A Short History of Pan-Indianism

From the Native American Information Service, 30 July 1997

Pan-Indianism is a non-violent liberation philosophy with roots in Native American Peace cosmologies. The Pan-Indian movement serves to stabilize Indian youth, who previously were committing suicide at the rate of 34%, and to provide a way of practicing a Native American spirituality which young Indian couples and single parents, can base their family spirituality on, assuring an extended family, and stimulating the next generation to remain Indian. Their Indian identity may be the only thing keeping these young people alive in a dominant culture which gives them the message that no one needs them. Just as Christianity has been a vehicle for genocide, Pan-Indianism is a vechile for Repatriation. The attempt to absorb Traditional Native American symbols and ethics into Christianity, thereby destroying the original meaning of them, is spiritual colonialism rather than Pan-Indianism. Inter-tribalism is usually associated with political inter-cultural [Christian] relationships between Indian Nations, monitored by the government under the BIA, and primarily of an economic nature (Jorgensen 1972).

Pan-Indianism involves the process of synthesizing the collective spiritual reality and Traditional wisdom of more than one Native American Nation, but not necessarily all of them. Sun Dance itself is Pan Indian since more than one Indian Nation has traditionally practiced it. Pan-Indianism tends to be Traditional and non-Christian. Pan-Indianism is open to all peoples.

The post-industrial, Pan-Indian Movement emerged in 1977 when the Haudenosaunee, and Indians from North and South America, presented their Great Law of Peace to the United Nations, with a warning that Western civilization, through the process of colonialism, was destroying the earth's ability to renew herself. They recommended the development of liberation technologies which would be anti-colonial, or self-sustaining, and the development of liberation theologies. A liberation theology will develop in people a consciousness that all life on the earth is sacred and that the sacredness of life is the key to human freedom and survival (Akwesasne Notes 1978: basic call to consciousness). The Peacemaker argued not for the establishment of law and order, but for the full establishment of peace, and universal justice.

In 1978, Indians walked from San Francisco to Washington, D.C., this trek was called The Longest Walk. The outcome of this walk was the Native American Freedom of Religion Act. During this walk, we were taught spiritual wisdom. The spiritual leaders got together and worked out ceremonies which did not conflict with any one Indian Nation's spiritual beliefs. This commonality, is the foundation for modern Pan-Indianism.

Many Indian Nations are forbidden, by prophecy, to share their specific religious beliefs, even with other Indians, and with members of their own tribe who are less than full-bloods. The Lakota had no such restrictions. There is a Lakota prophecy that says, when the Lakota share their spiritual ways, Indians will get their Treaties honored, so, at the time of the Longest Walk, Lakota were eager to share their Sweat Lodge, in order to create unity among Indians and their extended families, to heal and to stabilize individuals and family relationships. A Lakota spiritual leader had a vision that the colors black, red, yellow and white, our sacred colors, stood for the four races. This became the belief of choice of Pan-Indianism. The Lakota offered their Sweat Lodge ceremony and the Sweat Lodge has become the most widely spread ceremony in Pan-Indianism. It was in the Sweat Lodge that we first learned to pray all my relations.

After the Longest Walk the Sun Dance extended to California at D-Q University. Many of the Indians who had been on the Longest Walk, participated in that Sun Dance. This was a continuation of the Sun Dance being extended to Pan-Indianism. Now there has been another vision of Buffalo Calf Woman turning into buffalo of the four sacred colors. This has served to bolster the idea that the Red Road is for everyone.

The Pan-Indian movement is made up of all four races, but the largest contingency are non-federally recognized Indians, primarily urban, who are desperately clinging to their Indian identity. These people are not white, although some white people do also Sun Dance, they are very much in the minority, and are usually related to or have married into Indian families. Many Mixed Bloods (with less than 1/4 from a single tribe), because the federal government no longer recognizes them as Indians, even though they may have 100% Indian blood, do not come under the jurisdiction of the BIA or Tribal councils, so their rights to the Bill of Rights have not been abrogated. Jaimes (Jaimes 1992: 136-137) accuses the Federal government of psychic disempowerment in their blood quantum policy. ...federal policymakers have increasingly imposed 'Indian identification standards' of their own design...--this aspect of U.S. policy has increasingly wrought havoc with the American Indian sense of nationhood (and often the individual sense of self) over the past century. (Jamies 1982: 124) Nationhood implies conformity with international human rights ethics. Ethnic cleansing is a violation of human rights.

