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Intertribal Communication, Literacy, and the Spread of the Ghost Dance

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Intertribal Communication, Literacy, and the Spread of the Ghost Dance

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in History

by

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ABSTRACT:

During the 1880s, western Native Americans created networks of communication threaded together through postal correspondence and intertribal visitation among reservations. Through this network native groups cultivated intertribal relationships and exchanged ideas despite attempts by the United States government to separate, contain, and Americanize them. Frequent visits to other reservations, often over long distances, gave men and women a chance to share news and information, exchange religious and cultural traditions, and forge new intertribal bonds. Many Indians also used letter-writing to communicate with the world outside of their reserves in ways unanticipated by government policy makers. Thousands of Native Americans learned to read and write during the 1880s and then used this literacy, meant as a tool of assimilation, to strengthen their own cultures, preserve a measure of sovereignty, and express their thoughts outside of white control.

In 1889 and 1890 these intertribal connections facilitated the spread of the ghost dance, a Native American religious movement, among dozens of tribes scattered across 800,000 square miles. Visitations and correspondence brought news of the dance out of the Great Basin, through the Rocky Mountains, and into northern and southern plains reservations. Tribes sent investigators, often on railroads, to determine the truth, and some proponents of the movement wrote or traveled to spread the news. Others wrote simply to inform their friends or relatives of what they knew about it all. Government officials tried to slow the dissemination of the movement by tightening visitation, arresting those traveling without permission, and eventually by censoring the mail, but communications and the spread of the movement continued. Following the massacre of Lakotas at Wounded Knee, communication among tribes

continued, partly as a continuing effort to assess the ghost dance and partly to evaluate Indians' place in the new arrangement of power.

By examining in detail these emerging systems of communication and exchange, this dissertation reveals the beginnings of a Pan-Indian sense of common concerns as well as the shrewd use of both government programs, notably education, and the mechanisms of modernization, notably the railroads and postal system, to protect and preserve basic elements of traditional life.

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DEDICATION

In memory of my mother, Gail.

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INTRODUCTION

“We also want permission to visit our friends at other Agencies, we do not want the gate closed between us. The great Father said he wanted us to be at peace with each other and to be friendly. To be this we should be permitted to make friendly visits among each other as the white people do.” –Young Man Afraid of His Horses, Red Cloud, and Little Wound, December 1888.¹

“There are fifty-nine agencies altogether, and the Great Father has asked us all to be one...Indians are all one...These people who came here from the other agencies are of the same blood that we are and want to be one...We want the doors left open so that we may have permission to visit these different agencies if we want to...Now, we consider ourselves as one.” – Young Man Afraid of His Horses, March 1892.²

During the second half of 1889, Southern Arapaho chief Left Hand (the younger), who lived at the Cheyenne and Arapaho Agency in Indian Territory, received letters from his Northern Arapaho acquaintances at the Wind River Agency in Wyoming. Correspondence between the Natives at the two agencies was common, but these letters carried some unusual information. They told of the arrival of a “second Jesus” in the northern country.³ Other Indians at the agency, including the Southern Cheyennes, had been receiving similar correspondence from the Northern Arapahos at Wind River and from the Northern Cheyennes at the Tongue

¹ Little Wound, Young Man Afraid of His Horses, and Red Cloud to the President, December 10, 1888, Records of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, Record Group 75.19.85, Pine Ridge, Copies of Misc. Letters Sent, Box 54, National Archives and Records Administration (KC). Hereafter, Records of the Bureau of Indian Affairs will be abbreviated RBIA. Record Group will be RG, and National Archives and Records Administration will be NARA.

² “Letter from the Secretary of the Interior in Relation to the Affairs of the Indians at the Pine Ridge and Rosebud Reservations in South Dakota,” March 16, 1892, Ex. Doc. No. 58, The Executive Documents of the Senate of the United States for the First Session of the Fifty-Second Congress, 1891-'92, Vol. V (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1892), 42-43.

³ Agent Charles Ashely to CIA, January 30, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.19.10, Cheyenne and Arapaho, Letters Sent, Reel 32, NARA (OHS). Chief Left Hand should not be confused with Chief Land Hand the elder, Niwot, who died from wound he sustained at the Sand Creek Massacre on November 29, 1864. The men were not related. Left Hand the elder was fluent in English. Left Hand the younger was not.

River Agency in Montana since the summer of 1889.⁴ Curious, Left Hand wanted to investigate the claims. He chose Black Coyote, the lieutenant of the agency police, and Washee, a sergeant of the scouts, to travel to a mountain where the “second Jesus” reportedly lived.⁵ The Arapahos and Cheyennes were anxious to discover the truth. Two hundred dollars was raised by the Indians to pay for Washee and Black Coyote’s rail fare north. The railroad shortened the nine hundred mile trip to Wind River, where the two men attempted to gather some details about this new messiah.⁶ While the men were away, the Arapahos and Cheyennes continued the investigation by sending out letters of inquiry.⁷ One of the interpreters at the agency, possibly Paul Boynton (Red Feather), a Carlisle graduate of Cheyenne and Arapaho descent, wrote to the Northern Cheyennes at the Tongue River Agency in Montana. He asked (in English):

Cheyennes and Arapahoes here are greatly excited about a Christ coming among some of the Northern tribes of Indians. The Arapahoes have been getting letters from Northern Arapahoes in regard to it. My friends here wish me to ask what there is about it, and what do you know about it? They sent two of their young men to the Shoshone agency in Idaho a month and a half ago to find out all about it, but those two have not returned yet.⁸

The interpreter at Tongue River replied (in English):

⁴ James Mooney, *The Ghost-dance Religion and the Sioux Outbreak of 1890*, Extract from the *Fourteenth Annual Report of the Bureau of Ethnology* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1896), 894.

⁵ The Indians believed the messiah’s home to be a “three days journey” from the Wind River Agency, according to the agent. The commanding officer at Fort Reno gave Washee permission to head north, but the Southern Arapaho agent had to ask the Commissioner of Indian Affairs if Black Coyote could go. The agent recommended the trip and informed the Commissioner that Black Coyote had relatives at Wind River that he had been hoping to visit anyway. The Commissioner consented.

⁶ The Wind River Agency was one hundred miles north of the Union Pacific line. A stop at Wind River meant a two hundred mile round trip on foot or horseback.

⁷ Agent Upshaw to CIA, April 20, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 13159, Box 617, NARA (DC).

⁸ “They Expect a Saviour,” *New York Sun*, April 27, 1890; *Chicago Tribune*, April 27, 1890. Paul Boynton and Robert Burns were interpreters for Agent Ashley in 1890, see *The Indian Helper*, December 19, 1890.

The Indians say Christ is in the mountains, and that he wants all the Indians to come to him. He will put them behind him, and having all the whites before him, will roll the world over on the whites and destroy them. He is a white man.⁹

Portions of these letters were published in a report about this Indian “Saviour” that appeared in papers across the country on April 27, 1890. The reporter wondered how this new religion became so popular among the Indians. “One of the difficult things to explain,” he wrote, “is the wide distribution of the story which seems to have been brought out independently at two places, over 1,000 miles apart.”¹⁰

The story’s distribution quickly grew far wider. Within six months, most Americans, of both Native and European descent, had heard about this Indian messiah and his so-called “ghost dance.” In November 1890, William Plumb, the agent at the Western Shoshone Agency in Nevada, reported that the Shoshones were “looking for the coming of the Indian Christ, the resurrection of the dead Indians, and consequent supremacy of the Indian race.”¹¹ One thousand people gathered for a dance in which the participants could “see the faces of departed friends and relatives.” Several of the headmen were off the reservation on a visit to the Walker River Agency, three hundred miles southwest, to “confer with a man that calls himself Christ,” and others went to the Fort Hall Agency in Idaho, three hundred miles northeast, to “get news” from Indians coming from Montana and the Dakotas. Like the newspaper report from April, Agent Plumb could not comprehend the span of belief. “The astonishing part of the business is the fact that all the Indians in the country seem to possess practically the same ideas and expect about the same results,” Agent Plumb wrote. Many other government reports carried similar information

⁹ “They Expect a Saviour,” *New York Sun*, April 27, 1890; *Chicago Tribune*, April 27, 1890.

¹⁰ “They Expect a Saviour,” *New York Sun*, April 27, 1890; *Chicago Tribune*, April 27, 1890.

¹¹ Agent William Plumb to CIA, November 8, 1890, RBIA, RG 75, SC 188, Box 199, NARA (DC).

back to Washington. This ghost dance movement, which originated from the experiences of a Paiute man in Nevada, had reached most western reservations by early 1890. It seemed that thousands of Native Americans were accepting a new, Pan-Indian religious movement that had a collective message. The Indians' ideas about the movement were "so universal," Plumb assumed, "that I cannot think but some designing white man or men are at the bottom of the whole matter and yet there seems to be nothing beyond the merest suspicion to base that opinion on."

Of course, the ghost dance was not spread by white men. But in less than a year's time, the ideas of a Paiute man from sparsely settled Mason Valley, Nevada were communicated to Native peoples living on dozens of distinct reservations spread over eight hundred thousand square miles. The movement's rapid spread is not surprising once one grasps the interconnectedness among the tribes of the west in the 1880s. Indians could seek and deliver information about the ghost dance movement through a network created through intertribal visitation and letter writing.

By 1880, nearly every Native American living west of the Mississippi River was on a reservation. Each tribe was forced to settle onto their own, frequently shrinking pieces of land where they were to be introduced to what policymakers understood as the American way of life. The seven major bands of Lakota shared parts of what is now South Dakota, the diverse Shoshones held onto to parts of Wyoming, Idaho, and Nevada, the Cheyennes and Arapahos were both divided between northern and southern bands, and dozens of other tribes were spread throughout the plains, including Indian Territory. As remote as they seemed to late nineteenth century Americans, however, the Indian reservations of the west were not islands disconnected

from the outside world. These Indian agencies, created by the federal government to keep the Native populations contained in set boundaries, away from the white populations coursing across the Great Plains, were not prisons. Despite the attempt by the Office of Indian Affairs to keep them separate from other tribes until their culture vanished, Native Americans were able to connect with one another.

A network of communication, threaded together by intertribal visitation and letter writing, fostered a growing sense of community between reservations during the 1880s. During those years, Indians submitted hundreds of requests to visit other agencies. At least seventy-four Indian groups, and probably many more, were given passes to visit distant agencies between 1888 and 1890 alone, varying from parties of one to parties of hundreds. At least sixty different groups of Indians traveled off-reservation without permission in those same years, defying the wishes of their agent. Although agents attempted to limit the movement of their wards, there was great fluidity in the reservation system.

Even in the absence of visitation, the written language, passed along by the Postal Service, bridged the gaps among reservations, allowing men and women to communicate efficiently across the vast distances that separated them from other tribes or from their sons and daughters living at eastern boarding schools. Intertribal communication was no easy matter in the nineteenth century, even between tribes living on the same reservation. On the three reservations in western Indian Territory, for instance, there were at least eight languages being spoken from five distinct linguistic families.¹² But, as a lingua franca, English could facilitate intertribal communication. Letter writing allowed distant acquaintances to share news, express

¹² Omer Call Stewart, *Peyote Religion: A History* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1987), 63-64.

their thoughts and beliefs, and expand their culture, accelerating the development of larger intertribal communities. The flexibility of tribal membership, the regularity of intertribal marriage and kinship, the considerable movement of people from one reservation to another, and the growth of off-reservation boarding schools demanded communication through letters most often written in English. In 1889, nearly twenty percent of the Natives living in the Dakotas, Idaho, Indian Territory (excluding the Five Civilized Tribes), Montana, Nebraska, Nevada, Utah, and Wyoming (about thirteen thousand) could read, either in English, in their Native languages, or both.¹³

This network facilitated the dissemination of the 1890 ghost dance, a religious movement that spread as fast as any in American history. The ideas of the movement originated in the Great Basin with a man named Wovoka (or Jack Wilson) on a reservation in Nevada and were carried across the Rockies onto dozens of reserves on the Great Plains and into the minds of thousands of people. Wovoka, who was thought by many to be a new messiah, prophesized the coming of a regenerated earth, apart from whites, if Indians danced according to his instructions. Information about the movement spread among reservations. Skeptical tribal leaders sent out investigators to travel hundreds of miles to meet Wovoka to determine the truth. Those living east of the Rockies relied on the relationships they had built with the western tribes to find him. The expanding railway system made these journeys much easier. Correspondents, who for years had used letters to share news with friends and family on other reserves, exchanged ideas about the new messiah. So many letters regarding the ghost dance reached reservations that some Indian Affairs agents censored the mail in an effort to limit the movement's progress. This

¹³ *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs to the Secretary of the Interior, 1889* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1889), 496-514. Hereafter the *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs* will be abbreviated *ARCIA*.

shared purpose, to communicate what the ghost dance was to others within their developing intertribal community, brought Natives throughout the American West closer together.

The ghost dance has received considerable scholarly attention, but most studies of the movement have failed to explain its dissemination. How was this religious movement able to spread across the continent, from reservation to reservation, across those lines of confinement, in only a matter of months? There was a similar movement in 1870, also known as “the ghost dance,” which had nearly identical geographic origins and ideological substance as the 1890 ghost dance, but it never spread east of the Rockies. Scholars have theorized, without much success, about why that earlier movement did not thrive outside of the Great Basin. Most scholars see the 1890 movement as a last gasp of religious hope for the desperate Indians of the West and believe that it spread farther than the 1870 movement because Indians’ plight had grown more desperate in the intervening years. Tribes of the Great Plains were said to be more attracted to a “revitalization movement” in 1890 than they were in 1870. One anthropologist went so far as to argue that the Native peoples of the west accepted these new religious ideas in an effort to boost their numbers. Because the ghost dance assured that the dead would return to life, the study claims, the demographically endangered tribes of the west were more likely to believe in the dance in 1890.¹⁴

Historians have had difficulty explaining the ghost dance’s spread because they have given too little attention to how Native peoples transmitted ideas across reservation boundaries.

¹⁴ Russell Thornton, *We Shall Live Again: The 1870 and 1890 Ghost Dance Movements As Demographic Revitalization* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986). For information about the 1870 ghost dance see Cora Du Bois, *The 1870 Ghost Dance*, Anthropological Records Vol. 3, No. 1 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1939); Michael Hittman, “The 1870 Ghost Dance at the Walker River Reservation: A Reconstruction,” *Ethnohistory* 20, no. 3 (Summer 1973): 247-278; Gregory Smoak, *Ghost Dances and Identity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 113-151.

One historian wrote that it was “not surprising the Ghost Dance religion spread so rapidly from tribe to tribe,” because, she reasoned, “by this time its adherents, mainly restricted to reservations, lived a life totally alien to tradition. They found their daily existence one of frustration, hunger, persistent illness, death, and debilitating anomie.” But, she neglected to inquire how people “restricted to reservations” could spread a religion rapidly.¹⁵

A poorly constructed deprivation theory of religion was used as an explanation by whites for the dance as soon as they learned of the movement’s existence. Writing for *Harper’s Weekly* in 1890, Lt. Marion Maus reasoned: “For years he has been confined to military reservations, and has chafed under the restraint thus put upon him. Little wonder he looks for a change, and longs for his once free life, and gladly grasps the new belief in the red Savior.”¹⁶ Many others expressed similar theories in the papers and magazines that exploited the “Messiah Craze.”¹⁷ Some historians have grasped these opinions, ignoring the perspective of the believers and the complexities of Native religion. One argued that because of the “gradual weakening of the aboriginal cultural norms and the long history of defeat suffered by these people,” it was “not surprising to find revivalistic movements flourishing among them.”¹⁸ Did the Lakota travel to

¹⁵ Martha Royce Blaine, *Some Things Are Not Forgotten: A Pawnee Family Remembers* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997), 53.

¹⁶ Lt. Marion P. Maus, “The New Indian Messiah,” *Harper’s Weekly*, December 6, 1890.

¹⁷ See the opinion of members of the American Folk-Lore Society in “Weird Things in Dreams, The Indian Messiah and other Superstitions,” *New York Times*, November 25, 1890. For the opinion of Episcopal Bishop W. H. Hare, see “Bishop Hare’s Views on the Treatment of the Delusion,” *New York Times*, November 26, 1890; “The Indian Millennium,” *The Omaha Daily Bee*, October 29, 1890. The Superintendent of Indians Schools at the time concluded that “all depressed peoples have their Messiah,” see *ARCIA*, 1891, 529. The Indian agent in charge of the Yankton reservation thought that the believers were the “half fed and half starved” who dreamed about the “old days when the Buffalo abounded.” See Agent E. W. Foster to CIA, November 25, 1890, RBIA, RG 75, SC 188, Box 199, NARA (DC).

¹⁸ Marvin K. Opler, “The Southern Ute of Colorado,” *Acculturation in Seven American Indian Tribes*, ed. Ralph Linton (D. Appleton-Century Company, 1940), 188.

Nevada to investigate the rumors of the Ghost Dance because, they were “desperate and miserable,” as Robert Larson concluded?¹⁹

In 1982, Raymond J. DeMallie argued that these interpretations took “too narrow a perspective.”²⁰ “To dismiss the ghost dance as only a reaction to land loss and hunger does not do it justice,” he maintained, “to dismiss it as merely a desperate attempt to revitalize a dead or dying culture is equally unsatisfactory.” Scholars have treated the ghost dance “as an isolated phenomenon, as though it were divorced from the rest of Lakota culture.” They have not accepted “the basic religious nature of the movement,” missing the “broader implications and interconnections” of the ghost dance.

Unfortunately, scholars have ignored other changes besides dispossession that were occurring in Native life in the years following the 1870 dance. The 1890 ghost dance reached the Plains because Native Americans were actively communicating more than ever before, not simply because they were dying or suffering more or because they thought they were going extinct. The dance was accepted by more people because more people knew about it. Intertribal visitation, stimulated by the nature of the reservation system and encouraged by the growth of the railroad, had become easier by 1890. And, by the late 1880s, many Native Americans had become literate. Thus, the movement existed in a world that studies have yet to describe. The reservations of the west were not static points on the map, encircled by the dynamism of the

¹⁹ Robert W. Larson, *Red Cloud: Warrior-Statesman of the Lakota Sioux* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1997), 265.

²⁰ Raymond J. DeMallie, “The Lakota Ghost Dance,” *Pacific Historical Review* 51, no. 4 (Nov. 1982): 388-389. DeMallie believes that historians have been reluctant to “allow the Lakotas their own legitimate perspective” because “empathetic writers have characterized the Lakota as though they were either uncomprehending children or were motivated by precisely the same political and economic drives as white men.” The ghost dance should not be seen “as the last gasp of heathenism,” but as a movement that offered Natives “renewed access to spiritual power.”

white nineteenth century world. Native peoples moved about, exchanged ideas, and communicated over long distances. Anthropologists, ethnologists, and historians have helped us understand the changes the reservation system wrought on Native life, but for a variety of reasons, few have recognized the web of interconnectedness between Native groups that emerged in the reservation years.

Reservation life was constructed by the federal government, but it was ultimately shaped by the people living within it. The government attempted to remove important facets of Native society. War between tribes was no longer tolerated. Whites hoped that Natives would take up farming, especially after the near-extinction of the bison, the primary protein of Plains Indians. Missionaries flocked to the reservations and schools were built to educate Indian children. Government agents were there to unravel the knotty bounds of Native culture. Their job was to convince the Indians, through bribery or punishment or shaming, that education and agriculture were the only way forward for their people.²¹ In 1874, Francis Walker, by then a former Commissioner of Indian Affairs of the Grant administration, stated his hope that Indians “be resolved into the body of our citizenship.” After a few generations, if all went according to Walker’s plan, “the Native Indians, as a pure race or a distinct people, shall have disappeared from the continent.”²² But this could only be accomplished if Indian agents kept the people “upon the reservation,” segregated from white communities, not allowing them to stray off “for

²¹ For background on the development of reservation policies see Francis Paul Prucha, *The Great Father: The United States Government and the American Indians*, Abridged Edition (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1986), 181-197; Stephen J. Rockwell, *Indian Affairs and the Administrative State in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 246-328.

²² Francis Walker, *The Indian Problem*, (Boston: James R. Osgood and Company, 1874), 92.

the occasional debauch” at white settlements.²³ Without confinement, the Indians would “break away in their old roving spirit.” “Nothing but the knowledge that he must stay on his reservation, and do all that is there prescribed for him,” Walker argued, “will, under any adequate system of moral and industrial correction and education, prevent a general breaking-up of Indian communities, and the formation of Indian gypsy-camps all over the frontier States and Territories, to be sores upon the public body, and an intolerable affliction to the future society of those communities.”²⁴

Of course, Walker’s expectations were not met. Indians did not allow themselves to be kept prisoners on reservations. Indians thought they would have the freedom of movement and they expected agents to give it to them. When that freedom was threatened, Natives fought to keep it. In December 1888, Little Wound, Young Man Afraid of His Horses, and Red Cloud sent a letter to President Grover Cleveland that complained about geographic restrictions. “We should be permitted to make friendly visits among each other as the white people do,” they argued; after all, the President “said he wanted us to be at peace with each other and to be friendly.”²⁵ “We do not want the gate closed between us,” they insisted.

Scholars have overstated the confinement of the reservation system. Frederick Hoxie argued that the Crow “could not travel beyond the invisible boundaries of their reserve” in the 1880s and Jerome Greene wrote that the Lakota lived a “sedentary reservation existence.”²⁶

²³ Ibid, 78-79.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Little Wound, Young Man Afraid of His Horses, and Red Cloud to the President, December 10, 1888, RBIA, RG 75.19.85, Pine Ridge, Copies of Misc. Letters Sent, Box 54, NARA (KC).

²⁶ Frederick Hoxie, “Crow Leadership Amidst Reservation Oppression,” in *State and Reservation: New Perspectives on Federal Indian Policy*, ed. George Castile and Robert Bee, (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1992), 44; Jerome A. Greene, *American Carnage* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2014), 37.

Whatever the rules and regulations, the intentions and strategies of Indian Affairs policy makers, government employees never wholly controlled the populations on the reserves. Although Indian Affairs was a radically bureaucratized, expansive, post-Reconstruction reform program, it did not have the administrative capacity (initiative, funding, manpower, or otherwise) to accomplish its goals. While Native peoples undoubtedly faced limitations on their movement (they were not allowed to pick up and pass through the agency borders at their will) they found ways to interact with those outside. Tribal histories now paint a picture of a dynamic world west of the Mississippi before and after the arrival of Europeans, documenting the trade networks, kinship ties, and political alliances that united Indians peoples across the west.²⁷ Those relationships did not cease after tribes reluctantly entered the reserves.

Scholars have also ignored the ability of Indians to express themselves, especially their discontent, to those beyond their own reservations. George Hyde thought that “hardly a whisper of what went on” within the Lakota reservations in the 1880s “reached the outer world” because

²⁷ For more on intertribal relations before the mid-1870s, see Robert H. Lowie, *The Crow Indian* (New York: Farrar and Rinehart, 1935), 206-214; Raymond J. DeMallie, “Sioux Before 1850,” in *Handbook of North American Indians*, Vol. 13, Pt. 2, ed. William C. Sturtevant (Washington: Smithsonian Institution, 2001), 727-734; Loretta Fowler, *Arapahoe Politics, 1851-1978* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1982); John Stands in Timber and Margot Liberty, *Cheyenne Memories* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998); Donald J. Berthrong, *The Southern Cheyennes* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1963); Kingsley M. Bray, “Lone Horn’s Peace: A New View of Sioux-Crow Relations, 1851-1848,” *Nebraska History* 66 (1985): 28-47; Donald J. Blakeslee, “The Plains Interband Trade System: An Ethnohistoric and Archaeological Investigation” (Ph.D. diss., Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 1975); D. B. Shimkin, “Dynamics of Recent Wind River Shoshone History,” *American Anthropologist* 44, no. 3 (July-Sept., 1942): 451-462; Leslie Spier, “The Sun Dance of the Plains Indians: Its Development and Diffusion,” *Anthropological Papers of the American Museum of Natural History* 16, Pt. 7 (New York: AMNH, 1921); Frank Rzeckowski, “The Crow Indians and the Bozeman Trail,” *Montana: The Magazine of Western History*, no. 4 (Winter 1999): 30-47.

the Indians did not have a “method for telling the world.”²⁸ Hyde did not recognize that the Lakota were, in fact, using written English. Hyde claimed that the government “attempted to force the Sioux to...learn English” in the 1880s, but “in every instance it failed.”²⁹ But a careful look at Native encounters with literacy in the early reservation years proves that many Indians found English useful. Most studies of Indian groups of the Plains and Great Basin fail to appreciate their acceptance and use of the written word as a consequence of the growth of Indian education.

Contemporaries sometimes had a better sense of what was going on. In 1890, George Bird Grinnell, an early ethnologist, conservationist, organizer of the first Audubon Society, and the editor of *Forest and Stream*, was surprised to learn that Plains Indians were keeping up “a constant correspondence by letter” with one another. In fact, while Grinnell was visiting the Pawnee Agency in Oklahoma, he discovered that “a lot of letters” were being received from the Sioux living in the Dakotas, who were “trying to get the Pawnees to unite with them” in the ghost dance. This correspondence, according to Grinnell, was “one of the disadvantages, perhaps, of the Indian education.”³⁰

Whites were surprised to discover that Indian groups were using the government’s “civilizing” education to their own advantage by spreading the ghost dance’s message through letters. Education was at the core of the Office of Indian Affairs’ strategy to “Americanize” the Native populations of the West and millions of dollars were spent by the federal government during the 1880s to teach Indians how to read and write. Federal policy makers hoped that education would put an end to “primitive” practices like the ghost dance, a movement seen by

²⁸ George Hyde, *A Sioux Chronicle* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1956), 238.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, xix.

³⁰ *New York Herald*, November 23, 1890.

many whites to be a regressive, barbarous religion that had no place in a civilized America. Education was supposed to make Native Americans think and act like whites, discouraging ideas like the ghost dance, not playing a part in their success. Those who believed in the value of the ghost dance used “progressive” things like literacy to communicate its importance to others.

Letter writers also corresponded with the white world. A look inside the records of the Office of Indian Affairs reveals that Native peoples were constantly writing to white authorities. Between December 1888 and March 1891 alone, the office of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs received over nine hundred letters and petitions sent by Native Americans covering a multitude of topics. Many took it upon themselves to persuade and compel the government to limit their involvement in Indian lives. Their lives were controlled by treaties, laws, regulations, and policies all recorded on paper in the only language to which whites Americans paid any attention. For years the government’s rhetoric proceeded unchallenged down a one-way road. But in the 1880s, Native Americans of the west, with pens in hand, commenced a campaign for self-determination. They sent letters to white friends and allies, government agents and officials, politicians, and the President, representing themselves, hoping to penetrate the mass bureaucracy that blanketed their lives.

In 1992, George Miles wrote, “the failure of historians to transmit Indian voices has meant that most modern Americans remain unaware that Native Americans have been reading and writing in their own language and in English for more than three hundred years.”³¹ Twenty years later, the challenge still exists for historians. Indian literacy has proven to be a small, yet complicated research field. Professors of history, Native American Studies, anthropology,

³¹ George Miles, “To Hear an Old Voice: Rediscovering Native Americans in American History,” in *Under An Open Sky: Rethinking America’s Western Past*, ed. William Cronon, et al (New York: W.W. Norton: 1992), 55.

ethnohistory, English and literary criticism, linguistics, education, and church historians have all interested themselves in Indian literacy. Each carry their own disciplinary methods, theories, and bias into their work, giving students of Indian literacy a wide range of viewpoints. But few studies have concentrated solely on literacy, instead focusing on education more generally, especially among the Native Americans of the Plains and Great Basin.³² Native American Studies scholars generally treat literacy as another means of assimilation and/or acculturation. Church historians detail the work of missionaries, giving attention to education but less to literacy. Historians have tended to be the least interested group, perhaps because of the glaring difficulty of researching literacy among those who seem to have left little written record of their lives.

Professors of literature and language seem to be the most interested students of those few pieces of literature left behind.³³ Hilary Wyss's *Writing Indians: Literacy, Christianity, and*

³² Several studies focus on Native literacy in the colonial era (particularly the literacy of a single man, William Apess) and in the early Republic among the Cherokee, Choctaw, Chickasaw, and other southeastern groups. See Maureen Konkle, "Indian Literacy, U. S. Colonialism, and Literary Criticism," *American Literature* 69, No. 3 (Sept. 1997): 457-486. For the multidisciplinary nature of Native American studies, see Richard White, "Using the Past: History and Native American Studies," in *Studying Native America*, ed. Russell Thornton (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1999).

³³ Hilary Wyss, *Writing Indians: Literacy, Christianity, and Native Community in Early America* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2000); Amelia V. Katanski, *Learning to Write "Indian:" the Boarding-School Experience and American Indian Literature* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2005); Ruth Spack, *America's Second Tongue: American Indian Education and the Ownership of English, 1860-1900* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2002); Amy M. Goodburn, "Literacy Practices at the Genoa Industrial Indian School," *Great Plains Quarterly* 19 (Winter 1999): 35-52. Wyss studies the role literacy played in the confrontation of Indians and Christianity before the nineteenth century in the Northeast. Amelia Katanski adds to the scholarship on Indian boarding schools by focusing on Carlisle and exploring the creation of the "Indian voice" that formed during the early twentieth century. According to Katanski, English literacy was a tool of colonialism, but it also contributed to Pan-Indianism and the development of Indian literature. Katanski's uses a theoretical construct of literary analysis, what she calls "repertoires of identity," to understand a handful of pieces of indigenous literature. It is far from an empirical method - supposing what a writer actually

Native Community in Early America, Amelia Katanski's *Learning to Write "Indian:" the Boarding-School Experience and American Indian Literature*, and Ruth Spack's *America's Second Tongue: American Indian Education and the Ownership of English, 1860-1900* are the three most accomplished looks at Native American encounters with literacy. All three are written by professors of language or literature. Each uses similar methods of exploration and analysis, focusing on Indian productions of literature. Each urges her readers to see Indian students less as victims and more as active agents, a viewpoint that diverges from those scholars of Indian education who have emphasized the destruction of Indian culture in the face of colonialism rather than its development. Unfortunately, all three books lack historical context. While they provide insight into the ideology of government policy and missionary strategy, their analysis often appears to be on an island, separate from the practical events of history. Individual Indians seem to be using literacy to find a "voice" rather than to understand the latest treaty, to help feed their family, or to send news to a loved one. None of them recognize the importance of letter writing as a form of communication. Also, the Indians they portray rarely seem to have a choice in learning English. Only Spack recognizes that some Indian families in the Great Plains hoped for educational opportunities throughout the 1870s and 1880s.³⁴

means when the writer does not say it plainly is always a tricky proposition. My study hopes to avoid the trappings of literary analysis that scholars have used to gain an insight into the "Indian voice." Spack's *America's Second Tongue* is the only full-length historical work that focuses exclusively on English-language teaching for Native students during the early reservation era. Spack, a professor of English, calls it a "story of linguistic ownership, and the meaning of ownership keeps shifting, depending on whether one is perceived to own English or to be owned by it." Spack shows that Indian pupils were open to English instruction and they recognized language and literacy as a tool to further their culture. Native people took ownership of English "and shaped it to accommodate new and powerful forms of expression." Spack does not really focus on the intentions of the Indians on entering the schools, however, focusing instead on the intentions of the educators.

³⁴ Many scholars have focused on individual educated Natives and how they used their education to become outspoken critics of government policies. See Leon Speroff, *Carlos Montezuma*,

Even those who study Indian education emphasize Indian resistance to white ways rather than Indians' desire to acquire literacy for their purposes. George Miles challenged historians "to recognize and explore the significance of not only Indian literacy but of the many ways that Native Americans expressed themselves to each other and to their white neighbors."³⁵ For Miles, the study of Indian literacy will lead to "alternative ways of thinking about Native Americans" and an "approach to Indian history that accurately reflects the historical record and allows us to create new plots for American history that incorporate rather than silence the Indian voice." Unfortunately, historians have a long way to go to fulfill Miles' challenge.

Historians have a limited understanding of Native communication, particularly during the early reservation years, when most assume that the Indians (outside of the so-called Five Civilized Tribes) were still pre-literate. In the late nineteenth century, the "moccasin telegraph" was a common description of how reservation communication worked. The phrase was used in popular literature, especially at the turn of the twentieth century to explain the surprising swiftness that news spread between Natives, gossip that was thought to be prone to exaggeration and inaccuracies. The moccasin telegraph, or telegram, was mysterious; whites were not sure how it operated. Indians did not seem to have modern means of communication, so whites assumed that they spread gossip through the grapevine, a system that resembled something like the telephone game. Nineteenth century U.S. Indian agents regularly spoke about the "rumors"

M.D.: A Yavapai American Hero (Portland: Arnica Press, 2004); Siobhan Senier, *Voices of American Indian Assimilation and Resistance: Helen Hunt Jackson, Sarah Winnemucca, and Victoria Howard* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2001); Benson Tong, *Susette LaFlesche Picotte, M.D.: Omaha Leader and Reformer* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1999); Lucy Maddox, *Citizen Indians: Native American Intellectuals, Race, and Reform* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005); Raymond Wilson, *Ohiyesa: Charles Eastman, Santee Sioux* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1983).

³⁵ Miles, 70.

that swirled around the reservations, particularly as news about the ghost dance made its way westward. Indians were rarely thought to have reliable information. Whites were the ones who passed along news. Illiterate Indians only spread rumors.

This myth of Native simplicity persists. Today, the term “moccasin telegraph” is used to describe rumors or secret information. *Cassell’s Dictionary of Slang* defines the moccasin telegraph as “the informal way in which news moves between Native American communities.”³⁶ And some scholars of the ghost dance have attributed the divergence of ghost dance doctrine to the inaccuracy of Native communication. One argued that the Lakota mistakenly thought Wovoka was an Indian messiah because their information was distorted by the inefficiency of the Native communication: “rumors usually became exaggerated as it is passed by word of mouth from one Indian to another.”³⁷

When it became obvious to Indian Affairs authorities that Native Americans had a common belief in the ghost dance, they were surprised. It seemed that thousands of Native Americans were accepting a new, Pan-Indian religious movement that had a collective message. Many whites, including General Nelson A. Miles, commander of the Military Division of the Missouri, initially placed blame for the movement on the Mormons, who were thought to be

³⁶ Jonathon Greene, ed., *Cassell’s Dictionary of Slang, 2nd Edition* (London: Orion Publishing House, 2005), 951.

³⁷ Jame H. McGregor, *The Wounded Knee Massacre From Viewpoint of the Sioux* (Minneapolis: The Lund Press, Inc., 1940), 40. Another said “red man’s news routes” produced “rumors from nowhere,” see Thisba Hutson Morgan, “Reminiscences of My Days in the Land of the Ogallala Sioux,” *South Dakota Report and Historical Collections* 29 (1958): 49-50.

conspiring to bring the gullible Natives into their fold.³⁸ They could not believe that Indians had the faculty to create and sustain such a popular religious movement.³⁹

From the onset of colonization, Europeans assumed that Native societies were inherently simple, decentralized structures. Natives built small, self-contained tribes and whites built states. Whites saw Natives as primitive, which made their political organizations and intertribal relationships primitive. Native racial inferiorities, whites believed, did not allow for the creation of a complex society. It was not in their nature to build something outside of their own small band or tribe (in fact, the U. S. government justified the colonization of the Natives by labeling tribes as unorganized and unproductive). Accordingly, white Americans could not believe that the colonized tribes of the west, who were thought to be wholly suppressed, could effectively strengthen their sovereignty through intertribal relationships. The ghost dance proved them wrong, but this narrative remained in place. Twenty-three years after the height of the ghost dance movement, General Miles, who spent over two decades dealing with the Plains Indians, presented his history of the “Messiah Craze,” Sitting Bull’s death, and Wounded Knee to *The Denver Post*. Miles still did not understand how Indians could have disseminated the ghost dance so widely. He believed that the “instigators” of the ghost dance used “some secret method scarcely realized or comprehended by the savages themselves” to arouse the curiosity of the

³⁸ Maj. Henry Carroll to Post Adj. Fort Custer, May 7, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 19493, Box 635, NARA (DC); “The Indian Craze,” *Daily Alta California*, November 8, 1890. For studies on this connection, see Gregory E. Smoak, “The Mormons and the Ghost Dance of 1890,” *South Dakota History* 16, no. 3 (1986): 269-294; Garold D. Barney, *Mormons, Indians, and the Ghost Dance* (Latham, MA: University Press of America, 1986); Lawrence G. Coates, “The Mormons and the Ghost Dance,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 18 (Winter 1985), 89-111.

³⁹ R. H. Pratt to Edward Mann, November 26, 1890, Richard Henry Pratt Papers, MSS S-1174, Outgoing Letters, Box 10, Folder 4, Yale Collection of Western Americana, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University; “How It All Came About: Correspondents Now Tell How the Indian War Started,” *The Galveston Daily News*, January 19, 1891.

Indians of the west.⁴⁰ Gen. Miles could only hypothesize about some mysterious method because intertribal communication was unexpected. Most nineteenth century whites did not think that racially inferior Indians were capable of building a large Native community.

Almost every government official would come to admit that Natives were responsible for the ghost dance's spread, but most failed to attribute its growing breadth to letter writing. "Within a few months the belief in this new religion has spread from tribe to tribe with marvelous rapidity," *Harper's Weekly* reported in December 1890.⁴¹ This was accomplished by "runners" who had "traversed thousands of miles to reach distant tribes and bear the glad tidings." While these "runners" were an important means of communicating the movement (although much of the miles were "traversed" while sitting in railcars), the wide and rapid dissemination of the ghost dance movement would not have been possible without letter writing.

It became obvious to some Indian Affairs agents that Natives were communicating the movement through letters. In November 1890, Charles Adams, the agent at the Kiowa, Comanche, and Wichita Agency in Southwest Oklahoma asked his boss, the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, if he could censor the mail intended for Kiowa and Comanche eyes. Adams believed that the letters coming into his reservation from tribes living hundreds of miles away contained a message that might endanger the government's mission to civilize. The letters provided information about a "new Christ" who hoped Indians everywhere would hear his message. Adams thought that the letters should be confiscated so that the Indians, who were in "an unsettled frame of mind," would not be further influenced. "The Indians communicate with each other through the mails to a great extent," Adams wrote, "and know by these means exactly

⁴⁰ "Gen. Nelson A. Miles Writes Story of the Great Conspiracy," *Denver Post*, March 8, 1914.

⁴¹ "The New Indian Messiah," *Harper's Weekly*, December 6, 1890.

how things are progressing in the land where this man is now convincing his followers that the white man must go, and that in the near future, nothing but the Indians and buffalo will inhabit the earth.”⁴² The letters contained news about the ghost dance and the U.S. Postal Service was the major vehicle for the movement’s dissemination.

Most scholars that recognize the use of literacy in the ghost dance movement see it as a peculiarity. James Mooney, the first to study the dance in detail and its most influential scholar, gave the most credit to correspondence for the movement’s spread. Mooney was told by William Selwyn, “an educated Sioux,” that “numerous letters” were sent to Pine Ridge in 1889 from “Indians in Utah, Wyoming, Montana, Dakota, and Oklahoma.” Selwyn was the postmaster at the time. He told Mooney that he usually read letters to Indians who asked for help reading, which Mooney concluded gave Selwyn “position to get accurate knowledge of the extent and nature of the excitement.”⁴³ This arrangement led Mooney to deduce that educated Indians had played a large role in the movement:

When the various tribes are isolated upon widely separated reservations, the Ghost dance could never have become so widespread, and would probably have died out within a year of its inception, had it not been for the efficient aid it received from the returned pupils of various eastern government schools, who conducted the sacred correspondence for their friends at the different agencies, acted as interpreters for the delegates to the messiah, and in various ways assumed the leadership and conduct of the dance.⁴⁴

Robert Utley’s classic *The Last Days of the Sioux Nation* repeated Mooney, briefly noting that Indians in 1890 “communicated by mail with members of distant tribes simply by getting a

⁴² Agent Charles Adams to CIA, November 5, 1890, RBIA, RG 75, SC 188, Box 199, NARA (DC).

⁴³ Mooney, *The Ghost-dance Religion*, 819.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

friend who had been to school to write a letter in the English language.”⁴⁵ Utley confidently declared that the “innovations of white civilization spread the news faster and farther than could have been possible in the old days.” The railroad allowed the Lakotas to learn of the religion from the Shoshones “by word of mouth” and the letter gave them the news “from tribes all over the west.”

But while others have echoed Mooney’s theory, no other scholar has fully explored it. In her 1971 study on Pan-Indianism, Hazel Hertzberg recognized that because Indians were concentrated on reservations, they were “more accessible to each other.”⁴⁶ Roads, railroads, and the mail “made it simpler for them to reach each other.” The English language “made it easier for leaders to exchange ideas and exert influence widely.” Hertzberg decided that the ghost dancers used these things to carry their ideas.

Unfortunately, scholars have not found much evidence to support these theories. Besides Selwyn’s role at Pine Ridge, Mooney only reported a few other instances of an educated Indian using literacy to spread the dance. A “Messiah Letter,” as Mooney called it, was “written down on the spot” during a visit to Wovoka in Nevada by Casper Edson, an Arapaho who had spent time at the Carlisle Indian school. Another Arapaho gave Mooney the letter while he was in Oklahoma researching the ghost dance. On the back side of the letter was a message written by the daughter of Black Short Nose, “a school girl,” who dictated her father’s message on his return from Nevada. The “Messiah Letter,” Mooney stated, was “the genuine official statement of the Ghost-dance doctrine as given by the messiah himself to his disciples.”⁴⁷ Mooney also

⁴⁵ Robert Utley, *The Last Days of the Sioux Nation*, 2nd Ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 67. Curiously, Utley does not examine Selwyn’s reports of letters.

⁴⁶ Hazel Hertzberg, *Search for an American Indian Identity: Modern Pan-Indian Movements* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1971), 14.

⁴⁷ Mooney, *The Ghost-dance Religion*, 780.

mentioned one other letter in his study, written in Lakota by an Oglala at Pine Ridge to a friend at Rosebud agency in 1891, but he offered no further detail of the dancers' use of literacy to spread the movement, other than to give credit to Indians from eastern boarding schools for their assistance. He gave no consideration to the role of the hundreds of other literate Indians living on the reservations who had never attended an eastern boarding school.

The more recent works from Sam Maddra, Jeffery Ostler, and Rani-Henrik Andersson on the Lakota ghost dance all reference the Messiah Letter, but do not build on Mooney's observations.⁴⁸ Andersson's tremendous study mentions Selwyn's letters and the letters that the Lakotas sent to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs in July 1890 (asking why their rations were cut) and letters from Indians sent to the mission newspaper telling of the dance, but he does not examine literacy's role the movement as a whole. He shadows Mooney in a brief paragraph that announces "education and literacy" as "essential" for the spread of the dance, but never expands on this argument.⁴⁹ Michael Hittman also documents the reports of Wovoka receiving letters and packages from distant Indians with fascinating results, but his focus stays on Wovoka.⁵⁰

This study makes clear that Indians were writing a lot of letters in the decade before the ghost dance and naturally used correspondence to spread news about the movement once it began. Unfortunately, nineteenth century Lakotas, Cheyennes, Arapahos, Utes, and dozens of

⁴⁸ Rani-Henrik Andersson, *The Lakota Ghost Dance of 1890* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2008); Sam A. Maddra, *Hostiles? The Lakota Ghost Dance and Buffalo Bill's Wild West* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2006); Jeffrey Ostler, *The Plains Sioux and U.S. Colonialism from Lewis and Clark to Wounded Knee* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

⁴⁹ Andersson, *The Lakota Ghost Dance of 1890*, 164-165.

⁵⁰ Michael Hittman, *Wovoka and the Ghost Dance*, expanded edition (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997).

other Indian groups are a part of what Elliott West has called “the radically silent,” those voices “who have been shut almost completely out of the usual historical record.”⁵¹ It is not easy finding the Native voice in our archives, a point scholars of Native American history have persistently complained about (probably to unsympathetic ears). In his study on Indian education, David Wallace Adams found the challenge of representing the voice of Indian children “almost unsurmountable.” The documentary record of the Native voice is “both sparse and unreliable” he wrote.⁵² This dissertation, however, utilizes dozens of nineteenth century letters written by or for Indians, a great untapped record of Native life, that have never been seen by scholars. While letters and other texts written by Indians living on the reservations of the Plains and Great Basin in the last quarter of the nineteenth century are relatively scarce, this is not evidence that few Indians were writing letters. Compared to the non-Indian population of the United States (62,947,714 in 1890, 88 percent of which could read), the dwindling Native populations (220,314 by 1889) left behind far fewer letters than whites for future historians to find.⁵³ However, thousands of Indians, around 15 percent of those living on western reservations (outside the so-called “Five Civilized Tribes”), could read in English or a Native language in

⁵¹ Elliott West, “Listen Up: Hearing the Unheard in Western History,” in *The Essential West: Collected Essays* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2012), 203.

⁵² Adams, *Education for Extinction: American Indians and the Boarding School Experience, 1875-1928* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1995), x. Adams uses letters written between Hampton students and their parents found in the Hampton Institute Archives, which I also use in this study, but it is a small number. Brenda Child’s *Boarding School Seasons: American Indian Families, 1900-1940* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1998) was among the first to take advantage of the cache of letters written by Ojibwe students and their families, but none date from the nineteenth century. Boarding school records are flush (relatively speaking) with twentieth-century letters, but nineteenth-century letters are more rare.

⁵³ 43% of African Americans were literate in 1890

some capacity by the end of the 1880s (it is not known how many could write).⁵⁴ Fortunately, numerous texts from their hands have survived the passage of time.

This dissertation uses letters written by and for Native peoples, predominantly from the 1880s, gathered from Indian Affairs agency records at the National Archives collections in Kansas City, Denver, Oklahoma City, and Washington D.C. Most Native letters in these collections are buried in unorganized boxes of miscellaneous letters sent and received by Indian agents. Agency records from the 1880s and early 1890s were haphazardly kept and preserved, some agencies are missing wide gaps of years, and others have few surviving documents from any part of the nineteenth century. Some are preserved better than others. The Pine Ridge Agency records were well looked after, for example, but most of the Fort Hall and Wind River records from the late 1880s and early 1890s have disappeared. The records of the Commissioner's office in Washington D.C. were well kept and hundreds of letters from Natives were found in its boxes of letters received (which is regrettably sorted by date of arrival rather than by sender). The office received tens of thousands of letters per year (over forty thousand in 1890 alone) from agents, politicians, companies, the general public, and Indians. A good number of Native texts were also found in collections from History Colorado, the Indian Rights Association, and the American Horse Papers and the Richard Henry Pratt Papers at the Beinecke Library at Yale University. Some letters exist because of the efforts of early ethnologists and historians who managed to read, copy, or collect Native correspondence during the early twentieth century.⁵⁵ The ethnologist James Owen Dorsey, for instance, was able to collect two

⁵⁴ *ARCIA*, 1890. Only 144,523 Indians were counted for reading. 21,756 were deemed able to read. See Chapter 1 for discussion on Indian Affairs statistics and their meaning.

⁵⁵ Walter S. Campbell (aka Stanley Vestal) managed to preserve copies of numerous Sioux letters, see the Walter S. Campbell Collection, Western History Collections, University of Oklahoma Libraries.

hundred and thirty-eight letters written in the Native language Čegiha by Omaha and Ponca men and women. The letters, many of which are private correspondence, were written between 1872 and 1889.⁵⁶ Over one hundred of those letters were published with Dorsey's *The Čegiha Language* and the rest were published in 1891's *Omaha and Ponka Letters*. These are still the largest collections of Native letter writing ever printed.⁵⁷

Many letters used in this study are written artifacts of people learning on-the-go – some were expressing ideas on paper for the first time. Letters written by Natives in English are rarely incoherent, and most Natives were quite adept at writing in their second language, but some of the meaning writers tried to convey in their second language could be lost.⁵⁸ Word usage and sentence structure in many letters can seem unusual; Native speech patterns and figures of

⁵⁶James Owen Dorsey, *Omaha and Ponka Letters*, Smithsonian Institution, Bureau of Ethnology (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1891); James Owen Dorsey, *The Čegiha Language*, Department of the Interior, Contributions to North American Ethnology (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1890). J. Owen Dorsey was an Episcopal missionary to the Ponca and Omaha in the 1870s. He became a student of their Siouan language, called Čegiha, and accepted a position with John Wesley Powell's Bureau of Ethnology in 1878. By 1891, Dorsey had published multiple studies on multiple Indian groups and their languages, including his 1890 effort on Čegiha and Omaha and Ponca culture for the Bureau of Ethnology (*The Čegiha Language*).

⁵⁷ The letters reveal the immense exchange of thoughts, news, and information between the Ponca, Omaha, Otoe, Yankton Sioux, and other groups in the reservation years. Recipients were told of prairie fires and weather, deaths and illnesses, the state of crops and finances, recent visits to and from other Indians, and tribal politics. But Dorsey wanted to learn all he could about the Omaha and Ponca way of life before the reservation system destroyed it. Much of what we know about Plains culture comes from the work of nineteenth century ethnologists and anthropologists like Dorsey, men and women who were interested in documenting the pre-reservation ways of life. The reservations gave ethnologists access to Plains people, but they were not there to observe how the Natives confronted Americanization. They collected traditional stories and religious paraphernalia (to be shipped to The Field Museum, the Smithsonian, or the American Museum of Natural History), studied languages and cultural systems, and other important pieces of the past, but few were interested in how Native Americans were changing in their present. Even today, our museums, where most Americans encounter and consider the Native American experience, present pre-reservation life.

⁵⁸ Letters quoted in this study are presented as closely as possible to the original, no grammar or punctuation is corrected, “[sic]” is not used. Necessary corrections are made in the footnotes.

speech are reflected in their writings. Letters written by Native people in any language offer a rare peek into their personal histories, but anyone hoping to find the “authentic voice” in a Native text will be disappointed.⁵⁹ There are a number of different types of Native texts and interpreting the meaning in each can be problematic. There are texts composed entirely by Native people, written in a Native language or written in English. Some texts were written using both a Native language and English. There are also texts that were dictated by Natives and transcribed (and usually translated) by a literate individual, white or Native. The transcription of a Native language into the written form of that language might alter the original language. And a translation into English always disrupted the original language.⁶⁰ Nevertheless, this study recognizes the usefulness of letters written for the illiterate or those not proficient in written English. One Indian agent reported in the early twentieth century that his office had written three hundred letters for Indians “to friends on distant reservations, even to points in Canada” in a single year.⁶¹

Texts written by Native Americans in English during the late nineteenth century are more commonly found in library archives and governmental records than those written in a Native language. Many Native groups did not have a written form of their language until the twentieth century. The Sioux did, but the Cheyennes, Arapahos, Kiowas, and others did not. They wrote their letters in English. In addition, most of the Native-authored texts that have been preserved

⁵⁹ For insight on the difficulties of interpreting Native written material, see Raymond J. DeMallie, “These Have No Ears: Narrative and the Ethnohistorical Method,” *Ethnohistory* 40, no. 4 (Autumn, 1993): 515-538. Douglas Parks and Raymond J. DeMallie declared that the “only truly authentic voices that document the American Indian past comes to us in Native languages accessible solely through translation,” see Douglas R. Parks and Raymond J. DeMallie, “Plains Indian Native Literatures,” *boundary 2* 19, No. 3 (Autumn, 1992): 105.

⁶⁰ The transcriber or translator always inserted his or her voice into the text to some degree, whether he or she was Native or white.

⁶¹ Clark Wissler, *Indian Cavalcade* (New York: Sheridan House, 1938), 344.

in government, university, and institutional archives were written in English because that was the language of the whites who received the letters, the same whites who controlled the archives. Most Native language texts from the nineteenth century were letters that were written by Natives to others Natives, but personal correspondence between Native peoples was kept private and was seldom preserved in archives. Only sometimes would government officials, anthropologists, or other interested whites like James Owen Dorsey somehow acquire a letter written by a Native individual intended for another Native individual and preserve it.

Another problem faced by this study is the large variety of cultures it describes. This dissertation makes use of letters from individuals from dozens of tribes, each considerably different from the other. Each author came from a background unique to his or her Native group. It is also difficult to provide adequate context of the intricate histories of the Kiowas, Northern Arapahos, Oglala Lakotas, Southern Utes, and the twenty-plus other tribes this study covers. It may be easy to see these groups as one people, but it is not my intention to present them in that way.

FIGURE 1: AGENCIES MOST REFERENCED IN THIS STUDY, 1889⁶²

Agency	Location	Tribes or Bands	Population
Cheyenne River	Dakota	Miniconjou (Lakota), Two Kettles (Lakota), Sans Arc (Lakota), Sihasapa (Lakota)	2846
Crow Creek and Lower Brule	Dakota	Lower Brulé (Lakota), Lower Yanktonai	2171
Devil's Lake	Dakota	Sisseton (Eastern Dakota)	2947
Fort Berthold	Dakota	Mandan, Hidatsa, Arikara	1195
Pine Ridge	Dakota	Oglala (Lakota), Northern Cheyenne	5611
Fort Hall	Idaho	Shoshone, Bannock	1600
Rosebud	Dakota	Upper Brulé (Lakota)	7586

⁶² The Sioux are composed of dozens of tribal groups that are generally described as belonging to one of four subgroups (based on dialect and culture): The Nakotas (Assiniboine), the Eastern Dakotas or Santee Sioux (Sisseton and Wahpeton are sub-divisions), the Western Dakotas or Yankton Sioux (Yankton and Yanktonai), and the Lakotas or Teton Sioux (Oglala, Hunkpapa, Sihasapa, Brulé, Two Kettles, and Sans Arcs).

FIGURE 1: AGENCIES MOST REFERENCED IN THIS STUDY, 1889 (CONT.)

Agency	Location	Tribes or Bands	Population
Sisseton	Dakota	Sisseton and Wahpeton (Eastern Dakota)	1487
Standing Rock	Dakota	Hunkpapa (Lakota), Upper and Lower Yanktonai (Western Dakota)	4610
Yankton	Dakota	Yankton (Western Dakota)	1760
Southern Ute	Colorado	Southern Ute	1814
Cheyenne and Arapaho	I.T.	Southern Cheyenne, Southern Arapaho	3598
Kiowa, Comanche, and Wichita	I.T.	Kiowa, Comanche, Wichita, Apache, Waco, Caddo	4088
Ponca, Pawnee, and Otoe	I.T.	Ponca, Pawnee, Otoe	1780
Blackfeet	Montana	Blackfeet	2293
Crow	Montana	Crow	2456
Fort Peck	Montana	Assiniboine (Nakota), Yankton (Western Dakota)	1891
Fort Belknap	Montana	Assiniboine (Nakota), Gros Ventre	1793
Tongue River	Montana	Northern Cheyenne	867
Santee & Flandreau	Nebraska	Mdewakanton (Eastern Dakota), Wahpeton (Eastern Dakota) Ponca	1354
Omaha and Winnebago	Nebraska	Omaha, Winnebago	2347
Nevada	Nevada	Paiute	959
Western Shoshone	Nevada	Western Shoshone, Paiute	477
Uintah & Ouray	Utah	Uintah (Northern Ute), Uncompahgre (Northern Ute), Whiteriver (Northern Ute)	1904
Wind River	Wyoming	Shoshone, Northern Arapaho	1945

Chapter one of this study begins with a brief survey of Native education and the early usage of literacy by Natives. Plains Indians acquired literacy in a variety of ways before and during the reservations years, from early missionaries to day schools on the reserves to eastern boarding schools. The chapter then explores how letter writing became an important tool for communication between Native peoples. Parents and their children off at eastern boarding schools kept in touch despite the vast distance between them. Traveling Indians, separated

spouses, and others had access to the postal service to relay messages back and forth. And for the first time, Natives began communicating with those outside of their own tribes, on distant reservations, using the written word. Letters allowed Indians to stay informed about the affairs of other groups and men like Red Cloud and Sitting Bull used letters to influence others. Tribes divided by geography or by the government, like the Northern and Southern Cheyennes, Northern and Southern Arapahos, the Southern Utes and the Uintahs and Ourays, or the divisions of Lakotas living at different agencies, could stay in constant communication. Tribes without a previous relationship could forge new bonds and those with a history of conflict could make peace. English allowed groups outside of the same language family to communicate more effectively. Gifts were shipped in the mail to friends at distant agencies. Letters asked for help and warned others of danger. Weather, health, and death were major topics.⁶³ Correspondence allowed Indians to communicate and express themselves outside of white control.

Chapter two takes a look at the ways that Natives used literacy to communicate their thoughts extra-tribally to the white world in the years leading up to the ghost dance. Through writing, Natives were not only trying to preserve their cultures, they were also trying to establish sovereignty. Indians used letters to question the power of the government over their lives, to demand change, to remind officials about the government's obligations, to voice their support or opposition to the appointment of agency employees, agency rules and regulations, and other government decisions. They wrote to oppose allotment and defend their lands rights. Between January 1889 and March 1890, over one hundred letters regarding allotment were sent to the Commissioner of Indians Affairs by Native Americans (or those claiming to be of Native American descent), at least twenty-four came from Native American women. Letters criticized

⁶³ Some used the written word to communicate their last wishes, even through a suicide note.

the inefficiency, corruption, or immorality of agents, policemen, and even missionaries. They asked for employment, more schools, additional rations, or basic necessities like building material for a roof. Many used letters to supersede the authority of their agents, writing instead to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, congressmen, and the President directly. Others wrote to whites outside of the government to right wrongs, sending letters to the Indian Rights Association and even newspapers.

Chapter three demonstrates the prominence of another means of forging bonds, intertribal visitation, in the 1880s and how fluid the reservation world really was. Fortunately, this is not the only study to recognize the elasticity of reservation boundaries. Frank Rzeckzkowski's *Uniting the Tribes*, demonstrates the ways the Crow Indians interacted with other Northern Plains peoples before and during the reservations era, a time of "exceptional cultural and social vitality on the Northern Plains." In fact, Rzeckzkowski places great interest in visitation between the Crows and others, finding that this intertribal contact had "covert – and sometimes overt – political dimensions."⁶⁴ My study looks at intertribal visiting between many different Plains and Great Basin tribes. Before they were forced onto reservations, Native groups enjoyed and relied upon their commercial, religious, and social relationships with foreign tribes. These bonds were not lost in the reservation years. Tribes continued to connect, perhaps more than ever. U. S. Indian agents tried to limit the movement of men and women across agency boundaries, but it was never outright banned. Many were given permission to visit other reserves. Those who could not, or did not care to obtain permission often traveled anyway. Letters of invitation began visits between tribes, allowing relationships to be forged between

⁶⁴ Frank Rzeckzkowski, *Uniting the Tribes: The Rise and Fall of Pan-Indian Community on the Crow Reservation* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2012), 12.

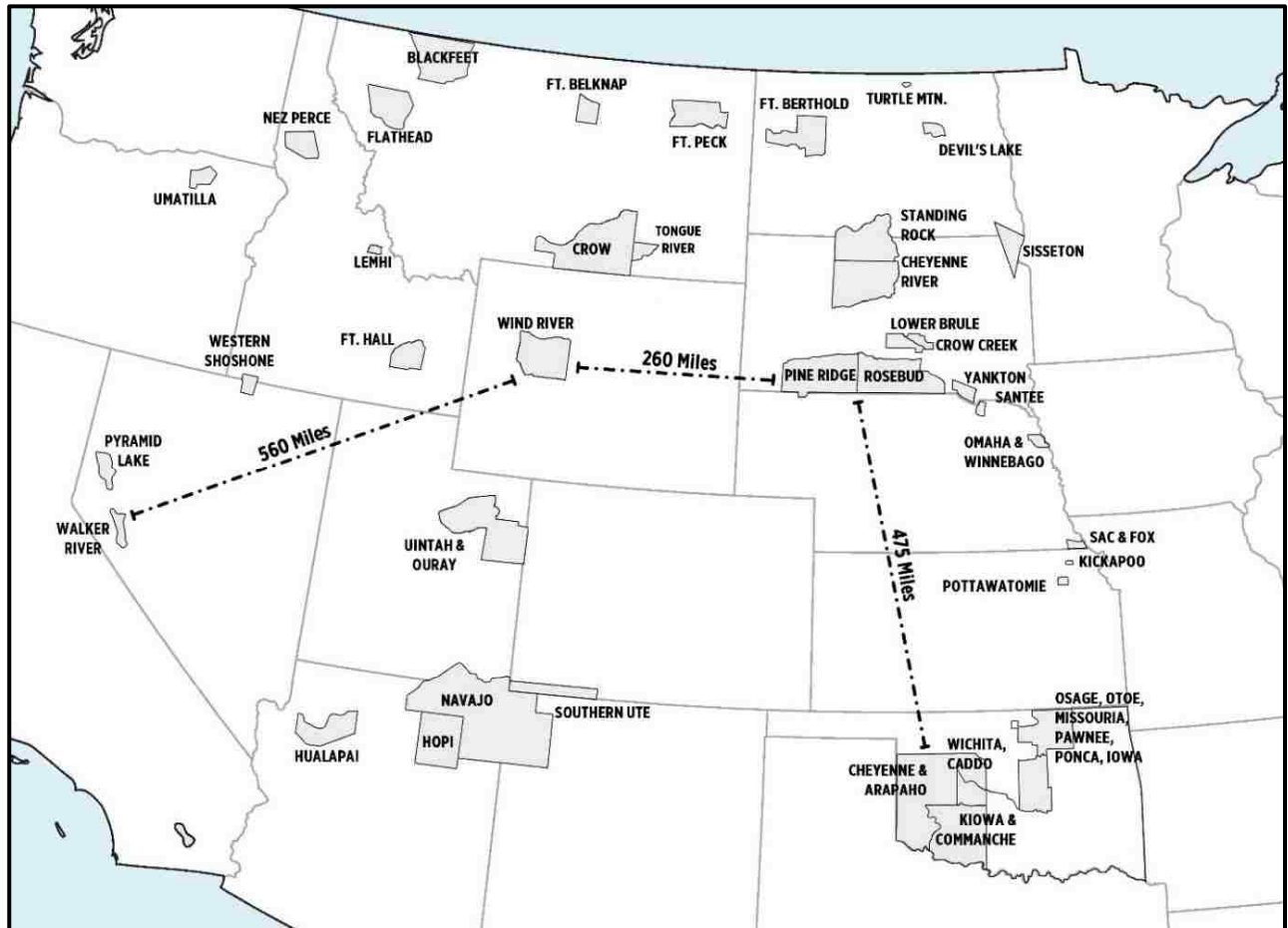
groups that were great distances apart. Tribes in the Great Basin could make plans to visit tribes in the Dakota grasslands. Railroads made many of these journeys practical. Visits gave men and women a chance to share news and information and exchange religious and cultural systems and ideas. Natives visited sick friends and family members. Some arranged visits to discuss government policy and contemplate resistance to legislation. Dancing was perhaps the Indians' greatest motivation to travel.

The second half of this dissertation concentrates on the dissemination of the ghost dance. Chapters four, five, and six help explain how Native Americans throughout the west gathered and relayed information about the new messiah. Intertribal visitation and correspondence brought the news out of the Nevada agencies, to the Fort Hall Agency of Idaho, and through the Rockies to the Wind River Agency in Wyoming. From there, Wovoka's message made it to the Northern Plains reservations of Montana and the Dakotas and down to the Southern Plains reservations in Indian Territory. Chapter four details the intricate and deliberate spread of the movement, how it crossed reservation boundaries via numerous sources in 1889 and 1890. Letters piqued the interest of tribal leaders and investigators were sent west, often on railroads, to find Wovoka and discover the truth of his words. Some proponents of the movement wrote or traveled to spread the news. Others were simply informing their friends or relatives of what they knew about it all.

Things began to change once federal authorities found out about the movement. Agents, who were already tasked to limit the perpetuation of savage ways, feared that the dance would lead to dissent or outright rebellion. Agents tried to limit communication between reservations by tightening visitation, arresting those traveling without permission, and eventually by censoring the mail. Chapter five explores the Native response to this white reaction. Some

Natives declared their right to practice their religion to Indian Affairs and to the press. Many stayed informed on the dance through newspapers and some challenged the inaccurate reports that the dance was leading to violent outbreaks. Chapter six details the participation of educated Indians in the movement and how the government, who was spending millions on Indian education, confronted that reality. The Commissioner of Indian Affairs and prominent educators went to great lengths to deny that the educated were using their tax-funded education to support an uncivilized pursuit. Together, these chapters reveal that American Indians were communicating with those outside of their traditional circles in the decade before the spread of the ghost dance. The intertribal network that took shape because of letter writing and visitation made the rapid spread of this Pan-Indian religious movement possible.

FIGURE 2: SELECTED AGENCIES, CIRCA 1890



CHAPTER 1 – “If You Could Read and Write, I Should Be Very Happy”: Native Literacy

A network of correspondence between tribes was established in the decades before the ghost dance thanks in large part to written language, especially in English. Intertribal communication was not an easy matter, even between tribes living on the same reservation. For instance, on just three reservations in Indian Territory, Natives spoke the Caddo and Wichita languages (Caddoan family), the Comanche language (Uto-Aztecan, the Delaware, Cheyenne, and Arapaho languages (Algonquian), the Kiowa-Apache language (Athapascan), and the Kiowa language of the Kiowa-Tanoan family. Out of necessity for a lingua franca, Spanish and English were acquired before the reservation years by members of these tribes. By the 1880s, written English provided Indians an opportunity to communicate across tribal boundaries more effectively.

Before the 1880s, the large majority of Plains Indians could not speak English or read and write in any language, and prior to 1875, they had little opportunity to become acquainted with literacy. As government policy makers became more committed to Indian assimilation during the late 1870s, however, their commitment to Indian education deepened. Indian adoption of the English language, understood to be the key to assimilation, became the primary goal of the government schools.¹ During the 1880s, furthermore, for perhaps the first time in their history, the Lakotas, Arapahos, Paiutes, and other groups living west of the Mississippi found they had a practical use for written language. While many Natives seem to have resisted other aspects of white culture, written language was an exception. This chapter will detail the acceptance of

¹ Even though much of the government’s Indian policies were rooted in racism, many policy makers in the 1880s believed that education could overcome the racially-determined incapacities of the Indian race. Although Natives were not white, they could become more white through instructive assimilation.

literacy by N and their practical use of it to communicate inter-tribally and within their own smaller communities before 1890.

A lot has been written about the federal government's effort to educate Native Americans in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Studies focus on Indian Affairs' growing commitment to education in the 1870s, the creation of off-reservation boarding schools in the late 1870s and 1880s, the government-mandated switch to English-only instruction, and the methods used by educators to try to remove systematically Native culture from young peoples' habits. Others analyze the Native students' experiences, especially at boarding schools, and offer thoughts on how they resisted acculturation.² *Education for Extinction*, by David Wallace Adams, typifies the studies on Indian education.³ As its title suggests, Adams argues that educators hoped to eradicate Indian culture through an educational process that taught Indians basic knowledge and technical skills that fit their evolutionary capabilities. Adams, like other scholars of Indian education, focuses on the boarding school system where Indian children experienced the greatest threat of assimilation. A few scholars, such as Ruth Spack, have argued

² Michael C. Coleman, *American Indian Children at School, 1850-1930* (Oxford: University Press of Mississippi, 1993); K. Tsianina Lomawaima, *They Called it Prairie Light* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995). Coleman finds that Indian students "exhibited an adaptive, modern 'tribal patriotism;' they accepted certain elements of white civilization in order to defend tribal *identity*, rather than be assimilated into American society," page 68.

³ David Wallace Adams, *Education for Extinction*. Other examples include Frederick Hoxie, *The Final Promise: The Campaign to Assimilate the Indians, 1880-1920* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1984); Clyde Ellis, *To Change Them Forever* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1996); Brenda J. Child, *Boarding School Seasons*; Amelia V. Katanski, *Learning to Write "Indian"*; Henrietta Mann, *Cheyenne-Arapaho Education, 1871-1982* (Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 1997); Jacqueline Fear-Segal, *White Man's Club: Schools and the Struggle of Indian Acculturation* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2007); Cathleen D. Cahill, *Federal Fathers & Mothers* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011); Karl Markus Kreis, *Lakota, Black Robes, and Holy Women* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2000); Francis Paul Prucha, *The Churches and the Indian Schools, 1888-1912* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1979); Genevieve Bell, "Telling Stories Out of School: Remembering the Carlisle Industrial School, 1879-1918" (Ph.D. diss., Stanford University, 1998).

that Indians used education, and literacy in particular, as a tool to control their own fates and foster their own culture.⁴ But because most scholars have put so much of their energies into studying the undeniably detrimental aspects of Indian education and the natural resistance by Indians toward those efforts, little attention has been paid to Indians' pursuit of literacy and even less to literacy's role in extratribal communication.

Many Plains tribes were multilingual before and after European contact, although fluency in other languages was not common. Native groups were exposed to multiple languages during their intertribal interactions, but most Indians did not learn languages that were not closely related to their own. Bilingualism allowed tribes to maintain social, political, and economic relationships with other tribes and Europeans. Constant contact among tribes with mutually unintelligible languages required some individual or individuals to learn the language of the foreign group. Sometimes, the communication gap could be bridged through a third language, one that both parties understand, called a lingua franca. In fact, regional lingua francas developed throughout the west. For instance, Santee bands became familiar with the Ojibwa (Chippewa) dialect (which became a lingua franca because of its use by fur traders) in Minnesota. During the nineteenth century, the Lakota language was commonly used among members of Northern Plains tribes and the Comanches in the Southern Plains. Also, the Great Plains Sign Language became a sophisticated lingua franca for the Indians west of the

⁴ Ruth Spack, *America's Second Tongue*. Spack shows that Native people took ownership of English "and shaped it to accommodate new and powerful forms of expression." She recognizes that even the most compassionate and progressive schools were set to destroy Native language and culture, and "wittingly or unwittingly" to undermine "students' potential and sense of self." But Spack also shows that Indian pupils were open to English instruction and they recognized language and literacy as a tool to further their culture. Spack's study is the best on the methods used by several schools to teach Indian children the English language. See also Mindy Morgan, *The Bearer of This Letter: Language Ideologies, Literacy Practices, and the Fort Belknap Indian Community* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2009).

Mississippi at least two centuries before that. Intercultural communication, then, did not originate with the arrival of Europeans, although both French and English would be also used as lingua francas. A French-Lakota “pidgin” language was in use for a period of time, and, during the early years of American westward expansion, Indians encountered English and various forms of pidgin English (Indian-modified and even Black English from Buffalo soldiers).⁵

Natives living west of the Mississippi were adapting to new forms of communication long before the U. S. government began their assimilation program. Early missionaries to the Sioux found that they had some experience with the concept of written text. In 1834, a missionary reported Indians using *wowape*. *Wowape* “consisted of rude paintings and hieroglyphs...figures of men and horses, of battle-axes and scalps, drawn with coal or cut in bark, told the story of a war-party. Rude pictures of pipes and horses’ feet...told a man’s history.”⁶ Pictographs were used for centuries by Native American to express themselves and explain their world. Lakota winter count pictography, *waniyetu wówapi*, one of many forms of Native pictography, has received plenty of attention from scholars and museums. Winter counts are pictographic calendars that served as a record of tribal or family history. An important event from each year was represented by an image and the images were arranged sequentially. By the 1870s, white ethnographers were asking Plains Indians to produce copies for study and collection. The origins of the winter count are unknown, but at some point, probably during the nineteenth century, the Lakotas decided to rely on a written record rather than just on oral

⁵ Alan Taylor, "Indian Lingua Francas," in *Language in the USA*, eds. Charles Ferguson and Shirley Brice Heath (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 175-195; William L. Leap, *American Indian English* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1993), 151-156. For a look at Chinook Jargon (Wawa) that developed in the Pacific Northwest, see George Lang, *Making Wawa: The Genesis of Chinook Jargon* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2009).

⁶ Dakota Presbytery Council, *The Dakota Mission, Past and Present* (Tribune Job Print Co., 1886), 17; Spack, *America’s Second Tongue*, 49.

tradition alone when maintaining their history. Bands would give the responsibility for the upkeep of the winter count to a single man. The count was used periodically to retell past events and mark the passage of time.⁷

Pictographs were also commonly used by Indians to communicate ideas to those outside of a linguistic family. Mandan Indians wrote letters to fur traders using symbols that represented “I will barter” and the particular animal they could provide or desired. One letter pictured a gun next to thirty strokes, which meant the man would barter thirty beaver skins and a gun for the skins of a buffalo, weasel, and otter, which were also pictured.⁸

FIGURE 3: MANDAN PICTOGRAPH



Communicating through pictographs continued well into the reservation period. In fact, once a postal system was established at every Indian agency in the West, at least one illiterate Southern Cheyenne named Turtle-following-his-Wife living in Indian Territory at the Cheyenne and Arapaho Agency used a pictograph to communicate to a Northern Cheyenne named Little Man living seven hundred miles away at the Pine Ridge Agency.⁹ Little Man easily understood the

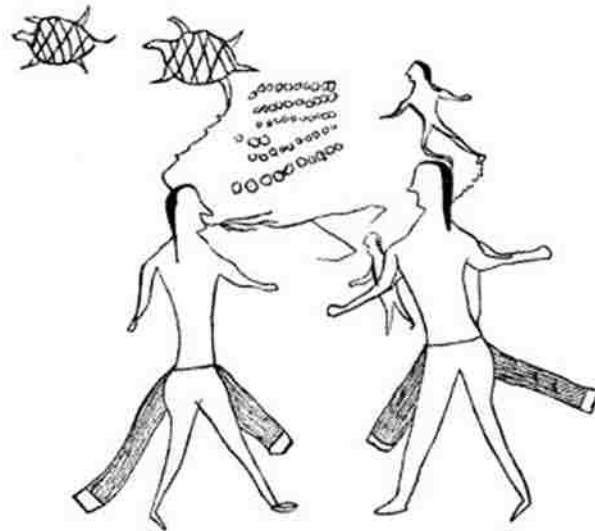
⁷ Candace S. Greene, Russell Thornton, ed., *The Year the Stars Fell: Lakota Winter Counts at the Smithsonian* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2007), 2-3.

⁸ Alexander Philipp Maximilian, *Travels in the Interior of North America* (London: Ackerman and Company, 1843), 352.

⁹ Garrick Mallery, “Picture Writing of the American Indians,” *Tenth Annual Report of the Bureau of Ethnology to the Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution, 1888- '89* (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1893), 363-364.

meaning of the picture upon receiving it. Turtle-following-his-Wife was telling Little Man that he had sent \$53 to the agent at Pine Ridge to pay for his journey to his father's home in Indian Territory. The agent received the money in a separate letter.

FIGURE 4: TURTLE-FOLLOWING-HIS-WIFE TO LITTLE MAN



Long distance communication between Little Man and his father was necessary, perhaps, because the two major Cheyenne bands, the Northern and Southern, lived on separate reservations. The postal service gave the literate and the illiterate, like Turtle-following-his-Wife and Little Man, a practical way to communicate.

A few western groups created their own written language outside of white involvement. In the winter of 1883-84, a group of Sac and Fox from Iowa visited the Winnebago on their reservation in Nebraska. The pioneering ethnologist Alice C. Fletcher was with the Winnebago at the time. She was told by the Sac and Fox that some of their people could read and write in their Native language. This surprised Fletcher because no white man had developed an alphabet for the Sac and Fox. She learned that the Sac and Fox created their own written alphabet (now known as Western Great Lakes Syllabary or Great Lakes Algonquian Syllabics) decades before,

but to the disappointment of Fletcher, the Sac and Fox on that particular visit to the Winnebagos were not among those who could use it.¹⁰

Within the next year, however, a group of Winnebagos independently learned the alphabet while visiting the Sac and Fox reserve then adapted it to their own language (Ho-Chunk or Hoocąk). In August 1885, the agent in charge at the Winnebago reserve wrote to Fletcher:

The tribe have suddenly taken to writing their own language, and people who have never learned English have acquired this art. The people claim they took the basis of it from the Sauk and elaborated it themselves. It is a very suggestive sight to see half a dozen fellows in a group, with their heads together, working out a letter in these new characters; it illustrates the surprising facility with which they acquire what they want to learn.¹¹

A single Winnebago man had “discovered” the Sac and Fox alphabet’s “adaptability,” put it to use, and taught other Winnebagos how to use it. The “knowledge spread rapidly” among the Winnebagos in Nebraska and Wisconsin. “At the present time the principal correspondence of the tribe takes place by means of these characters,” Fletcher observed in 1890.¹² The Winnebago phonetic alphabet (Hotcąk) borrowed seventeen English letters (thirteen consonants and four vowels) and created two new symbols. Fletcher watched with interest the many Winnebago children who “labored to make our English letters bend about the Indian words.”¹³ She wondered why the Winnebagos would be inspired to write down Ho-Chunk. She decided that

¹⁰ The Sac and Fox developed their script as early as 1800 which also came in use with the Kickapoo and Potawatomie, see Willard Walker, “Native American Writing Systems,” 156-162.

