ankle” becomes Mooney’s description of the garment he thought the Indians copied (Stenhouse, 1874, 192). However, it cannot be simply assumed the Indian converts who received the “Mormon endowment robes” passed the idea of “a protective garment” on to other natives who in turn created the “holy shirts” used in the Ghost Dance movement.

Records from the Endowment House and the Logan, St. George, and Manti temples from 1850 to 1890 show that 238 Indians experienced the endowment (Table 1), but careful analysis of this data shows very little opportunity for these Indians to have shared “the endowment robe” with the Indians on the Wind River Reservation. According to Mooney, the Arapaho on this reservation passed the ideas of a protective shirt to those who invented the Ghost Shirts. No Indians were endowed in 1890; only seven were endowed in 1889. One woman listed no birth place and three others listed northern Nevada, while the only man came from Corinne, Utah, and the other two women, both Shoshone, said they were born in the Wind River Mountains of

TABLE 1

LOCATION AND NUMBER OF INDIANS ENDOWED 1850-90

Location	Number	1850-		76-	81-	85	86	88	89	90
		74	75	80	84					
Idaho	27		23			2	2			
Utah	90	4	55	7	5	7	10	1	1	
Nevada	48		34			9	2			3
Wyoming	30		18			6	4			2
California, Arizona, Nebraska, Colorado	5		2	1	2					
Unidentified	38	2	29	1	4	1				1
TOTAL NUMBER ENDOWED	238	6	161	9	11	25	18	1	7	

Wyoming. All these natives evidently had close ties with the Mormons living at the Washakie Indian farm and were unlikely candidates to share information with those men who dominated the leadership of the medicine dance and created the Ghost Shirts.

In 1888, an additional woman was endowed but had been reared by white foster parents. None entered Mormon temples in 1887, but in 1886 eighteen were endowed. Ten of them were born in northern Utah, four in western Wyoming, two in northern Nevada, and two in southern Idaho; twenty-five entered Mormon temples in 1885 and all of them were born in this same region except one born at an unknown location. During the preceding five years, eleven Indians had been endowed; the largest number were a group from Utah with Anglo names. All had close ties with the Mormons. All were Shoshone or Utah Indians except those who came from Arizona. Thus, for a full decade before the massacre at Wounded Knee, none of the sixty-two endowed Indians appear in any of the government letters or other studies which identify those involved in the Ghost Dance movement. It is possible that one or more Mormons not listed in the records shared their ideas with those leading this native American religious movement, but no evidence appears in the documents to substantiate this point.

Most of the Indians entered the Salt Lake Endowment House in the mid-1870s, a natural consequence of hundreds joining the Mormons after the 1870s Ghost Dance movement. In 1875, a record 161 were endowed. (The next most endowed in a single year was twenty-five in 1885.) Most of them lived in Northern Utah where the Mormons tried gathering their converts together near Corinne, but conflict with the gentiles forced the Saints to try homesteading them on some unimproved land. Eventually, the Mormons gathered some 300 Indians near the Idaho border in 1880 and created an Indian village named Washakie. Most of these Indians were baptized and attended Sunday services and a Mormon school. Some even served missions in the Indian Territory. Many went through the Endowment House, and surviving ward records confirm that these Shoshone were among those listed on the endowment records in 1875. The Indian affairs folder in Brigham Young's papers lists

the names of those baptized and endowed. Unfortunately, most Washakie Ward records were burned in 1890, but the records kept after this date contain nearly a hundred names of those endowed in 1875 (LDS Membership Records, Malad, Idaho, 1872-1918). None of these Indians is known to have participated in the Ghost Dance of the 1890s.

Furthermore, the Indians endowed in 1875 heard Dimick B. Huntington's translation of the ceremony into Shoshone. Conveying its ideas must have been difficult since little native vocabulary existed for some key concepts in the endowment ceremony. An examination of the Shoshone and Utah vocabulary Huntington printed in 1914 shows that interpreting the lengthy endowment would have been extremely difficult. Even though his vocabulary was probably more complete than his published version, it is unlikely that a complete transfer of detailed concepts could be effected across cultural boundaries. It thus seems unlikely that these Indians completely understood or remembered those segments of the ceremony dealing with the temple clothing for fifteen years and then shared it with other Indians. It seems even less likely that those five natives endowed before 1875 discussed the endowment with those leaders of the Ghost Dance. Nor is it any more likely the eight who were endowed during the remaining years of the 1870s became involved in the medicine dance of the 1890s since all were reared in white homes except one Hopi in Arizona; the Hopi did not participate in the movement. None of the Indians born at Wind River or any other Indians endowed in Mormon temples appear in any government correspondence or in other studies investigating this native American religious movement.⁴

Mooney was right, however, about the Mormon's special interest in the native Americans. The Saints proselyted among the Shoshone and Bannock in the 1850s, establishing missions along a tributary of the Salmon River and at Fort Supply near Fort Bridger. Few converts from these missions remained faithful and none appear to have been endowed.