Indians ceded their land to the government by Treaty. A Treaty is an international contract. Contracts are the crux of Western civilization. It is unconscionable in today's world to deny a whole group of people the fulfillment of their contracts solely on the basis of race. Pan-Indianism can teach that the return of the Black Hills is central and indispensable to the Sun Dance Way.

On the Longest Walk were some Buddist priests. Dennis established a close friendship with the leader of these monks, and it was this old man who first sounded a call for a New Age. This was in a conversation between this Buddhist elder and Dennis which was published in a book called Buddhism and World Peace. In the beginning the New Age people were respectful and participated in many Pan-Indian ceremonies. Many leaders in the New Age movement are Indian people. As they gained more autonomy, some became arrogant and refused to give jurisdiction to Lakota for their ceremonies and began to abuse the ceremonies by corrupting them. This corruption may be due more to innocent ignorance than to deliberate disrespect. The primary abusers are not the unenrolled, they are those who have corrupted the meanings. Our enemy is not New Agers. Our enemy is willful ignorance.

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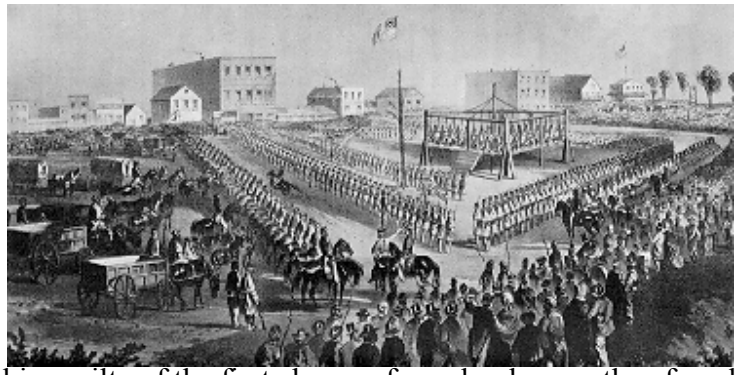
Hangings

On December 16, 1862, President Lincoln authorized the execution of 38 Dakota. The following quote was taken from The Dakota Conflict Trials homepage:

"Ordered that of the Indians and half-breeds sentences to be hanged by the military commission, composed of Colonel Crooks, Lt. Colonel Marshall, Captain Grant, Captain Bailey, and Lieutenant Olin and lately sitting on Minnesota, you cause to be executed on Friday the 19th day of December, instant the following names, to witness (38 names listed by case number of record: 2, 4, 5, 6, 10, 11, 12, 14, 15, 19, 22, 24, 35, 67, 68, 69, 70, 96, 115, 121, 138, 155, 170, 175, 178, 210, 225, 254, 265, 279, 318, 327, 333, 342, 359, 373, 377, 382, 383). The other prisoners you will hold subject to further orders, taking care that they will neither escape nor are subject to any unlawful violence."
Abraham Lincoln, President of the United States

There were actually 300 sentenced to death, but Lincoln decided that the number was too high, so he changed it to 38. On December 26, 1862, in Mankato, MN, 38 Sioux Indians were hung. This is the largest mass execution in American history.



The scene at 10:00 AM on December 26, 1862. The actual explanations of three cases were found on the homepage listed above. The following is a short description of them:

Case 2: Te-he-hdo-ne-cha was charged with murder, he was then charged with rape. The courts found him guilty of the first charge of murder; he was then found guilty of the second charge of rape. He was then sentenced to be hung by the neck until he was dead.

Case 4: Tazoo was charged with murder, he was also charged with rape. The courts found him guilty of the fist charge of murder; he was then found guilt for the second charge of rape. He also was sentenced to be hung by the neck until he was dead.

Case 178: Na-pay-shne was charged with the participation of murders, outrages, and robberies done by the Sioux Indians on the MN frontier. The courts found him guilty of the charge and sentenced him to be hung by the neck until dead.