¹¹ Alice C. Fletcher, “A Phonetic Alphabet, Used by the Winnebago Tribe of Indians,” *The Journal of American Folklore* 3, no. 11 (Oct. – Dec. 1890): 299.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid., 301. One hundred and twenty-eight sound combinations could be formed from fifteen initial sounds. The Winnebago language (Ho-Chunk) sounded much different than the Sac and Fox dialects, it has more consonant and vowel sounds, and the adaption reflects that. See Willard Walker, “The Winnebago Syllabary and the Generative Model,” *Anthropological Linguistics* 16, no. 8 (Nov. 1974): 393-414.

the education of the young Indians in English had “set Indians to thinking how they can preserve their own language.”

The Winnebagos continued to develop their written language - today there is an iPhone app that teaches students Ho-Chunk - but before the 1870s, the large majority of Indians living west of the Mississippi (and outside of the so-called “Five Civilized Tribes,” the Cherokee, Choctaw, Creek, Chickasaw, and Seminole) had little opportunity to learn to read and write, despite decades of contact with Europeans. The best prospect of literacy first arrived with missionaries during the second half of the nineteenth century, but contact with missionaries was sporadic until the reservation years. Although Jesuits had contact with the eastern Plains people since the late 1600s, the first significant effort to evangelize them came during the 1830s. Protestant missionaries produced Indian language primers that presented an Indian language writing system along with translations of English words and stories from the Bible. Missionaries developed systems of writing as a way to allow Indians to read the Bible, a normal route toward Indian conversion east of the Mississippi for two centuries. Primers were printed for the Osages in 1834, the Santees and Sissetons (Dakotas) in 1836, the Otoes in 1837, the Iowas in 1843, and the Omahas in 1850.¹⁴ Catholic missionaries began educating the Santees of the eastern Plains in the 1840s with Dakota language prints of catechism, prayers, songs, and biblical messages.¹⁵

In the 1830s and 1840s, a mixed-blood French-Dakota trader named Joseph Renville created multiple translations of biblical material for the Protestant-led Dakota Mission, which spurred efforts to educate the Santees. The first Dakota school, which was built by Renville for

¹⁴ Douglas Parks and Robert Rankin, “Siouan Languages,” in *Handbook of North American Indians*, Vol. 13, Part 1 (Smithsonian Institution, 2001), 110. A language primer was printed for the Ponca in 1873.

¹⁵ Karl Markus Kreis, *Lakotas, Black Robes, and Holy Women*, 4-5.

use as a mess house for his traders, began at Lac qui Parle (in present-day Minnesota) in December 1835. Missionary Thomas S. Wilkerson asked Renville to help create a written Dakota language. Within three months, Wilkerson and Renville had their students writing to each other “on scraps of paper and birch bark. These epistles were brief, and not elegant, but intelligible.”¹⁶ In 1851, the Lac qui Parle school reported that “the greater part” of their sixty students were learning to read their own language but only six were learning English. Also in 1851, the mission school at Kaposia, a Dakota seasonal village in present-day Minnesota, reported that out of thirty-seven Dakota students, eight could read (the Bible) and write in both English and Dakota, one who could only read English, thirteen who could not read English but could read Dakota, four who could spell and read in “McGuffey’s eclectic primer,” and eleven who were “learning to spell” in Dakota and English. Only nineteen of the students were full-blood Dakotas. The school reported that it was not difficult “to teach any who will attend school regularly to read the English language; but we have never succeeded in teaching any to understand or speak much of it until they have resided for some time in a family where it is the spoken language.”¹⁷

Under the tutelage of missionaries, around two hundred Santees living in a government prison learned to read and write during the winter of 1862-1863. The prisoners wrote one hundred to two hundred letters per week to their families camped nearby. The families likewise received instruction in order to read the letters by missionaries living with them.¹⁸ One early

¹⁶ Thomas S. Williamson, “Reminiscences: The First School for Teaching to Read and Write Dakota,” *Iapi Oaye*, March 1876, p. 12. Quoted in Mary Butler Renville, *A Thrilling Narrative of Indian Captivity* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2012), 8.

¹⁷ *ARCLIA*, 1851, p. 437-438. The Red Lake Mission reported that all twenty-one of the Ojibwa students could read and write in English and Ojibwa.

¹⁸ Roy Meyer, *History of the Santee* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1967), 136-137.

letter written by a Santee in the Dakota language was received by Rev. S. D. Hinman, an Episcopal missionary to the Santees, in January 1869. A young Santee named John Wapaha, one of Hinman's first converts, told his former pastor that he would never throw away the words of God, "if I can only make them mine I will be happy." Wapaha had not seen Rev. Hinman in two years. Delighted with letter, Rev. Hinman translated it into his journal in order "to show that Indians" could "be steadfast."¹⁹

In the 1860s, the federal government began negotiating treaties with Plains tribes standing in the way of western migration. Tribes were forced to surrender territories for much smaller reservation lands (agencies). The government's goal was to keep Natives on their agencies within Indian Territory and out of the way of white settlement. In the Medicine Lodge Treaty of 1867 for instance, the Kiowas, Comanches, Apaches, Southern Cheyennes and Southern Arapahos agreed not to harm whites and consented to railroad construction (although only a minority of the members of those tribes actually consented to the treaty).²⁰ In return, the government agreed to provide food and clothing and fund the employment of agency workers like carpenters, farmers, millers, and most importantly, teachers. Medicine Lodge provided for the construction of schools with teachers "competent to teach the elementary branches of an English education." Educators' progress was slow during the 1870s. Many Native groups were reluctant to settle on the agencies, making it difficult to attract children to the schools. But by the late 1870s, after a series of Indian wars, most groups, including the Lakotas, were living on

¹⁹ Samuel D. Hinman, January, 24, 1869, *Journal of the Rev. S. D. Hinman, Missionary to the Santee Sioux Indians* (Philadelphia: McCalla & Stavely, Printers, 1869).

²⁰ The Medicine Lodge Treaty of 1867 surrendered tribal territories in the Southern Plains for much smaller reservation lands (agencies). The government's goal was to keep the tribes on their agencies within Indian Territory and out of the way of white settlement. See Henrietta Mann, *Cheyenne and Arapaho Education*, 10-11.

reservations. Congress did not always provide the appropriations to build and support schools, despite the treaty obligations. Churches often did. For instance, the Yanktons were promised a school in an 1858 treaty (at the request of the Yanktons), but it was not established until 1870 despite their chiefs repeated requests to have their children educated. By the mid-1870s, however, Native language literacy “began to flourish” at the Yankton Agency.²¹

The Yanktonai at the Crow Creek Agency (the Upper Missouri Agency until 1874) got their first school in 1872 after an Episcopal mission was established.²² The Sissetons and Wahpeton Sioux at Devil’s Lake began attending a Catholic school in 1874.²³ Most of the children of the Lakota bands, the Northern Arapahos, and the Northern Cheyennes did not begin attending school until after 1875, once they settled permanently on reservations. The Shoshones at Wind River had contact with traveling teachers for years before a day school opened for thirty-two students in 1878. In the Southern Plains, formal education began among the Southern Cheyennes and Arapahos in 1871 at a day school, although instruction began through sign language because the Quaker teachers did not speak the students’ language. At least one Arapaho chief, Little Raven, encouraged his band’s children to learn to read and write in these early years. Most Cheyennes remained unenthusiastic about sending their children to school until the late 1870s, after the Red River War.²⁴ In 1873, the Kiowa chief Kicking Bird welcomed a Quaker missionary into his camp to start a school. Kicking Bird believed Kiowa children needed to confront the “new road” that was being forced upon his people by the federal

²¹ Raymond J. DeMallie, “Yankton and Yanktonai,” in *Handbook of North American Indians*, Vol. 13, Pt. 2, ed. William C. Sturtevant (Washington: Smithsonian Institution, 2001), 780.

²² *ARCIA*, 1872, 263.

²³ *ARCIA*, 1874, 238.

²⁴ Henrietta Mann, *Cheyenne and Arapaho Education*, 25-26, 29-33.

government by learning “white skills.”²⁵ In 1875, there were only forty Kiowa and Comanche children enrolled at the single school, but fifty-seven Kiowas and Comanches learned to read that year (out of a population of three thousand one hundred and eighty).²⁶ At the nearby Cheyenne and Arapaho Agency, only twenty-one Natives could read in 1875, but thirteen had learned in the previous year.²⁷

Bringing the English language to the Native populations of the West became a governmental concern in 1869 as part of President Grant’s “peace policy.” As American settlers filled the West, conflicts between Native groups and the U.S. military became all too common in the 1860s. Grant’s policy intended to remedy the hostility between the Indians and the government while protecting the whites migrating westward.²⁸ The Peace Commission, which determined that it “costs less to civilize than to kill,” saw education as a humane way to solve the Indian question, to help the Indian understand the superiority of civilization, and to bring the Natives into American life.²⁹ Government schools should “introduce the English language in every tribes” because the “sameness of language” would produce the “sameness of sentiment and thought.” If Indians spoke English, one member of the Peace Commission thought, than Indians would think like whites and future war could be avoided. “In the difference of language to-day lies two-thirds of our trouble,” he thought.³⁰

²⁵ Jacqueline Fear-Segal, *White Man’s Club*, 8.

²⁶ *ARCIA*, 1875; William T. Hagan, “19th Century Indian Education Programs,” in *Clash of Cultures: The American Indian Student in Higher Education*, Institute on the American Indian Student in Higher Education, ed. Roy H. Sandstrom (St. Lawrence University, 1972), 99.

²⁷ *ARCIA*, 1875.

²⁸ Francis Paul Prucha, *American Indian Policy in Crisis* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1976), 3-71.

²⁹ *ARCIA*, 1868, 43.

³⁰ *ARCIA*, 1868, 43.

During much of 1870s, however, the mission schools that drew support from federal funds instructed their Native students in their own Native language and often taught them how to read and write in their own Native language.³¹ Because the missionary's primary goal was to convert, they needed the Indians to read the Bible and that could be accomplished more quickly if the Bible was written in their vernacular. This technique was nothing new, but Indian Affairs officials hoped that mission schools would produce English-speaking Indians. In 1878, the agent at the Yankton Agency lamented that "the study of English is too much neglected, and it is rarely spoken by the children." He thought that this was "a serious evil." But the missionary at the Yankton Agency insisted that instructing in the Native tongue was more practical. It would take "three or four years in a boarding school, and twice as many in a day-school, for them to learn enough English to make it a fit medium for the conveyance of ideas to their minds."³² Educators with a religious background tended to favor Native language instruction, while government educators nearly all argued for English-only instruction. This debate lasted throughout the 1880s, even after Indian Affairs mandated English-only, but because of years of Native language instruction, many Plains people read and wrote in their own language. Some missionaries, like Alfred L. Riggs, refused to stop using Native language instruction. His school stopped receiving federal funding in 1893 as a result.³³

³¹ The Lakota had encounters with missionaries from early on. In 1870, the Jesuit Pierre-Jean De Smet baptized more than four hundred Sioux along the Missouri River. In 1875, the Episcopal Church sent missionaries to Lakotas being held by the army at Pine Ridge and Rosebud. In 1876, Catholic missionaries, who were the most active in the Dakotas, established the first lasting mission at the Standing Rock Agency. See Jeffrey Ostler, *The Plains Sioux*, 56-57.

³² Ruth Spack, *America's Second Tongue*, 18-19.

³³ Raymond J. DeMallie, "Santee," in *Handbook of North American Indians*, Vol. 13, Pt. 2, ed. William C. Sturtevant (Washington: Smithsonian Institution, 2001), 773.

In 1881, President Grant's policy of giving single denominations monopoly rights at each agency ended, giving any church the ability to build mission schools at any agency they wished. Government-run schools were also built with increased frequency during the 1880s. Unlike the mission schools, however, the government schools made Indian adoption of the English language the primary goal. By the mid-1880s, government policy makers became convinced that English-only instruction was the best method. Indian pupils were prohibited from using their language in the classroom. Their teachers could only speak in English, leaving the students to slowly figure out how to read, write, and speak the new language with a blank slate. Government policy makers believed that assimilation was impossible for an Indian who could not read, write, and speak English. They thought it would benefit the Indian economically, socially, and politically, giving them the ability to participate in the white world.

The government's fervent English-only policy can also be seen as a part of the "Americanization" movement that intensified during the wave of European immigration during the 1880s.³⁴ Policy makers believed that the Indian populations should adopt English as readily as the immigrants arriving at U.S. shores. Unlike immigrants, however, Native Americans often saw the English language as an imposition from a colonizer. Commissioner of Indian Affairs J. D. Atkins believed that "true Americans all feel that the Constitution, laws, and institutions of the United States, in their adaption to the wants and requirements of man, are superior to those of any country; and they should understand that by the spread of the English language will these laws and institutions be more firmly established and widely disseminated."³⁵ The English

³⁴ Francis Paul Prucha, *The Great Father*, 687-715.

³⁵ *ARCIA*, 1887, 19.

language was the foundation of the plan and its introduction to every tribe was seen as the key to erasing the differences between Natives and whites.³⁶

The federal government began to invest more in Indian assimilation and Indian education in the 1880s.³⁷ In 1876, for instance, Congress appropriated only \$20,000 for education, but by 1885 it appropriated \$75,000 and nearly a million dollars more came from the general fund. By 1890, Congressional commitment skyrocketed to close to one and a half million dollars per year, nearly half of Indian Affairs' total budget.³⁸

FIGURE 5: ANNUAL APPROPRIATIONS MADE BY THE GOVERNMENT FOR SUPPORT OF INDIAN SCHOOLS³⁹

Year	Appropriation	Year	Appropriation
1877	\$20,000	1884	\$675,200
1878	\$30,000	1885	\$992,800
1879	\$60,000	1886	\$1,100,065
1880	\$75,000	1887	\$1,211,415
1881	\$75,000	1888	\$1,179,916
1882	\$135,000	1889	\$1,348,015
1883	\$487,000	1890	\$1,364,568

For Indian educators, the ability to read and write in English was the Indians' first step on their staircase toward civilization. By February 1887, Commissioner of Indian Affairs J. D. C. Atkins ordered every school on an Indian reservation to commit fully to the English-only approach. Missionaries on the agencies were undoubtedly upset with the policy, as one wrote in the bilingual newspaper of the Dakota Mission, "NO MORE INDIAN SCHOOLS! NO MORE

³⁶ For a look at English-only at the Genoa School, see Amy M. Goodburn, "Literacy Practices at the Genoa Industrial Indian School," *Great Plains Quarterly* 19 (Winter 1999): 35-37.

³⁷ For a look at the government's own assessment of Indian education in the late 1880s, see Alice Fletcher, *Indian Education and Civilization, Bureau of Education Special Report 1888* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1888).

³⁸ In 1882, the Commissioner of Indian Affairs informed Congress that they owed Indians two and a half million dollars of undelivered funds for education.

³⁹ Data from the *ARCIA*, 1892, p. 41. Does not include amounts provided for by treaty agreements.

INDIAN BIBLES! NO MORE MISSIONS! These are the logical results of the present policy of the Indian Bureau, as shown in its astounding rules against the use of the Indian language.”⁴⁰

Some in the general public grew concerned that missionary efforts would be harmed. At one point, a *New York Times* editorial called the policy “a stupid act of tyranny,” but after the government reassured the public that the policy would not affect religious instruction, the controversy eventually died down.⁴¹ English-only became a point of national pride, as Commissioner Aktins wrote in 1886, “the English language as taught in America...the language of the greatest, most powerful, and enterprising nationalities beneath the sun... is good enough for all her people of all races.”⁴²

Many Plains Indians sent their children to schools throughout the 1870s and 1880s. They did it for a variety of reasons, many willingly and hopefully.⁴³ In fact, as the next chapter will

⁴⁰ *Iapi Oaye*, August-September 1887; as cited in Spack, *America's Second Tongue*, 34.

⁴¹ Ruth Spack, *American's Second Tongue*, 33-35; Some educators continued to use the Native language in the classroom well into the late 1880s. Some missionaries were chastised for performing religious services in Native languages. For a look at the English-only debate after the mandate, see CIA to Rev. C. G. Sterling, July 24, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.19.85, Pine Ridge, Corres. Received from OIA, Box 9, NARA (KC); Agent D. J. M. Wood to Pawnee Supt., May 1, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.19.77, Pawnee Ponca Otoe, Reel 17, NARA (OHS); “Is It Right,” *The Indian Helper*, September 2, 1887; “One Dollar for the Best,” *The Indian Helper*, September 30, 1890; *The Indian Helper*, November 11, 1887; “Is it Right for the Government to Stop the Teaching of Indian Languages in Reservation Schools?,” *The Indian Helper*, November 18, 1890; “The Chiefs,” *The Indian Helper*, February 20, 1891; R. H. Pratt to Rev. W. Pierson, November 22, 1890, Richard Henry Pratt Papers, MSS S-1174, Outgoing Letters, Box 10, Yale Collection of Western Americana, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

⁴² *ARCIA*, 1886, xxiii. In 1890, Commissioner T. H. Morgan hoped that curriculum would teach Indian students “to look upon America as their home, and upon the United States Government as their friend and benefactor. They should be made familiar with the lives of great and good men and women in American history, and be taught to feel pride in all their great achievements. They should hear little or nothing of the ‘wrongs of the Indians’ and of the injustice of the white race,” see Amy M. Goodburn, “Literacy Practices at the Genoa Industrial Indian School,” 37.

⁴³ Agent H. D. Gallagher to CIA, January 27, 1890, Letters Sent to the Office of Indian Affairs by the Pine Ridge Agency 1875-1914, Microfilm Publication M1282, Roll 10 (Washington DC: National Archives, 1985); Supt. Riggs to Agent McChesney, September 24, 1888, RBIA, RG

show, Indians wrote to officials to ask for more schools and teachers. But scholars tend to emphasize the ways in which agents manipulated or bullied parents to send their children to schools, which indeed happened.⁴⁴ Since the government was responsible for much of the Indians' well-being, authorities could convince parents to send their children to school by providing extra benefits and rations, or they could threaten to take rations away.⁴⁵ Some enrolled their children for political reasons, to gain or maintain favor with their agents. Jeffrey Ostler

75.19.11, Cheyenne River, Box 569, NARA (KC); Agent Perain Palmer to Agent James McLaughlin, October 6, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.19.113, Standing Rock, Misc. Corres. Received, Box 33, NARA (KC); Agent Charles Penny to Supt. White's Institute, May 15, 1891, RBIA, RG 75.19.85, Pine Ridge, Copies of Misc. Letters Sent, Box 54, NARA (KC); Agent Charles Penny to Supt. Genoa, March 29, 1891, RBIA, RG 75.19.85, Pine Ridge, Copies of Misc. Letters Sent, Box 54, NARA (KC); Supt. Immaculate Conception to Agent J. George Wright, November 18, 1889, RBIA, RG 75.19.96, Rosebud, Letters Received, Box 5, NARA (KC); Pine Ridge Agent to CIA, telegrams, February 10 & 11, 1891, Letters Sent to the Office of Indian Affairs by the Pine Ridge Agency 1875-1914, Microfilm Publication M1282, Roll 10 (Washington DC: National Archives, 1985); Agent Charles Ashley to CIA, February 20, 1891, RBIA, RG 75.19.10, Cheyenne and Arapaho, Letters Sent, Reel 32, NARA (OHS); St. Paul's Mission to Agent A. O. Simmons, October 10, 1889, RBIA, RG 75.19.30, Ft. Belknap, Misc. Letters Received 1877-1915, Box 2, NARA (Denver).

⁴⁴ David Wallace Adams, *Education for Extinction*, 209-222, 244-252.

⁴⁵ For examples of agents' methods to send or keep children in school, see Juan Alonzo to CIA, November 12, 1889, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 33317, Box 571, NARA (DC); M. P. Wyman to CIA, March 17, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.19.21, Crow Agency, Press Copies of Misc. Letters Sent, Box 3, NARA (Denver); CIA Circular Letter 14780, November 21, 1888, RBIA, RG 75.19.18, Consolidated Ute, Decimal Files, Box 159, NARA (Denver); CIA to C. F. Stollsteimer, February 29, 1888, RBIA, RG 75.19.18, Consolidated Ute, Decimal Files, Box 159, NARA (Denver); CIA to C. A. Bartholomew, March 13, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.19.18, Consolidated Ute, Decimal Files, Box 159, NARA (Denver); CIA to Charles McChesney, March 25, 1886, RBIA, RG 75.19.11, Cheyenne River, Box 249, NARA (KC); CIA to Frank Lillibridge, October 18, 1892, RBIA, RG 75.19.11, Cheyenne River, Box 569, NARA (KC); CIA to James McLaughlin, September 19, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.19.113, Standing Rock, Misc. Corres. Received, Box 34, NARA (KC); Charles Ashley to S. A. Vestal, February 5, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.19.10, Cheyenne and Arapaho, Letters Sent, Reel 32, NARA (OHS); Charles Adams to White Wolf, August 22, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.19.50, Kiowa Comanche and Wichita, Letters Sent, Reel 18, NARA (OHS); "A Right Move," *The Indian Helper*, August 1, 1890.

points to an instance in 1882 where many Brulés “concluded that it would be best to gain (or avoid losing) political capital” by sending their children to an off-reservation boarding school.⁴⁶

While few were opposed to sending their children to on-reservation day or boarding schools, parents were often understandably unwilling to send their children to off-reservation boarding schools. The traumatic cultural change, the great distance from the agency, and a real threat of sickness and death were a few of the most common reasons parents refused.⁴⁷ In 1884, for instance, the agent at Rosebud reported that he was having a difficult time inducing parents to send their children away to school but that they wanted to have a boarding school on the agency. “We have been promised for a long time by the Great Father that we should have a boarding school at this agency,” they wrote their agent, and asked, “Why do we not have it? Have one built here as on other agencies and we will send our children. We do not want to send our

⁴⁶ Jeffrey Ostler, *The Plains Sioux*, 159.

⁴⁷ R. H. Pratt to CIA, telegram, January 3, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 204, Box 583, NARA (DC); R. H. Pratt to CIA, telegram, January 2, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 205, Box 583, NARA (DC); Agent A. O. Simmons to CIA, March 13, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 8476, Box 605, NARA (DC); Elaine Goodale to CIA, July 15, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 22027, Box 643, NARA (DC); Agent M. P. Wyman to CIA, June 18, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.19.21, Crow Agency, Press Copies of Misc. Letters Sent, Box 3, NARA (Denver); Agent M. P. Wyman to CIA, March 17, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.19.21, Crow Agency, Press Copies of Misc. Letters Sent, Box 3, NARA (Denver); St. Paul’s Mission to Agent A. O. Simmons, December 18, 1889, RBIA, RG 75.19.30, Ft. Belknap, Misc. Letters Received 1877-1915, Box 2, NARA (Denver); Agent C. Scobey to CIA, May 13, 1891, RBIA, RG 75.19.35, Ft. Peck, Letters Sent to the Commissioner 1881-1927, Box 34, NARA (Denver); J. George Wright to CIA, March 24, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.19.96, Rosebud, Copies of Letters Sent, Volume 18, NARA (KC); CIA to Agent W. A. Swan, April 15, 1885, RBIA, RG 75.19.11, Cheyenne River, Box 570, NARA (KC); CIA to Agent James McLaughlin, September 19, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.19.113, Standing Rock, Misc. Corres. Received, Box 34, NARA (KC); Agent Charles Ashley to CIA, February 20, 1891, RBIA, RG 75.19.10, Cheyenne and Arapaho, Letters Sent, Reel 32, NARA (OHS); Agent Charles Adams to Supt. Chilocco, May 10, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.19.50, Kiowa Comanche and Wichita, Letters Sent, Reel 18, NARA (OHS); Agent D. J. M. Wood to CIA, October 27, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.19.77, Pawnee Ponca Otoe, Reel 17, NARA (OHS).

children from home... Why has not the oft-repeated promise been fulfilled?"⁴⁸ Some at Pine Ridge and Cheyenne River made similar requests in 1890.⁴⁹ Many children undoubtedly resisted the boarding school system. In 1886 and 1887, the superintendent at Fort Stevenson in Dakota Territory complained that his students had a "pernicious habit of running away," back to the agency. He proposed the building of a high wall around the school, but it does not appear that the penal solution was implemented.⁵⁰ Resistance ranged from extreme measures, such as arson, to more passive acts, such as secretly sustaining their traditions amongst friends.⁵¹

Army officer Richard Henry Pratt was among the first to convince the government to invest in off-reservation boarding schools for Indian students. He reasoned that the surest way to rid Indian children from their savage ways was to immerse them in a "civilized" environment, separate from their past. Pratt had his first experiences with Indian education while stationed at Fort Marion, Florida where seventy-two Southern Plains Indian prisoners were held from 1875 to 1878.⁵² He experimented with different methods to teach and assimilate the Kiowa, Cheyenne, Arapaho, and Comanche men, some well into their forties and fifties, to white ways. Manual labor and English classes (both important in Pratt's mind) took the bulk of the prisoners' time. For many of them, this instruction was their first experience with the written word. They were taught how to read and write and some corresponded with their families back in Indian Territory.

⁴⁸ *ARCIA*, 1884, 45.

⁴⁹ Agent H. D. Gallagher to CIA, May 1, 1890, Letters Sent to the Office of Indian Affairs by the Pine Ridge Agency 1875-1914, Microfilm Publication M1282, Roll 10 (Washington DC: National Archives, 1985); Elaine Goodale to CIA, October 11, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 32124, Box 671, NARA (DC).

⁵⁰ *ARCIA*, 1886, 222; *ARCIA*, 1887, 319.

⁵¹ David Wallace Adams, *Education for Extinction*, 224-229.

⁵² R. H. Pratt, *Battlefield and Classroom: For Decades with the American Indian, 1867-1904* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1964), 116-190; Jacqueline Fear-Segal, *White Man's Club*, 2-26. The prisoners were taken during the Red River War, which was fought between the U.S. Army and resistant bands of Comanche, Southern Cheyenne, Arapaho, and Kiowa.

Some of the men used their newfound skill to write to Washington to ask for their release.⁵³ A number of them continued to write Pratt for years after their release from Fort Marion.

Pratt believed that education had reformed the Southern Plains prisoners. Satisfied with the prisoners' progress and convinced that holding the men in a controlled, civilized environment aided assimilation, Pratt continued his methods at the Hampton Institute in Virginia and then at his own Carlisle Indian Industrial School in Pennsylvania.⁵⁴ In 1879, Pratt was able to convince chiefs at Rosebud and Pine Ridge to send eighty-four children to Carlisle. Eighteen Southern Cheyenne and ten Southern Arapaho boys and girls were also immersed in Pratt's program in 1879. One of the boys was smuggled onto the train to Pennsylvania by his father Antelope, a returned Fort Marion prisoner.⁵⁵ One hundred and forty-seven students were at Carlisle during its first year and the total reached two hundred and thirty-nine by 1880. For nearly four decades, Carlisle was the home to thousands of Native children from nearly every Indian agency in the west.

In June 1880, several chiefs, including Spotted Tail (Siŋt́e Glešká), the Brulé Lakota, visited the Carlisle School at the government's expense. Spotted Tail was not pleased with what he saw at Carlisle, but not because he was against education. Instead, he was displeased with Carlisle's military emphasis. Spotted Tail criticized it as a "soldier's place," and argued that he

⁵³ Diane Glancy, *Fort Marion Prisoners and the Trauma of Native Education* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2014), 78, 95-97. In 1878, Ah-kes wrote: "Dear Washington: We love you. Me and my people here all time three years. Me tire now. My mother's name is Peonte; my father's name Black Horse. P.S. Our bad and their bad are still with us."

⁵⁴ R. H. Pratt, *Battlefield and Classroom*, 190-229; David Wallace Adams, *Education for Extinction*, 30-59. See also, Elaine Goodale Eastman, *Pratt, the Red Man's Moses* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1935). The Hampton Institute was founded by Gen. Samuel C. Armstrong in 1868 for the education of African American students. A program for Native American students began in 1878. Seventeen of the Fort Marion prisoners went to Hampton after their release, a handful of others found spots at other schools. Carlisle opened its doors in 1879.

⁵⁵ Henrietta Mann, *Cheyenne and Arapaho Education*, 50-51.

had sent his four sons and grandchildren there only to learn to speak, read, and write English. Although Spotted Tail returned to Rosebud with his children, the other chiefs allowed theirs to stay.⁵⁶ Other groups were also willing to send their children to Pratt. In 1880, the Cheyenne and Arapaho agent reported that “not a day passes, hardly, but some one asks that his child may be included in the next lot called for, for Carlisle.”⁵⁷ There were forty-two Southern Cheyennes and twenty-one Southern Arapahos attending off-reservation schools in 1880. There were sixty-eight Cheyenne and Arapaho students at Carlisle alone in 1881 and ninety-one in 1882.⁵⁸ Sophia Lacey, a Blackfoot, asked the Commissioner of Indian Affairs if her three sons could be educated at Carlisle (she had three siblings already there). She was not satisfied with the agency school because it was useful “only to feed the children.” “I can feed mine at home,” Lacey wrote, “but I can not school them.”⁵⁹ Lacey traveled one hundred and fifty miles to the agency on two different occasions to ask the agent if it was possible to send the boys to Carlisle, but the agent made no effort to fulfill her request. Consequently, she wrote a letter directly to the Commissioner.

The number of Indians who attended school rose steadily throughout the 1880s. By 1892, 15.56 percent of Indians living on Dakota agencies were enrolled in a day or boarding

⁵⁶ George E. Hyde, *A Sioux Chronicle*, 51-57; *ARCIA*, 1880, 45. The Sioux began to represent a large portion of students in the eastern boarding schools. During the 1886 school year, there were ninety-nine Sioux students out of the 604 students from 37 different tribes at Carlisle. Of the 142 Indian students at Hampton during the same year, 79 were Sioux. From 1879-1890, around two hundred children from Rosebud and one hundred from Pine Ridge attended Carlisle and around one hundred from Standing Rock and Cheyenne River attended Hampton, see *ARCIA*, 1886; Jeffrey Ostler, *The Plains Sioux*, 159.

⁵⁷ Henrietta Mann, *Cheyenne and Arapaho Education*, 52.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 53-54, 56-57.

⁵⁹ Sophia Lacey to CIA, January 10, 1891, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 3134, Box 699, NARA (DC).

school (this statistic includes all ages, not just children; the percentage of children would have been much higher), up from just 0.56 percent in 1873 and 3.95 percent in 1882. Eight percent of all Indians in the U.S. were enrolled in a school in 1892 (excluding the “Five Civilized Tribes”).⁶⁰ The percentage of students who attended Dakota schools increased sharply from 1887 to 1892. Government officials were becoming more successful at persuading (and coercing) Sioux parents to send their children to school and parents were more willing to accept white education.

FIGURE 6: NUMBER AND PERCENTAGE OF INDIANS LIVING ON DAKOTA RESERVATIONS ENROLLED ACCORDING TO INDIAN AFFAIRS DATA: 1873-1892.⁶¹

Year	Number of Indians Living in the Dakotas Enrolled at a School	Percentage of Indians Living in the Dakotas Enrolled at a School
1873	201	0.56%
1875	598	1.27%
1876	899	4.01%
1877	1121	4.15%
1878	1478	5.70%
1879	1345	5.06%
1880	1136	4.18%
1881	1175	4.23%
1882	1227	3.95%

Year	Number of Indians Living in the Dakotas Enrolled at a School	Percentage of Indians Living in the Dakotas Enrolled at a School
1883	1949	6.21%
1884	2347	7.66%
1887	2909	10.10%
1888	3271	10.89%
1889	3430	11.35%
1890	3585	13.30%
1891	3678	13.65%
1892	4082	15.56%

⁶⁰ *ARCIA*, 1873-1892. Curriculum and teaching methods at Indian schools varied greatly until the mid-1880s when the government put a greater emphasis on standard practices. Most schools reserved a large portion of instruction time to industrial education, such as home making for the girls and farming for the boys. In this regard, Indian schools differed greatly from White schools. See Adams, *Education for Extinction*. For a detailed look at language instruction see Ruth Spack, *American's Second Tongue*, 45-109.

⁶¹ *ARCIA*, 1873-1892.

**FIGURE 7: AVERAGE ATTENDANCE AT INDIAN SCHOOLS IN THE DAKOTAS
ACCORDING TO INDIAN AFFAIRS DATA: 1881-1892⁶²**

1881	532	1887	2142
1882	851	1888	2575
1883	944	1889	2623
1884	1293	1890	2758
1885	1471	1891	2742
1886	1965	1892	3064

Hundreds of Indians were learning to read every year, although progress was gradual. In 1880, the agent at Devil’s Lake reported that “a change, however is gradually taking place, as is shown from the fact that in the past they strongly opposed schools and religious teachings, but now they are either reconciled or indifferent, and allow their children to attend school.”⁶³ During the same year at Lower Brulé, the agent also reported a disappearance of the opposition to education. At Pine Ridge, Agent McGillicuddy reported “a strong desire” for education of their children, but he believed that “the nature and habits of these Indians do not afford indulgence or very sanguine hopes of speedy enlightenment. Their roving habits, and their tardiness in acquiring by generous industry permanent abodes, do not justify the belief that they will make very rapid progress in the way of education.”⁶⁴ By the mid-1880s, however, the attitudes of agents seemed more positive. At Cheyenne River in 1887, the agent noted that attendance and desire was larger than ever. The progress at Lower Brulé was “all that could be asked.”⁶⁵ In 1890, the Blackfeet agent was astonished how quickly the children at his agency picked up English and how fast some learned.⁶⁶ Captain Pratt declared at Carlisle, “The literary work of the school has met with its

⁶² *ARCIA*, 1881-1892.

⁶³ *ARCIA*, 1880, 30.

⁶⁴ *ARCIA*, 1880, 36, 40, 45.

⁶⁵ *ARCIA*, 1887, 19, 26.

⁶⁶ Agent George Steell to CIA, November 1, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 34529, Box 676, NARA (DC).

usual gratifying success. Young Indians beginning without a knowledge of English may be taught to speak and think, read, write, and cipher in this language almost as readily as white children, and there is no good reason why the innumerable Indian languages should be much longer continued, not to say elaborated.”⁶⁷ English literacy was the foundation of classroom instruction. The Superintendent of Indian Schools believed that the most “prominent features of the school room drill” should be “English conversation and intelligent English reading,” “first, last and always.”⁶⁸

There was another practical component in the government’s push for literacy. Agents hoped that it would improve their relationships with Indians, making their job easier. Because of the expanse of reservations, notes and letters were the most efficient method of communication for an agent needing to inform, assure, or instruct his Indian population. Letters from agents typically served as official commands, or polite requests. For instance, the Kiowa, Comanche, and Wichita agent Charles Adams wanted the Comanches to send their children to the agency’s new school house, to “do the right thing and help fill the school.”⁶⁹ He told White Wolf to take the letter and “have it read to the people in your vicinity.” Other letters were written to gather opinion, gauge the attitude of Indians, or to admonish certain actions.⁷⁰ Quite often, communication between agents and their Indian police or Indian employees had to occur through

⁶⁷ *ARCIA*, 1887, 260.

⁶⁸ *ARCIA*, 1890, 268.

⁶⁹ Charles Adams to White Wolf, August 22, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.19.50, Kiowa Comanche and Wichita, Letters Sent, Reel 18, NARA (OHS).

⁷⁰ Agent J. George Wright to CIA, January 2, 1891, RBIA, RG 75.19.96, Rosebud, Copies of Letters Sent, Volume 20, NARA (KC); Agent J. George Wright to CIA, January 23, 1891, RBIA, RG 75.19.96, Rosebud, Copies of Letters Sent, Volume 20, NARA (KC).

letters.⁷¹ Although personal correspondence between active agents and the Indians living on their reserves was less common, plenty of personal letters survive between active agents and Indians living off the reservation and letters between retired agents and Indians.⁷² Letters were also sent from agents to Indians living on different agencies.⁷³ There is also evidence that some agents wrote letters to Indians in their Native language, even though Indian Affairs discouraged the use of Native languages in the 1880s.⁷⁴

In nine years, between 1880 and 1889, nearly seven thousand Indians living on reservations in the Dakotas, Wyoming, Montana, Idaho, Nevada, Nebraska, and Indian Territory (excluding the Five Civilized Tribes) learned how to read according to Indian Affairs estimates. By 1889, nearly eleven thousand Lakota, Santee, Yankton, Yanktonai, Mandan, Assiniboine, Gros Ventres, Ute, Paiute, Shoshone, Bannock, Arapaho, Cheyenne, Kiowa, Comanche, Apache, Wichita, Ponca, Pawnee, Otoe, Blackfeet, Crow, Omaha, Winnebago, and others could read in

⁷¹ Straight Head to Agent P. Palmer, March 26 (no year), RBIA, RG 75.19.11, Cheyenne River, Box 249, NARA (KC); George Sword to Pine Ridge Agent, March 30, 1891, RBIA, RG 75.19.85, Pine Ridge, Misc. Corres. Received, Box 31, NARA (KC).

⁷² W. C. Courtis to L. F. Spencer, December 19, 1890, Lebbeus Foster Spencer Papers, MSS 596, History Colorado Stephen H. Hart Library and Research Center; Ellen Eaglehawk to Agent James McLaughlin, February 16, 1882, *James McLaughlin Papers*, Microfilm Roll 2, Assumption College (Richardson, ND), 1968; Mary Louise Hinkankoyakewin to Agent James McLaughlin, *James McLaughlin Papers*. Mary, a student at Devil Lake Agency's mission school, wrote to her old agent, then serving at Standing Rock, to tell him about Christmas at the reservation.

⁷³ Agent H. D. Gallagher to Ralph Eagle Feather, May 22, 1888, RBIA, RG 75.19.85, Pine Ridge, Copies of Misc. Letters Sent, Box 54, NARA (KC).

⁷⁴ Agent William McKusick to CIA, November 13, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 35513, Box 678, NARA (DC); Agent James McLaughlin to CIA, December 24, 1890, *Reports and Correspondence Related to the Army Investigations of the Battle at Wounded Knee and to the Sioux Campaign of 1890–1891*, National Archives Microfilm Publications (Washington: National Archives and Records Service, 1975), Roll 1, Target 3, Jan. 1891, File 2.

English or their Native language.⁷⁵ Only nine years earlier, less than three thousand could read.⁷⁶ Seventeen percent of those tribes could read in 1889, but only four percent in 1880.

FIGURE 8: NUMBER OF INDIANS WHO LEARNED TO READ EACH YEAR, 1875-1887, ACCORDING TO INDIAN AFFAIRS DATA⁷⁷

	Number of Indians Living in the Dakotas Who Learned to Read During the Past Year	Total Number of Indians Who Learned to Read During the Past Year in the U.S.
1875	119	1383
1876	89	980
1877	223	1206
1878	228	1532
1879	183	1717
1880	306	
1881	336	
1882	233	1706
1883	345	1889
1884	474	2257
1885	1472*	3198
1886	968	3153
1887	496	2446

*The Pine Ridge Agency reported that 1000 Indians learned to read in 1885.

By 1890, nearly a quarter of Indians living in the Dakotas could read English or Dakota compared to only 10.25 percent five years earlier.⁷⁸ The figure for 1892 was 23.7 percent. The Office of Indian Affairs did not count those who had the ability to write, nor did their statistics measure competency. Agents did not give their Indians exams to gauge their abilities.

⁷⁵ *ARCIA*, 1889.

⁷⁶ *ARCIA*, 1880.

⁷⁷ *ARCIA*, 1875-1887.

⁷⁸ *ARCIA*, 1890.

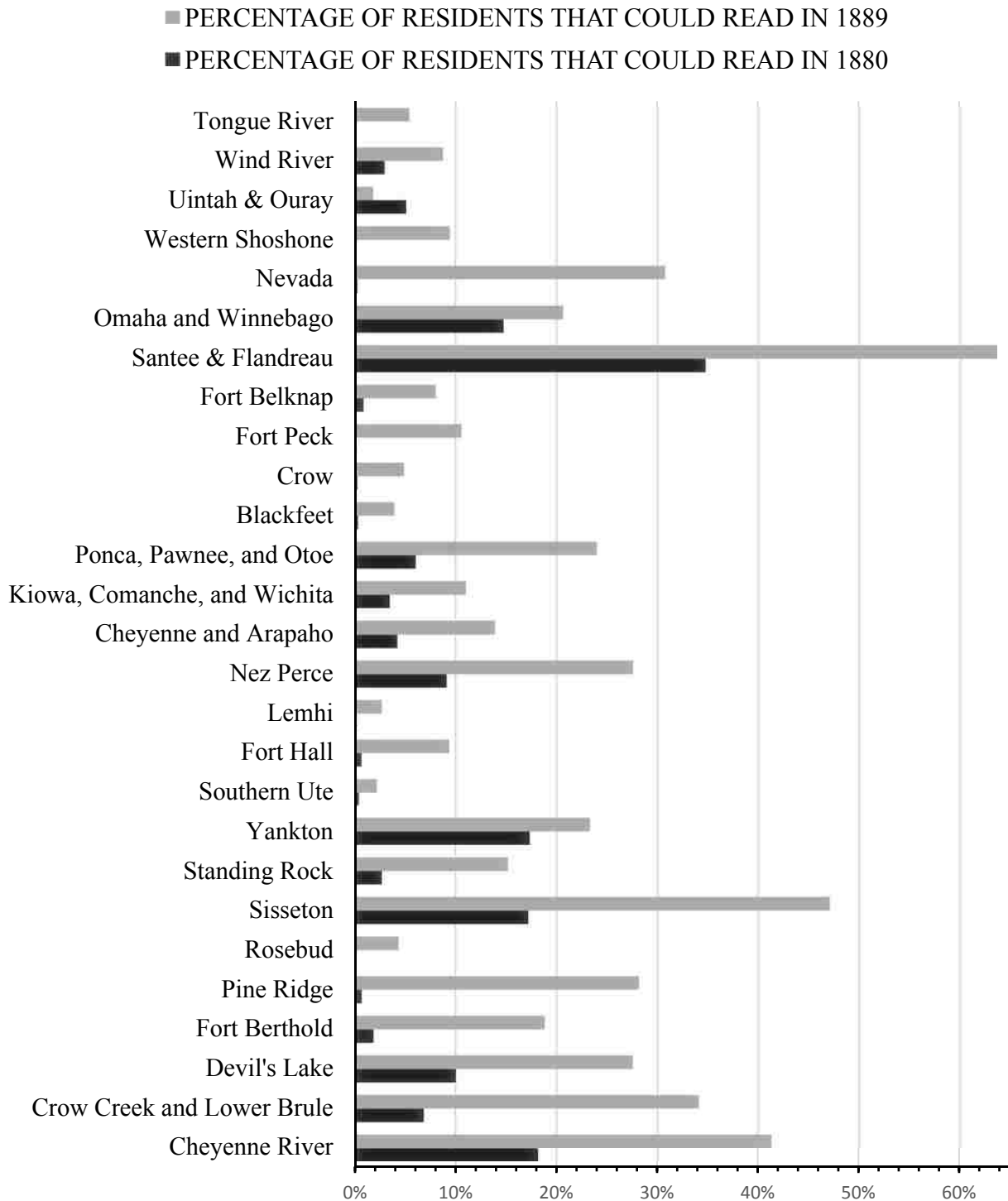
**FIGURE 9: NUMBER OF INDIANS WHO COULD READ IN 1880 AND 1889
ACCORDING TO INDIAN AFFAIRS DATA⁷⁹**

Agency	Number of Residents that Could Read in 1880	Number of Residents that Could Read in 1889
Cheyenne River	320	1175
Crow Creek and Lower Brule	155	740
Devil's Lake	109	812
Fort Berthold	26	225
Pine Ridge	50	1580
Rosebud	NO DATA	330
Sisseton	258	700
Standing Rock	70	700
Yankton	350	410
Southern Ute	10	40
Fort Hall	10	150
Lemhi	1	14
Nez Perce	110	400
Cheyenne and Arapaho	249	500
Kiowa, Comanche, and Wichita	143	450
Ponca, Pawnee, and Otoe	111	427
Blackfeet	24	90
Crow	9	120
Fort Peck	7	200
Fort Belknap	18	144
Santee & Flandreau	407	862
Omaha and Winnebago	376	250*
Nevada	8	295
Western Shoshone	NO DATA	45
Uintah & Ouray	23	16*
Wind River	61	170
Tongue River	NO DATA	47
TOTAL	2,905	10,892

*Not every resident was counted for reading.

⁷⁹ *ARCIA*, 1880, 1889.

FIGURE 10: LITERACY RATES ON RESERVATIONS, 1880 & 1889



They only counted subjectively, often estimating or trusting the opinion of teachers or the Indians themselves. Because dozens of agents employing hundreds of employees gathered the annual statistics, it is difficult to ascertain exactly what “can read” meant.⁸⁰ It does seem, however, that Indian Affairs considered the accuracy of their annual census and corresponding statistics important. Although the Commissioner admitted that it was difficult to get accurate statistics in 1887, agents and teachers were continually urged to report “reliable” stats.⁸¹

Despite the emphasis on English, a large percentage of those Indians who could read did so only in their Native language. In their annual reports to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, agents typically counted the number of Indians who could read on their reservations, lumping together those reading in English and Native languages. But in 1885 and 1886, some agents distinguished between the two and included numbers of each in their reports. In 1886, the agent at Pine Ridge tallied six hundred and thirty-four who could only read English, three hundred and sixty-one who could only read Dakota, and four hundred and five could read both English and Dakota.⁸² Most western Indians who could write in their Native language were taught by white and Native missionaries. Many Siouan speaking people (Sioux, Omahas, Poncas) took advantage of their early contact with missionaries. The Santees (Eastern Dakota), Yanktons

⁸⁰ Annual Reports of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs detailed the state of the office and the state of Indians under government care. The commissioner presented a compilation of reports from Indian agents throughout the country who gave their testimony (with appropriate statistics) on the state of agriculture, industry, health, economy, crime, religion, and education (which is often given the most attention). Each report was specific to each reservation or tribe.

⁸¹ *ARCIA*, 1887, xxxvii; H. D. Gallagher to All Day School Teachers, February 20, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.19.85, Pine Ridge, Copies of Misc. Letters Sent, Box 54, NARA (KC); H. D. Gallagher to All Superintendents and Teachers of Schools, RBIA, RG 75.19.85, Pine Ridge, Copies of Misc. Letters Sent, Box 54, NARA (KC); CIA to Agent John Tully, July 2, 1892, RBIA, RG 75.19.117, Tongue River, Letters Received 1890-1924, Box 5, NARA (Denver). It seems that most agents did not enjoy their annual reports, it took up much of their “valuable time” and was expensive.

⁸² *ARCIA*, 1886, 396.

(Western Dakota), and Lakotas (Teton) were all taught to write Dakota.⁸³ Many Lakotas communicated with one another using both written Lakota and English. However, several languages, including Kiowa, Cheyenne, Arapaho, Shoshoni, did not have a written form until the twentieth century.⁸⁴ These groups relied on English. English literacy also allowed groups outside of a common language family to communicate via letter. Kiowas could read letters from Cheyennes, Arapahos could send letters to Shoshones, and so on. English literacy allowed for the creation of an open media community where all Native peoples could congregate.⁸⁵

Literacy also opened new sources of information to Indians. Plains Indians had newspapers printed in their own language as early as 1871.⁸⁶ From 1871 to 1939, an English and

⁸³ A modification of the Dakota alphabet system for the Lakota dialect was published in 1939 by Rev. Eugene Buechel, *A Grammar of Lakota: The Language of the Teton Sioux Indians* (Saint Francis, SD: Saint Francis Mission, 1939). See also Albert White Hat, *Reading and Writing the Lakota Language*, ed. Jael Kampfe (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1999).

⁸⁴ John P. Harrington, *Vocabulary of the Kiowa Language*, Smithsonian Institution Bulletin of the Bureau of American Ethnology, 84 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1928); Rodolphe Petter, *English-Cheyenne Dictionary* (Kettle Falls, WA, 1915); A. L. Kroeber, "The Bannock and Shoshone Languages," *American Anthropologist* 11, No. 2 (1909): 266-277.

⁸⁵ The use of written Native language also changed the spoken language. George Sword, an Oglala Lakota at the Pine Ridge Agency, thought that the white missionaries' written version of Dakota eventually altered the way his people spoke. Before the younger generations began using the written language, each syllable in the Lakota language had a distinct meaning, but missionaries combined those syllables to form English words, not compound phrases. Because of the written language, those monosyllabic words were, over time, formed into compound words when spoken. According to Sword, the "young people" began to speak "as the white people have written it." See George Sowrd, "Change of the Lakota Language," Dr. James R. Walker Collection, MSS 653, Box 3, Document 169:1, History Colorado Stephen H. Hart Library and Research Center; James R. Walker, *Lakota Belief and Ritual*, ed. Raymond J. DeMallie and Elaine A. Jahner (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1980), 21-22, 75. Sword also noted how the written language was changing Lakota religion, because the old "holy" language was only know by the "holy men" and there were no "holy men among the young people," "the people do not understand the meaning of any words in the holy language. They holy language is used by the holy men in holy songs and ceremonies. This is the language of Wakan Tanka. All animals understand this language."

⁸⁶ For a history of newspapers and the Five Civilized Tribes, see Daniel F. Littlefield, Jr. and James W. Parins, *American Indian and Alaska Native Newspapers and Periodicals, 1826-1924* (Wesport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1984), xi-xxiii.

Dakota language newspaper run by the Dakota Mission called *Iapi Oaye* operated at the Santee Agency. Although not produced by the Sioux, it claimed eight hundred Sioux readers in 1877.

FIGURE 11: INDIANS READING IN ENGLISH AND A NATIVE LANGUAGE IN 1886 AT VARIOUS AGENCIES ACCORDING TO INDIAN AFFAIRS DATA⁸⁷

Agency	Can Read English Only	Can Read Native Only	Can Read Both
Cheyenne River	260	380	160
Crow Creek and Lower Brule	10	150	190
Devil's Lake	5	85	150
Pine Ridge	634	361	405
Rosebud	350	150	100
Sisseton	NO DATA	250	450
Standing Rock	200	50	170
Yankton	NO DATA	120	180
Fort Hall	29	2	NO DATA
Nez Perce	90	45	85
Fort Peck	19	NO DATA	115
Santee & Flandreau	133	150	361
Omaha and Winnebago	350	100	50

The paper began to print the same material in both English and Lakota as a way to encourage the Sioux to learn English. Because the paper was run by Christian missionaries, its contents did not represent the viewpoint of the Sioux. Nonetheless, *Iapi Oaye* still provided the Sioux with news, education, and entertainment. Raymond J. DeMallie claims *Iapi Oaye* was “circulated widely and served as an important means of communication among the various Sioux agencies.”⁸⁸ The Episcopalians began printing the Dakota language *Anpao* in 1878 and the Catholics established

⁸⁷ *ARCIA*, 1886.

⁸⁸ Raymond J. DeMallie, ed. *The Sixth Grandfather: Black Elk's Teachings Given to John G. Neihardt* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1984), 8; Ruth Spack, *America's Second Tongue*, 50. Rev. John P. Williamson established the paper in 1871. In March 1884, then-editor Alfred L. Riggs decided to divide and separately publish the Dakota and English language material; the former retaining the title of *Iapi Oaye*, and the English language section called *Word Carrier*.

Sina Sapa Wocekiye Taeyanpaha in 1892, both aimed at Christian Sioux.⁸⁹ Newspapers and periodicals printed at Carlisle, Hampton, the Genoa Institute, and other boarding schools made their way onto the reservations as well, allowing parents and former students to be informed on the happenings at the schools.⁹⁰ They were English-only publications intended for both a white and Native audience, but they offered Natives from all parts of the country news that was relevant to them. Michael Burns, an Apache, valued Carlisle's *The Indian Helper* because he "learned much interesting news...about Indians throughout the United States."⁹¹ Ten thousand copies of *The Indian Helper* were being printed weekly by 1890.⁹² Natives also were devoted readers of white newspapers and magazines, as discussed in following chapters.⁹³

⁸⁹ Daniel F. Littlefield, Jr., *American Indian and Alaska Native Newspapers and Periodicals, 1826-1924*, xxv.

⁹⁰ Ibid., xxviii-xxix; Jacqueline Fear-Segal, "Eyes in the Text: Marianna Burgess and The Indian Helper," in *Blue Pencils & Hidden Hands: Women Editing Periodicals, 1830-1910*, ed. Sharon Harris (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2004), 123-145. For testimonies from Native readers on their fondness for the Carlisle paper *The Indian Helper*, see *The Indian Helper*, March 2, 1888; June 8, 1888; October 5, 1888; March 22, 1889; April 19, 1889; April 26, 1889; May 24, 1889; June 28, 1889; November 28, 1890.

⁹¹ *The Indian Helper*, April 18, 1890. Jacqueline Emery argues that few "realize just how influential student-run newspapers...were in helping to form and sustain a cross-tribal community at the turn of the twentieth century," see Jacqueline Emery, "Writing Against Erasure: Native American Students at Hampton Institute and the Periodical Press," *American Periodicals* 22, No. 2 (2012), 195.

⁹² *The Indian Helper*, June 20, 1890. One of those copies went to E. D. Presecott, the postmaster at Wounded Knee Creek at the Pine Ridge Agency, see "Not Married After All," *The Indian Helper*, November 29, 1889.

⁹³ In 1880, four Omaha sisters, Susette, Marguerite, Susan, and Rosalie La Flesche, wrote letters to the popular children's magazine *St. Nicholas* and were preserved because they were published in *St. Nicholas*'s "Letter Box" column. Susette La Flesche began the first letter: "I do not know whether you allow 'savages' in your 'Letter-Box,' but my two younger sisters seeming to have no doubt whatever on the subject, Rosalie and I have concluded not to let them get ahead of us; besides, nothing is ever complete unless 'we four' are all 'in it.'" See Suzanne Rahn, "Young Eyewitnesses to History," in *St. Nicholas and Mary Mapes Dodge: The Legacy of a Children's Magazine Editor, 1873-1905*, ed. Susan R. Gannon, Suzanne Rahn, Ruth Anne Thompson (New York: McFarland Books, 2004), 112-115. The sisters were the daughters of Joseph La Flesche, a last chief of the Omaha whose father was a French Canadian fur trader. Susette (Inshata Theumba or Bright Eyes) would go on to become a well-known author and supporter of Native

FIGURE 12: LITERACY AMONG INDIANS LIVING IN THE DAKOTAS, 1885 AND 1886 ACCORDING TO INDIAN AFFAIRS DATA⁹⁴

	Can Read English Only	Can Read Indian Language	Read Both English and Indian Language	Total Number Over Twenty Who Can Read	Total Number Under Twenty Who Can Read
1885	1329	1139	852	1026	2264
1886	1559	1546	1813	1984	2934

Statistics do show that Indians youths were much more likely to learn to read, although a surprising number of Indians over the age of twenty-one learned to read in 1886. Many of the children attending schools had only known life on the agencies. Although their parents and older siblings experienced the traditional ways of life, hundreds of Indian youth were born into a world that the government policy makers had fashioned. By 1892 there were 5,217 dwelling houses on Dakota agencies, 64.5 percent of Indians were “wholly” wearing "civilized dress" (14 percent in part), and 21 percent could “use English enough for ordinary intercourse.”⁹⁵ In 1882, by comparison, 20 percent of Indians on Dakota agencies had worn civilized dress and only 1.47 percent could use English. Farm life, dresses, or newspapers might have been an unnatural oddity to the older generations, but those things had become a part of life to many Indian youths. This generation shift was never out of the minds of policy makers. The strategies on which the agency system was founded on depended on this trend.⁹⁶

American rights. Susan became the first Native American women to be certified as a medical doctor (and was educated at Hampton). Marguerite became a teacher at the Yankton Agency. Rosalie became a tribal leader and ethnologist. Their brother Francis also became an ethnologist for the Smithsonian.

⁹⁴ *ARCIA*, 1885, 1886.

⁹⁵ *ARCIA*, 1892.

⁹⁶ *ARCIA*, 1882, 1892. By 1892, a greater percentage of Sioux were using English than those from other agencies.

Before the reservation years, the mail was not a common feature of Native life. Communicating with someone you could not see was accomplished through an intermediary. Messengers carried spoken messages back and forth. But Natives soon realized that the mail offered practical benefits and as more and more Natives learned to read and write, the usefulness of literacy became more apparent. Indians did not stop adapting after they were placed onto the agencies.⁹⁷ Like horses, guns, and other white tools acquired before it, literacy became critical piece of Native life. Native Americans did not, however, necessarily acquire literacy to use in the ways white educators expected. They knew that English literacy was meant to be a tool that would destroy their culture, yet many came to use it instead as a tool of self-determination. Natives used letters to communicate with the white world, allowing them to actively manage and resist governmental control (a subject for the next chapter).

Though aware of the destructive effects Americanized education could have on their children, many Native Americans still expressed a desire to have them educated. Standing Elk (Herakanajin) sent six of his children to school because he thought “that is best way” and he wanted other Lakotas to do the same. He wrote to the Standing Rock agent in 1884, “If we don’t send our children to school how can they get education and how can be they like white children when they are grown enough they won’t try the white mens way so I think we better send our

⁹⁷ One example of how Plains people ignored white desires and adapted technology to suit their own needs: the government provided Lakotas with building materials in the hope that they would construct log houses as another step toward civilization. However, the Oglala at Pine Ridge did not create the houses the agents were hoping for. Instead, they created long villages along streams, a modification of the old camp circle that ensured a continuation of their way of life. Government agents wrongly assumed that the Oglala would conform to their vision. Instead, they adapted the practical benefits of log housing for their own uses. See *ARCIA*, 1884, 38-39; Jeffrey Ostler, *The Plains Sioux*, 134.

children to school now so they can learn some thing good before they grown up.”⁹⁸ In 1877, Red Cloud personally told President Rutherford Hayes, “I also wants schools to enable my children to read and write, so they will be as wise as the white man’s children...we would like to have Catholic priests and nuns, so that they could teach our people how to read and write.”⁹⁹ In 1879 the famous chief, along with other Lakota headmen, repeated this demand to their agent.¹⁰⁰ While visiting the Hampton Institute, Red Cloud told the students that they should listen to the superintendent, “he has brains, he has eyes, he will take good care of you. I like all his work, and I am very glad to see it.” When asked what the parents back home thought about Hampton, Red Cloud responded, “The Indians love their children but they sent them here, a great ways off, to learn the white man’s ways. This shows what we think of it.”¹⁰¹ The Hampton Institute was always sure to publish the good words of visiting chiefs. In August 1880, the *Southern Workman*, the Hampton publication, reported that visiting Lakota Like-the-Bear told the Hampton superintendent in a speech, “I see you are making brains for my children; you are making eyes for them so they see well. That is what I reach out to the Great Spirit for.”¹⁰² Likewise, chief Wizi hoped that education would benefit Lakotas:

Looking at our children here, I think how sometimes I put seeds into the ground. If I don’t see them growing after a time I feel uneasy. Then I look again, and if I see them sprouting, I feel glad, so I feel about our children. I see the seed is growing here now, and by and by it will do good among my own people.¹⁰³

⁹⁸ Herakanajin to Agent James McLaughlin, October 28, 1884, *James McLaughlin Papers*, Microfilm Roll 2, Assumption College (Richardson, ND), 1968.

⁹⁹ Ross Alexander Enoch, *The Jesuit Mission to the Lakota Sioux: Pastoral Theology and Ministry, 1886-1945* (Kansas City: Sheed and Ward, 1995), 22.

¹⁰⁰ James C. Olson, *Red Cloud and the Sioux Problem* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1965), 268.

¹⁰¹ *Southern Workman*, February 1883, 19; David W. Adams, *Education for Extinction*, 248.

¹⁰² *Southern Workman*, August 1880, 85.

¹⁰³ *Southern Workman*, March 1891, 166-167.

But as far as many Indians were concerned, acquiring literacy did not mean a loss of tradition. Sitting Bull, known to be one of the most ardent Lakota traditionalists in the 1880s, wanted his people to learn to read and write. Mary Collins, a missionary to Sitting Bull's camp at the Standing Rock Agency, wrote that Sitting Bull was "very much opposed to the Indians becoming civilized," he did not want Collins to try to persuade his people to "leave their old ways of living" or to "abandon their dances," but he still wanted her to teach them how to read.¹⁰⁴ Sitting Bull did not equate literacy with conceding to colonization. Stanley Vestal attributed this statement to Sitting Bull: "If you see anything good in the white man's road, pick it up and keep it. But if you find something that is not good, or that turns out bad, leave it alone."¹⁰⁵ And another: "We must teach the children to read and write, so that the white men cannot cheat us, and we must hang on to our land until the young folks can speak English and look out for our own interests."¹⁰⁶ Sitting Bull was receiving and replying to letters from as far away as France and Germany in 1882. He asked Major George P. Ahern to translate his correspondence, who recalled that the "letters included requests for his autograph, his tomahawk, pipe, etc."¹⁰⁷ Sitting Bull "only occasionally [deemed] a reply necessary." He could not speak English and he could only write his name, but Sitting Bull found the written word useful.

Other prominent Lakotas adopted correspondence with enthusiasm. In 1880, Oglala chief American Horse at Pine Ridge began a long correspondence with a twelve-year-old white boy named Edwin Landy, the son of a Cincinnati photographer named James Landy. In an April

¹⁰⁴ Mary Collins, "A Short Autobiography," reproduced in Stanley Vestal, *New Sources of Indian History, 1850-1891* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1934), 61-62.

¹⁰⁵ Stanley Vestal, *New Sources of Indian History, 1850-1891* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1934), 273-274.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 274.

¹⁰⁷ George Ahern to W. S. Campbell, July 12, 1929, Walter S. Campbell Collection, Box 107, Folder 4, Western History Collections, University of Oklahoma Libraries.

1880 letter to Edwin, American Horse wrote, “Although I have received a great many letters from other little boys in the East, yet I consider you my first.”¹⁰⁸ American Horse later met Edwin and James Landy in Chicago and a friendship developed. In December 1880, American Horse told Edwin that he had his family’s picture on his wall and “it seems as if we were all together. I think you every day and I remember all you say to me.”¹⁰⁹ American Horse’s wife was sick; he wrote that she was “not likely to live.” “I am afraid I shall be sad hearted,” he confessed. In July 1881, American Horse described reservation life to Edwin:

The Indians are getting along nicely. They are building houses and living like white people. They have nice villages on White Clay, Wounded Knee, Medicine Root, and other places. We have streets in our town like you and have our own cows which we milk like White people now. We have chickens and everything and you would think the Indians are White people were you to come out here to see them driving ox teams and working as the Great Father told us to do and I want to tell you about it.¹¹⁰

The two also exchanged gifts through the mail. Edwin sent American Horse rings and a watch and Edwin was given moccasins and beaded Indian work. American Horse’s relationship with the Landys was not exclusive. American Horse regularly used the mail, corresponding with several whites during his lifetime.

The growth of Native literacy coincided with the westward expansion of the U.S. Postal Service. Spurred by population booms and the efficient reach of the railroads, post offices tied the Great Plains and Rockies into a national network, making daily communication between

¹⁰⁸ American Horse to Edwin Landy, April 30, 1880, American Horse Papers, MSS S-903, Yale Collection of Western Americana, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University. This letter was transcribed by a missionary.

¹⁰⁹ American Horse to Edwin Landy, December 8, 1880, American Horse Papers, MSS S-903, Yale Collection of Western Americana, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

¹¹⁰ American Horse to Edwin Landy, July 28, 1881, American Horse Papers, MSS S-903, Yale Collection of Western Americana, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

Indian reservations possible. The federal government dedicated money to shore up gaps in the postal network in the 1870s and 1880s. In 1877, the Postal Service used most of its new appropriations to deliver mail to the Black Hills of South Dakota and more and more small towns in the West received mail during the 1880s. In 1887, free delivery was established in towns of 10,000 people where revenues were at least \$10,000 a year.¹¹¹ Five hundred and thirty-six post offices were operating in the Dakota Territory in 1882. By 1888 the number was 1,065, one fewer than Nebraska, which had 841 post offices in 1882. Two hundred and nineteen post offices operated in Indian Territory in 1888, 173 in Wyoming Territory, 296 in Montana Territory, and 136 in Nevada.¹¹² Six hundred and sixty-seven post offices opened in Indian Territory, Nebraska, Colorado, North and South Dakota, Montana, Wyoming, Idaho, and Utah in 1890 alone.¹¹³ Each Indian agency had at least one post office, some had multiple in service.¹¹⁴

¹¹¹ Wayne E. Fuller, *The American Mail: Enlarger of the Common Life* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972), 73-74, 103. For a look at the expansion of the post before the Civil War, see David M. Henkin, *The Postal Age: The Emergence of Modern Communications in Nineteenth-Century America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006); Richard Johns, *Spreading the News* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995).

¹¹² *United States Postal Guide*, Vol. XI, No. 1, January 1889 (Washington: Brodix Publishing Co., 1889), 6.

¹¹³ *Annual Report of the Postal Master General of the United States, 1890* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1890), 198. Natives were often employed as mail carriers, see *ARCI*, 1886, 242; White Shield to Post Office, May 28, 1879, RBIA, RG 75.19.10, Cheyenne and Arapaho, Box 472, Post Office, NARA (OHS). The earliest documented play written by a Native American was *The Indian Mail Carrier* by the Seneca Gowongo Mohawk, copyrighted in 1889 and 1892. Mohawk was a female and starred in the play as the male lead. The play was “incredibly popular,” selling out shows in the U.S. before heading to Europe, see Matthew Reborn, *Pioneer Performances: Staging the Frontier* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 6-11; Eric Cheyfitz, ed., *The Columbia Guide to American Indian Literatures of the United States Since 1945* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006).

¹¹⁴ Pine Ridge had a post office at the agency headquarters and at a trader’s store at Wounded Knee Creek. The Cheyenne and Arapaho Agency had post offices at Darlington, Cantonment, and Fort Reno. The Kiowa, Comanche, and Wichita had post offices at Anadarko and Fort Sill.

Yet, because of the size of reservations, many Indians still had to travel a good distance to reach the nearest post.¹¹⁵

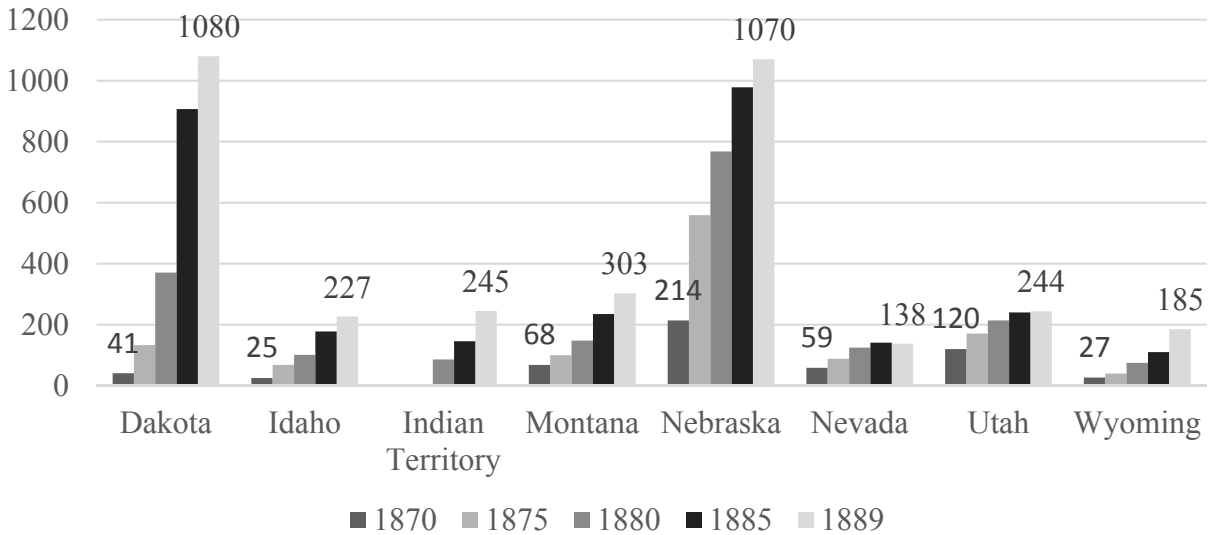
FIGURE 13: NUMBER OF POST OFFICES BY STATE OR TERRITORY, 1870-1889¹¹⁶

	1870	1875	1880	1885	1889
Arizona	21	42	85	143	160
California	506	731	889	999	1283
Colorado	94	188	351	506	609
Dakota	41	133	371	907	1080
Idaho	25	68	101	178	227
Indian Territory	NO DATA	NO DATA	86	146	245
Iowa	1138	1352	1486	1636	1736
Kansas	500	1064	1507	1646	1815
Montana	68	100	148	235	303
Nebraska	214	559	768	978	1070
Nevada	59	88	125	141	138
New Mexico	40	66	114	189	228
Oregon	157	268	371	463	593
Utah	120	171	214	240	244
Washington	77	155	238	364	476
Wyoming	27	40	75	110	185
TOTAL	4957	6900	8809	10766	12281

¹¹⁵ Millie Bisnett, a seventeen year old Oglala girl, told R. H. Pratt in a letter that she would write more often if she lived closer to the agency post office, see Millie Bisnett to R. H. Pratt, June 24, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 21249, Box 640, NARA (DC). Others had difficulty getting to their mail because of geography and the weather, see “Letter from C. W. H.,” *Word Carrier*, April 1890.

¹¹⁶ *Annual Report of the Postal Master General of the United States, 1870-1889*, compiled in Richard Helbock, *United States Post Offices*, Volumes 1-2 (2001), made digitally available by Cameron Blevins at <<http://www.cameronblevins.org/postal-data/>>.

FIGURE 14: GROWTH OF POST OFFICES IN VARIOUS STATES AND TERRITORIES, 1870-1889



Written language became an important tool for communication between Native peoples during the 1880s. Letters bridged the distance between families and friends, allowing them to keep in touch. Many Indians used letters for the first time out of necessity. With hundreds of Indian boys and girls sent off to live at boarding schools, often hundreds of miles away, concerned parents wrote to communicate with their children. Students regularly sent letters back home at the request of their parents, as an exercise in English class, or of their own free will.¹¹⁷ Parents also corresponded with school administrators and government officials concerning their children. During the 1880s, a great chain of correspondence was created among superintendents and parents, parents and students, and students to superintendents and agency officials.

At most Indian schools, letter writing was a specific skill taught alongside general literacy. The Hampton Institute claimed that in a few months their average students were able

¹¹⁷ Clerk in Charge to R. H. Pratt, May 31, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.19.50, Kiowa, Reel 18, NARA (OHS); Emma DeKnight to Agent Charles Adams, April 21, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.19.50, Kiowa, Reel 91, NARA (OHS); *ARCIA*, 1883, 226; David W. Adams, *Education for Extinction*, 249.

“to form short sentences, either in conversation or in little letters to his teachers or the friends at home.”¹¹⁸ Educators recognized the practical benefit of letter writing. In 1883, Laura Tileston, a fifth division English teacher at Hampton reported, “These are exceedingly bright boys...they are giving more particular attention to letter-writing, as that will be of the greatest service to them when they go home.”¹¹⁹ In his report of the Ponca School to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, the agent at the Pawnee, Ponca, and Otoe Agency in Indian Territory boasted:

The system of pupils writing business and social letters is, in my mind, very advantageous as it gives them an insight to business that older men and women would be glad to possess, many of these letters are simply grand both in composition and penmanship. Such proficiency is rarely observed in the states among white children.¹²⁰

Children at White’s Institute in Wabash, Indiana sent monthly letters (along with their report cards) to their parents, a common practice at most boarding schools.¹²¹ Roscoe Conkling sent his father his report card that showed “Very good” in “Work,” “Neatness,” “Conduct,” “Recreation,” “Conduct,” and “Health.” “I send my love to my mother and sister,” Conkling wrote, “I want you to wide a letter to me.”¹²² Topics varied, but students tried to keep their parents informed.¹²³ Students received important news from home, learning of illnesses or deaths of loved ones.¹²⁴

¹¹⁸ *ARCIA*, 1887, 267.

¹¹⁹ *ARCIA*, 1883, 167, 169.

¹²⁰ Agent Woods to CIA, May 16, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.19.77, Pawnee Ponca Otoe, Reel 17, NARA (OHS).

¹²¹ O. Bales to Crow Creek Agent, August 2, 1886, RBIA, RG 75.19.20, Crow Creek, Box 21, NARA (KC); O. Bales to Kiowa Agent, September 2, 1886, RBIA, RG 75.19.50, Kiowa, Reel 93, NARA (OHS).

¹²² Roscoe Conkling to Father (Name Unknown), September 30, 1889, RBIA, RG 75.19.50, Kiowa, Reel 93, NARA (OHS). (“I want you to [write] a letter to me.”)

¹²³ *The Indian Helper*, March 9, 1888; *The Indian Helper*, February 22, 1889; *The Indian Helper*, February 8, 1889; *The Indian Helper*, February 8, 1889; *The Indian Helper*, June 21, 1889; R. H. Pratt to Agent H. D. Gallagher, December 2, 1889, RBIA, RG 75.19.85, Pine Ridge, Copies of Misc. Letters Sent, Box 54, NARA (KC).

¹²⁴ Frank Wankicun to Agent James McLaughlin, January 14, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.19.113, Standing Rock, Misc. Corres. Received, Box 34, NARA (KC); *Twenty-two Years' Work of the*

Students also wrote to friends in order to hear news from the reservation.¹²⁵ Sometimes the distance between friends was unbearable. A boy at the Kiowa Agency wrote to his friend Orry Giving at Haskell, “I will let you know that my mother is dead, today is the third day since she die. I thought that I would like to see you little while and then you will return to school again because I do not feel well, may be when I meet you I will feel better, this is all I have to say.”¹²⁶ One Carlisle student complained in a letter back home that she was tired of writing letters each month without getting any replies. “If you should ask me a question when I get home and I will not answer your question would you think that I was very polite or impolite?” she reasoned.¹²⁷ Another student understood that those back home could not “write letter as well as we can because you never went to school like we. But you could get somebody to write for you and you can do the talking for yourself.”¹²⁸

Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute at Hampton, Virginia (Hampton, Virginia: Hampton Normal Press, 1893), 467-468; Lois Pretty Scalp to CIA, September 1, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 27654, Box 658, NARA (DC); Charles H. Smith to CIA, November 2, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 33932, Box 675, NARA (DC). In at least one instance, R. H. Pratt at Carlisle may have encouraged the censorship of his student’s letters to their parents. In 1890, Pratt answered the concerns of the chaplain at the Mount Vernon Barracks in Alabama, where a number of Apache had been held as prisoners since 1887. The prisoners were receiving letters from Carlisle students and the chaplain had some unknown concern about them. Pratt told him that he should act as postmaster and the officer in charge should “manage just how that should be done.” “There is more or less of discipline connected with it, and he being responsible should control,” Pratt recommended. While Pratt does not explicitly discuss restricting the prisoners’ incoming mail, it seems that is what he was referring to, see R. H. Pratt to Rev. W. Pierson, November 22, 1890, Richard Henry Pratt Papers, MSS S-1174, Outgoing Letters, Box 10, Yale Collection of Western Americana, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

¹²⁵ Johnson Lane to Friend (Name Unknown), October (Date Illegible) 1889, RBIA, RG 75.19.50, Kiowa, Reel 92, NARA (OHS).

¹²⁶ Friend (Name Unknown) to Orry Giving, November 7, 1889, RBIA, RG 75.19.50, Kiowa, Reel 92, NARA (OHS).

¹²⁷ *The Indian Helper*, March 3, 1888.

¹²⁸ *The Indian Helper*, March 3, 1888.

Parents did write back.¹²⁹ In letters sent east, parents often encouraged their children to succeed at boarding schools. While many parents were hesitant to trust white educators, some told their children to do all that they were told. One Ponca man wrote to his son at Carlisle in their Native language:

I say what I think in order to urge you to persevere. If you do well one of the good things which the white people teach you, you may become rich. Though it generally gives me much trouble not to see you for a single day, yet when they cause you to do one good thing, one thing which you can find, for the sake of your improvement, attend to it! I think that alone is good. There is no chance for us to continue to live as Indians, as we have been doing in the past: we walk towards the white people, and we follow them in carrying out their plans. That is it: you shall make me thankful to you if you do something well when the white people teach it to you.¹³⁰

Likewise, a Cheyenne named Bobtail wrote his son: “Those who went to Carlisle are on a good road. I think they will learn English fast and understand the white man’s road quickly. So they can bring it back to their people.”¹³¹ Brave Bull, a Lakota, used his friend Big Star to compose a letter to his daughter stating, “If you could read and write, I should be very happy.”¹³² Another wrote to his daughters, “I told you both before you went away how much I wanted you to learn English to read and write like white people.”¹³³

In 1880, Hampton Superintendent Samuel C. Armstrong provided the Commissioner of Indian Affairs several letters from parents to their children that illustrated the “Indian interest in the improvement of the children.”¹³⁴ No doubt the most favorable letters were selected, as

¹²⁹ *The Indian Helper*, March 9, 1888; *The Indian Helper*, June 27, 1890; *The Indian Helper*, August 1, 1890.