Some Washakie Indians did, however, maintain contact with relatives at Fort Hall where there was some ghost dancing. None of the known dancers joined the Mormon Church. Only seven Indians born near Fort Hall received endowments in Mormon temples before Wounded Knee. Five of the seven were endowed in 1875; one was endowed in 1885.

Reports citing Bannock Jim as a Mormon and an important link to the Ghost Dance are not supported by facts. Also known as Pagwhite, Bannock Jim was a leader during the Bannock Indian War of 1878. No Church records

⁴ Some of the many observers who listed names of Indians involved in the Ghost Dance are A. T. Lea to J. A. Cooper, received at the Commissioner of Indian Affairs Office, Nov. 1890; James McLaughlin to Morgan, Commissioner of Indian Affairs, 2 April 1892; John Foster to Commissioner of Indian Affairs, 3 Dec. 1890; Robert Wanhg (Uintah agency) to Commissioner of Indian Affairs, 2 Dec. 1890; "The Indian Situation," extract from the *Sioux Falls Press*, 2 Dec. 1890; Perain P. Palmer (Cheyenne River Agency) to Commissioner Morgan, 9 Dec. 1890; James McLaughlin to T. J. Morgan, 10 March 1891; Pay-kin-aw-wash, Chief of the White Earth in Minnesota, to Commissioner of Indian Affairs, 15 October 1891; Rev. N. B. Rairden to D. M. Browning, 27 July 1896; James McLaughlin to T. J. Morgan, 18 June 1890; and W. H. Johnston to Adjutant General, 13 Aug. 1890; Case 188.

list him as a member. Furthermore, no successful formal missionary work was organized among the Shoshone-Bannock at Fort Hall during the nineteenth century in spite of encouragement from General Authorities at Salt Lake City that had led to an abortive missionary effort in 1877 (Hill 1877). In 1883, Apostle Lorenzo Snow and five missionaries met with the Indian agent at Fort Hall and offered to teach farming to the tribes without any cost to the government. The agent, however, rejected the offer, fearing the Mormons would encourage polygamy while the government was trying to suppress it. Even when the Mormons specifically promised not to teach polygamy, the agent refused (Snow 1884, 439-53).

In a letter to Lorenzo Snow written 2 July 1885, President John Taylor wrote that the Shoshone-Bannock "desire our counsel. The Lord is visiting them. He gives them the truth; and we should as his ministers, do our part in lifting them up in their degraded condition." Taylor suggested that three high priests living near Fort Hall be called to give the natives "instructions in the gospel, morals, honesty, integrity, and the fear of God, and such principles as are taught to other Saints in an organized capacity" (Taylor Papers). During the next year, the Mormons organized a small mission near Fort Hall where many natives spent the winter months. Franklin D. Richards wrote to John Taylor on 5 January 1886 that they held services in homes and built a small chapel (Richards Papers). But resistance from Indian agents and lack of Indian interest soon brought an end to this mission. It seems extremely unlikely that Bannock Jim or some other Indian from Fort Hall served as the link between the Mormons and the Plains Indians.

Nor does it seem likely the Shoshone Indians on the Wind River Reservation in Wyoming gave the Arapahoes or any other Indians ideas about the "endowment robes," even though Amos Wright and his missionaries baptized Chief Washakie and some 422 of his band in 1880 (Wright 1880). According to endowment records after 1880, only two men and ten women list their birth place in Wyoming, Washakie's tribal domain. Again, there is no overlap between their names and those on the government lists of ghost dancers.

In 1884, reports circulated among the Shoshone that the government would terminate financial support when their treaty obligations were fulfilled. Some militant Shoshone talked of waging war against the Indian agent and the soldiers, thinking death more honorable than reservation life, and asked Mormons from Utah to join them. After several meetings, the Mormons persuaded them not to use violence (Snow 1885).