Before the men were executed they were allowed to meet with their families one last time. When the men were being brought to the scaffold they were chanting and singing Dakota songs. Three drumbeats signaled the movement of the execution. The town was then filled with cheers. The bodies of the 38 men were buried in a single grave on the edge of the town.

The Wounded Knee Massacre

December 29, 1890
by Lorie Liggett

The Wounded Knee Massacre in 1890 (which was originally referred to by the United States army as the Battle of Wounded Knee -- a descriptive moniker that remains highly contested by the Native American community) is known as the event that ended the last of the Indian wars in America. As the year came to a close, the Seventh Cavalry of the United States Army brought an horrific end to the century-long U.S. government-Indian armed conflicts.

On the bone-chilling morning of December 29, devotees of the newly created Ghost Dance religion made a lengthy trek to the Pine Ridge Reservation in southwestern South Dakota to seek protection from military apprehension. Members of the Miniconjou Sioux (Lakota) tribe led by Chief Big Foot and the Hunkpapa Sioux (Lakota) followers of the recently slain charismatic leader, Sitting Bull, attempted to escape arrest by fleeing south through the rugged terrain of the Badlands. There, on the snowy banks of Wounded Knee Creek (Cankpe Opi Wakpala), nearly 300 Lakota men, women, and children -- old and young -- were massacred in a highly charged, violent encounter with U.S. soldiers. The memory of that day still evokes passionate emotional and politicized responses from present-day Native Americans and their supporters. The Wounded Knee Massacre, according to scholars, symbolizes not only a culmination of a clash of cultures and the failure of governmental Indian policies, but also the end of the American frontier. Although it did bring an end to the Ghost Dance religion, it did not, however, represent the demise of the Lakota culture, which still thrives today.

Ghost Dance Religion

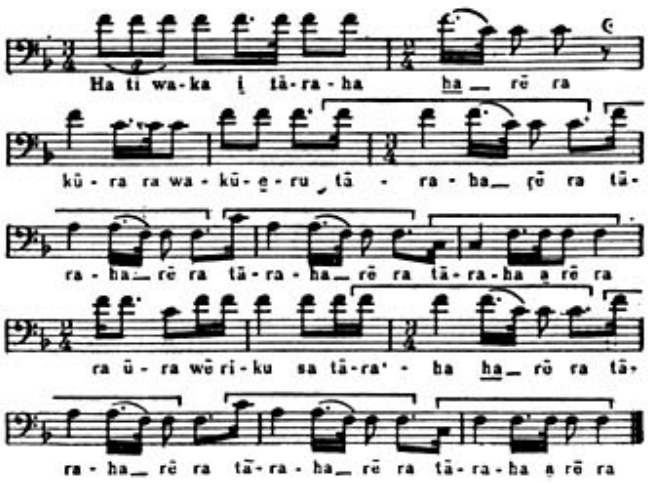
By the late 1880s, many Indian tribes, desperate and facing a dire existence of poverty, hunger and disease, sought a means of salvation to revitalize their traditional culture. The evolution of a new religion, the Ghost Dance, was a reaction to the Indians being forced to submit to government authority and reservation life. In early 1889, a Paiute shaman, Wovoka, (son of the mystic, Tavibo, whose teachings influenced the new religion) had a vision during an eclipse of the sun in which he saw the second coming of Christ and received a warning about the evils of the white man.

Knowledge of the vision spread quickly through the Indian camps across the country. Word began to circulate among the people on the reservations that a great new Indian Messiah had come to liberate them, and investigative parties were sent out to discover the nature of these claims. On one of the excursions, it is said that the messiah appeared to an Arapaho hunting party, crowned with thorns. They believed him to be the incarnation of Jesus, returned to save the Indian nations from the scourge of white people. Delegations were sent to visit Wovoka in western Nevada and returned to their camps disciples, preaching a new religion that promised renewal and revitalization of the Indian nations. Among those who met with Wovoka, Good Thunder, Short Bull, and Kicking Bear became prominent leaders of the new religion which was called the Ghost Dance by white people because of its precepts of resurrection and reunion with the dead.