¹³⁰ Dorsey, 1891, 90.

¹³¹ Bobtail to Son, December, 15 1879 in David W. Adams, *Education for Extinction*, 249.

¹³² Brave Bull to Daughter, January, 4 1880 in David W. Adams, *Education for Extinction*, 252.

¹³³ Swift Bear to Rainwater and White Woman, April 17, 1880, *ARCIA*, 1880, 306; David W. Adams, *Education for Extinction*, 249.

¹³⁴ *ARCIA*, 1880, 184.

Armstrong was quite the fundraiser, but all seem to be authentic. A father from Crow Creek wrote:

My Son: I am going to write you a letter again. I want you to write letters to me often. I am glad that you are trying to learn...The boys down there, their fathers would like to go down and see them...Then they would like to send all their children. Learn to talk English; don't be ashamed to talk it.¹³⁵

Another father wrote, "I want you to learn how to be a printer. I want you to learn to talk English...If I was down there— if I saw all the boys down there, then I would come back and tell the Indians and they would be all glad. I hope some of the boys will learn to be a teacher, when they come back that they can teach the boys and girls." A brother told his sister, "I want you to learn all you can and learn something good, and God watch you all the time...That's the reason I let you go to Hampton."¹³⁶ Chief Wizi told his half brother that he wished he were young, "so I could go down and learn too. I want you to learn all you can and come back and teach your brothers. Try to learn and talk English, too."¹³⁷ Many parents and pupils familiarized themselves with the written word for the first time during this process.

Parents missed their children and letters allowed them to connect. Some parents desperately asked for letters from their children. This distress can be seen in the report of the agent in charge of the Pyramid Lake and Walker River reservations in Nevada who had to comfort the parents of a group of Paiute boys at the Grand Junction boarding school:

Judging from letters received of recent date by relatives and friends from these boys, they are apparently better contented with their new home than was anticipated...The parents of those who are in Colorado mourn them as lost, or as they would the dead, and are frequently at the office at daylight making inquiries as to their (the children's) welfare and asking for letters. It is really a pitiful sight to witness their distress and sorrow at times when they come to talk about the children and ask how many "moons" before they come home, while their

¹³⁵ *ARCIA*, 1880, 185.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*

appearance indicates that they had passed a restless night, or perhaps not slept any. At times I really feel sorry, and console them in every possible manner, by pointing out the advantages their children will derive by the change, and refer them to the letters of encouragement they receive.¹³⁸

Despite efforts to reassure parents, plenty of them asked their children to come home. Felix Iron Eagle told his father to “keep quiet” in reply to a request to come home, “I have a good chance to learn the English language, when I learn it better, then I can go home and help him all I can.”¹³⁹ Some parents wrote to their children in their Native language, which could leave those letters unread, especially at schools that only taught English. Letters were received by two Carlisle girls in 1887 from their mothers that were written in “Sioux.” Nobody at Carlisle could translate for the girls.¹⁴⁰ Another Carlisle student replying to a letter from home wrote that he was “pleased to receive” the letter, but he “couldn’t quite understand” it because it was written in “Indian language.” The student said he laughed at the Carlisle boys who tried to learn the Sioux language once they returned home. “If they learn in that way,” he wrote, “they will go backward...I hope your next letter will be written in English.”¹⁴¹

Many students wrote home to the parents to report their bad health, often asking to be sent back to the reservation.¹⁴² Paul Good Bear told his father that he was in the hospital, but

¹³⁸ *ARCIA*, 1887, 163. For other examples of letters from worried parents, see C. Otaakadi to Supt. Armstrong, January 3, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.19.113, Standing Rock, Misc. Corres. Received, Box 34, NARA (KC); Nicholas Rulean to CIA, May 12, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 14827, Box 622, NARA (DC).

¹³⁹ *The Indian Helper*, February 2, 1889.

¹⁴⁰ *The Indian Helper*, October 14, 1887.

¹⁴¹ *The Indian Helper*, March 3, 1888.

¹⁴² Agent H. D. Gallagher to R. H. Pratt, February 26, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.19.85, Pine Ridge, Copies of Misc. Letters Sent, Box 54, NARA (KC); Agent Charles Penny to R. H. Pratt, May 20, 1891, RBIA, RG 75.19.85, Pine Ridge, Copies of Misc. Letters Sent, Box 54, NARA (KC); Charles Penny to Supt. Lincoln Institute, August 6, 1891, RBIA, RG 75.19.85, Pine Ridge, Copies of Misc. Letters Sent, Box 55, NARA (KC); Charles Penny to Supt. Lincoln Inst., August 6, 1891, RBIA, RG 75.19.85, Pine Ridge, Copies of Misc. Letters Sent, Box 55, NARA (KC).

asked him not to cry.¹⁴³ Parents also wrote directly to school superintendents to inquire about the health of their children. Blue Tomahawk wanted his son Dennis, who was ill at Carlisle, to come home to Rosebud. He had recently lost two daughters to the same illness on the reserve. However, R. H. Pratt did not think that Dennis would survive the journey home, particularly in the cold winter weather. “I will write to you every day and tell you about your son,” Pratt promised Blue Tomahawk, but Dennis would not return home.¹⁴⁴ Dennis Tomahawk came to Carlisle with the first group of students from Rosebud and Pine Ridge in 1879. He died on January 19, 1881, eleven days after Pratt’s letter to Blue Tomahawk.¹⁴⁵

Other parents used letter writing to have their ill children sent home.¹⁴⁶ At Pine Ridge, White Cow Killer asked his agent via letter to help him persuade Pratt to send his sick son home

¹⁴³ Agent Ashley to R. H. Pratt, June 14, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.19.10, Cheyenne and Arapaho, Reel 33, NARA (OHS); Agent Charles Ashley to R. H. Pratt, June 14, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.19.10, Cheyenne and Arapaho, Letters Sent, Reel 32, NARA (OHS); Agent Ashley to R. H. Pratt, June 14, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.19.10, Cheyenne and Arapaho, Reel 33, NARA (OHS); Agent Charles Penny to R. H. Pratt, May (illegible date) 1891, RBIA, RG 75.19.85, Pine Ridge, Copies of Misc. Letters Sent, Box 54, NARA (KC); Charles Penny to R. H. Pratt, May (date illegible) 1891, RBIA, RG 75.19.85, Pine Ridge, Copies of Misc. Letters Sent, Box 54, NARA (KC).

¹⁴⁴ R. H. Pratt to Blue Tomahawk, January 19, 1889, Richard Henry Pratt Papers, MSS S-1174, Outgoing Letters, Box 10, Yale Collection of Western Americana, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

¹⁴⁵ Dennis Blue Tomahawk’s gravestone at the Carlisle Indian School Cemetery records his death on January 19, 1880, but Pratt’s letter to Blue Tomahawk regarding Dennis’ illness was sent in January 1881.

¹⁴⁶ Agents were sometimes suspicious of illness claims from students at off-reservation schools who asked to be sent home. They might ask confirmation from the school superintendent or ignore requests all together. See Agent Charles Adams to R. H. Pratt, January 1, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.19.50, Kiowa, Reel 18, NARA (OHS); Agent Charles Adams to R. H. Pratt, January 7, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.19.50, Kiowa Comanche and Wichita, Letters Sent, Reel 18, NARA (OHS). Agents and agency employees usually did what they could to have children returned to their parents because of illness or tragedy, even if school superintendents were hesitant. In order to get an Omaha boy home from the Genoa Institute to see his dying father, the Omaha agency physician (Susan La Flesche) and the agency school superintendent had to write to the Genoa superintendent. The Crow Creek agent urged the Genoa superintendent to send a girl home who had a chronic infection in her eyes (a common ailment for Indian pupils) and was in danger of

from Carlisle.¹⁴⁷ Fannie Pullian's mother had "information that her daughter was quite ill" at the Genoa Institute.¹⁴⁸ The mother asked the Pine Ridge agent to have Fannie sent home. Instead of depending on an agent, one concerned Arapaho parent wrote to Chief Left Hand hoping that he could find information on his sick children at the Haskell Institute.¹⁴⁹

Students informed their parents via mail when they were ready to leave school and return home permanently.¹⁵⁰ Some students wrote to their agents asking to be released from school, sometimes only for a short spell.¹⁵¹ James Ahatone, a Kiowa, wrote to Agent Charles Adams at the Kiowa, Comanche, and Wichita Agency to remind him that he was promised to be returned home after three years at Chilocco. "I always carried water for you when down at

going blind. See Susan La Flesche, et al to Supt. Genoa, January 17, 1889, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 5511, Box 505, NARA (DC); Agent A. P. Dixon to Supt. W. B. Backus, 1890 (undated), RBIA, RG 75.19.20, Crow Creek, Box 44, NARA (KC).

¹⁴⁷ H. D. Gallagher to R. H. Pratt, February 28, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.19.85, Pine Ridge, Copies of Misc. Letters Sent, Box 54, NARA (KC).

¹⁴⁸ Charles Penny to Supt. Genoa, August 20, 1891, RBIA, RG 75.19.85, Pine Ridge, Copies of Misc. Letters Sent, Box 55, NARA (KC).

¹⁴⁹ Agent Charles Ashley to Supt. Haskell Institute, October 31, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.19.10, Cheyenne and Arapaho, Reel 32, NARA (OHS).

¹⁵⁰ Agent Charles Penny to Supt. St. Francis Xaviers School, May 21, 1891, RBIA, RG 75.19.85, Pine Ridge, Box 9, NARA (KC).

¹⁵¹ David W. Adams, *Education for Extinction*, 236-238; Thomas Jackson to Agent Charles Adams, June 2, 1891, RBIA, RG 75.19.50, Kiowa Comanche and Wichita, Chilocco Indian School, Reel 91, NARA (OHS); Isaac Moore to Agent Charles Adams, RBIA, RG 75.19.50, Kiowa Comanche and Wichita, Haskell, Reel 92, NARA (OHS). Some wrote hoping to be enrolled at a school. Nettie Harrel at the Cheyenne and Arapaho Agency wrote directly to the Lincoln Institute with the hope of returning to school there. Her father finally consented, she had asked him "but he did not feel as though he could let me return, but I begged him so hard that he had to say yes," see Nettie Harrel to Miss Tyler, November 25, 1889, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 34070, Box 573, NARA (DC). Annie Boswell asked the Commissioner if her two brothers at the Lincoln Institute could join her at Carlisle. Annie Boswell to CIA, October 14, 1889, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 29620, Box 562, NARA (DC); Supt. Lincoln Institute to CIA, October 28, 1889, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 30584, Box 565, NARA (DC); R. H. Pratt to CIA, November 4, 1889, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 31687, Box 567, NARA (DC). Annie's older brother had already gone home. The Lincoln superintendent determined that it was best for the younger brother to remain at Lincoln. The CIA and Carlisle agreed.

school...answer soon,” Ahatone wrote Adams, hoping a favor in return.¹⁵² A year later, Ahatone, still at Chilocco, tried again, telling Agent Adams that he just finished his fourth year. Both he and Jerry Rush, an Apache, wanted to come home.¹⁵³

If requests to visit home were denied, some students used the mail to supersede the authority of their school superintendents by asking their agents or the Commissioner of Indian Affairs for the privilege.¹⁵⁴ Thomas Ikinicapi wrote to the Commissioner in Washington DC twice, in December 1888 and January 1889, hoping to return to Cheyenne River.¹⁵⁵ Logan Weston found that the lessons at Genoa were too easy, he had already spent three years at Hampton, which left him feeling like he was wasting his youth. “I want to learn all I can while I am young,” he wrote to the Commissioner. Weston wanted to leave school and start his own farm.¹⁵⁶ Josiah Patterson told the Commissioner that his eyes were failing him and he could not

¹⁵² James Ahatone to Agent Charles Adams, June 2, 1891, RBIA, RG 75.19.50, Kiowa Comanche and Wichita, Chilocco Indian School, Reel 91, NARA (OHS).

¹⁵³ James Ahatone and Jerry Rush to Agent Charles Adams, June 6, 1892, RBIA, RG 75.19.50, Kiowa Comanche and Wichita, Chilocco Indian School, Reel 91, NARA (OHS).

¹⁵⁴ George Baker to CIA, April 3, 1889, RBIA, Registers of Letters Received, 1881-1907, Microfilm Publication P2186, Roll 34, Letter 8618; Maurice Walker to CIA, April 3, 1889, RBIA, Registers of Letters Received, 1881-1907, Microfilm Publication P2186, Roll 34, Letter 8619; Edward Star to CIA, May 1, 1890, RBIA, Registers of Letters Received, 1881-1907, Microfilm Publication P2186, Roll 40, Letter 15485; George Little Beaver to Supt. Charles Robinson, December 10, 1888, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 30575, Box 493, NARA (DC); Lewis Miller and C. Redwolf to CIA, February 18, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 5728, Box 597, NARA (DC); Pine Ridge Agent to Hattie Longwell, May 19, 1891, RBIA, RG 75.19.85, Pine Ridge, Copies of Misc. Letters Sent, Box 54, NARA (KC).

¹⁵⁵ Thomas Ikinicapi to CIA, December 6, 1888, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 30013, Box 492, NARA (DC); Thomas Ikinicapi to CIA, January 4, 1889, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 398, Box 496, NARA (DC). He was allowed home in July 1889, but died in December 1891, see *Twenty-two Years' Work*, 366. Ikinicapi had a close relationship with Susan La Flesche while at Hampton, but the it ended when La Flesche left for medical school, see Benson Tong, *Susan LaFlesche Picotte, M.D.* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1999), 78.

¹⁵⁶ Logan Weston to CIA, January 3, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 433, Box 583, NARA (DC).

“do any good” at Haskell. He believed that it was time for him to make “a living” for himself.¹⁵⁷ “I lost a position by coming here in order that I might learn a trade,” he wrote, “but they put me in school and I only work half days so therefore I am dissatisfied.” Similarly, Edward Snake wanted to leave Carlisle after the school year because he wanted to “work at my land at home...I know I cannot learn anything if I keep on this way.”¹⁵⁸

Two Elks, Thomas Bear Robe, W. H. Babby, James Bobb, and other parents took to the mail to have their children returned to them.¹⁵⁹ Writing from Rosebud, Joseph Garneaux tried to get his son returned home from Genoa, but the superintendent claimed he did not have the authority to release the young man. He wrote the Commissioner that he was promised by the former superintendent that his son would only be at Genoa for one year. Garneaux was “suffering from the rheumatism” and he needed his son to help. “At times I am confined to my bed and have to turned and cared for by some one,” he explained.¹⁶⁰ Long Pumpkin, a Rosebud Brulé (whom historian George Hyde called both a “brainless warrior” and an “empty-headed warrior”), wrote to the Commissioner in October 1890 to ask that his son be returned from

¹⁵⁷ Josiah Patterson to CIA, September 6, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 27725, Box 658, NARA (DC).

¹⁵⁸ Edward Snake to CIA, March 21, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 8886, Box 606, NARA (DC).

¹⁵⁹ W. H. Babby to CIA, March 27, 1889, RBIA, Registers of Letters Received, 1881-1907, Microfilm Publication P2186, Roll 34, Letter 8326; H. D. Gallagher to CIA, April 6, 1889, RBIA, Registers of Letters Received, 1881-1907, Microfilm Publication P2186, Roll 34, Letter 9175; Pine Ridge Agent to Two Elks, December 2, 1891, RBIA, RG 75.19.85, Pine Ridge, Copies of Misc. Letters Sent, Box 55, NARA (KC); Agent Charles Ashley to R. H. Pratt, October 26, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.19.10, Cheyenne and Arapaho, Letters Sent, Reel 32, NARA (OHS); James Bobb to Supt. Charles Meserve, December 19, 1892, RBIA, RG 75.19.50, Kiowa Comanche and Wichita, Haskell, Reel 92, NARA (OHS).

¹⁶⁰ Joseph Garneaux to CIA, August 13, 1889, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 23175, Box 546, NARA (DC). The letter seems to have been written by the Rosebud agent for Garneaux.

Genoa.¹⁶¹ He claimed the superintendent promised him that if he sent one of his daughters to the school that the son could go home. Long Pumpkin said he was “lame and not able to work” (he was shot in the leg during the aftermath of Spotted Tail’s murder by Crow Dog in 1884), his “old lady” was “not able to work” either, and all five of his children were in school.¹⁶² “Please ask the superintendent to allow my boy to come,” he wrote, “I will help you all I can and am a friend to you all.”

Students wrote to their agents back home asking for information or assistance. A Kiowa student at Haskell wrote to his agent asking if he could get him and his little brother into White’s Institute in Indiana. He had been at Haskell for almost six years, but he did not want to go home because he was afraid his mother would not let him go off to another school. “I want to learn all I can while I have a chance to,” he wrote (the student was also “very sorry” that some of the returned Haskell boys were dancing).¹⁶³ John Inkanish, a Caddo writing from the Kiowa, Comanche, and Wichita Agency, complained to his agent that some Chilocco boys and girls were being allowed to come home early. He asked that the Chilocco superintendent be reprimanded because some of the students were dancing but not learning “how to talk English language.”¹⁶⁴ Others wrote home to their agents just to let them know how things were going.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶¹ George E. Hyde, *A Sioux Chronicle*, 168; George E. Hyde, *Spotted Tail’s Folk: A History of the Brule Sioux* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1961), 343.

¹⁶² Long Pumpkin to CIA, October 22, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 33019, Box 673, NARA (DC); George E. Hyde, *A Sioux Chronicle*, 168.

¹⁶³ Unknown Student to Kiowa Agent, November 1892, RBIA, RG 75.19.50, Kiowa, Reel 92, NARA (OHS).

¹⁶⁴ John Inkanish to Kiowa Agent, July 8, 1891, RBIA, RG 75.19.50, Kiowa Comanche and Wichita, Chilocco Indian School, Reel 91, NARA (OHS).

¹⁶⁵ Delos Lonewolf, a student at the Chilocco boarding school, asked his agent to send more students to his school. “I know lots of children want come but there folks won’t let them come,” he wrote, “they ain’t got sins [sense] enough to send there boy to school,” see Delos Lonewolf to Agent W. D. Myers, July 18, 1889, RBIA, RG 75.19.50, Kiowa Comanche and Wichita, Chilocco Indian School, Reel 91, NARA (OHS). Henry Inkanish wrote home to defend his

Returned students kept in touch with friends and teachers back east, reporting news of employment, illness, or important life events like marriage.¹⁶⁶

Traveling Indians also used the postal service to keep in touch with their families back at the reservation. Letters allowed Indians like Kaxé-ǰ^Nba, a Ponca, to communicate his thoughts to his child who had left home:

My child, before you went, I was not poor at all. When you departed, I was very poor. I always remember you, and I greatly desire to see you. It is not probable that there will be any way for me to get to see you. I am sad because you went so far away. I hope to hear good words from you. I send you this when there is no moonlight. Enough.¹⁶⁷

Other Poncas made similar expressions to absent loved ones. “When I do not see you I am poor, but when I see you I am not poor,” a man wrote.¹⁶⁸ Letters were also written to express love.

One boy at Carlisle wrote to a prospective sweetheart, “I have thought in writing to you and

school, Chilocco. He heard that some Caddo chiefs were upset that their children were made to pull plows in the field. Inkanish told his agent that this rumor was not true, they had horses and mules that did that. “I have never seen anybody pull plow since I been here,” he wrote, “you tell them to send some other chief again to see this school right.” Inkanish believed that some of the Kiowa boys must have told the visiting chiefs a lie or they just saw them plow a little line for strawberries, see Henry Inknaish to Agent Charles Adams, May 13, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.19.50, Kiowa Comanche and Wichita, Chilocco Indian School, Reel 91, NARA (OHS). A pair of Oglala boys got themselves into some trouble for passing notes through a fence to pupils at the Holy Rosary Mission. The Pine Ridge agent accused the boys, Leonard White Bird and William Little Bull, of “creating disturbance...by improper practices,” and threatened to punish them as harshly “as the law prescribes” if they did not stop. It is not known what information the notes contained or why that information seemed to be so damaging to the minds of the pupils, but the illicit communications were passed during the ghost dance troubles at Pine Ridge, see Agent D. F. Royer to Rev. John Jutz, November 3, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.19.85, Pine Ridge, Copies of Misc. Letters Sent, Box 54, NARA (KC).

¹⁶⁶ *The Indian Helper*, January 18, 1889; *The Indian Helper*, February 22, 1889; *The Indian Helper*, March 29, 1889; Mary McHenry Cox to I. G. Wright, March 7, 1891, RBIA, RG 75.19.96, Rosebud, Letters Received, Box 5, NARA (KC).

¹⁶⁷ James Owen Dorsey, *The Cegiha Language*, 476.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 485.

request whether we can agree and constant of friendship or not. Please see about the matter and give the information with cause.”¹⁶⁹

Spouses separated by distance could now correspond. George Miller, an Omaha man who was off the reservation trying to earn money, instructed his wife (in letters written in the Omaha language) to attend to their children, to use the sitting room as a corn granary, to make a belt for their friend Frank La Fleche, and “do whatever you think is right.”¹⁷⁰ He was upset that his wife did not write more letters to him, “day after day I am constantly thinking about my children, and I wish to hear how they are,” he wrote.¹⁷¹ A month later, in reply to a letter from his wife, Miller wrote that his efforts to make money were a “total failure,” but he still was able to stuff ten dollars in the envelope.¹⁷² He told his wife that he thought of her every day and that he was sad, but he would return home. Letter writing also gave Indians a means to find lost loved ones. Frank Black Hawk worked off the reservation, two months in a coal mine and then as a farmer for \$1 a day, but he could not get his brothers at Standing Rock to reply to his letters. He had to write to the agent there to find out where they were.¹⁷³ Mazantanka (John Lynde), who described himself as a “halfbreed,” wrote to the agent at Fort Totten in search of his mother. In 1868, as a boy, he had been taken by soldiers at Fort Totten (Devil’s Lake Agency) to Fort Bennett (Cheyenne River Agency). Separated by more than three hundred and fifty miles, he had not seen his mother since the day he was kidnapped. “I also wish that you would find out

¹⁶⁹ *The Indian Helper*, September 31, 1888.

¹⁷⁰ James Owen Dorsey, *Omaha and Ponka Letters*, 117.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 111.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, 121.

¹⁷³ Frank Black Hawk to Agent James McLaughlin, November 26, 1891, RBIA, RG 75.19.113, Standing Rock, Misc. Corres. Received, Box 34, NARA (KC).

whether my mother is still living or not,” he requested, “I forgot my mother’s name I was very small when I left Fort Totten with the Soldiers.”¹⁷⁴

Some used the mail to convey bad news to those off the reserve. Others used the written word to express their last thoughts or wishes before death.¹⁷⁵ In 1879, an Omaha man on his death bed and surrounded by his loved ones dictated a letter (written in the Omaha language) to a Yankton man named Tuqmaxa-witcayutapi (Honey Eater). “Though I am very ill I send you a letter by some one,” he wrote, “often in the past, when I returned home after visiting you, a letter would come from you, just like a person (to ask for presents for the Yanktons)...I am ill, but I do not know at all whether I shall live or die.”¹⁷⁶ Spotted Tail Jr. had his last will and testament put to paper before he was to “travel the ‘starry trail’ in route to the happy hunting grounds” in 1888.¹⁷⁷ He promised dozens of his possessions to friends and family. Whirlwind Soldier got his buffalo shield, Thunder Hawk his head dress, Big Turkey his bear claw necklace, Sky Bull his bonnet of eagle feathers, High Bear his porcupine scalp shirt, and Running Antelope got his Omaha dance outfit. Luke Shield left a suicide letter before he took his life in May 1890. According an agent, Shield, who had been struggling to find his place at Standing Rock after his return from an eastern boarding school, wrote that he “knew he had done a great wrong and was now going to punish himself for his weakness.”¹⁷⁸ Shield reportedly felt immense shame for

¹⁷⁴ John Lynde to Agent James McLaughlin, May 22, 1881, *James McLaughlin Papers*, Microfilm Roll 2, Assumption College (Richardson, ND), 1968.

¹⁷⁵ John Arnold to Cheyenne River Agent, October 18, 1888, RBIA, RG 75.19.11, Cheyenne River, Box 249, NARA (KC).

¹⁷⁶ James Owen Dorsey, *Omaha and Ponka Letters*, 69. Parentheses added by Dorsey in his translation.

¹⁷⁷ Spotted Tail Jr.’s Last Will and Testament, Lebbeus Foster Spencer Collection, MSS 596, History Colorado Stephen H. Hart Library and Research Center, Denver, Colorado.

¹⁷⁸ Agent H. D. Gallagher to Agent James McLaughlin, June 3, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.19.85, Pine Ridge, Copies of Misc. Letters Sent, Box 54, NARA (KC).

abandoning his first wife at Standing Rock (whom his agent compelled him to marry because of one night of romance) and marrying another woman at Pine Ridge who did not know about his first marriage.¹⁷⁹

Letter writing became a normal part of life for many Indians of the West during the 1880s. This practice, which was once a specialized skill, developed into a collective habit. As a result, correspondence began to connect those who lived on different reservations. For instance, between 1881 and 1893, at least sixty letters were received by the Southern Utes in southwest Colorado from the Northern Utes at the Uintah and Ouray Agency in Utah. Those letters survive because the Southern Ute agent kept them with the rest of the agency's official correspondence and records (something that most Indian agents did not do - the letters written by the Southern Utes in reply do not survive). The early letters from the Northern Utes were composed by their agent, who simply transmitted the thoughts of a Ute leader or leaders in the third person (the letters begin with "Sapparrano wishes me to express" or "wants me to write...to tell your Indians"), rather than transcribing the Ute's words in the first person. But after 1886, most of the letters were written by the Indians themselves or by an interpreter/transcriber. Their letters carried news, information, and well-wishes between the two groups, who shared many relatives and friendships. At least two dozen letters from the Northern Utes to the Southern Utes relayed

¹⁷⁹ Elaine Goodale Eastman, "A Hasty Conclusion," in *The Midland Monthly*, Vol. II, No. 3, September 1894 (Des Moines: Johnson Brigham Publisher), 192-199. While at Standing Rock, Luke Shield wrote to a former teacher: "Miss A. Brown: My dear friend, This is not good place to live. No church on Sunday, and I never see any of the boys I know. Indians here all too wild. Dance all the time. I like to work but the agent did not have anything for me to do. I cut sixteen loads of hay. I am very glad for it. I saw one girl yesterday. She like me very much and maybe I marry her. What think? Please write to me soon as you take this letter. I shake hands with you in my heart. I remember you always. Yours truly friend, Luke Shield. Please ask them to sing 118 for me."

bad news.¹⁸⁰ Sapporano and Red Moon wrote to Buckskin Charley and Ignacio that one of their headmen, Touasanca, drowned in the Green River (“he was a very good old man and everybody here regrets his death”), two others had died, and two girls were sick, but “everything is all right here and the Utes are fat, happy, and contented and would like you to write them a letter.”¹⁸¹ In November 1890, the Northern Utes reported two deaths. “We will inform you of all deaths that may happen here at anytime in the future,” they promised, “All my brothers and sisters have died and left me all alone and I will have to die sometime can’t help all from dying sometimes, the Dr can’t help people from dying sometime...All die sometime large and small, old and young.”¹⁸² A Northern Ute man wrote that his brother drowned in the Grand River on their way to visit the Southern Utes in Colorado (he had found the body and buried it). The man asked his friends at the Southern Ute Agency “to write me a letter as I am all alone and want

¹⁸⁰ Uintah and Ouray Agent to Southern Ute Agent, December 22, 1886, RBIA, RG 75.19.18, Consolidated Ute, Decimal Files, Box 2, NARA (Denver); Chepeta to Ignacio, March 8, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.19.18, Consolidated Ute, Decimal Files, Box 1, NARA (Denver); Charley, et al to Ignacio, et al, March 8, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.19.18, Consolidated Ute, Decimal Files, Box 2, NARA (Denver). Both letters have the same handwriting; Chepeta to Buckskin Charley, et al, March 8, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.19.18, Consolidated Ute, Decimal Files, Box 2, NARA (Denver); Northern Ute to Buckskin Charley and other Utes, May 10, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.19.18, Consolidated Ute, Decimal Files, Box 2, NARA (Denver); Northern Ute to Buckskin Charley and others, June 7, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.19.18, Consolidated Ute, Decimal Files, Box 2, NARA (Denver); Charley Shawanaux to Buckskin Charley and others, June 21, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.19.18, Consolidated Ute, Decimal Files, Box 2, NARA (Denver); Charley Shawanaux to Buckskin Charley and others, July 4, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.19.18, Consolidated Ute, Decimal Files, Box 2, NARA (Denver).

¹⁸¹ Sapporano, et al to Buckskin Charley, et al, March 19, 1887, RBIA, RG 75.19.18, Consolidated Ute, Decimal Files, Box 2, NARA (Denver).

¹⁸² Elk, Ignacio, Johnson Smith to Buckskin Charley, et al, November 1, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.19.18, Consolidated Ute, Decimal Files, Box 2, NARA (Denver).

something to comfort me.”¹⁸³ His wife and son, his last, died earlier in the year. “I think it is to God that I should loose so many of my children,” he grieved.¹⁸⁴

The Utes were not the only group who relied on the written word. Many tribes were in communication with one another during the 1870s and 1880s. Letters allowed tribes to maintain relationships with others. Small pox ravaged the Omahas and Poncas in 1878 and the letters exchanged reflected the loss and allowed the tribes to grieve collectively. “Your elder brother is dead...Your daughter had twins. Both died...Scabby Horn, your father, is almost dead. He will die before you see him,” one wrote.¹⁸⁵ Another letter, from October 1878, was sent to “tell you that the people have died.”¹⁸⁶ Four were dead, including the recipient’s father. “Our people are very sick, so my heart is not very good...the people usually die in five days. The sickness is bad,” an Omaha told a Ponca. “My heart is far more sad than tongue can tell,” another wrote.¹⁸⁷ Letters also allowed tribes to offer their neighbors condolences.¹⁸⁸

Indians also used the mail to ship gifts to friends at distant agencies.¹⁸⁹ Young Man Afraid of His Horses at Pine Ridge sent a box express with two pipes to High Chief at the Cheyenne and Arapaho Agency in Oklahoma.¹⁹⁰ Red pipestone pipes seemed to be a hot

¹⁸³ Rooriguts to Southern Ute Agent, August 8, 1891, RBIA, RG 75.19.18, Consolidated Ute, Decimal Files, Box 2, NARA (Denver).

¹⁸⁴ Rooriguts to Southern Ute Agent, February 16, 1891, RBIA, RG 75.19.18, Consolidated Ute, Decimal Files, Box 2, NARA (Denver).

¹⁸⁵ James Owen Dorsey, *The Cegiha Language*, 476.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 497.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 502.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 486, 491.

¹⁸⁹ Augusta Achin, a Pueblo, shipped a loaf of bread from New Mexico to Carlisle, PA in 1887, see *The Indian Helper*, December 23, 1887; “August Achin,” RBIA, RG 75.20.3, Carlisle, Entry 1327, Box 58, Card 2909.

¹⁹⁰ Capt. Charles Penny to Agent Charles Ashley, July 7, 1891, RBIA, RG 75.19.85, Pine Ridge, Copies of Misc. Letters Sent, Box 55, NARA (KC), Agent Charles Ashley to Capt. Charles Penny, July 20, 1891, RBIA, RG 75.19.85, Pine Ridge, Misc. Corres. Received, Box 28, NARA (KC).

commodity among Omaha and Ponca letter writers. Several letters specifically ask for them to be sent by mail. In 1879, the Omaha chief Mantcu-nanba wrote to his Yankton friend, chief Feather-in-the-Ear (Wi Ya Ko Mi), to “beg” for “some claws of grizzly bears, send them to me in the mail-bag from your post-office.”¹⁹¹ The Pawnees in Indian Territory had sent Mantcu-nanba a letter wanting a necklace of bear claws and he wanted to oblige them. Mantcu-nanba promised Feather-in-the-Ear that he would “do my best and get something in return from them.” It is impossible to know how many packages were sent by Native peoples during the 1880s, but in 1890, the Postmaster-General reported that “Indian pipes and tomahawks” filled the service’s Dead Letter Office.¹⁹²

Letters were also used to warn other tribes of danger. Mantcu-nanba wrote to Feather-in-the-Ear to warn the Yanktons of an outbreak of small pox that was spreading in the south among the Omahas. Mantcu-nanba instructed the Yankton to ask “for medicine among the white people...If you are vaccinated you will not have the small-pox.”¹⁹³ Shim-a-raff, a Northern Ute at the Uintah Agency, wrote a letter to his brother Snake Pete, who was visiting the Southern Ute Agency, to warn that a man wanted to kill him. According to Shim-a-raff, one of the men who was traveling with Snake Pete was found dead in the woods. That man’s brother believed that Snake Pete was responsible. “I want you to come back home as soon as you can,” Shim-a-raff

¹⁹¹ James Owen Dorsey, *The Cegiha Language*, 722. Dorsey translated the Omaha word “i-amádi” (meaning “where they carry them on their back) as “mail-bag.”

¹⁹² *Annual Report of the Postal Master General of the United States*, 1890 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1890), 28.

¹⁹³ James Owen Dorsey, *The Cegiha Language*, 732. Dorsey translated the Omaha word “zégicái” (which literally means “they prescribe for you”) as “vaccination.”

urged his brother.¹⁹⁴ Similarly, Waqpeca, an Omaha, warned Unajin-ska, a Ponca, via letter that soldiers would probably arrest him if he tried to visit the Omahas.¹⁹⁵

Letters also allowed Indians to keep informed on the political affairs of other Indians groups living hundreds of miles away. In 1879, Cañge-skă, an Omaha man, wrote in his Native language to his Yankton friend Feather-in-the-Ear hoping to hear “a correct account of the various affairs of the Dakota tribes up the Missouri River” and “of the various affairs of you own nation, and what they are doing.”¹⁹⁶ Another Omaha man wrote to a Yankton friend, “I hope that you will send and tell me exactly how you are, and what you are doing. I wish to see those young Dakotas whom I made my children (in the pipe-dance). I failed to visit them in the year that they named to me.”¹⁹⁷ The Omaha man asked to acquire a calumet, “such as they use in the pipe-dance,” from another Yankton family, “and dance the calumet dance for his children.”¹⁹⁸ The Omaha man also addressed the Oglala chief Red Cloud in the letter. He asked Red Cloud to “ask that my petition be granted as a personal favor to you” when he went to Washington. The Omaha man wanted to talk to the President “about several matters,” he explained, “when the Omahas reach the Yankton village, tell them what you will give me. When you come to the Yankton lodges, send me a letter quickly. I wish to hear from you.”¹⁹⁹ Indians also discussed intertribal relations in letters to members of their own tribes. In 1878, an Omaha wrote to his grandson that he had shaken hands with the Brulé Lakota Spotted Tail. “It was for no special

¹⁹⁴ Shim-a-raff to Snake Pete, August 6, 1891, RBIA, RG 75.19.18, Consolidated Ute, Decimal Files, Box 2, NARA (Denver).

¹⁹⁵ James Owen Dorsey, *The Cegiha Language*, 730.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 720.

¹⁹⁷ James Owen Dorsey, *Omaha and Ponka Letters*, 74-75. Parentheses added by Dorsey in his translation.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 80.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 69.

reason that I shook hands,” he said, “yet it was good. It was very good for me to shake hands with him.”²⁰⁰ The man also wanted to hear “which of the nations” his grandson was “on good terms” with.

Some used the mail to ask other tribes for assistance. In 1885, Sitting Bull received a letter from Gabriel Dumont, one of the Métis leaders of the North-West Rebellion in Saskatchewan. Dumont hoped that Sitting Bull could help the Arikaras and Gros Ventres (living in at the Fort Berthold and Fort Belknap agencies respectively) secure a pass to Canada to help the Métis, Crees, and Assiniboine in their revolt against the Canadian government. The letter was written in a combination of French, English, and Native language and Sitting Bull asked Aaron Wells, an assistant farmer at Standing Rock of Native and European descent, to read it to him. “They must think I am a fool,” Sitting Bull reportedly said after hearing Dumont’s wishes.²⁰¹ He knew that the U. S. government would never allow the Arikara and Gros Ventres to enter a rebellion against the Canadian government. Another Lakota leader, the Brulé chief Spotted Tail, used letters to communicate with other Indian groups like the Omaha as early as 1879.²⁰² He was using interpreters to send letters as early as 1877.²⁰³

Indians from different reserves also used letters to discuss and organize protests against government policies like the Dawes bills. In May 1889, as the Sioux were confronted with a

²⁰⁰ James Owen Dorsey, *The Cegiha Language*, 480. Older Omaha men commonly addressed younger Omaha as “my grandchild,” even outside of kinship. These two men may have not been genetically related, see Dorsey, *The Cegiha Language*, 505.

²⁰¹ Typescript excerpts from the unpublished memoirs of Philip Faribault Wells, "95 Years Among the Indians of the Northwest," Walter Stanley Campbell Collection, Box 117, Western History Collections, University of Oklahoma.

²⁰² James Owen Dorsey, *Omaha and Ponka Letters*, 64.

²⁰³ R. Eli Paul, *The Nebraska Indian Wars Reader, 1865-1877* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1998), 164. Spotted Tail wrote to General George Crook during the Great Sioux War in 1877.

revised Sioux Bill, a white trader at Pine Ridge reported to the Commissioner that an “anonymous letter originally sent to Red Cloud” was being circulated among the Pine Ridge Indians.²⁰⁴ The letter suggested that the Sioux should “get together” to organize a united front against the bill before the Commissioner visited the Sioux agencies. The trader could not obtain a copy of the letter to send to the Commissioner. It was, of course, kept secret from whites, which was a common practice. Many Indians did not want the government to read their private letters, especially letters that could be used against them by agents. Their letters were kept private, and consequently, are rarely found in government archives today.

FIGURE 15: “HOME OF CHIEF RED CLOUD,” CIRCA 1890, DENVER PUBLIC LIBRARY, X-31434



²⁰⁴ Edward Asay to CIA, May 11, 1889, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 13851, Box 523, NARA (DC).

But Indian Affairs records reveal that Natives throughout the west communicated with one another in order to combat land cession. In September 1889, a special agent told the Commissioner of Indian Affairs that Red Cloud, because of his “strong influence,” received a lot of letters “from those of influence scattered over the Indian nation asking his advice not only in relation to this Bill but on many of the topics that pertain to the Government and the Indians.”²⁰⁵ Indians who could not travel the distance to Pine Ridge could council with Red Cloud via letter. Even those who were visiting Pine Ridge wrote letters to Red Cloud. In 1891, a number of Lakotas from surrounding reserves asked the Oglala “permission to remain” at Pine Ridge through letters to Red Cloud.²⁰⁶ It seems the written language became a part of Red Cloud’s daily life. A photograph of Red Cloud’s home (on previous page), taken in 1890 or 1891, shows a small shelf above a cast iron stove next to the chief’s quilt-covered bed. On the shelf sat books, stacks of paper, and a couple bottles of ink.²⁰⁷

Letter writing became an important component in the communications of nineteenth century Plains and Great Basin Indians. Although literacy was meant to be a tool of American

²⁰⁵ G. W. Parker to CIA, September 13, 1889, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 26149, Box 554, NARA (DC). Six weeks earlier, the Secretary of the Interior asked the CIA to do what he could to limit the influence of Red Cloud and to recognize American Horse “as the chief of the Sioux,” see Sect. Int. to CIA, July 1, 1889, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 17191, Box 531, NARA (DC). Even those who were in favor of allotment could express their opinions to members of other tribes. In 1889, an Omaha man wrote to a Ponca friend, “We Indians in all parts of the country will become citizen: although we are not white people by birth, we know that only when we imitate the white men in working can we hope to prosper continually,” see James Owen Dorsey, *Omaha and Ponka Letters*, 115.

²⁰⁶ “Letter from the Secretary of the Interior in Relation to the Affairs of the Indians at the Pine Ridge and Rosebud Reservations in South Dakota,” March 16, 1892, Ex. Doc. No. 58, *Executive Documents of the Senate of the United States for the First Session of the Fifty-Second Congress, 1891-'92*, Vol. V (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1892), 50.

²⁰⁷ Red Cloud’s wife Pretty Owl sits on the bed. The couple’s wall was also decorated with Catholic imagery, American flags, and even a Japanese samurai sword. For some speculation on how Red Cloud acquired the sword see Peter Bleed, “Indians and Japanese Swords on the North Plains Frontier,” *Nebraska History* 68 (1987): 112-115.

colonization, the writing that was produced by Native Americans, their thoughts and expression, could not be colonized. Indians, even those considered to be non-progressive, used the skill in ways that they determined. Maqpiya-qaga, an Omaha man who apparently considered himself a traditionalist, told the Ponca chief Standing Grizzly Bear in a letter that he was “disgusted” with the progressive group of his people “because they do not wish to be Indians.”²⁰⁸ He was upset that the progressive Omaha wanted to diminish the influence of chiefs, “to live as white men and to throw away the Indian life.” Maqpiya-qaga used literacy to tell a member of a foreign tribe about the political divisions within his own tribe. Even though he was a non-progressive, Maqpiya-qaga considered the written word to be a part of Indian life.

²⁰⁸ James Owen Dorsey, *The Cegiha Language*, 486-487.

CHAPTER 2 – “Going to Get the Mail to It”: Writing to the White World

In July 1890, in the midst of the ghost dance excitement, Feather-in-the-Ear (Wi Ya Ko Mi), a Yankton chief, wrote to the Secretary of the Interior and the Commissioner of Indian Affairs to ask if he could get a horse and a wagon that were not being used at the Yankton Agency. “My grandchildren have all died this summer and I am a poor old man,” he wrote, “but I want to go and see some of my friends at other Agencies, but I have no good horse.”¹ Feather-in-the-Ear usually asked his agent for such things, but the agent “always says he will write to Washington about it and it is so long before we hear so I thought I would get a man to write a letter straight to you.” He added, “When you answer me I want you to send the letter to me because we wrote a letter to Washington once and the answer came back to the Agent and he never showed us the letter but told us about it and we did not like that way of doing business.”² But by writing a letter directly to Washington, Feather-in-the-Ear, like many American Indians of the late nineteenth century, found a way to carry his voice through the immense forest of bureaucracy that had been planted around his people.

The Bureau of Indian Affairs was created by the U.S. government to control the Native populations of the west. Hundreds of employees and millions of federal and private dollars supported a system of education, food rations, and other forms of assistance, but Indians still had a difficult time getting what they required. Agents, special agents, subagents, assistant farmers, clerks, superintendents, teachers, and other government employees were hired to manage the thousands of Indians living on reservations in the west. The government built a system that

¹ Feather-in-the-Ear to Secretary of the Interior, July 25, 1890, Letter 22983, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Box 645, NARA (DC).

² Ibid.

required rules and regulations, documents, receipts, and record keeping. Permissions had to be obtained, letters had to be sent, communication between the west and Washington DC had to transpire. All of this was done to limit Native American independence, to keep them away from the white world while the younger generation could be assimilated through education and agriculture. Feather-in-the-Ear became frustrated with the procedure his people had to follow to get something as basic as a horse and wagon. Not only did he not trust his agent to convey his opinion to Washington, he did not trust the agent to accurately tell him Washington's instructions. Feather-in-the-Ear and many others used letter writing to communicate with the white world directly.

Most chiefs and headmen believed that the best way to guarantee that their voices were being heard was to visit Washington and discuss matters with the Commissioner or the President face-to-face. Understandably, tribes wanted to send delegations to Washington so they could personally receive and witness assurances and promises from the government. Men could know with certainty that their concerns were heard. Tribes often sought permission to send a delegation, but some individuals took it upon themselves to request a visit. Red Cloud asked to visit Washington to discuss the Dawes Bill in March 1889 and again in January 1891 and February 1891 to settle the ghost dance troubles.³ Many other individuals made the request to visit Washington D.C.: White Swan (Miniconjou from Cheyenne River) in June 1888, Wolf Chief (Fort Berthold) in December 1888 and September 1889, Cloud Chief (Southern Cheyenne) and Left Hand (Southern Arapaho) in March 1889, High Snake (Winnebago) in February 1890,

³ H. D. Gallagher to CIA, March 14, 1889, *Registers of Letters Received, 1881-1907*, RBIA, Microfilm Publication P2186, Roll 34, Letter 7250; Red Cloud to R. V. Ball, January 26, 1891, RBIA, RG 75, Special Cases, 1821-1907, SC 188, Box 200, NARA (DC); Red Cloud to William J. Pollock, February 5, 1891, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 5164, Box 703, NARA (DC);

Washakie and the Northern Shoshone in January 1891, Good Lance (Pine Ridge Oglala) in January 1891.⁴ Those who were allowed to make the trip were seen to hold great responsibility and men often disagreed about who should represent their people in Washington.⁵ Some felt that the delegations chosen by their council or by the agent did not represent their wishes.⁶

Letters gave Indians another path to Washington. They could write to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, the President, congressmen, or to white allies directly, no matter their standing with their people. Because the government controlled every aspect of their affairs while confining them to ever-shrinking reservations, letter writers sought self-determination and tried to improve their lives. “We are here on this land like prisoners that’s what I don’t like now,” John Half Iron wrote from the Santee Agency in December 1889.⁷ Half Iron told the Indian

⁴ CIA to Agent Charles McChesney, July 13, 1886, RBIA, RG 75.19.11, Cheyenne River, Box 570, NARA (KC); Wolf Chief to CIA, December 29, 1888, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 368, Box 496, NARA (DC). Wolf Chief to CIA, September 21, 1889, *Registers of Letters Received, 1881-1907*, RBIA, Microfilm Publication P2186, Roll 37, Letter 27453; Cloud Chief and Left Hand to CIA, March 18, 1889 (telegram), RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 7477, Box 509, NARA (DC); Cheyenne Arapaho Agent to CIA, March 18, 1889, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 7497, Box 509, NARA (DC); High Snake to CIA, February 28, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 6321, Box 598, NARA (DC); Good Lance to CIA, January 30, 1891, RBIA, RG 75, Special Cases, 1821-1907, SC 188, Box 200, NARA (DC); Washakie, et al to the President, January 31, 1891, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 5896, Box 704, NARA (DC).

⁵ See White Eagle to CIA, May 6, 1889, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 13082, Box 521, NARA (DC).

⁶ In October 1889, George Sword from Pine Ridge, who identified himself as a progressive, explained his displeasure with certain members of a Sioux delegation heading to Washington. Writing to Senator Charles Manderson, Sword argued that the men chosen did not “conduct themselves in a manner that will advance civilization.” He understood that these men were allowed to go to Washington because they had agreed to allotment, but he thought it crucial that the government took the opportunity to “push us on towards civilization” by allowing “new men...to take hold and those old Chiefs take a back seat.” A trip to Washington would only give the chiefs more influence. See George Sword to Sen. Manderson, October 31, 1889, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 32329, Box 569, NARA (DC).

⁷ John Half Iron to Herbert Welsh, December 16, 1889, *Indian Rights Association Papers, 1864-1973*, Microfilm Roll 15, Historical Society of Pennsylvania (Glen Rock, New Jersey: Microfilming Corp. of America, 1974).

Rights Association that he wanted a Commissioner of Indian Affairs who wanted to help the Indians, who would “now let us free and not to have us lock up.” His people wanted autonomy on their own lands, freedom from the control of agents and their excessive rules. Half Iron, who was sixty-four years old at the time, was not a chief, but he was able to express his frustration to a powerful ally, with the hope that the Santees’ situation might change. “I always say something when I can,” he told the Indian Rights Association.

During the 1880s, Native Americans used literacy in attempts to reestablish their sovereignty. The U.S. Postal Service allowed Indians to question the power of the federal government and make their thoughts known to white America. In December 1889, Sam White Bird, Iron Nation, Killing White Buffalo and nine other Lower Brulé wrote to the office of W. H. Wills & Co., pension, patent, and claim attorneys in Washington D.C., to seek assistance in their fight with the government. The Lower Brulé were poor, but they did not want to sell their land. They hoped that a lawyer could make public the injustices done to them. They wanted the press to get involved. “We give you this letter and you going to send it some newspapers in every cities,” they directed.⁸ “That is the reason we give you this letter,” White Bird wrote, closing the letter with a pledge: the men were “going to get the mail to it.” Instead of relying on petitions or letters to officials, Sam White Bird and his friends sought help from the American public.

⁸ Sam White Bird, et al to W. H. Wills & Co., December 30, 1889, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 1456, Box 498, NARA (DC). Unfortunately, W. H. Wills & Co. simply forwarded the letter to the chief of the Land Division of Indian Affairs because it did not “pertain” to “matters...exactly in our line.” See W. H. Wills & Co. to C. A. Maxwell, January 15, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 1456, Box 486, NARA (DC).

FIGURE 16: ORIGIN AND NUMBER OF INDIAN LETTERS SENT TO THE COMMISSIONER OF INDIAN AFFAIRS, 1890

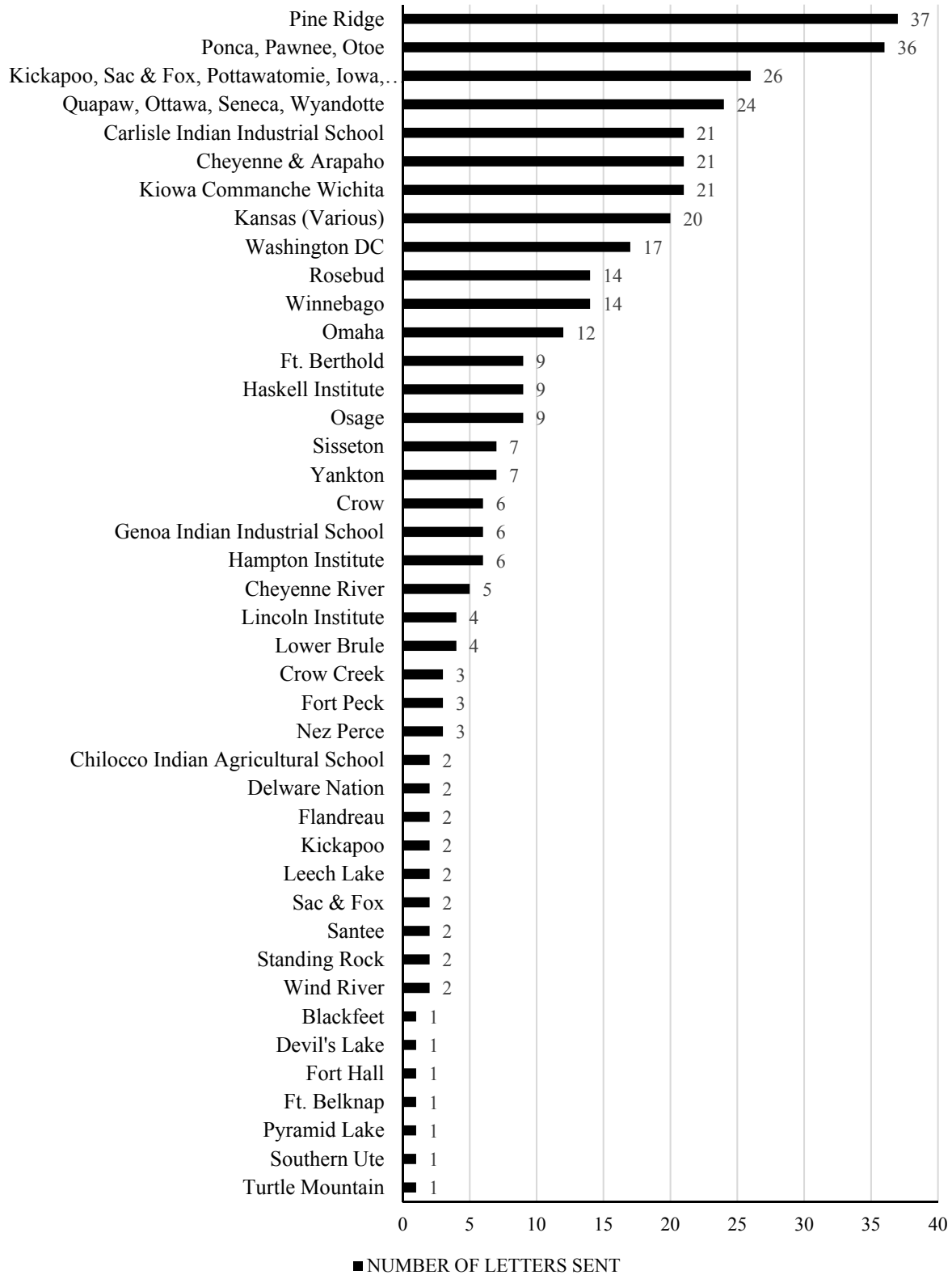
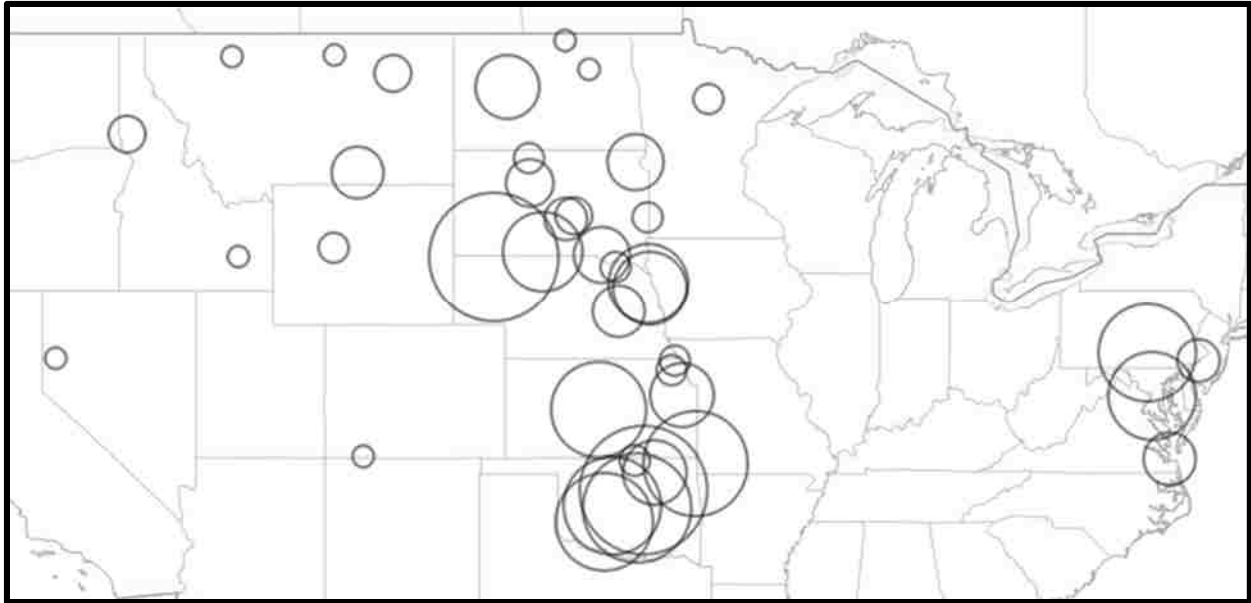


FIGURE 16: ORIGIN AND NUMBER OF INDIAN LETTERS SENT TO THE COMMISSIONER OF INDIAN AFFAIRS, 1890 (CONT.)



Petitions were a common way for tribes to communicate with the federal government. They represented the desires, grievances, and proposals of a tribe or band, usually signed by a select number of headmen, but could also be signed by hundreds. The documents could be composed by white hands, but the words and their intent were carefully chosen by Indians. Petitions were written in English so that they could be read by government officials, but on occasion they were written in the Native language of the tribe with an English translation attached at the end. Indians who could sign their names usually did and those who could not left their “X” or “touched the pen-handle.”⁹ In the 1880s, petitions were often used by various tribes to obtain the things that were owed to them. In August 1889, for instance, the Arapahos at Wind

⁹ For a look at the negotiations and misunderstandings in Plains treaty councils, see Raymond J. DeMallie, “Touching the Pen: Plains Indian Treaty Councils in Ethnohistorical Perspective,” in *Major Problems in American Indian History*, ed. Albert Hurtado and Peter Iverson (Lexington, MA: D.C. Heath and Company, 1994), 344-355.

River petitioned the President for more rations, clothes, wagons, barbed wire, and farm implements.¹⁰ The words of Black Coal, Sharp Nose, Little Wolf, White Horse, Eagle Head, and Bill Friday were all recorded by the letter writer and mailed to the Commissioner. In October 1889, a group of thirty-three Yanktons petitioned for more horses, cows, and pigs and help with building houses and making wells, which “would go towards civilizing” the Yanktons.¹¹ These types of petitions were common and most tribes used them to remind the government of their obligations. However, petitions were not always written as a series of requests or demands. They were often written as a communal letter that relayed information to important officials to keep them connected to the reservation. In 1871, for instance, a group of Santees recently assigned to the Santee Sioux Agency in Nebraska sent a petition to the president (written in Dakota Sioux with English translation attached) to inform him of their situation, “because you always have at heart the interest of your children, and, as we believe, are desirous of knowing the truth about them.”¹² The government received at least seven petitions from the Santees from 1871 through 1876. Petitions were also used to gather information from the government, to investigate the intent of Indian Affairs, Congress, or the President, and to question their ideologies. In a December 1888 petition, Little Wound, Young Man Afraid of His Horses, and Red Cloud at Pine Ridge asked what the President wanted them to do that they had not already done, “we dress like white people and send our children to the school.”¹³ They argued that they

¹⁰ Arapaho Indians to CIA, August 30, 1889, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 25344, Box 552, NARA (DC).

¹¹ Yankton Indians to CIA, October 16, 1889, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 30369, Box 564, NARA (DC).

¹² Santee to the President, February 20, 1871, Letters Received by the Office of Indian Affairs 1824-1881, Microcopy No. 234, Roll 768, Santee Sioux Agency, 1871-1876 (Washington: National Archives Microfilm Publications, 1958).

¹³ Little Wound, et al to CIA, December 10, 1888, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 716, Box 496, NARA (DC).

paid “more attention to what [the President] says than his white children do,” and wondered why they were the ones being mistreated.

Many Indians felt that Native-penned petitions and letters were necessary because, like Feather-in-the-Ear, they believed agents could not be relied upon to convey their complaints to the Commissioner for them. For instance, the Tongue River Cheyennes complained to Major Henry Carroll of the 1st Cavalry that they were not receiving enough food and clothing rations or sufficient tools for farming. No homes were built for them and there was not enough room at the school for their children. “They did not believe the Great Chief at Washington knew how they were situated,” Carroll reported to his superior, “as they thought their Agent did not write many letters.”¹⁴ Likewise, an Omaha named Two Crows complained to another Indian that agents did not write to the President when the Omaha asked them. “They say that they have written for us,” Two Crows petitioned, but “the agents do not speak the truth.”¹⁵ Two Crows and other Omaha headmen needed to be heard by the President, so they sent their own letters. Even if agents wrote letters, they could not always be trusted to write what Indians asked them to write.

Some Natives relied on trustworthy whites to write letters for them. The Yanktons told the Commissioner of Indian Affairs that they got a man to write a letter for them “who will tell what we want to say and not what he thinks.”¹⁶ However, Indian leadership did not always trust white letter writers and by the end of the 1880s, most letters received by government officials were written by literate Indian men and women. For extremely urgent matters, relying on white men to relay concerns seemed risky. For example, in early 1889, beef and flour rations were late

¹⁴ Copy Major Henry Carroll to Post Adjutant Fort Custer, May 24, 1889, Letter 156XX (Illegible), RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Box 527, NARA (DC).

¹⁵ Dorsey, 1891, 32.

¹⁶ Running Bull, et al to CIA, November 6, 1889, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 33002, Box 571, NARA (DC).

to arrive at the Kiowa, Comanche, and Wichita Agency and the Indians there were starving. According to Eugene E. White, the agent at the time, the Kiowa council agreed that if they used a white man to write a letter explaining their desperate situation for them, they would not know for sure if their sentiments would make it into the letter.¹⁷ The council eventually decided that writing a letter to Washington was useless anyway, because Washington never responded. Their pessimism was cultivated out of experience, but luckily, the rations eventually made it to the reservation.¹⁸

Some agents regulated the flow of mail in and out of their reservations. Censorship was a common tactic by agents to control the Indians they managed. In 1879, Gahige, an Omaha man, wrote to a Ponca named Heqaka-mani to explain the difficulties of getting a letter to the Poncas. The Ponca agent “usually conceal from the Ponkas the letters that we sent them,” he wrote, “they do not give them the letters; therefore we hesitate about asking the favor (of the Ponca agent).”¹⁹ Gahige wanted to hear “the true account” of Red Cloud’s words after Heqaka-mani’s visit with the Oglala Sioux. Like many groups, the Nez Perces used letters to the Office of Indian Affairs

¹⁷ Eugene E. White, *Service on the Indian Reservations: Being the Experiences of a Special Indian Agent While Inspecting Agencies and Serving as Agent for Various Tribes* (Little Rock: Diploma Press, Arkansas Democrat Company, 1893), 312-316.

¹⁸ There were Kiowa who were capable of writing to Washington in 1889, and some did. Perhaps the Kiowa council thought a letter transcribed by an agent would carry more weight. Joshua Given, a highly educated, ordained Kiowa, asked the Kiowa agent to write to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs for him (to seek permission for Kiowa and Comanche leaders to visit Washington). Given wrote to the Commissioner multiple times, but in this instance he sought a higher authority to do the writing. Agent Charles E. Adams to CIA, February 5, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.19.50, Kiowa, Reel 18, NARA (OHS). Mistrust not only fell on whites. In 1892, Kiowa leaders accused Joshua Given of purposely misleading them as a translator during the Jerome Commission negotiations. The Jerome Commission was tasked to convince the Kiowa, Comanche, and Wichita to accept allotment. See Linda D. Smalling, *From Satank to Joshua Given: the Assimilation of the Kiowas* (MA Thesis, University of Central Oklahoma, 1994), 68-81.

¹⁹ James Owen Dorsey, *Omaha and Ponca Letters*, 44. Parentheses added by Dorsey in his translation.

to express complaints against their agents and agency employees. But in 1883, after a letter of complaint was determined to be written under false identity, the Nez Perce agent suggested that all Indian correspondence to and from Indian Affairs should be read by the agency before being delivered to the recipient. The agent reasoned that “Indians receive letters from the Indian Office containing information which they cannot understand, but pretend to, and interpret it to their friends as they see fit, and in many instances cause unpleasant feelings between the agent and his Indians until the letters are correctly interpreted to them.”²⁰

The Commissioner’s office was also at times suspicious of letters and petitions sent to them by Indians. They questioned the authorship of some letters, believing that the words of illiterate men could be easily fabricated or altered by dishonest literate Indians or whites. Wind River Agent John Foshier claimed that a petition sent to the Secretary of the Interior by forty five Northern Arapaho contained accounts fabricated by the white man who wrote the document, Joseph Magill, editor of the *Wind River Mountaineer*.²¹ Agent Foshier told the Commissioner that because Magill was Catholic, he seemed “to delight in stirring up trouble, whenever an opportunity offers, and say anything, no difference how absurd, against the management of the Indian Office.”²² He blamed the “outside influence” for keeping the Arapaho “in a constant ferment,” only complaining of “unfair treatment by the Government” because of Magill and others. It is not clear if Foshier’s accusations against Magill were justified, but the Arapahos undoubtedly played a role in putting the Wind River agent to task. Unfortunately, agents generally had the autonomy to deal with Indians in the manner they saw fit. Even if Indians

²⁰ *ARCIA*, 1883, 59.

²¹ Joseph Magill to Sec. Int., January 7, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 1750, Box 696, NARA (DC).

²² Agent John Foshier to CIA, February 5, 1891, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 1750, Box 696, NARA (DC).

addressed their protests to a higher authority, the agent could simply deny the charges, which usually satisfied the Commissioner.

Letter writing was a tool used by Natives to improve their situation and to give them a sense of control over the governmental decisions made on their behalf. In letters to agents, the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, or to white allies like the Indian Rights Association, Natives criticized government policies and employees, demanded assistance, and offered their opinions on agency decisions, like the hiring and firing of agents, farmers, and teachers. Letters were also written in support of government employees, including agents and interpreters.²³ Because agents were the most significant government force in their lives, Indians tried to influence who would be hired to direct their reservations. Red Cloud and other Pine Ridge Oglalas sent petitions indorsing James Cook as their future agent.²⁴ Many of the Pine Ridge Oglalas were disappointed with the Commissioner's decision not to renew the employment of their agent H. D. Gallagher in 1890. The Oglala William Selwyn as well as Spotted Horse and Standing Soldier wrote letters to the Commissioner for the retention of Gallagher.²⁵ Many others, however, wrote in opposition of their agents. Complaints against agents filled the Commissioner's desk. Little Wound,

²³ Agent H. D. Gallagher to CIA, March 25, 1890, *Letters Sent to the Office of Indian Affairs by the Pine Ridge Agency 1875-1914*, Microfilm Publication M1282, Roll 10 (Washington DC: National Archives, 1985); Flandreau Indians to CIA, December 12, 1889, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 1706, Box 498, NARA (DC); Thomas West to IRA, February 20, 1891, *Indian Rights Association Papers, 1864-1973*, Microfilm Roll 16, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

²⁴ S. Barker to CIA, March 12, 1891, *Registers of Letters Received, 1881-1907*, RBIA, Microfilm Publication Number P2186, Roll 44, Letter 10318.

²⁵ William Selwyn to CIA, November 22, 1889, *Registers of Letters Received, 1881-1907*, RBIA, Microfilm Publication Number P2186, Roll 37, Letter 34347; Spotted Horse and Standing Soldier to CIA, March 10, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 7857, Box 603, NARA (DC).

Young Man Afraid of His Horses, and Red Cloud told the President that they did not want Agent McGillicuddy rehired because “none of the Indians want him.”²⁶ There were plenty of other “good men to select from.” Peter Decora, a Winnebago, complained that his agent helped the men who refused to send their children to school, rather than helping those who try to help themselves.²⁷ He believed that the agent ignored certain government employees who made a habit of drinking and had more than one wife. “But nobody ever says anything to them,” Decora protested. Henry Fisherman, a Lower Brule at Cheyenne River, told the Commissioner that his agent would not arrest a man that was trying to cause trouble with him. The agent and the police were putting men in the guard house for minor offenses, such as dancing, arguing, selling wood, or “one boy goin to sporte for the girls,” but they would not put the man who wanted “to fight” him, Swift Hawk, in the guard house.²⁸ Swift Hawk responded with a letter of his own to the Lower Brulé agent. He claimed he was only trying to stop Fisherman and Eagle Horse from illegally cutting green timber. He had reported them before, “but it seems nobody take any notice of it.”²⁹

Some struggled to express their displeasure with their agents because of their inexperience with written English, but they tried anyway. Homer H. Clark told the Commissioner that his agent at the Crow Creek reserve, Major Dixon, “did many wrong,” but he

²⁶ Little Wound, Young Man Afraid of His Horses, and Red Cloud to the President, December 10, 1888, RBIA, RG 75.19.85, Pine Ridge, Copies of Misc. Letters Sent, Box 54, NARA (KC).

²⁷ Peter Decora to CIA, January 18, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 2095, Box 588, NARA (DC).

²⁸ Henry Fisherman to CIA, January 21, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 2490, Box 589, NARA (DC).

²⁹ Swift Horse to Lower Brule Agent, January 29, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 3958, Box 592, NARA (DC). The Lower Brule agent referred the matter to the Commissioner, but he believed that Fisherman was at fault, cutting timber “for speculative purposes,” see Agent W. W. Anderson to CIA, February 5, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 3958, Box 688, NARA (DC).

could not elaborate what the agent did. He asked the Commissioner to talk to White Ghost because he could not say “very well in English.”³⁰ S. H. Fine made similar complaints about his agent several months earlier. “I am very sorry to tell you about this Agent his not good man any how only got mad at to Indians all the time,” he wrote.³¹ Fine hoped to undermine the power of his agent.

In the summer 1890, a group of Western Shoshones in Nevada used an anonymous letter writer to express their displeasure with their agent to the Secretary of the Interior. The Shoshones accused Agent Plumb of selling them grass seed that belonged to the government. The agent’s wife, according to the men, was using government rations to supply her restaurant on the reservation. They complained that Agent Plumb did not “hear that Indians,” he never visited with them, and he did not “care for them all he cares is to fix up everything around his own place – he got nice garden and takes all the water from the poor Indians he dresses his children and wife all in Indian calico and shoes and poor Indians have no change of clothing.”³²

³⁰ Homer H. Clark to CIA, February 2, 1891, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 5983, Box 704, NARA (DC). White Ghost had sent a letter of complaint against his agent in April 1890. See White Ghost and Truth Teller to CIA, April 1, 1890, *Registers of Letters Received, 1881-1907*, RBIA, Microfilm Publication P2186, Roll 39, Letter 15739.

³¹ S. H. Fine to R. H. Pratt, June 21, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 18284, Box 632, NARA (DC).

³² Anonymous to SI, undated, rec’d August 2, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 23611, Box 647, NARA (DC). At least one other anonymous letter of complaint against an agent was sent to the CIA in 1890, originating from Fort Peck Indians. See Anonymous to CIA, February 8, 1890, *Registers of Letters Received, 1881-1907*, RBIA, Microfilm Publication P2186, Roll 39, Letter 5290. For other letters of complaints against agents, see Frank White to CIA, December 13, 1889, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 36309, Box 579, NARA (DC); Short Horn to CIA, August 5, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 24627, Box 649, NARA (DC); Agent H. D. Gallagher to CIA, April 17, 1890, *Letters Sent to the Office of Indian Affairs by the Pine Ridge Agency 1875-1914*, Microfilm Publication M1282, Roll 10 (Washington DC: National Archives, 1985); Benjamin Damon to R. H. Pratt, June 13, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 21249, Box 640, NARA (DC).

Running Bull, Feather-in-the-Ear, White Swan, and three other Yanktons complained that their agent was intentionally preventing them from voicing their opinions to him. They informed the Commissioner that the Yankton agent would only council with a group of thirty men he selected. “These 30 men are not the representatives of the nation,” they protested, “we the Chiefs and Headmen are the proper representatives of the nation according to the treaty.”³³ The Yankton agent was attempting to diminish the influence of the chiefs over their people by limiting their contact with the government, but Running Bull, Feather-in-the-Ear, and White Swan knew that they could correspond with the Commissioner directly.

Indian letter writers hoped to expose the inadequacies of their agencies, but agents often used their power to limit criticism. In November 1889, Two Strike, High Hawk, and the Brulé leadership at the Rosebud Agency wrote a letter of complaint against their agent, J. George Wright, to Nebraska senator C. F. Manderson, requesting that he forward it to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs.³⁴ They claimed that the agent’s interpreter threatened to take away their ration tickets if they made any complaints, but the Brulé complained anyway. They wanted their educated boys hired for agency positions including interpreter. They wanted a new head farmer and more rations because people were starving. They said that agency inspectors would not speak with them when they came for inspections. They appealed:

Great Father we are men same as the white people, Born under the same Sun that Shines for all, Lead By the same God that uses all persons alike. We are trying to work and make a living. But Great Father if you could only learn the truth of how we are treated you as well as our God would have pity on us.

³³ Running Bull, et al to CIA, November 6, 1889, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 33002, Box 571, NARA (DC).

³⁴ Two Strike and High Hawk to Hon. C. F. Manderson, November 20, 1889, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 34692, Box 575, NARA (DC).

The men also wrote that they were fully aware of all the injustices at the other Sioux agencies “because we visit one another.”

The letter initiated an official investigation headed by an inspector, who interviewed High Hawk about the situation. This interview provides a rare glimpse into High Hawk’s letter writing process and explains how the Rosebud Brulé decided to express their complaint as a tribe. The inspector asked High Hawk if he wrote the letter to the “Great Father.”³⁵ High Hawk told him that he did write to the Commissioner and that a Mr. Shaw (Amberson Shaw of Valentine, Nebraska) wrote the letter for him. According to High Hawk, the Agent Wright continually ignored the Brulé’s request to talk. Wright “said he was busy and would not talk,” High Hawk alleged, “we waited a few weeks and came again, but he would not talk. We tried him the third time without success. Then we got mad.” The Brulé decided to write the letter because they “thought the agent did not want to listen to us so we went to someone who would.” The inspector then asked High Hawk: “who was in the council that authorized the writing of that letter?” High Hawk replied, “the leaders of this tribe.” “The whole Nation, or only a few?” “All the people,” High Hawk affirmed. High Hawk and White Horse traveled to Valentine, Nebraska to visit Shaw to have their people’s complaints put into words. The inspector, however, believed that the letter pressed Shaw’s agenda, but he never explained what that agenda was.

³⁵ Testimony of High Hawk and others, April 26, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 13660, Box 619, NARA (DC). Amberson Shaw owned a store and photography studio in Valentine, Nebraska and performed as a knife thrower in a wild west show. He was a white man and former scout who had close contact with the Lakota after his marriage to a Lakota woman (whom he had four children with, including Rev. Dallas Shaw). He served as an interpreter and lived on Rosebud for a time. By 1890, he had a new white wife. See “Captain Amberson G. Shaw” in *Compendium of History, Reminiscence and Biography of Western Nebraska* (Chicago: Alden Publishing Company, 1909), 492-493.

Other Rosebud headmen, however, had a favorable opinion of Agent Wright. After the agent was removed from his position in August 1890, Swift Bear, Quick Bear, and eight other “progressive” headmen, wrote the President that Wright was honest and knew “how to do business for us.”³⁶ They thought the agent’s removal was a mistake because it would take the new agent “two or three years to learn how to run an agency and look to our wants.” More than once in the past, they argued, a new agent would come in a ruin all of the progress made. When Wright arrived, “he took charge – put life into us and made our hearts strong – and we went to work again.” Even Hollow Horn Bear, who had been critical of Wright weeks earlier, put his mark to the letter.³⁷

Word of the Brulé’s troubles with the Rosebud agent reached Cheyenne River. A group of men at Cheyenne River, including White Swan, Charger, Swift Bird, Hump, and eight others wrote to the Commissioner to not only express their grievances with their own agent, but the Rosebud agent as well. “We heard by some reliable Indians from Rosebud Agency,” the men wrote, “that some Indians who belonged there wanted to see [their agent] about their wishes, but he did not opened the door for them and express himself that he did not wish to hear them.”³⁸ They wanted the Commissioner to make sure agents were getting to their offices at 7:00 AM to open their doors and “let the Indians come in and see that agent to ask him anything he wants.” White Swan and the others also hoped that more transfers could be granted to those wanting to

³⁶ Rosebud Indians to CIA, October 23, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 33608, Box 674, NARA (DC).

³⁷ Hollow Horn Bear to the President, CIA, September 13, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 29579, Box 664, NARA (DC).

³⁸ White Swan et al to CIA, June 9, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 18265, Box 632, NARA (DC).

move to other agencies. Lastly, the men wanted more work given to the Indians and mixed-blood rather than to white men.

Indians regularly wrote letters of criticism against agents for not providing government jobs for their people, especially those recently returned from boarding schools. Helen Onion at the Crow Agency asked her old superintendent at Carlisle, Richard Henry Pratt, to help get her a job at the agency. The Crow agent, she wrote, was “not good.”³⁹ Plenty Living Bear at Rosebud had the same complaint. His agent “just gave a white people to do things to work at the Agency some of the school boys has nothing to do.”⁴⁰ Lois Pretty Scalp wrote that he had an opportunity to work off the Crow reserve at Fort Custer, but his agent would not let him leave. “I have been away from the Indians for 7 years and here I came home to work for my people,” he told the Commissioner.⁴¹ Kias Red Wolf at the Cheyenne and Arapaho Agency told Pratt that his agent did little for the returned pupils and there was “a great deal of dissatisfaction.”⁴² William Little Elk, a thirty-year-old Southern Cheyenne and former Carlisle student, reported that many of the returned students “are going back in Indian ways...because there is no work to do.”⁴³ Little Elk wondered, “how we going to keep up the way that we have learn?” “If you want us to do right to want us become like whites do something for us,” he argued, “sent something that we may work

³⁹ Helen Onion to R. H. Pratt, June 8, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 18556, Box 633, NARA (DC).