Soon after the Saints came to the Great Basin, Joshua Terry, Mormon missionary and Indian interpreter, married a Shoshone woman whose name has not survived. She gave birth to a son named George in 1853. Although he became literate, George chose to live among his mother's people and eventually became chief of a small Shoshone tribe (Jenson 1:572-73). During the Ghost Dance era, George wrote President Wilford Woodruff that the Lamanites in the north, south, east and west claimed "the Lord is working amongst them and has sent heavenly messengers, and that great events are about to take place (Terry to Woodruff 5 July 1889). Puzzled, George's father Joshua Terry

asked Woodruff for advice on 14 May 1889 (Woodruff 9:33). On 25 May 1889, Woodruff wrote to George:

We fully expect that the Lamanites . . . will receive many manifestations in the last days . . . It is probable that they will receive the ministrations of perhaps the three Nephites. . . . But the description which you give to the narration of these Indians who have seen these supernatural things, does not inspire us with much confidence. Great care has to be taken not to allow a wrong spirit to prevail among those people for their tendency, as we understand, is to accept alleged supernatural manifestations with a great deal of credulity.

Gospel principles are a safe guide, he advised, so teach Washakie and all influential Indians not to quarrel, and “to refrain from war and from shedding blood, from drunkenness, from all licentiousness and from everything that would degrade them and grieve the Spirit of God” (Woodruff to Terry).

Evidently, Terry’s Book of Mormon message influenced Washakie, the Shoshone chief, to turn from the Ghost Dance. This long-time friend of the Mormons with Oa-Toh wrote Woodruff 7 July 1889:

When this Indian from Fourt Hall came, he turned my head and pleased my heart for he talked so nice about the dead and their coming [back] so soon and many other things did he say, also we were to dance almost all the time day and night. My mind was puzzled. I then sent a young man to see John the Indian bishop at Washakie for to inquire of him, which would be the proper way for me to follow, that which the Mormons had taught me or should I now throw that all away, and take hold of that which this man from Fourt Hall had been teaching us. The young man returned saying “that John said that the Indian from Fourt Hall has been giving Washakie and his people lies,” I now believe you (Woodruff Papers).

Apparently Washakie continued to wonder about this Ghost Dance religion even after Wounded Knee. Dictating a letter 25 February 1892 to his “dear old friend, Hank Brownson,” he said: “I want you to write me and tell me what you know about this new profit that we hear about in the west, and if he is truly a great medicine man, we have heard a great deal about him. The Sioux believe him but we do not know what to think” (Trenholm and Carley 1964, 297). The Ghost Dance movement continued to influence the Wind River Reservation during the last decade of the nineteenth century and Mormons continued to preach against it. On 29 September 1901, Amos Wright wrote Lorenzo Snow that he spent much of his time trying “to keep down the excitement” among the Indians and controlling their “indiscretions,” for this dance engendered as much superstition as liquor (Wright Papers). The Mormons must oppose the Ghost Dance, he added in a letter to Joseph F. Smith, the next president, dated 25 November 1901, because, if their native converts did not abide the reservation rule prohibiting its performance, the Church would be charged with inciting insurrection (Wright Papers).

The Mormons also used their influence to suppress the Ghost Dance among the Ute Indians. In 1872, the Mormons operating a farm, at Indianola in Thistle Valley for a hundred or so Ute Indians. Frequently, relatives from the Uintah Reservation came to visit family and friends. On 3 May 1889, Canute Peterson wrote Wilford Woodruff that Tabby and his band of Utes had arrived claiming that the Lord had sent “heavenly messengers, and that great events

are about to take place, and they believe the Great Mormon Chief will give them the very best of counsel" (Woodruff Papers). The entire First Presidency — Woodruff, George Q. Cannon, and Joseph F. Smith — wrote back "To our good friends the Chiefs and Braves" on 24 May 1889, advising them to avoid movements that would disturb the peace. "Do not listen to bad men. Do not go to war. Do not shed blood, live in peace with one another. The Great Spirit will choose you yet to do a great work. When the time comes He will tell you what you are to do. Until then, keep quiet. Avoid trouble. Do not get drunk" (Woodruff Papers).