According to Wovoka, converts of the new religion were supposed to take part in the Ghost Dance to hasten the arrival of the new era as promised by the messiah. Although the Bureau of Indian Affairs banned the Ghost Dance (as they did all other Indians spiritual rituals), the Lakotas adopted it and began composing sacred songs of hope:

The whole world is coming,
A nation is coming, a nation is coming,
The eagle has brought the message to the tribe.
The Father says so, the Father says so.
Over the whole earth they are coming,
The buffalo are coming, the buffalo are coming,
The crow has brought the message to the tribe,
The Father says so, the Father says so.

"THE BUFFALO ARE COMING"



Courtesy of the Bureau of American Ethnology Collection

Listen, he said, yonder the buffalo are coming,
These are his sayings, yonder the buffalo are coming,
They walk, they stand, they are coming,
Yonder the buffalo are coming.

The Ghost Dance religion promised an apocalypse in the coming years during which time the earth would be destroyed, only to be recreated with the Indians as the inheritors of the new earth. According to the prophecy, the recent times of suffering for Indians had been brought about by their sins, but now they had withstood enough under the whites. With the earth destroyed, white people would be obliterated, buried under the new soil of the spring that would cover the land and restore the prairie. The buffalo and antelope would return, and deceased ancestors would rise to once again roam the earth, now free of violence, starvation, and disease. The natural world would be restored, and the land once again would be free and open to the Indian peoples, without the borders and boundaries of the white man. The new doctrine taught that salvation would be achieved when the Indians purged themselves of the evil ways learned from the white man, especially the drinking of alcohol. Believers were encouraged to engage in frequent ceremonial cleansing, meditation, prayer, chanting, and most importantly, dancing the Ghost Dance. Hearing rumors of the prophecy and fearing that it was a portent of renewed violence, white homesteaders panicked and the government responded.

The government agent at Standing Rock, James McLaughlin, described the Ghost Dance as an "absurd craze" -- "demoralizing, indecent, disgusting." Reservation agents described the Indians as "wild and crazy," and believed that their actions warranted military protection for white settlers. But while one of the primary goals of the Bureau of Indian Affairs was to convert the Indians to Christianity, they did not recognize that the fundamental principles of the Ghost Dance were indeed Christian in nature and had the effect of converting many to a belief in the one Christian God. In addition, Wovoka preached that, to survive, the Indians needed to turn to farming and to send their children to school to be educated. Ironically, while these efforts would appear to coincide with the goals of the Bureau, the Ghost Dance was outlawed by the agency. The Bureau feared the swelling numbers of Ghost Dancers and believed that the ritual was a precursor to renewed Indian

Before dancing, the ritual participants would enter a sweat lodge for purification. Then the worshippers, painted with sacred red pigment, would adorn themselves in a special costume which was believed to be a gift from the Father. The hallowed clothing was usually made of white cotton muslin cloth embellished with feathers and painted symbols seen in the wearers' visions, as well as a prominent eagle figure. While many tribes of Plains Indians wore the ghost shirts and partook of the dance, only the Lakota believed that the clothing would protect them from the bullets of the white man -- an assertion that was made in response to the dancers feared intrusion by U.S. soldiers. This was an idea which agitated the government agents, who, rather than realizing the defensive nature of the ghost shirts, viewed them as symbols of aggression.

One of the songs sung at the ceremonies celebrated the special protection of the Ghost Shirt:

Verily, I have given you my strength, Says the Father, says the Father. The shirt will cause you to live, Says the Father, says the Father.

The actual dance was performed by all members joining hands to create a circle. In the center of the formation was a sacred tree, or symbol of a tree, decorated with religious offerings. Looking toward the sun, the dancers would do a shuffling, counter-clockwise side-step, chanting while they sang songs of resurrection. Gradually the tempo would be increased to a great beat of arousal. Some dances would continue for days until the participants "died," falling to the ground, rolling around and experiencing visions of a new land of hope and freedom from white people which was promised by the messiah. The dance often produced mass hypnosis in its transfixed participants, and thus, it became known as the Ghost Dance. Curious onlookers were prohibited, furthering the sense of mystery about the ritual and elevating the tension between the dancers, settlers, and soldiers.