⁴⁰ Plenty Living Bear to R. H. Pratt, June 29, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 20195, Box 637, NARA (DC).

⁴¹ Louis Pretty Scalp to CIA, September 1, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 27654, Box 658, NARA (DC).

⁴² Kias Red Wolf to R. H. Pratt, June 16, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 21249, Box 640, NARA (DC).

⁴³ William Little Elk to R. H. Pratt, June 14, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 20195, Box 637, NARA (DC).

at and that will bring us something to keep up.” Little Elk suggested that the government should build “all kinds” of shops on every Indian Agency.

Saketopa wrote to his agent, James McLaughlin at Standing Rock, to ask for a job. According to Saketopa, others would not work because they wanted to dance. He accused McLaughlin of not giving him a job because “people tell you not to give me work, And so you done do...But I will ask you for myself.”⁴⁴ Frank Conroy, a twenty-two year old man at Rosebud, asked the Commissioner for help finding a job as a blacksmith. The Commissioner had personally told Conroy to write to him if he needed any help after he left school. “I am not shame to say that I could work just well as a white man could do,” he wrote.⁴⁵ Ralph Eagle Feather also at Rosebud told the Commissioner that he went to Carlisle from 1879 to 1882 where he “learned how to talk English, to read, to write and also learned how to work, my trade is the carpenter trade...I learned my trade just as well as the white man could do it.”⁴⁶ But Eagle Feather was frustrated with the situation that returned students found themselves in on their return to the reservation. There was little opportunity to practice their trades, “that’s the reason a good many students return to their old Indian habits again,” he believed. Most white educators wanted boarding school students to return to their agencies in order to serve as a good model of civilized life for the uneducated. But Eagle Feather saw this as a lost opportunity for those students. “It should be the duty of every Indian school...as well as the Indian agent...to forward

⁴⁴ Saketopa to Agent James McLaughlin, January 3, 1888, *James McLaughlin Papers*, Microfilm Roll 2, Assumption College (Richardson, ND), 1968.

⁴⁵ Frank Conroy to CIA, August 5, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 24626, Box 649, NARA (DC).

⁴⁶ Ralph Eagle Feather to CIA, January 20, 1891, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 6842 (with 8742), Box 710, NARA (DC).

Indian youth and worthy Indians of any age into civilized life,” he argued, “and to constantly direct the attention of all Indians [to] that.”

In March 1890, thirty Yankton chiefs and headmen petitioned to give Indians preference in appointments to any position on the agency “which they are competent to fill.”⁴⁷ They needed competent Indians employed as agency farmers and interpreters who could speak the Native language and operate machinery. “Our young people who have attended school” should be encouraged, they wrote. Thomas Tuttle, a Hampton graduate at the Crow Creek agency, argued that not enough was being done to assist the progressive Sioux. It was the Christian Indians at Crow Creek who were doing all they could “to induce the non-progressive Indians to labor in civilized pursuit,” not the agency employees.⁴⁸ “We think the young men and the good men who are wanted to be civilized ought to be allowed, encourage and grant their wish to start in the civilize life so the others can see and follow them,” he wrote, “but if we are going to wait until the old people are gradually converted from the old heathen habits as they are doing the past years, they would never soon be civilized. While the good men and young men will suffer for want of the life of civilization.”

Letters of application from Indians for government jobs were received by agents and the Commissioner. William Selwyn wanted to be the interpreter and clerk at the Sisseton Agency, George Means, a recent Carlisle graduate, inquired about a position at Pine Ridge (He would later find a clerk job at Rosebud), and Frank Locke submitted his desire and qualifications to be a

⁴⁷ Yankton Indians to CIA, March 27, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 10472, Box 610, NARA (DC).

⁴⁸ Thomas Tuttle to CIA, undated, rec'd May 5, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 13928, Box 619, NARA (DC).

blacksmith at Rosebud, including his certificate from Carlisle.⁴⁹ White Shield and a few young men at the Cheyenne and Arapaho Agency wanted to carry the mail for the postal service.⁵⁰

Indians also wrote to criticize the Indian police at various reservations. A group of Yanktons complained that their agency's head of police, John Grey Face, was not a Yankton and did not "respect" their people.⁵¹ A year later, seven Yankton headmen charged Grey Face of murdering Waktekdi in 1865 in a drunken rage, fighting a man for courting his daughter in 1873, knocking down a man in 1887, freeing a prisoner who was a relative in 1888, not arresting a relative of his in September 1890, and helping a rapist escape trial in October 1890.⁵² The Yanktons also accused Henry Stricker, a judge of the Indian court, of raping Poor Bear's wife in 1876, stealing wood in 1880, fighting One Bull in 1885, drawing a gun on David Stricker in 1890, and not trying his son for rape in 1890. They charged another judge, Red Horse, of fighting, raping another man's wife, and attacking Standing Buffalo. The Yankton agent, E. W. Foster, told the headmen that their charges were "trifling," but the Yanktons still requested that their letter be sent to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs.

⁴⁹ William Selwyn to CIA, November 18, 1889, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 33527, Box 572, NARA (DC); William Selwyn to CIA, November 19, 1889, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 33622, Box 572, NARA (DC); George Means to Agent D. F. Royer, October 30, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.19.85, Pine Ridge, Misc. Corres. Received, Box 27, NARA (KC); Frank Locke to Pine Ridge Agent, March 21, 1891, RBIA, RG 75.19.85, Pine Ridge, Misc. Corres. Received, Box 30, NARA (KC). Locke had lost his previous blacksmith position at the agency in 1889 (making \$10 per month and working alongside Paul Eagle Star, see *The Indian Helper*, July 26, 1889) because of poor planning by the agent.

⁵⁰ Benjamin Williams to Agent, May 28, 1879, RBIA, RG 75.19.10, Cheyenne and Arapaho, Box 472, NARA (OHS).

⁵¹ Running Bull, et al to CIA, November 6, 1889, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 33002, Box 571, NARA (DC).

⁵² Yankton Indians to E. W. Foster, undated (rec'd by Foster in November 1890), translated copy, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 37633, Box 684, NARA (DC).

Swift Bird at Cheyenne River wanted their lieutenant of police dismissed because he was not able to prevent some of the Sioux from leaving Cheyenne River for Pine Ridge during the ghost dance troubles.⁵³ Cloud Chief, who claimed that he was a progressive Cheyenne, wanted the captain of the Cheyenne and Arapaho Agency Indian police removed because he was a non-progressive. He also wanted the agency farmer removed.⁵⁴ Others, however, supported the police. The Kiowa chief Lone Wolf (the Younger) asked the Commissioner to give his agency's police a raise (although the lieutenant of the Indian police, Koh-ty, transcribed the letter for Lone Wolf).⁵⁵ Others realized a need for additional police. Noheart asked his agent at Cheyenne River for an additional policeman to support the one policeman at the camp at the mouth of the Moreau River.⁵⁶

Because they did not believe their agent was treating them fairly, Grindstone and James Little Eagle sent their complaints about the character of certain policemen (and some head farmers) at the Standing Rock Agency directly to the Commissioner.⁵⁷ They alleged that the policemen attended dances and gave away their horses, rations, and clothing. Some had more

⁵³ Swift Bird to Agent P. P. Palmer, November 20, 1891, RBIA, RG 75.19.11, Cheyenne River, Box 570, NARA (KC).

⁵⁴ Cloud Chief, et al to CIA, December 4, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 38384, Box 685, NARA (DC). According to the Cheyenne and Arapaho agent, the letter was written for Cloud Chief by Leonard Tyler, a Southern Cheyenne graduate of Carlisle and future peyotist leader, see Charles Ashley to CIA, December 17, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 39382, Box 688, NARA (DC), and Omer Stewart, *Peyote Religion: A History* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1986) 104-105, 116.

⁵⁵ Lone Wolf and White Wolf to CIA, January 15, 1889, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 1003, Box 497, NARA (DC).

⁵⁶ Noheart to Agent P. P. Palmer, November 5, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.19.11, Cheyenne River, Box 570, NARA (KC). Strangely, the envelope for the letter is postmarked September 14, 1890, Fort Bennett.

⁵⁷ Grindstone and James Little Eagle to CIA, July 31, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 24201, Box 648, NARA (DC); CIA to Agent James McLaughlin, August 9, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Sent, Accounts Division, Letter Book 114, NARA (DC).

than one wife, others raised only wild sunflowers rather than grain. The Standing Rock agent, James McLaughlin, responded to Grindstone and Little Eagle's letter as criticisms "'Much Ado about Nothing,'" abounding in "exaggeration and misrepresentation."⁵⁸ McLaughlin defended his stance against polygamy, cohabitation outside of marriage, and dancing ("the only dance allowed...is the 'Grass Dance' and this is only tolerated on Saturdays; and there is no such wholesale giving away of property"). The agent called Grindstone a man with "little or no force of character," having raised "some very worthless children." As for Little Eagle, he was a polygamist "until about 4 years ago" and "a very good man but rather selfish and unpopular among his neighbors" who "unreasonably expects that every Indian should think and act as he does." McLaughlin suspected the letter was only written as a stunt to get them a trip to Washington to speak to the "Great Father."

The conduct and performance of all agency employees, not just the police, were criticized. Fast Horse at Pine Ridge reported that "nearly all the agency employees were drunk, intoxicating around the agency" on Christmas.⁵⁹ Some Sissetons accused their agency's superintendent of the mill and the boss carpenter, D. F. Vollmer, of corruption (and being a "Democrat under Democratic rule and a Republican under the Republican administration").⁶⁰ Their agent recommended Vollmer's removal. Some Otoe men accused the superintendent of

⁵⁸ Agent James McLaughlin to CIA, October 1, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 30921, Box 668, NARA (DC).

⁵⁹ Fast Horse to Benjamin Miller, January 15, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 2921, Box 590, NARA (DC). Fast Horse wrote a previous letter regarding the same complaint, but had not heard back.

⁶⁰ Sisseton Indians to CIA, January 31, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 8207, Box 604, NARA (DC).

their sons' school of keeping whiskey and wine at the school. In an investigation, the superintendent did admit to being under the influence of liquor while at the school.⁶¹

Indians frequently took to print to attack government interpreters. Many Indians thought that it was crucial that the government hire interpreters that could be trusted to relay communication accurately and honestly. In 1880, a group of Omahas asked the Commissioner to discharge their interpreter immediately, as soon as the Commissioner read their letter.⁶² Louis Benoist at Cheyenne River charged the agency's interpreter of profiting off government property and bringing whiskey onto the reservation.⁶³ Swift Bird at Cheyenne River wrote to his agent, P. P. Palmer, to inform him that his people believed they had the right to choose the agency's new interpreter.⁶⁴ From Crow Creek, the Lower Yanktonai chief White Ghost asked the Commissioner if the Crow Creek delegation to Washington D.C. could use their own agency interpreter. "We trust him before we would trust any other interpreter because our interpreter is acquainted with our business more than any other interpreter and with him we can do more satisfactory business before the great father," White Ghost wrote (through the secretary of the Chief Council, E. P. H. Ashley).⁶⁵

⁶¹ Agent D. J. M. Woods to CIA, November 6, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.19.77, Pawnee Ponca Otoe, Reel 17, NARA (OHS). Agent Woods wrote the petition to the CIA for the Otoe.

⁶² Dorsey, 85.

⁶³ CIA to Agent C. E. McChesney, April 2, 1888, RBIA, RG 75.19.11, Cheyenne River, Box 249, NARA (KC).

⁶⁴ Swift Bird to Agent P. P. Palmer, November 20, 1891, RBIA, RG 75.19.11, Cheyenne River, Box 570, NARA (KC).

⁶⁵ White Ghost to CIA, December 9, 1889, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 35328, Box 577, NARA (DC).

There were also written protests against licensed Indian traders.⁶⁶ Red Cloud accused two traders of intentionally overcharging the Indians at Pine Ridge. He wanted the men gone: “the quicker they go out the better I will feel.”⁶⁷ Red Cloud believed the Commissioner should ask basic questions when giving a man a license to set up shop at an agency, like “Is he a good man? Does he treat the Indians well and is he honest and fair in his dealings with them?” Wolf Chief, a Hidatsa man at the Fort Berthold Agency, complained about a new trader, a relative of the agent, who opened his store inside the government storehouse.⁶⁸ Wolf Chief owned his own trader store thirty-five miles from the agency, and he saw the new trader’s location as unfair competition. He requested a copy of “Reservation laws” so that he could read trader store regulations himself “and be not troublesome to my agent and to this office.”⁶⁹ Other Indians wrote to the Commissioner to ask for copies of treaties and regulations. Chief Mountain Panther, a Warm Springs Indian (Oregon), wrote from Kentucky to ask for a copy of “the Indian Laws of the United States and Canada.” He was traveling with the “Oregon Medicine Company” and he told the Commissioner that he had “much use for the books.”⁷⁰

⁶⁶ Many Indians to CIA, June 1, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 17761, Box 630, NARA (DC); Edmond Mallet to CIA, August 1, 1889, *Registers of Letters Received, 1881-1907*, RBIA, Microfilm Publication P2186, Roll 36, Letter 23814.

⁶⁷ Red Cloud to CIA, April 27, 1889, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 11204, Box 517, NARA (DC).

⁶⁸ Wolf Chief to CIA, February 21, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 6439, Box 599, NARA (DC). Wolf Chief drew the Commissioner the layout of the building to demonstrate his concern. In fact, Wolf Chief wanted his agent removed because the agent tried to stop him from opening his own store. According to Wolf Chief, the agent only wanted to help his relative, who owned the store at the agency, stay clear of competition. Several weeks before, Wolf Chief complained that his agent would not allow him to sell metallic cartridges. The agent “bothered” him “in every way to keep me from keeping a Store.” See Wolf Chief to CIA, May 19, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 16300, Box 626, NARA (DC).

⁶⁹ Wolf Chief to CIA, March (undated) 1890, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 8999, Box 606, NARA (DC).

⁷⁰ Chief Mountain Panther to CIA, August 23, 1889, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 24959, Box 551, NARA (DC). The letter was dictated to a “Dr. E.”

Letter writing allowed Indians to report horrible crimes, like sexual abuse, that otherwise may have been concealed by white authorities. In early 1891, William Selwyn (Wicahaokdeum), a Yankton Sioux at the Yankton Agency, wrote a letter to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs to defend the agency doctor, Dr. W. L. Brown, against charges from a white missionary.⁷¹ According to “some rumors,” the missionary reported that the doctor (who was responsible for 1,800 people scattered over 430,000 acres) was inefficient and absent during a time of need.⁷² Selwyn’s infant child was one of two people who died while the doctor was away, but the infant died of pneumonia only two hours after Dr. Brown left his house. Selwyn believed the doctor was being vilified because of “personal malice,” and he knew the reason.⁷³ A couple of months earlier, Selwyn and the doctor went to see a consumptive Indian “young man” on the reservation.⁷⁴ Before his death (thirty-nine Yanktons died of consumption that year), the young man wanted to let go of a secret. He asked that a U. S. Marshall be present. The young man accused the missionary (“the same missionary who is now agitating the Indians and scheming against Dr. Brown”) of committing “some dirty and filthy work that a human being could not thought of.” Letters from the minister to the “sick boy requesting him to cover up all the cruel and fiendish work” were read aloud as evidence. Despite the “rotten transaction of the missionary,” the six people who heard the confession decided not to make it public because “it would injure the church and its influences and would result in more harm than good.” But Selwyn suspected that the minister was worried that Dr. Brown would use the secret against him,

⁷¹ William Selwyn to CIA, February 6, 1891, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 6060, Box 704, NARA (DC).

⁷² Ibid; *ARCIA*, 1891, 434.

⁷³ William Selwyn to CIA, February 6, 1891, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 6060, Box 704, NARA (DC).

⁷⁴ Ibid. The *ARCIA* 1891 stated that it was “one of the older boys” at school that died of pneumonia, p. 430.

“prompting the course taken to injure Dr. Brown.” In order to defend Dr. Brown, Selwyn could no longer cover-up the missionary’s sins.⁷⁵

Similarly, Running Bull and a group of Yankton headmen asked the Commissioner to discharge the superintendent of the Yankton Boarding School, Henry E. Dawes because he “had taken improper liberties with six of the girls.” The men had told the Yankton agent, but he refused to discharge the Dawes.⁷⁶ The Yankton wrote the letter to the Commissioner on November 6, 1889, the same day they asked the agent to discharge Dawes, but the letter was not received by the Commissioner until November 18. It seems that the Yankton agent took action against Dawes because his service as superintendent was officially terminated on November 8.

In December 1889, a Mrs. Good Bear made complaints of sexual harassment against her agent at Fort Berthold, the recently hired John S. Murphy. In a letter to the Commissioner, Wolf Chief compiled the statements of Mrs. Good Bear, her husband, and other witnesses regarding the incident. Mrs. Good Bear accused Murphy of petting her under her chin, “repeatedly” rubbing her breast, and putting his hands against her “private parts” while she was in the carpenter shop getting some nails.⁷⁷ Murphy told Mrs. Good Bear to follow him into a back

⁷⁵ It is not known which minister or missionary Selwyn and the young man accused, but there were two head ministers on the Yankton Agency in late 1890: Presbyterian missionary John P. Williamson and Episcopal missionary Joseph W. Cook. There is no mention of the event in other records, but in 1893 Selwyn recommended that Rev. Williamson become the custodian of the Yankton’s treaty book, a responsibility unlikely given to a man seen as morally reprehensible. See *The Executive Documents of the Senate of the United States for the Second Session of the Fifty-third Congress, 1893-1894* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1895) 97. In his annual report for 1891, Rev. Williamson wrote that the “great work” of the missionary was “to bring the truth to bear on the hearts of the heathen, for ‘the truth will make them free.’” *ARCIA*, 1891, 435. Joseph W. Cook served as a missionary to the Yankton for thirty years, from 1869 to 1899.

⁷⁶ Running Bull, et al to CIA, November 6, 1889, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 33002, Box 571, NARA (DC).

⁷⁷ Wolf Chief to CIA, December 21, 1889, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 37274, Box 582, NARA (DC).

room, but she left the building. A woman named Yellow Head, who went to the shop with Mrs. Good Bear, witnessed the incident. Brave Bear walked into the shop during the incident and stated that Murphy was adamant that he leave the shop immediately. Also in the letter, Mr. Good Bear stated that he confronted Murphy about the abuse but Murphy threatened to send him to the guard house. Mr. Good Bear then brought Mrs. Good Bear to the agent's office where she accused Murphy face to face. Murphy asked a policeman to remove Mrs. Murphy from his office "because she told a falsehood." With nowhere else to turn for justice, Mr. Good Bear asked Wolf Chief to write the letter to the Commissioner, with witnesses present. Other Fort Berthold Indians signed their names to the letter, asking that the matter be investigated, but Murphy remained the agent at Fort Berthold until 1893.

Some took to the mail to get schools built or teachers hired. General petitions from tribes usually contained requests for more schools and some sent personal letters asking for the same. A group at Rosebud petitioned for more schools to be built in October 1890, at the height of the ghost dance's popularity there.⁷⁸ Several weeks later, thirty-six Sihasapa Lakotas at the Cheyenne River Agency asked for a boarding school to be built at their camp near the mouth of the Moreau River and pledged that they would "never join the Ghost dance nor believe what they are doing."⁷⁹ In late 1890, some Southern Utes proposed to build their own schoolhouse if the government would pay a teacher's salary.⁸⁰ In February 1891, the Lower Brulé asked for a

⁷⁸ Sioux Indians to the President, October 23, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 33608, Box 674, NARA (DC).

⁷⁹ Blackfeet to CIA, December 15, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 40165, Box 690, NARA (DC).

⁸⁰ A. C. Huntley to CIA, December 1, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 38133, Box 685, NARA (DC).

boarding school to be built as close to the center of their settlement as possible (Medicine Bull, One to Play With, and David Zephyr, who had traveled to Washington DC as delegates for the tribe, resorted to writing a letter because they had been unable to “get a detailed hearing” in DC with the commissioner because of the ghost dance troubles).⁸¹ Likewise, Wolf Chief asked the commissioner to build a new school at Fort Berthold. There was a Catholic school at Fort Berthold, but most of the Indians there were “firmly opposed” to sending their children there.⁸² Instead, many chose to send them to the school at Fort Stevenson, which was far away and was in disrepair and “about to fall down.” The Commissioner initially ignored the request in his letter back to Wolf Chief, but Wolf Chief persisted, and he eventually convinced the Commissioner to build a day school and a boarding school.⁸³ Lone Wolf (the Younger) a Kiowa chief, wanted the government to live up to the terms of their treaty and build a new school house for two hundred children (“and let it be a brick building”).⁸⁴ The Kiowas were sharing a school house with the Apaches and it was too small and old. In March 1889, a Sisseton petition asked that one hundred and sixty acres of agency land be reserved for a new Catholic school.⁸⁵

Others, however, were opposed to the construction of new schools. Over sixty Gros Ventres and Assiniboines at the Fort Belknap Agency petitioned the Secretary of the Interior to

⁸¹ Medicine Bull to CIA, February 12, 1891, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 5562, Box 704, NARA (DC).

⁸² Wolf Chief to CIA, August 10, 1889, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 23002, Box 545, NARA (DC).

⁸³ CIA to Wolf Chief, September 14, 1889, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Sent, Law & Land, NARA (DC); Wolf Chief to CIA, November 5, 1889, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 33401, Box 572, NARA (DC).

⁸⁴ Lone Wolf and White Wolf to CIA, January 15, 1889, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 1003, Box 497, NARA (DC). Koh-ty, a Lt. of the Indian Police, wrote the letter for the men.

⁸⁵ J. D. Jenkins to CIA, March 1890, *Registers of Letters Received, 1881-1907*, RBIA, Microfilm Publication P2186, Roll 34, Letter 8100.

reconsider spending a large portion of their appropriations on a new school building. The men argued that the school was not necessary since the Catholic Mission school was built, which, along with the already established schools, easily accommodated the agency's student population. They believed that the money would be better spent on live stock, farming implements, and houses.⁸⁶

Indians were also concerned with whom the government hired to teach their children and they wanted some control over the hires. A group of nine Cheyennes and six Arapahos petitioned to have their former agent, John D. Miles, hired as the new superintendent at the Haskell Institute in Lawrence, Kansas. "If you do us this favor we promised you more of our children to that school, although we got largest number of our children there at present than any other tribes," they wrote.⁸⁷ In July 1890, Sitting Bull (the Hunkpapa Lakota) sent a letter to Thomas A. Bland, founder of the National Indian Defense Association, for help getting Bland's fellow activist Catherine Weldon hired as a teacher at Standing Rock. Weldon was Sitting Bull's friend and frequent pen pal. Sitting Bull wanted Bland, who had been an anti-allotment ally for the Sioux and a thorn in the Indian Bureau's side, to relay his wishes the Commissioner of Indian Affairs. Standing Rock agent James McLaughlin did not like Sitting Bull or Weldon (he forced her off the agency in 1889 and would later blame her for funding Sitting Bull's ghost dances).⁸⁸ Sitting Bull wrote that if the President allowed Weldon to "teach our children, it would make our

⁸⁶ Gros Ventres and Assiniboine Indians to Sec. Int., June 27, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 23002, Box 645, NARA (DC).

⁸⁷ Cheyenne and Arapaho Indians to CIA, November 28, 1888, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 29627, Box 492, NARA (DC).

⁸⁸ *Executive Documents of the Senate of the United States for the Second Session of the Fifty-First Congress* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1891), 7; Ostler, *The Plains Sioux and U.S. Colonialism*, 207-208.

hearts glad.”⁸⁹ In her bid for the position, Weldon told the Commissioner that Sitting Bull was “anxious to have his people improve and become civilized, notwithstanding what may have been published and spoken of him.”⁹⁰ “(Sitting Bull) has begged me repeatedly to come and live among them,” she wrote, “he knows that the Indians must follow in (the white people’s) footsteps or perish.” Weldon was not hired as a teacher (even though she offered to work without a salary, just rations) but was allowed to return to Standing Rock. Sitting Bull was killed in an arrest attempt four months later.

In April 1890, students at the Haskell Institute complained about their superintendent Charles Meserve in a petition to the Commissioner. They accused Meserve of treating them unfairly and calling them thieves or liars. Meserve denied that the petition came from his pupils, but “rather from some mischief-making white person.”⁹¹ The pupils were happy, Meserve claimed, but admitted that some were upset that he outlawed dancing at the school and the carrying of knives, sling shots, and revolvers. “It would be a very easy matter to get a lot of Indian boys to sign any kind of petition,” Meserve believed, not considering that his students might have the gumption to initiate a protest. Lamotte Primeaux also demanded justice from the Haskell superintendent. Primeaux, a Ponca who was attending Lawrence (Kansas) Business College, was kicked out of the dorms at the Haskell Institute where he was boarding. He was

⁸⁹ T. A. Bland to CIA, July 30, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 23452, Box 646, NARA (DC).

⁹⁰ Catherine Weldon to CIA, August 7, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 24695, Box 649, NARA (DC).

⁹¹ Charles F. Meserve to CIA, April 19, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 12843, Box 616, NARA (DC).

charged with desertion, but Primeaux explained to the Commissioner that it was misunderstanding and that the decision was made without a trial.⁹²

Frustrated with government injustice and finding nowhere else to turn for help, some Indians appealed to the American public through newspapers. In August 1879, a group of Omaha men wrote to the journalist Thomas Tibbles of the *Omaha Daily Herald* in order to convey their criticisms of the President to the white public. In the letter written in the Omaha language, the men stated, “we used to think that the oversight which the President exercised over us Indians was a good thing, but now it is not apt to be so.”⁹³ The Indians “ought to be human beings,” they wrote, “we desire you to make us human beings!” They argued that the President did not see them as human beings and prevented them from progressing: “the President usually blocks our way!” “Though I have a different skin, I hope that I may live in the land as do the people with white skins,” the men pleaded. They told Tibbles that the letter was written so that whites could understand their condition, “We wish you to pity us when you see this letter.” The Omahas knew that their letter would be read by whites who might be willing to help.

In 1879, Hupeça, a thirty-two-year-old Omaha man, dictated a letter to William M’Kim Heath, who hoped to have it printed in the *Cincinnati Commercial Tribune*. “My friends, O ye people, I hope that you may see me, and that I may see you...as I love you because you work for yourselves, I do that.”⁹⁴ Hupeça described the crops he grew and the animals he raised and the

⁹² Lamotte Primeaux to CIA, June 10, 1889, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 15829, Box 527, NARA (DC).

⁹³ Several Omaha to T. H. Tibbles, August 22, 1879 in Dorsey, 1891, 20-33. Tibbles covered the misfortunes of Standing Bear (Ponca) and his legal suit against the government which drew attention to Indian rights in 1879. *Standing Bear v. General Crook* recognized that an Indian was a person under the law and that they were entitled to rights and protections. Tibbles would later marry Susette LaFlesche, a member of the Omaha tribe and the daughter of chief Joseph LaFlesche, a man of French and Native ancestry.

⁹⁴ James Owen Dorsey, *Omaha and Ponka Letters*, 37-41.

house he had built, but he still saw his people dying in poverty “because we know nothing.” “Help us,” he pleaded, “If you aid us, we ought to live.” He accused the whites of craving Indian lands, wishing the them dead, and killing the deer, buffalo, antelope, and elk “which abounded for our good.” Hupeça hoped that “the people in the whole world hear of” his letter, “and by the time that the people have heard about me, give me a letter and send it.” The letter was not a petition to the United States government, it was a direct plea to the people of the United States. It is not known if the *Cincinnati Commercial Tribune* published the letter.

Land rights were a common topic in Indian letters to government officials. Natives used the mail to gather information about the government’s strategies to obtain Indian lands and to protest the ever changing shape of reservations. In 1881, Kash-y-pas questioned the agent at Fort Totten about a rumor that the government was looking to buy up his people’s lands. He did not believe what he heard, but he was afraid that his people “may be misled” and he needed to hear the truth from the agent.⁹⁵ Kash-y-pas had asked the agent about the matter before and grew tired waiting to hear his response. “The time is past when you promised to send me news,” he wrote. In 1882, Eleven Yanktonai chiefs at Crow Creek Agency signed a sixteen page petition aimed at halting the taking of their lands. They claimed that they never signed the Fort Laramie Treaty in 1868, they were not even invited to the council, but the signatures of five Yanktonais appear on the treaty. “A grave mistake has been made, or a great wrong has been perpetrated upon our people,” the chiefs wrote.⁹⁶ The Yanktonais also accused the government of cheating

⁹⁵ Kash-y-pas to Agent James McLaughlin, April 19, 1881, *James McLaughlin Papers*, Microfilm Roll 2, Assumption College (Richardson, ND), 1968.

⁹⁶ Crow Creek Indians to the President, April 15, 1882, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 36332, Box 579, NARA (DC).

them out of their lands in 1858 and 1867. “Towns and villages are springing up all around us,” they complained, “while settlers are rapidly taking up the lands about us and beginning to crowd us on all sides.” The chiefs only wanted the President to seek justice and carefully investigate their claims.

Tribes wanted to be sovereign bodies that controlled their own lands, but they usually had little say over agency operations on their lands, such as the location of the agency headquarters, the creation and location of subagencies, or boundary lines between agencies.⁹⁷ Some Indians asked the Commissioner of Indian Affairs to consider their opinions on such matters. An Indian’s proximity to an agent’s office or an agency store was essential on reservations that spanned thousands of square miles with little infrastructure to aid transportation. In January 1889, Wolf Chief at Fort Berthold, heard that the government was considering creating a new agency. He wrote the Commissioner that if a new agency was approved, it should be built thirty miles west of the current agency, closer to his camp.⁹⁸ In December 1889, Lip, a Brulé from Rosebud, wrote to Herbert Welsh of the Indian Rights Association in Philadelphia on behalf of the Rosebud men at Pass Creek Camp, who were worried that the government was going to

⁹⁷ In 1889, a group of Omaha protested the creation of Thurston County by the Nebraska State Legislature, which set the Omaha and Winnebago Agency along with a small strip of white land within the county’s borders. With the creation of the county, the state had to power to tax the Indians’ personal property (they could not legally tax their real estate) at excessive rates to pay for the roads, schools, and courts required for the new county. The Omaha sent a delegation to Washington to reverse Nebraska’s bill. However, Omaha from both sides of the debate used letters to express their opinions. An Omaha named Chon-za-nin-ga, who was in favor Thurston County’s creation, wrote to the Commissioner to warn him that the Omaha delegation was heading his way. “Let them pay their own way home,” Chon-za-nin-ga wrote, “we must go according to any law and live upon them.” See Chon-za-nin-ga to CIA, April 14, 1889, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 10379, Box 515, NARA (DC); Judith A. Boughter, *Betraying the Omaha Nation, 1790-1916* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1998), 136.

⁹⁸ Wolf Chief to CIA, January 26, 1889, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 2948, Box 500, NARA (DC).

redraw the boundary between Rosebud and Pine Ridge. This would place Pass Creek on Pine Ridge land and assign the people living there to the Pine Ridge rolls. Lip told Welsh that his people did not want to travel the ninety miles to the Pine Ridge agency headquarter on ration days. If they remained at Rosebud, they would have to move their homes north of the boundary line towards the Missouri River. “We have lived on Pass Creek for seven years,” Lip wrote, “and we have done a great deal of work there and do not want to have to tear down our house and stables, and discard our fields which we have broken up and made in good condition and fence with cedar posts.”⁹⁹ A few weeks later, Rueben Quickbear (or Quick Bear), representing the Black Pipe Creek Camp at Rosebud, also sent a letter to Welsh. The Black Pipe Creek Brulé were facing the same problem as the Pass Creek Camp, but they had heard a rumor of a sub-agency being established near the two camps that would put the Indians closer to their rations. Quickbear, a former Carlisle student, wanted to know if the rumor was true. “If you can give us any hope that this can be done, please answer this letter very soon,” he told Welsh.¹⁰⁰ Unfortunately, the sub agency never materialized and the Rosebud agent urged the Brulé at Black Pipe Creek to move north. In September 1890, Hollow Horn Bear addressed the issue in a letter to the President, the Commissioner, and two members of the Sioux Commission. He claimed that the new agent, J. George Wright, threatened to send soldiers to chase the Brulé off

⁹⁹ Lip to Herbert Welsh, December 4, 1889, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 113, 1890 Box 583, NARA (DC). Lip’s letter was written in Lakota. Welsh, who lived in Philadelphia, sent the letter to a translator at Pine Ridge. The translator then sent the letter back to Welsh.

¹⁰⁰ Rueben Quickbear to Herbert Welsh, December 4, 1889, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 113, Box 583, NARA (DC). Quickbear asked Lucy B. Arnold, a white teacher at Rosebud, to proof read his letter before he sent it to Welsh.

of their land “as they would cattle” if they refused to move.¹⁰¹ Hollow Horn Bear called Wright “the Boy agent” and demanded his removal because he was “not doing things straight.” “If you properly enquire into his doings,” Hollow Horn Bear assured the men, they would agree. “Many years ago the Great father made a law that our agents should be married men, but now you have given us a boy agent, who has no wife and who is making our people wild instead of pacifying them,” he argued. Hollow Horn Bear was worried that a reply to his letter might not reach him. He instructed the Commissioner to answer him “with a registered letter please – then I will get it, otherwise it will be stopped on the road.” Perhaps he was afraid that Wright would not give him the letter on its arrival at the agency. Wright was removed from his post soon after, but for unrelated reasons. Lip tried to express his wishes once more to the government in October 1890. He wrote letters (with the help of Benedict White an “Indian school boy”) to the Commissioner and the Secretary of the Interior, still maintaining his desire (and eighty other families’) to be placed on the Pine Ridge rolls rather than move his settlement across the new boundary line.¹⁰²

Between January 1889 and March 1890, over one hundred letters regarding allotment were sent to the Commissioner of Indians Affairs by Native Americans (or those claiming to be of Native American decent), at least twenty four came from Native American women. The 1887 Dawes Act would dramatically alter reservation life for the Natives of the west. Indians knew the ramifications of the legislation and they were offended that it was created without their consent. Letter writers expressed their frustration with the Dawes Act and the Dawes Sioux Bill

¹⁰¹ Hollow Horn Bear to the President, CIA, September 13, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 29579, Box 664, NARA (DC). The letter was dictated to Amberson Shaw and signed by Hollow Horn Bear.

¹⁰² Lip to CIA, October 12, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 32874, Box 672, NARA (DC); Lip to Sec. Int., October 12, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 32740, Box 672, NARA (DC).

(which sought to break up the Great Sioux Reserve to provide more land for Dakota settlers). In December 1888, Little Wound, Young Man Afraid of His Horses, and Red Cloud, all headmen at Pine Ridge, wrote to the President to express their displeasure with the Dawes Sioux Bill. “This land you ask for we cannot give up,” the men wrote President Cleveland, “we do not wish to sell it, having none to spare.”¹⁰³ They claimed that former treaties had not be honored and they wanted clear markers delineating the boundary of their reserve “so that no trouble will arise from white peoples’ stock coming on our lands.”

In January 1889, the Kiowa chief Lone Wolf (the younger) expressed his concerns with the Dawes Act to the Commissioner. “We all know the good intentions of the Severalty Act and we know that if we accept allotment our property will be protected,” he said, “but we are afraid for the reason that we are not prepared to take this new step.” Lone Wolf argued that the government had not given his people the school houses that they were promised (one for every thirty children), which left their children unprepared to “take care of properties.”¹⁰⁴ The Kiowas were “afraid” that they might “become paupers,” the allotments and “civilized life” would be a burden “too heavy,” and “instead of a blessing, it will surely be a cursing” to them.

Like Lone Wolf, others thought there were too many unanswered questions about the bill. The government continued to receive letters regarding allotment years after the Dawes Act was passed. Confusion abounded, certain regulations were not made clear. Many simply wanted

¹⁰³ Little Wound, Young Man Afraid of His Horses, and Red Cloud to the President, December 10, 1888, RBIA, RG 75.19.85, Pine Ridge, Copies of Misc. Letters Sent, Box 54, NARA (KC). The Pine Ridge agent recorded the letter in his letterpress book.

¹⁰⁴ Lone Wolf and White Wolf to CIA, January 15, 1889, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 1003, Box 497, NARA (DC). Koh-ty, a Lt. of the Indian Police, wrote the letter for the men.

more information.¹⁰⁵ In May 1889, Rosso Pappan, a Pawnee employed as interpreter at the Pawnee, Ponca, and Otoe Agency, asked the Commissioner to send his thoughts “all about the matter” in a letter so that he could “show the Indians your views.” Pappan was in favor of the Dawes Bill, but the Pawnees were “about evenly divided” about it.¹⁰⁶ He told the Commissioner that many of the Pawnees thought that he only supported the bill to benefit himself, but a letter from the Commissioner might convince them otherwise. The Commissioner, however, for reasons unknown, told his clerk that there was no need to reply to Pappan.

In the same month, Asa Kills a Hundred at Pine Ridge sought information about the bill from the Indian Rights Association. He reported that the Pine Ridge Indians were “expending a great deal of thought upon the land question,” and he wanted to know what the Sioux Commission, which was created by the government to negotiate the bill with the Indians, was going to do while at Pine Ridge.¹⁰⁷ Likewise, John Half Iron asked the Indian Rights Association to “explain to me about the bill.” He was told by the commission that if his people signed the bill, “then we can have money,” but he had not heard anything about it recently.¹⁰⁸

Many had to write to the Commissioner in order to acquire their land. Others were worried that the land they hoped to receive in severalty would not be surveyed and assigned. In 1888, a group of Yankton headmen petitioned President Cleveland (in the Dakota language) to

¹⁰⁵ In September 1890, the Lower Brule and Crow Creek Indians petitioned to have a delegation sent to Washington “to explain” to the President their “rights under” the Dawes Act, “selling part of our land in which sale we have been deceived or never have fully understood,” see Lower Brule and Crow Creek to CIA, September 16, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 29157, Box 663, NARA (DC).

¹⁰⁶ Rosso Pappan to CIA, May 29, 1889, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 15120, Box 526, NARA (DC).

¹⁰⁷ Asa Kills a Hundred to Herbert Welsh, May 6, 1889, *Indian Rights Association Papers, 1864-1973*, Microfilm Roll 15, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

¹⁰⁸ John Half Iron to Herbert Welsh, March 19, 1890, *Indian Rights Association Papers, 1864-1973*, Microfilm Roll 16, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

have the value of their lands in Iowa assessed so that it could be sold.¹⁰⁹ In February 1891, Henry Twist (also Twiss) at Pine Ridge, anxious to hear news about the surveying on his agency, decided to write to the Commissioner. He wrote:

Gen'l Morgan, Dear Friend: I have learned that you are Commissioner of Indian Affairs, so I want to write you a letter. For the last five years I have been with the Ogalallas and have been industrious. I and my immediate relatives constitute eight families; we are anxious to have our land in severalty. I would like to know how some one may expect the survey and I want to be called in by the agent when the time comes. I have already made the choice of lands for us, so am anxious to know the prospect and to get our tickets as soon as may be. When you receive this I shall be pleased to hear from you. I shall be ready for a word from you at any time. Henry Twist.¹¹⁰

Like Twist, many had to take it upon themselves to learn the details of allotment. Men and women asked the Commissioner about the allotment rights of their children, half-blood relatives, or white spouses. Julia Whelan, who identified herself as a "Mixed Blood Sioux," asked the Commissioner if her sister Rose could take up her allotment now that she was nineteen years old.¹¹¹ Ijkala Russell, who had married a white man, wrote to President Harrison to obtain her rightful allotment as a member of "the Sioux tribe" after trying unsuccessfully multiple times.¹¹² J. B. Dumarce, a Sisseton, asked the Commissioner to allow his relatives to move to the agency and receive an allotment of land. His agent would not allow it even though his relatives were Sisseton.¹¹³ Charles Rabbit asked the Standing Rock agent if he would meet with him personally

¹⁰⁹ Yankton Indians to President, December 21, 1888, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 961, Box 497, NARA (DC).

¹¹⁰ Henry Twist to CIA, February 10, 1891, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 6478, Box 706, NARA (DC).

¹¹¹ Julia Whelan to CIA, May 8, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 14498, Box 622, NARA (DC).

¹¹² Ijkala Russell to President Harrison, April 4, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 12118, Box 614, NARA (DC).

¹¹³ J. B. Dumarce to CIA, June 7, 1889, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 15715, Box 527, NARA (DC).

to help him pick out a claim for his own. He promised he would “work like a man.”¹¹⁴ The Lower Brulé wrote at least two letters to the Commissioner in late 1890 and early 1891 to address their troubles with allotment.¹¹⁵

Indians often sought information or advice about their land rights from whites outside of Indian Affairs. Luke Walker at the Lower Brulé Agency asked Herbert Welsh at the Indian Rights Association for a copy of the bill.¹¹⁶ Sitting Bull sent a letter to T. A. Bland at the National Indian Defense Association in August 1890 because he was worried that his agent at Standing Rock, James McLaughlin, was threatening to take away the rations of those Indians who declined to have their land surveyed for allotment.¹¹⁷ Bland was asked to investigate the matter with the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, but McLaughlin denied making any threats.

In 1889, High Hawk, a Brulé at Rosebud, sent a letter to John B. Sanborn in Minnesota, hoping to get some information to fight the Dawes Bill. Sanborn was a member of the Indian Peace Commission (1867-1869) that oversaw the Fort Laramie Treaty of 1868 and High Hawk wanted to be reminded of its terms. “I forget most of it,” he said, “but remember that the Indians were to have undisturbed possession of their lands for 38 years.”¹¹⁸ It had only been twenty one

¹¹⁴ Charles Rabbit to Agent James McLaughlin, March 11, 1890, *James McLaughlin Papers*, Microfilm Roll 2, Assumption College (Richardson, ND), 1968.

¹¹⁵ CIA to Agent A. P. Dixon, November 12, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Sent, Land Division, Letter Books 207-208, NARA (DC); Medicine Bull to CIA, February 12, 1891, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 5562, Box 704, NARA (DC); CIA to Agent A. P. Dixon, November 18, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.19.20, Crow Creek, Box 12, NARA (KC); CIA to Agent A. P. Dixon, November 18, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.19.20, Crow Creek, Box 12, NARA (KC).

¹¹⁶ Luke Walker to Herbert Welsh, April 13, 1889, *Indian Rights Association Papers, 1864-1973*, Microfilm Roll 14, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

¹¹⁷ T. A. Bland to CIA, August 23, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 32143, Box 671, NARA (DC).

¹¹⁸ High Hawk to John B. Sanborn, May 24, 1889, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 15257, Box 526, NARA (DC).

years, High Hawk reminded Sanborn, and so it was against the law “to take our lands from us.” It was “all we Indians have in the world” and they did not “wish to give anymore of our land to the Whites.” High Hawk asked Sanborn for his help “as a friend.”

In January 1890, four Miniconjou Lakotas from Cheyenne River, White Swan, Charger, Crow Eagle, and Straight Head, asked the Commissioner for a second time if he would remove a group of “Santee Mixed Bloods” from the reservation because they had no right to take up land in severalty. The men also hoped that their own children would be able to select lands for themselves when they married in order to “give the young folks a chance to own their land in one piece.”¹¹⁹ Many Indians were worried that allotment would result in the fractionation of their lands. Future generations would need their own plots. The Miniconjous would soon chose which plots they would take in severalty and they wanted to give their children the same opportunity when they reached adulthood. They knew that fewer and fewer acres would be available to later generations, a prediction that was realized in the years to come. Unsatisfied, White Swan, Charger, Crow Eagle, and nine others at Cheyenne River asked the Commissioner additional questions about allotment six months later, including whether they would be allowed to transport their stock from one agency to another. Eventually, White Swan had to resort to writing Senator Henry Dawes himself. White Swan told Sen. Dawes that General Crook had given the Miniconjous a map of Cheyenne River to show them the size of their lands during negotiations over the Dawes Bill. But White Swan claimed that Cheyenne River was not “so big

¹¹⁹ White Swan, et al to CIA, January 6, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 538, Box 584, NARA (DC).

as what Gen. Crook told us.”¹²⁰ “I guess you change the boundary line because Gen. Crook is dead,” White Swan reasoned.

White Swan also asked Sen. Dawes to send him a copy of the past treaties between his people and the government and a copy of the Dawes Act. “The paper of our reservation to the Agent, and stay there and we don’t know what is coming to us,” White Swan wrote, “but there is some Educated Indians we can keep the paper of promises and if any of them come untrue we can see to it ourself.” He added in post script: “I don’t mean that we going to keep all the paper ourself we want one send to our agent and to the Indians.” Six months later, in January 1891, White Swan, recently returned from a trip to Washington, followed up with the Commissioner via letter. While in Washington, he requested to live ten miles south of Cheyenne River. His letter was meant to serve as a reminder of his request for the Commissioner.¹²¹ Similarly, Louis Bordeaux (who identified himself as “Sioux mixed blood”) at Rosebud had to request a copy of the Sioux Bill twice. The Commissioner’s office incorrectly sent him a copy of a Chippewa Treaty the first time.¹²²

Several Indians wanted to make changes to their allotments, including William Selwyn who wanted to transfer to the Yankton Agency but was unsure how his allotments would be handled.¹²³ Two Bear and Little Chief from Standing Rock asked the Commissioner if they

¹²⁰ White Swan to Henry Dawes, August 8, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 25905, Box 652, NARA (DC).

¹²¹ White Swan to CIA, January 24, 1891, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 7901, Box 707, NARA (DC).

¹²² Louis Bordeaux to CIA, May 7, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 14557, Box 621, NARA (DC).

¹²³ W. T. Selwyn to CIA, March 2, 1891, *Registers of Letters Received, 1881-1907*, RBIA, Microfilm Publication P2186, Roll 44, Letter 9057.

could move their allotment to another location on the reserve.¹²⁴ W. B. Jones at Rosebud wanted to have his land allotted as grazing land instead of tilling land, but he was unable to contact the allotting agent. He wrote to the Santee and Pine Ridge agencies looking for the man, but no one knew where to forward the letters. Jones asked the Commissioner for help, but he was told that only the allotting agent could make the change.¹²⁵ In February 1890, George Sword, the captain of the Indian Police at Pine Ridge, informed the Commissioner that he wanted to take his allotted lands.¹²⁶ Nine months later, he asked the Commissioner for a “nice frame house” when he received his allotment. He had seen “with my own two eyes” some nice frame houses at the Santee Agency, but nobody had one at Pine Ridge except for Red Cloud.¹²⁷ George Sword described his loyalty to the government, his service to the military, and his opposition to the ghost dance (“it is not the right way to worship,” he said), and he believed he deserved a house.

Allotment created division on reservations throughout the West that were reproduced in print. At most agencies, factions who favored allotment clashed with those who were opposed. A group of six Omahas who supported the Dawes Act wrote the Commissioner that those who “refuse to submit” to allotment were “keeping up their old traditional ideas and modes of living, against the will and advice of those of us who are willing to accept the situation.”¹²⁸ The men

¹²⁴ CIA to Agent James McLaughlin, March 19, 1891, RBIA, RG 75.19.113, Standing Rock, Misc. Corres. Received, Box 34, NARA (KC).

¹²⁵ W. B. Jones to CIA, January 30, 1891, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 4877, Box 702, NARA (DC).

¹²⁶ George Sword to CIA, February 4, 1890, *Registers of Letters Received, 1881-1907*, RBIA, Microfilm Publication P2186, Roll 38, Letter 4097.

¹²⁷ George Sword to CIA, undated, received November 22, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 36111, Box 680, NARA (DC).

¹²⁸ Henry Fontenelle, White Horse, et al to CIA, undated, rec'd August 13, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 22570, Box 644, NARA (DC). The non-progressive leaders visited the Ponca in order to buy land on the Ponca reserve, believing that they could escape allotment there.

wanted the Commissioner to write a letter to the leaders of the non-progressive “anti-citizen party” to inform them of their duties and given them “some threat of deprivation or punishment” for their “idiotic, senseless ideas.”

Correspondence was used by Eastern Shoshones at the Wind River Agency in Wyoming to solve their land disagreement with the Arapahos that was created by the Dawes Bill. The Shoshones laid claim to all of the Wind River land, the agency was created for them and they viewed the Arapaho as residents, not owners. The Dawes Act would cede Wind River land to the government. In return, the Indians would receive compensation. The Arapahos believed they were entitled to a portion of that compensation and between 1887 and 1891, the Arapahos and Shoshones quarreled over the uncertainties created by the Dawes Bill.¹²⁹ In early 1891, Washakie, recognized as the leader of the Eastern Shoshone, and others wrote to the President that the people would not “concede” the idea “that the Arapahoes have a right to one foot of land on this Reservation.”¹³⁰ The Shoshones were “willing to sell a part of this Reservation to the Government for the Arapahoes, but...we protest against any improvements that will in any way give the Arapahoes a right to any of the land.” Washakie argued that his people never invited the Arapahos to their reservation or give them any land. In fact, the Arapahos were fighting “the soldiers and the Siouxs and got whipped.” According to Washakie, they Shoshones allowed the Arapahos to live there, “thinking that they could not hurt the land by living on it,” but they “did not think that this would give them any right to the land.” But the government did not agree with Washakie. Later that year both tribes were made equal owners of the reservation and the two

¹²⁹ Henry E. Stamm, *People of Wind River* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1999), 242.

¹³⁰ Washakie to the President, January 31, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 5896, Box 598, NARA (DC).

tribes decided to sale 1.2 million acres of Wind River while reserving 900,000 acres for themselves.¹³¹

Letters allowed Natives to express their opinion on government policies, but if those opinions were seen to be damaging to the government's civilizing efforts, an agent could use that written record of opinion against letter writers. In January 1891, shortly after Wounded Knee, J. George Wright, the agent at Rosebud, tried to point out the causes of the ghost dance troubles. Wright blamed a group of "turbulent Indians" including Two Strike, a Brulé headman who had a reputation for being a "non-progressive."¹³² Wright did not want to see these non-progressives sent to Washington as part of the post-troubles Sioux delegation. He asked the Commissioner to consider certain facts about Two Strike before he was allowed to represent his people on the delegation. According to Wright, on February 1, 1889, Two Strike, wrote to his agent that he did not want to sell any more land and would not support allotment. Wright believed Two Strike's belligerent letter, still held in the agency records, proved his non-progressive propensities.

Some letter writers were worried about retribution from their agents for their criticisms. For instance, Standing Buffalo at Fort Peck told the Commissioner that their assistant head farmer, George Cooley, was a drunk and his wife was "an old prostitute and not married to him."¹³³ According to Standing Buffalo, Cooley used government provisions to pay Indians for private work and his wife traded provisions for Indian annuity money. Standing Buffalo told the Commissioner that he hoped his letter would not be sent to the Fort Peck agent, "as have been done in the past, thereby putting him on his guard" against letter writers. Similarly, the Ponca

¹³¹ Henry E. Stamm, *People of Wind River*, 242.

¹³² Agent J. George Wright to CIA, January 23, 1891, RBIA, RG 75.19.96, Rosebud, Copies of Letters Sent, Volume 20, NARA (KC).

¹³³ Standing Buffalo to CIA, July 3, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 20525, Box 638, NARA (DC).

chief White Eagle was worried that his letter of complaint to the Commissioner might eventually be read by his agent. “The agent now here as he does not like me,” White Eagle told the Commissioner, “and would seek to injure me if he knew this letter was written.”¹³⁴ White Eagle believed his people were “cursed” with “unreligious” “Democratic” (members of the Democratic Party) men who knew little about their needs. He wanted “Republican Christian Men and Women” to serve at their agency.¹³⁵ Others wanted to keep their agents out of the loop. Cloud Chief, Starving Elk, and White Antelope, three Southern Cheyennes at the Cheyenne and Arapaho Agency, had written to the Commissioner before, but their agent never let them know if the Commissioner replied. In December 1890 they asked the Commissioner to reply to them, his “Indian friends,” instead of forwarding it to the agent.¹³⁶

Little Chief, a Cheyenne chief at Pine Ridge, wrote to the Commissioner multiple times in 1890 hoping that his people at Pine Ridge would be able to live with the rest of the Northern Cheyennes at the Tongue River Agency. They had been at Pine Ridge since 1883, preferring to live there rather than Indian Territory, but the Cheyenne grew tired of sharing the reserve with the more numerous Oglala Sioux. Little Chief complained that the Sioux did not have a right to the land, they had come “in my land” from Wisconsin “about 100 years ago.”¹³⁷ It was the Cheyennes who “has the land sent to [by] God.” The Commissioner finally replied to Little Chief’s second letter (he did not reply to the first, which did not go unnoticed by Little Chief)

¹³⁴ White Eagle to CIA, May 6, 1889, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 13082, Box 521, NARA (DC).

¹³⁵ Republican President Benjamin Harrison took office two months before White Eagle’s letter, but a Republican man would not take charge at the Ponca, Pawnee, and Otoe Agency until 1890.

¹³⁶ Cloud Chief, et al to CIA, December 4, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 38384, Box 685, NARA (DC).

¹³⁷ Little Chief to CIA, May 18, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 16336, Box 626, NARA (DC).

through a letter addressed to the Pine Ridge agent and informed the chief that the Cheyennes would not be moving to Tongue River. Instead, the Commissioner wanted Little Chief to “keep his people on the reservation and set them an example of industry and good behavior.”¹³⁸ If the Sioux interfered with the Cheyennes, the Commissioner wanted Little Chief to tell the agent, who would “take prompt action to protect them.” On the other hand, William Crow, a Northern Cheyenne, wrote that he did not want to leave Pine Ridge for Tongue River.¹³⁹

Letters were also sent to government officials to report white trespassers or whites using Indian land to graze cattle. A large group of Rosebud Indians petitioned to try to finally put an end to years of illegal grazing on their lands. Not only were white men’s cattle covering their country, Indian cattle, horses, and timber were being stolen (“thousands of stumps can be counted”).¹⁴⁰ Eighty-four Cheyennes at the Cheyenne and Arapaho Agency decided to write the Secretary of War to ask for help removing 50,000 head of cattle from their lands. They asked the Secretary to send someone to “see about this matter,” but they did not want him to send an agent or other men “who are getting pay for cattle remaining in here.” The Cheyennes thought that their agent was corrupt, which convinced them to seek help outside of Indian Affairs. “Our appeal to the Agent is of no use,” they wrote, “he is putting what ought to be ours on his own side.”¹⁴¹ The Northern Arapahos at Wind River complained that ranchers’ cattle were breaking

¹³⁸ CIA to Agent H. D. Gallagher, May 30, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.19.85, Pine Ridge, Corres. Received from OIA, Box 9, NARA (KC).

¹³⁹ William Crow to R. H. Pratt, June 13, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 21249, Box 640, NARA (DC).

¹⁴⁰ Rosebud Indians to CIA, April 20, 1889, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 11010, Box 516, NARA (DC).

¹⁴¹ Copy of Eighty-four Cheyenne Indians to Sec. War Bradford Procter, February 10, 1891, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 10003, Box 714, NARA (DC).

down their fences and destroying their crops.¹⁴² The agency employees did nothing about it because the ranchers “do well by them.” White Wolf, a Comanche chief at the Kiowa, Comanche, and Wichita Agency, complained to the Commissioner that cattlemen were unlawfully living on the reservation, “daily coming and intruding upon our rights.”¹⁴³ According to White Wolf, the Comanche had agreed to lease a portion of their lands to the cattlemen because of their “fine gifts” and bribes to Quanah Parker, who gave “hardly anything” to his followers. In March 1890, Plenty Coups asked the secretary of the Board of Indian Commissioners, Eliphalet Whittlesey, for help removing cattlemen from the Crow Agency.¹⁴⁴

After the Dawes Bill, some Indians sought to protect their allotted lands from trespassers.¹⁴⁵ In October 1890, Standing Buffalo complained to the Commissioner of trespassers on his allotment at Fort Peck.¹⁴⁶ Similarly, in February 1891, Tobacco Eater, who accepted allotment thirty-eight miles from Fort Peck, complained that his agent did little to stop white trespassers. “They only laugh at us,” he wrote, “there should be a policeman stationed at my house with the power to arrest all trespassers who enter inside the lines of the allotted

¹⁴² Arapaho Indians to CIA, August 30, 1889, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 25344, Box 552, NARA (DC).

¹⁴³ Lone Wolf and White Wolf to CIA, January 15, 1889, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 1003, Box 497, NARA (DC). Koh-ty, a Lt. of the Indian Police, wrote the letter for the men.

¹⁴⁴ E. Whittlesey to CIA, March 7, 1890, *Registers of Letters Received, 1881-1907*, RBIA, Microfilm Publication Number P2186, Roll 39, Letter 7053.

¹⁴⁵ A group of ten Winnebago, including Grey Hair, Young Prophet, and John Johnson, claimed that a group of “half breeds of Minnesota that became citizens” were “trying to steal us and try to kill us from our lands and property.” There were two different parties of the half breeds, one “that talk english are democrats and the timber Indians are the Republicans.” Winnebago to CIA, November 14, 1889, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 33390, Box 572, NARA (DC).

¹⁴⁶ Standing Buffalo to CIA, October 2, 1890, *Registers of Letters Received, 1881-1907*, RBIA, Microfilm Publication Number P2186, Roll 42, Letter 30866.

lands.”¹⁴⁷ Tobacco Eater wanted to know the names of the men who were entering his land and he believed they should have their lands confiscated as punishment. “What is the use of laws?” he asked. The Commissioner had received two letters from Tobacco Eater in 1890 about the matter, but never replied.¹⁴⁸ Consequently, Tobacco Eater sent two letters to the Commissioner’s superior, the Secretary of the Interior John Noble, in February 1891 that asked that the strip of land he lived on be surveyed “to avoid future trouble,” and that the beef rations at Fort Peck be improved.¹⁴⁹

Many used the mail to fight the endless battle against hunger on the reservations. A group of Kiowas complained about the “absolutely unwholesome” flour that was being rationed to them in 1890.¹⁵⁰ They sent the Commissioner a sample of the substandard flour in the mail along with their letter. In the winter of 1888, Wolf Chief at Fort Berthold told the President and the Commissioner that the Gros Ventres and Mandans’ crops were ruined and they did not know what they would do for food.¹⁵¹ Two winters later, Wolf Chief’s people were still struggling:

We all thought we would have a big crop last fall but the frost came and now I have no crop at all and we don’t know what I will do this winter for food. Now

¹⁴⁷ Tobacco Eater to CIA, February 26, 1891, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 8469, Box 710, NARA (DC); Tobacco Eater to SI, February 6, 1891, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 8605, Box 710, NARA (DC); Tobacco Eater to SI, February 25, 1891, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 8605, Box 710, NARA (DC). Thomas Cushing, who signed his names to the letters as a witness, wrote the letters for Tobacco Eater. Cushing was Tobacco Eater’s son-in-law.

¹⁴⁸ Tobacco Eater and Standing Buffalo to CIA, December 19, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 200, Box 692, NARA (DC).

¹⁴⁹ Tobacco Eater to SI, February 6, 1891, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 8605, Box 710, NARA (DC); Tobacco Eater to SI, February 25, 1891, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 8605, Box 710, NARA (DC).

¹⁵⁰ Chattle-kon-kee, Kor-pai-e-te, et al to CIA, June 9, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 18248, Box 632, NARA (DC).

¹⁵¹ Wolf Chief to President, December 1888, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 30060, Box 492, NARA (DC).

I write to you for I want you to know how we are fixed for this winter and I wish you would give us more food so I want stove this winter. I wish now if you get my letter to talk to Great Father and see what he will do for us and I have no more Buffalo and a very few deer left if you Great Fathers do not help us we don't know how we going to get along. I wish you would write me and tell me what you are going to do.¹⁵²

The Commissioner replied to Wolf Chief a month later, offering little help. Unsatisfied, Wolf Chief sent another letter on February 17, 1891.¹⁵³ Adam Pazi, a Sisseton, told the Indian Rights Association that his people had been suffering a “great deal.”¹⁵⁴ He wanted to know if the government was going to do anything for them. “We want to live like citizens,” Pazi wrote, “but we are still like little children.” Eli Spotted Bear, in a letter written in Dakota, wanted his agent to give his people some “oats to sow.”¹⁵⁵ If the agent had “any seeds whatever,” they needed them immediately.

Many tried to convince the government that their people deserved more rations, especially after Congress reduced the appropriations for rations in 1889 and ignored recommendations from Indian Affairs to increase appropriations in spring 1890.¹⁵⁶ Three hundred and sixteen Crows petitioned for an increase of one pound of beef per ration to one and a half pounds in November 1889.¹⁵⁷ They asked that money be taken from other funds owed to them, like grazing money, to pay for the increase. They blamed the “destruction of the buffalo”

¹⁵² Wolf Chief to CIA, December 8, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 39465, Box 688, NARA (DC).

¹⁵³ Wolf Chief to CIA, February 17, 1891, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 7158, Box 707, NARA (DC).

¹⁵⁴ Adam Pazi to IRA, May 28, 1889, *Indian Rights Association Papers, 1864-1973*, Microfilm Roll 15, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

¹⁵⁵ Eli Spotted Bear to Agent Swan, April 29, 1885, RBIA, RG 75.19.11, Cheyenne River, Box 569, NARA (KC). The letter was translated by a “Mrs. Riggs” at the Oahe Dakota Mission, probably Louisa Irvine Riggs, wife of Rev. Thomas L. Riggs.

¹⁵⁶ *ARCIA*, 1891, 192-193.

¹⁵⁷ Crow Indians to CIA, November 12, 1889, RBIA, RG 75.19.21, Crow Agency, Press Copies of Misc. Letters Sent, Box 2, NARA (Denver).

and their inability to grow enough crops for their hardships. The Crows petitioned for more beef again in September 1890, but this time two hundred and eight-nine signatures filled the document.¹⁵⁸ At Rosebud, where the Sioux were receiving two million fewer pounds of beef than the year before, the chiefs and headmen Swift Bear, Quick Bear, Hollow Horn Bear, and seven others petitioned the President to send them the rations that the treaty owed them. Writing in October 1890, the men claimed that their people were starving. Those Indians who were “crazy and excited over the new religion which has come among us” were only hungry, the young men were “feeling very bad and think the government is trying to starve us to death.”¹⁵⁹ They told the President that people were killing their work oxen to eat and that their children were crying from hunger. In late November, a group of Sioux petitioned the President for more rations. President Harrison’s private secretary told the Secretary of the Interior to try everything he could “within the law and the appropriations” to satisfy the petitioners, but little was done.¹⁶⁰

That winter of 1890 was difficult for the Indians on Plains agencies. In December, seventy-six Sissetons and Wahpetons at the Sisseton Agency petitioned the government and their “friends in the east” to prevent the eventual “suffering and actual starvation” of their people. They appealed to the Indian Rights Association and to “all Christian people and friends of the Indians everywhere for aid and assistance.”¹⁶¹ Red Cloud asked the Commissioner to give his agent permission to buy cattle on the open market in February 1891. He wrote that the agent

¹⁵⁸ M. P. Wyman to CIA, September 30, 1890, *Registers of Letters Received, 1881-1907*, RBIA, Microfilm Publication P2186, Roll 42, Letter 30877.

¹⁵⁹ Rosebud Indians to CIA, October 23, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 33608, Box 674, NARA (DC).

¹⁶⁰ E. W. Halford to Sec. Int., November 24, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 36465, Box 681, NARA (DC).

¹⁶¹ Sisseton Indians to CIA, December 2, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 37601, Box 684, NARA (DC).

should be able to buy cattle raised by Indians in order to feed Indians, an idea that went against policy.¹⁶² Similarly, Paul White Swan at Cheyenne River asked the agent at Standing Rock if he wanted to buy some of his friend's cattle. "I have something to do with it," he wrote, "so will you please help me."¹⁶³

The government intentionally created a reservation system that left the Indians dependent on the federal government for basic necessities. Not only did the government dictate what foods the Indians received, the government also controlled the flow of manufactured goods, livestock, farming implements, and medicines entering the reservations. Many Natives used letters to ask for items they could not acquire on the reserves or to report shortages of necessities. Rosa Bearface asked her agent if she could have some flour sacks to cover the inside walls of her log house. "I know Major that you have saved all the flour sacks for the oats, but this is for myself that I ask you to do for me," she pleaded.¹⁶⁴ Noheart wanted a kitchen for the house he was building at Cheyenne River.¹⁶⁵ Wolf Chief at Fort Berthold asked the Commissioner for a boat large enough to get across the Missouri River safely with rations.¹⁶⁶

Wagons were a hot commodity for many. Feather-in-the-Ear, the Yankton chief who asked the Commissioner if he could have a wagon so that he could "go and see some of my

¹⁶² Red Cloud to CIA, February 4, 1891, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 5556, Box 704, NARA (DC). Clarence Three Stars wrote the letter for Red Cloud.

¹⁶³ Paul White Swan to Standing Rock Agent, October 14, 1891, RBIA, RG 75.19.113, Standing Rock, Misc. Corres. Received, Box 34, NARA (KC).

¹⁶⁴ Rosa Bearface to Agent James McLaughlin, August 28, 1888, *James McLaughlin Papers*, Microfilm Roll 2, Assumption College (Richardson, ND), 1968.

¹⁶⁵ Noheart to Agent P. P. Palmer, November 5, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.19.11, Cheyenne River, Box 570, NARA (KC).

¹⁶⁶ Wolf Chief to CIA, February 21, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 6439, Box 705, NARA (DC).

friends at other Agencies,” was not the only Indian who wrote letters asking for one.¹⁶⁷ Little Chief, a Cheyenne at Pine Ridge, asked the Commissioner for wagon to use when his people were allowed to move to Tongue River.¹⁶⁸ He claimed that only one Cheyenne had a wagon. Big Road at Pine Ridge asked Herbert Welsh at the Indian Rights Association to help him get a light wagon because he wanted “to be a man,” not because he wanted “to show that” he was a “chief.”¹⁶⁹ He wanted to lead his people, send them to church and school and “teach them to farm.” He planned to teach ten or fifteen young men to farm and then have those men teach “the rest.” Likewise, Chief Big Tree, a Kiowa, wrote to Capt. Richard Henry Pratt, the superintendent at Carlisle, seeking a spring wagon manufactured by Carlisle students. He claimed that he wanted the wagon to demonstrate to other Kiowa the benefit of an education and a trade. Big Tree believed that Indians would pay to see wagons made by Indian hands at the school houses on the Kiowa Agency. Capt. Pratt told Big Tree that he would have to ask his agent for a spring wagon (and told him that it was time his people “ought to be ashamed” that they were still taking government beef rations).¹⁷⁰ The Kiowa agent suggested that Big Tree just wanted a wagon for his own use, which he recommended.¹⁷¹ George Sword and Fast Horse at

¹⁶⁷ Feather in the Ear to CIA, July 25, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 22983, Box 652, NARA (DC).

¹⁶⁸ Little Chief to CIA, March 19, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 9581, Box 608, NARA (DC).

¹⁶⁹ Big Road to Herbert Welsh, February 28, 1891, *Indian Rights Association Papers, 1864-1973*, Microfilm Roll 17, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

¹⁷⁰ R. H. Pratt to Chief Big Tree, July 18, 1889, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 22093, Box 543, NARA (DC).

¹⁷¹ Agent Myers to CIA, August 5, 1889, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 22093, Box 543, NARA (DC).

Pine Ridge were given spring wagons shortly after they wrote to the Commissioner in support of the Dawes Act.¹⁷²

Horses were also needed. Greasy Horn, who described himself as “a Yankton and a poor man,” asked the Commissioner for two horses after he heard that the Yankton were going to be given some.¹⁷³ Greasy Horn lost his stable and two horses six or seven years prior in a prairie fire. Hubbell Big Horse, a Southern Cheyenne and former Carlisle pupil, told Pratt that he thought that the Commissioner should give him some horses and farm implements to start a farm. “Not as a gift,” he wrote, “but as payment for land that once belonged to my people which the white man is now farming.”¹⁷⁴ Newton Big Road, a thirty-two-year-old Oglala at Pine Ridge, needed reapers, wire fence, plows, mowing machines, and other farm tools to earn any money on his farm. “And besides,” he reasoned, “this is not a good farming country.”¹⁷⁵ Big Road had four years education at Carlisle, but there was not any work at Pine Ridge.

In late 1890, the Standing Rock Agency experienced a shortage of medicines. Morris Martin, a former student at Hampton Institute, was unable to get cough medicine or cod liver oil from the agency physician Dr. James Brewster. “What’s the use to have you here if you don’t have anything but yourself,” Martin asked Dr. Brewster.¹⁷⁶ Undeterred, Martin wrote to his old doctor at Hampton, Dr. Martha M. Waldron, to ask if she could ship him some “malt oil

¹⁷² CIA to Agent H. D. Gallagher, April 12, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.19.85, Pine Ridge, Corres. Received from OIA, Box 9, NARA (KC); Fast Horse, et al to CIA, March 5, 1890, *Registers of Letters Received, 1881-1907*, RBIA, Microfilm Publication P2186, Roll 39, Letter 9083.

¹⁷³ Greasy Horn to CIA, August 28, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 26015, Box 653, NARA (DC).

¹⁷⁴ Hubbell Big Horse to R. H. Pratt, June 8, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 18556, Box 633, NARA (DC).

¹⁷⁵ Newton Big Road to R. H. Pratt, June 9, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 20195, Box 637, NARA (DC).

¹⁷⁶ Morris Martin to Dr. Martha Waldron, November 21, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.19.113, Standing Rock, Misc. Corres. Received, Box 33, NARA (KC).

hemorrhage medicine” and cough medicine. Martin told Dr. Waldron that he had informed Dr. Brewster that the doctor at Hampton was “a lady, but better than every Doctor in South and North Dakota.” According to Martin, Dr. Brewster responded, “well if she is better than every one of us in South and North Dakota [she] better send you those things.” Dr. Waldron expressed concern to the agent at Standing Rock about the lack of medication for the Indians in his care. The agent replied that they were expecting the medication to arrive soon, but he did not think “any good would arise from a remittance of money to purchase Medicines necessary for the treatment of Martin.”¹⁷⁷ The agent assured Dr. Waldron that Dr. Brewster would “do the best he can under the circumstances until the supplies arrive.”

Indians also used letter writing to secure debts owed them by the government, white citizens, or other Indians. Letters and petitions were often the only way Indians could secure owed funds. The Commissioner of Indian Affairs and other officials frequently received requests for money in writing throughout the 1880s. In December 1890, the Kiowa petitioned the Commissioner to issue to them their grass money being held by the U. S. Treasurer. The petition, written by Joshua Given, claimed that the Kiowa needed the money to get them through the winter.¹⁷⁸ Five months earlier, a separate, much smaller group of Kiowa made the opposite request to the Commissioner, to hold the grass money in the treasury despite the efforts of others.¹⁷⁹ However, the Kiowa agent, Charles Adams, told the Commissioner that he hoped that

¹⁷⁷ Agent James McLaughlin to Dr. Martha Waldron, December 19, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.19.113, Standing Rock, Corres. Sent, NARA (KC).

¹⁷⁸ Kiowa Indians to CIA, December 5, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 38273, Box 685, NARA (DC). Grass monies were the funds given to a group of Indians for the use of their prairies by white ranchmen.

¹⁷⁹ Chattle-kon-kee, Kor-pai-e-te, et al to CIA, June 9, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 18248, Box 632, NARA (DC).

the Indians' request to release the grass money would be granted so that they might be gratified. He was worried about the ghost dance, "the impending troubles in the North-west and which have already infected the reservation next to this."¹⁸⁰ During the same month, the Yankton petitioned for \$1,740 from a railroad right of way and \$3,000 from annuities be distributed to their people.¹⁸¹ Fifteen headmen at the Fort Belknap Agency asked that the money owed to them for railroad right of way rights be spent on cows for their people.¹⁸² In February 1891, Wolf Chief at Fort Berthold asked the Commissioner for the \$80,000 a year that the Mandans and Gros Ventres were promised because his people were "weak and people die from hungry sick and lot of them have and plenty die because they don't get good thing to eat."¹⁸³ Wolf Chief had previously written to the Commissioner about the \$80,000 in April 1888 and in May 1889, reporting their great need for the money, but nothing was done. The Commissioner's clerk suspected that Wolf Chief was writing so many letters to the Commissioner because "possibly he likes to get letters from Washington to show to his people his importance."¹⁸⁴ Of course, the most probable reason for Wolf Chief's persistence was to convince Indian Affairs to do something for his people, which was not an easy task. Indians had an uphill battle, even with the ability to correspond directly to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs.

¹⁸⁰ Agent Charles Adams to CIA, December 6, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 38273, Box 685, NARA (DC).

¹⁸¹ Yankton Indians to CIA, December 17, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 40370, Box 690, NARA (DC).

¹⁸² Under Bull, Man Sits High, et al to CIA, September 20, 1888, RBIA, RG 75.19.30, Ft. Belknap, General Corres. 1878-1889, Box 1, NARA (Denver).

¹⁸³ Wolf Chief to CIA, February 2, 1891, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 4820, Box 702, NARA (DC).

¹⁸⁴ Wolf Chief to CIA, May 18, 1889, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 13918, Box 523, NARA (DC).

Red Cloud sent a series of letters, beginning in 1879, to a variety of white correspondents in an attempt to force the government pay him and his people for the thousands of horses the army seized from the Oglala in 1876. In 1879, Red Cloud wrote:

I ask who got the benefit of all these horses and all the robes and rich dresses that were taken out of our tepees? Were they sold? Did the Government get the money? We did not...I do not think the military would bring their hearts into the Indian work...We can never know anything unless we take our hearts with us...One thing I do know, they are very unreasonable, asking or ordering one thing to-day and another...he takes our horses, burned our tepees, and the Great Spirit knows this has often been done when there was no just cause.¹⁸⁵

Red Cloud was still asking for compensation in 1890, even though a concession in the Dawes Sioux Bill of 1889 assured it.¹⁸⁶ In a letter to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, he wrote, “This claim has been in the hands of the Great Father for a number of years any number of promises has been made to me, time and again that this would be paid.” “But just as many time,” Red Cloud lamented, the debt had “been overlooked, this looks to me like neglect or carelessness on the part of the government and it seems strange to me and my people why we are treated this way.”¹⁸⁷

Similarly, two Yankton men, Running Bull and Lightning Iron, waged a lengthy campaign by letter to get money owed to them, about \$15,000 to \$20,000, for services as scouts under General Sully. They spoke with Indian advocates, lawyers, a special agent, and “a great many people” who said would help them. The special agent wrote them “a good many letters

¹⁸⁵ “Red Cloud, Chief of the Ogalalla Sioux,” *The Council Fire and Arbitrator*, December 1884, Vol. VII, No. 12 (Washington DC).

¹⁸⁶ Ostler, *The Plains Sioux*, 229.

¹⁸⁷ Red Cloud to CIA, May 30, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 17061, Box 628, NARA (DC). James A. Finlay, owner of a trading store at Pine Ridge, wrote the letter for Red Cloud.

about it,” but was unable to secure the money for them.¹⁸⁸ John Half Iron, a Santee, believed the government owed his people thousands of dollars of interest (\$15,000 a year for over two decades). “What do you think [the President] say about that,” Half Iron asked Herbert Welsh, “This is what he said. If there is only one white man living on earth and one Santee Indian living with him, they will give each other some things until the world comes to an end. This is what he put it down in a book.”¹⁸⁹ Half Iron wanted Welsh to find that book in the White House. “We think we are men, not beast,” he implored. A group of Pine Ridge Indians complained to the Commissioner that their agent was paying them for their freight-hauling work in store credit, rather than in cash, a practice that would allow the agent to pocket government funds. The Commissioner believed that they should be paid in cash.¹⁹⁰

Between November 1888 and March 1890, over one hundred letters regarding annuity money were sent to the Commissioner of Indians Affairs by Native Americans (or those claiming to be of Native American decent). At least thirty-one came from Native American women. Many of these letters came from boarding school students and other Indians who were living off of their reservations. They had to write to Indian Affairs in order to secure their annuity money. The Pawnee Henry Ward Beecher (Tah-hou-Roose), demanded his annuity money be sent to the Hampton Institute in Virginia and Thomas Cabney, an Omaha, wanted it mailed across the

¹⁸⁸ Running Bull and Lightning Iron to IRA, May 27, 1889, *Indian Rights Association Papers, 1864-1973*, Microfilm Roll 15, Historical Society of Pennsylvania. The letter was written for the men by John P. Williamson in Greenwood, Dakota. A lawyer, Judge Campbell, quit working for them soon after. In 1889, the two men wrote to Herbert Welsh of the Indian Rights Association about the matter. “So now we come to you,” they wrote, “and get you to work the case for us...please let us know if you will take the case for us and try and get a bill through the next Congress for our relief, and we shall be thankful if you will do it.”