To encourage them to follow this advice, the Mormons at Indianola gave them "a few presents mounting [to] some where near \$50.00." The Ute Chief Saffroni reportedly said the Utes had been searching for a certain chief who had received "a message from the Good Spirit, but could not find him and in this they were disappointed." However, he declared they were well satisfied with the presents and the advice and "would carry out the instructions to the best of their ability." Offering an alternative to the ideas of this "voice from the west," the Mormons told them about Joseph Smith's search for divine guidance and explained "how he received the plates, how he translated the engravings of the Plates into the English language, told them who Moroni was, also that he was their forefather and a great Prophet." Mormon interpreters added that their white neighbors persecuted them because of these beliefs. Mormons and friendly chiefs were the only ones who "believed in their book, and understood how their fathers came to this country" (Canute Peterson to Woodruff, 7 June 1889, Woodruff papers). These Indians did not become involved in the Messiah movement.

The Ghost Dance movement did not seem to appeal to Mormon Indians converts nor to other Christian natives, but rather to Indians who resisted farming, Christianity, or education — any direct challenge to their traditional cultural heritage. Many reports appear in government documents even more explicit than the one S. G. Fisher, the agent from Fort Hall, wrote to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, 26 November 1890:

this extermination and resurrection business is not a new thing here by any means, as it has been quite a craze with them every few years for the last twenty odd years to my certain knowledge. The form varies a little according to the insane freaks of the medicine men, but in the main is the same. Some additional touches has been neglected here to fore that frustrated bringing about the expected results.

These Indians were visited during last spring and summer by representatives from nearly or quite a dozen different reservations, Porcupine from Pine Ridge Dakota being one of the number.

I see no cause for alarm. The fact is quite a portion of them have nothing to gain and to loose in case of an outbrak.

Sarelte fever at boarding school (Case 188).⁵

⁵ For more details showing that Christian Indians were not involved in the Ghost Dance see the following documents in Case 188: A. T. Lea to J. A. Cooper received at the Commissioner of Indian Affairs Office Nov. 1890; James McLaughlin to Morgan, Commissioner of Indian Affairs, 2 April 1892; John Foster to Commissioner of Indian Affairs, 3 Dec. 1890; Robert Wanh (Uintah Agency) to Commissioner of Indian Affairs, 2 Dec. 1890; "The Indian Situation," extracts from the *Sioux Falls Press*, 2 and 9 Dec. 1890; Perain P. Palmer

THE MODERN LEGACY

Most twentieth-century authors have accepted James Mooney's conclusion about the Mormons's involvement in the Ghost Dance movement and have not carefully examined the information generated by the Messiah craze.

For example, in his biography of Wovoka, Paul Bailey claims the "eastern Paiutes" became "spiritually dominated by the Mormon Church" through the doctrines of the Book of Mormon. The book's promises that the ancient Judean Messiah would again return and redeem the Lamanites or the Indians paralleled the new messianic prophet in the West where the Saints had very little influence. Bailey said Mormon Paiute converts

by the scores saw in Wovoka not only God's working means for rejuvenation and redemption, but they quickly claimed him as their own. The circles of the ghost dance began forming in the very shadows of the Mormon chapels. Mormon white settlers themselves, cognizant of the familiarly ringing religious phenomenon in their midst, listened attentively to the new tidings, and before long they themselves were shuffling in the dance circles along with their "Lamanite" brethren of the promise (Bailey 1957, 100).

Bailey claims that the Book of Mormon story for Christ's return to lift the Indians to greatness was "assimilated and accepted by hundreds upon hundreds of Paiutes, long before Wovoka stepped into the center of the spiritual stage." Consequently, Wovoka found

his latest and most enthusiastic converts among those who already had embraced the tenets of the Faith. Mormon Indian missionaries had converted almost to the man the tribes and class of Paiutes in southern Utah and eastern Nevada and many of the first to enter the great white sanctuary . . . [of the St. George Temple], to receive the higher "endowments" and deeper mysteries of the faith, were Indians. [These converts, he declared, had the] privilege of henceforth wearing the holy undergarment . . . whose sacred markings were a protection against physical harm and satanic influences (Bailey 1957, 122-23).

Paiute shamen often tried to prove they were invulnerable against both bullets and arrows. Frank Spencer, a Ghost Dance shaman of the 1870s, also claimed he was invulnerable to guns (Park 1934, 109).