A Lakota Sioux described the Ghost Dance:

"They danced without rest, on and on...Occasionally someone thoroughly exhausted and dizzy fell unconscious into the center and lay there "dead"...After a while, many lay about in that condition. They were now "dead" and seeing their dear ones...The visions...ended the same way, like a chorus describing a great encampment of all the

Dakotas who had ever died, where...there was no sorrow but only joy, where relatives thronged out with happy laughter...The people went on and on and could not stop, day or night, hoping...to get a vision of their own dead...And so I suppose the authorities did think they were crazy - but they were not. They were only terribly unhappy." (Source: 500 Nations, 1994)

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The Ghost Dance (Natdia) is a spiritual movement that came about in the late 1880s when conditions were bad on Indian reservations and Native Americans needed something to give them hope. This movement found its origin in a Paiute Indian named Wovoka, who announced that he was the messiah come to earth to prepare the Indians for their salvation.

The Paiute tradition that lead to the Ghost Dance began in the 1870 in the Western Great Basin from the visions of Wodziwob (Gray Hair) concerning earth renewal and the reintroduction of the spirits of ancient Numu (Northern Paiute) ancestors into the contemporary day to help them. Central to the Natdia religion was the dance itself - dancing in a circular pattern continuously - which induced a state of religious ecstasy.

The movement began with a dream by Wovoka (named Jack Wilson in English), a Northern Paiute, during the solar eclipse on January 1, 1889. He claimed that, in his dream, he was taken into the spirit world and saw all Native Americans being taken up into the sky and the Earth opening up to swallow all Whites and to revert back to its natural state. The Native Americans, along with their ancestors, were put back upon the earth to live in peace. He also claimed that he was shown that, by dancing the round-dance continuously, the dream would become a reality and the participants would enjoy the new Earth.

His teachings followed a previous Paiute tradition predicting a Paiute renaissance. Varying somewhat, it contained much Christian doctrine. He also told them to remain peaceful and keep the reason for the dance secret from the Whites. Wovoka's message spread quickly to other Native American peoples and soon many of them were fully dedicated to the movement. Representatives from tribes all over the nation came to Nevada to meet with Wovoka and learn to dance the Ghost Dance and to sing Ghost Dance songs.

The dance as told by Wovoka went something like this: "When you get home you must begin a dance and continue for five days. Dance for four successive nights, and on the last night continue dancing until the morning of the fifth day, when all must bathe in the river and then return to their homes. You must all do this in the same way. ...I want you to dance every six weeks. Make a feast at the dance and have food that everybody may eat."

The Natdia, it was claimed, would bring about renewal of the native society and decline in the influence of the Whites.

Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) agents grew disturbed when they became aware that so many Indians were coming together and participating in a new and unknown event.

In early October of 1890, Kicking Bear, a Minneconjou, visited Sitting Bull at Standing Rock telling him of his visit to Wovoka.WovokaThey told him of the great number of other Indians who were there as well, referring to Wovoka as the Christ.

And they told him of the prophecy that the next spring, when the grass was high, the earth would be covered with new soil and bury all the white men. The new soil would be covered with sweet grass, running water and trees and the great herds of buffalo and wild horses would return. All Indians who danced the Ghost Dance would be taken up into the air and suspended there while the new earth was being laid down. Then they would be returned to the earth along with the ghosts of their ancestors.

When the dance spread to the Lakota, the BIA agents became alarmed. They claimed that the Lakota developed a militaristic approach to the dance and began making "ghost shirts" they thought would protect them from bullets. They also spoke openly about why they were dancing. The BIA agent in charge of the Lakotas eventually sent the tribal police to arrest Sitting Bull, a leader respected among the Lakotas, to force him to stop the dance. In the struggle that followed, Sitting Bull was killed along with a number of policemen. A small detachment of cavalry eventually rescued the remaining policemen.

Following the killing of Sitting Bull, the United States sent the Seventh Cavalry to "disarm the Lakota and take control." During the events that followed, now known as the Wounded Knee Massacre on December 29, 1890, 457 U.S. soldiers opened fire upon the Sioux, killing more than 200 of them.