¹⁸⁹ John Half Iron to IRA, February 28, 1891, *Indian Rights Association Papers, 1864-1973*, Microfilm Roll 15, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

¹⁹⁰ CIA to Agent H. D. Gallagher, July 22, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.19.85, Pine Ridge, Corres. Received from OIA, Box 9, NARA (KC).

country to Stockton, California.¹⁹¹ In February through March 1890 alone, John Bear (a Winnebago at Hampton), James Enouf (a Pottawatomie at Hampton), Josephine Barnaby (an Omaha woman teaching at a Sioux agency), and James Wolf, Edward Snake, and Levi St. Cyr at Carlisle all asked the Commissioner of Indian Affairs to send their annuity money to their respective locations.¹⁹² Others wrote to their agents back home. Johnson Lane, a Wichita at the Haskell Institute in Lawrence, Kansas, asked his agent for the grass money owed him.¹⁹³ Isaac Moore, also at Haskell, told the Kiowa, Comanche, and Wichita agent that he did not know how often grass money was issued to his people back home, but he had never received it.¹⁹⁴

Some Indians had a difficult time receiving their annuities even after writing to government officials. William Morgan, Frank West, and three other Pawnees at Carlisle, concerned that their annuity money was sent back to the treasury because of their absence from the agency, questioned the Commissioner via letter.¹⁹⁵ They had to write again three months

¹⁹¹ Henry W. Beecher to R. V. Belt, July 15, 1889, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 19020, Box 634, NARA (DC); Thomas Cabney to CIA, July 8, 1889, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 19021, Box 634, NARA (DC).

¹⁹² John Bear to CIA, February 3, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 3548, Box 591, NARA (DC); James Enouf to CIA, February 16, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 5089, Box 595, NARA (DC); Josephine Barnaby to CIA, February 21, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 6023, Box 598, NARA (DC); James Wolf to CIA, March 25, 1890, March 25, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 9441, Box 608, NARA (DC); Edward Snake to CIA, February 1, 1890, *Registers of Letters Received, 1881-1907*, RBIA, Microfilm Publication Number P2186, Roll 38, Letter 3200; Levi St. Cyr to CIA, February 3, 1890, *Registers of Letters Received, 1881-1907*, RBIA, Microfilm Publication Number P2186, Roll 38, Letter 34347.

¹⁹³ Johnson Lane to Agent, September 12, 1889, RBIA, RG 75.19.50, Kiowa Comanche and Wichita, Haskell Institute, Reel 92, NARA (OHS).

¹⁹⁴ Isaac Moore to Agent, May 11, 1891, RBIA, RG 75.19.50, Kiowa Comanche and Wichita, Haskell Institute, Reel 92, NARA (OHS).

¹⁹⁵ William Morgan, et al to CIA, October 31, 1889, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 31171, Box 566, NARA (DC).

later because the Commissioner had yet to reply.¹⁹⁶ It was not unusual for the Commissioner to take his time replying to Indians, but the Pawnees grew impatient. In February 1890, Morgan had to write to the Commissioner for the third time to discover what had become of their annuities.¹⁹⁷ He also wanted to know what was being done with the annuities for his mother who had been in the Government Hospital for the Insane in Washington since 1886. For Native Americans seeking action, letter writing was often an act of perseverance. It might take months for government authorities to reply to Indian letters. Even communication with Indian allies, like the Indian Rights Association, could be unreliable.

Delos Lonewolf, a seventeen year old Kiowa student at the Chilocco boarding school, informed his agent in July 1889 that the Kiowa at Chilocco had yet to receive all of their grass money.¹⁹⁸ In March 1890, the Kiowa agent, Charles Adams, told the superintendent of Chilocco to only give all of the money to those who ask for it. Otherwise, he instructed it be kept in trust for them “as the parents will in every case uphold the children in the demand for money.”¹⁹⁹ Months later, in October and November 1891, Delos Lonewolf and N. E. Brace were still bugging Agent Adams for money owed to them (Brace was sure to offer Adams’ wife and all he knew at the agency his love).²⁰⁰ Duba-mon-thin, an Omaha man, wrote to the Commissioner

¹⁹⁶ William Morgan, et al to CIA, January 13, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 1175, Box 585, NARA (DC).

¹⁹⁷ William Morgan to CIA, February 15, 1890, William Morgan, et al to CIA, October 31, 1889, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 4725, Box 503, NARA (DC). Morgan also told the CIA that he wanted to become a doctor.

¹⁹⁸ Delos Lonewolf to Agent W. D. Myers, July 18, 1889, RBIA, RG 75.19.50, Kiowa Comanche and Wichita, Chilocco Indian School, Reel 91, NARA (OHS).

¹⁹⁹ Agent Charles Adams to B. S. Cappock, March 4, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.19.50, Kiowa Comanche and Wichita, Letters Sent, Reel 18, NARA (OHS).

²⁰⁰ Delos Lonewolf to Agent Charles Adams, November 17, 1891, RBIA, RG 75.19.50, Kiowa Comanche and Wichita, Chilocco Indian School, Reel 91, NARA (OHS); N. E. Brace to Agent Charles Adams, October 12, 1891, RBIA, RG 75.19.50, Kiowa Comanche and Wichita, Chilocco Indian School, Reel 91, NARA (OHS).

after the death of his twenty-one year old son. He wanted the Commissioner to give the annuity money his son would have received to his son's widow. "When he was living he was very active but when he reached manhood he died and left me," Duba-mon-thin wrote, "he was married to a young school girl who could talk English very well...take pity on her and help her in doing as I ask you."²⁰¹ Duba-mon-thin told the Commissioner that all Christians loved God and his son loved God ("and loved to listen to his word"), but "God has willed it, so he was cut down and left us."²⁰²

In 1890, Persis Bighair returned home to the Crow Agency after seven years at Carlisle and she found herself under the domain of the Crow agent. Bighair was not satisfied with the path the agent set for her so she wrote a letter to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, hoping that he would help her out. Bighair wrote:

²⁰¹ Duba-mon-thin to CIA, November 25, 1889, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 34354, Box 574, NARA (DC). Dr. Susan LaFlesche seems to have written the letter for Duba-mon-thin.

²⁰² Even if an Indian was able to independently secure a payment owed through letter writing, that money might still be placed under the domain of an agent. Red Hawk wrote to F. C. Briggs at Hampton to request money owed him, a sum of \$20.75, so that he could buy a pony to use for his new job as a policeman. But Briggs chose to send the \$20.75 check to Red Hawk's agent at Standing Rock instead of sending it directly to Red Hawk. See F.C. Briggs to Agent James McLaughlin, September 9, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.19.113, Standing Rock, Misc. Corres. Received, Box 34, NARA (KC). Some Indians facing legal troubles corresponded with lawyers. Lawyer John H. Burns reported to Herbert Welsh that he received letters from Plenty Horses almost daily and repeated letters from his father Living Bear. Plenty Horses was arrested eight days after the Wounded Knee Massacre for killing Lt. Edward W. Casey in the Badlands at Pine Ridge and he sought council from Burns. "They seem somehow to think that because I have stood by them, or up for them, in the past, they have only to call upon me, overlooking entirely the question of compensation," Burns complained to Welsh. Burns told Plenty Horses that he could not represent him for less than five hundred dollars, a bargain according to Burns, but too much for Plenty Horses. He eventually found lawyers who would work pro bono and was acquitted in the well-publicized trial. John H. Burns to Herbert Welsh, March 28, 1891, RBIA, RG 75, Special Cases, 1821-1907, SC 188, Box 200, NARA (DC).

Dear friend I thought I would write a few lines to you this evening will you please be kind enough to let me have my cousin Shaving wife she was married to my uncle Shaving own son so please let me have soon she was married to my cousin the agent took her put her in school I don't think that is right she is get married took her put her in the school her mother and her his land want her back please. I been at school for 7 years I just come home to help my people Agent keeps me he don't give me anything to do for a month since I come home so I would like to go out to help my people this time for I have at Carlisle many years just come home to help my people for my mother is sick for year is not well no body help her so want me to come back help them so please write soon let me hear from you soon please let me have my cousin Shaving wife this is all from your friend Miss Persis Bighair from Carlisle girl been for 7 year age 20 year let me hear from you soon²⁰³

Writing in her second language, Bighair did her best to communicate her wishes to the Commissioner. She wanted her cousin, who was married, released from school. She also felt a need to help her people, but was not allowed to do much. Bighair's letter represented her best chance to overcome the authority of the Crow agent. Literacy allowed Native Americans to constantly challenge the federal government. Arguments could be mailed to a government thousands of miles away, creating real change in Natives' lives.

²⁰³ Persis Bighair to CIA, September 1, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 27635, Box 658, NARA (DC).

CHAPTER 3 - “We Want the Doors Left Open”: Intertribal Visiting

In September 1886, over four hundred Oglala Lakotas from the Pine Ridge Agency in South Dakota arrived unannounced at the recently consolidated Uintah and Ouray Agency in Utah. Led by the son of Red Cloud, the men went directly to the agency office on arrival, presented their papers to Agent Eugene White, and asked for some rations. The group had “a great many papers of the nature of testimonial, or certificates of good character,” White wrote several years later, but the only pass they held was issued by Capt. James Bell, an Army officer who was acting as a temporary agent at Pine Ridge.¹ The pass only gave the party permission to visit the Shoshones at the Wind River Agency in Wyoming, but the Oglala decided to travel a great deal farther.² The Oglala crossed the continental divide to see the Utes, nearly seven hundred miles, a trip aided in part by the railroads.

White knew that the Oglalas came in peace and he was hospitable to the men (although he would not give them government rations) and allowed them to stay a week to allow their horses to rest. The Oglalas told Agent White that they came to “swap” with the Utes. They wanted to exchange red pipestone long-stem pipes, moccasins, tobacco pouches, and “other trinkets made of buckskin and ornamented with beads and porcupine quills” for ponies and buckskin.³ Three or four days after their arrival, the Utes held a “big dog feast” at Chief Sowawick’s camp that was attended by two thousand persons in all. White compared the

¹ Eugene E. White, *Service on the Indian Reservations: Being the Experiences of a Special Indian Agent While Inspecting Agencies and Serving as Agent for Various Tribes* (Little Rock: Diploma Press, Arkansas Democrat Company, 1893), 161.

² Capt. James Bell to Southern Ute Agent, September 13, 1886, RBIA, RG 75.19.18, Consolidated Ute, Decimal Files, Box 1, NARA (Denver). Agent Bell of Pine Ridge asked the agent at the Southern Ute Agency to send the Oglala home if they reached his agency, but it is not clear if the Oglala made it there.

³ White, *Service on the Indian Reservations*, 161-162.

gathering to a Fourth of July barbecue. Sowawick addressed the Oglalas using sign language, the only way the groups could communicate. White could not understand anything that was communicated between the groups. Three hundred men participated in a dance, one hundred Oglalas and two hundred Utes, which lasted several hours. At midnight, a medicine man named Wash brought the Utes and Oglalas closer into the ring. The dancers remained at the edge and meat was served with some ceremony. Although not much is known about the dance itself, White described colorful paint, feathers, and jingle bells on the dancers. The Oglala party left Uintah and Ouray after a week and a lasting relationship was established between the groups. The U.S. Postal Service allowed the tribes to keep in touch and at least eight future meetings between the Oglala and Ute occurred before the end of 1890. Because of this new connection built among the two tribes, some Utes were able to share their knowledge of a new Indian messiah with the Oglalas during a visit to Pine Ridge in the late fall of 1888.⁴

Reservations were experiments in acculturation designed to keep Indians contained and away from white society. Indians supposedly would no longer spend their days roaming and hunting, but would be settled farmers. Artificial government boundaries separated tribal groups to keep peace and limit distractions, which would ease the government's effort to civilize the Indians. And as part of the effort to suppress a separate Native identity, the government hoped to end the intertribal visitation that had been an important part of Indian life for generations.

Reservation life presented plenty of challenges for Native peoples and they did what was needed to maintain intertribal relationships. Elaine Eastman described Pine Ridge as a "forlorn,

⁴ William Selwyn to Agent E. W. Foster, November 25, 1890, RBIA, RG 75, SC 188, Box 199, NARA (Washington, DC).

straggling concentration camp in the middle of the vast empty spaces of Dakota Territory.”⁵ The reservation system, however, did not keep friends and families apart. Natives traveled to feel independence, to experience life outside their reservations, and to expand their connections. Their trips were made for leisure, business, politics, and especially religion. More often than not, if a large party was making a visit to another reserve, a dance would be held.

Natives constantly challenged the efforts to isolate them from one another. At least seventy-four Indian groups, and probably many more, were given passes to visit distant agencies between 1888 and 1890, varying from parties of one to parties of hundreds. At least sixty different groups of Indians traveled off-reservation without permission in those same years. Reservation boundaries were fluid. It was impossible for government employees to watch the movement of every Indian on reservations that stretched for thousands of square miles. Indians remained geographically mobile and maintained relationships among different. During the 1880s, Indians throughout the West, particularly those living great distances apart, visited each other more than ever before. A Pyramid Lake Paiute named Johnson Sides told the *Reno Evening Gazette* that the Indians on the west side of the Rockies wanted to “become more neighborly than heretofore, and hereafter they will visit each other more often.”⁶ While visiting Bannock and Shoshone at Fort Hall in late 1888, a reservation made easily accessible by the railroads, Sides saw Nez Perce and Lemhi Indians join the Fort Hall Indians in a “grand dance.” According to Sides, it was the first time the Nez Percés and Lemhi had visited the Bannocks and Shoshones in years.

⁵ Elaine Goodale Eastman, “The Ghost Dance War and Wounded Knee Massacre of 1890-91,” *Nebraska History* 26, No. 1 (Jan.- March, 1945): 26.

⁶ “A Satisfactory Visit,” *Reno Evening Gazette*, January 3, 1889. Sides was an informant of sorts for the *Reno Evening Gazette*, see “The Rise, Fall, and Redemption of Johnson Sides,” in Florence Finch Kelly, *Emerson's Wife: And Other Western Stories* (Chicago: A. C. McClurg & Company, 1911), 161-168.

Efforts were made at the beginning of the reservation years to limit intertribal contact. As early as 1877, the Superintendent of Indian Affairs in Dakota Territory called intertribal visiting one of “the most serious obstacles to settled habits.”⁷ “While visiting is one of our great difficulties,” he wrote, “it is one that can be controlled.” Two years later, the Standing Rock agent still called visitation “a constant source of annoyance.”⁸ In fact, in some cases, Indians were forging agent signatures on travel passes. The agent at Fort Berthold said that “his” Indians loved to visit other tribes, “especially their old enemies the Sioux,” but because “this disposition has very properly been curbed by the government, they now submit to the prohibition of their wandering proclivities, although not very cheerfully.”⁹ By the late 1880s, agents were still curbing visitation and Indians expressed their dissatisfaction with those restraints. In December 1888, Little Wound, Young Man Afraid of His Horses, and Red Cloud sent a letter of complaint to President Grover Cleveland. “We should be permitted to make friendly visits among each other as the white people do,” they argued.¹⁰ After all, the President “said he wanted us to be at peace with each other and to be friendly.” “We do not want the gate closed between us.”

Visitation held a social and commercial benefit for Indians, but the government opposed visitation for a number of reasons. Agents did not like what they saw as excessive generosity in the tradition of giving gifts to a visiting group. Visiting Indians could expect to receive horses and other fineries from their hosts as well as some annuities provided by the government. Cynical agents saw visitation as a scheme, visiting groups hoping to profit while “their” Indians lost property and food. Also, some agents were afraid that intertribal visitation only encouraged

⁷ *ARCIA*, 1877, 50.

⁸ *ARCIA*, 1879, 48.

⁹ *ARCIA*, 1879, 30.

¹⁰ Little Wound, Young Man Afraid of His Horses, and Red Cloud to the President, December 10, 1888, RBIA, RG 75.19.85, Pine Ridge, Copies of Misc. Letters Sent, Box 54, NARA (KC).

“the old desire to roam.” The government hoped to take the nomadic habits out of the Indian lifestyle; visitation was thought to be the way Indians quenched their inherent desire to move about. Moreover, agents found that Indians neglected their fields and their work while visitors were on the reserve. In August 1879, two hundred and seven Gros Ventres, Mandans, and Arikaras from Fort Berthold in Montanan visited the Standing Rock Lakotas in Dakota Territory. They stayed five days and danced, feasted, and exchanged presents while corn fields and hay “were entirely neglected.” “When the visitors left,” the Standing Rock agent reported, “many of the Indians here were without shirts, hats and other necessary garments, having given them away.” The degree of exaggeration on the agent’s part is not known, and it may not have been a literal case of giving one’s guest the shirt off one’s back, but he believed that the Standing Rock Indians would soon besiege his office with applications to visit Fort Berthold, “that our Indians may share the benefit of being visitors.”¹¹

When visiting was curbed by Indian Affairs, some took the mail to express their displeasure. In July 1879, Spotted Tail, the Brulé Lakota chief, sent a letter to the Secretary of the Interior to communicate his disappointment with the restrictions the government was placing on his people. He told the Secretary that he was doing everything he was told and advised his people to stay out of trouble with white people. He wrote that he was trying to be like white people by staying home. But he also was “good hearted” like the white man, and he and his people “like to visit each other as the whites do.”¹² “When you have relatives sick you want to go and see them; so do I,” Spotted Tail argued. He sent a young man to the Cheyenne Agency to see his sick sister with a pass from his agent, but the Cheyenne Agency “did not respect it...they shot at him and tried to kill him” because they had a military man as the agent. “When those

¹¹ *ARCIA*, 1879, 49.

¹² *ARCIA*, 1879, 184.

people come and visit us we feed them and use them well, and send them back home,” he continued, “when any Indian goes there they take his horse away and put him in jail. This will make trouble and I want them to stop it.” Spotted Tail could see little reason why his people were not allowed to travel through what was once their countryside.

Most agents did not enjoy dealing with visiting Indians. It took time and resources to properly manage visitation. Permission had to be sought through the mail, passes had to be written, and transportation might have to be secured, sometimes through the railroads. Also, agents always assumed that trouble might arise during travel. Indian police were involved in directing visiting parties or intercepting trespassers. Some policemen were asked to travel to distant reservations to retrieve Indians without passes.¹³ In some circumstances, agents sent Indian policemen to escort visiting parties to their destination. In November 1890, Pine Ridge's Agent Daniel Royer sent two policemen along with fourteen Oglalas on their journey to the Crow Agency “to see that no depredations were committed while enroute.”¹⁴ The group left in the midst of the ghost dance troubles at Pine Ridge. Royer was worried about possible trouble with white settlers, but he still allowed them to travel. A group of Poncas were also assigned police escorts in November 1890 during their visit to the Kiowa, Comanche, and Wichita and Cheyenne and Arapaho agencies.¹⁵ Some agents were worried that their Indians would be contaminated with ghost dance ideology from foreign Indians, others did not.¹⁶ In a few

¹³ Agent John Waugh to Agent James McLaughlin, September 18, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.19.113, Standing Rock, Misc. Corres. Received, Box 34, NARA (KC).

¹⁴ Agent D. F. Royer to Agent W. P. Wyman, November 3, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.19.85, Pine Ridge, Copies of Misc. Letters Sent, Box 54, NARA (KC).

¹⁵ Agent D. M. Woods to Whom It May Concern, November 1, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.19.77, Pawnee Ponca Otoe, Reel 17, NARA (OHS).

¹⁶ Blackfeet Agent to Fort Belknap Agent, November 29, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.19.3, Blackfeet Agency, Copies of General Letters Sent, Box 6, NARA (Denver).

instances, agents expressed a fear of the spread of actual disease because of visitation. The Pawnee, Ponca, Otoe agent blamed the transmission of syphilis to the Otoes on a band of visiting Omahas in the winter of 1886.¹⁷

The vastness of reservations and the Indians' unwillingness to make their comings and goings known to agents made visitation difficult to control.¹⁸ For many Indians, passes were simply a formality that could be ignored and they constantly traveled without permission. For instance, the agent at the Cheyenne and Arapaho Agency found groups as large as four hundred arriving without notice from distant reservations in 1887 and 1888.¹⁹ The agent at Fort Peck grew so frustrated with not being able to control his Indians' movements that he recommended breaking up the remote Wolf Point subagency and moving the Indians to other agencies. His Gros Ventres visited Fort Berthold and the Yanktons visited Standing Rock so frequently that the agent thought it best that they be moved there permanently. "These Indians for thousands of years have been nomads," he complained, they would not settle down "as long as the excuse and temptation is before them to visit their relatives at distant agencies."²⁰ Some groups traveled extraordinary distances without the knowledge of their agents. In early 1889, a group of delegates selected by a council of Turtle Mountain Chippewas left their agency in North Dakota and headed to Washington D.C. without permission.²¹ It is not known how far Chippewas made

¹⁷ *ARCIA*, 1887, 87.

¹⁸ If an agent agreed to allow one of "his" Indians to visit another agency, the agent was supposed to ask both the Commissioner of Indian Affairs and the agent at the intended destination. Most agents did not bother the Commissioner with every visit request, even if they allowed the visit to occur. In the late 1880s, there were many more of the agent-to-agent requests than the trio of agent to commissioner and agent requests.

¹⁹ *ARCIA*, 1888, 93.

²⁰ *ARCIA*, 1886, 184.

²¹ Agent John Cramsie to CIA, February 8, 1889, Letter 4159, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Box 502, NARA (Washington, DC).

it before they were caught, but other groups attempted long journeys without notifying the government.²²

Pine Ridge's Agent H. D. Gallagher knew that the Oglala Lakotas and Northern Cheyennes on his agency enjoyed the freedom to travel and visit other tribes. He was not as worried about visitation as much as his contemporaries, but by the end of 1889, his opinion would change. Gallagher gave out passes to other reserves for much of 1889. He allowed twenty-five Sissetons to visit his Oglalas at Pine Ridge in May 1889 and did not hesitate to ask J. George Wright, the Rosebud agent, if he would allow seventy-five Oglalas and Cheyennes to visit Rosebud in September 1889 on the invitation of Brulé friends.²³ Granting them the privilege would "make their hearts good by granting passes" Gallagher told Wright.²⁴ Agent Wright had no objection to a "limited number of deserving Indians" traveling to Rosebud, but he did not want a large group because there was not enough food to support them.²⁵ Visiting Indians expected "to be 'feasted' while here," Wright explained.

Complying with Wright's request, Gallagher gave out only thirty passes for the visit on September 25, but around two hundred Indians arrived at Rosebud. The Indians held a feast and

²² Agent H. D. Gallagher to Crow Creek Agent, February 8, 1889, RBIA, RG 75.19.85, Pine Ridge, Copies of Misc. Letters Sent, Box 54, NARA (KC). It was also common for an Indian belonging at one agency to live on another for long periods of time without permission. The greatest obstacle for an Indian wanting to move unofficially was figuring out how to find food at their new home. Sometimes a man or woman from another agency, often hundreds of miles away, would show up at an agent's office to ask to be transferred in order to receive government rations. Agents usually granted such requests and the individual would be placed on the agency "rolls," although some were denied transfer as punishment for traveling without permission, see Agent Charles McChesney to Agent W. W. Anderson, June 28, 1887, RBIA, RG 75.19.20, Crow Creek, Box 21, NARA (KC).

²³ Agent H. D. Gallagher to Sisseton Agent, May 3, 1889, RBIA, RG 75.19.85, Pine Ridge, Copies of Misc. Letters Sent, Box 54, NARA (KC).

²⁴ Agent H. D. Gallagher to Agent J. George Wright, September 16, 1889, RBIA, RG 75.19.85, Pine Ridge, Copies of Misc. Letters Sent, Box 54, NARA (KC).

²⁵ Agent J. George Wright to Agent H. D. Gallagher, September 21, 1889, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Box 559, Letter 28215, NARA (Washington, DC).

a dance (reported as being the Omaha dance).²⁶ Eight to ten cows were killed to supply the feast, much to the dismay of Wright, who ordered the Pine Ridge Indians to return home without rations. When a Rosebud Indian policeman was sent out to convey the order to the large group, however, Little Hawk detained the policeman and refused to let him go back to the agency headquarters.²⁷ Additional policemen were sent to the rescue. Bloodshed was avoided only because Little Hawk's brother's rifle jammed, but Wright and his policeman eventually calmed the situation in a council. But the incident soured Gallagher on intertribal visitation. "I sincerely wish the visiting business could be broken up," he wrote to Agent Wright, "and I will be with you in whatever may be undertaken to accomplish it."²⁸

²⁶ Ibid.; W. Cartwright to Agent J. George Wright, October 1, 1889, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 28215, Box 559, NARA (Washington, DC).

²⁷ Special Agent George Parker to CIA, October 1, 1889, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 28215, Box 559, NARA (Washington, DC). Agent Wright sent out several policemen to rescue the policeman. The force was able to get hand-cuffs on Little Hawk despite his resistance (It seems that it was the Brulé Little Hawk of Rosebud, the nephew of Crazy Horse and son of Two Strike, not the Oglala Little Hawk, headman of the Hunkpatila band and uncle of Crazy Horse, but it is not certain). Soon, a crowd gathered outside the stockade where Little Hawk was being held. Little Hawk's brother arrived on horseback holding a breech loading rifle and began riding around the stockade. He fired a shot that missed a policeman, the second cartridge got jammed, and the police were able to throw Little Hawk's brother in jail. Special Agent George Parker reported that the crowd around the stockade "were getting noisy and it looked for a few minutes as if there would be a racket," but a council held between the Indians and Wright and Parker managed to solve the issue. Wright told the council that the orders of the Great Father had to be obeyed and those who visited without permission had to be punished. Parker called it a "pleasant" council, but wondered what would have happened if the second cartridge would have left the rifle. Little Hawk and his brother remained in jail and the Pine Ridge Indians left Rosebud. Crow Dog was the most "belligerent" speaker at the council, according to Parker, although his argument was not recorded.

²⁸ Agent H. D. Gallagher to Agent J. George Wright, October 2, 1889, RBIA, 75.19.96, Rosebud, Letters Received, Box 5, NARA (KC). A similar episode had occurred in the previous spring 1889. Around two hundred Rosebud Indians had come to Pine Ridge during the planting season. Dances were held and the Pine Ridge Indians gave some of their stock to the Rosebud visitors. Also, Gallagher let Standing Elk and four others visit Tongue River in August 1889, but many others arrived without passes. Agent H. D. Gallagher to Agent R. L. Upshaw, August 31, 1889, RBIA, RG 75.19.85, Pine Ridge, Copies of Misc. Letters Sent, Box 54, NARA (KC).

Gallagher had given out eighty-four passes to Pine Ridge Indians between September 18, 1889 and October 2, 1889 alone, not including the many who left the reserve without permission, a volume that grew tiresome for Gallagher. It seemed to him that the Oglalas and Cheyennes were taking advantage of his inclination to issue passes. By November 1889, Gallagher was less enthusiastic about issuing passes, but he still was willing to leave the decision to the agent at the reserve the Indians intended to visit. In that month, a group of Oglalas asked Gallagher if they could visit the Crows, a tribe that was once a major rival to the Oglalas. Gallagher told them that it would be a “great annoyance” for the Crow Agent, but he consented to ask only “to satisfy them.” “I beg you not to think your disapproval would be any disappointment to me,” Gallagher explained to the Crow agent. He was only asking to please the group of Oglalas.²⁹ The Crow agent declined because he had already had too many visitors at his agency during the year.³⁰ Gallagher, however, did allow two men and a woman to visit Cheyenne River in December 1889.³¹ By June 1890, Gallagher hoped the agent at Rosebud would join him in reducing the number of passes they issued so that “the evil effects resulting from it” would be minimized.³²

Visitation was never banned outright, but some did try to put an end to visits by large parties, which agents believed caused the most trouble. In 1885, the new agent at Yankton “incurred the displeasure of a good many” after he stopped the practice. “This old custom was yielded...with great opposition from some of the chiefs and headmen,” the agent reported.³³

²⁹ Agent H. D. Gallagher to Agent W. P. Wyman, November 1, 1889, RBIA, RG 75.19.85, Pine Ridge, Copies of Misc. Letters Sent, Box 54, NARA (KC).

³⁰ Agent W. P. Wyman to Agent H. D. Gallagher, November 10, 1889, RBIA, RG 75.19.21, Crow Agency, Press Copies of Misc. Letters Sent, Box 4, NARA (Denver).

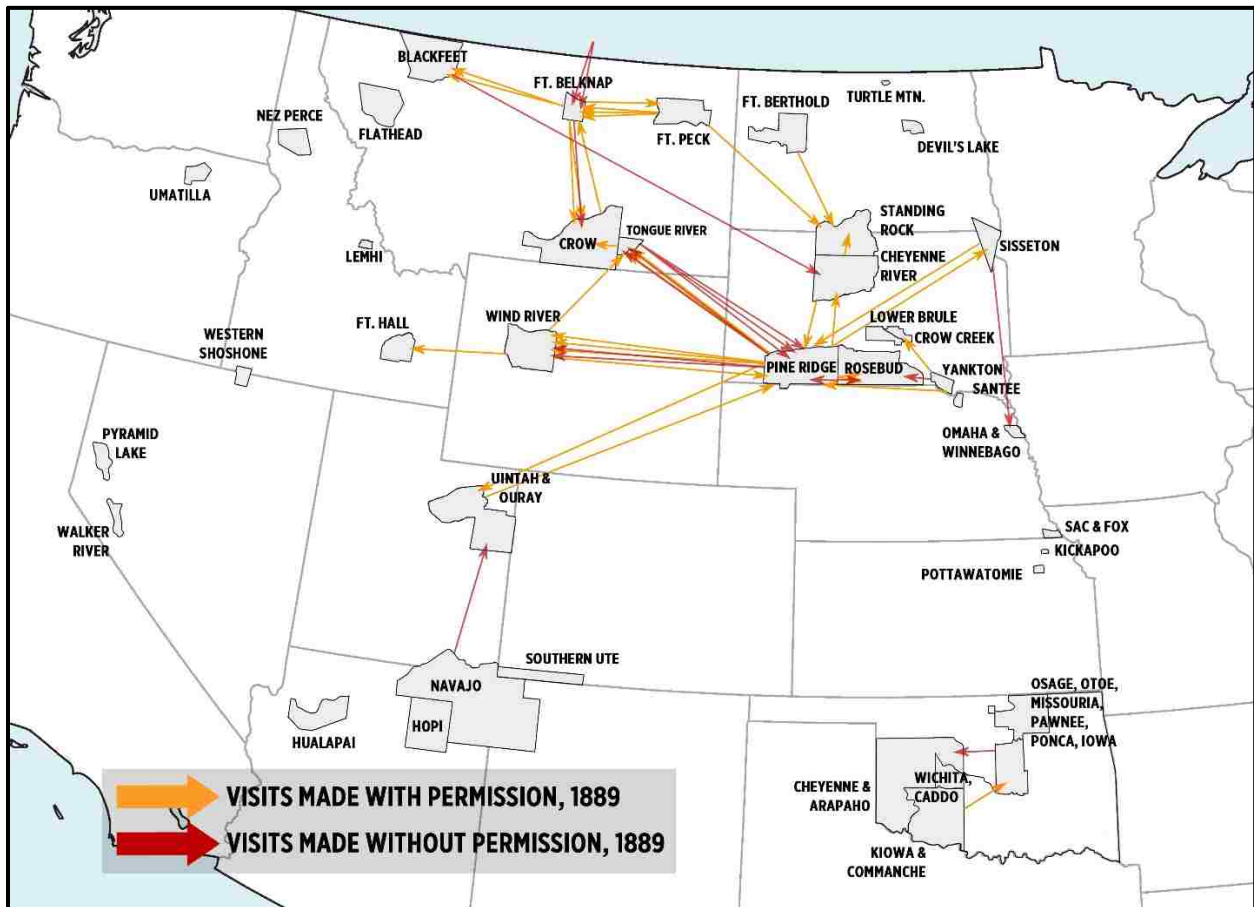
³¹ Agent Charles McChesney to Agent H. D. Gallagher, December 14, 1889, RG 75.19.85, Pine Ridge, Misc. Corres. Received, Box 27, NARA (KC).

³² Agent H. D. Gallagher to Agent J. George Wright, June 12, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.19.85, Pine Ridge, Copies of Misc. Letters Sent, Box 54, NARA (KC).

³³ *ARCIA*, 1885, 62.

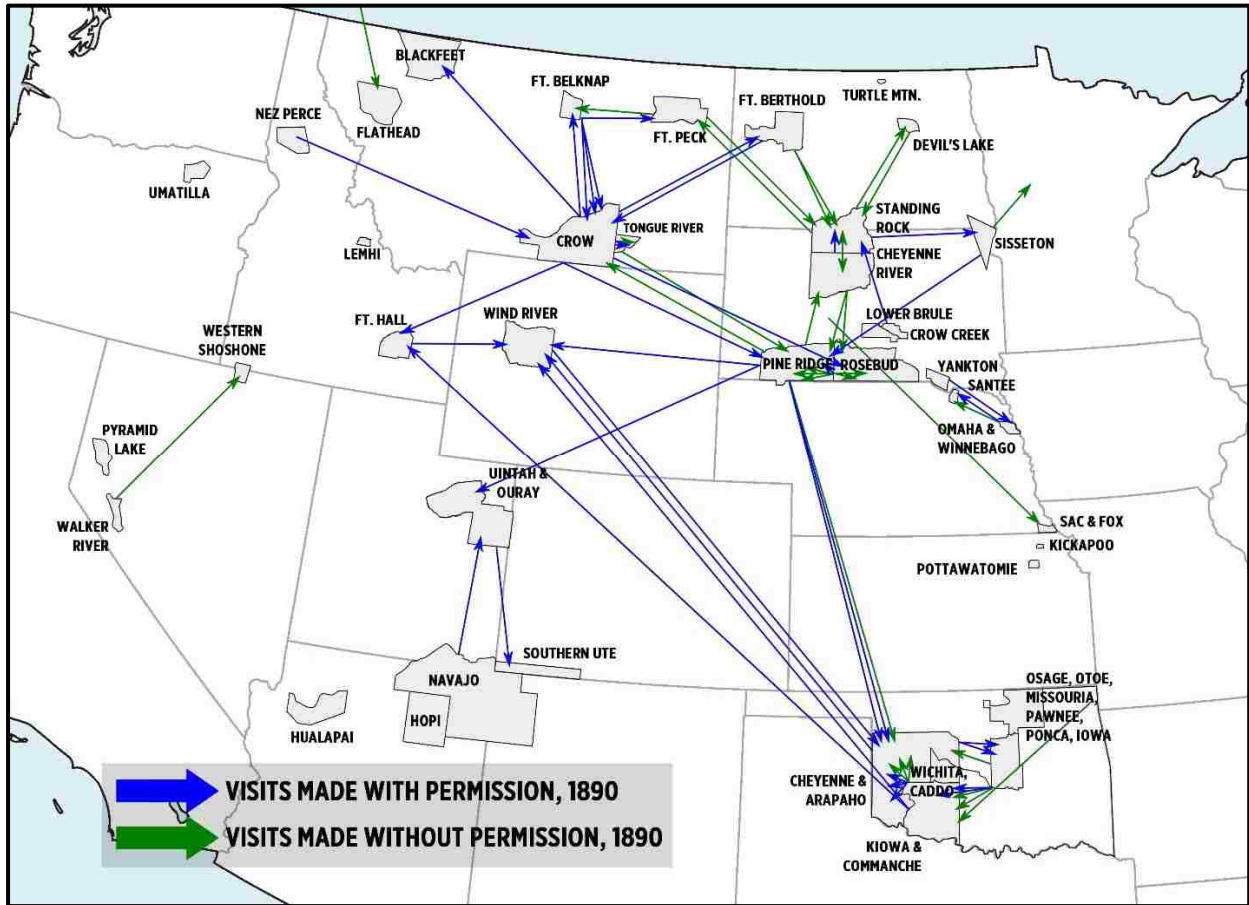
Some Yanktons inevitably left without their agent’s consent. The agent responded by tearing up their ration tickets on their return, which decreased the number leaving the agency in 1886. But the prohibition did little to stop remote Indians from visiting Yankton. During a thirty-day period in the summer of 1886, the Yankton Agency was visited by about one hundred and fifty Indians (men, women, and children) in groups of twenty to sixty. “These visits are prolific evil,” the agent demurred, “Indians stop their work to have a general ‘good time’ with their visiting friends.”³⁴ The visitors danced every night with the Yankton Sioux.

FIGURE 17: KNOWN VISITS MADE WITH AND WITHOUT PERMISSION, 1889



³⁴ *ARCIA*, 1886, 94.

FIGURE 18: KNOWN VISITS MADE WITH AND WITHOUT PERMISSION, 1890



If an agent did accept another agent's request, most saw it as a favor that should be returned in the future. Letters between agents often acknowledged the courtesy of the act, some guaranteed to reciprocate if any Indians wanted to visit their reserve.³⁵ But agents did not always agree on the value of visitation.³⁶ Some agents did not want any visitors for any reason. In 1888, Crow Agent E. P. Briscoe refused to give his Indians passes and he denied multiple

³⁵ Agent D. F. Royer to Agent W. P. Wyman, November 3, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.19.85, Pine Ridge, Copies of Misc. Letters Sent, Box 54, NARA (KC).

³⁶ Edwin Fields, agent at Fort Belknap, believed that the "best interest of the Indians are served by requiring them to live within the limits of their reservation," but he never prohibited all visitations, see Agent Edwin Fields to Hon. H. Reed, May 25, 1889, RBIA, RG 75.19.30, Ft. Belknap, Misc. Letters Sent 1880-1927, Box 1, NARA (Denver).

requests for visitation from other agencies. Briscoe told the agent at Fort Berthold that visiting Indians only caused problems. "It is my desire to get this tribe under perfect control," Briscoe wrote.³⁷ The Fort Belknap agent hoped that Little Chief would be allowed to visit the Crow, but Briscoe would not allow it, reasoning that he wished to keep the Crow "from being excited and 'stirred up' by visitors."³⁸

In September 1888, a Crow Creek Sioux named Charles LeClaire wrote a letter to Briscoe to ask permission to visit the Crow Indians. Briscoe denied the visit request. Briscoe informed the Crow Creek agent, W. W. Anderson, that he did not want any Indian visitors on his agency because his Indians were "quiet and controlled and are kept well in hand." But LeClaire and his party left Crow Creek anyway, Agent Anderson had given LeClaire a pass to the Crow Agency before he received Briscoe's rejection letter. Anderson informed Briscoe that the LeClaire party was on their way. Briscoe chastised Anderson for being too hasty and reminded him that according to Bureau of Indian Affairs regulations, the approval of the agent of the Indians to be visited must be obtained before a pass can be given.³⁹ Agent Briscoe asked the commanding officer at Fort McKinney and the agent at Tongue River to be on the lookout for the traveling Sioux.⁴⁰

³⁷ Agent E. P. Briscoe to Agent Thomas Jones, September 18, 1888, September 14, 1888, RBIA, RG 75.19.21, Crow Agency, Press Copies of Misc. Letters Sent, Box 4, NARA (Denver).

³⁸ Agent E. P. Briscoe to Agent Edwin Fields, September 22, 1888, September 14, 1888, RBIA, RG 75.19.21, Crow Agency, Press Copies of Misc. Letters Sent, Box 4, NARA (Denver); Agent Edwin Fields to Agent E. P. Briscoe, September 17, 1888, RBIA, RG 75.19.30, Ft. Belknap, Misc. Letters Sent 1880-1927, Box 1, NARA (Denver).

³⁹ Agent E. P. Briscoe to Agent W. W. Anderson, September 24, 1888, RG 75.19.21, Crow Agency, Press Copies of Misc. Letters Sent, Box 4, NARA (Denver).

⁴⁰ Agent E. P. Briscoe to Agent W. W. Anderson, September 14, 1888, RBIA, RG 75.19.21, Crow Agency, Press Copies of Misc. Letters Sent, Box 4, NARA (Denver); Agent E. P. Briscoe to Commanding Officer Fort McKinney, September 24, 1888, RBIA, RG 75.19.21, Crow Agency, Press Copies of Misc. Letters Sent, Box 4, NARA (Denver); Agent E. P. Briscoe to Agent R. L. Upshaw, September 25, 1888, RBIA, RG 75.19.21, Crow Agency, Press Copies of Misc. Letters Sent, Box 4, NARA (Denver).

Briscoe was replaced by W. P. Wyman as agent of the Crows in 1889. Agent Wyman was not as strict on keeping visiting tribes away. He allowed a party of seven or eight Cheyennes from Tongue River, including Two Moons, to visit in the fall of 1889. Wyman did not think a small party would do any harm, but he admitted that a larger party would be demoralizing.⁴¹ The policy regarding visitation was always fluid and it seemed to depend on the disposition of the agent-in-charge. It is not surprising then that Indians felt that their rights were being violated arbitrarily when their requests to travel were denied. Some Indians, especially if they were considered “good” Indians by an agent, were allowed to visit or receive visiting family and friends while others were not, often at the whim of an agent.⁴² But sometimes the Indians’ desire to visit was so great that an agent would issue passes just to keep those under their charge pleased in an attempt to avoid future difficulties. Agent White affirmed the problem writing, “The different tribes are also fond of visiting each other in large numbers, and Agents frequently find it inexpedient to refuse them permission to do so, even if they can see no benefit to be derived from it.”⁴³ Even the less desirable were given passes to maintain harmony.

⁴¹ Agent W. P. Wyman to Agent R. L. Upshaw, October 23, 1889, RBIA, RG 75.19.21, Crow Agency, Press Copies of Misc. Letters Sent, Box 4, NARA (Denver).

⁴² According to their agent, a group of thirty-two Sioux from Crow Creek deserved to visit the Fort Berthold Agency because they were “good, substantial, progressive Indians; those among them having children of school age have cheerfully put them in school; their crops are harvested and hay gathered for their stock for winter use; they are quiet and peaceable and I’m sure would engage in no mischief on their trip,” see Agent W. W. Anderson to CIA, September 9, 1889, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 25973, Box 553, NARA (Washington, DC). Many of the letters agents sent to seek permission contain similar adjectives. Applicants were rarely described in poor terms because those allowed to travel were usually those favored by the agents. Special qualifications were often mentioned, especially for Indian policemen or other Indian governmental employees. The agent at Wind River, for instance, told the Commissioner of Indian Affairs that he should not expect any trouble from Little Wolf while visiting Fort Hall because he had just completed an eight-month service as a judge on the court of Indian offenses, see Agent John Fosher to CIA, March 15, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 8748, Box 606, NARA (Washington, DC).

⁴³ Eugene E. White, *Service on the Indian Reservations* (Little Rock: Diploma Press, Arkansas Democrat Company, 1893), 160.

Indians often sought permission to visit other agencies by writing letters to their agents, the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, or the agent at the reservation they hoped to visit. Cyrus Matonajin, a half Yankton Dakota, half Brulé Lakota who lived at the Yankton Agency, wrote to his agent to seek permission to visit his father's side of the family who were Brulé at the Rosebud Agency. "I don't want to run off but I want a pass," Matonajin wrote.⁴⁴ Spotted Horse at Standing Rock wrote (with the help of John Grass) to his agent hoping to see his mother and sister at Rosebud for the first time in thirteen years. His sister was "very sick," he told the agent, "wish you give me a pass for 30 days."⁴⁵ Feather-in-the-Ear, however, asked the Secretary of the Interior if he could have a horse and a wagon to travel to other agencies, but he did not bother to ask permission to travel. He seems to have assumed that it was his right, in his old age, to visit his friends.⁴⁶ Crazy Bear, a Pine Ridge Sans Arc Lakota, wrote to the Crow Agent, where he intended to visit, rather than ask his own agent. The Crow agent would not consider the request unless it came from the Pine Ridge agent.⁴⁷

Some Indians sent invitations to distant tribes via the mail, the only practical way to propose a visit to a group living hundreds of miles away. They could be written by an agent, but invitations were commonly made outside the government's auspices. Indians sent letters of invitation and planning directly to other Indians. In 1879, for instance, an Omaha man wrote to a

⁴⁴ Cyrus Matonajin to Major Leary, November 7, 1889, RBIA, RG 75.19.96, Rosebud, Letters Received, Box 5, NARA (KC). Matonajin's father had married a Brulé woman at Rosebud and had "a lot of children" who Matonajin had not seen in nine years, including his oldest sister who was married to Standing Bear. The Yankton agent forwarded the letter to the Rosebud agent, calling Matonajin a "good man." Matonajin died at Yankton in 1890.

⁴⁵ Spotted Horse to Agent James McLaughlin, May 15, 1889, *James McLaughlin Papers*, Roll 2.

⁴⁶ Feather-in-the-Ear to Secretary of the Interior, July 25, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 22983, Box 645, NARA (Washington, DC).

⁴⁷ Agent M. P. Wyman to Crazy Bear, November 10, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.19.21, Crow Agency, Press Copies of Misc. Letters Sent, Box 4, NARA (Denver).

Ponca friend directing him to get ready for a visit from the Omahas and to ask the Yanktons already visiting the Poncas if they would “entertain” them. “Do you have an eye to their interests?” the Omaha man asked.⁴⁸ He also wanted to know about the Ponca’s visit with Red Cloud and the Oglalas. Letters sent by the Omahas or Poncas to friends or relatives in other tribes usually spoke of future visits or apologies for not making past visits.⁴⁹ On a single day, August 22, 1878, nine letters were written by the Omahas in their Native language and several of them referred to an anticipated visit of the Poncas.⁵⁰ “When we Indians meet, we ought to do something for one another,” an Omaha wrote to a Ponca friend.⁵¹

Indians also kept in touch with their guests via letter after they traveled back home, which allowed them to continue communication, cultivate relationships, and resolve any unfinished business from the visit. In one instance, the Omahas used letter writing to quell tensions with another tribe after a disastrous visit. A group of Yanktons visited the Omahas in winter 1878, but the progressive Omaha leaders would not meet with the Yanktons because they were the guests of the conservative Omaha chiefs. Lion, a progressive, told a correspondent that he did not speak to the Yanktons because he “did not regard them as” his “friends.”⁵² The “old men” chiefs (conservatives) “wished to be the only ones to have them for friends,” Lion wrote, “they alone chiefs.” Mantcu-nanba, a conservative Omaha chief, gave his side of the story to his Yankton friend Mato-maza. He wrote that Walking Elk, the leader of the visiting Yanktons, said he would not return to the Omaha lands for four years because of the way he was treated. Mantcu-nanba asked the “young men” (progressives) to give the Yanktons food, but they

⁴⁸ James Own Dorsey, *Omaha and Ponca Letters*, 44.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 481, 482; James Owen Dorsey, *The Cegiha Language*, 475-476, 490, 494, 513, 518, 519, 522.

⁵⁰ James Owen Dorsey, *The Cegiha Language*, 482.

⁵¹ James Owen Dorsey, *Omaha and Ponca Letters*, 1891, 115.

⁵² James Owen Dorsey, *The Cegiha Language*, 712.

refused. Mantcu-nanba told Mato-maza that he would be sad for a year as a result.⁵³ The progressive Omahas were afraid that the Yanktons would be offended by their actions. They sent a letter to the Yanktons that explained the situation. “You know about us that we are some Indians who walk apart from the rest,” the Omaha writer told the Yanktons, “we continue apart from them,” but “we are sad because we did not pay any attention to you before you left, allowing you to depart without giving you any food at all.”⁵⁴ The young men also tried to mollify Mantcu-nanba by inviting him to feasts, but he refused to go. “I say that I am sick,” Mantcu-nanba wrote, “I am sick because they have not headed my words.”⁵⁵ Walking Elk prohibited Mantcu-nanba from visiting the Yanktons in the future (according to a letter by Mantcu-nanba), even though he was not responsible for the poor treatment.⁵⁶

The Oglalas cultivated their relationship with the Utes through letter writing. In 1887, Sowawick wrote to the Southern Ute Chief Ignacio to inform him that he had received a letter from Red Cloud. “He writes his people are making good progress,” Sowawick told Ignacio, “he also wrote me they would come down part way from his land and wanted me to meet him half way and have a visit. I should like very much to know you come up here and we will go up together and meet him and his friends that may accompany him and have a good visit.”⁵⁷ Red Cloud most likely wanted to meet Sowawick at the Fort Hall Agency in Idaho. In early 1888, Marcisco, a Ute chief, and Ike visited Pine Ridge. Red Cloud’s son-in-law, Slow Bear, and

⁵³ Ibid., 714.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 713.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 714.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 1890, 731.

⁵⁷ Sowawick to Ignacio, May 7, 1887, RBIA, RG 75.19.18, Consolidated Ute, Decimal Files, Box 2, NARA (Denver). At least fifty-seven letters were sent from the Uintah and Ouray Utes in Utah to the Southern Utes in Southwest Colorado between 1883 and 1893. Agents wrote the letters for the Utes during the first few years, but it is not always clear who transcribed the letters in later years.

twenty-four other Pine Ridge Oglalas may have accompanied Marcisco and Ike back to the Uintah and Ouray Agency.⁵⁸ In August 1888, one hundred Oglalas arrived at Uintah and Ouray, but were only allowed to visit for two days because they had made the journey without their agent's permission.⁵⁹ They left with one hundred horses given to them by the Utes (and a letter from the Uintah agent showing that they had come into possession of the horses "honestly").⁶⁰ In June 1889, Marcisco and a companion, arrived at the Pine Ridge agent's office unannounced. They requested the agent to tell their Uintah agent via letter that they had arrived safely. The Ute men did not carry a pass and H. D. Gallagher, the Pine Ridge agent, was not sure if they had traveled the great distance with permission.⁶¹

In July 1888, another party of Pine Ridge Oglalas, fourteen men, eight women, and seven children traveled to the Wind River Agency and remained there until at least May 1889. It was reported that the group intended to go from Wind River to the Uintah Agency.⁶² In February 1890, Catoup, a Ute at Ouray, wrote to Chief Buckskin Charley (Sapiah) at the Southern Ute Agency to tell him that the Sioux were expected to arrive in Utah in the summer for a visit (also to let him know that Chief Sapparrano had died). "We would like it if some of your people will come up here and make us a visit at the same time that the Sioux Indians are here and I would

⁵⁸ Agent H. D. Gallagher to Uintah Agent, May 21, 1888, RBIA, RG 75.19.85, Pine Ridge, Copies of Misc. Letters Sent, Box 54, NARA (KC). Visitors from the reservations were often asked to carry messages to family and friends back home, see *The Indian Helper*, March 28, 1890. Writing from the Cheyenne and Arapaho Agency, American Horse, a resident of Pine Ridge, sent twenty-five dollars home to his family and asked the agent at Pine Ridge to decide how to divide it between his wife and children, see American Horse to Agent, June 23, 1891, RBIA, RG 75.19.85, Pine Ridge, Box 28, NARA (KC).

⁵⁹ It is doubtful that this was Slow Bear's group because they had Agent Gallagher's permission.

⁶⁰ Maj. Adna R. Chaffe to Asst. Adj. Gen., May 24, 1889, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 15595, Box 527, NARA (Washington, DC).

⁶¹ Agent H. D. Gallagher to Agent Byrnes, June 3, 1889, RBIA, RG 75.19.85, Pine Ridge, Copies of Misc. Letters Sent, Box 54, NARA (KC).

⁶² Copy of Brig. Gen. Ruger to Asst. Adj. Gen. Div. Missouri, May 10, 1889, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 13580, Box 522, NARA (Washington, DC).

like you to write me and tell me if you will come,” Catoup wrote.⁶³ The connection between the Utes and Oglalas continued into the next decade because of correspondence and visiting. In March of 1890, Red Cloud wrote a letter to Marcisco inviting the Utes to meet him at the Wind River Agency in Wyoming. Marcisco forwarded the letter to Buckskin Charley. Marcisco had already written back to Red Cloud and he wanted Buckskin Charley to go with him. He asked Buckskin Charley to “tell this to all of the Utes, so that they will all know.”⁶⁴ The Oglalas were not the only Plains tribe to visit with the Northern Utes in the late 1880s. Some traveled all the way to Utah. In August 1889, a large party from Wind River visited the Northern Utes in Utah. Close to one hundred Northern Arapahos (including Black Coal and Sharp Nose), seven

⁶³ Catoup to Buckskin Charley, February 1, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.19.18, Consolidated Ute, Decimal Files, Box 2, NARA (Denver).

⁶⁴ Marcisco to Buckskin Charley, March 10, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.19.18, Consolidated Ute, Decimal Files, Box 2, NARA (Denver). Five days later, Marcisco told Buckskin Charley that he had not received another “letter from the Sioux,” see Marcisco to Buckskin Charley, March 15, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.19.18, Consolidated Ute, Decimal Files, Box 2, NARA (Denver). It is not clear why Red Cloud wanted the Ute to meet him at Wind River, the letter is missing, but the request was made around the same time a delegation of Sioux from Pine Ridge and Rosebud returned home from a journey west to find information on the ghost dance. In June, Red Cloud told Agent Gallagher that he wanted to go to Wind River to build up his health at the hot springs in the area. Red Cloud was allowed to go with five companions in late July, but around fifteen others accompanied the group without permission. Red Cloud was allowed to continue to Wind River after those without permission were forced home. Unfortunately, the Acting Commissioner learned of Red Cloud’s visit and criticized agent Gallagher for disregarding the Indian Affairs policy of obtaining the Commissioner’s permission first (even though it was not unusual for agents to issue passes without the Commissioner’s consent). A circular letter from the CIA, sent to each agency on October 29, 1887, set the rules for visitation. Red Cloud’s pass was revoked and the Oglala left Wind River on September 23. Red Cloud was warned not to encourage others to leave Pine Ridge without permission. It is not known if he ever met with the Ute there. See Agent H. D. Gallagher to Wind River Agent, June 30, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.19.85, Pine Ridge, Copies of Misc. Letters Sent, Box 54, NARA (KC); Copy of Col. J. G. Tilford to Asst. Adj. General, telegram, July 25, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 24858, Box 650, NARA (Washington, DC); Copy of Col. J. G. Tilford to Asst. Adj. General, telegram, August 21, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 26879, Box 655, NARA (Washington, DC); Acting Commissioner to Daniel F. Royer, September 5, 1890, RG 75.19.85, Pine Ridge, Corres. Received from OIA, Box 9, NARA (KC); Agent John Foshier to Agent H. D. Gallagher, September 29, 1890, RG 75.19.85, Pine Ridge, Misc. Corres. Received, Box 27, NARA (KC).

Shoshones, and eleven Lakotas (perhaps Little Wound's party) returned to Wind River with two hundred and thirty-five horses they received from the Utes.⁶⁵ The party of Lakotas went from Pine Ridge to Wind River, then to Uintah, back to Wind River, and finally home to Pine Ridge.

It was railroads that made the trips from the Dakotas to Idaho, Utah, and Nevada practical. In 1889, a group from Pine Ridge were allowed to visit the Bannocks and Shoshones at Fort Hall in Idaho, a trip of considerable distance.⁶⁶ American Horse and twenty-five others were allowed to visit the Utes in July 1889, a journey that would have been much more difficult without rail travel.⁶⁷ Between the first and second ghost dance movements in 1870 and 1890, railroad mileage west of the Mississippi increased six times over, from twelve to seventy-two thousand miles. Improved transportation brought more settlers, farming, and industry into the open plains. From 1870 to 1890, the population of Nebraska increased nearly nine times and the Dakotas nearly thirty-six times.⁶⁸ Railroads also brought more efficient mail service to the Great Plains and Rocky Mountains.⁶⁹ They also allowed Plains Indians to make trips across the Rockies and into the Great Basin.

After the Civil War, some Native groups attempted to slow railroad construction, but to little effect. Sioux, Cheyennes, and Arapahos attacked the construction of the Kansas Pacific and Union Pacific lines during the late 1860s, leading to military intervention. The railroad was

⁶⁵ Agent Byrnes to CIA, telegraph, August 19, 1889, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 23195, Box 546, NARA (Washington, DC).

⁶⁶ L. A. White to Pine Ridge Agent, November 10, 1889, RG 75.19.85, Pine Ridge, Misc. Corres. Received, Box 27, NARA (KC).

⁶⁷ Agent H. D. Gallagher to Uintah Agent, July (undated), 1889, RBIA, RG 75.19.85, Pine Ridge, Copies of Misc. Letters Sent, Box 54, NARA (KC).

⁶⁸ John F. Stover, *American Railroads* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1961), 83.

⁶⁹ Wayne E. Fuller, *The American Mail*, 73-74, 103. In 1877, the Postal Service used most of its new appropriations to deliver mail to the Black Hills of South Dakota. More and more small towns in the west received mail during the 1880s. In 1887, free delivery was established in towns of 10,000 people where revenues were at least \$10,000 a year.

the primary tool of American expansion into Indian territories and confounding its construction was attempted by some tribes.⁷⁰ Most Plains Indians, however, kept their distance from the tracks. The railroads were coming and the Indians could do little to stop it. General Sherman once told President Grant that his army was not going to let a “few thieving, ragged Indians stop and check the progress of the railroad.”⁷¹ Soon, the buffalo disappeared, in large part due to the railroads, and treaties were signed, moving Indians away from the land that railroads required.

Natives, however, did not necessarily run away from the Iron Horse once it was in place and they were confined to reservations. Instead, some used the rails as did many white Americans, to move around a continent increasingly bound together by this modern means of transportation. In many cases, railroad companies encouraged Natives to ride the rails. The Utah & Northern Railway Company offered the Bannocks and Shoshones at the Fort Hall Agency free rides until 1908 (as an incentive to allow the railroad a right-of-way on the reserve in 1878).⁷² In Nevada, the Paiutes and Shoshones made a similar agreement with the Central Pacific Railroad that offered employment and allowed them to ride freight cars any time free of charge (chiefs got to ride in coach). For the privilege of crossing the Walker River Agency, the Carson & Colorado Railroad agreed to carry all its Indians and any goods they wanted to ship for

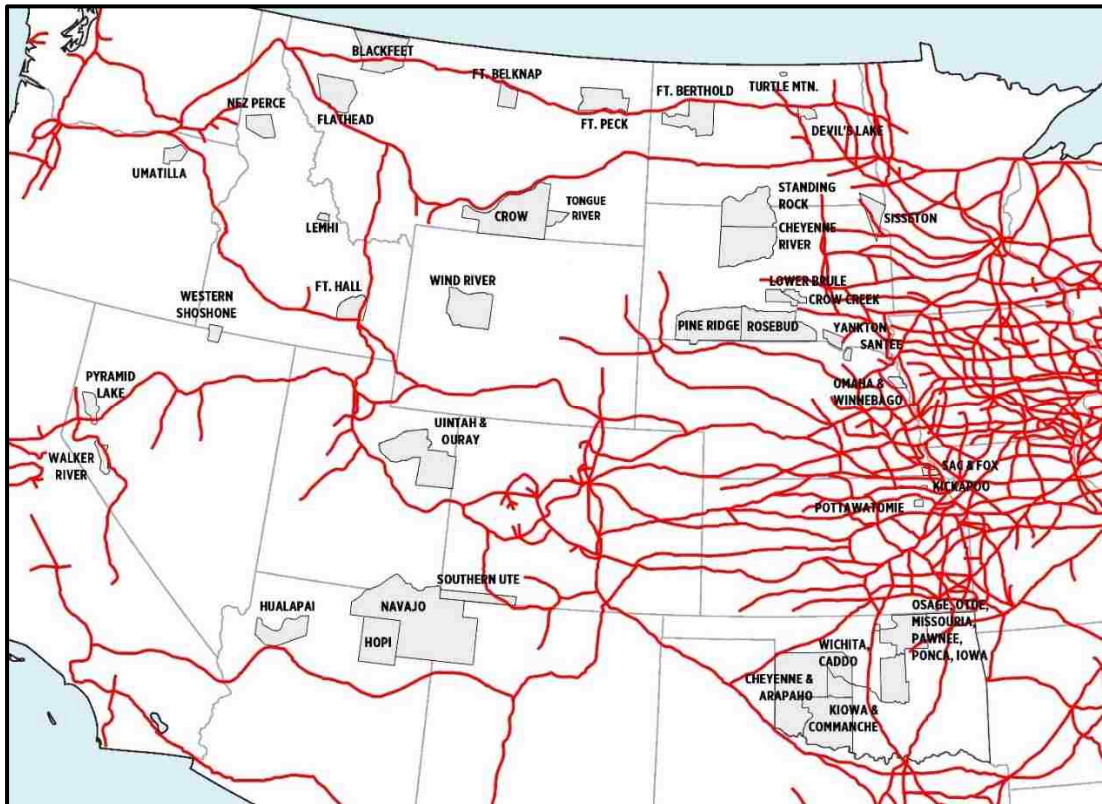
⁷⁰ M. John Lubetkin, *Jay Cooke's Gamble: The Northern Pacific Railroad, the Sioux, and the Panic* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2006).

⁷¹ Michael Fellman, *Citizen Sherman: A Life of William Tecumseh Sherman* (New York: Random House, 1995), 264.

⁷² Thornton Waite, *The Railroad at Pocatello* (Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2012), 7, 9, 12. The Utah & Northern only had a 200-foot-wide right-of-way. The Utah & Northern merged with the Oregon Short Line and other Union Pacific subsidiaries in 1889, forming the Oregon Short Line & Utah Northern Railway Company (OSL&UN). The line south of Pocatello was narrow gauge until 1890.

free.⁷³ Indians rode the line “almost incessantly,” often on the top of the box cars.⁷⁴ Paiutes found economic benefits from the rails, many traveled yearly to work in the hops fields of eastern California.⁷⁵

FIGURE 19: WESTERN RAIL LINES, CIRCA 1890



Indians took advantage of these arrangements, eventually leading to restrictions on their travel. Complaints, usually centered on the grubby appearance of Indian passengers, sent them

⁷³ John F. Due, “The Carson and Colorado Railroad,” *Economic Geography* 27, No. 3 (July 1951): 260. The Paiute were worried that the railroad would lead to increased competition for their already limited natural resources, see E. C. Johnson, *Walker River Paiutes: A Tribal History* (Schurz, NV: Walker River Paiute Tribe, 1975), 60.

⁷⁴ David F. Myrick, *Railroads of Nevada and Eastern California*, Vol. 1 (Berkeley: Howell-North Books, 1962), 179. The C&C stretched along western Nevada down to Owens Lake in eastern California. It was built in 1880-1883 and 1890. Paiutes used the route on trips between the Pyramid Lake Agency and the Walker River Agency. It was the route most Indians took on their visits to Wovoka.

⁷⁵ Ed A. Dyer, “Wizardry,” Special Collections, University Archives, University of Nevada Libraries, Reno, transcribed in Hittman, *Wovoka*, 247-255.

into the baggage cars or boarding steps. Travelers commented that Paiutes in Nevada expected and received donations from passengers. Some Nevada Paiutes and Shoshones in Utah built “squalid wigwams made of poles, brush, and bits of old canvas or army blankets” at the train stations. The women came “to the platforms of the cars to sell trinkets, beaded moccasins, and purses, baskets woven from willows and soap-weed, necklaces of acorns and quartz crystals and agates.”⁷⁶ Beginning in the 1880s, Navajos sold blankets at train stations that had pictures of trains and advertisements in their weaving. By the late 1880s, railroads were no longer unfamiliar to Indians and before the end of the Indian Wars, tourists were even traveling to the battlefields, including Little Big Horn in 1889. During the 1890s, tourists who paid to see the frontier lamented that the west had become too tame. Even Sitting Bull, who had harassed Northern Pacific Railroad surveyors in the Yellowstone Valley as early as 1871, attended the completion ceremony of the Northern Pacific in 1883.⁷⁷ In the same year, Red Cloud made the train ride to Virginia to visit the Hampton Institute. Similar to their introduction to literacy, many Plains Indians experienced railroad travel for the first time because of the Indian boarding school system. By the early 1880s, delegations from the Crows, Shoshones, Bannocks, Cheyennes, Arapahos, Lakotas, Ojibwes, and Pueblos had all visited Carlisle or Hampton. The schools paid for the eastern excursions to promote their institutions among the tribal leaders and the white public.⁷⁸

During the 1880s, agents allowed their Indians to take advantage of rail travel. In the summer of 1890 alone, the railroad station at Billings, Montana transported Indians between the

⁷⁶ *Harper's Weekly*, March 22, 1890.

⁷⁷ Dee Brown, *Hear That Lonesome Whistle Blow* (New York: Touchstone, 1977) 85-93, 101, 205, 217; Sarah Gordon, *Passage to Union: How the Railroads Transformed American Life, 1829-1929* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1996), 306. Railroad companies began promoting tourism in the West in the early 1870s, leading to the creation of Yellowstone National Park.

⁷⁸ David Wallace Adams, *Education for Extinction*, 248.

Crow Agency and Fort Hall, Fort Berthold, Fort Belknap, and the Nez Perce Agency.

Sometimes an agent could simply provide an Indian with a written statement of his approval to show to railroad workers and the Indian would be allowed to travel. For instance, on a pass addressed the conductor of the Northern Pacific, the Crow agent wrote “the bearers Hawk and Middle Bear are Gros Ventres Indians and have been on a visit to the Crows. They wish to return to their agency and if you will kindly pass them I will be greatly obliged.”⁷⁹

FIGURE 20: RAILROAD PASS GIVEN TO CROW INDIANS, 1888⁸⁰

Mont. P. Ry. No. 108 5
To the Conductor on N.P. R.R.
Sir:
Please pass for Indian children
viz: John, Lucy, Mary, Hannah, & Alvin, Mission
from Custer station to Billings and return.
They wish to visit their mother who is
ill.
Very Respectfully
E. C. Briscoe
N.P. Indian Agent
for James Bennett
acq agt

The pass given to a group of Crows journeying to Fort Hall in Idaho requested that "the conductor of the NPRR will please pass them over the road."⁸¹ Many of these NPRR Indian passes were intended only as free rides on the car platforms, “the drafty and dangerous open

⁷⁹ Agent W. P. Wyman, Railroad Pass for Hawk and Middle Bear, November 11, 1889, RBIA, RG 75.19.21, Crow Agency, Press Copies of Misc. Letters Sent, Box 4, NARA (Denver).

⁸⁰ Agent E. Briscoe to NPRR Conductor, November 10, 1888, RBIA, RG 75.19.21, Crow Agency, Press Copies of Misc. Letters Sent, Box 4, NARA (Denver).

⁸¹ Agent W. P. Wyman, Railroad Pass for Fish High Up and Charges Through the Crowd, August 30, RBIA, RG 75.19.21, Crow Agency, Press Copies of Misc. Letters Sent, Box 4, NARA (Denver).

spaces between enclosed passenger cars.”⁸² Perhaps because of its affordability, agents seemed to encourage Indians to use the railroads. The Cheyenne and Arapaho agent wrote to a freight company for High Wolf and High Chief, two Cheyenne visiting from Pine Ridge, to quote railroad transport for them and eight ponies back to Pine Ridge, instead of sending them off on horseback for the long journey across the plains.⁸³ Because of their convenience and accessibility, railroads played a large part in keeping reservations connected.

In 1888, Young Man Afraid of His Horses (more properly translated Young Man Whose Enemies Are Afraid of His Horses or They Even Fear His Horses) hoped to make a visit to the Crow Agency in Montana from his home at Pine Ridge. The Commissioner of Indian Affairs deemed his request “inadvisable.”⁸⁴ Young Man Afraid of His Horses, an influential headman at Pine Ridge, was angered by the decision. He had been to the Crow Agency in the past, he had relatives living there, and he decided to articulate his quarrel with the government. In late December 1888, a number of Pine Ridge Indians asked the Inspector of Annuities, M. W. Day, to write a letter to General George Crook for them. Young Man Afraid of His Horses, through the official interpreter, wrote to Gen. Crook:

Write to ‘Three Stars’ and say: Is it right to stop us Indians from visiting each other? We ask it because you are the first man who made us friendly when we were at war. You made us quit the war path and made us one nation, related to each other. We were at war with one another, you made us stop and be friendly; we now want to keep up this friendship and visit each other so we can talk of things that are of interest, and what is best for our own common welfare.

⁸² Carlos Schwantes and James Ronda, *The West the Railroads Made* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2008), 101.

⁸³ Agent Ashley to D. Atwood, May 31, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.19.10, Cheyenne Arapaho Agency, Reel 32, NARA (OHS).

⁸⁴ CIA to Agent H. D. Gallagher, December 17, 1888, November 18, 1888, RBIA, RG 75.19.85, Pine Ridge, Corres. Rec’d from the Office of Indian Affairs, Box 9, NARA (KC).

It is the wish of the Department that we refrain from visiting, and always remain in our houses, or may we not be like white people, who, I understand, do not always stay at home, but sometimes relieve the monotony of their life, ease their mind and learn how other people live by sometimes traveling around to see people. Must we always stay in the house and do the same things day after day all our lives, without any pleasure?

The government told us to be friends and live as neighbors and relatives, and now, just as we are doing so and enjoying the good of peace, they turn around and stop us, without telling us any reason why. Is that the work of some Agent, merely to suit his own purposes, or is it the will of the Department? If it is the wish of the Government and the Government changes so often, how can it expect us to know what it really wants.

I feel insulted by the treatment of the Agent at the Crow Agency. I had permission from my Agent to go to the Crow Reservation; I had no sooner reached there than I was surrounded by the military, made a prisoner and put off the reservation...I want to speak of the future, to talk of making claim for damages, for taking the Black Hills from us so cheaply...I was appointed Chief of the Ogallalas to watch over and protect them, and I want to look after the welfare of my children in the future. For this I want to visit the Crows and plan with them for the protection of our people; for the white man is crowding us, and will want to crowd us still more...Please get for me a copy of the Treaty of '68, and the subsequent orders modifying it relating to the change of our religion, marriage laws and amusements (Sun and Ghost dances, etc.) We ask our Agent for these things and he write letters, but they are unanswered, so we take a different [approach].⁸⁵

Young Man Afraid of His Horses did not trust his agent enough to compose this complaint for him. He was confused with the arbitrary nature of visitation rules. He argued that the Oglalas should be able to visit their friends because happiness was a basic right for whites and should be for Indians as well. He also believed that in order to secure their future, Indians needed to visit one another to discuss matters that would affect all of them.

Young Man Afraid of His Horses and many others were compelled to visit neighboring reservations to discuss the government's role in their lives and contemplate resistance to legislation, something that worried federal authorities. The Dawes Act and the Dawes Sioux

⁸⁵ Lt. M. W. Day to Gen. George Crook, January 26, 1889, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 5119, Box 504, NARA (Washington, DC).

Bill, in particular, were hot topics on the agencies. The Dawes Act required that a majority of a tribe agree to allotment and cession of their lands, which led to debate and division on reservations. In 1886, Sitting Bull, who lived at Standing Rock, went to the Crow Agency in Montana where he met with a small group from Pine Ridge and nearly one hundred from Cheyenne River. The Crows seemed to be favoring allotment, but Sitting Bull was able to change their opinion at several councils held during his stay. The Crows' agent reported that Sitting Bull's visit had "most pernicious results" and was an "unfortunate occurrence," which convinced him to deny visit requests from Rosebud and Pine Ridge in 1887.⁸⁶ Sitting Bull used intertribal visitation to drum up intertribal opposition to the Dawes Act.⁸⁷ The perceived debacle led to a circular letter from the Commissioner of Indian Affairs sent to every agency on February 2, 1887 that outlined a strict procedure for intertribal visitation, making it necessary that all visitation requests be made through the Commissioner (which would be frequently ignored by agents). But the Sioux continued their discussions on allotment into 1887 and 1888. The Rosebud agent reported that councils were held at his agency with delegates from every Sioux agency. The Indians thought it "incumbent to council" at Rosebud and the agent did what he could to prevent it. He sent police to break up the meetings, but if a large council was disrupted by the police, "than two smaller were convened."⁸⁸ Of course, Indians were encouraged to attend the government sanctioned councils held in 1888 and 1889 which gave officials a chance to persuade them to approve the Dawes Sioux Bill.

In July 1889, while the Pine Ridge Indians were debating the merits of land secession, Gallagher gave a pass to Little Wound (and his party of eight others) to the Wind River Agency

⁸⁶ *ARCIA*, 1887, 134.

⁸⁷ Jeffrey Ostler, *The Plains Sioux*, 222.

⁸⁸ *ARCIA*, 1888, 55.

simply to get rid of him for a while. When he asked for the Wind River agent's permission, Gallagher called Little Wound a "good, peaceable" Indian.⁸⁹ But a month later he confided to the Chair of the Sioux Commission, whose duty it was to convince at least a majority of the Sioux in the Dakotas to agree to secession and allotment, that Little Wound was "as obstinate as ever."⁹⁰ Gallagher wanted him off the reserve so that he would not negatively influence the debate. Little Wound knew Gallagher's plan, but he agreed to leave if he was allowed to visit Wind River so that Gallagher "would have a chance to work on his people."⁹¹

It is not known why Little Wound was willing to leave Pine Ridge before the momentous vote, but something important must have drawn him to Wind River. He may have gone to investigate early reports of the ghost dance, which had arrived by letters and visiting Utes, Shoshones, Crows, and Arapahos over the previous months.⁹² In June 1889, twenty-two Pine Ridge Oglalas came home from a visit with Wind River Arapahos, perhaps carrying the more tangible information on the new dance.⁹³ In late October 1889, several Pine Ridge Oglalas along with some Rosebud Brulé went to Wind River without authorization (which at that point had become a habit according to Gallagher). Yellow Knife, Foolish Woman, Good Thunder, Flat Iron, Eagle Horse, Little Hawk (the Oglala), Little Soldier, and Broken Arm were among the group. Months later, Gallagher discovered that the trip was made to learn about a "Great Medicine Man" in Wind River country "who came especially to place the Indians once more in

⁸⁹ Agent H. D. Gallagher to Wind River Agent, July 3, 1889, RBIA, RG 75.19.85, Pine Ridge, Copies of Misc. Letters Sent, Box 54, NARA (KC).

⁹⁰ Agent H. D. Gallagher to Chair of Sioux Commission, August 20, 1889, RBIA, RG 75.19.85, Pine Ridge, Copies of Misc. Letters Sent, Box 54, NARA (KC).

⁹¹ Ibid. For more on Gallagher's strategy, see Jeffrey Ostler, *The Plains Sioux*, 236-237.

⁹² William Selwyn to Agent Edwin Foster, November 25, 1890, RBIA, RG 75, Special Case 188, NARA (Washington, DC).

⁹³ Copy of Lt. Col. A. S. Burt to Asst. Adj. Gen. Dep. of the Platte, June 25, 1889, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 18670, Box 535, NARA (Washington, DC). According to Black Coal, an Arapaho headman, the Sioux had assisted them with their farming.

their primitive condition of freedom and independence, surrounding them with immense herds of buffalo and other wild game and bringing such confusion to their white persecutors as would insure the happiness of the Indians for all time to come.”⁹⁴ Three of the men were put in the guard house and “given a good lecture” for leaving without permission on their return to Pine Ridge in the spring 1890. What they learned at Wind River created excitement at Pine Ridge, which will be discussed in Chapter 4 of this study.

The Commissioner of Indian Affairs did not want Indians from other agencies visiting the Sioux agencies while the Sioux Commission was working to persuade the Sioux to agree to the Sioux Bill. Fifty Indians (perhaps Mandans, or Hidatsas) from Fort Berthold were denied a visit to the Hunkpapa Lakotas at Standing Rock in May 1889, even though the Standing Rock agent welcomed it. The Fort Berthold agent repeated their request but proposed that the visit occur after the Sioux Commission completed their task. “I am anxious for the Indians to make this visit,” the agent wrote, “they are industrious and deserving.”⁹⁵ Similarly, a group of Poncas were denied a visit to the Cheyenne and Arapaho agency because the Cheyenne Commission were working there. The Cheyenne and Arapaho agent did not want his Indians entertaining the Poncas instead of attending the councils with the commission.⁹⁶ In November 1889, the Yankton headmen Running Bull, Feather-in-the-Ear, White Swan, and three others, wrote to the Commissioner to complain about the state of affairs on their agency, including their inability to visit other tribes. They argued that when they made their treaty with the government, they were

⁹⁴ Agent H. D. Gallagher to Wind River Agent, October 28, 1889, RBIA, RG 75.19.85, Pine Ridge, Copies of Misc. Letters Sent, Box 54, NARA (KC); Agent H. D. Gallagher to CIA, June 10, 1890, *Letters Sent to the Office of Indian Affairs by the Pine Ridge Agency 1875-1914*, RBIA Microfilm Publication M1282, Roll 10.

⁹⁵ Agent at Fort Berthold Agency to CIA, June 17, 1889, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 16552, Box 529, NARA (Washington, DC).