But according to Bailey, Wovoka, "irked" at the requirement of traveling to St. George, decided to prove on his own that "he was immune from death; that the bullets of his enemy had no effect upon him; [and] that he had long since been lifted from the menaces of disease and pain." When the Sioux, Cheyenne, and other Plains Indians came, Wovoka stripped himself to the waist and slipped on a shirt marked with "magic red ochre . . . [and] protective symbols." Before 300 Indians, Wovoka handed a shotgun to one of his followers while he stood in the middle of a blanket. From ten paces, the disciple fired both barrels. After the smoke cleared, no blood and no holes in

(Cheyenne River Agency) to Commissioner Morgan, James McLaughlin to T. J. Morgan, 10 March 1891; Pay-kin-aw-wash, Chief of the White Earth in Minnesota, to Commissioner of Indian Affairs, 15 Oct. 1891; Rev. N. B. Rairden to D. M. Browning, 27 July 1896; James McLaughlin to T. J. Morgan, 18 June 1890; and W. H. Johnston to Adjutant General, 13 Aug. 1890.

the shirt convinced even the skeptics that Wovoka was a powerful medicine man. According to Bailey, Wovoka had substituted paper wads for buckshot in the shells. Nevertheless, the Ghost Shirt was born (1957, 126-28).

Bailey bases this imaginative story primarily on E. A. Dyer's manuscript "Wizardry: The Jack Wilson Story" (Danberg 1968, 14-15). Several details are his own invention: the situation surrounding the ghost shirt and Wovoka's refusal to go to the temple. Bailey also greatly exaggerated several statements. The Mormons did not convert "almost to the man the tribes and clans of Paiutes in southern Utah and eastern Nevada" nor were Indians among "the first to enter the great white sanctuary at St. George" (Bailey 1957, 122). In fact, the Saints baptized nearly 200 natives from the Shivwits band and a few from other Paiute bands, but originally there were fifteen bands of Southern Paiutes. It is evident the Mormons did not "spiritually dominate" nor "assimilate hundreds upon hundreds of Paiutes," considering the prevalence and continuations of native religions among the Southern Paiutes. Isabel T. Kelly (1929) clearly shows that shamanism continued among seven bands into the twentieth century. Only eleven Indians entered the St. George Temple between its dedication in 1877 and Wovoka's public campaign in 1889. Five of the eleven natives had evidently been reared in Mormon homes and two came from the Hopi who were not influenced by the dancing in Arizona. The spelling of the other names and their birth place show that none of them appear to be Southern Paiute. Thus, none of them likely influenced Wovoka at Walker Lake in western Nevada.

Furthermore, communication between the Southern and Northern Paiutes was difficult; they did not even speak the same dialect. Wovoka and his people were linguistically more similar to the Bannock of Idaho and certain bands in Oregon and California than with the Southern Paiute in Utah. Cora Du Bois (1939) has clearly shown that the Ghost Dance movement of the 1870s that originated among Wovoka's relatives moved north to the bands of Nevada, Oregon, and west to those in California, not south and east across Death Valley or through those dry and forbidding regions separating the Northern and Southern Paiutes. Even the railroad, which brought Indians together during the Ghost Dance of the 1890s, did not produce the association between the Northern and Southern Paiute that Bailey claims.

In 1970, anthropologists Sharon and Thomas McKern perpetuated the Nelson-Mooney-Bailey inaccuracies by saying the Sioux ghost shirt was "perhaps inspired by the Mormon endowment robe" (1970, 59-68). During the same year, Weston La Barre's work on the Ghost Dance also noted "the ghost shirt may have been influenced by the Mormon 'endowment robe'" (1970, 250). In 1971, Randolph W. Linehan's senior thesis in anthropology at Yale on "The Development of a Mormon Empire in the Western United States" devoted ten pages to the Ghost Dance of the 1890s. He quotes and paraphrases Bailey.

For instance, he borrows a story from Bailey's *The Ghost Dance Messiah* without revealing that it is a novel. The Paiute prophet, according to this account, tells Peter Swenson from Mount Pleasant, Utah, "Tell your big

Mormonee boss that I, Jesus, want two pairs of your underwear.” Peterson refused, and Wovoka sent “Uncle Charley Sheep to steal a pair.” Because the garments “pinched like hell in the crotch . . . [Wovoka] cut off the long white legs with . . . scissors. What he had left was a pair of stringed and painted shirts.” Linehan said “the result was ‘the Ghost Shirts which were to play such an important part in the massacre of the Sioux at Wounded Knee’ ” (Linehan 1971, quoting Bailey 109–10).