The Ghost Dance reached its peak just before the Wounded Knee Massacre in 1890.

When it became apparent that ghost shirts did not protect from bullets and the expected resurrection did not happen, most former believers quit the Ghost Dance. Wovoka, disturbed by the death threats and disappointed with the many reinterpretations of his vision, gave up his public speaking. However, he remained well-respected among his followers and continued his religious activities. He traveled and received visitors until the end of his life in 1932. There are still members of the religious movement today. Believers in the Ghost Dance spirituality are convinced that performing the Ghost Dance will eventually reunite them with their ancestors coming by railway from the spirit world. The ancestor spirits, including the spirit of Jesus, are called upon to heal the sick and to help protect Mother Earth. Meanwhile, the world will return to a primordial state of natural beauty, opening up to swallow up all other people (those who do not have a strong spirituality based upon the earth). The performers of the Ghost Dance theoretically will float in safety above with their ancestors, family, and peoples of the world who follow the extensive spirituality.

Wounded Knee Massacre

The Father Comes Singing

There is the father coming,
There is the father coming.
The father says this as he comes,
The father says this as he comes,
"You shall live," he says as he comes,
***"You shall live," 'he says as he comes*.**

- Sioux Ghost Dance Song

1890 Observation and Description of the Ghost Dance

Mrs. Z.A. Parker observed the Ghost Dance among the Lakota at Pine Ridge Reservation, Dakota Territory on June 20, 1890 and described it as such:

We drove to this spot about 10:30 o'clock on a delightful October day. We came upon tents scattered here and there in low, sheltered places long before reaching the dance ground. Presently we saw over three hundred tents placed in a circle, with a large pine tree in the center, which was covered with strips of cloth of various colors, eagle feathers, stuffed birds, claws, and horns-all offerings to the Great Spirit. The ceremonies had just begun. In the center, around the tree, were gathered their medicine-men; also those who had been so fortunate as to have had visions and in them had seen and talked with friends who had died. A company of fifteen had started a chant and were marching abreast, others coming in behind as they marched. After marching around the circle of tents they turned to the center, where many had gathered and were seated on the ground.

I think they wore the ghost shirt or ghost dress for the first time that day. I noticed that these were all new and were worn by about seventy men and forty women. The wife of a man called Return-from-scout had seen in a vision that her friends all wore a similar robe, and on reviving from her trance she called the women together and they made a great number of the sacred garments. They were of white cotton cloth. The women's dress was cut like their ordinary dress, a loose robe with wide, flowing sleeves, painted blue in the neck, in the shape of a three-cornered handkerchief, with moon, stars, birds, etc., interspersed with real feathers, painted on the waists, letting them fall to within 3 inches of the ground, the fringe at the bottom. In the hair, near the crown, a feather was tied. I noticed an absence of any manner of head ornaments, and, as I knew

their vanity and fondness for them, wondered why it was. Upon making inquiries I found they discarded everything they could which was made by white men.

The ghost shirt for the men was made of the same material-shirts and leggings painted in red. Some of the leggings were painted in stripes running up and down, others running around. The shirt was painted blue around the neck, and the whole garment was fantastically sprinkled with figures of birds, bows and arrows, sun, moon, and stars, and everything they saw in nature.

Down the outside of the sleeve were rows of feathers tied by the quill ends and left to fly in the breeze, and also a row around the neck and up and down the outside of the leggings. I noticed that a number had stuffed birds, squirrel heads, etc., tied in their long hair. The faces of all were painted red with a black half-moon on the forehead or on one cheek.

As the crowd gathered about the tree the high priest, or master of ceremonies, began his address, giving them directions as to the chant and other matters. After he had spoken for about fifteen minutes they arose and formed in a circle. As nearly as I could count, there were between three and four hundred persons.