⁹⁶ Agent Charles Ashley to Agent Woods, September 19, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.19.10, Cheyenne Arapaho Agency, Reel 32, NARA (OHS).

made to agree to “treat as friends all the tribes round about us.”⁹⁷ Why then, they asked, could they not go and visit their friends? “The Agent won’t let us,” they wrote, “if we ask him for a pass he won’t give us one. If we go of our own will as men do, he telegraphs ahead and has us put in jail as spies.” The Yankton wanted to know why they could not “travel around like white men do!” The agent hoped to keep his Indians reined in during the Dawes debates, but Running Bull, Feather-in-the-Ear, and White Swan believed they had a right to travel freely without the government labeling their communication with other tribes as spying.

In 1889, drought devastated Indian crops and pastures throughout the Great Plains, yet Congress reduced beef rations at most agencies, leaving agents concerned that visitors might cut into the food supply. In March 1890, the agent at Tongue River, R. L. Upshaw, heard that a large group of Northern Cheyennes from Pine Ridge were heading to his agency without consent. He urged the Commissioner to send the military to stop them because there were no supplies at Tongue River to feed them. Upshaw predicted that the Indians would resort to killing cattle on rancher property to survive.⁹⁸ The Northern Cheyennes at Pine Ridge wanted to live with their Northern Cheyenne friends and relatives at Tongue River, not being able to even visit did not sit well. By April 1890, the Cheyennes at Pine Ridge, led by Little Chief, were refusing to plant crops that season as protest. Agent Upshaw reported that the Cheyennes would move to Tongue River without permission when their horses were strong enough for the trip. “The government will ultimately be compelled to unite these people with the Tongue River Cheyennes, with whom they properly belong,” Upshaw wrote, “and establish them on a

⁹⁷ Running Bull, et al to CIA, November 6, 1889, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 33002, Box 571, NARA (Washington, DC).

⁹⁸ Agent R. L. Upshaw to CIA, March 19, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 9281, Box 607, NARA (Washington, DC).

reservation of their own if any good is expected of them. They give more trouble than the 5000 Sioux we have at this Agency.”⁹⁹ In July, Long Chin and Walking Whirlwind, both Pine Ridge Cheyennes, slipped off to Tongue River and soldiers were sent to intercept.¹⁰⁰ A special agent reported that around thirty-five Pine Ridge Cheyennes were living at Tongue River in July, feeding themselves off the rations of others. Some had been there three months, others three years.¹⁰¹ The Commissioner allowed these thirty-five Cheyennes to remain at Tongue River and draw rations. He believed that Congress would soon support the consolidation of the Northern Cheyenne to their own agency (which did not occur until 1891).¹⁰²

Agents were also concerned that the Indians they managed were being taken advantage of by visiting tribes. In the fall of 1889, a group of Poncas visiting the Southern Cheyennes at the Cheyenne and Arapaho Agency came home with “over two hundred ponies, saddles, blankets, calico and other articles,” which displeased the Southern Cheyennes’ agent, Charles Ashley.¹⁰³ At some agencies, guests were often lavished with gifts during their stay. Several months later, the Ponca Agent, Edwin Wood, would not allow a group of Southern Cheyennes to visit his agency, upsetting Agent Ashley, who did not think it fair that his Cheyennes would not have the opportunity to be reciprocated. Ashley told Wood that he was as opposed to large numbers visiting as any, but he was “also as strongly opposed to unjust discrimination between Indians or of one agent securing by any means unfair advantage for his Indians over the Indians of another

⁹⁹ Agent H. D. Gallagher to Commanding Officer Fort Mead, April 20, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.19.85, Pine Ridge, Copies of Misc. Letters Sent, Box 54, NARA (KC).

¹⁰⁰ Agent H. D. Gallagher to Agent R. L. Upshaw, July 7, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.19.85, Pine Ridge, Copies of Misc. Letters Sent, Box 54, NARA (KC).

¹⁰¹ J. A. Cooper to CIA, July 21, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 23198, Box 646, NARA (Washington, DC).

¹⁰² CIA to J. A. Cooper, August 1, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.19.117, Tongue River Agency, Letters Received, Box 5, NARA (Denver).

¹⁰³ Agent Charles Ashley to Agent J. M. Wood, June 24, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.19.10, Cheyenne Arapaho Agency, Reel 32, NARA (OHS).

agency.”¹⁰⁴ Ashley requested the visit on behalf of the Cheyennes for a second time, telling Wood that it was the Poncas who had invited the Cheyenne in the first place. It was only fair that one hundred Cheyennes visit the Ponca Agency. But only a few months earlier, in March 1890, Ashley told Wood that he thought “the yearly custom” of large visitations were “demoralizing and detrimental” to the Indians’ “best interests.” He would do all in his power to “discourage and prevent” them and cooperate with Wood “to this end.”¹⁰⁵ This indecisiveness was typical for Indian agents who had to constantly manage the requests of hundreds of people. It also shows the influence the Indians held over their agents. Their demands were not always met, but Indians certainly pressured agents to bend to their will. Even though Agent Ashley pledged to his fellow agent that he would stop visitation, he ultimately acted according to the wishes of the Cheyennes.

Agents viewed the gift giving practiced during intertribal visits as excessive and wasteful. The Crow agent allowed Bad Belly and party to visit Pine Ridge and Rosebud, but only after they agreed not to accept “presents of any great value.”¹⁰⁶ He made a similar exception to twenty-five Crows going to Fort Belknap, they could give or receive “bead work or other purely Indian Articles,” but valuable things were off limits. The agent did not want “unpleasant feelings...engendered” if gifts were not reciprocated.¹⁰⁷ Some Indians made visits primarily to acquire wealth, usually in the form of horses, which were given during dances like the calumet dance. In 1880, a group of Omahas admitted that a proposed visit from the Otoes might lead to

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Agent Charles Ashley to Agent J. M. Wood, March 9, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.19.10, Cheyenne Arapaho Agency, Reel 32, NARA (OHS).

¹⁰⁶ Agent M. P. Wyman to Agents at Pine Ridge and Rosebud, July 19, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.19.21, Crow Agency, Press Copies of Misc. Letters Sent, Box 4, NARA (Denver).

¹⁰⁷ Agent M. P. Wyman to Agent A. Simmons, May 10, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.19.30, Ft. Belknap, Misc. Letters Received, Box 2, NARA (Denver).

burdensome gift giving. The Omahas asked George Merrick, an Omaha who wrote in the Omaha language, to write to an apologetic letter to the Otoe, denying their visit request. Merrick wrote:

After considering the subject, my friend, they have found it difficult for them...At the very beginning of the spring, my friend, you came to the Omaha settlement, and you remained throughout the summer. You fully understand the situation of the Omaha young men. You know everything that they have. As they are without horses (to give away) I have said that what you propose is difficult for them (to perform). The people here have not traveled in any direction among the other tribes, and it has been so all through the winter. Therefore the Indians petition you (not to come). The Omahas fear that if you come you will be full of anxiety, and that you will make them full of anxiety, even those Omahas whom you have as your kindred... We Indians (remember how it has been told about) the Indians of the olden times; how they visited one another in consequence of their regarding themselves as related. When they visited one another, they exchanged food and whatever else they had...As we have no horses (to give away), I have told you just how we are situated. Reconsider the decision which you have reached.¹⁰⁸

Agents were not the only ones wary about unwelcome visitors. Omaha letter writers frequently complained of having to give horses to visiting Dakotas or Winnebagos. Merrick's letter expressed concern that the Otoes would stay too long and drain the Omahas' limited resources. Unsurprisingly, even those Omahas related to the Otoes had the same worries about the proposed visit. The letter also reveals the amount of planning that went into intertribal visitation that would not have been possible without the mail. Because of letter writing, the Omaha could relay their thoughts to the Otoe before they reached the agency.

¹⁰⁸ James Owen Dorsey, *Omaha and Ponka Letters*, 77. The parentheses were added by Dorsey in his translation. The Omaha "young men" that Merrick mentions may refer to the Omaha "young men's party," a group of progressives who followed the half French, half Omaha Joseph La Flesche and settled near the Presbyterian Mission. Dorsey does not make this clear. See Alice Fletcher and Frances La Flesche, *The Omaha Tribe*, 27th Annual Report, Bureau of American Ethnology, 1905-1906 (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1911) 633.

Many Indians ignored the instructions of their agents not to visit. During the summer of 1890, Hollow Horn Bear, the prominent Rosebud Brulé, repeatedly requested passes to Pine Ridge. In August, Agent J. George Wright finally agreed, but only if Hollow Horn Bear went in a party of three. Wright told Agent Gallagher at Pine Ridge that Hollow Horn Bear would probably arrive with more than expected, but he gave him the pass anyway. Hollow Horn Bear wanted a pass for several men, but Wright would not allow more than three and threatened to lock up any man without a pass. Hollow Horn Bear dismissed the warning and a “large number” accompanied him to Pine Ridge.¹⁰⁹ Wright asked Gallagher (who would soon be dismissed as the Pine Ridge agent) if he would, as “a personal favor,” arrest those without passes on their arrival and “put the leaders to cutting wood until ready to return.” Wright told Gallagher that Hollow Horn Bear “has always dared you would not do so (I invariably do so and consequently am not much bothered) and I want him to see that you will do so.” Threat of cutting wood or a temporary jailing was as harsh a punishment the agents would impose. Hollow Horn Bear went around his agent’s authority and wrote to the President, the Commissioner, and two member of the Sioux Commission to protest the restrictions against him, among other things. “We are not allowed to visit any where,” he complained, “when at our last treaty you promised us that if the treaty was signed we could go when and where we please.”¹¹⁰

Hollow Horn Bear and others were willing to travel and then face the consequences. In May 1890, the Kiowa, Comanche, and Apache agent, Charles Adams, told all of the Kiowas, Comanches, and Apaches that he was “strictly opposed” to a proposed visit to the Cheyenne and

¹⁰⁹ Agent J. George Wright to Agent H. D. Gallagher, August 24, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.19.85, Pine Ridge, Misc. Corres. Received, Box 27, NARA (KC).

¹¹⁰ Hollow Horn Bear to the President, CIA, September 13, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 29579, Box 664, NARA (Washington, DC).

Arapaho Agency, but a group left the reservation anyway.¹¹¹ Adams told Charles Ashley, his counterpart at the Cheyenne and Arapaho Agency, that he “would never sanction” such visits. But two days later, Adams wrote to Ashley on behalf of the Kiowas who wanted to visit their Southern Cheyenne friends. The Kiowas told Adams that they “want to dance for them and try to recover some of the ponies etc that the Cheyennes got from them on their last visit to this agency.”¹¹² Adams seemed to be writing only to satisfy the Kiowas’ demands, he made no recommendation for the visit and he was sure to tell Agent Ashley that his reply would be interpreted directly to the Kiowas “for an answer to their plea.” Ashley responded probably as Adams predicted, he denied the request because the Cheyennes were busy farming and it would not be “to the best interests of the service.”¹¹³

However, eleven days later, Agent Ashley reported that one hundred and fifty Indians from the Kiowa Comanche Agency had congregated at his agency, one hundred of whom were Kiowas. The Kiowas claimed that Adams told them they would be fed by Agent Ashley. “I am not at all pleased with the situation,” Ashley wrote.¹¹⁴ Adams had no idea that the one hundred and fifty Indians had left his agency. Adams explained that he would, “without hesitation,” give a pass to a well behaved Indian for a reasonable number of days, but he would not allow any Indians to visit another reservation “for the purpose of carousal or dancing or any purpose which would be likely to create a disturbance or draw on the subsistence or property of the visited

¹¹¹ Agent Charles E. Adams to Agent Ashley, May 7, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.19.50, Kiowa Comanche Apache, Reel 18, NARA (OHS).

¹¹² Agent Charles E. Adams to Agent Charles Ashley, May 9, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.19.50, Kiowa Comanche Apache, Reel 18, NARA (OHS).

¹¹³ Agent Charles Ashley to Agent Charles E. Adams, May 12, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.19.10, Cheyenne Arapaho Agency, Reel 39, NARA (OHS).

¹¹⁴ Agent Charles Ashley to Agent Charles E. Adams, May 20, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.19.10, Cheyenne Arapaho Agency, Reel 32, NARA (OHS).

parties.”¹¹⁵ The Kiowas knew Adams would never offer passes to such a large group so they left without his permission. Adams and the Pawnee and Ponca agent D. M. Woods joined in a sort of pact to limit visitation, becoming “one another’s helpers.”¹¹⁶

Some Indians used forged passes to travel. On one occasion, a forged letter may have been used by a group of Southern Cheyennes to convince their agent that they had permission to visit the Comanches. In July 1891, the Cheyenne chief Whirlwind and sixty others from the Cheyenne and Arapaho Agency asked Agent Ashley if they could visit the Comanches, who invited them to the Kiowa Comanche Agency. But Ashley told Agent Adams at the Kiowa Comanche Agency that he could find no good reason why such a large group “should inflict themselves upon” him.¹¹⁷ A week later, Whirlwind went to his agency office with a letter that he claimed was from Agent Adams sent to Ben Clark, a former army scout and interpreter for the Cheyenne. The letter stated that Whirlwind’s party was indeed allowed to visit the Comanches. However, after looking over the letter, Agent Ashley, told Whirlwind that he did not recognize the handwriting and deemed the letter a forgery. Sometimes Indians traveling without permission could not avoid detection. A Standing Rock Miniconjou Lakota named Wipes His Arse, son of Bear’s Vest, traveled alone to Cheyenne River to see his grandfather Big Foot (or Spotted Elk, the Miniconjou leader who would later die at Wounded Knee) and was caught by chance by the 8th cavalry. The captain suspected that Wipes His Arse was a “runner” carrying a message, but Big Foot hoped his grandson could transfer to Cheyenne River permanently.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁵ Agent Charles E. Adams to Pawnee Ponca Agent, March 6, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.19.50, Kiowa Comanche Apache, Reel 18, NARA (OHS).

¹¹⁶ Agent D. M. Woods to Agent Charles E. Adams, February 2, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.19.77, Pawnee Ponca Otoe, Reel 39, NARA (OHS).

¹¹⁷ Agent Charles Ashley to Agent Charles Adams, July 8, 1891, RBIA, RG 75.19.50, Kiowa Comanche Apache, Reel 40, NARA (OHS).

¹¹⁸ Captain 8th Cavalry to Agent James McLaughlin, May 17, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.19.113, Standing Rock, Misc. Corres. Received, Box 33, NARA (KC).

Punishments varied for leaving the reserve without permission. Usually the visitors were just sent back home. Three Lower Brulé Sioux who arrived at Pine Ridge without a pass were given a choice to go back home or “suffer a term at hard work under guard.”¹¹⁹ They chose to go home, but others did not always have a choice. A stay in the guard house was a common punishment, especially if the visitors refused to go home.¹²⁰ A group of Rosebud Brulé arrived at Pine Ridge without permission and were ordered to return home at once, but the group did not leave. They stayed for several days until Agent Gallagher threatened them with the guard horse.¹²¹

Visiting sick friends or relatives or visits to mourn a death were often given special consideration by agents. Two Kiowas were allowed to see an old friend who was very ill at the Cheyenne and Arapaho Agency only a week after another group of Kiowas was denied a leisurely visit to the same agency.¹²² Saucy Bear and his wife, two Crow Creek Sioux, were allowed to visit Standing Rock as a means of mourning the loss of their son. They had friends

¹¹⁹ Agent H. D. Gallagher to Agent W. W. Anderson, May 28, 1888, RBIA, RG 75.19.85, Pine Ridge, Copies of Misc. Letters Sent, Box 54, NARA (KC).

¹²⁰ Agent Charles McChesney to Agent J. George Wright, April 14, 1890, Rosebud, Letters Received, Box 5, NARA (KC); Agent J. George Wright to agent H. D. Gallagher, July 7, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.19.85, Pine Ridge, Misc. Corres. Received, Box 27, NARA (KC).

¹²¹ Agent H. D. Gallagher to Agent J. George Wright, July 8, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.19.85, Pine Ridge, Copies of Misc. Letters Sent, Box 54, NARA (KC). Some Indians went to other reservations to escape punishment for other offenses. His Horse in Sight (or Bad Devil) left Pine Ridge for Rosebud with his mistress without permission. He had just been released from the guard house for beating his wife, an offense he committed multiple times before, see Agent H. D. Gallagher to Agent J. George Wright, June 12, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.19.85, Pine Ridge, Copies of Misc. Letters Sent, Box 54, NARA (KC). Good Bull took refuge at Rosebud to “escape punishment for leaving his family and taking up with another woman,” see Agent C. Scobey to Agent James McLaughlin, July 6, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.19.113, Standing Rock, Misc. Corres. Received, Box 33, NARA (KC). War Club, a Yankton at Fort Peck, was imprisoned for leaving the agency for Standing Rock with another man’s wife. War Club was able to escape the guard house flee to the Fort Belknap Agency, see Agent C. Scobey to Fort Belknap Agent, August 28, 1890, RBIA RG 75.19.30, Fort Belknap, Misc. Letters Received, Box 2, NARA (Denver).

¹²² Agent Charles E. Adams to Agent Charles Ashley, May 19, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.19.50, Kiowa Comanche Apache, Reel 18, NARA (OHS).

and relatives at Standing Rock. The Crow Creek agent asked Agent McLaughlin to offer “the best possible treatment” of Saucy Bear.¹²³ Other agents were not so sympathetic. The Fort Berthold agent reported that his Indians were “constantly offering excuses” to get out of work, like wanting to visit a sick relative.¹²⁴ The Superintendent of Indian Affairs in Dakota Territory felt little sympathy for the bereaved, telling the commissioner that a “death in the family is worse than no excuse!”¹²⁵ But for the most part, agents gave consent to visits they thought meaningful, like illness or to retrieve stolen or indebted horses.¹²⁶ Indians living in the Dakotas also found opportunity to visit with other groups during the annual convocation held by the Episcopal Church, mission meetings, or other church sponsored events at various agencies.¹²⁷

The reservation system was so fluid that some Indians who wanted to transfer to another agency to live would simply go to that agency without notifying an agent. Some would try to draw rations at their new agency without letting the agent know, others made themselves known to the agent on arrival.¹²⁸ It was common for agents to approve a transfer to Indians arriving at

¹²³ Agent A. P. Dixon to Agent James McLaughlin, October 31, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.19.113, Standing Rock, Misc. Corres. Received, Box 34, NARA (KC).

¹²⁴ *ARCIA*, 1885, 30.

¹²⁵ *ARCIA*, 1877, 50.

¹²⁶ *ARCIA*, 1886, 75, 94.

¹²⁷ Agent H. D. Gallagher to Sisseton Agent, June 13, 1888, RBIA, RG 75.19.85, Pine Ridge, Copies of Misc. Letters Sent, Box 54, NARA (KC); Aaron B. Clark to Agent L. F. Spencer, September 10, 1889, Lebbeus Foster Spencer Papers, MSS 596, History Colorado Stephen H. Hart Library and Research Center; Rev. C. G. Sterling to Agent H. D. Gallagher, August 8, 1890, *Letters Sent to the Office of Indian Affairs by the Pine Ridge Agency 1875-1914*, RBIA Microfilm Publication M1282, Roll 10; Agent W. P. Wyman to Rev. Joseph Bandini, November 25, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.19.21, Crow Agency, Press Copies of Misc. Letters Sent, Box 5, NARA (Denver); Dakota Mission to Agent James McLaughlin, September 9, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.19.113, Standing Rock, Misc. Corres. Received, Box 34, NARA (KC); Agent E. W. Foster to CIA, November 29, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 37463, Box 683, NARA (DC). A convention of a society called the Brotherhood of Christian Unity was held at the Lower Brule Agency in late 1890 with Indian members in attendance.

¹²⁸ Agent Leary to CIA, November 21, 1889, RBIA, RG 75.19.96, Rosebud, Letters Received, Box 5, NARA (KC); CIA to Agent J. George Wright, December 6, 1889, RBIA, RG 75.19.96, Rosebud, Letters Received, Box 5, NARA (KC).

their doorstep, even if the individual had left without a pass, but large groups were usually turned away.¹²⁹ In July 1890, seven hundred and twenty Rosebud Brulé tried to move to Pine Ridge without the knowledge of their agent. Agent Gallagher at Pine Ridge instructed his Indian police to order them back home, but a dozen of their headmen (under Lip) told Gallagher that they wanted to be transferred to Pine Ridge because they believed the General Allotment Act allowed it. If they were to be placed on permanent homesteads, they wanted to be reunited with their kinsmen. They had heard that the Rosebud Agent was preparing the agency census and were afraid that if they were counted at the census at Rosebud, their hope of transfer would be lost. Gallagher convinced the Rosebud Indians to return home by assuring them that he would write to their agent and ask him “to be as lenient as possible with them” for leaving without permission.¹³⁰ They agreed, but only after they were counted so that the government would know how many Rosebud Brulé wanted to transfer to Pine Ridge. Half of the seven hundred started back for Rosebud, but the other half remained for “a big dance,” perhaps a ghost dance, before they planned to leave.”¹³¹

Those receiving passes often brought along others who had not. Eighteen Sioux from the Sisseton Agency arrived at Rosebud on their way to Pine Ridge, but only six had passes, the

¹²⁹ Agent James McLaughlin to Agent Charles McChesney, July 7, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.19.113, Standing Rock, Misc. Corres. Received, Box 33, NARA (KC). A man named Spotted Hawk was transferred to Pine Ridge from Cheyenne River in 1886, but a year later he told the Pine Ridge agent that he was only on a long visit. All of Spotted Hawk’s property was still at Cheyenne River and he wanted to return. He was transferred back to Cheyenne River, see Agent H. D. Gallagher to Agent Charles McChesney, RBIA, RG 75.19.11, Cheyenne River, Misc. Corres. Received, Box 354, NARA (KC).

¹³⁰ Agent H. D. Gallagher to Agent J. George Wright, July 13, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.19.85, Pine Ridge, Copies of Misc. Letters Sent, Box 54, NARA (KC).

¹³¹ Agent H. D. Gallagher to Agent J. George Wright, July 13, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.19.85, Pine Ridge, Copies of Misc. Letters Sent, Box 54, NARA (KC).

other twelve tagged along.¹³² They were sent home without punishment. Agents thought that Indians were taking advantage of their willingness to allow travel. In February 1889, Wounded Eye and fourteen other Northern Cheyennes at Pine Ridge asked Agent Gallagher if they could visit the Northern Cheyennes at the Tongue River Agency. Gallagher told Robert L. Upshaw, the Tongue River agent, that the Indians would probably leave without authority if a pass was not given.¹³³ Upshaw denied the request. He told Gallagher that every time he allowed Pine Ridge Indians to visit Tongue River, too many Indians visited, more than allowed on the pass. Upshaw worried about the rations needed to feed the Pine Ridge Indians, especially since he had a hard time feeding the Tongue River Indians. He also believed that when Cheyennes from Pine Ridge visited the Tongue River Cheyennes, it agitated an issue that he had no control over. The Commissioner told Gallagher that he wanted the “least possible intercourse” between the Cheyennes at Pine Ridge and the Cheyenne at Tongue River. If the Pine Ridge Cheyennes were to visit Tongue River, the Commissioner reasoned, they would not only use too much of the Tongue River rations, they would also “in all probability exercise an extremely demoralizing, if not dangerous influence” upon the Tongue River Cheyennes.¹³⁴ The number of Cheyennes traveling between Tongue River and Pine Ridge was a constant problem for the agents and the soldiers responsible for chasing them down. In April 1890, the Tongue River counted around twenty to thirty Pine Ridge Cheyennes at his reserve without permission.¹³⁵

¹³² Agent J. George Wright to Agent W. M. Kusick, January 2, 1891, RBIA, RG 75.19.96, Copies of Letters Sent, Vol. 20, NARA (KC); Agent W. M. Kusick to Agent J. George Wright, January 10, 1891, RBIA, RG 75.19.96, Rosebud, Letters Received, Box 5, NARA (KC).

¹³³ Agent H. D. Gallagher to Agent R. L. Upshaw, January 9, 1889, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 3787, Box 502, NARA (DC).

¹³⁴ CIA to Agent H. D. Gallagher, February 19, 1889, RBIA, RG 75.19.85, Pine Ridge, Corres. Rec'd from the Office of Indian Affairs, Box 9, NARA (KC).

¹³⁵ See several letters discussing the Tongue River/Pine Ridge problem, including Agent R. L. Upshaw to Major Henry Carroll, April 21, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 19493, Box 635, NARA (DC). In April 1890, the army recommended that the Pine Ridge

Visits could also be denied because of the actions of other Indians. In July 1889, Upshaw submitted a request to the Commissioner for Buffalo Hump and other Cheyennes to visit relatives at Pine Ridge.¹³⁶ Although Upshaw favorably recommended the visit (and Agent Gallagher did not object), the Commissioner denied it because of the recent “disturbances threatened” by Grasshopper to initiate a sun dance at Tongue River. “The less intercourse had between the Indians of the two Agencies the better it will be for both,” the Commissioner responded.¹³⁷ The Commissioner also instructed Gallagher and Upshaw to telegraph the army headquarters Dept. of Dakota whenever any Indian left their reservations without permission so that they could be apprehended by the army.¹³⁸ Buffalo Hump asked his agent if he could make the visit before June 20. The Commissioner did not mail off his decision until August 12.

The Commissioner also denied the request of Red Bird and family from Tongue River to visit Cheyenne River, even though the agents at both agencies approved. The Commissioner again cited the disturbances by Grasshopper and his sun dance.¹³⁹ But Upshaw persisted. For a second time, he asked the Commissioner if Buffalo Hump could visit Pine Ridge and if Red Bird could visit Cheyenne River. Upshaw told the Commissioner that Buffalo Hump and Red Bird were “exceptionally good men...and I believe the others will have no bad influence.”¹⁴⁰ They were considered good men by Upshaw because they were seen to be making efforts toward

Cheyenne be allowed to live with their Tongue River brethren, but that did not happen until October 1891.

¹³⁶ Agent R. L. Upshaw to CIA, July 18, 1889, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 20238, Box 539, NARA (DC); H. D. Gallagher to R. L. Upshaw, July 3, 1889, RBIA, RG 75.19.85, Pine Ridge, Copies of Misc. Letters Sent, Box 54, NARA (KC).

¹³⁷ CIA to Agent R. L. Upshaw, August 10, 1889, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Sent, NARA (DC).

¹³⁸ CIA to Agent H. D. Gallagher, August 12, 1889, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Sent, NARA (DC).

¹³⁹ CIA to R. L. Upshaw, August 12, 1889, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Sent, NARA (DC).

¹⁴⁰ Agent R. L. Upshaw to CIA, August 21, 1889, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 23985, Box 548, NARA (DC).

civilization. Red Bird made “better improvements” than any on Tongue River. Upshaw’s recommendation was a “recognition of their efforts and improvement.” Most agents used visitation as a reward for Indians who seemed to be progressive and as an incentive for “good conduct.”¹⁴¹ Agent John Murphy at Fort Berthold was not in favor of “whole sale visiting,” but for a trio of “fairly industrious” Mandans wanting to visit Standing Rock, he allowed them to go “as a kind of relaxation.”¹⁴²

Likewise, Gallagher allowed Little Chief to visit Tongue River, even in the midst of the Grasshopper trouble, because Little Chief was “very well disposed and has always objected to his people leaving the agency without authority.”¹⁴³ Plus, Little Chief “never advocated” the resettlement of the Pine Ridge Cheyenne to the north. Agent Upshaw and Agent Gallagher both agreed to allow the Tongue River Cheyenne Little Wolf and his wife to visit their grandchildren at Pine Ridge in August 1889.¹⁴⁴ But Upshaw and Gallagher did not grant every Indian a pass. A large number of Cheyennes visited Tongue River in August without authority, so did ninety Sioux sometime that summer. Also in August, a Cheyenne man from Tongue River visited Pine Ridge without permission and was caught and sent home.¹⁴⁵ In September, the Commissioner did allow Butcher, an Arapaho at Wind River, to visit relatives and friends at Tongue River (it took Commissioner Morgan over a month to respond). The Commissioner told the Wind River

¹⁴¹ Agent D. M. Woods to Agent Charles E. Adams, October 15, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.19.50, Kiowa Comanche Apache, Reel 40, NARA (OHS).

¹⁴² Agent John S. Murphy to Agent James McLaughlin, August 8, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.19.113, Standing Rock, Misc. Corres. Received, Box 33, NARA (KC).

¹⁴³ Agent H. D. Gallagher to Agent R. L. Upshaw, May (undated), 1889, RBIA, RG 75.19.85, Pine Ridge, Copies of Misc. Letters Sent, Box 54, NARA (KC).

¹⁴⁴ Agent H. D. Gallagher to Agent R. L. Upshaw, August 1889, RBIA, RG 75.19.85, Pine Ridge, Copies of Misc. Letters Sent, Box 54, NARA (KC); W. M. Burger to CIA, September 5, 1889, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 25616, Box 553, NARA (DC).

¹⁴⁵ Agent H. D. Gallagher to R. L. Upshaw, August, undated, 1889, RBIA, RG 75.19.85, Pine Ridge, Copies of Misc. Letters Sent, Box 54, NARA (KC).

agent to caution Butcher to “travel by a direct route, both in going to and returning...to abstain from the use of intoxicants, and conduct himself in a quiet, orderly manner on the trip.”¹⁴⁶ This is what was expected from traveling Indians: stay out of trouble and mind the rules.

Before the reservation era, intertribal relations were cemented with regular meetings that featured dancing and feasting.¹⁴⁷ Tribal religious beliefs and rituals were transmitted from tribe to tribe. This tradition continued after tribes were relocated to reserves. Dances were still important religious ceremonies and social traditions during the reservation years. And, before the wide dissemination of the ghost dance in 1890, intertribal dancing, in several forms, was common. From the earliest reservation years onward, dancing was a major motivation for visitation. Large dance gatherings attracted tribes from surrounding agencies. Ideas were exchanged between groups and religious practices were acquired and adapted. Because of the expansion of intertribal communication during the reservation years, religious ideas like the sun dance or the Omaha dance could be still shared with distant groups. Dances were typically an intertribal affair, an important event where cultures gathered and exchanged the material and the spiritual. Because members from individual tribes visited multiple reservations, often on the

¹⁴⁶ CIA to Agent Fosher, September 7, 1889, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Sent, NARA (DC).

¹⁴⁷ See Gloria A. Young, “Intertribal Religious Movements,” in *Handbook of North American Indians*, Vol. 13, Pt. 2, ed. William C. Sturtevant (Washington: Smithsonian Institution, 2001), 996-1010; Gloria A. Young and Erik D. Gooding, “Celebrations and Giveaways,” in *Handbook of North American Indians*, Vol. 13, Pt. 2, ed. William C. Sturtevant (Washington: Smithsonian Institution, 2001), 1011-1012. Scholars have made the distinction between social and religious dances in Native life before and during the early reservation years. Performances could be seen as entertainment. Rituals of religious dance could be stripped away for a more social setting, but social dancing was not absent of structure or ceremonial elements. Some theorize that because of governmental intervention, religious dancing diminished during the 1880s. See Clark Wissler, “General Discussion of Shamanistic and Dancing Societies,” *American Museum of Natural History Anthropological Paper*, Vol. XI, Part XII (New York: AMNH, 1916), 862; Royal Hassrick, *The Sioux: Life and Customs of a Warrior Society* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1964), 160.

same trip, ideas originating at one point could be disseminated to people living on reservations throughout the west.

Federal policymakers thought that dancing only served to remind Indians of their pre-reservation life. It was a practice of the past, a “demoralizing influence,” that stood in the path of progress. Government officials, missionaries, and reformers included anti-dancing rhetoric into their civilizing campaigns of the 1880s. But even though agents were instructed by their superiors to curb dancing on reservations, they were rarely outright banned.¹⁴⁸ Indians continued to get the go ahead to dance from their agents, even after the ghost dance troubles. Natives repeatedly compelled their agents to allow dancing. Agents relented and dances were held in an environment that agents believed they could control. But many Natives organized clandestine dances outside of agents’ authority. If Indians were caught dancing outlawed dances like the sun dance, the “scalp-dance,” or the “war-dance,” only the courts of Indian offenses had jurisdiction to punish those who practiced them.¹⁴⁹

In his *The Ghost-dance Religion and the Sioux Outbreak of 1890*, James Mooney wrote that by 1890, the “old Indian dances had been nearly obsolete” for the Southern Cheyennes.¹⁵⁰ According to Mooney, it was not until after the ghost dance that those tribes began dancing again. There was a “revival of the Indian idea” because of the “new religion,” Mooney explained. But Mooney exaggerated the Cheyennes’ turn from dancing in the late 1880s. While

¹⁴⁸ Clyde Ellis, “‘We Don’t Want Your Rations, We Want This Dance’: The Changing Use of Song and Dance on the Southern Plains,” *Western Historical Quarterly* 2, No. 2 (Summer, 1999): 133-154; Clyde Ellis, “‘There is No Doubt...the Dances Should Be Curtailed’: Indian Dances and Federal Policy on the Southern Plains, 1880-1930,” *Pacific Historical Review* 70, No. 4 (November 2001): 543-569.

¹⁴⁹ The courts were established at agencies beginning in 1883 to settle disputes between tribal members and punish minor crimes. They were composed of prominent men on the reservations who were typically chosen by the agents.

¹⁵⁰ James Mooney, *The Ghost-dance Religion*, 895.

the government was able to limit the frequency of dances, the Southern Cheyennes never stopped dancing. For instance, in May 1890, the Cheyenne chief Whirlwind asked the Cheyenne and Arapaho agent if his people could dance. The agent offered no objection as long as it did not occur within five miles of an agency school. To the chagrin of the agent, around one hundred Kiowas and fifty or so Comanches and Apaches traveled to his agency to join the Cheyenne dance.¹⁵¹ And this was not an isolated incident, over one hundred Poncas danced with the Southern Cheyennes in the fall 1889.¹⁵²

At agencies throughout the West, organized dances often attracted hundreds of Indians from multiple tribes. Around two hundred Rosebud Indians visited Pine Ridge to dance in the spring 1889.¹⁵³ A good number of Pine Ridge Indians went to Rosebud without permission to dance later the same year. In September 1890, two hundred Pine Ridge Indians danced at Rosebud (reportedly the Omaha dance, although it could have been a ghost dance).¹⁵⁴ In June 1890, after ration day at Pine Ridge, six or seven hundred Northern Cheyenne and Sioux gathered at White River to dance. The number of dancers was so great that some white settlers near White River and the Black Tail and Beaver Creeks (in Nebraska) grew alarmed and left the area in fear of an outbreak (after hearing rumors). The military saw no reason for fear and

¹⁵¹ Agent Charles E. Adams to Agent Charles Ashley, May 9, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.19.50, Kiowa Comanche Apache, Reel 18, NARA (OHS); Agent Charles Ashley to Agent Charles E. Adams, May 12, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.19.10, Cheyenne Arapaho Agency, Reel 39, NARA (OHS); Agent Charles Ashley to Agent Charles E. Adams, May 20, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.19.10, Cheyenne Arapaho Agency, Reel 32, NARA (OHS).

¹⁵² Agent Charles Ashley to Agent J. M. Wood, June 24, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.19.10, Cheyenne Arapaho Agency, Reel 32, NARA (OHS).

¹⁵³ Agent H. D. Gallagher to Agent J. George Wright, October 02, 1889, RBIA, 75.19.96, Rosebud, Letters Received, Box 5, NARA (KC).

¹⁵⁴ Agent J. George Wright to Agent H. D. Gallagher, September 30, 1889, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 28215, Box 559, NARA (DC); W. Cartwright to Agent J. George Wright, October 1, 1889, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Box 559, Letter 28215, NARA (DC).

concluded that troops were not needed. The dancers decided to end their gathering (which also involved horse racing) three days early after they were told that the white settlers had panicked.¹⁵⁵

Because of the sheer number of Natives who wanted to dance, agents had a difficult time curbing the tradition. At the Standing Rock Agency, dancing was still allowed in 1890.¹⁵⁶ The Standing Rock agent, James McLaughlin, confessed to the Commissioner in October 1890, when ghost dancing was gaining attention, that he allowed his Indians to gather for the grass dance, but only on Saturdays and without the “wholesale giving away of property.”¹⁵⁷ Whenever an Indian gave away “horses, rations, money and clothing” at a dance, the offense was quickly punished. McLaughlin prided himself for being able to end the “pagan practices” of the “Sun Dance,” “War Dance,” “Scalp Dance,” “Kiss Dance,” “Buffalo Dance,” the “Horse Dance,” and the “tom-tom’ Orchestra” that was heard in “some of the camps.” The grass dance was allowed to continue because it did not have the “objectionable features” of the other dances. McLaughlin could not think of another “pastime amusement” to substitute for the grass dance, which was needed for the Indians’ “recreation and amusement...until they become more civilized.” Like many agents, McLaughlin had to satisfy the desires of the reservation’s populace, but only allowed dancing that was deemed relatively inoffensive to western sensibilities. He was able to rationalize his toleration of the grass dance by insisting on its harmlessness and by believing that he controlled the practice because he scheduled it. Unfortunately, McLaughlin and other Plains

¹⁵⁵ Gen. Ruger to Adjutant General of Army, June 17, 1890, telegram, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 19129, Box 634, NARA (DC).

¹⁵⁶ Saketopa to Agent James McLaughlin, January 3, 1888, *James McLaughlin Papers*, Microfilm Roll 2, Assumption College (Richardson, ND), 1968; Agent James McLaughlin to CIA, October 1, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 30921, Box 668, NARA (DC).

¹⁵⁷ Agent James McLaughlin to CIA, October 1, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 30921, Box 668, NARA (DC).

agents would not tolerate the ghost dance because they thought its beliefs and features were harmful to the Natives. They could not control it.

In 1886, the Yankton agent lamented that he had tried for two years to break up dancing on his reserve and the visitation from other tribes that came with it, but his predecessor had allowed the Indians to build a dance house and hold dances on Saturday nights. The Indians claimed “the right to continue them” and the agent “utterly failed” in all peaceful means to stop them.¹⁵⁸ “Considering the large number of people who attend these dances,” the agent reported in 1885, “and the serious consequences which would result from a forcible ejection from the dance house of the persons in attendance, I have not thought it wise to resort to this means to stop it.”¹⁵⁹ In 1887, the Yankton agent resorted to jailing and cutting the hair of Wakea, “the expert dancer of the tribe,” for his “misconduct.”¹⁶⁰ The agent prided himself on the effectiveness of the punishment. Wakea seemed to have given up dancing and was “living nicely” on a “little farm.”

Dancing was tolerated by government employees to keep Indians happy, but like the Yankton agent, most tried to discourage the practice. The Cheyenne River agent allowed dances on the Saturday nights before ration day, but Lower Brulé and Cheyenne River Indians still held unauthorized dances together.¹⁶¹ The Cheyenne River Miniconjou Lakotas invited the Standing Rock Hunkpapa Lakotas to dance at their reservation in May 1890 (the Miniconjou had visited the Hunkpapas the previous winter), but the Standing Rock agent would not allow it. The agent thought that the group of fifty Hunkpapas, headed by Gall (considered a leading progressive

¹⁵⁸ *ARCIA*, 1886, 99.

¹⁵⁹ *ARCIA*, 1885, 61.

¹⁶⁰ *ARCIA*, 1888, 65.

¹⁶¹ *ARCIA*, 1886, 51; R. L. Kelly to Agent McChesney, May 28, 1889, RBIA, RG 75.19.11, Cheyenne River, Box 251, NARA (KC); Henry Fisherman to CIA, January 21, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 2490, Box 589, NARA (DC).

chief), might leave anyway.¹⁶² Agents knew that dancing was tied to visitation. After some Pawnees danced with the Wichitas in 1886 without permission, their visitation privileges were taken away.¹⁶³

Some whites were vehemently opposed to any leniency concerning dancing. In the summer of 1890, a group of Santee Sioux visited the Winnebago Agency in nearby northeast Nebraska, a trip that occurred often. The two tribes danced and the Santees went home with horses given to them by the Winnebagos. A few months later, a group of Winnebagos went to the Santee reserve to dance, and the Santees gave away some horses in return. Rev. Charles Stroh, of the Episcopal Church at Santee, asked the agent to end the tradition, but the agent did not believe he had the authority to end a religious practice. Alfred Riggs of the Santee Normal School told the Commissioner of Indian Affairs that the dancing affected the “moral and temporal welfare” of the Indians and “the better class of Indians” deplored it.¹⁶⁴ In October 1890, around thirty Sisseton Sioux from South Dakota visited the Mille Lac Chippewas (Ojibwe) in Minnesota and initiated a dance. The chairman of the Chippewa Commission complained to the Commissioner that the Sissetons were “a worthless set” who had danced and feasted in the fall 1889 at White Earth and Red Lake and swindled the Chippewas out of ponies and presents. “The Sioux are crafty, irritating, and worthless, the hospitable Chippewas, generous to a fault will give them their last garment or mouthful of food,” it was “a begging expedition.”¹⁶⁵ The

¹⁶² Agent James McLaughlin to Agent Charles McChesney, May 27, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.19.11, Cheyenne River, Box 251, NARA (KC).

¹⁶³ *ARCIA*, 1886, 131.

¹⁶⁴ Alfred Riggs and Charles Stroh to CIA, November 24, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 36576, Box 681, NARA (DC).

¹⁶⁵ Henry Rice to CIA, October 30, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 33937, Box 675, NARA (DC).

Sisseton agent sent his Indians in Minnesota a letter, written in Dakota, instructing them to return home at once.¹⁶⁶

In the summer of 1890, an inspector at the Pawnee, Ponca, and Otoe Agency reported that dancing was having a negative influence on the school children. He thought that when the children returned home, “the parents in a few days or weeks undo (presumably by said dances) much good that has been accomplished for the pupils at school.” The inspector recommended that agents should prohibit dancing to persons under the age of twenty-one. The Pawnee and Ponca agent agreed.¹⁶⁷ Schools did not accommodate a student’s right to dance. The practice was considered to be incompatible to educational pursuits. Two Yankton students at St. Paul’s School were dismissed in 1889 because they frequently ran away to join dances.¹⁶⁸

But not every white government official felt the need to eliminate dancing entirely. Some tolerated dancing because they believed the practice would die a natural death. In 1886, Agent W. W. Anderson, in charge at the Crow Creek and Lower Brule agencies reported:

These Indians have given up the sun-dance, scalp-dance, and other barbarous dances that keep alive their wild natures and retard their progress, but I have not

¹⁶⁶ Agent W. M. Kusick to CIA, November 13, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 35513, Box 679, NARA (DC). Parties of Sisseton Sioux visited the Mille Lac, Red Lake, White Earth Chippewa bands of Wisconsin in 1889 and 1890 to dance. A government official called their visit to Mille Lac a “begging Expedition.” The Sisseton agent sent the party a letter written in Dakota explaining that they must return home because of complaints against them, see Henry Rice to CIA, October 30, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 33937, Box 675, NARA (DC) and Agent William McKusick to CIA, November 13, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 35513, Box 679, NARA (DC). Some Santee Sioux engaged in dances with some Winnebago at both the Santee reserve and the Winnebago reserve in 1890, see Alfred Riggs to CIA, November 24, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 36576, Box 681, NARA (DC); Agent James Helms, November 24, 1890, RBIA, RG 75, SC 188, Box 199, NARA (DC); Agent Robert Ashley to CIA, January 22, 1891, RBIA, RG 75, SC 188, Box 200, NARA (DC). Dancing visits were common as far east as the Green Bay Agency in Wisconsin, where some Menominee would receive Pottawatomie, Winnebago, and Chippewa visitors, see *ARCIA*, 1888, 239.

¹⁶⁷ Agent D. J. M. Wood to Charles L. Davis, October 14, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.19.77, Pawnee Ponca Otoe, Reel 17, NARA (OHS).

¹⁶⁸ *ARCIA*, 1889, 75.

endeavored to break up the squaw-dance and such other harmless amusements. I like to see happy smiling faces around me, and want these people to enjoy life in an innocent manner, providing their work is kept up. Every race of people has its amusement, and these should not form the exception. As they gradually get accustomed to work and become more interested in accumulating property, the cruder sports will die out and give place to more enlightened amusements.¹⁶⁹

Likewise, Col. J. F. Wade at Camp Schofield disagreed with a complaint that some Southern Arapaho were causing a distraction by dancing too close to an Arapaho school. He believed dancing was “only the Indian method of amusement” similar to “the ball room, theater, saloon, &c., of his more civilized brother.”¹⁷⁰ The military found no reason to force the group of Arapaho to stop their dancing, but the policy of Indian Affairs was to outlaw dancing (“the nocturnal orgies, etc.”) or any “encamping, congregating, or engaging in any noisy or disorderly conduct” within five miles of a school.¹⁷¹

Natives tried to convince the government that their religion should not be managed by policy makers. In May 1889, all of the Kiowa headmen asked their agent to obtain from the Commissioner of Indian Affairs permission to hold their “medicine dance” in July. They told the agent that it was their religion, it was how they worshiped the “Great Spirit,” but the agent saw “no good results” in their “custom.”¹⁷² He called the dancing “demoralizing and disgraceful” and claimed that women were prostituted and property was destroyed during past dances.¹⁷³ The Commissioner denied the request as expected. The Kiowas were read the letter and insisted that their agent write back to the Commissioner, but the agent declined. Military assistance was

¹⁶⁹ *ARCIA*, 1886, 66.

¹⁷⁰ Col. J. F. Wade to Cmd. Officer Fort Reno, September 28, 1889, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 30434, Box 564, NARA (DC).

¹⁷¹ Agent Charles Ashley to CIA, May 20, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.19.10, Cheyenne and Arapaho, Letters Sent, Reel 32, NARA (OHS).

¹⁷² Agent Myers to CIA, May 16, 1889, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 13673, Box 522, NARA (DC).

¹⁷³ Agent Myers to CIA, August 1, 1889, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 21983, Box 543, NARA (DC).

requested to prevent the dance because the agent believed that the Kiowas would hold the dance without permission.¹⁷⁴ Others wrote to Washington directly to plea for religious freedom. Little Wound, Young Man Afraid of His Horses, and Red Cloud told the President that he had made them “ashamed by stopping our Ghost Lodges. The Great Father should consider that we are Indians.”¹⁷⁵

But the government did not stop regulating Native religion. Indians did not have First Amendment rights because they were not U.S. citizens. Policy makers could limit Native dancing for the sake of western sensibility. In 1883, the Commissioner of Indian Affairs Hiram Price pronounced that there was “no good reason why an Indian should be permitted to indulge in practices which are alike repugnant to common decency and morality; and the preservation of good order on the reservations demands that some active measures should be taken to discourage and, if possible, put a stop to the demoralizing influence of heathenish rites.”¹⁷⁶ The sun dance, one of the practices Price singled out, was condemned by the government in the mid-1880s. The sun dance was adopted by much of the Northern Plains tribes before the 1800s and it was performed by most Plains tribes during the 1800s. The dance was an earth-renewal ritual, usually annually held, that developed great variety through intertribal exchange. For some tribes, the ceremony was a demonstration of humility, supplication, and sacrifice before the Great Spirit. The ritual took several days to perform, fasting would occur, and some men and women (in some tribes) practiced self-torture by pressing skewers, which were attached by string to a

¹⁷⁴ Acting Sect. of War to CIA, June 7, 1889, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 15339, Box 526, NARA (DC).

¹⁷⁵ Little Wound, Young Man Afraid of His Horses, and Red Cloud to the President, December 10, 1888, RBIA, RG 75.19.85, Pine Ridge, Copies of Misc. Letters Sent, Box 54, NARA (KC). The Pine Ridge agent recorded the letter in his letterpress book.

¹⁷⁶ *ARCIA*, 1883, XV.

center pole, through their chest or back skin.¹⁷⁷ It was seen by uninformed white observers to be an especially barbarous event, something that the government could not allow on the reservations, but many Plains Indians tried to keep the ceremony alive. Although agents tried to draw support from some progressive leaders to end the dance, time and time again, Natives from separate agencies coordinated sun dances together.

The sun dance gathering was a momentous time of the year for many Plains people. More than just a time for ceremony, the dance was a “public festival” that allowed Indians to intermingle with relatives and acquaintances from other bands and tribes, to act out visions and share those vision experiences, witness the power of medicine men, and to participate in giveaway rituals.¹⁷⁸ According to D. B. Shimkin, the sun dance was “a vehicle of intertribal participation” between most Plains Indians during the early 1800s.¹⁷⁹ Natives tried to continue the tradition on the reservations. At the Sioux agencies, the sun dance was an expected and important ritual until the government used their resources to put an end to it. At least 1,000 Lower Brulé Sioux traveled to Rosebud to sun dance in 1879 and nearly 4,000 Oglala and Brulé met and sun danced near the Pine Ridge line in 1880.¹⁸⁰ In 1881, dozens of non-Indians, including military and agency officials, witnessed 3,500 Lakotas gathered for a sun dance in the same area. The Sioux welcomed the whites because they wanted to demonstrate the significance

¹⁷⁷ Leslie Spier, “The Sun Dance of the Plains Indians: Its Development and Diffusion,” *Anthropological Papers of the American Museum of Natural History*, Vol. 16, Pt. 7 (1921): 451-527.

¹⁷⁸ Raymond J. DeMallie, “The Lakota Ghost Dance: An Ethnohistorical Account,” *Pacific Historical Review* 51, No. 4 (Nov. 1982): 400.

¹⁷⁹ D. B. Shimkin, “Wind River Shoshone Sun Dance,” in *Anthropological Papers, No. 41*, Smithsonian Institution, Bureau of American Ethnology Bulletin 151 (Washington DC: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1953), 407.

¹⁸⁰ Stephen R. Riggs, *Dakota Grammar, Texts, and Ethnography* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1893), 229; Ernest L. Schusky, *The Forgotten Sioux: An Ethnohistory of the Lower Brule Reservation* (Chicago: Nelson-Hall, 1975), 107.

of their religion to those who might threaten it, but white minds were not changed.¹⁸¹ The Sioux knew that their religious ceremonies were in danger. An 1882 sun dance was observed by ethnologist Alice Fletcher, but the Oglalas would not allow her to study other ceremonies, telling her, “The white people do not understand us, they laugh at our sacred things, and they will laugh at these things which they did not know before.”¹⁸² Agents at Rosebud and Pine Ridge threatened to reduce supplies, farming implements, and food rations to those who sun danced and offered benefits to the leaders who agreed not to protest the suppression of the dance, two strategies that successfully ended large ceremonies on those agencies.¹⁸³ The last sun dance held on a Sioux agency with permission occurred in 1884.

But Indians living on Rosebud, Standing Rock, Pine Ridge, and other Dakota agencies still held sun dances in secret.¹⁸⁴ Some even traveled to other agencies to continue the outlawed ceremony. In August 1888, a Pine Ridge Cheyenne named Grasshopper (previously mentioned) left his agency with a party of twenty-four others to hold a sun dance at the Tongue River Agency in Montana with the Cheyennes living there. Grasshopper was denied permission to leave the agency for such a purpose, but he decided to head to Tongue River anyway. The Pine Ridge agent, H. D. Gallagher, instructed his Indian Police Lieutenant, Fast Horse, to catch up with the party and compel them to return home, threatening them with troops if necessary. Fast Horse was instructed not to “precipitate a conflict” with the “runaways.”¹⁸⁵ Grasshopper’s party

¹⁸¹ Jeffrey Ostler, *The Plains Sioux*, 173-179.

¹⁸² Alice C. Fletcher, “The Elk Mystery or Festival,” *Reports of the Peabody Museum of American Archaeology and Ethnology*, Vol. 3, 1880-86 (Cambridge, MA: 1887), 280; Jeffrey Ostler, *The Plains Sioux*, 172-173.

¹⁸³ Jeffrey Ostler, *The Plains Sioux*, 177.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 179.

¹⁸⁵ Agent H. D. Gallagher to Lt. Fast Horse, August 8, 1888, RBIA, RG 75.19.85, Pine Ridge, Copies of Misc. Letters Sent, Box 54, NARA (KC); Agent H. D. Gallagher to Brig. Gen. Thomas H. Ruger, August 18, 1888, RBIA, RG 75.19.85, Pine Ridge, Copies of Misc. Letters Sent, Box 54, NARA (KC).

was eventually returned to Pine Ridge by U.S. troops (Fast Horse's horses' feet went lame), but Grasshopper was persistent. He asked Agent Gallagher to write to the Tongue River agent for permission to sun dance there, but Gallagher convinced Grasshopper that he would never agree to it.¹⁸⁶ Surprisingly, in November 1888, Gallagher did allow Grasshopper to visit his mother at Tongue River with his wife and mother-in-law. Gallagher told the Tongue River agent that he was sure that Grasshopper would give him no trouble. Grasshopper "has given up the idea of having a dance," Gallagher wrote, "I trust you will feel, like myself, that there would be no impropriety in this visit."¹⁸⁷ Permission for visitation often hinged on the intention of the visitors and Grasshopper decided to give the agent a new reason to visit Tongue River. There is no record of any trouble out of Grasshopper during that November 1888 visit.

However, in May 1889, Grasshopper, Roan Bear, and Roan Bear's wife, child, and mother left Pine Ridge for Tongue River without permission in a second attempt to lead a sun dance.¹⁸⁸ Grasshopper and Roan Bear persistently asked Gallagher if they could visit Oelrichs, a town twenty five miles from their camp. Gallagher finally agreed not realizing that Grasshopper's eventual destination would be Tongue River, which happened to be in the same direction as Oelrichs. After discovering Grasshopper had made it all the way to Tongue River, Agent Gallagher recommended to the Commissioner that Grasshopper be arrested and jailed. Three troops of cavalry were sent to Tongue River to prevent the sun dance and preserve the

¹⁸⁶ Agent H. D. Gallagher to Agent R. L. Upshaw, November 14, 1888, RBIA, RG 75.19.85, Pine Ridge, Copies of Misc. Letters Sent, Box 54, NARA (KC).

¹⁸⁷ Agent H. D. Gallagher to Agent R. L. Upshaw, November 18, 1888, RBIA, RG 75.19.85, Pine Ridge, Copies of Misc. Letters Sent, Box 54, NARA (KC).

¹⁸⁸ Agent H. D. Gallagher to Agent R. L. Upshaw, May 8, 1889, RBIA, RG 75.19.85, Pine Ridge, Copies of Misc. Letters Sent, Box 54, NARA (KC); *Registers of Letters Received, 1881-1907*, RBIA, Microfilm Publication Number P2186, Roll 40, Letter 12932; *The Indian Chieftain* (Vinita, I.T.), "Sly Sword Bearer," May 16, 1889.

peace, but Grasshopper's party went back to Pine Ridge before the cavalry intervened.¹⁸⁹ Frustrated, Brigadier General Thomas Ruger urged that agents be instructed to immediately telegraph the date that Indians left their reserves, including the number that left and their destination. The army had "several times within the past few years" been asked to send troops to capture Tongue River Cheyenne on their way to Pine Ridge without enough information.¹⁹⁰ In the summer 1887, around 200 Sioux were forcibly removed from Tongue River by the military, and it nearly came to blows according to Upshaw.¹⁹¹

Natives living outside the Dakotas also tried to maintain the sun dance during the 1880s. In May 1888, a group of Assiniboines from Fort Belknap went to Fort Peck without permission to participate in a sun dance. The Fort Belknap agent, worried that the Assiniboines would lose their crops from neglect, asked the Fort Peck agent to send them home as soon as they arrived. The sun dance "almost entirely demoralizes our Indians," the Fort Belknap agent wrote, "and they will steal off in spite of all we can do to prevent them. We permit very little dancing if any here and no 'Sun dances.'"¹⁹²

The sun dance was especially intertribal in character in Indian Territory. By the end of the nineteenth century, it was "always the custom" for the Southern Cheyennes and Southern Arapahos to attend each other's sun dances, "owing to the long intimacy" between the tribes,

¹⁸⁹ Copy of Brig. Gen. Ruger to Asst. Adj. Gen. Div. Missouri, May 9, 1889, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 13043, Box 521, NARA (DC); Copy of Brig. Gen. Ruger to Asst. Adj. Gen. Div. Missouri, May 10, 1889, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 13580, Box 522, NARA (DC).

¹⁹⁰ Copy Brig. Gen. Ruger to Asst. Adj. Gen. Div. Missouri, May 24, 1889, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 156XX (Illegible), Box 527, NARA (DC).

¹⁹¹ Agent R. L. Upshaw to CIA, March 19, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 9281, Box 607, NARA (DC).

¹⁹² Agent D. Cowell to Major Fields, May 26, 1888, RBIA, RG 75.19.30, Ft. Belknap, Misc. Letters Received, Box 2, NARA (Denver).

according to James Owen Dorsey.¹⁹³ At the Kiowa, Comanche, and Wichita Agency, the agent attempted to end a sun dance in 1881 by offering additional rations to those who would leave the dance, but none complied. In July 1881, a large group of Southern Cheyennes and Arapahos visited the Kiowas to join a “medicine” dance held by a Kiowa medicine man named Dátekâñ who believed he could bring back the disappearing buffalo from beneath the ground. He took the name Pá-tépté (Buffalo-bull-coming-out) and erected a medicine tipi to prepare the way for the buffalo. But according to the Cheyenne and Arapaho Agency interpreter, the Cheyennes were disappointed after the medicine man’s promises were unfulfilled. Little Chief, the Northern Cheyenne headman who was living with the Southern Cheyennes at the time, left the Kiowa Agency “in disgust.”¹⁹⁴ But less than a year later, Pá-tépté tried again and a group of Pawnees visited the Kiowa Agency (without permission) to dance.¹⁹⁵ Not much is known about the Kiowa medicine man’s rituals, but his promises drew enough attention to attract the Cheyennes, Arapahos, and Pawnees to the Kiowa reserve. However, by 1888, the Kiowa agent was willing to prevent unauthorized dancing with the threat of military intervention. The Commissioner of Indian Affairs instructed the agent in 1889 to end the sun dance using “all proper means and precautions.”¹⁹⁶ But the Kiowas along with the Southern Cheyennes and Southern Arapahos

¹⁹³ James Owen Dorsey, “The Arapaho Sun Dance,” *Field Museum Publication 75*, Vol. IV (Chicago, 1903), 23.

¹⁹⁴ E. L. Clark to J. D. Miles, August 15, 1881, RBIA, RG 75.19.10, Cheyenne and Arapaho, Reel 45, NARA (OHS); Ft. Sill Commanding Officer to J. D. Miles, July 8, 1881, RBIA, RG 75.19.10, Cheyenne and Arapaho, Reel 45, NARA (OHS); Agent Hunt to J. D. Miles, July 17, 1881, RBIA, RG 75.19.10, Cheyenne and Arapaho, Reel 32, NARA (OHS); E. L. Clark to J. D. Miles, July 22, 1881, RBIA, RG 75.19.10, Cheyenne and Arapaho, Reel 45, NARA (OHS); James Mooney, “Calendar History of the Kiowa Indians,” *Seventeenth Annual Report, Bureau of American Ethnology*, Pt. 1 (Washington DC: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1911).

¹⁹⁵ E. H. Bowman to Agent Hunt, May 23, 1882, RBIA, RG 75.19.50, Kiowa Comanche and Wichita, Reel 47, NARA (OHS).

¹⁹⁶ Clyde Ellis, “‘There is No Doubt...the Dances Should Be Curtailed’: Indian Dances and Federal Policy on the Southern Plains, 1880-1930,” *Pacific Historical Review* 70, No. 4 (November 2001): 561-562.

were still trying to hold sun dances through 1890, although James Mooney reported that the last Kiowa sun dance took place in 1887.¹⁹⁷

Government officials and white missionaries were not the only ones trying to combat dancing. In August 1886, Richard Davis, a Carlisle educated Cheyenne, reported that the sun dance just held by the Cheyenne and Arapaho was not as “good” as it used to be and only six men danced.¹⁹⁸ Davis asked “many of the Indians” why they did not dance and they told him that it “was getting too old to them.” One of the dancers was a returned Carlisle student, which Davis thought showed “weakness.” “I was surprised when I saw him,” he wrote, “but the rest of the returned boys are doing something.” Davis blamed the medicine dances for pulling down his people. Others like Davis believed dancing was a tradition that should be given up. At Crow Creek, Hampton graduate Thomas Tuttle told the Commissioner of Indian Affairs that he was trying his best to convince the “non-progressive” Sioux to stop their dancing. “I also tell the people who dances that they are doing wrong by dancing not try to become civilized,” he wrote, “I tell them to send their children to school as after a while they will not need any white people to teach them as their own children can become teachers and they can draw the same salary as a white man.”¹⁹⁹ For Tuttle, dancing was incompatible with self-sufficiency. Leonard Tyler (Magpie), an educated Southern Cheyenne and Christian convert, wrote that he and Sam Noble, another Cheyenne, attended two sun dances at the Cheyenne and Arapaho Agency in 1888. Instead of dancing, the men held prayer meetings and sang gospel hymns before they were ordered away by the medicine men.²⁰⁰

¹⁹⁷ James Mooney, “Calendar History of the Kiowa Indians,” 385.

¹⁹⁸ Richard Davis to *The Indian Helper*, August 11, 1886, in *The Morning Star*, September 1886.

¹⁹⁹ Thomas Tuttle to CIA, undated, rec’d May 5, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 13928, Box 619, NARA (DC).

²⁰⁰ *The Indian Helper*, September 7, 1888.

The sun dance became popular throughout the Plains long before the reservation era, but some groups, like the Utes, acquired the dance in the early 1890s. As the dance was being suppressed in the eastern reservations, it entered the Great Basin and began to flourish in Ute society. It is not known what the Utes learned about the sun dance from the Oglalas in 1886, but in 1890, a Northern Ute named Grant Bullethead learned the ceremony from the Shoshones at the Wind River Agency, who had acquired the dance from the Arapahos.²⁰¹ The Northern Utes then carried the dance to the Southern Utes. Both groups, according to Marvin Opler, adapted the sun dance to “their own needs,” “in the light of their own religious experience.”²⁰²

But what took so long for the sun dance to reach the Utes? In 1868, the Utes captured some sun dance medicine dolls of the Kiowas (who had lost them to the Osage in 1833 and got them back in 1835), but the Utes did not adopt the sun dance for another twenty-two years. Leslie Spier assumed that the Utes were not well acquainted with the sun dance in 1868, so they did not understand the meaning or significance behind the medicine dolls they captured. The Utes did not have friendly contact with the Kiowas and they could not acquire knowledge about the sun dance from them or the dolls. According to one source, the Utes learned more about the dance from a Kiowa man, but he “was soon killed by the Ute.”²⁰³ The conditions for the transmission of the dance to the Utes were not right until the reservation years, when relations

²⁰¹ David Rich Lewis, *Neither Wolf Nor Dog: American Indians, Environment, and Agrarian Change* (Oxford University Press, 1994), 57; Marvin Opler, “The Integration of the Sun Dance in Ute Religion,” *American Anthropologist*, 43 (1941): 550-572; Anne M. Smith, *Ethnography of the Northern Utes* (Museum of New Mexico Press, 1974), 208.

²⁰² Marvin Opler, “The Integration of the Sun Dance in Ute Religion,” 571.

²⁰³ Robert Harry Lowie, “Sun Dance of the Shoshoni, Ute, and Hidatsa,” *Anthropological Papers of the American Museum of Natural History*, Vol. 16, Pt. 7 (New York: AMNH, 1921), 405.

with Plains tribes were more peaceful.²⁰⁴ Tribal relations between the Utes and Plains tribes were not intimate before the Utes began communicating with Plain tribes like the Oglalas in the late 1880s. The workings of the sun dance, especially the dance songs, were learned by the Utes while they were visiting other tribes.²⁰⁵

Because of the expansion of intertribal communication during the reservation years, religious ideas like the sun dance could be passed to distant groups. The grass dance, also known as the Omaha dance, was acquired by Plains tribes from the Omahas and others during the 1860s and disseminated widely in the 1880s. It functioned largely as a social dance with social gatherings surrounding its performance.²⁰⁶ Quite a bit of evidence suggests that the Omaha dance grew in popularity in 1890, the same year that the ghost dance was widely practiced. Omaha dances were held with regularity at Rosebud soon before and after the ghost dance troubles.²⁰⁷ At Pine Ridge, photographs recorded Omaha dances (among others) in 1890 and 1891 in front of Indian and white spectators.²⁰⁸ An Omaha dance lodge was constructed

²⁰⁴ Leslie Spier, "The Sun Dance of the Plains Indians: Its Development and Diffusion," *Anthropological Papers of the American Museum of Natural History*, Vol. 16, Pt. 7 (New York: AMNH, 1921), 516-517.

²⁰⁵ Anne M. Smith, *Ethnography of the Northern Utes*, 211.

²⁰⁶ Clark Wissler, "General Discussion of Shamanistic and Dancing Societies," 862.

²⁰⁷ Agent J. George Wright to CIA, January 23, 1891, RBIA, RG 75.19.96, Rosebud, Copies of Letters Sent, Volume 20, NARA (KC). Most whites had little knowledge on the complexities of Native dancing. A white spectator might confuse an Omaha dance with another and many dances were generically referred to as war, scalp, squaw, and even grass dance.

²⁰⁸ Clarence Grant Morledge, "Pine Ridge Agency, S. D.," 1890, photograph, Denver Public Library, Western History and Genealogy Digital Collections, X-31389; Clarence Grant Morledge, "Sioux Indians dancing the Scalp Dance, P. R. Agc S. D.," 1890, photograph, Denver Public Library, Western History and Genealogy Digital Collections, X-31407; Clarence Grant Morledge, "Omaha Dancers P. R. Agency, S. D. with painted war horse.," July 3, 1891, photograph, Denver Public Library, Western History and Genealogy Digital Collections, X-31298. Many white visitors to reservations enjoyed the novelty of dancing and hoped to witness the events. At the Southern Ute Agency in Colorado, an employee of the U. S. Land Office was reprimanded for soliciting the Ute to perform a variety of dances in November 1890, see CIA to Comm. of the Gen. Land Office, January 2, 1891, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Sent, Land Division, Letter Books 209-210, p. 194, NARA (DC).

near Wounded Knee at Pine Ridge sometime before December 1890. In 1891, a group of Pine Ridge Indians traveled to Chadron, Nebraska to buy lumber to build an Omaha dance lodge.²⁰⁹ And in 1890, some Tongue River Cheyennes erected their Omaha dance lodge using lumber issued to them for the purpose of flooring their homes. The dance was allowed at Tongue River because it was “considered peaceable.”²¹⁰

Writing in 1916, the anthropologist Clark Wissler noted that the Omaha dance and “a number of old ceremonies were revived in new forms and associations” beginning in 1890, the same time that the ghost dance reached the Southern Plains.²¹¹ He attributes this phenomena to the “great period of economic adjustment” that the Natives were experiencing during the 1880s.

FIGURE 21: “OMAHA DANCERS P.R. AGENCY, S.D. WITH PAINTED WAR HORSE,” JULY 3, 1891, DENVER PUBLIC LIBRARY, X-31298



²⁰⁹ Mark Awakuni-Swetland, *Dance Lodges of the Omaha People*, 2nd Edition (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2008), 44.

²¹⁰ John Tully to CIA, December 1, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 37882, Box 684, NARA (DC).

²¹¹ Clark Wissler, “General Discussion of Shamanistic and Dancing Societies,” 868-871.

The Natives' "social ideals and machinery were decidedly out of joint," he discerned, and consequently, the "conditions" were prime "for the assimilation and diffusion" of revived religious beliefs. According to Wissler, it was the harsh economic and social conditions the Natives were living through that inspired things like the grass dance and the ghost dance, "else why should there have been so many other new ceremonies springing into life?" he asked. It was an opinion borrowed from Mooney, popularized by Wissler and his contemporaries, and sustained by generations of ghost dance scholars. But Wissler did not consider other changes that facilitated the "conditions for the assimilation and diffusion" of dancing. Intertribal communication was expanding during the reservation years. Men and women from different tribes were visiting each other in large numbers, creating new relationships, exchanging ideas, and affirming Native identity. And importantly, by 1890, Natives were writing to each other more than ever before, often in a common language, to keep in touch, plan visits, and dispense information. This diffusion of new ideas between Native groups did not occur only because they suddenly found themselves suffering in 1890. It occurred because Native groups had an intertribal network of communication in place.

In 1888, Young Man Afraid of His Horses demanded that "the gate" should not be "closed between" the tribes of the west.²¹² Three years later, he told a council between his people and government officials: "We want to live up to the Great Father's words. There are fifty-nine agencies altogether, and the Great Father has asked us all to be one...Indians are all one...These people who came here from the other agencies are of the same blood that we are and want to be one...We want the doors left open so that we may have permission to visit these

²¹² Little Wound, Young Man Afraid of His Horses, and Red Cloud to the President, December 10, 1888, RBIA, RG 75.19.85, Pine Ridge, Copies of Misc. Letters Sent, Box 54, NARA (KC).

different agencies if we want to...Now, we consider ourselves as one.”²¹³ Young Man Afraid of His Horses never believed the government had closed the gate, the doors had been “left open.” It was his people and their desire to remain connected to one another who kept it that way. Federal authorities attacked the “demoralizing influence” of dancing, but Natives compelled their agents to allow the continuation of that important part of their lives. Because of the expansion of intertribal communication during the reservation years, religious ideas could be still shared with distant groups.

²¹³ “Letter from the Secretary of the Interior in Relation to the Affairs of the Indians at the Pine Ridge and Rosebud Reservations in South Dakota,” March 16, 1892, Ex. Doc. No. 58, *Executive Documents of the Senate of the United States for the First Session of the Fifty-Second Congress, 1891-'92*, Vol. V (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1892), 42-43. Young Man Afraid of His Horses died of pneumonia in 1893 on his way to the Crow Agency for a visit.

CHAPTER 4 – “Go and Tell All of the Tribes”: Communicating the Ghost Dance

Wovoka (Jack Wilson), the intellectual source of the ghost dance, was described by white settlers around Mason Valley, Nevada as an “honest, hard-working Indian.”¹ He was a Northern Paiute. Born sometime in the late 1850s or early 1860s, he was the son of medicine man Numu-tibo’o (or Tavibo) a follower of the 1870 Ghost Dance prophet Wodziwob, and Tiya, a ranch laborer (a common occupation for Nevada Paiutes). He grew up being regularly employed, fed, and housed by the Wilsons, a prosperous white ranching family. He learned some English and became familiar with Christianity. Wovoka’s wife was named Mary, Tumma was her Paiute name, and the couple had three daughters that survived childhood, one of whom attended Carson Industrial School when it opened in 1890. Like his father, Wovoka had a reputation as a spiritual man. He became known for his control of the weather after successfully predicting (and producing) rainfall, and by 1887, he gained renown after reportedly performing several miracles. He occasionally experienced visions.²

Sometime in 1888 or early 1889, Wovoka was filled with an optimistic belief that God intended to renew the world, to “have it made over again.”³ Wovoka fell into a deep trance

¹ A. I. Chapman to Gen. John Gibbons, December 6, 1890, in *Annual Report of the Secretary of War, 1891*, Vol. 1 (Washington: Government Printing Office).

² Michael Hittman, *Wovoka and the Ghost Dance* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997), 19, 27-34, 36-43, 63. Hittman’s study on Wovoka is easily the most comprehensive. See also Grace Danberg, “Wovoka,” *Nevada Historical Society Quarterly* 11, no. 2 (Summer 1968): 5-53; Omer Stewart, “Contemporary Document on Wovoka,” *Ethnohistory* 24, no. 3 (Summer 1977): 219-222; L. G. Moses, “Jack Wilson and the Indian Service: The Response of the BIA to the Ghost Dance Prophet,” *American Indian Quarterly* 5, no. 4 (November 1979): 295-316; L. G. Moses, “‘The Father Tells Me So!’ Wovoka: The Ghost Dance Prophet,” *American Indian Quarterly* 9, no. 3 (Summer 1985): 335-351.

³ A. I. Chapman to Gen. John Gibbons, December 6, 1890, in *Annual Report of the Secretary of War, 1891*, Vol. 1 (Washington: Government Printing Office).

while cutting wood in the Pine Grove Mountains and “was taken up to the other world” where he “saw God, with all the people who had died long ago.”⁴ It was the first of “many times” that God visited him to tell him what to do.⁵ James Mooney, who interviewed Wovoka in 1892, reported that Wovoka believed God told him to:

Go back and tell his people they must be good and love one another, have no quarreling, and live in peace with the whites; that they must work, and not lie or steal; that they must put away all the old practices that savored of war; that if they faithfully obeyed his instructions they would at last be reunited with their friends in this other world, where there would be no more death or sickness or old age.⁶

God gave him instructions to perform a dance “at intervals, for five consecutive days each time, [and] they would secure this happiness to themselves and hasten the event.”⁷ It would be Wovoka’s mission to teach the dance, a modification of the Paiute round dance, to his people. Wovoka and his Paiute followers cleared an area for dancing and built willow-frame huts to provide shelter during the five days of dancing and praying. Curiosity drove many surrounding Indians to attend the events. Wovoka’s influence spread throughout the Great Basin. He successfully demonstrated his divine abilities and garnered attention. Some believed he was a new messiah, although Wovoka would later deny his divinity to white investigators.⁸

⁴ James Mooney, *The Ghost-dance Religion*, 771-772. Mooney was the second man to interview Wovoka in an official capacity. The first was an Indian scout named Arthur I. Chapman. Chapman provided the government with accurate information on Wovoka, see A. I. Chapman to Gen. John Gibbons, December 6, 1890.

⁵ A. I. Chapman to Gen. John Gibbons, December 6, 1890.

⁶ James Mooney, *The Ghost-dance Religion*, 771-772.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Wovoka sent a letter to the agent at Pyramid Lake in February 1890, intending it to be forwarded to Washington. The prophet was curious if the government saw him as an authentic prophet, see Michael Hittman, *Wovoka*, 18.

Because of their proximity to Walker River, the Shoshones from the Western Shoshone Agency in Nevada, the Uintah Agency Utes in Utah, and the Bannocks and Shoshones from the Fort Hall Agency in Idaho quickly learned about Wovoka's dance.⁹ Mooney described the transmission as "nearly" simultaneous. It was reminiscent of the 1870 ghost dance movement which originated around Walker River and became popular with groups throughout Nevada, Utah, eastern California, Idaho, and Oregon.¹⁰ The 1870 dance, however, was contained to areas west of the Rockies, but within months, Wovoka's dance had spread as far as Montana. The *Lyon County Times* reported on August 3, 1889:

The Piutes are having the biggest dance ever held in Mason Valley. Representatives of Big Indians are there from Montana, Idaho, Utah, and California...The great weather prophet is said to be a fine looking man, much resembling the late Henry Ward Beecher.¹¹

James Mooney called the Shoshone and Bannock at the Fort Hall Agency in Idaho "the chief medium of the doctrine between the tribes west of the mountains and those on the plains."¹²

Because of the location of their reservation near the continental divide, the Fort Hall Indians were close to the Indians of the Great Basin, west of the divide, and the Shoshones and Arapahos at the Wind River Agency in Wyoming, east of the divide.¹³ The ties between the Shoshones

⁹ For more on the initial spread see Michael Hittman, *Wovoka*, 63-103.

¹⁰ Cora Du Bois, *The 1870 Ghost Dance*, Anthropological Records Vol. 3, no. 1 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1939); Michael Hittman, "The 1870 Ghost Dance at the Walker River Reservation: A Reconstruction," *Ethnohistory* 20, no. 3 (Summer 1973): 247-278; Gregory Smoak, *Ghost Dances and Identity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 113-151. Wodziwob, the 1870 ghost dance leader, prophesized dead Indians returning to the world on train coming from the east, see DuBois, 5.

¹¹ *The Lyon County Times*, August 3, 1889.

¹² James Mooney, *The Ghost-dance Religion*, 807.

¹³ Unfortunately, the Fort Hall and Wind River agency records from the nineteenth century are fairly incomplete. Most of the documents that remain are the letters sent from their agents to officials in Washington D.C.

who lived in Nevada, Idaho, and Wyoming placed the Shoshones in both the Great Basin and Plains worlds.¹⁴ Anthropologist Åke Hultkrantz described the Shoshones as “synthesizers and transformers of cultural material derived from both eastern and western sources; their culture is a blend of the two.”¹⁵ During the 1880s, there was “constant visiting back and forth between” the Indians at Fort Hall and Wind River.¹⁶ Nevada Paiutes were at Fort Hall in late 1888, where the Bannocks, Snakes, Shoshones, and visiting Nez Perces and Lemhis held a large dance. A Paiute who attended that dance said that the Natives living west of the Rockies were determined to “become more neighborly than heretofore, and hereafter they will visit each other more often.”¹⁷ Before the reservation years, the camas prairies around Fort Hall in the Snake River Plain were an annual meeting place for bands of Bannocks, Shoshones, Paiutes, Nez Perces, and Umatillas where they would trade and dance while the women gathered camas and yampa roots.¹⁸ That tradition lost ground during the reservation years, but the area remained a hub of intertribal connection. Four rail lines eventually merged at Fort Hall (and it was only a short distance from the main Union Pacific line), making it a routine stop for Indians traveling by rail from all directions.¹⁹ Fort Hall, after all, was the halfway point Red Cloud chose to meet Sowawick in

¹⁴ Western Shoshones intermarried with Eastern Shoshones at Fort Hall and Wind River.