Edna Dean Proctor wrote that “Wovoka seems also to have been influenced to some extent by Mormonism” (Spencer and Jennings 1977, 510) while University of Utah historian Brigham D. Madsen said the Mormon missionaries “may even have been the originators of the ‘ghost shirts,’ an invulnerable sacred garment of the Ghost Dance religion, which probably came from the ‘endowment robe’ that many Indians receive upon joining the Utah church.” Madsen also accepts Mooney’s idea that the Mormons “helped to give shape to the doctrine which crystallized some years later in the Ghost Dance” (1980, 198).

In 1983 Harry William Westerman wrote a senior thesis at Harvard on ghost dancing, claiming that “the tribal religions [of the Plains Indians] had been profoundly influenced by Christianity of two kinds, Gentile and Mormon” (p. 21). Mormon scriptures emphasizing “pure” and “white” influenced Mormon religious costume, he said, and “may, in turn, have affected the development of the Ghost Shirts.” He claims that Mormon folklore about the “endowment robe” protecting the Saints from death undoubtedly circulated among the Plains Indians and they borrowed these ideas to make the Ghost Shirt. Similarities between the two garments, Westerman said, established the connection. He cited their protective qualities, the promise of salvation, a divine origin, and the rule that they must be worn at all times (pp. 28–33).

We may well wonder just how involved in this Ghost Dance religion the Mormons actually were. By the early summer of 1890, the Mormons had heard reports from their missionaries and had read accounts in the news about the alleged visit of Christ to the Indians. Curious Wilford Woodruff sent John King, a Cherokee living in Thistle Valley, to investigate.

King went to Fort Custer, Montana, where early in July 1890 he learned from two of his uncles and Porcupine the details of Christ’s reported visit. In an account published 14 August 1890 by *The County Register* (San Pete) and 23 August by the *Deseret Weekly News* Porcupine related that Christ appeared to Indian delegations gathered near Walker Lake and “showed scars on his hands and feet where he said the people had driven spikes, nailing him to the cross. He also had a bad wound in his side, where he said a spear had pierced his flesh.” Furthermore, this Messiah had said he had been on earth hundreds of years ago, but the white people had hung him on a cross. Following his death, he had returned to his Father and Mother in heaven. Now his Father, who had created everything, had sent him back to earth and this time his mission was to the “Indian nations, whose red children, being poor and simple minded would hear and believe Him.” If the Indians performed ritual dances, their dead ancestors would soon be resurrected, their sick would be healed, and all good people would be renewed so that “nobody would be more than 40 years

old." Before disappearing, Porcupine said, Christ had taught them not to steal, kill or bear false witness.

Since much of Porcupine's account agreed with the doctrines that King had accepted from the Mormons, he not only believed Christ had appeared to the Lamanites on earth but thought Porcupine had been appointed as one of Christ's "disciples to go forth and preach his sayings to all people." King returned to Utah and reported his findings to President Woodruff, who assumed the heavenly visitor had been one of the Three Nephites instead of the Messiah. Feeling a special responsibility to the Lamanites, Woodruff asked King to serve as a missionary to the "wild" tribes. After considerable deliberation, in November of 1890 King accepted the call (King to Woodruff, 10 Nov. 1890; Woodruff Papers).

Porcupine's account caused a stir among some Mormons. Could the millennium be at hand? Some thought this spiritual awakening was a sign that the second coming was approaching. *The County Register* of 28 August 1890 reported a speech by Lund at the San Pete stake conference:

We need not say — 'Our Lord delayeth his coming! . . . We can be sure it is in the near future, because the Lord told Joseph Smith . . . that if he lived to be a certain age, he should see His face, which points to 91. . . . Zion will be redeemed, but there are still many things to be done, before that event takes place. Temples will be built . . . and the prophecies with regard to the Lamanites, and the ten tribes will have to be fulfilled.

During October conference, the Saints not only accepted the Manifesto to end polygamy, but the *Deseret News* and *Millennial Star* record nine speeches denying an imminent coming. During the first session on 27 October 1890, President Woodruff tried to silence the rumor that Christ would return in 1891:

I do not think anyone can tell the hour of the coming of the Son of Man. . . . We need not look for the time of the event to be made known. I will say here that in my dreams I have had a great many visits from the Prophet Joseph Smith since his death . . . [In one interview I] asked the question, Why are you in such a hurry here? He said . . . The prophets and apostles in this dispensation have no time nor opportunity to prepare to go to the earth with the great bridegroom . . . he said the time was at hand for the coming of the Son of Man . . . [but it was] not revealed to us, nor never will be until the hour comes.