One stood directly behind another, each with his hands on his neighbor's shoulders. After walking about a few times, chanting, "Father, I come," they stopped marching, but remained in the circle, and set up the most fearful, heart-piercing wails I ever heard-crying, moaning, groaning, and shrieking out their grief, and naming over their departed friends and relatives, at the same time taking up handfuls of dust at their feet, washing their hands in it, and throwing it over their heads. Finally, they raised their eyes to heaven, their hands clasped high above their heads, and stood straight and perfectly still, invoking the power of the Great Spirit to allow them to see and talk with their people who had died. This ceremony lasted about fifteen minutes, when they all sat down where they were and listened to another address, which I did not understand, but which I afterwards learned were words of encouragement and assurance of the coming messiah.

When they arose again, they enlarged the circle by facing toward the center, taking hold of hands, and moving around in the manner of school children in their play of "needle's eye." And now the most intense excitement began. They would go as fast as they could, their hands moving from side to side, their bodies swaying, their arms, with hands gripped tightly in their neighbors', swinging back and forth with all their might. If one, more weak and frail, came near falling, he would be jerked up and into position until tired nature gave way. The ground had been worked and worn by many feet, until the fine, flour-like dust lay light and loose to the depth of two or three inches. The wind, which had increased, would sometimes take it up, enveloping the dancers and hiding them from view. In the ring were men, women, and children; the strong and the robust, the weak consumptive, and those near to death's door. They believed those who were sick would be cured by joining in the dance and losing consciousness. From the beginning they chanted, to a monotonous tune, the words:

Father, I come;
Mother, I come;
Brother, I come;

Father, give us back our arrows.

All of which they would repeat over and over again until first one and then another would break from the ring and stagger away and fall down. One woman fell a few feet from me. She came toward us, her hair flying over her face, which was purple, looking as if the blood would burst through; her hands and arms moving wildly; every breath a pant and a groan; and she fell on her back, and went down like a log. I stepped up to her as she lay there motionless, but with every muscle twitching and quivering. She seemed to be perfectly unconscious. Some of the men and a few of the women would run, stepping high and pawing the air in a frightful manner. Some told me afterwards that they had a sensation as if the ground were rising toward them and would strike them in the face. Others would drop where they stood. One woman fell directly into the ring, and her husband stepped out and stood over her to prevent them from trampling upon her. No one ever disturbed those who fell or took any notice of them except to keep the crowd away. They kept up dancing until fully 100 persons were lying unconscious. Then they stopped and seated themselves in a circle, and as each recovered from his trance he was brought to the center of the ring to relate his experience. Each told his story to the medicine-man and he shouted it to the crowd. Not one in ten claimed that he saw anything. I asked one Indian, a tall, strong fellow, straight as an arrow-what his experience was. He said he saw an eagle coming toward him. It flew round and round, drawing nearer and nearer until he put out his hand to take it, when it was gone. I asked him what he thought of it. "Big lie," he replied. I found by talking to them that not one in twenty believed it. After resting for a time they would go through the same performance, perhaps three times a day. They practiced fasting, and every morning those who joined in the dance were obliged to immerse themselves in the creek.

Three Noted Chiefs of the Sioux

Harper's Weekly
New York - 20 October 1890 - Volume 34, pp. 995

THE delusion of the coming of the Messiah among the Indians of the Northwest, with the resulting ceremony known as the ghost dance, is indicative of greater danger of an Indian war in that region than has existed since 1876. Never before have diverse Indian tribes been so generally united upon a single idea. The conspiracy of Pontiac and the arrayment of savage forces by Tecumseh are insignificant by comparison. The conditions do not exist that ordinarily have led to wars upon the Western frontier. The peril of the situation lies in the fanaticism which may carry the superstitious and excitable Indian to the point of hostilities in defiance of all hope of ultimate success; and the uncertainty of this element baffles the judgment of the oldest frontiersman, in the effort to determine the extent of the danger. A single spark in the tinder of excited religious gatherings may precipitate an Indian war more sanguinary than any similar war that has ever occurred. The hope of peace lies in the judicious display of force, united with conciliation, by the United States authorities, helped by the coming of severely cold weather, which would make an outbreak obviously hopeless, and allow time for the delusion to dissipate.