¹⁵ Quoted in Judith Vander, *Shoshone Ghost Dance Religion: Poetry Songs and Great Basin Context* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997), 43.

¹⁶ James Mooney, *The Ghost-dance Religion*, 807. D. B. Shimkin described the Shoshones as adaptable people who traveled widely, see D. B. Shimkin “Dynamics of Recent Wind River Shoshone History,” *American Anthropologist* 44, no. 3 (July- Sept., 1942): 456-461. The most common second languages of the Western Shoshones were the Paiute and Ute dialects, while the Bannocks at Fort Hall were linguistically similar to the Paiutes (Numic dialects), see Judith Vander, *Shoshone Ghost Dance Religion*, 42.

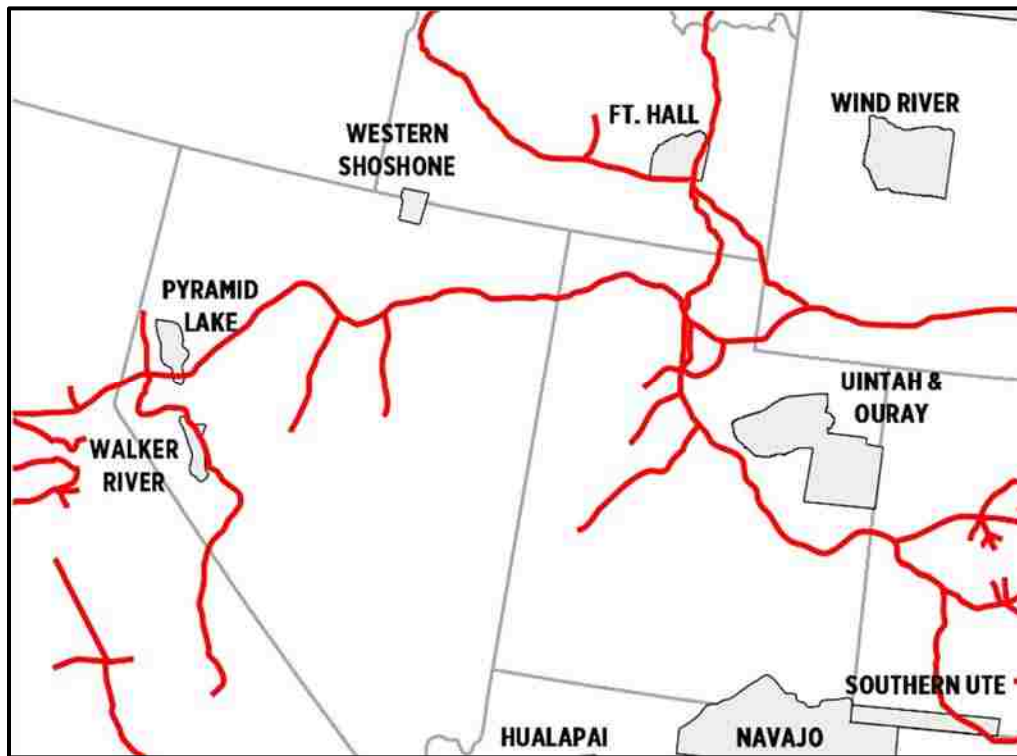
¹⁷ “A Satisfactory Visit,” *Reno Evening Gazette*, January 3, 1889.

¹⁸ Gen. Oliver O. Howard, “A Phenomenal Scout,” *The Youth’s Companion*, October 15, 1891, in the Stanton G. Fisher Papers, MS106, Folder 15, Idaho State Historical Society.

¹⁹ The Pocatello station was nearest to Fort Hall, see Thornton Waite, *The Railroad at Pocatello* (Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2012).

1887. The railroads could take Red Cloud the seven hundred miles to Fort Hall nearly nonstop, but a trip to Sowawick's Uintah reserve in Utah would have required many more miles on horseback.

FIGURE 22: GREAT BASIN RAIL LINES AND NEARBY RESERVES, 1890



Wovoka himself likely took advantage of the railroad. He traveled extensively in his younger days and probably used the rails for economic reasons. Ed Dyer, a white friend of Wovoka and his “personal secretary,” remembered that the Walker River Paiutes “were in the habit about that time, of making seasonal trips en masse, perched atop the railroad’s handy boxcars to northern California for the purpose of picking hops...likely enough young Jack Wilson also travelled to the California hop fields.”²⁰ The Carson & Colorado Railroad passed

²⁰ Ed A. Dyer, “The Jack Wilson Story,” Special Collections, University Libraries, University of Nevada Libraries, Reno, transcribed in Hittman, *Wovoka*, 247-255.

right through Wovoka's Walker River Agency and it was the path hundreds of Indians took to visit him.

Natives began funneling through Fort Hall because of the ghost dance in 1889. Perhaps every Indian from the Plains who visited Nevada to learn more from Wovoka traveled by rail through Fort Hall. From Fort Hall, Indians could travel south down the Union Pacific to Ogden, Utah, then west on the Central Pacific until they reached Wadsworth or Reno, Nevada. Around a dozen different tribes passed through at Fort Hall during 1890 alone.²¹ Some stopped at the agency for an extended time to commune with the Bannocks and Shoshones and, according to Mooney, "to procure interpreters from among the Bannock to accompany them to Nevada."²² An Arapaho man may have brought the first report of Wovoka east to Wind River after a trip to Nevada via Fort Hall in 1888, although James Mooney never mentioned it.²³ Mooney did report that a Fort Hall Bannock brought information to the Northern Arapahos and Shoshones at Wind River in "early" 1889. While visiting the Paiute, the unnamed Bannock was told to "go and tell all the tribes" that "the dead people were coming back."²⁴ According to Dick Washakie, the son of the Wind River Shoshone chief Washakie, three Shoshones (named Pawasanga, Warasi, and Waagi) and a Bannock from Fort Hall traveled by rail to Wind River to spread the news and to instruct the people how to dance. "Next year, after having the dance," they said, "the dead will come back, and all the white people will be gone."²⁵

²¹ Agent S. Fisher to CIA, November 26, 1890, RBIA, RG 75, SC 188, Box 199, NARA (DC).

²² Mooney, *The Ghost-dance Religion*, 807.

²³ *The Standard*, Associated Press, November 16, 1890.

²⁴ James Mooney, *The Ghost-dance Religion*, 807.

²⁵ D. B. Shimkin, "Dynamics of Recent Wind River Shoshone History," 451-462. Dick Washakie was an informant for Shimkin. Washakie told Shimkin that the group arrived in 1890 on the railroad to Lander, Wyoming, but the track to Lander was not completed until 1906. The nearest rail station to Wind River in 1890 was at Rawlins, Wyoming, Union Pacific line, around

The Northern Arapahos and Shoshones at Wind River received firsthand knowledge about Wovoka after Sage (Nakash) and Yellow Calf, both Arapahos, and several Shoshones including Täbinshi, actually met Wovoka in the “early spring of 1889” after a journey largely by rail to the Mason Valley in Nevada. The men, who believed Wovoka was a new messiah, brought home some of the original Paiute ghost dance songs.²⁶ A Wind River Shoshone named Tassitsie was also among those “so intrigued” by the ghost dance that he traveled to Nevada to visit Wovoka.²⁷ Sage and Yellow Calf later recalled that they instantly knew the Paiute wearing white man’s clothes in a sagebrush hut they came upon in Mason Valley was the messiah. Wovoka gave the men the details of a new dance and instructed the men to return to their people “and live in peace, be good, never lie, believe in the Ghost Dance and everything would be fine.”²⁸ Wovoka’s identity was proven after the men watched him die and come back to life. “Then he told us he was going to die, go up to the Great Mystery and return with a special message for us,” Yellow Calf said, “and that is what he did.” As Wovoka lay unresponsive, the men could not feel a heartbeat. Sage tickled his nose and Yellow Calf kicked him in the ribs just to make sure he was dead. Once Wovoka revived himself he claimed that he had been with the Great Mystery and many of the men’s dead friends and relatives, who told him that they wanted

115 miles from Wind River, see *Report of the Secretary of War, First Session of the Fifty-Second Congress* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1892), 549.

²⁶ James Mooney, *The Ghost-dance Religion*, 894.

²⁷ D. B. Shimkin, “Dynamics of Recent Wind River Shoshone History,” 457.

²⁸ Tim McCoy and Ronald McCoy, *Tim McCoy Remembers the West: An Authobiography* (New York: Doubleday, 1977), 213-215. The author McCoy was a former movie star cowboy who met Wovoka, Sage and Yellowcalf, and Kicking Bear and Short Bull in 1924. His book was not published until 1977 and he spoke with Sage and Yellowcalf thirty-five years after their encounter with Wovoka. It is not clear how well McCoy actually “remembered the west” or if he took notes during his interview with the men, but this is the only surviving testimony of Sage and Yellowcalf. Other historians (Alice Beck Kehoe, Michael Hittman, and Loretta Fowler) have used McCoy in their studies.

to return to their loved ones and “wanted all our people to live together again, just as they had done before the white man took everything away.” The dead wanted Sage and Yellow Calf to believe “this Medicine Man, Wovoka, because he was the messiah, knew what was good, and how to make great things come to pass.” If they danced a “Great Cloud will come and on it will be all the Indians who ever lived, mounted on their war ponies, and all the buffalo, elk, antelope and deer. This Great Cloud will cover over the white man and then everything will be as it always had been.” But Wovoka also instructed the men to be peaceful with the white man, “not to be too hard” on them, because “he was going to send them to some other place.” After Sage and Yellow Calf’s return home, Shoshone headmen Munhavi and Tawunasia became “promulgators” of the dance at Wind River.²⁹

Information about the ghost dance spilled into the Great Plains in 1889. Most historians describe the first bits of information that tribes received about the movement as “rumblings” or “rumors.”³⁰ Few refer to what the Arapahos, Lakotas, or other Plains groups first learned about the ghost dance as “information” or “intelligence,” or any word that describes Native communication as accurate or reliable. Historians tend to use words that imply inaccuracy and doubt, words like “rumor,” because that is how white authorities on the reservations described the information Natives received about the dance. Most of what we know about what Indians knew about the dance, particularly in 1889 and early 1890, comes from the observations and testimonies of white authorities. Unfortunately, the whites who observed the spread of the dance were far removed from the action. Very few whites had any considerable knowledge about the

²⁹ D. B. Shimkin, “Dynamics of Recent Wind River Shoshone History,” 457.

³⁰ Robert Utley says that “vague rumors of the Messiah” circulated among the Sioux, see Robert Utley, *The Last Days of the Sioux Nation*, 60.

information Natives were receiving. In fact, it took several months for white authorities to even figure out who the new messiah actually was.³¹ Natives, on the other hand, had enough information to be able to find the messiah in the sparsely settled, far-off Mason Valley Nevada within days of leaving their agencies. Whites finally discovered Wovoka's identity in November 1890, while Lakotas, Arapahos, Shoshones, Cheyennes, and others had been visiting him since 1889.

The common assumption is that mere rumors were enough to convince Indians to travel thousands of miles to learn about a messiah because Indians were desperate for a savior. It is seldom considered, on the other hand, that Indians received tangible information from the beginning.³² While inaccurate information was undoubtedly transmitted tribe to tribe, most of the Natives who traveled to Nevada to see Wovoka knew what to expect, even before the first "official" delegations were sent out. Moreover, there is no evidence that Indians accepted inaccurate information more readily than whites. Every trip to see Wovoka was an investigation. Portraying it only as a "search for hope" is too simplistic; it was also search for the truth. Natives compiled information, discerned the legitimacy of reports, and spent money on travel for fact-finding delegations. This investigative process is often forgotten in studies about the movement, but it was an important part of the dance's dissemination.

Take for instance the Southern Arapaho's first encounter with the movement. In 1889, Left Hand received letters about a "second Jesus" from his friends or relatives at the Wind River Agency in Wyoming. Left Hand and his Southern Arapaho people were curious about these

³¹ For a compilation of government reports on Jack Wilson, see Michael Hittman, *Wovoka*, 269-291.

³² George Hyde's *Sioux Chronicle* argued that the Pine Ridge Sioux, "seized on the rumor of the coming of this strange savior" because they "were extremely discouraged and had lost all hope for the future." See George Hyde, *Sioux Chronicle*, 239.

letters and they organized an investigation, funded by themselves, to travel north to Wind River. Washee and Black Coyote were chosen, they left Indian Territory and headed to Wind River. While they were on their way, the Northern Arapahos and the Shoshones at Wind River informed the Southern Arapahos via letter that the reports they had received had been “verified.”³³ Washee decided to investigate further at the Fort Hall Agency in Idaho and Black Coyote remained at Wind River through April 1890. Black Coyote was fortunate enough to speak with a group of Northern Arapahos, Northern Cheyennes, and several Lakotas from Pine Ridge, Rosebud, and Cheyenne River who had just returned from Mason Valley where they spoke with this supposed messiah directly. They convinced Black Coyote that much of what the letters spoke of was true and gave him the instructions they had received from Wovoka. On his return to the Cheyenne and Arapaho Agency, Black Coyote conveyed the messiah’s message, his dance, and his songs to the Southern Arapahos and Southern Cheyennes.³⁴ In late April 1890, the Cheyenne and Arapaho agent, Charles Ashley, told the Wind River agent, John Foshier, that thanks to the reports “of the coming of the second Jesus” from the Wind River Indians, “much excitement prevails at this agency and much annoyance has been occasioned.”³⁵ Because he wanted to contain “this agitation” from spreading, Ashley denied Foshier’s request to allow four Northern Arapahos to visit the Cheyenne and Arapaho Agency. However, Ashley did say he would consent to the visit if the four Arapaho men wanted to come “simply for the purpose of visiting friends,” but not if they had been “prominent” in the messiah business.

³³ *ARCIA*, 1890, 178.

³⁴ Agent Charles Ashley to CIA, August 4, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 24229, Box 648, NARA (DC).

³⁵ Agent Charles Ashley to Agent John Foshier, April 24, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.19.10, Cheyenne and Arapaho, Letters Sent, Reel 32, NARA (OHS).

The Southern Cheyennes at the Cheyenne and Arapaho Agency did not completely trust the Black Coyote's account because he was an Arapaho. They decided to send their own Cheyenne investigators, Little Chief and Bark, to question the Northern Cheyenne at Pine Ridge and Tongue River about the matter. Later Northern Arapaho parties, led by White Shield and White Buffalo respectively, also made trips to Tongue River in August and September 1890.³⁶

At Tongue River, a large number of Northern Cheyennes gathered in April 1890 to hear the report of the two members of their tribe who were a part of the delegation that Black Coyote encountered at Wind River. Their agent, R. L. Upshaw, was so alarmed by the number of Indians who took their children out of school and left the agency to attend the meeting that he asked for military assistance. According to Upshaw, the returned Cheyennes told their people that the man who claimed to be "the Christ in the flesh" had "a message to all tribes of Indians."³⁷ Upshaw knew little about "their craze," but he said it was "widely disseminated." His Northern Cheyennes were in communication with the Southern Cheyennes and Arapahos through letter and he was told by a "half breed Sioux from Pine Ridge" that the news was "'all the talk' among the Indians there."

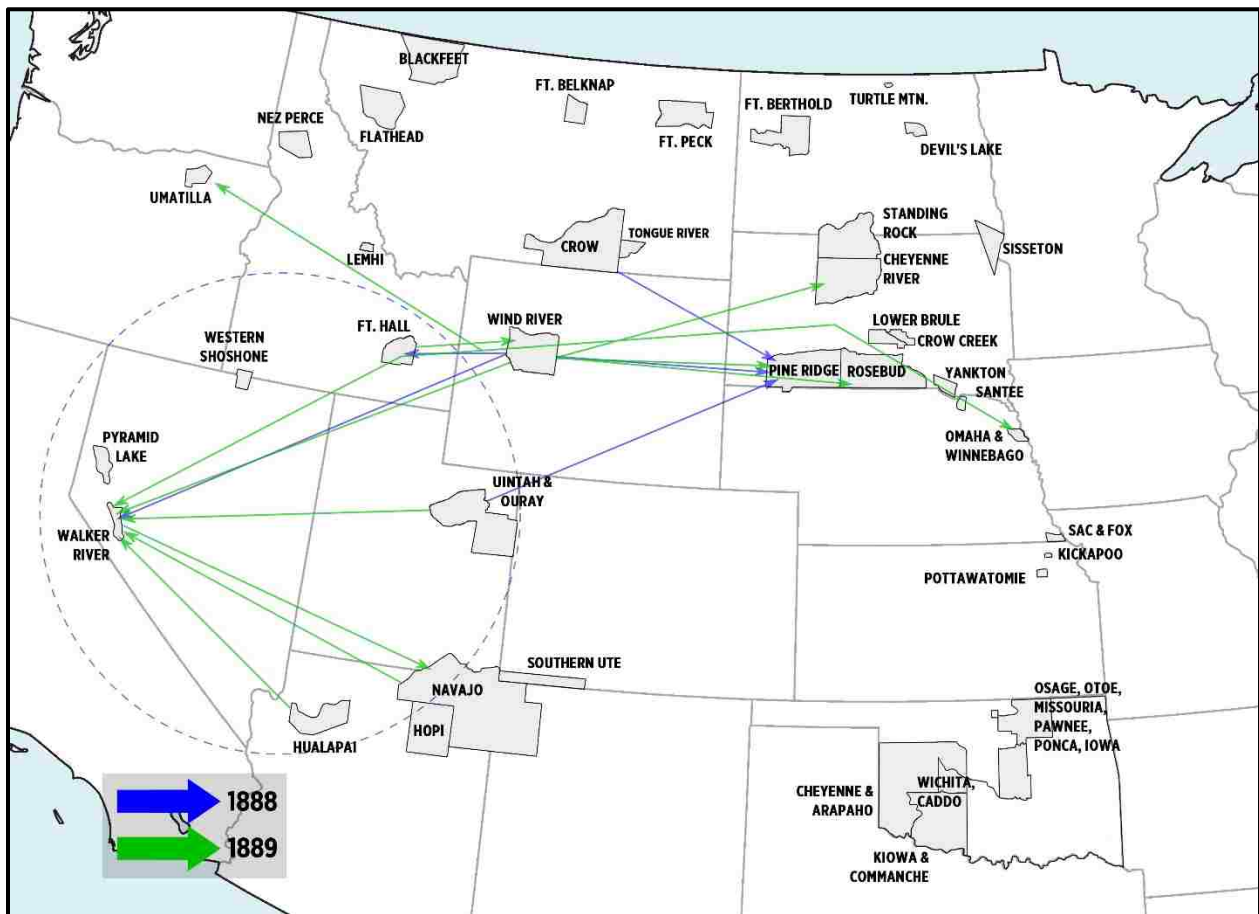
This intertribal letter writing and visitation facilitated the spread of the ghost dance. Beginning in 1889, Natives sent letters to inform those living on other reservations that a man in

³⁶ Agent Charles Ashley to Lt. H. W. Wheeler, June 20, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.19.10, Cheyenne and Arapaho, Letters Sent, Reel 32, NARA (OHS); Agent Charles Ashley to Capt. E. M. Hays, November 26, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.19.10, Cheyenne and Arapaho, Letters Sent, Reel 32, NARA (OHS); James Mooney, *The Ghost-dance Religion*, 895. Mooney states that Little Chief and Bark headed to Wind River, but the men's pass has Pine Ridge and Tongue River as their destinations.

³⁷ Agent Upshaw to CIA, April 20, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 13159, Box 617, NARA (DC); *ARCIA*, 1890, 135. Upshaw told the Commissioner of Indian Affairs that "military support to the agent is a necessity to their advancement in civilization." Troops arrived at Tongue River on April 13, 1890 and peacefully dispersed the crowd.

the west could change their world. Some Natives traveled to distant reserves to spread the dance and its message. In turn, Natives investigated the claims of letters and visitors by organizing delegations tasked with finding the source of the dance. Many of these men reached Wovoka at the Walker River Agency in Nevada with the help of the railroads. By the end of 1890, most Plains Indians had heard about the ghost dance and thousands believed in its promises. No other religious movement reached so many Natives in such a short amount of time.

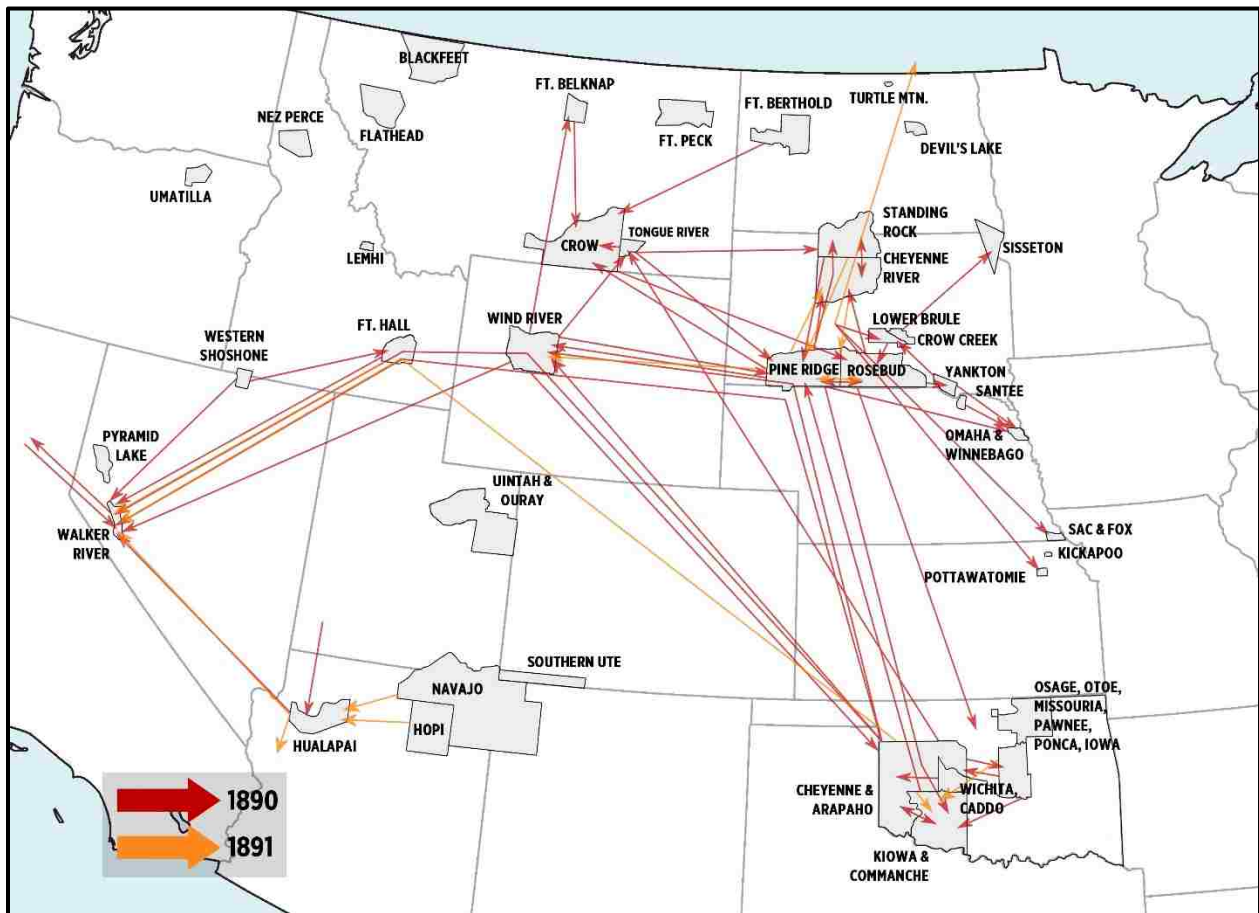
FIGURE 23: KNOWN INTERTRIBAL VISITS CONCERNING THE GHOST DANCE, 1888-1889³⁸



³⁸ These are the known visits between tribes (made explicit by government records, newspaper articles, and James Mooney's investigations) that concerned the ghost dance movement between 1888-1889. Each arrow may represent one visit or multiple visits between reservations/areas.

The dance not only affected the southern and northern divisions of the Cheyennes and Arapahos or the Paiutes who inaugurated the first dances, but also over thirty other tribes including the Shoshones, Bannocks, Utes, Mohaves, Hualapais, most bands of the Lakotas, Assiniboines, Gros Ventres, Arikaras, Mandans, Kiowas, Caddos, Wichitas, Comanches, Apaches, Poncas, Pawnees, Otoes, Osages, Kickapoos, and others.

FIGURE 24: KNOWN INTERTRIBAL VISITS CONCERNING THE GHOST DANCE, 1890-1891³⁹



³⁹ These are the known visits between tribes (made explicit by government records, newspaper articles, and James Mooney's investigations) that concerned the ghost dance movement in 1890. Each arrow may represent one visit or multiple visits between reservations/areas.

In 1889, the Oglala Lakotas and Northern Cheyennes at the Pine Ridge reservation began receiving letters from the Shoshones and Arapahos at Wind River, the Utes in Utah, and “some distant agencies,” which relayed information “about the advent” of a “new Messiah.”⁴⁰ William Selwyn, a literate Yankton Sioux employed at the time as postmaster at Pine Ridge, read some of the letters for the Oglalas and Cheyennes at Pine Ridge. “Parties who could not read letters generally brings their letters to me to read for them,” Selwyn explained, but he did not specify the language contained in the letters.⁴¹ They were most likely written in English. According to Selwyn, there had been “some talk...about the New Messiah” in the fall of 1888 during visits from groups of Utes, Shoshones, Crows, and Arapahos, but the influx of letters from the western tribes in 1889 created “much attention” and convinced the Lakotas at Pine Ridge, Rosebud, and Cheyenne River to investigate the claims.

In the summer of 1889, a Northern Arapaho from Wind River traveled east to the Indians at Pine Ridge, Rosebud, and Cheyenne River. Short Bull, a Brulé Lakota from Rosebud, told a reporter nearly two years later that the visiting Arapaho man believed that “the buffalo were coming back and that they white people would all be killed” and that the Shoshone chief Washakie at Wind River had more information.⁴² Short Bull’s curiosity was piqued in the fall of

⁴⁰ William Selwyn to Agent E. W. Foster, November 25, 1890, RBIA, RG 75, SC 188, Box 199, NARA (DC). Selwyn’s letter was written at the request of his agent at Yankton in November 1890 during a period the government was investigating the origins and extent of the dance, see Agent E. W. Foster to CIA, November 25, 1890, RBIA, RG 75, SC 188, Box 199, NARA (DC).

⁴¹ William Selwyn to Agent E. W. Foster, November 25, 1890, RBIA, RG 75, SC 188, Box 199, NARA (DC); James Mooney, *The Ghost-dance Religion*, 798, 819; Robert Utley, *The Last Days of the Sioux Nation*, 67; George E. Hyde, *A Sioux Chronicle*, 239; Jeffrey Ostler, *The Plains Sioux*, 243. Selwyn received his education under the patronage of a Philadelphia businessman. He was employed at various positions in the Sioux agencies.

⁴² *The Malvern Ledger* (Iowa), March 12, 1891.

1889 when he was given a letter to bring back to the Rosebud “Council house” while on a freight trip to Valentine, Nebraska. The letter was given to him by a “messenger” from “the West.” It said: “the Father has come.”⁴³

At Cheyenne River, the Miniconjou Lakota (but Oglala born) Kicking Bear received a similar letter from his uncle Spoonhunter, an Oglala who was married to a Northern Arapaho and lived at Wind River, urging him to come to Wyoming to attend a ghost dance.⁴⁴ Kicking Bear happened to be Short Bull’s brother-in-law. Both men would become dedicated to the ghost dance’s spread. Both men learned about the movement through letters.

Information came to the Lakotas intentionally, through letters and messengers, and unintentionally, through encounters with Indians who learned of the dance while traveling through the western reservations. On July 23, 1889, Chasing Crane, a Pine Ridge Oglala, came upon a group of Oglala hunting deer in the sand hills of northern Nebraska while traveling home from the Rosebud Agency. He told the group that God had appeared to the Crows “across the Stony Mountains.”⁴⁵ Elaine Goodale (later Eastman), a white New Englander who taught school at Pine Ridge, accompanied the hunting party that July. She wrote in her diary that Chasing Crane believed that this God was the same “Savior who once before came upon the earth and was killed by the white people.” According to Chasing Crane, this messiah told the Indians that “he could no longer bear to hear parents crying for their children, dying everywhere of hunger and strange diseases brought by white men. He promised to let down the sky upon all the whites and bring back the buffalo for our use. The Messiah was beautiful to look upon, with waving

⁴³ George Crager, “As Narrated by Short Bull,” Buffalo Bill Museum and Grave, Golden, CO, transcribed in Sam A. Maddra, *Hostiles?*, 192-205.

⁴⁴ David Humphreys Miller, *Ghost Dance* (New York: Duell, Sloan, and Pearce, 1959), 30.

⁴⁵ Elaine Goodale Eastman, *Sister to the Sioux, the Memoirs of Elaine Goodale Eastman, 1885-1891* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1978), 97, 137.

hair. He bore paint as a sign of power.” Goodale wrote that the Oglalas “all listened spellbound” to Chasing Crane’s testimony.

During the first half of 1889, the chiefs and headmen at Cheyenne River counseled to discuss the information that had been arriving since 1888, as did the leaders at Rosebud and Pine Ridge. While it is not clear how closely the Lakota leaders at these three agencies coordinated a response to the news, the leaders were in communication. They undoubtedly shared information and deliberated collectively because a joint investigative delegation made up of representatives from the three agencies was planned in the summer of 1889. The delegation hoped to travel west to Wind River and Fort Hall to gather information on the location of the messiah so that they could finally speak to him directly. The decision to send the delegation was not an act of “desperation” by leaders running out of options to save their people as some historians have described it.⁴⁶ The Lakotas considered the validity of information being sent to them and chose reliable men to investigate. They wanted to know more about this new system of belief.

The Pine Ridge council, made up of Red Cloud, Young Man Afraid of His Horses, Little Wound, American Horse, Big Road, Fire Thunder, and others, asked Good Thunder lead the delegation of five to seven other Oglalas. The Rosebud Brulé council selected Short Bull and the Cheyenne River Miniconjous council selected Kicking Bear because of their knowledge and interest in the messiah. Some Northern Cheyennes, probably from Pine Ridge, and some Northern Arapahos, probably returning to Wind River, also accompanied the Lakotas.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Phillip S. Hall, *Reflections of the Badlands* (Freeman, SD: University of South Dakota Press, 1993), 57; Jerome Greene, *American Carnage*, 65.

⁴⁷ William Selwyn to Agent E. W. Foster, November 25, 1890, RBIA, RG 75, SC 188, Box 199, NARA (DC); D. F. Royer to CIA, November 8, 1890, RBIA, RG 75, SC 188, Box 199, NARA (DC); James McLaughlin, “The ‘Indian Messiah Doctrine,’” November 1890, *James McLaughlin Papers*, Microfilm Roll 20, Assumption College (Richardson, ND), 1968; James

The Rosebud council told Short Bull to “be there with a big heart. Do not fail.”⁴⁸ Short Bull pledged to bring back the messiah’s words even if it took him two years. Probably sometime in August 1889, he traveled by horse and buggy to Pine Ridge where he intended to meet the other delegates. The group had left Pine Ridge the night before (without their agent’s permission) but Short Bull caught up with them at Sage Creek near the Casper Mountains three days later.⁴⁹ The delegates traveled to the Wind River Agency in Wyoming to visit some Arapahos and talk to Washakie. After staying there for a week, the delegates made it to Fort Washakie. The agent there, knowing their planned destination, gave them railroad passes. Short Bull and his fellow delegates traveled by rail, stopping at various points due to mechanical problems, deep snow, and socializing opportunities. They finally made it to the Fort Hall Agency in Idaho and met Bannocks, the Northern Arapahos Sitting Bull and Bill Friday, and Porcupine of the Northern Cheyennes. Porcupine, a Pine Ridge Cheyenne who had been on an extended and perhaps illegal visit to the Tongue River Agency, left Montana with two other Northern Cheyennes, Big Beaver and Ridge Walker. They traveled without a pass on the Union Pacific, stayed two days at Fort Bridger, and then took a passenger train to Fort Hall. The Northern Arapahos were the ones who told Porcupine about Wovoka. They had heard about him from some Shoshones that visited the Walker River Agency. The Arapahos told Porcupine that

Mooney, *The Ghost-dance Religion*, 820; Robert Utley, *Last Days*, 60-65; Alice Beck Kehoe, *The Ghost Dance*, 48-49. James Mooney and many later studies have suggested that two separate Sioux delegations traveled to Mason Valley to find Wovoka, but the conflicting timelines in the primary sources are most likely describing the same, single delegation. See Rani-Henrik Andersson, *The Lakota Ghost Dance of 1890*, 31-32.

⁴⁸ George Crager, “As Narrated by Short Bull.”

⁴⁹ George Sword, “The Story of the Ghost Dance,” *The Folk-Lorist* 1 (July 1892), 28. The Pine Ridge delegates left their reservation without their agent’s knowledge, something that happened regularly, see Agent H. D. Gallagher to Wind River Agent, October 28, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.19.85, Pine Ridge, Copies of Misc. Letters Sent, Box 54, NARA (KC).

if his people “would listen to this new God he would take away all bad things, and give us all nice things.”⁵⁰

According to Short Bull, over one hundred Indians, including the Lakota delegations, Porcupine’s delegation, and Sitting Bull (the Northern Arapaho), boarded the train at Fort Hall and traveled until they reached Winnemucca, Nevada. They met with Paiutes there, then continued on the Central Pacific Railroad to Wadsworth where they met the Paiute Captain Dave. Dave loaded them in a wagon and traveled up to the Pyramid Lake Agency.⁵¹ The Paiutes at Pyramid Lake told Porcupine that Christ had indeed “appeared on earth again.”⁵² After several days there, Captain Dave’s son took the group down to the rail station at Wabuska where the men hopped on a train on the six-year old Carson & Colorado line (free of charge) and rode it until they reached the Walker River Agency.⁵³ What they found astonished them. “It appeared that Christ had sent for me to go there,” Porcupine later recalled, “and that was why unconsciously I took my journey. It had been foreordained. Christ had summoned myself and others from all heathen tribes, from two to three or four from each of fifteen or sixteen different tribes. There were more different languages than I ever heard before and I did not understand

⁵⁰ “Proceedings of a council held with the Cheyennes on Tongue River, Montana, Nov. 18th, 1890,” RBIA, RG 75, SC 188, Box 199, NARA (DC); “Statement of the Cheyenne ‘Porcupine’ of Meeting with the New ‘Christ,’” copy in Gen. Thomas H. Ruger to Adj. Gen. U. S. Army, June 25, 1890, RBIA, RG 75, SC 188, Box 199, NARA (DC).

⁵¹ A. I. Chapman to Gen. John Gibbons, December 6, 1890, in *Annual Report of the Secretary of War, 1891*, Vol. 1 (Washington: Government Printing Office), 194.

⁵² “Statement of the Cheyenne ‘Porcupine’ of Meeting with the New ‘Christ,’” copy in Gen. Thomas H. Ruger to Adj. Gen. U. S. Army, June 25, 1890, RBIA, RG 75, SC 188, Box 199, NARA (DC).

⁵³ David F. Myrick, *Railroads of Nevada and Eastern California*, Vol. 1 (Berkeley: Howell-North Books, 1962), 166-181; John F. Due, “The Carson and Colorado Railroad,” *Economic Geography* 27, no. 3 (July 1951), 260.

any of them. They told me when I arrived that my great father was there also, but did not know who he was.”

Perhaps thirty-four different tribes gathered at the area designated by Wovoka near Walker Lake by March 1890. The Indian police at the Walker River Agency estimated sixteen hundred attendees.⁵⁴ They waited for Wovoka’s appearance. On the evening of his arrival, Wovoka had his followers demonstrate the dance to the crowd. Before the dance ended, Wovoka, wearing white man’s clothes and a pair of moccasins, spoke. “I have sent for you and am very glad to see you,” he announced, “I will teach you, too, how to dance a dance, and I want you to dance it.”⁵⁵ The next day, Porcupine, who “had heard Christ had been crucified,” noticed scars on Wovoka’s wrist and face, leading him to believe that Wovoka was the man they had heard about. The next morning, Wovoka assembled the people and sat down. Porcupine remembered what he said:

He said he wanted to talk to us again and for us to listen. He said: ‘I am the man who made everything you see around you. I am not lying to you, my children. I made this earth and everything on it. I have been to heaven and seen your dead friends and have seen my own father and mother. In the beginning, after God made the earth, they sent me back to teach the people, and when I came back on earth the people were afraid of me and treated me badly. This is what they did to me (showing his scars). I did not try to defend myself. I found my children were bad, so I went back to heaven and left them. I told them that in so many hundred years I would come back to see my children. At the end of this time I was sent back to try to teach them. My father told me that the earth was getting old and worn out, and the people getting bad, and that I was to renew everything as it used to be, and make it better.’

⁵⁴ William Selwyn to Agent E. W. Foster, November 25, 1890, RBIA, RG 75, SC 188, Box 199, NARA (DC); A. I. Chapman to Gen. John Gibbon, December 6, 1890, *Report of the Secretary of War, 1891*, Vol. 1:191-194; Kicking Bear, “I Bring You Word From Your Fathers, the Ghosts,” reproduced in James McLaughlin, *My Friend the Indian* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1910) 197-201; James Mooney, *The Ghost-dance Religion*, 818-820; Michael Hittman, *Wovoka*, 231-236, 271-272.

⁵⁵ “Statement of the Cheyenne ‘Porcupine’ of Meeting with the New ‘Christ,’” copy in Gen. Thomas H. Ruger to Adj. Gen. U. S. Army, June 25, 1890, RBIA, RG 75, SC 188, Box 199, NARA (DC).

He told us that all of our dead were to be resurrected; that they were all to come back to earth, and that as the earth was too small for them and us, he would do away with heaven, and make the earth itself large enough to contain us all; that we must tell all the people we meet about these things. He spoke to us about fighting, and said that was bad, and we must keep from it; that the earth was to be all good hereafter, and we must all be friends with one another. He said that in the fall of the year the youth of all good people would be renewed, so that nobody would be more than 40 years old, and that if they behaved themselves well after this the youth of everyone would be renewed in the spring. He said if we were all good he would send people among us who could heal all our wounds and sickness by mere touch, and that we would live forever. He told us not to quarrel, or fight, nor strike each other, nor shoot one another; that the whites and the Indians were to be all one people. He said if any man disobeyed what he ordered, his tribe would be wiped from the face of the earth; that we must believe everything he said, and that we must not doubt him, or say he lied; that if we did, he would know it; that he would know our thoughts and actions, in no matter what part of the world we might be.⁵⁶

Porcupine and Short Bull's descriptions of the journey and of Wovoka's message were recorded by Native and white interpreters. In June 1890, Porcupine was arrested at Tongue River (he was deemed to be a "bad influence" because of his knowledge of the ghost dance) and he made a statement to the army about his journey, which was translated and recorded.⁵⁷ In November 1890, over four months after making that statement, Porcupine told a council attended by Cheyennes and white officials what Wovoka told the delegates:

The God was glad that I came to see him. When the Indians were created, they were made bad, but that badness is to be thrown off and they are to be made good. If they listen to him, he will change all their condition and make them good. Everything is now very old and there are now very few Indians. Our

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Agent Upshaw to CIA, telegram, June 5, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 17190, Box 629, NARA (DC); Sect. of Interior to Sect. of War, June 5, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 17767, Box 630, NARA (DC); "Statement of the Cheyenne 'Porcupine' of Meeting with the New 'Christ.'" The army already had a fairly accurate knowledge of Porcupine's experience in May 1890, see Maj. Henry Carroll to Post Adj. Fort Custer, May 7, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 19493, Box 635, NARA (DC). For Kicking Bear's testimony, see James McLaughlin, "The 'Indian Messiah Doctrine,'" November 1890, *James McLaughlin Papers*, Microfilm Roll 20, Assumption College (Richardson, ND), 1968.

dances were bad and the God have given us a new dance. We must not get tired of dancing. Every one must dance, the young and the old, the men and the women the boys and the girls. Four nights in succession we must dance and then on the fifth day. When were are through dancing we must go to our own houses. We must dance when the moon is just round. If we dance in this way we will never get tired. If we dance, our gardens will grow nice and we will never get sick or crazy. We must not quarrel or scold each other. We must not hate each other. We must love each other. We must love all the world. The new God said, 'My children listen to me well, The ones who does not listen to me will die; if the whites or Indians don't listen they will die.' That is what he said. If any one asks me, I must tell what the God said – I must not tell lies. The lies are not good. The God hears everything that is said about him. If the soldiers wont let us dance we must dance any way. We must dance even though the soldiers beat us for it. We must not let the soldiers see the dance. First God made a white man and he was nice, after that God went to Heaven, and after a while came down on earth to talk to the white man. The white man was afraid when he saw him, and abused the God, and he did not do anything to the white man or get angry, and then they nailed him on a cross and cut him next the heart and abused him. Then the God said he was going up into Heaven again. All this was concerning the white man. The whites work six days and on the 7th they must tell about this God. This God said if we lived good lives we would not become poor. When this was finished he went up into Heaven. Before he went up into Heaven, he said he would come back for the Indians. The Indians must not abuse him when he comes as the whites did, and he will then throw away everything that is bad.' This is what he said.⁵⁸

Short Bull recalled that Wovoka told them:

I have sent for you to tell you certain things that you must do. There are Two Chiefs at your Agencies and I want you to help them all you can. Have your people work the ground so they do not get idle, help your Agents and get farms this is one chief – The other Chief is the Church – I want you to help him for he tells you of me; when you get back go to Church. All these churches are mine, if you go to church when you get back others will do the same. I have raised two bodies of men on this earth and have dropped one of them that is the Army, I want no more fighting. take pity on one another, and whenever you do anything that is bad something will happen to you – I mean fights between the Indians and whites – all over the world one should be like the other and no distinction made, always sing and pray about me, for it is right, 2 days from now

⁵⁸ "Proceedings of a council held with the Cheyennes on Tongue River, Montana, Nov. 18th, 1890," RBIA, RG 75, SC 188, Box 199, NARA (DC). Porcupine's words were recorded by interpreters: Father Van Der Velden and "an Indian girl at the school."

all nations will talk one tongue (Short Bull thinks he meant 200 or 2 years) the sign talk will be no more. Educate your children send them to schools.⁵⁹

Farming, sending children to school, and even attending white churches were all part of Wovoka's message. However, much has been made by scholars of the differing testimonies presented by the returned delegates.⁶⁰ None of the stories are exactly the same. The agent at Fort Hall noticed a diversity of beliefs regarding the dance among the Natives living on and visiting his reservation. "The fact is," he told the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, "scarcely any two tribes have the same idea as to exactly what they must do" to bring about Wovoka's prophecies.⁶¹ It is important to remember that Wovoka only spoke his Native Paiute language and rudimentary English. Anything Porcupine, Short Bull, or other Plains delegates heard came through interpreters or their own understanding of English or sign language. A likely path of communication for the Plains delegates was Paiute to English and then to sign language. We should also keep in mind the "vast cultural differences," as Raymond DeMallie described it, between the Paiutes and Lakotas and other Plains peoples.⁶² Wovoka presented his ideas within his own cultural perspective. There was no unifying "native religion" that each tribe understood in the same way. A Lakota, Cheyenne, or Arapaho delegate would consider Wovoka's message

⁵⁹ George C. Crager, "As Narrated by Short Bull." Crager transcribed and translated Short Bull's testimony while the two were traveling with Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show. Crager's comments are in parenthesis. See Sam Maddra, *Hostiles?*, 12.

⁶⁰ See Maddra, *Hostiles?*, 45-62; Rani-Henrik Andersson, *The Lakota Ghost Dance of 1890*, 37-40; Thomas Overholt, "Short Bull, Black Elk, Sword, and the Meaning of the Ghost Dance," *Religion* 8, no. 2 (1978), 171-195.

⁶¹ Agent S. G. Fisher to CIA, November 26, 1890, RBIA, RG 75, SC 188, Box 199, NARA (DC). In an interview, Short Bull stated that Kicking Bear and Yellow Breast did not go further than Wind River with him and Turning Hip. *Malvern Ledger* (IA), March 12, 1891.

⁶² Raymond J. DeMallie, "The Lakota Ghost Dance: An Ethnohistorical Account," *Pacific Historical Review* 51, no. 4 (Nov. 1982), 387.

individually, within the confines of his own traditions.⁶³ Moreover, Wovoka did not preach a specific doctrine that demanded strict adherence. As DeMallie put it, “each man went away from meeting Wovoka with a personal interpretation of the ghost dance religion.”⁶⁴ This nondoctrinal religion allowed individuals to “contribute to the understanding of the totality of the power (*Wakan Tanka*) through his own individual experiences,” which fell in line with the religious traditions of the Plains groups. Heretics did not exist in the movement, “only believers and nonbelievers.” Consistency in doctrine was not a measure of spiritual worth. Each individual had their own experience and their own understanding of that experience. Consequently, Short Bull’s testimony was different than Kicking Bear’s, Porcupine’s, and Sitting Bull’s, but they all conveyed a similar message. Likewise, letters sent between tribes expressed the movement outside of a western religious framework. While Natives hoped to convey an understanding of the messiah’s message in their letters, they did not expect the written words to be interpreted literally and as the sole message. And for those receiving the letters, they expected to find the variety of interpretations that came from the various authors.

⁶³ For studies on individual tribes and the ghost dance see, Benjamin R Kracht, “The Kiowa Ghost Dance, 1894-1916: An Unheralded Revitalization Movement,” *Ethnohistory* 39, no. 4 (Autumn 1992), 452-477; Donald N. Brown, “The Ghost Dance Religion Among the Oklahoma Cheyenne,” *The Chronicles of Oklahoma* 30 (Winter 1952–53); Alexander Lesser, *The Pawnee Ghost Dance Hand Game: Ghost Dance Revival and Ethnic Identity* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1978); Henry F. Dobyns and Robert C. Euler, *The Ghost Dance of 1889 Among the Pai Indians of Northwestern Arizona* (Prescott, AZ: Prescott College Press, 1967); Brad Logan, “The Ghost Dance Among the Paiute: An Ethnohistorical View of the Documentary Evidence,” *Ethnohistory* 27, no. 3 (Summer 1980), 267-288; Richard W. Stoffle, et al., “Ghost Dancing the Grand Canyon: Southern Paiute Rock Art, Ceremony, and Cultural Landscapes,” *Current Anthropology* 41, no. 1 (February 2000), 11-38; Hugh A. Dempsey, “Blackfoot Ghost Dance,” *Glenbow-Atlanta Institute Occasional Papers* 3 (Calgary: Glenbow-Atlanta Institute, 1968); Judith Vander, *Shoshone Ghost Dance Religion*.

⁶⁴ Raymond J. DeMallie, “The Lakota Ghost Dance: An Ethnohistorical Account,” 387.

Yet, despite the broad interpretation, many whites were surprised by the commonality of beliefs among tribes living hundreds of miles apart. They shared the Western Shoshone agent's astonishment that "all the Indians in the country seem to possess practically the same ideas and expect about the same results."⁶⁵ Six months earlier, *The Omaha Daily Bee* offered a similar observation: "It appears that though these Indian tribes are fully 1,000 miles apart they both have the same belief that a savior is soon coming to them and that he will destroy the white people of America."⁶⁶ At the Fort Peck Agency, Agent C. R. A. Scobey found that the Sioux there had a "strong and abiding faith" in the ghost dance "as it is propounded at other agencies."⁶⁷ They expected the coming of a messiah in the spring, the resurrection of their dead friends and family, the return of the bison and other game, and, according to the agent, "the destruction of the whites."

Whites were concerned about that last point. Newspapers reported that the Indians believed that a variety of supernatural calamities would befall Americans, like a great flood swallowing the white world or an earthquake.⁶⁸ Whites focused on the destruction of their race, while Natives only looked toward a transformed earth. There is no evidence that Wovoka prophesized the destruction of the white race, only that whites would no longer be around the Indians. Notably absent in the common current of the delegates' interpretation are any militant ideas. Wovoka always emphasized peace and even taught that some features of the white world were fruitful. He told the people to "educate your children, send them to schools." "When you

⁶⁵ Agent William Plumb to CIA, November 8, 1890, RBIA, RG 75, SC 188, Box 199, NARA (DC).

⁶⁶ "An Indian Messiah," *Omaha Daily Bee*, April 27, 1890.

⁶⁷ Agent C. R. A. Scobey to CIA, November 21, 1890, RBIA, RG 75, SC 188, Box 199, NARA (DC).

⁶⁸ "An Indian Prophecy," *Omaha Daily Bee*, April 12, 1890.

get back go to church. All these churches are mine,” he relayed to the Lakota, “have your people work the ground so they do not get idle help your Agents and get farms.” Historian Omer Stewart called it a message of “clean living, peaceful adjustment with whites,” and “hard work” (Michael Hittman thought “the Protestant-type work ethic” was “at the core” of Wovoka’s religion).⁶⁹ With proper dancing, these things would renew the world. This might seem like a pro-assimilation message, but Sam Maddra concluded that instead, Wovoka thought that Indians “should take the benefits of white society that are offered, with the knowledge and reassurance that doing so would not make them any less Indian.”⁷⁰

Short Bull and the others listened to “the Messiah” for five days straight. On the fifth day Short Bull shook hands with Wovoka who only told him that “soon there would be no world, after the end of the world those who went to church would see all their relatives that had died. This will be the same all over the world even across the big waters.”⁷¹ The Lakota delegation sent letters home during their journey to keep their people informed. They claimed that “the Messiah has now come to the world” and there was “no mistake about the advent of the new Messiah.”⁷² These reports created much anticipation for the delegation’s return home.

A letter published in the February 1890 edition of *The Word Carrier* (the English language Indian newspaper published by the Dakota Mission) from an Indian pupil at Santee Normal Training School detailed what he or she heard about the messiah. The editors of *The*

⁶⁹ Omer Call Stewart, *Peyote Religion: A History* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1987), 66; Michael Hittman, *Wovoka*, 35.

⁷⁰ Sam Maddra, *Hostiles?*, 42.

⁷¹ George C. Crager, “As Narrated by Short Bull.” Good Thunder saw his son who had died years before in war, see George Sword, “The Story of the Ghost Dance,” 30.

⁷² William Selwyn to Agent E. W. Foster, November 25, 1890, RBIA, RG 75, SC 188, Box 199, NARA (DC).

Word Carrier published several letters from Native students each month. No special attention was given to this letter; it was featured on the back page of the paper with the rest of the student letters. There was still little concern or understanding about the ghost dance movement among whites in February 1890. Also, it is not clear which reservation the student was from since there were students from all parts of the Dakotas and Nebraska at the school, but the student's account is remarkably in-depth considering it was written weeks before the Lakota delegation returned from Nevada:

I will now tell you some stories that I heard from the West. One day the men gathered together to talk about something, I guess, and one looked up and saw a black cloud coming, and a man was in the cloud. He came and stood over where the men gathered together. He said many things to them; but I cannot tell you in English, but I will try to do my best to tell you. He said, 'I know you people are like little children gathering together and talk. I have seen you from above. It is because of the white men. See what they have done even to me,' and he showed his hands and feet, and his side where they stuck him a spear. He told them many things, and said he was going to help them and all the Indians to fight against the white people. And he did many strange things, and gave them some paint, and told them to paint themselves; and when they did, they were like crazy, and after while when they got over, then they as happy as a bird. He said to them to believe all his words, and to believe him. If any body didn't he would die. Two old men didn't and both died in the evening. I wish I was a good English speaker and could translate. I would tell every bit of it to you. D. D.⁷³

The student's letter features descriptions of the messiah that were commonly communicated: his scars of crucifixion, his paint, and his promise to help the Native people. There is no mention of a dance, but there is an emphasis on a "fight against the white people," a theme that was not shared by Wovoka himself. In addition, it is not clear where or how the student heard this story, but it is likely that the student received this news in a letter from home considering that he or she wrote the letter during the winter months, a time when boarding school students did not visit home.

⁷³ *The Word Carrier*, February 1890.

After several months away, the Lakota delegation returned to their reservations in April 1890. Sitting Bull, the Northern Arapaho, returned to Wind River and Porcupine returned to Tongue River. The *Chadron Democrat* reported in May 1890 that a group of Sioux at Pine Ridge had returned from their visit to the Wind River Mountains in Wyoming with, they claimed, was letter written by Jesus Christ. This letter was given to them as proof of their supernatural experience. The letter was so powerful, in fact, that the Sioux told the newspaper that “two white men read the letter and they both died immediately.”⁷⁴

Three Lakota men who were a part of the Lakota delegation, Broken Arm, Elk Horn, and Kicks Back, decided to separate from the delegation at Wind River (before it headed southwest toward Nevada) and head northwest to investigate in Oregon. They went without permission and stayed at the Umatilla Agency for two weeks in March 1890. The men gathered an unknown amount of knowledge about the messiah while conversing with the Umatillas through sign language. The Umatilla agent knew about Smohalla’s 1855 and 1856 “messiah craze” that “agitated” the Indians in eastern Oregon and Washington and did not want a repeat of those beliefs in 1890.⁷⁵ The agent bought the three Lakota men train tickets and sent them back to Pine Ridge.⁷⁶

When Porcupine returned to Tongue River, he called for a gathering where for five days he relayed what Wovoka had told him: “I have returned to my tribe to tell all this. The Christ said we must tell it to every one.”⁷⁷ Porcupine warned his people to listen to Wovoka’s message

⁷⁴ *Chadron Democrat*, “The Saviour and the Sioux,” May 8, 1890.

⁷⁵ For more on Smohalla, see James Mooney, *The Ghost-dance Religion*, 708-745; Robert H. Ruby and John A. Brown, *Dreamer-Prophets of the Columbia Plateau: Smohalla and Skolaskin* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1989).

⁷⁶ *ARCIA*, 1891, 529.

⁷⁷ “The New Indian Messiah,” *Harper’s Weekly*, December 6, 1890.

“for their own good.”⁷⁸ “It will please the God if we say yes,” Porcupine announced, “He told the Indians that they must not quarrel with the whites or kill them. We must dance. If we don’t dance we will get crazy and poor.”⁷⁹ In May 1890, Maj. Henry Carroll reported that the Cheyennes treated Porcupine “with the greatest deference and obedience” during the dances because he “had revelations from the new God.”⁸⁰ He found that “unusual mystery” was observed regarding the dance and whites could get few details about it.

The Lakota delegates who made it to Nevada did not receive warm welcomes from their agents upon their return home, but word of their experiences spread. At Rosebud, Short Bull, determined to help fulfill Wovoka’s prophecies, began to confer with Brulé leaders. But Agent Wright brought Short Bull in and tried to convince him that his belief in the messiah was foolish. He warned Short Bull not to continue to spread his stories at Rosebud.⁸¹ The headmen at Pine Ridge scheduled a council “to organize the new religion,” but after William Selwyn informed Agent H. D. Gallagher what the “apostles” were telling the people, the Indian police dispersed the growing crowd. Gallagher was concerned that the gathering would disrupt the early spring farm work. The “promoters of the enterprise” (Good Thunder and two others) were “given a good lecture upon the mischief they were doing” and thrown in the guard house for two days.⁸²

⁷⁸ “Statement of the Cheyenne ‘Porcupine’ of Meeting with the New ‘Christ,’” copy in Gen. Thomas H. Ruger to Adj. Gen. U. S. Army, June 25, 1890, RBIA, RG 75, SC 188, Box 199, NARA (DC).

⁷⁹ “Proceedings of a council held with the Cheyennes on Tongue River, Montana, Nov. 18th, 1890,” RBIA, RG 75, SC 188, Box 199, NARA (DC).

⁸⁰ Maj. Henry Carroll to Post Adj. Fort Custer, May 7, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 19493, Box 635, NARA (DC).

⁸¹ Aaron B. Clark to L. F. Spencer, December 4, 1890, Lebbeus Foster Spencer Papers, MSS 596, History Colorado Stephen H. Hart Library and Research Center.

⁸² H. D. Gallagher to CIA, June 10, 1890, RBIA, RG 75, SC 188, Box 199, NARA (DC); George Sword, “The Story of the Ghost Dance,” 30.

The men promised not to hold councils about their experience. Gallagher then met the Lakota while they were in council and explained “the silliness of what had been told them and cautioned them against being made dupes of by evil disposed persons who could attempt to practice upon their credulity.”⁸³ Although some agents like Gallagher actively tried to limit the spread of the movement, few agents realized how quickly the dance was spreading (a group of Sioux had already told the Omahas and Winnebagos in eastern Nebraska about it in April 1890) and none of them could predict that its message would be carried by the mail.⁸⁴

According to Mooney, the Northern Utes at the Uintah and Ouray Agency in Utah sent delegates to investigate Wovoka “soon after” the first dances were held at Walker River in January 1889.⁸⁵ The Utes were very familiar with the 1870 movement and they had plenty of information about the 1890 movement (they were close to the Paiute geographically and linguistically). The Northern Utes undoubtedly danced, but it does not seem to have been especially popular among them.⁸⁶ This did not stop them from relaying information about the dance to others, however. They were probably among those who sent the Pine Ridge Oglalas letters about it in 1889.⁸⁷ The Southern Utes were visited by an emissary of Wovoka, a Paiute

⁸³ H. D. Gallagher to CIA, June 10, 1890, RBIA, RG 75, SC 188, Box 199, NARA (DC).

⁸⁴ James Mooney, *The Ghost-dance Religion*, 817.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 802, 805, 806.

⁸⁶ Anne M. Smith, *Ethnography of the Northern Utes*, Museum of New Mexico Papers in Anthropology no. 17 (Sante Fe: Museum of New Mexico Press, 1974), 216-220; David Rich Lewis, *Neither Wolf Nor Dog: American Indians, Environment, and Agrarian Change* (Oxford: University of Oxford Press, 1994), 32, 57; John A. Jones, *The Sun Dance of the Northern Ute*, Anthropological Papers 47, Bureau of American Ethnology Bulletin 157, (Washington DC: Government Printing Office, 1955), 239-241. Jones argues that the ghost dance was not popular among the Ute because of their fear of the dead, but Smith suggests that since they tried the dance, there must have been “very real despair at this period,” see page 219.

⁸⁷ William Selwyn to Agent E. W. Foster, November 25, 1890, RBIA, RG 75, SC 188, Box 199, NARA (DC).

man named Yunitckwo'ov, to teach the tribe the dance. He told them that their ancestors would return within the year (the Utes had traditionally considered the return of the dead as access to an ancestor's spiritual guidance, not a physical resurrection), but when the prophecy failed, the Southern Utes ceased Yunitckwo'ov's version of the dance.⁸⁸ The Southern Ute agent was apparently oblivious to any dancing at his agency, he reported that his Indians were "free from any taint of the Ghost Dance" in early December 1890 and January 1891.⁸⁹

In Arizona, the Hualapais had been making trips to Walker Lake and holding their own ghost dances since spring 1889 after a Paiute from southern Utah brought the dance to the tribe.⁹⁰ They sang their ghost dance songs in the Paiute language.⁹¹ In 1891, some Hualapais danced with the Chemehuevi, traveling southwest on railroad coal cars.⁹² California and Nevada newspapers reported that a Paiute traveled west of the Sierra Nevada, most likely by rail, to the Chico, California area to exhort the small bands of Western Shoshones there to dance in December 1890.⁹³ James Mooney found that some of those Shoshones visited the Paiutes in Nevada to dance as well. Newspapers reported that Shoshones and Paiutes were dancing

⁸⁸ Marvin K. Opler, "The Southern Ute of Colorado," in *Acculturation in Seven American Indian Tribes*, ed. Ralph Linton (New York: D. Appleton-Century Company, 1940) 188-190. The Southern Ute modified the dance to fit their own cultural systems after they rejected Yunitckwo'ov.

⁸⁹ Ute Agent to CIA, December 1, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.19.18, Consolidated Ute, Outgoing Corres., Box 2, NARA (Denver); Ute Agent to CIA, November 24, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.19.18, Consolidated Ute, Outgoing Corres., Box 2, NARA (Denver); Ute Agent to CIA, January 3, 1891, RBIA, RG 75.19.18, Consolidated Ute, Outgoing Corres., Box 2, NARA (Denver).

⁹⁰ William G. Blakely to Capt. Bowman, September 30, 1890, copy in War Dept. to Sect. Int., October 22, 1890, RBIA, RG 75, SC 188, Box 199, NARA (DC).

⁹¹ James Mooney, *The Ghost-dance Religion*, 814-815.

⁹² *Mohave County Miner*, December 12, 1891.

⁹³ "The Diggers Dancing," *Reno Evening Gazette*, December 16, 1890; "Ghost Dances," *Sacramento Daily*, December 17, 1890.

together near the head of the Humboldt River along the railroad line in January 1891.⁹⁴ The Mission Indians in southern California and the Pit River Indians in northern California also took up the dance.⁹⁵

By the end of May 1890, white authorities in the Dakotas, Montana, and Oklahoma began noticing the impact of the delegates' return, but most did not think their stories would amount to much and little was reported specifically about the dance during the next few months.⁹⁶ Selwyn wrote that the jailing of the men at Pine Ridge settled things down "for a while."⁹⁷ Agent Gallagher did not think "any serious trouble" would come to pass because of the "excitement."⁹⁸ He predicted that their belief in the messiah would shortly pass "from their minds." But the Pine Ridge Indians' connection with the Southern Cheyennes and Arapahos sustained their faith. Correspondence with their southern friends kept the Pine Ridge population focused on Wovoka's prophecies. "I see the way they have been corresponding from one agency to another is doing some harm," Selwyn reported to his agent, "the Cheyennes and Arapahoes at Darlington, Ind. Territory are wild with this excitement. This I come to find out by the reading of some letters while at Pine Ridge."⁹⁹

⁹⁴ "A Military Post a Necessity," *Daily Nevada State Journal*, January 10, 1891.

⁹⁵ James Mooney, *The Ghost-dance Religion*, 804.

⁹⁶ Agent H. D. Gallagher to CIA, June 14, 1890, RBIA, RG 75, SC 188, Box 199, NARA (DC); J. George Wright to CIA, June 16, 1890, RBIA, RG 75, SC 188, Box 199, NARA (DC); Maj. Henry Carroll to Post Adj. Fort Custer, May 7, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 19493, Box 635, NARA (DC).

⁹⁷ William Selwyn to Agent E. W. Foster, November 25, 1890, RBIA, RG 75, SC 188, Box 199, NARA (DC).

⁹⁸ H. D. Gallagher to CIA, June 10, 1890, RBIA, RG 75, SC 188, Box 199, NARA (DC).

⁹⁹ William Selwyn to Agent E. W. Foster, November 25, 1890, RBIA, RG 75, SC 188, Box 199, NARA (DC).

One of these letters sent between the two agencies was obtained by a white missionary who forwarded a copy to Richard Henry Pratt at Carlisle. The letter was sent by Crooked Nose, a twenty-five-year-old Pine Ridge Cheyenne, to his brother at the Cheyenne and Arapaho Agency in Oklahoma. Sometime in the summer of 1890, he wrote:

Dear Brother: Yes, it is so about Jesus and all Indians talking about it now the heaven, come to save the Indians with long hair first then the white men Jesus came to save Indians. It is to far up in sky where he was. It is not half so far where he is now you may come to him and all the Indians Jesus gives some berries some black and some red I ate two. How you all getting along in Darlington. Please send me some money and tell red Necks wife to send money too. From your brother, Crooked Nose.¹⁰⁰

Letters like this one, an exchange of news between relatives and friends, a common mode of communication by 1890, enabled the rapid spread of the ghost dance movement. Even those tribes who never danced, like the Pottawatomie, learned about it through the mail. The Pottawatomie received a letter “from the Sioux to adopt their dance,” but according to their agent, none put much thought into it.¹⁰¹

Indian agents remained unconcerned about the ghost dance until the summer of 1890. Most believed that it was nothing more than a fad.¹⁰² Interest in the dance seemed to have peaked. But during the month of June 1890, agents in the northern and southern Plains were forced to confront the effects of the movement. In late May 1890, Charles L. Hyde of Pierre, South Dakota informed the Secretary of the Interior that he had information, gathered from a confidential source, “that the Sioux Indians or a portion of them are secretly planning and

¹⁰⁰ Crooked Nose to Brother, undated, published in *The Red Man*, October/November 1890.

¹⁰¹ Agent John Blair to CIA, January 2, 1891, RBIA, RG 75, SC 188, Box 200, NARA (DC).

¹⁰² Robert Utley, *The Last Days of the Sioux Nation*, 75-76.

arranging for an outbreak in the near future.” He did not want to “cause any undue action or alarm,” but he suggested keeping watch “on the different bands and using conservative judgement about allowing any of them to leave their respective agencies.”¹⁰³ Hyde’s informant was a mixed-blood student at the Presbyterian College at Pierre who had received letters about the messiah, and perhaps this secret outbreak, from his relatives at Pine Ridge.¹⁰⁴ Hyde was a large landowner and real estate dealer (he may have been the wealthiest man in South Dakota at the turn of the century and was convicted of fraudulent advertising of land in 1912, but pardoned by President Taft). The intentions of his report may have been pure, but he was undoubtedly invested in the lands surrounding the Lakota reservations. He did not forward the Pierre student’s correspondence to the Secretary, so it is not known exactly what the letters from home contained.¹⁰⁵ Agent Charles McChesney at Cheyenne River told Commissioner of Indian Affairs Thomas Morgan that the letter warned the student “to look out for himself” if the Indians did “break out.”¹⁰⁶

Nevertheless, the Secretary of the Interior passed Hyde’s report to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs. The Acting Commissioner then called for a report from each of the agents at the Lakota reserves, to “take prompt measures to ascertain whether there is any ground for

¹⁰³ Charles L. Hyde to Sect. Interior, May 29, 1890, RBIA, RG 75, SC 188, Box 199, NARA (DC).

¹⁰⁴ Agent Charles McChesney to CIA, June 16, 1890, RBIA, RG 75, SC 188, Box 199, NARA (DC); James Mooney, *The Ghost-dance Religion*, 843; Doanne Robinson, *A History of the Dakota or Sioux Indians*, South Dakota Historical Collections, Vol. II (Aberdeen, SD: News Printing Co., 1904), 469; Alice Beck Kehoe, *The Ghost Dance*, 14.

¹⁰⁵ For more on Hyde see Doanne Robinson, *History of South Dakota, Personal Mention of Citizens of South Dakota*, Vol. I (B. F. Bowen & Co, 1904), 829-830; George Washington Kingsbury, *South Dakota: Its History and Its People*, Vol. IV (Chicago: S. J. Clarke Publishing Company, 1915), 981.

¹⁰⁶ Agent Charles McChesney to CIA, June 16, 1890, RBIA, RG 75, SC 188, Box 199, NARA (DC).

apprehension,” but none of the agent thought there was much to Hyde’s warning.¹⁰⁷ While the Indians were interested in the new messiah and his message, there was not any evidence of planned violence.¹⁰⁸ Agent H. D. Gallagher at Pine Ridge said the excitement there was caused by the “reported appearance of the ‘Great Medicine Man,’” but he was sure that it would “soon die out without causing trouble.”¹⁰⁹ Agent J. George Wright said that most of the Rosebud Indians “scoffed at” the idea of an outbreak.¹¹⁰

But Agent Wright also mentioned that “several secret communications” were being passed between the Sioux agencies in March 1890. It is not known if these communications contained any information about the messiah or why Wright assumed they were meant to be secret. Perhaps he regarded any personal letter between Natives suspicious, especially if they came from the “non-progressive Indians” whom he blamed for the communications, those “disgruntled” and “dissatisfied” men who had refused to sign the Sioux Bill the year before. According to Wright, the letters recited the Indians’ “grievances against the Government” and urged “their friends to meet them in council at Cheyenne River in the spring, when their future policy, and other matters, would be considered,” although he never claimed to have read one of the letters.¹¹¹ Agent Wright’s report did not mention anything concerning the messiah, but on

¹⁰⁷ Act. Comm. R. V. Belt to Agent H. D. Gallagher, June 7, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.19.85, Pine Ridge, Corres. Received from OIA, Box 9, NARA (KC).

¹⁰⁸ Agent Charles McChesney to CIA, June 16, 1890, RBIA, RG 75, SC 188, Box 199, NARA (DC).

¹⁰⁹ Agent H. D. Gallagher to CIA, June 14, 1890, RBIA, RG 75, SC 188, Box 199, NARA (DC).

¹¹⁰ Agent J. George Wright to CIA, June 16, 1890, RBIA, RG 75, SC 188, Box 199, NARA (DC).

¹¹¹ Agent J. George Wright to CIA, June 16, 1890, RBIA, RG 75, SC 188, Box 199, NARA (DC). After instructing his police to report the business of the non-progressive leaders’ councils, Wright learned that the men decided not to be counted in the ongoing census. In response, Wright imprisoned Crow Dog and other non-progressive leaders and warned them not to council against law and order or leave the reservation without permission.

June 18 newspapers reported that some Northern Cheyennes from Tongue River, including one who was made a “high priest” by the messiah, had just ghost danced with the Indians at Rosebud.¹¹² Just days before, Agent McChesney reported that there was “some little excitement among my Indians regarding the coming of the Indian messiah.”¹¹³ It seems likely that these secret communications being passed between Rosebud, Pine Ridge, and the other Sioux agencies were, at least in part, about the ghost dance. The newspaper report explained the secrecy the Indians practiced concerning the “new religion.” They refused to discuss it with white men; it was “all very mysterious.”

White authorities began to suspect that the communications being sent out by the Lakotas had a malicious purpose in mid-June. White settlers around the Tongue River Agency in Montana grew anxious because some “friendly” Cheyennes told them that messengers were sent to the Indians at Standing Rock and Pine Ridge “to solicit...aid” in a “proposed outbreak.”¹¹⁴ There was a larger than usual number of Cheyennes roaming about, but the agents at Standing Rock, Pine Ridge, and Tongue River found no occasion for alarm. The trouble began after a white man was supposedly killed by some Cheyennes near the Crow reservation around the same time that Porcupine had assembled a large dance at Tongue River. White settlers connected the two events and the Cheyennes feared retribution, according to the Tongue River agent, R. L.

¹¹² “The Bald Face Prophet of the Cheyenne, *The Daily Huronite*, June 18, 1890.

¹¹³ Agent Charles McChesney to CIA, June 16, 1890, RBIA, RG 75, SC 188, Box 199, NARA (DC).

¹¹⁴ J. Bryan to Hon. Thomas Carter, telegram, June 12, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 18013, Box 631, NARA (DC); “Memo. rel. to No. Cheyenne Outbreak,” RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 18609, Box 633, NARA (DC). Two “renegade Bannock Indians” were making some sort of trouble at Tongue River in April 1890 and Agent R. L. Upshaw recommended they be arrested by the army. Before that could happen, Upshaw sent them back to Fort Hall, see Gen. Thomas H. Ruger to Adj. Gen. U. S. Army, May 20, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 19493, Box 635, NARA (DC).

Upshaw. “Every effort has been made to allay the excitement,” Upshaw told the Commissioner, but the “wild stories” being told by both the whites and the Cheyennes made it difficult.¹¹⁵

Agent Upshaw had the army arrest Porcupine in early June for being a nuisance, but released him.¹¹⁶ On June 19, he recommended that Porcupine be placed under surveillance, but if his “delusion” did not die and if he continued to “hold large gatherings to expand and propagate new revelations,” Upshaw thought he should be “sent to some other place.”¹¹⁷ But later, on the same day the he wrote that letter, Upshaw telegraphed the army to arrest Porcupine. Major Henry Carroll, however, refused, reporting that the Cheyenne were quiet and had returned to their homes.¹¹⁸

Also in June, G. C. Douglass in Bagley, Iowa, who “frequently” received “communications from the Indians among whom I was employed,” forwarded a letter written in Lakota he received to the Secretary of the Interior.¹¹⁹ It was from a Rosebud Brulé that had heard the same rumors of an outbreak. “They will fight with the whites, it is said,” the Brulé

¹¹⁵ Agent R. L. Upshaw to CIA, June 19, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 19377, Box 635, NARA (DC).

¹¹⁶ Agent Upshaw to CIA, telegram, June 5, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 17190, Box 629, NARA (DC); Sect. of Interior to Sect. of War, June 5, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 17767, Box 630, NARA (DC)

¹¹⁷ Agent R. L. Upshaw to CIA, June 19, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 19377, Box 635, NARA (DC).

¹¹⁸ Gen. Thomas H. Ruger to Asst. Adj. Gen. Div. of the Missouri, June 20, 1890, copy in RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 20626, Box 638, NARA (DC). A Sioux man and two women were at the Sac and Fox Agency in the summer 1890 and reportedly told the people there about a “big fight,” see Sac and Fox Agent to CIA, November 27, 1890, RBIA, RG 75, SC 188, Box 199, NARA (DC).

¹¹⁹ G. C. Douglas to Sect. Interior, June 13, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 18612, Box 633, NARA (DC). Douglas was concerned that his correspondent would learn about the letter reaching the Secretary of the Interior “Please do not make known to the Indians who informed you of the same as it was a private communication to me and should I go back among them it might result in my detriment.” Partial translation of the Lakota letter provided to me by Rani-Henrik Andersson.

man wrote. The letter, which has proven difficult to translate into English, spoke about stars, going to see the stars, and meeting deceased people.

For some, talk about the messiah and a planned outbreak went hand in hand. Because of the content of the letters he read for the Oglalas and Northern Cheyennes in spring 1890, William Selwyn expected “a general Indian war” to break out in the spring 1891.¹²⁰ Wovoka prophesized that the return of the bison and the removal of the white man would occur in the spring 1891. Selwyn assumed that some of his people were creating “secret plans” over the “last one year or so” in preparation for that prophecy. Secrecy was a part of the movement for the Lakotas, their dance leaders were hesitant to share any information with white authorities.¹²¹ This secrecy created suspicion and whites distrusted dancers.

In June 1890, a brigadier general noticed that knowledge of the messiah “had quite a wide diffusion and excited much interest amongst a number of tribes, particularly the Arapahoes and Cheyennes and those nearly related to them.”¹²² News of the dance reached as far as Hampton, Virginia by summer of 1890. Robert P. Higheagle wrote from Pine Ridge to Luke

¹²⁰ William Selwyn to Agent E. W. Foster, November 25, 1890, RBIA, RG 75, SC 188, Box 199, NARA (DC).

¹²¹ Edward Roan Bear recalled that when Kicking Bear, Short Bull, and Low Dog brought the dance to Big Foot’s camp, the emphasized that the dead would come back “through this secret belief.” See Edward Roan Bear Papers, 1953-1954, MS 20121, State Historical Society of North Dakota, Bismarck.

¹²² Thomas H. Ruger to Adjutant General, June 25, 1890, RBIA, RG 75, SC 188, Box 199, NARA (DC). A group of Crow Creek Sioux went to dance at the Sisseton Agency without permission in June 1890, although it is not known if it was a ghost dance, see Charles Crawford, et al to CIA, June 21, 1890, RBIA, RG 75, SC 188, Box 199, NARA (DC); Charles Crawford, et al to CIA, undated, June 1890, RBIA, RG 75, SC 188, Box 199, NARA (DC); Agent William McKusick to CIA, July 3, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 20600, Box 638, NARA (DC).

Najinhkte that he had first learned of the ghost dance while away at school at Hampton.¹²³

Similarly, Joe Abner, a Southern Cheyenne at the Haskell Institute in Lawrence, Kansas, heard from his people at the Cheyenne and Arapaho Agency that a Sioux traveled south to Indian Territory to spread the dance.¹²⁴ By November 1890, Native letters about the dance had spanned the Atlantic. Several Natives working in Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show in Europe received letters from their friends at Pine Ridge that spoke of the movement. A reporter noted that some, including Rocky Bear, were unconvinced, while others "inclined to reflect upon the intelligence regarding the Messiah."¹²⁵

Ghost dances were also held at the Kiowa, Comanche, and Wichita Agency in June 1890 after exchanging visits with the Cheyennes and Arapahos, where the dancing was already under way. Agent Charles Adams, found that "nearly all of the Indians through out the country" believed in the "false deity."¹²⁶ In May, Adams was willing, on behalf of the Kiowas, to ask Agent Ashley at the Cheyenne and Arapaho Agency if five Kiowa could visit for the purpose of dancing. Agent Ashley declined the visit because he did not want to disrupt the farm work on his reserve.¹²⁷ Nevertheless, to the great displeasure of Ashley, around one hundred and fifty

¹²³ Robert P. Higheagle to Luke Najinhkte, December 7, 1890, reproduced in Vestal, *New Sources of Indian History, 1850-1891*, 42.