George Q. Cannon, a member of the First Presidency, stressed that Joseph Smith's statement had been made in response to the Millerite prediction of the 1840s:

We need not expect that 1891 will bring any such thing as the coming of the Lord. It was said yesterday that no man knoweth the day or the hour. . . . But I will tell you when men can know. They can know that such and such a time is not the time. . . . There are a great many events to take place that have not yet occurred; and the Savior will not come until they do take place (*Millennial Star* 52 [3 Nov. 1890]).

The Messiah craze intensified. During October more Indians donned the ghost shirts and danced in defiance of the Indian agents. The *Deseret Weekly News* of 8 November carried the report of McLaughlin, the agent at Standing

Rock Indian Agency claiming that the "Sitting Bull faction" was preaching the annihilation of the whites and the supremacy of the Indians. The same issue contained an editorial reporting:

General Miles expresses the belief that the movement is attributable to the 'Mormons' or, in other words, that the Indian Messiah is one of their Elders pretending to be the Savior. More than that, it seems that he expresses an opinion virtually to the effect that as the being whom the Indians claim to have seen and heard speaks numerous tribal languages, a number of Elders must be engaged in working this deception.

The editorial branded these charges as "fallacious" and ignorant, for certainly no missionary would "dare commit such a serious fraud as to impersonate the Savior of the World."

Eleven days later, Woodruff directed his secretary, George Reynolds, to write to John King in Montana:

In view of General Miles' report that he deems the Mormons to be at the bottom of the present movement among the Lamanites regarding the coming of a Messiah, the President thinks the present an unsuitable time for any of our brethren to visit these tribes, as their presence would, in all probability, be regarded as confirmation of General Miles' suspicions, and if, unfortunately, any harm was done it would be laid at their doors or on those of the whole people. For this reason the present is not regarded as an opportune time for missionary efforts among these tribes (19 Nov. 1890, Woodruff Papers).

Meanwhile, the *Deseret Weekly News* reprinted stories from prominent newspapers. Such headlines as "The Indian Revolt," "The Indians Could Sweep the Country West of the Missouri," "Rumors of an Outbreak Among the Sioux," "Sitting Bull Leading," "Settlers Armed, Indians to be Killed on Sight" appeared in the *Deseret News* between 18 October and 27 December.⁶

As tensions between the whites and Indians reached the point that open warfare seemed imminent, the Mormons took another step to avoid being drawn into the conflict. Woodruff wrote to stake presidents William Budge of Bear Lake and Thomas E. Ricks of Rexburg, on 21 November 1890:

You . . . undoubtedly have noticed in late news papers alarming rumors of a contemplated Indian outbreak. How much truth there may be in these reports we cannot say, as we know simply what the papers publish . . . It may be largely an excitement gotten up by white men for sinister purposes. We think [you should] caution the Saints, especially those living in exposed settlements . . . not to rashly expose themselves, and to take all necessary precautions for their safety, as well as on the other hand, to avoid any entanglements with unprincipled people who may have motives in compromising . . . our people. While we do not know of any cause for alarm or excite-

⁶ On 10 November the *Deseret News* published that the Indian Messiah Movement would not likely lead to an uprising, but "broken treaties, delayed appropriations and religious frenzy have combined to make the Indians feel the worst is yet to come." On 19 November, the *News* described the Indians at Pine Ridge as "dancing, meeting and talking wild, not knowing what to believe." It further reported on the location and status of the troops in many areas. In the same paper, the editorial, "The Great Indian Scare," questioned how much credence should be placed in the reports of an impending uprising, but then on the 20th, reported "Indian Trouble" at Pine Ridge: the Messiah would purportedly arrive in the shape of a buffalo and give the signal for opening of the conflict to annihilate the white race. Finally, on 22 November, the *News* reported in an article, "The Indian Scare," that Indian warriors were heading for Utah in small roving bands of armed Indians who told settlers they were going to find the Messiah.

ment among the Saints we think that prudence would dictate the exercise of care. (Woodruff Letterbook)