In the present state of affairs the noted Sioux chief Sitting Bull, who has already been the source of so much trouble in the course of Indian affairs, appears once more as a prominent figure. This time he does not have the fair pretext under which he incited the war in 1876, which led to the defeat and massacre of General Custer's command on Little Big Horn River, and terminated with the escape of Sitting Bull and his immediate followers into British territory. Since his surrender through the mediation of the Dominion officials in 1880, and his return to the Standing Rock Reservation in 1883, he has found his authority greatly diminished among the Dakota Sioux. This authority he has endeavored to regain by identifying himself with every element of hostility to the whites and opposition to the innovations of civilization, and has been so far successful that at the conference at Standing Rock, Dakota, in July and August, 1888, he influenced his tribe to refuse to relinquish their lands by purchase.

Contrary to the general estimate concerning him, this famous chief is a man of mediocre ability, not noted for bravery as a warrior, and inferior as a commander and an intelligence to some of his lieutenants. Sheer obstinacy, stubborn tenacity of purpose, and low cunning, with an aptitude for theatrical effect and for working on the superstitions of his people, are the attributes by which he has acquired and retained influence among the Northwest tribes. Personally he is pompous, vain, boastful, licentious, and untrustworthy. He has constantly been a disturbing element at the agency since his return from confinement as a military prisoner seven years ago, and has grown worse in this respect as he has felt his authority and importance departing.

The dangerous elements that this chief has called around him do not represent the most noted Indians who fought under his leadership in the Sioux war fourteen years ago and followed him in his exile across the British frontier. Those warriors have realized the futility of warfare with the whites, and are sincerely desirous not to incur its evils again. The Indians of whom Sitting Bull is the representative comprise the irreconcilables -- warriors who adhere to the old aboriginal usages and chiefs jealous of their authority, which wanes in proportion as their followers advance in civilization. This small but dangerous faction are ready at any time for war. In

sympathy with their desire are many young men ambitious for a chance to distinguish themselves as warriors.

The chiefs of the greatest influence among the majority of the Indians are men of strong will and good sense, who have accepted the situation, and are willing to adapt themselves to the new condition of things. They could control their people by their own influence unaided if the scene of the gatherings was not so near exposed settlements, which tempt lawless Indians to make trouble in hope of booty. The present excitement is fanned to some extent by unscrupulous white persons desirous of a war with the hope that it shall bring them emolument, and end in throwing open the reservation lands for settlement.

Foremost among the Indians who have taken the side of peace and safety, and have made every effort to break up the delusion which finds expression in the ghost dances, are chiefs Gall and John Grass, both warriors held in great respect for wisdom and bravery, who took a prominent part as followers of Sitting Bull in the war that brought about the massacre at the Little Big Horn. The change in them in the fourteen years since both these chiefs were on the war-path in the equipments of savagery -- the war bonnets, the braided hair pieced out with buffalo tails, and the array of weapons -- is remarkable. The difference between the good and the bad Indian is indicated in the countenance even more obviously than among the civilized whites. The strong faces of these two chiefs indicate their character, which, unlike that of Sitting Bull, is fearless, upright, bright, and progressive.

The foremost leader among the Sioux is Chief Gall, who stands above all other chiefs in their estimation. Many persons familiar with the situation say that he planned the campaign of 1876, which made Sitting Bull famous as a commander and strategist, and affirm that no serious outbreak among the Northwest tribes will occur so long as he remains friendly to the government.

This famous war chief is one of the best farmers at the Standing Rock Agency. His family are all members of the Episcopalian Church. He takes no part in the ghost dance, nor does he lend his sanction to it. He feels that the Indians fail to appreciate the benefits of their present surroundings, and want old times, which have been magnified in their imagination by tradition, to return. "I think it better," he said, at the conclusion of a conference he and John Grass had with Major James McLaughlin, the United States agent at Standing Rock, "for us to live as we are living rather than create trouble, not knowing how it will end."

An element of great value in the preservation of order upon the reservation, and conspicuously useful in the present disturbed condition of affairs at the agency, is the Indian police. At Standing Rock the force is thirty in number, commanded by a captain and a lieutenant. For the adjudication of affairs occurring upon the reservation an Indian court has been established at the agency. Two of the judges are members of the police force, and the third one is John Grass, who speaks English. The impartiality and excellent judgment displayed in the conduct of this court have been noteworthy, and its decisions have almost invariably been accepted without complaint.