Five weeks later on 29 December, the massacre at Wounded Knee demolished the Indians' hopes of a restoration. The Mormon press, two days earlier had criticized the government and whites living near the reservations for their mistreatment of the Indians. The editor of the *Deseret News* had called for the government to remove the existing causes for the revolt, accused the government of menacing the Indians by "pushing United States troops into the Territory" to force them into submission, and criticized the whites in the Dakotas for suggesting that every Indian found off the reservation without written permission from the agent should be shot. How would whites feel "if the Indians should pass a resolution that . . . every white man found on the reservation without a written permit . . . be shot down." If the Indians were to take such steps, "the murderous act would be regarded as an uprising of Indians, and they would be slaughtered . . . wholesale according to the most approved processes of civilization . . . Designing white men who are anxious to precipitate an 'uprising' should be the objects of governmental solicitude. . . ." Speaking of Ghost Dance movement in the same article, the editor asked:

Suppose the Indians believed a Messiah will come to deliver them from what they regard as the oppression, cruelties and treachery of the white man, are not the Christians in a parallel situation? The latter are proclaiming everywhere the coming of the Messiah, and that His brightness will "consume the wicked" when He shall appear? . . .

The fact is that if the government and the people of this nation generally had pursued toward the Indians the same policy as have the "Mormons" there would be no Indian question agitating the country today. . . . As samples, we may consistently point to the Indian farm in Box Elder County, where a number of Indians are living under "Mormon" supervision. They conduct a farm on the co-operative plan and live in houses, being instructed in the civilized methods of cultivating the soil.⁷

Even though Mormons could see mistakes in government Indian policy and in the white man's inhuman treatment of the Indians, the Saints misunderstood the complexities of this messiah movement by interpreting it strictly from the limited framework of their scriptures. They might have enjoyed additional insight by viewing it from the Indians' perspective, but instead Mormons saw Messiahism as evidence that God had intervened to redeem the Lamanites. In fact, Joseph F. Smith, second counselor in the First Presidency, asserted that the visitations were "to awaken in the benighted minds of these degenerated people a belief and faith in and ultimately a knowledge of a crucified and risen Redeemer, and the righteous precepts which he taught." He fully expected many of the Book of Mormon prophecies to be fulfilled by means of visions, dreams, and heavenly manifestations among the Indians. Like Woodruff, Smith believed that the Lamanites had been visited, not by Christ but

Probably one or more of the three Nephites disciples who tarried, whose mission was to minister to the remnants of their own race, had made an appearance to Porcupine

⁷ For other *Deseret News* editorials see, "A Savage Sentiment," *Deseret Weekly*, 2 Jan. 1891; "The Slaughter of the Reds," *Deseret Weekly*, 10 Jan. 1891; "The Indian Slaughter," *Deseret Weekly*, 17 Jan. 1891, and "No More Indian Wars," *Deseret Weekly*, 28 Feb. 1891.

and perhaps to many others, and taught them Jesus and Him crucified and risen from the dead, and that He was soon to come again in power and great glory to avenge them of their wrongs upon the wicked and restore them to their lands and to the knowledge of their fathers and of the Son of God. . . . God had instituted the true order of communication between Himself and man, and has established in HIS CHURCH, and to this truth all mankind will do well to take heed, lest they be deceived . . . It is in perfect harmony with the order of heaven for ministering spirits or messengers from God or Christ to visit the Lamanites. (1891, 269-71)

CONCLUSION

The Mormons were understandably puzzled about the eschatological meaning of this Messiah movement at the same time other people expressed their bewilderment, but close examination of the evidence shows that the Mormons did not conspire with the Indians in promoting the Ghost Dance. Nor did Mormon temple robes likely underlie the famous Ghost Shirts. Mormon elders did not mark their bodies with scars, impersonate the Messiah, and participate in the Ghost Dance ceremonies. Nor is it any more likely that Mormon doctrines were any more influential in shaping the ideas of the Messiah movement than the ideology of other Christian denominations. Mormon ideas about preparing the Indians for their scriptural and prophetic destiny of founding a New Jerusalem in Jackson County, Missouri, and building a majestic temple for ushering in Christ's millennial reign were not in harmony with most of the doctrines of the Messiah movement of the 1890s. The Ghost Dancers, while feeling the psychological stress of losing their tribal domain, were not dreaming about a Mormon millennial era with cities, towns, factories, farms, and ranches. Instead they yearned for a return to a primitive version of the Garden of Eden where their dead ancestors would share in their ancient utopian life.

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