¹²⁴ "The Ghost Dance," *Reno Evening Gazette*, November 25, 1890.

¹²⁵ "Tangled Rumors," *The Omaha Daily Bee*, November 20, 1890.

¹²⁶ Agent Charles Adams to CIA, July 6, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.19.50, Kiowa Comanche and Wichita, Letters Sent, Reel 18, NARA (OHS).

¹²⁷ Agent Charles Ashley to Agent Charles Adams, May 12, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.19.10, Cheyenne and Arapaho, Letters Sent, Reel 32, NARA (OHS).

Kiowa, Comanche, and Wichita arrived at the Cheyenne and Arapaho Agency to dance on May 20, 1890.¹²⁸

Despite his opposition to the large gathering, Agent Ashley was not entirely against visitation. He allowed two Cheyennes to travel to Pine Ridge and Tongue River in June 1890 to investigate the messiah, perhaps hoping that the men would return with a report discrediting the movement.¹²⁹ Dozens of Cheyennes were given permission to visit the Ponca, Pawnee, and Otoe Agency in July.¹³⁰ Ashley also allowed a Pine Ridge Oglala named High Wolf to stay at the Cheyenne and Arapaho Agency for an additional thirty days in May.¹³¹ High Wolf knew about the messiah story, although it is not clear how much information he had. Agent Ashley knew the news was coming to his reserve from the northern tribes, but he saw no harm in High Wolf's presence. High Wolf was allowed to travel throughout Indian Territory to visit other tribes like the Kiowas, possibly spreading information about the dance. A Kiowa named Apiatan accompanied High Wolf home to Pine Ridge in September to determine the validity of Wovoka's claims.¹³²

¹²⁸ Agent Charles Ashley to Agent Charles Adams, May 20, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.19.10, Cheyenne and Arapaho, Letters Sent, Reel 32, NARA (OHS); Agent Charles Ashley to CIA, August 4, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 24229, Box 648, NARA (DC).

¹²⁹ Agent Charles Ashley to Lt. H. W. Wheeler, June 20, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.19.10, Cheyenne and Arapaho, Letters Sent, Reel 32, NARA (OHS).

¹³⁰ Agent Charles Ashley to Agent D. J. M. Wood, July 23, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.19.10, Cheyenne and Arapaho, Letters Sent, Reel 32, NARA (OHS); Agent Charles Ashley to Agent D. J. M. Wood, July 29, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.19.10, Cheyenne and Arapaho, Letters Sent, Reel 32, NARA (OHS).

¹³¹ Agent Charles Ashley to Agent Charles Adams, May 21, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.19.10, Cheyenne and Arapaho, Letters Sent, Reel 32, NARA (OHS); Agent Charles Ashley to Agent Charles Adams, May 22, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.19.10, Cheyenne and Arapaho, Letters Sent, Reel 32, NARA (OHS).

¹³² James Mooney, *The Ghost-dance Religion*, 908.

The Kiowas received their first detailed information about the messiah at a gathering on the Cheyenne and Arapaho reserve on May 20, 1890. Agent Ashley reported that "medicine dances...of intense religious excitement," emerging from belief in the new christ, were held with the Kiowas.¹³³ James Mooney reported that the Kiowas learned more about the dance in June after a delegation of twenty men (including Poor Buffalo) was sent to the Cheyenne and Arapaho Agency to investigate.¹³⁴ The Kiowa men brought back some "sacred" red paint that Wovoka offered visitors, which was passed between tribes. Inspector for Indian Affairs William W. Junkin, told his hometown paper, the *Fairfield Ledger* (Iowa), that the Kiowa sent investigators all the way to Pine Ridge in May or June, where they believed the messiah had appeared to the Northern Cheyennes. Junkin thought that not everyone accepted the story that the white man would be swallowed by a flood, so they sent the delegation north to find the truth.¹³⁵

The dances at the Kiowa, Comanche, and Wichita Agency were quiet according to the Agent Adams, meant to show appreciation to the messiah who would restore the bison. Inspector Junkin counted two thousand to two thousand five hundred Indians at a dance (but not all participated) two miles west of the agency near the Washita River. Three hundred teepees and one hundred and fifty bowers built from brush surrounded the dance site, which was populated for a week.¹³⁶ Like all other tribes, the Kiowas danced the ghost dance in a circle, with hands clasped, without a drum. The Kiowas and the Lakotas were the only Plains groups

¹³³ Agent Charles Ashley to CIA, August 4, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 24229, Box 648, NARA (DC).

¹³⁴ James Mooney, *The Ghost-dance Religion*, 907.

¹³⁵ "In the Indian Territory, The Kiowa, Comanches, Wichitas, Caddoes and Affiliated Tribes," *Fairfield Ledger* July 9, 1890, clipping in Agent Charles Adams to CIA, July 16, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 22313, Box 643, NARA (DC). William W. Junkin was a part owner of the *Fairfield Ledger* according to Agent Charles Adams.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

who danced around a small tree or pole, which may demonstrate the influence of the Kiowas' visit to Pine Ridge in May or June 1890.¹³⁷ At the height of the dance, Junkin observed, four hundred people participated at a time. Men, women, and children danced for hours (with "earnestness and credulity" according to Junkin) until they were exhausted. The "religious feeling" and the dance itself was something new to the Kiowas, Junkin discerned.

Agent Adams allowed the dances to continue even though he claimed to know such dancing was prohibited. He did not seem to consider the dancing a serious concern.

Commissioner of Indian Affairs Thomas Morgan, however, questioned Adams' decision.

Adams' defended himself by placing blame on Inspector Junkin who convinced him to permit the dance.¹³⁸ Junkin said he allowed the dance for a few reasons, primarily because "it would have required a regiment of soldiers" to tell the Kiowa no. Junkin was also convinced by Kiowa chief Big Tree's argument. Big Tree beseeched Junkin and Agent Adams at a council on June 24, 1890 (held to discuss a variety of issues) to let his people keep dancing:

We have always had different roads. The Great Spirit when he created us gave us forms of worship; the whites one, the reds another. We worship in the form of dancing; you worship in the form of prayer. We are not responsible for our different ways. As the reds have their way to worship a god, so have the whites theirs. They do not like ours and instead of scolding us when they are angry, as they think they do, they scold the Great Spirit. Last summer we thought it our duty to have one of these dances or forms of worship; the privilege was denied and we accepted the denial. We want to worship this summer. There is nothing bad in it. We believe in it and we want your help. Any orders from the department we are ready to comply with, but when we want a favor it seems as though we cannot get it.¹³⁹

¹³⁷ James Mooney, *The Ghost-dance Religion*, 802.

¹³⁸ Agent Charles Adams to CIA, July 16, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 22313, Box 643, NARA (DC).

¹³⁹ "In the Indian Territory, The Kiowa, Comanches, Wichitas, Caddoes and Affiliated Tribes," *Fairfield Ledger* July 9, 1890. In December 1890, Big Tree told Maj. Wirt Davis that "the Kiowa are divided on the subject of the Messiah business. Some of the Kiowas believe in it and some do not. (Big Tree) does not believe in it and does not take any interest in it. It is a new

Big Tree saw little difference between his religion and the so-called modern religion of the whites. Junkin wrote that his “heart melted” after hearing the Kiowas’ plea and he gave them permission to hold their dance “upon condition that nothing bad or cruel would be practiced.”¹⁴⁰ Besides, Junkin thought, the Kiowa would stop dancing soon enough once their delegations returned from the north with evidence that the “new Christ” was really “a myth or humbug.” His prediction eventually came true, but not as quickly or easily as he thought. A different delegation, one that left the Kiowa Agency in September 1890, determined that Wovoka was a fraud. That information was carried home from Nevada by rail in February 1891.¹⁴¹

In mid-July, Agent Adams tried to put a stop to a dance planned by the Kiowas, Comanches, and Apaches. The Commissioner received a telegram purportedly from Joshua Given, an ordained Kiowa who had been educated at eastern boarding schools, asking his permission to allow the dance.¹⁴² Commissioner Morgan replied with his own telegram: “the dance among the Kiowas is positively prohibited.”¹⁴³ Commissioner Morgan also sent Given a more lengthy response in letter form, chastising him for making such a request on the behalf of

dance, a religious dance, and was not known to the Kiowa before this year,” see Maj. Wirt Davis to Asst. Adj. Gen., December 23, 1890, RBIA, RG 75, SC 188, Box 199, NARA (DC).

¹⁴⁰ “In the Indian Territory, The Kiowa, Comanches, Wichitas, Caddoes and Affiliated Tribes,” *Fairfield Ledger* July 9, 1890. Commissioner Morgan thought Junkin should “be called to the impropriety” for authorizing the dance, see CIA to Sect. Int., July 21, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Sent, Misc. Division, Letter Books Vol. 5, NARA (DC). Junkin later defended himself against the Commissioner’s displeasure by stating that he did all he could to prevent the dances and that he doubted anyone else would have done differently, see William W. Junkin to CIA, August 9, 1890, Agent Charles Adams to CIA, July 16, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 24987, Box 650, NARA (DC).

¹⁴¹ See Chapter Five.

¹⁴² Joshua Given to CIA, telegram, July 18, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 22043, Box 642, NARA (DC).

¹⁴³ CIA to Joshua Given, telegram, July 18, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Sent, Misc. Division, Letter Books Vol. 5, NARA (DC).

his people. “I should suppose that your stand and influence among these Indians, as a missionary to lead them in a higher and better way would have deterred them from asking you to make sure a request on their behalf,” Morgan scolded, “and would have made manifest to you the inconsistency and impropriety of your preventing such a request.”¹⁴⁴ They were “heathen dances,” that kept alive the “old customs and superstitions” that prevented the Indians from becoming “civilized and enlightened.” Morgan ordered Given to ally himself “clearly and unmistakably on the side of order, progress, thrift and christianity.” He reminded Given of his white friends who had helped him and expected him to have the “courage to stand firm, even among great loneliness, discouragements and obstacles.”

Given, however, denied sending the telegram and told Morgan that he was “greatly misled” if he thought he was sympathetic to the “non-progressive...heathen element.”¹⁴⁵ He claimed that Quanah Parker and other chiefs sent it and signed it “J. H. Given,” hoping that the Commissioner would put more credence in the arguments of a man like Given. Given did all he could, he said, to put an end to the dance. He criticized Inspector Junkin for allowing it and thought he should be better informed about Indian Affairs regulations. Once the Indians received permission from a “high authority” like Junkin, they were emboldened, Given wrote.

On July 20, Agent Adams sent his own telegram to the Commissioner to ask for troops to prevent the dancing. The Kiowa, Comanche, and Apache were “determined to hold their

¹⁴⁴ CIA to Joshua Given, July 21, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Sent, Misc. Division, Letter Books Vol. 5, NARA (DC).

¹⁴⁵ Joshua Given to CIA, August 4, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 24476, Box 649, NARA (DC). Given told Morgan that he was married to a white woman, “Surely you can see nothing in this tending to the downfall of Joshua Given?”

medicine dance,” and he did not think he could stop them alone.¹⁴⁶ “Nearly all of the Indians throughout the country are greatly exercised,” Adams had told the Commissioner four days earlier, “this man whom they call Jesus, sometime ago made his appearance at one of the northern agencies, and the report, probably greatly exaggerated, reached these Indians in a short while, and most of them believed.”¹⁴⁷ A party of soldiers from Fort Sill was sent to the Kiowa Agency (Anadarko, Indian Territory), to prevent the dance, which they did without a hint of violence. But the Kiowa were disappointed. They believed that Inspector Junkin had promised them the privilege.¹⁴⁸

Dancing also took hold at the neighboring Cheyenne and Arapaho Agency. The Northern Arapaho Sitting Bull, not to be confused with the Lakota chief, became the leading proponent of the ghost dance there. In June 1890, Sitting Bull, who was living at the Wind River Agency, sought permission to transfer south to the Cheyenne and Arapaho Agency. The Wind River agent agreed to ask the Cheyenne and Arapaho agent, Charles Ashley, if the transfer could happen. However, Ashley learned that Sitting Bull had gained prominence being “one of the Indians who claims to have seen Christ” and he did not want “further... agitation” at his agency.¹⁴⁹ Ashley heard that his Indians were expecting a visitor from Wind River who could “verify the reports received by them” and he believed Sitting Bull was that man. Sitting Bull’s transfer was initially denied, but the Wind River agent convinced Ashley that Sitting Bull would

¹⁴⁶ Agent Charles Adams to CIA, telegram, July 20, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 22264, Box 643, NARA (DC).

¹⁴⁷ Agent Charles Adams to CIA, July 16, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 22313, Box 643, NARA (DC).

¹⁴⁸ Asst. Adj. Gen. R. Williams to Adj. Gen. Div. of the Missouri, August 1, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 25370, Box 651, NARA (DC).

¹⁴⁹ Agent Charles Ashley to Agent John Fosher, June 12, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.19.10, Cheyenne and Arapaho, Letters Sent, Reel 32, NARA (OHS).

be no trouble during a visit. Sitting Bull must have made a good impression with Agent Ashley during his stay. In fact, by November, Ashley granted his transfer, calling Sitting Bull “an inoffensive man,” despite his growing prominence as a man who had “an interview with Christ.”¹⁵⁰

A lieutenant at Fort Sill called Sitting Bull “the most graceful sign talker” that he had ever met in the southwest, which allowed him to communicate effectively between the peoples of the Great Basin and the northern and southern Plains. Sitting Bull told the lieutenant that much of what had been said about him was not true, one of the many times ghost dancers disputed information whites had about the dance. Sitting Bull did not think that he saw Jesus alive, only a man who Jesus had “‘helped’ or inspired” who told him that persevering in the dance would “cause sickness and death to disappear.”¹⁵¹ By December 1890, Maj. Wirt Davis was calling Sitting Bull “an apostle like St. Paul,” “preaching the doctrine” off of the Cheyenne and Arapaho reserve to the Kiowa, Apache, and Wichita.¹⁵² Around three thousand Southern Arapahos, Southern Cheyennes, Caddos, Wichitas, Kiowas, and others gathered in September 1890 to dance under Sitting Bull’s direction. Most camps at the Cheyenne and Arapaho Agency were holding dances two to three times each week during that summer.¹⁵³ Despite the dancing

¹⁵⁰ Agent Charles Ashley to Capt. E. M. Hays, November 26, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.19.10, Cheyenne and Arapaho, Letters Sent, Reel 32, NARA (OHS).

¹⁵¹ Lt. H. L. Scott to Post Adjutant Fort Still, February 10, 1891, RBIA, RG 75, SC 188, Box 200, NARA (DC).

¹⁵² Maj. Wirt Davis to Asst. Adj. General, December 23, 1890, RBIA, RG 75, SC 188, Box 199, NARA (DC).

¹⁵³ James Mooney, *The Ghost-dance Religion*, 895.

and their visits north, the Southern Cheyennes, according to Col. J. F. Wade, were “good-natured” and “well-disposed” throughout the summer and fall.¹⁵⁴

The ghost dance spread quickly throughout Indian Territory. Tribes like the Pawnees, Poncas, and Caddos sought information about the dance from the Southern Cheyennes, Southern Arapahos, and Kiowas. A delegation of Poncas, Iowas, and Missouriias returned from a visit to the Cheyenne and Arapaho reserve to their people in late November and began dancing at soon after.¹⁵⁵ The Poncas visited the Cheyennes again in order to learn more about the dance and the Caddos, called “more civilized than most tribes” and “intelligent” by George Bird Grinnell, became interested.¹⁵⁶ On December 15, the Caddos and Arapahos had a “grand dance” before the winter season set in.¹⁵⁷ In early December, a large group of Kiowas and Comanches joined the Cheyennes at their reservation for dancing.¹⁵⁸ A newspaper reported that the Kiowa White Cloud, Hatch-e-she, and Running Bear were in Guthrie, Oklahoma “to invite some friends and their legal advisers” to a ghost dance, but all of the Indians there were “friendly and peaceful.”¹⁵⁹

Throughout 1890, Indians traveled to distant reservations, often by rail, to learn more about the dance and to carry it and its purpose to those outside of their own tribes. The post

¹⁵⁴ Col. J. F. Wade to Asst. Adj. Gen. Dept. of the Missouri, December 26, 1890, RBIA, RG 75, SC 188, Box 199, NARA (DC).

¹⁵⁵ “Spread of the Messiah Craze,” *Daily Alta*, November 26, 1890; James Mooney, *The Ghost-dance Religion*, 902.

¹⁵⁶ George Bird Grinnell, “Account of the Northern Cheyennes Concerning the Messiah Superstition,” *The Journal of American Folklore* 4, no. 12 (Jan.-Mar. 1891), 63.

¹⁵⁷ Maj. Wirt Davis to Asst. Adj. General, December 23, 1890, RBIA, RG 75, SC 188, Box 199, NARA (DC).

¹⁵⁸ Agent Charles Ashley to Capt. A. E. Woodson, December 4, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.19.10, Cheyenne and Arapaho, Letters Sent, Reel 32, NARA (OHS); *The Cherokee Telephone*, December 4, 1890.

¹⁵⁹ “Indians in Indian Territory to Have a Ghost Dance,” *Sacramento Daily*, December 25, 1890.

commander at Fort Washakie reported that “emissaries of the Indian ‘Christ’” had visited the Shoshones and Northern Arapahos at Wind River.¹⁶⁰ A group of Pine Ridge Cheyennes visited the Arapahos at Wind River in August 1890 and in October some Wind River Arapahos visited the Cheyennes at Tongue River.¹⁶¹ At one point, the Northern Arapahos assured the officers at Fort Washakie (on the Wind River reserve) that Pine Ridge Oglalas were visiting to impart their agricultural knowledge, not to share information about the dance. This was probably a lie, the Northern Arapahos did not want to damage the relationships with the officers they had taken pains to cultivate.¹⁶²

The new agent at Pine Ridge, D. F. Royer, blamed Kicking Bear for spreading the dance at his agency during the month of August 1890, but since Pine Ridge Indians were dancing before then, it is not clear what influence Kicking Bear had.¹⁶³ According to George Sword, the captain of the Indian police at Pine Ridge, Kicking Bear brought more information about the dance back to Pine Ridge sometime that summer after a trip to Wind River. Sword recalled that Kicking Bear spent time with the Northern Arapahos, shortly after the Pine Ridge agent arrested Good Thunder on their return from Nevada. While at Wind River, Kicking Bear watched the Northern Arapahos dance and learned their methods, once again making the Arapahos a primary

¹⁶⁰ E. R. Kellogg to Asst. Adj. Gen. Dept. of the Platte, October 27, 1890, RBIA, RG 75, SC 188, Box 199, NARA (DC).

¹⁶¹ E. R. Kellogg to Asst. Adj. Gen. Dept. of the Platte, October 27, 1890, RBIA, RG 75, SC 188, Box 199, NARA (DC); “The New Indian Messiah,” *New York Times*, November 16, 1890.

¹⁶² Loretta Fowler, *Arapahoe Politics, 1851-1978* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1986), 102.

¹⁶³ D. F. Royer to CIA, November 8, 1890, RBIA, RG 75, SC 188, Box 199, NARA (DC). Kicking Bear seems to have been joined with Sells-the-Pistol as the leading proponents of the dance at Pine Ridge, see Richard E. Jensen, ed., *The Indian Interviews of Eli S. Ricker* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2005), 145.

source of ghost dance knowledge for Indians from the northern and southern Plains.¹⁶⁴ Historian Jeffrey Ostler suspects that Kicking Bear returned to Pine Ridge in August “with a strong argument for continuing the dances even in the face of government opposition.”¹⁶⁵ Kicking Bear knew that the Pine Ridge agent wanted to suppress the movement, but he propagated the dance anyway.

Sometime between August 1890 and early October 1890, Kicking Bear instructed dancers at Hump’s and Big Foot’s (Spotted Elk) camps at Cheyenne River. In early October, he made his way to Standing Rock at the invitation of Sitting Bull (the Hunkpapa Lakota) and demonstrated the dance there. The dancing lasted several days. Sitting Bull had asked Agent McLaughlin on several occasions for permission to visit Cheyenne River, Pine Ridge, and Rosebud, but was denied the opportunity. Agent McLaughlin believed Sitting Bull wanted to involve himself in the dance. Instead, Sitting Bull directed six men to slip off the reserve and find Kicking Bear at Cheyenne River and invite him to Standing Rock.¹⁶⁶ McLaughlin had Kicking Bear arrested and ordered off the reserve, but the Indian police, “fearing the power of Kicking Bear’s ‘medicine,’” failed to do so. A few days later, however, Kicking Bear returned to Cheyenne River after Sitting Bull promised McLaughlin that his visitors would leave. Sitting

¹⁶⁴ George Sword, “The Story of the Ghost Dance,” 30-31. Kicking Bear witnessed dancers collapsing during the prolonged ceremony, seemingly dying and coming back to life. While unconscious, the dancers saw dead relatives and friends. According to Sword, Kicking Bear learned about the holy shirts and dresses from the Arapaho, how they were decorated, and how they could resist bullets. For more on Sword, see Robert Lee, “Warriors in Ranks: American Indian Units in the Regular Army, 1891-1897,” *South Dakota History* 21, no. 3 (1991), 268, 277, 303; Thomas Overholt, “Short Bull, Black Elk, Sword, and the Meaning of the Ghost Dance,” 171-195.

¹⁶⁵ Jeffrey Ostler, *The Plains Sioux*, 274.

¹⁶⁶ James McLaughlin, “The ‘Indian Messiah Doctrine,’” November 1890, James McLaughlin Papers, Microfilm Roll 20, Assumption College (Richardson, ND), 1968

Bull allowed the dancing at his camp to continue despite the disapproval of Agent McLaughlin.¹⁶⁷

Indians also continued to make the trek to Nevada to see Wovoka in person. Many of them arrived on the rail lines that cut through the Nevada reserves. A Nevada agent saw thirty-four men of several different tribes enroute to Wovoka's settlement near Walker Lake in April or May 1890.¹⁶⁸ Agent S. S. Sears, who learned Wovoka's identity from a Hualapai living outside his own agency in Arizona, reported that Wovoka was attracting "many Indians from abroad, the fame of his preachings expanding in the ratio of distance from point of delivery."¹⁶⁹ John Mayhugh, a former Western Shoshone agent who also accurately identified Wovoka (Jack Wilson) as the messiah, told the Commissioner that the Paiute in Nevada were expecting delegations from "most of the tribes north and northeast," including one led by Sitting Bull (the Hunkpapa Lakota), in November 1890.¹⁷⁰ Mayhugh advised the Commissioner to let these delegation make their investigations. He believed that tribes were seeking "the truth of the Prophecy," and upon seeing and listening to Wovoka, would not believe his claims.

Some Indians may have believed that the messiah or his prophet lived somewhere near the Crow reserve in Montana. According to Joshua Given, a group of Kiowas wanted to visit the Crows in August 1890 (after a visit with the Sioux) because they thought this. Given, an ordained Kiowa, asked the Commissioner not to allow the Kiowas to make the journey because it would "be very unfortunate for missionaries" at the Kiowa, Comanche, and Wichita

¹⁶⁷ James Mooney, *The Ghost-dance Religion*, 847. For a Native testimony on Sitting Bull's involvement in the dance, see Owen Lovejoy's article in *Word Carrier*, November 1890.

¹⁶⁸ Agent C. C. Warner to CIA, November 28, 1890, RBIA, RG 75, SC 188, Box 199, NARA (DC).

¹⁶⁹ Agent S. S. Sears to CIA, November 17, 1890, RBIA, RG 75, SC 188, Box 199, NARA (DC).

¹⁷⁰ John Mayhugh to CIA, November 24, 1890, RBIA, RG 75, SC 188, Box 200, NARA (DC).

reservation.¹⁷¹ That inaccurate piece of information, that the messiah might be in Montana, was carried to other agencies like Pine Ridge in August and September 1890.¹⁷² A network of communication linking the western reservations circulated all sorts of reports and many were not true. Groups from the Nez Perce Agency (late July), Fort Belknap (August), Fort Berthold (September), Tongue River (without permission in September), and Pine Ridge (late October) all visited the Crow in the summer and early autumn.¹⁷³ Groups of Crows visited Fort Berthold in July and Wind River in August.¹⁷⁴ Bad Belly's party of Crows was allowed to visit Pine Ridge and Rosebud in August for a period of sixty days.¹⁷⁵ Bad Belly, however, did not return to the Crow Agency. Instead, he became a ghost dancer and a "teacher or spreader of the Messiah

¹⁷¹ Joshua Given to CIA, September, 9, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 28577, Box 661, NARA (DC).

¹⁷² Spl. Agent E. B. Reynolds to CIA, September 25, 1890, RBIA, RG 75, SC 188, Box 199, NARA (DC).

¹⁷³ Agent M. P. Wyman to Northern Pacific RR Agent, July 21, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.19.21, Crow Agency, Press Copies of Misc. Letters Sent, Box 4, NARA (Denver); Agent M. P. Wyman to Agent A. O. Simmons, August 11, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.19.21, Crow Agency, Press Copies of Misc. Letters Sent, Box 4, NARA (Denver); Agent M. P. Wyman to Agent John Murphy, September 10, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.19.21, Crow Agency, Press Copies of Misc. Letters Sent, Box 4, NARA (Denver); Agent M. P. Wyman to Agent James Cooper, September 18, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.19.21, Crow Agency, Press Copies of Misc. Letters Sent, Box 4, NARA (Denver); Agent M. P. Wyman to Agent D. F. Royer, October 21, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.19.21, Crow Agency, Press Copies of Misc. Letters Sent, Box 4, NARA (Denver). There is no evidence that suggests that these visits were made because of the ghost dance, but one can assume that the movement was a topic of discussion between the groups.

¹⁷⁴ Agent M. P. Wyman to Fort Berthold Agent, July 2, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.19.21, Crow Agency, Press Copies of Misc. Letters Sent, Box 4, NARA (Denver); Agent M. P. Wyman to Shoshone Agent, August 30, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.19.21, Crow Agency, Press Copies of Misc. Letters Sent, Box 4, NARA (Denver).

¹⁷⁵ Agent M. P. Wyman to Pine Ridge and Rosebud Agents, July 19, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.19.21, Crow Agency, Press Copies of Misc. Letters Sent, Box 4, NARA (Denver). The party was told to "behave themselves properly" and not to accept presents from the Sioux.

craze,” traveling around for the next several years.¹⁷⁶ The agents’ decision to grant the visit backfired.

In August 1890, a group of more than thirty Lakotas (including four women and an unknown number of children) from both Cheyenne River and Rosebud sought permission to visit the Crow Agency, led by the Miniconjou Touch the Cloud and the Brulé High Hawk. The “dancing party” as they were described by Capt. Argalus Hennisee, had already been denied the privilege by Cheyenne River agent Charles McChesney, but after McChesney was replaced by Perain Palmer, the group had Capt. Hennisee seek permission for them, hoping Palmer had a more lenient visitation policy.¹⁷⁷ High Hawk told Hennisee that they wanted to trade feathers for ponies with the Crows, but Hennisee, who described High Hawk as “the leader of the dances,” knew that the group wanted to dance. Unfortunately, there is no record of High Hawk’s group making it to the Crow Agency. In November, Crazy Bear at Pine Ridge also sought permission to visit the Crows, but wrote directly to the Crows’ agent instead, who told Crazy Bear that he had to submit his request to his own agent.¹⁷⁸ In early December, Young Man Afraid of His Horses and forty three other Pine Ridge Oglalas visited the Crow (something Young Man Afraid of His Horses did regularly, see Chapter 3) and camped four miles from the agency. The Crow agent was concerned that the Oglalas were “talking up this Messiah Craze and are talking

¹⁷⁶ Crow Agent to Agent Charles Penny, January 3, 1895, RBIA, RG 75, SC 188, Box 200, NARA (DC).

¹⁷⁷ Captain A. G. Hennisee to Cheyenne River Agent, August 25, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.19.11, Cheyenne River, Box 251, NARA (KC). Hennisee was the commanding officer at Camp Cheyenne, which sat where the Belle Fourche River met the Cheyenne River in western South Dakota, just southwest of the Cheyenne River reserve. It is not clear why High Hawk, from Rosebud, was at Camp Cheyenne. High Hawk was a ghost dancing “hostile” who helped lead a number of Rosebud Brulé into the Badlands in December 1890, see *ARCIA*, 1891, 180.

¹⁷⁸ Agent M. P. Wyman to Crazy Bear, November 10, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.19.21, Crow Agency, Press Copies of Misc. Letters Sent, Box 4, NARA (Denver).

something of dancing ‘Ghost-dances.’”¹⁷⁹ He asked the commanding officer at Fort Custer to remove Young Man Afraid of His Horses and his people immediately. Even though Young Man Afraid of His Horse was never a ghost dance supporter, their presence there was “no good,” according to the agent, “the Crow would be more content and better satisfied without the presence of such people.”

Some agents allowed the Indians under their charge to travel to other agencies to learn more about the dance, often fully aware of the purpose of the visits. White Shield, a Southern Cheyenne, was given permission to visit the Tongue River Agency in August 1890 to investigate. Another Southern Cheyenne named White Buffalo, a former Carlisle student, made the same trip in September.¹⁸⁰ Agents, seemingly unconcerned about the dance’s spread, were still handing out travel passes in the fall and winter of 1890. White Elk, a Pawnee, was given a ten day pass to the Kiowa, Comanche, and Wichita Agency in late October.¹⁸¹ While it is impossible to know the purpose of his trip, White Elk surely brought some knowledge of the dance back to the Pawnees. He was a ghost dancer at one point in his life and he devised a ghost dance hand game after a vision experience.¹⁸²

¹⁷⁹ Agent M. P. Wyman to Col. A. K. Arnold, December 9, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.19.21, Crow Agency, Press Copies of Misc. Letters Sent, Box 5, NARA (Denver). In September, Red Cloud and a party of other Oglala visited Wind River so that Red Cloud could enjoy the health benefits of the hot springs there. Red Cloud was not a supporter of the dance, but he undoubtedly knew plenty about it. The agents at Pine Ridge and Wind River still allowed the visit, even though the government was concerned about the dance’s spread. See E. R. Kellogg to Asst. Adj. Gen. Dept. of the Platte, October 27, 1890, RBIA, RG 75, SC 188, Box 199, NARA (DC).

¹⁸⁰ Agent Charles Ashley to Capt. E. M. Hays, November 26, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.19.10, Cheyenne and Arapaho, Letters Sent, Reel 32, NARA (OHS); James Mooney, *The Ghost-dance Religion*, 895; “The Messiah Craze,” *New York Times*, November 24, 1890.

¹⁸¹ Clerk in Charge to Whom This May Come, Pass for White Elk, October 29, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.19.77, Pawnee Ponca Otoe, Reel 7, NARA (OHS).

¹⁸² Alexander Lesser, *The Pawnee Ghost Dance Hand Game*, 239.

Eventually, however, most agents realized that visitation only encouraged the dance's spread. In September, Agent Ashley was told that the Southern Cheyennes at his agency had sent out runners to the Indians at the Kiowa, Comanche, and Wichita reserve "requesting that as many of them as possible" to visit them. Ashley asked the Kiowa agent to do all he could to prevent that from happening.¹⁸³ But dancers just chose to travel without permission. In early December, a large number of Kiowas and Comanches met up with some Southern Cheyennes for dancing.¹⁸⁴

Lakota agents also struggled to curb visitation. On the last day of October 1890, the Cheyenne River agent, Perain Palmer, reported that Indians were coming from other agencies "to be initiated into the Ghost dance."¹⁸⁵ So many were coming that the rations at the camp were quickly exhausted, which led some to kill the agency's cattle to feed the dancers. The agency police watched the ghost dancing camps along the Cheyenne River closely to prevent the poaching, although some police joined the ghost dancers. Some children were attending the dances rather than school, but most kept good attendance. Palmer had some "influential Indians from some of the Christian camps" and Narcisse Narcelle, a man of French and Native descent married to a Lakota and employed as an agency farmer, travel to the dancing camps in an effort to convince the dancers to stop.¹⁸⁶ But Agent Palmer could do little to stop the flow of information about the dance from entering his agency. He thought that if he could remove

¹⁸³ Agent Charles Ashley to Agent Charles Adams, September 19, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.19.10, Cheyenne and Arapaho, Letters Sent, Reel 32, NARA (OHS).

¹⁸⁴ Agent Charles Adams to Capt. A. E. Woodson, December 4, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.19.10, Cheyenne and Arapaho, Letters Sent, Reel 32, NARA (OHS).

¹⁸⁵ Agent Perain P. Palmer to CIA, October 31, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 34242, Box 675, NARA (DC).

¹⁸⁶ Agent Perain P. Palmer to CIA, November 4, 1890, RBIA, RG 75, SC 188, Box 199, NARA (DC).

Hump, who seemed to be the “chief medicine man of the Ghost dance,” and the other leaders from the area, the “craze so great among these wild Indians” would quickly die out. If that was not possible, Agent Palmer believed he could manage the “temper” of the Indians if “no new apostles” came to Cheyenne River.¹⁸⁷ Palmer soon put his police and employees to task to watch out for any visiting apostles.

One day in November 1890, Agent Palmer journeyed the sixty miles to a dancing camp at Cherry Creek to survey the situation for himself. The dancers learned of the agent’s intentions about an hour before his arrived. They stopped dancing and around one hundred and fifty of the three hundred and fifty men, women, and children left the camp. When the agent arrived, the remaining two hundred were not dancing. Instead, they were dressed in “citizens’ clothing” (white man’s dress), which seemed odd to the agent. In fact, the Indians at the non-dancing camp nearby told the agent that the dancers had not worn citizens’ clothes in more than a month. The dancers who remained at Cherry Creek must have changed their clothes after hearing that their agent was on his way.¹⁸⁸ Agent Palmer learned little from the trip.

On November 10, however, an exasperated Palmer told the Commissioner that the Indians were coming to his reserve “from other agencies at will and go from this to other agencies, the Police have no longer any control of these dancers.” “There has been hopes of checking a further spread of the craze by persuasive means and good counsel,” the agent wrote, but the Indians refused to stop dancing. Around four hundred were dancing at the Cherry Creek

¹⁸⁷ Agent Perain P. Palmer to CIA, November 4, 1890, RBIA, RG 75, SC 188, Box 199, NARA (DC); Agent Perain P. Palmer to CIA, telegram, November 5, 1890, RBIA, RG 75, SC 188, Box 199, NARA (DC).

¹⁸⁸ Agent Perain Palmer to CIA, Agent Perain P. Palmer to CIA, December 1, 1890, RBIA, RG 75, SC 188, Box 199, NARA (DC).

camp, “quite a number” of which were “Christian Indians.” When told that the department was displeased with their actions, the dancers replied that they were displeased with the department. They would not stop dancing. Agent Palmer thought that the dancing “hostiles” from all the Sioux agencies were coordinating a joint “outbreak.”¹⁸⁹

By September 1890, perhaps one-fourth to one-third of the Lakota at Pine Ridge, Rosebud, Cheyenne River, and Standing Rock were believers or dance participants. One missionary at Rosebud estimated that ten percent were dancing at Standing Rock, fifteen percent at Cheyenne River, thirty percent at Rosebud, and forty percent at Pine Ridge.¹⁹⁰ Jeffrey Ostler estimates that between four and five thousand Lakota were “involved” in the ghost dance.¹⁹¹ At one dance along White Clay Creek at Pine Ridge, just eighteen miles north of agency headquarters, two thousand had gathered (including spectators).¹⁹² Whites suspected that the popularity of the dance was related to the Lakotas’ unhappiness with the meager rations they were receiving that year. According to Rev. Charles S. Cook, an ordained Yankton mixed-blood at the Holy Cross Episcopal Church, there was a sense of “growing unrest” at Pine Ridge in September 1890 caused by the Indians’ need for provisions and beef.¹⁹³ The unrest, Rev. Cook thought, “assumed shape through the wild fanaticism of the ‘ghost dance.’” Two or three hundred Indians would dance at a time and some fifteen or twenty would go into “a trance, and, on coming to, the various persons thus returning from the ‘new earth’ would get up and narrate

¹⁸⁹ Agent Perain P. Palmer, November 10, 1890, RBIA, RG 75, SC 188, Box 199, NARA (DC).

¹⁹⁰ Ninth Annual Report of the Executive Committee of the Indian Rights Association, 1891 (Philadelphia, 1892), 29; Jeffrey Ostler, *The Plains Sioux*, 274.

¹⁹¹ Jeffrey Ostler, *The Plains Sioux*, 274, footnote 32.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*, 274.

¹⁹³ Rev. Charles S. Cook to Rev. W. H. Hare, September 8, 1890, copy in Rev. W. H. Hare to CIA, September 11, 1890, RBIA, RG 75, SC 188, Box 199, NARA (DC).

how they had seen the Christ, shaken hands with him, &c.” The Pine Ridge agent told Cook that he had “never seen anything so crazing,” and that the dance would eventually “bring about a genuine trouble.”

Cook described a clash that occurred between the dancers and the Indian police at White Clay Creek. The dancers refused the orders of the police to stop dancing, which convinced Pine Ridge agent H. D. Gallagher to ride out to the gathering to disperse it. Guns were drawn but Agent Gallagher was able to avoid bloodshed thanks to the help of Young Man Afraid of His Horses (who was not a dancer). Gallagher reaffirmed his order that the dances must end, but the dancers ignored him. But he chose not to arrest anyone.¹⁹⁴ A few weeks later, a special agent, E. B. Reynolds, went out to White Clay Creek to see the dancing for himself. He told the leaders he was not there “to interfere.” Torn Belly allowed Reynolds to watch because, as Reynolds understood it, the dancers “were glad to see us as we would learn there was no harm in their dance.”¹⁹⁵ The dancers thought that the government might finally understand that the movement meant no harm, a similar strategy taken by the Pine Ridge sun dancers in 1881. Unfortunately, authorities were unconvinced, just as they were about the merits of the sun dance. Special Agent Reynolds believed that the strenuous, persistent dancing had ill effects on the Lakota’s health. He also thought that the dance was only reminding them of their old customs. The government was “spending large sums of money to wean them away” from these customs, he reasoned, why should the agents allow the dance to continue?

¹⁹⁴ Rev. Charles S. Cook to Rev. W. H. Hare, September 8, 1890, copy in Rev. W. H. Hare to CIA, September 11, 1890, RBIA, RG 75, SC 188, Box 199, NARA (DC); E. B. Reynolds to CIA, September 25, 1890, RBIA, RG 75, SC 188, Box 199, NARA (DC); *ARCIA*, 1890, 49; Jeffrey Ostler, *The Plains Sioux*, 275.

¹⁹⁵ E. B. Reynolds to CIA, September 25, 1890, RBIA, RG 75, SC 188, Box 199, NARA (DC).

In early November 1890, the new agent at Pine Ridge, D. F. Royer, reported that hundreds of Oglala were dancing at his reserve. At the White Clay Creek, Royer counted six hundred dancers under Torn Belly, His Fight, Bear Bone, and Jack Red Cloud. He estimated three hundred dancers at Medicine Root Creek under Little Wound and one hundred and fifty at Porcupine Creek under Knife Chief, Iron Bird, and Whetstone. There were around two hundred and thirty at Wounded Knee Creek under Big Road, Shell Boy, and Good Thunder, who had accompanied Kicking Bear to see Wovoka. According to Agent Royer, Little Wound was made “high priest over all the ghost dances” and he refused to end the dances.¹⁹⁶ He believed that all of the ghost dancers were “non-progressives,” those that were “hostile to the Department’s wishes, who harp in every council on the unfilled promises of the Government, defy the Agent and his police against law and order.” The “progressives,” who were not dancing, were “those who have always stood by the Agent.” While every agent had his own definition of what a progressive and a non-progressive was, Royer defined his Indians based on their obedience to him. Of course, Royer’s assessment was not accurate. Plenty of so-called progressives believed in the dance and some non-progressives did not.¹⁹⁷

Nevertheless, division grew at the Lakota agencies between the believers and the non-believers. Some non-believers, worried that continued dancing would only provoke a harsh reaction from the government, began telling federal authorities what they thought was happening

¹⁹⁶ D. F. Royer to CIA, November 8, 1890, RBIA, RG 75, SC 188, Box 199, NARA (DC); CIA to Sect. Interior, November 12, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Sent, Land Division, Letter Books 207-208, NARA (DC). Kicking Bear’s brother, Flying Hawk, was allowed to transfer to Pine Ridge from Standing Rock with his family in September 1890, see Agent H. D. Gallagher to Agent James McLaughlin, September 29, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.19.113, Standing Rock, Misc. Corres. Received, Box 33, NARA (KC).

¹⁹⁷ For a discussion on progressives and the movement, see Rani-Henrik Andersson, *The Lakota Ghost Dance of 1890*, 46-48, 80-81.

at the Lakota reservations. In late October, the progressive leaders at Rosebud, including Swift Bear, Hollow Horn Bear, Sky Bull, Pretty Eagle, and He Dog, wrote the President that many of their people were “crazy and excited over the new religion which has come among us.”¹⁹⁸ “On this account,” they continued, “and our being hungry – our young men are feeling very bad, and think the Government is trying to starve us to death.” The men urged the President to send the rations and beef that had been promised not only to prevent starvation, but also to stymie the popularity of the ghost dance. American Horse, Fast Thunder, Spotted Horse, and other progressives at Pine Ridge made a similar argument to their agent in late November.¹⁹⁹ George Sword, the Oglala captain of the U. S. Indian Police at Pine Ridge, wrote Commissioner Morgan that some of the head chiefs allowed their people to ghost dance, but he did not think that was the “right way to worship.”²⁰⁰ Some of the Oglala were “wild yet, they make up a Ghost dance pretty wild yet.” The dancers were told to stop but “they never listen” and Sword was “getting tired of it.”

At Standing Rock, Thomas Ashley, a twenty-three-year-old Hampton graduate, was disappointed that the ghost dance was affecting his people. “I am sorry to say some of us do not use all our education,” he wrote to his agent, “Oh father help me through this trouble so that I may live happy in this dark world and work for my Father which is in heaven.” Even Ashley’s wife had gone “back on old way” and was wearing Indian dress. “We must show there is a way

¹⁹⁸ Swift Bear, et al. to The Great Father, October 23, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 33608, Box 674, NARA (DC).

¹⁹⁹ Agent R. F. Royer to Act. Comm. R. V. Belt, November 27, 1890, RBIA, RG 75, SC 188, Box 199, NARA (DC).

²⁰⁰ George Sword to CIA, November (undated) 1890, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 36111, Box 680, NARA (DC). Sword was writing to ask the Commissioner for a “nice frame house.” According to Sword, Red Cloud was the only Indian that had a frame house at Pine Ridge.

a good many times better than the old way,” he declared.²⁰¹ Sam White Bird at the Lower Brulé Agency wrote a commentary in a November issue of the *Iapi Oaye*, the Dakota language paper printed by the Dakota Mission, titled “Messiya Itonsni” (The Lie of the Messiah, or the False Prophet).²⁰² He understood the ghost dance as the product of the devil (wakha sica) and his false prophet. White Bird hoped that his people would stop believing the lie, reminding them that the Bible warned that false prophets only led to destruction. In the English version of *Iapi Oaye*, called the *Word Carrier*, an anonymous writer argued that the devil intentionally designed the ghost dance as a “combination of the old heathen dance and the idea of a Messiah brought in by a gleam of Christianity” because missionaries had been so successful spreading the good news to the Sioux.²⁰³

Misinformation and the resulting fear spurred white authorities to end the dance on the Sioux reservations. Pine Ridge got a new agent, D. F. Royer, in October, just as the dance was attracting more attention. The timing was unfortunate. Royer came to the Dakota Territory from Pennsylvania in 1884. He was a medical doctor, teacher, and newspaper editor, but most importantly, Royer was a Republican. The 1888 presidential election of Republican Benjamin Harrison led to the spoils appointment of Royer. The more competent, but Catholic Democrat, Hugh Gallagher was released of his duties and the inexperienced Royer, who had little first-hand knowledge of Native Americans, took charge at Pine Ridge. Royer proved to be a disaster, his incompetence and timidity would lead to military intervention at the Sioux agencies. Agent

²⁰¹ Thomas Ashley to Agent James McLaughlin, November 19, 1890, James McLaughlin Papers, Microfilm Roll 2, Assumption College (Richardson, ND), 1968.

²⁰² Rani-Henrik Andersson, *The Lakota Ghost Dance of 1890*, 175.

²⁰³ *Ibid.*, 174.

Royer began sending desperate reports to the Commissioner in late October.²⁰⁴ On November 13, Royer claimed that a large number of dancers, perhaps two hundred, were armed and ready to fight after he tried to arrest a man for killing agency cattle. Royer continually asked for permission to leave Pine Ridge for a visit to Washington so he could convey the severity of the situation in person, a request that was always denied.²⁰⁵ Some accused him of wanting to leave out of fear. Agent Royer requested troops in a November 18 telegram to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs: “Indians are dancing in the snow and are wild and crazy. I have fully informed you that employees and government property at this agency have no protection and are at the mercy of these dancers. Why delay by further investigation? We need protection, and we need it now. The leaders should be arrested and confined in some military post until the matter is quieted, and this should be done at once.”²⁰⁶

Because of Royer’s alarm, reports of dissent at other Lakota agencies, and an inaccurate interpretation of the Lakota dance as a threat to civilian life, President Harrison decided that the ghost dance deserved the government’s complete attention.²⁰⁷ Commissioner Morgan told the Secretary of the Interior that the situation at Pine Ridge was “very critical” and because of Royer’s reports, believed that an “outbreak” might be imminent.²⁰⁸ There was a fear that the ghost dance could instigate rebellion on any reservation. Even though it was clear that a

²⁰⁴ Agent D. F. Royer to Acting CIA, October 30, 1890, RBIA, RG 75, SC 188, Box 199, NARA (DC).

²⁰⁵ Agent D. F. Royer to CIA, telegram, November 11, 1890, RBIA, RG 75, SC 188, Box 199, NARA (DC); Agent D. F. Royer to CIA, telegram, November 13, 1890, RBIA, RG 75, SC 188, Box 199, NARA (DC).

²⁰⁶ Agent D. F. Royer to CIA, telegram, November 15, 1890, RBIA, RG 75, SC 188, Box 199, NARA (DC).

²⁰⁷ Jeffrey Ostler, *The Plains Sioux*, 291-294.

²⁰⁸ CIA to Sect. Interior, November 13, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Sent, Land Division, Letter Books 207-208, NARA (DC).

minority of the Lakota seemed disobedient, the military was eventually tasked by the Department of the Interior to manage the situation. Troops from Fort Robinson under the command of Gen. John Brooke were ordered to Pine Ridge and Rosebud. Several other companies were stationed along the Cheyenne River and Fort Sully, Fort Bennett, and Fort Meade were garrisoned, shielding the white settlements surrounding the Badlands with soldiers. Agents were told to cooperate with the military. By November 20, nearly three thousand soldiers were ready to suppress any Indian threat, a fact that made all Lakotas nervous. After troops arrived, hundreds of Lakotas, believers and non-believers alike, left their camps in fear. Non-believers and some dancers sought refuge at the agency headquarters. A large group of Rosebud Brulé, perhaps two thousand, fled to the northern outskirts of Pine Ridge at Cuny Table in the Badlands, a camp later called the Stronghold by the military.²⁰⁹ Short Bull (who thought the soldiers were coming to Rosebud to kill him) and his followers were among those who camped there, refusing to give up the dance. Around fifty Rosebud Brulé went to the Cheyenne River Agency (and remained there until April 1891).²¹⁰ Two Strike first heard about the troops' arrival while at a trader's store, he put his "women and children into wagons and got on our ponies and left our homes."²¹¹

Pine Ridge officials ordered whites and Indians to head to agency headquarters for their own protection from roaming "hostiles." Some of these hostiles took advantage of the homes

²⁰⁹ Spl. Agent James A. Cooper to CIA, telegram, November 21, 1890, RBIA, RG 75, SC 188, Box 200, NARA (DC); Unknown to Agent Royer, telegram, November 28, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.19.85, Pine Ridge, Misc. Corres. Received, Box 154, NARA (KC); Agent J. George Wright to CIA, June 3, 1891, RBIA, RG 75.19.96, Rosebud, Copies of Letters Sent, Volume 20, NARA (KC).

²¹⁰ Agent J. George Wright to CIA, May 18, 1891, RBIA, RG 75.19.96, Rosebud, Copies of Letters Sent, Volume 20, NARA (KC).

²¹¹ Jeffrey Ostler, *The Plains Sioux*, 311. The presence of troops also made the settlers in the region panic, see Ostler, 306-309.

left empty. American Horse wrote to his friend James Landy in Cincinnati on two occasions to tell him that some Rosebud hostiles had severely damaged his and others' houses at Pine Ridge, stolen thirty-four of his horses, and killed all of his cattle. They also shot a large photo of American Horse given to him by Landy that was hanging on the wall. One bullet was sent through his forehead, another through the heart.²¹² They also damaged American Horse's pictures of the Landy family and stole the overcoat Landy had given him.²¹³ American Horse believed that he had "many enemies" because he had "the idea to lead my people toward civilization." He was not discouraged by the damage to his property, but, he confessed to Landy, "at times the position is a very unpleasant one among the Indians."²¹⁴ He thought some of the non-progressives hated him enough to shoot him, "if they should have an opportunity." "If these Indian should kill me remember I shall die for a good cause," he wrote.

²¹² American Horse to James Landy, December 1, 1890, American Horse Papers, MSS S-903, Yale Collection of Western Americana, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

²¹³ American Horse to James Landy, December 22, 1890, American Horse Papers, MSS S-903, Yale Collection of Western Americana, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University. 156 of American Horse's cattle were gone, he only found 13 by December 22. He found all his ponies except two at the hostiles' camp. American Horse also told Landy that the government should "make good the losses of the friendly Indians." He wondered if Landy could use his "influence" in his behalf to make sure they were compensated. Indians were allowed to request compensation for depredations done by the hostiles. Over 700 claims were made. Congress appropriated \$100,000 to pay the claims, but the funds were not sent out until summer 1892. See R. Eli Paul, "Dakota Resources: The Investigation of Special Agent Cooper and Property Damage Claims in the Winter of 1890-1891," *South Dakota History* 24, no. 3 (Winter 1994), 212-235. In January 1892, Thunder Beard wrote to Capt. George Brown at Fort Omaha, Nebraska to ask for help getting his claim filled, see Thunder Beard to George Brown, January 10, 1892, RBIA, RG 75.19.85, Pine Ridge, Misc. Corres. Received, Box 31, NARA (KC).

²¹⁴ American Horse to James Landy, December 1, 1890, American Horse Papers, MSS S-903, Yale Collection of Western Americana, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

Commissioner Morgan asked agents throughout the west to report their state of affairs to Washington, whether they knew the ghost dance existed at their agencies or not.²¹⁵ Agents and the Commissioner had been content discussing the subject by mail, but throughout November and December, reports required, more and more, the immediacy of the telegraph. Measures were designed to stop the dancing at the Lakota agencies with little success. Some agents began to limit the contact between the Indians under their charge with Indians from other agencies. Agent Steel would not allow some Gros Ventres from Fort Belknap, Montana to visit the Blackfeet Agency because he wanted to keep the Blackfeet quarantined. He described the ghost dance as a disease, he did not want his reservation “infected in any way” with it.²¹⁶ The ghost dance would “not be for the good of the soul, but for evil,” Steel told Agent A. O. Simmons at Fort Belknap, there needed to be “as little visiting as possible at present” between the agencies.

There was little interest in the dance at the Blackfeet reserve, but the Indians knew about the troops being sent to Pine Ridge and Rosebud. Agent Steel believed that the Blackfeet did not have enough knowledge about Christianity to be involved in the ghost dance. They knew “too little in regard to religion to have any knowledge of the second coming of Christ.”²¹⁷ But Steel was also worried that the Blackfeet could become interested in the dance if they received more information about it. He asked officials visiting his reserve to keep quiet because any inquiry or

²¹⁵ A circular letter was sent out on November 22, 1890.

²¹⁶ Agent George Steel to Agent A. O. Simmons, November 29, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.19.30, Ft. Belknap, Misc. Letters Received 1877-1915, Box 2, NARA (Denver).

²¹⁷ Agent George Steel to CIA, December 1, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.19.3, Blackfeet Agency, Copies of General Letters Sent, Box 1, NARA (Denver); Agent George Steel to Agent A. O. Simmons, November 29, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.19.30, Ft. Belknap, Misc. Letters Received 1877-1915, Box 2, NARA (Denver).

talk of the dance might have “injurious effect instead of good.”²¹⁸ “It is a very easy matter to agitate the minds of the Indians,” Steel declared, which compelled him to remain vague when several Blackfeet asked him what the ghost dance was.²¹⁹

Agent Simmons at Fort Belknap eventually took similar precautions to limit traveling. On November 21, he telegraphed the commanding officer at nearby Fort Assiniboine to report that the messiah craze was “very strong” at his agency and “nearly all” were “affected.”²²⁰ The dancers prepared “quietly” and kept their actions “secret.” Agent Simmons thought it would be wise to use a company of cavalry to “restrain” the outbreak of the dance by capturing “renegades” and the traveling “emissaries” of the movement. But only eight days later, Simmons presented a calmer assessment of the situation to the Commission of Indian Affairs. He reported that many of the Gros Ventres and Assiniboines at Fort Belknap had been “attacked” by “the Messiah craze,” but it was of a “light nature.”²²¹ There was no threat of violence. But he noted that the “craze” was brought to the people by a Gros Ventres man formerly of Fort Belknap, who had been living with the Northern Arapahos at Wind River. The man returned to his friends and family at Fort Belknap with news of the messiah and some received it “with unquestioning faith.”²²²

²¹⁸ Agent George Steel to CIA, December 16, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.19.3, Blackfeet Agency, Copies of General Letters Sent, Box 1, NARA (Denver).

²¹⁹ Agent George Steel to CIA, January 1, 1891, RBIA, RG 75.19.3, Blackfeet Agency, Copies of General Letters Sent, Box 1, NARA (Denver).

²²⁰ Agent A. O. Simmons to Maj. D. D. Van Valzah, November 21, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.19.30, Ft. Belknap, Misc. Letters Received 1877-1915, Box 2, NARA (Denver).

²²¹ Agent A. O. Simmons to CIA, December 5, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 38204, Box 685, NARA (DC).

²²² Agent A. O. Simmons to CIA, November 29, 1890, RBIA, RG 75, SC 188, Box 199, NARA (DC).

The agent at Rosebud, J. George Wright, also refused to allow suspected ghost dance leaders from visiting other reservations. Crow Dog and Two Strike repeatedly asked to visit Pine Ridge, but were denied each time. However, the two Brulé ignored the threat of punishment and went to Pine Ridge while Agent Wright was away from the agency.²²³ A special agent in charge in Wright's absence apparently gave Crow Dog and Two Strike the permission they needed.²²⁴ Wright blamed the later coordination between the dancers at Rosebud and Pine Ridge in mid-November 1890 on this visit.

At the Crow Creek and Lower Brulé agencies, Agent A. P. Dixon arrested three ghost dance "leaders from other reservations" in November, but discharged them after the men promised "good behavior."²²⁵ Agent Dixon realized that the movement between reserves was causing headaches for all the Sioux agents. He refused to issue or accept any new travel passes. A week later, after a small band of his Lower Brulé began dancing near Rosebud, Dixon had its leaders arrested, recalled all his Indians off the reservation with passes, and sent all visitors home.²²⁶ Slow Grower, Crazy Bear, Chasing Crane, Eagle Thunder, From Above, Gunny Sack Lodge, Bear Elk, Little Man, John Logan, Grinder, Running Rattler, Winter Chaser, Fool Elk, Butten, Pretty Voice Hawk, Blue Dog, and Shooting were all arrested "for participating in the 'Ghost Dance' and for endeavoring to induce others to engage therein with the object of inaugurating the 'Messiah Craze' now prevalent among the Sioux Indians; for disturbing the

²²³ Agent J. George Wright to CIA, December 5, 1890, RBIA, RG 75, SC 188, Box 199, NARA (DC).

²²⁴ Agent J. George Wright to CIA, March 10, 1891, RBIA, RG 75, SC 188, Box 200, NARA (DC);

²²⁵ Agent A. P. Dixon to Acting CIA, telegram, November 21, 1890, RBIA, RG 75, SC 188, Box 199, NARA (DC).

²²⁶ Agent A. P. Dixon to CIA, telegram, November 28, 1890, RBIA, RG 75, SC 188, Box 199, NARA (DC).

peace and mental attitudes of the Indians of that reserve, for violating the Rules and Regulations of the Indian Department and for a general disobedience of orders of the Agent in charge of said reservation.”²²⁷

The Yankton agent had the same strategy, to “prevent visitors from the western agencies...and to restrain the Indians from this agency from going abroad.”²²⁸ Nevertheless, dancers were still able to pass through their reservation borders. *The Omaha Daily Bee* reported that the vigilance of the agency authorities could do little to stop the “emissaries of the Messiah.”²²⁹ A party of Yanktons, who were “worked into a state of extreme excitement,” were headed to the Lower Brulé Agency, passing directly through Chamberlain, South Dakota on wagons led by fifteen or twenty teams of horses. Kuwapi, a Rosebud Brulé, was arrested in November at the White Swan community on the Yankton reserve for “teaching the Ghost Dance and preaching the doctrine of the New Indian Messiah.”²³⁰ William Selwyn, now living at and employed by the Yankton Agency, questioned Kuwapi to try to understand what he believed, why he believed it, and why he was at the Yankton reserve. He translated Kuwapi’s responses into English and sent them to the Yankton agent. Kuwapi said he first believed in the movement after he ate some of the buffalo meat that Wovoka sent with Short Bull back to the Rosebud Indians. It was not until he was more acquainted with the “doctrines” that he really believed in

²²⁷ Agent A. P. Dixon to Gen. Thomas Ruger, December 15, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.19.20, Crow Creek, Copies of General Letters Sent, Box 44, NARA (KC).

²²⁸ Agent E. W. Foster to CIA, November 25, 1890, RBIA, RG 75, SC 188, Box 199, NARA (DC).

²²⁹ “Messiah Emissaries at Work,” *The Omaha Daily Bee*, November 20, 1890.

²³⁰ Agent E. W. Foster to CIA, November 25, 1890, RBIA, RG 75, SC 188, Box 199, NARA (DC). White Swan is now under water. A series of dams on the Missouri River covered the area in the 1950s.

“the father.”²³¹ Kuwapi thought that in the spring, “the father” would restore the buffalo and other wild game and create a large cyclone to blow away the white people. He claimed that ghost dancers were visiting the “happy hunting ground” and seeing their dead friends and relatives during the black-outs caused by the dancing. Kuwapi admitted that he told a few Yanktons about the man who calls himself “the son of the Great Spirit,” but he “did not voluntarily express my wish for them to know and follow the doctrines of the new messiah.” He did not intend to teach the Yanktons, it was not a missionary mission he said, he only answered their questions. Selwyn asked Kuwapi if he thought the Rosebud Indians would defend their right to dance. Kuwapi said he thought some would, there had been talk of upcoming trouble in the spring.

Three days later, the Yankton agent reported that most at his agency treated the revelations of the new messiah with “derision and ridicule,” but that the older Indians hoped that it was true.²³² There were also the “half fed and half starved” who dreamed about the “old days when the Buffalo abounded.” The agent compared that desperate set to the “old Jews who longed for the old ways of Solomon in all his glory.” Both were attracted to the “doctrine” of the “advent of Christ.” The agent’s estimation was a common one: only desperation could lead people to believe in such a thing. Two weeks later on December 9, the agent inaccurately reported that none of the Yanktons were affected by the “religious delusions” that had “taken possession” of their relations’ minds (he did not mention those who were devoted to the movement just days before), but they were still “close and interested observers of the recent

²³¹ William Selwyn to Agent E. W. Foster, November 22, 1890, RBIA, RG 75, SC 188, Box 199, NARA (DC).

²³² Agent E. W. Foster to CIA, November 25, 1890, RBIA, RG 75, SC 188, Box 199, NARA (DC).

events that have disturbed the tranquility of some of the Sioux Indian Agencies further west.”²³³

While information about the dance was widely disseminated, not everyone believed. For instance, the new agent at Tongue River, John Tully, claimed that nobody was dancing on his reservation by late November, but the Northern Cheyennes were “fully informed of the disturbances existing elsewhere.”²³⁴

Upon his arrival at Tongue River, Tully was approached by Porcupine, who told him that he wanted to speak about the “new messiah.” Tully told him that he thought “it was all a humbug,” and Porcupine agreed (according to Tully), but he also said that “the man he met at Walkers Lake told him good things.”²³⁵ Porcupine lied to Tully. He did not think Wovoka was a fraud. He just did not want to make an enemy in Agent Tully. In the weeks before, Porcupine had been threatened with arrest by the temporary agent at Tongue River, special agent J. A. Cooper, if he continued to dance. Porcupine also told Cooper that he did not believe Wovoka, but Porcupine later admitted that he only said that to avoid being put in prison. Porcupine believed that the dance would “make friends between the whites and Indians,” but he knew that the federal officials did not have the same belief.²³⁶

Big Foot had similar misgivings. He told his agent at Cheyenne River in late October that he was “only leading or advising with a view to thoroughly investigate” the ghost dance, not promote it. But, according to his agent, Perain Palmer, Big Foot also said that “his people had

²³³ Agent E. Foster to CIA, December 9, 1890, RBIA, RG 75, SC 188, Box 199, NARA (DC).

²³⁴ Agent John Tully to CIA, December 8, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 38945, Box 687, NARA (DC); Agent John Tully to CIA, December 26, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 47, Box 692, NARA (DC).

²³⁵ Agent John Tully to CIA, December 1, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 37882, Box 684, NARA (DC).

²³⁶ “Proceedings of a council held with the Cheyennes on Tongue River, Montana, Nov. 18th, 1890,” RBIA, RG 75, SC 188, Box 199, NARA (DC).

been told that the presence of the Whites is all that has prevented the Messiah from coming,” which may have alarmed Palmer. Would Big Foot’s people try to hasten the coming of the messiah by removing the presence of the whites? By late November, Agent Palmer’s reports sounded dire. The ghost dancers were disobedient, Big Foot, Hump, and other leaders were unwilling to talk to the agent or the agency farmers, and it was thought that Big Foot had his people preparing for war. Some of the non-dancers told him that the dancers wanted to fight soon.²³⁷ Little No Heart, a progressive chief, asked Palmer via letter to assign more than one policeman at the dancing camp at the mouth of the Moreau River.²³⁸ Palmer thought he had positive evidence that “the best make of guns” were being sold to the dancers by the traders.²³⁹ In mid-December, around three hundred men, women, and children ignored ration day at Cheyenne River and remained at Big Foot’s camp, Hump’s camp, or at Cherry Creek to dance.²⁴⁰

Soon, however, reports at Cheyenne River began to sound more optimistic. Narcisse Narcelle was able to convince four hundred and eighty-two dancers (including twenty-six from the Standing Rock Agency) to leave their camps and go to the agency headquarters, where many surrendered their guns. According to Agent Palmer, Hump was “induced to turn against the dancers” and those who came in to the agency were “quiet and orderly” and they “expressed

²³⁷ Agent Perain Palmer to CIA, December 1, 1890, RBIA, RG 75, SC 188, Box 199, NARA (DC).

²³⁸ No Heart to Agent Perain Palmer, November 5, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.19.11, Cheyenne River, Box 570, NARA (KC). Little No Heart asked Palmer for fifteen loads of lumber for the house he was building. He also wanted to add a kitchen and a cellar.

²³⁹ Agent Perain Palmer to CIA, December 1, 1890, RBIA, RG 75, SC 188, Box 199, NARA (DC).

²⁴⁰ “Number and names of Indians absent and not drawing Rations at Cheyenne River Agency SD,” December 22, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.19.11, Cheyenne River, Box 364, NARA (KC).

their regrets for the trouble they caused.”²⁴¹ But Big Foot and his fewer than one hundred men refused to come in. They could not be persuaded to stop dancing. On December 12, Narcelle reported to Agent Palmer that the dancing at Cherry Creek was not letting up. The camp “just got the news” that the Pine Ridge and Rosebud Indians had “left their Agencies and gone west.”²⁴² According to Narcelle, the dancers were excited about it. Special Agent James Cooper at Pine Ridge told the agent at Fort Berthold of the “serious trouble” there, it looked “very much as though bloodshed will ultimately be the result here.”²⁴³ He thought that six hundred “well armed warriors” went into the Badlands on November 30 and declared “their intention to fight.”

Dancers at the “hostile” camps in the Badlands remained in contact with the outside world via letter. Lebbeus Foster Spencer, a former agent at Rosebud, corresponded with several headmen in December 1890, including Two Strike. Foster found it difficult to get his letters to those in the “hostile camp,” like Grey Eagle Tail, Brave Eagle, Big Turkey (who was baptized at the Catholic mission just before he joined the hostiles, “probably to put himself in rapport with the Messiah,” W. C. Courtis, the postmaster at Rosebud, surmised), and others, but at least one of Two Strike’s letters got through.²⁴⁴ A former Carlisle student named Raymond Stewart was described as Little Wound’s personal secretary, penning letters and translating for the chief (see

²⁴¹ Agent Perain P. Palmer to CIA, December 9, 1890, RBIA, RG 75, SC 188, Box 199, NARA (DC); Agent Perain Palmer to CIA, January 5, 1891, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 1516, Box 695, NARA (DC).

²⁴² Narcise Narcelle to Agent Perain Palmer, December 12, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.19.11, Cheyenne River, Box 570, NARA (KC).

²⁴³ Special Agent James Cooper to Agent John Murphy, December 1, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.19.31, Ft. Berthold, Corres. Received, Box 1, NARA (KC).

²⁴⁴ W. C. Courtis to L. F. Spencer, December 19, 1890, Lebbeus Foster Spencer Papers, MSS 596, History Colorado Stephen H. Hart Library and Research Center.

Chapter 6).²⁴⁵ On November 22, three days after troops arrived at Pine Ridge, Little Wound wrote to Agent Royer (with the help of John Sweeney, teacher at the No. 8 Day School at Pine Ridge) from the Badlands. He said that his people would not stop dancing even though the troops were on their way. “What are they coming for,” he asked, “we have done nothing.” He continued:

Our dance is a religious dance and we are going to dance until Spring, If we find then that Christ does not appear we will stop dancing, but in the mean time troops or no troops, we shall start our dance on this creek in the morning. I have also understood that I was not to be recognized as a chief no longer. All that I have to say to that is that you nor the white people made me chief and you can throw me away if you please, but let me tell you Dr. Royer that the Indians made me chief and by them I will be recognized as such as long as I live. I have also been told that you intended to stop our rations and annuities; Well for my part I don't care the little rations we receive do not amount to anything but Dr. Royer if such is the case please send me word so that my people and myself will be saved the trouble of going to the Agency.²⁴⁶

Sweeny told Royer that he thought Little Wound would “continue to dance until he is stopped by force.”²⁴⁷ Five days later, however, Little Wound and Big Road yielded without violence. But Kicking Bull and Short Bull were still in the Badlands, Big Foot remained uncooperative, and Two Strike's camp was on Wounded Knee Creek. Over the course of the next month, agency officials and the military attempted to quell the ghost dancing at these holdout dancing camps. Agents forwarded lists of the men they thought were most responsible for the trouble and who should be arrested (Royer at Pine Ridge had by far the longest list). Eventually, after thorough negotiations between dancers, progressives, and white authorities, all would be forced to come in to Pine Ridge and surrender.

²⁴⁵ W. C. Courtis to L. F. Spencer, December 19, 1890, Lebbeus Foster Spencer Papers, MSS 596, History Colorado Stephen H. Hart Library and Research Center.

²⁴⁶ John M. Sweeney to Agent R. F. Royer, November 22, 1890, MS 3176, The Edward E. Ayer Collection, The Newberry Library (Chicago).

²⁴⁷ *New York Times*, November 23, 1890.

On December 6, E. G. Bettelyoun, an Oglala and former student at the Lincoln Institute in Philadelphia, described the atmosphere at Pine Ridge to his former teacher.

All the Indians of this Agency have quieted down. It is the Indians of Rosebud reservation that are making all the trouble now. They have been making good many depredations and are afraid to come to the Agency for fear that the troops will make them prisoners. I think it will be settled peaceably if they come in. It is some of the Indians that have been wanting to get transferred from Rosebud Agency to this Agency. I don't like to much because some of it might not be so. I think all the papers are making it worse then it is. Remember me to all school mates.²⁴⁸

²⁴⁸ E. G. Bettelyoun to Mary McHenry Cox, December 6, 1890, RBIA, RG 75, SC 188, Box 199, NARA (DC).

CHAPTER 5 – “We Never Prayed for Anything But Happiness”: Making Sense of the Movement

In November 1890, George Bird Grinnell told the *New York Herald* that the Northern and Southern Cheyennes frequently visited “back and forth” and had kept “a constant correspondence by letter” with each other.¹ In addition, the Wind River Indians were sending “reports and letters...relative to the second coming” to Agent Ashley’s Cheyennes and Arapahos, which created excitement. Grinnell, reporting to the *New York Times* from the Cheyenne and Arapaho Agency, discovered that the Southern Cheyennes and other tribes in Indian Territory “frequently” received letters from “Northern Indians...touching on religious topics, and sometimes these letters contain most extravagant statements, which, however, are received by the Indians with implicit faith.”² One letter claimed that the army tried to arrest the messiah, but they could not physically hold onto him. Another told of an arrest attempt by General Nelson Miles that was foiled after the messiah made it rain for seven days and seven night, sweeping away the soldiers in a flood. Only Gen. Miles escaped to tell the tale. Grinnell also noticed “a lot of letters” were being received by the Pawnee from the “Sioux,” who were “trying to get the Pawnees to unite with them.” Grinnell thought this correspondence was “one of the disadvantages, perhaps, of the Indian education.”³

Students in that Indian educational system did in fact receive letters from home about the new messiah while at their boarding schools. Several Indian students at the Haskell Institute in Lawrence, Kansas received letters from relatives by December 1890. One girl got a letter from

¹ *New York Herald*, November 23, 1890; reprinted in George Bird Grinnell, “Account of the Northern Cheyennes Concerning the Messiah Superstition,” *The Journal of American Folklore* 4, No. 12 (1891): 61-69.

² “The New Indian Messiah,” *New York Times*, November 16, 1890.

³ *New York Herald*, November 23, 1890.

her father at the Kiowa Agency four hundred miles away. He told her “not to ridicule the coming of the Indian’s Christ, for she knows nothing of the wondrous manifestations the Indians have received from Him.”⁴ Another letter from an uncle to a nephew told of the revelations that occur at ghost dances, the trances with dead relatives, and their interviews with the messiah. The uncle advised his nephew to attend a dance before he judged the truth of the messiah.

In November, White Buffalo Man was arrested by the army because he refused to stop dancing at Cheyenne River. He was taken to Fort Pierre and placed under guard, but while he was with the state attorney, he was able to write a letter (or have a letter written) in English to his nephew Sitting Bull (the Hunkpapa Lakota) at Standing Rock.

I understand that my rashens are stoped, and I am now under guard by the soldiers, and that they are talking of sending me off somewhere. They wanted me to stop the dance, and I did not do it, so I understand that is what it is all done for. Will you let me know why they are doing me this way. If you can stop the action taken against me I will take it a great favor. Respectfully White Buffaloman⁵

Some agents were determined to stop this flow of information between reservations. They realized that letter writing needed to be controlled to halt the progress of the ghost dance. So many letters reached the Kiowa, Comanche, and Wichita Agency that the agent there, Charles Adams, requested the power to censor the Indians’ mail. He wanted the Postmaster General to instruct the postmaster at Anadarko, Oklahoma to deliver all the mail sent to the Indians into his hands for his “perusal.” He thought the Indians were “in an unsettled frame of mind” and “steps should be taken to avoid future trouble.” For Adams, the solution was to prevent his population

⁴ *New York Times*, November 22, 1890. Story also ran throughout the country, in *Pittsburg Dispatch* Nov. 22, *Fort Worth Weekly Gazette* Nov. 23 and 25, and *Deseret Evening News* Jan 8, 1891.

⁵ White Buffalo Man to Sitting Bull, November 11, 1890, reproduced in Stanley Vestal, *New Sources of Indian History*, 38-39.

from communicating with the outside world. "I consider this the principal precaution to be taken," he wrote. He continued:

I am fully convinced that this plan will save me an immense amount of trouble in the future. I was, a short while ago, made aware of the contents of a letter written to an Indian Chief, and they were of such a character that he should never have heard them at all. The letter was from one of the Northern Agencies and spoke of the new Christ that has been discovered in that locality, and contained a lot of instructions to these Indians that should never be carried out. Now had this letter fell into my hands originally, he never would have seen or the contents.

These Indians communicate with each other through the mails to a great extent, and know by these means exactly how things are progressing in the land where this man is now convincing his followers that the white man must go, and that in the near future, nothing but Indians and buffalo will inhabit the earth.

But Adams could do little to stop the letters from reaching Native eyes. In late December 1890, Maj. Wirt Davis reported that many of the Indians at the Cheyenne and Arapaho and the Kiowa, Comanche, and Wichita agencies could read and write and were receiving letters from friends and relatives at Pine Ridge, Tongue River, and Wind River.⁶ But the Southern Cheyennes were losing enthusiasm for the dance in late December, according to Maj. Davis, because the "latest letters from the Northern Cheyenne say that they have quit dancing on account of the presence of troops and the excitement prevailing there." Because of the information provided by their northern relatives, the Southern Cheyenne knew that the government was threatening to use force to end the dance there. The same might happen at their agency. There was not a loss of interest in the movement, just a more cautious approach.

Adams was not the only agent who wanted to censor Indian mail. The Cheyenne River agent reserved the right to read "all the letters received by Indians" so that could be "made

⁶ Maj. Wirt Davis to Asst. Adj. General, December 23, 1890, RBIA, RG 75, SC 188, Box 199, NARA (DC).

acquainted with the contents.”⁷ He thought that the mail was the only way his Indians could obtain information about the troubles outside the reserve, particularly at Pine Ridge. Eventually, in April 1891, over three months after Wounded Knee, the agent determined that the mail coming in from Pine Ridge would not cause trouble.⁸ Even the Superintendent of Indian Schools approved the seizing letters from students at the Genoa Indian School in Nebraska. He thought the contents of some letters “passed between the Genoa students and their friends on the reservation” might “be of some value” to Indian Affairs.⁹ The superintendent at Genoa promised to send any relevant information (taken from the private letters of his students) to the Commissioner.

Agent James McLaughlin not only made it difficult for the Hunkpapa Lakotas at Standing Rock to receive letters, he also restricted the sending of letters. The Lakotas, however, did not take that lying down. In an extraordinary letter to the Secretary of the Interior, Running Antelope, Standing Bear, and Thunder Hawk protested that the post office at the agency was under the control of McLaughlin. Some letters were not being sent or received. “To send you these few lines,” the men wrote, “we had to run the risk of being imprisoned as we had to steal across the river in the night time.”¹⁰ The group traveled to the Vanderbilt Post Office in Campbell County, South Dakota, across the Missouri River from Standing Rock, to mail their letter of complaint because they were “watched night and day.” The agency officials wanted control over the mail because they were “afraid that if the world would know the truth, justice

⁷ Agent P. Palmer to CIA, April 8, 1891, RBIA, RG 75, SC 188, Box 200, NARA (DC).

⁸ Agent P. Palmer to CIA, April 8, 1891, RBIA, RG 75, SC 188, Box 200, NARA (DC); Agent P. Palmer to CIA, March 2, 1891, RBIA, RG 75, SC 188, Box 200, NARA (DC).

⁹ David Dorchester to CIA, April 30, 1891, RBIA, RG 75, SC 188, Box 200, NARA (DC).

¹⁰ Running Antelope, et al to Sect. of Interior, March 20, 1891, *James McLaughlin Papers*, Microfilm Roll 2, Assumption College (Richardson, ND), 1968.

would be done.” The men accused McLaughlin of favoring only Catholic Indians. “We understood we had freedom of religion but we are indirectly compelled to be a catholic,” they argued, “the present Catholic society at this Agency, Mrs. McLaughlin leader, is more dangerous than all the Ghost Dances put together.” It is not known what the Secretary of the Interior made of Running Antelope, Standing Bear, and Thunder Hawk’s letter, but McLaughlin was not reprimanded for censoring the mail.

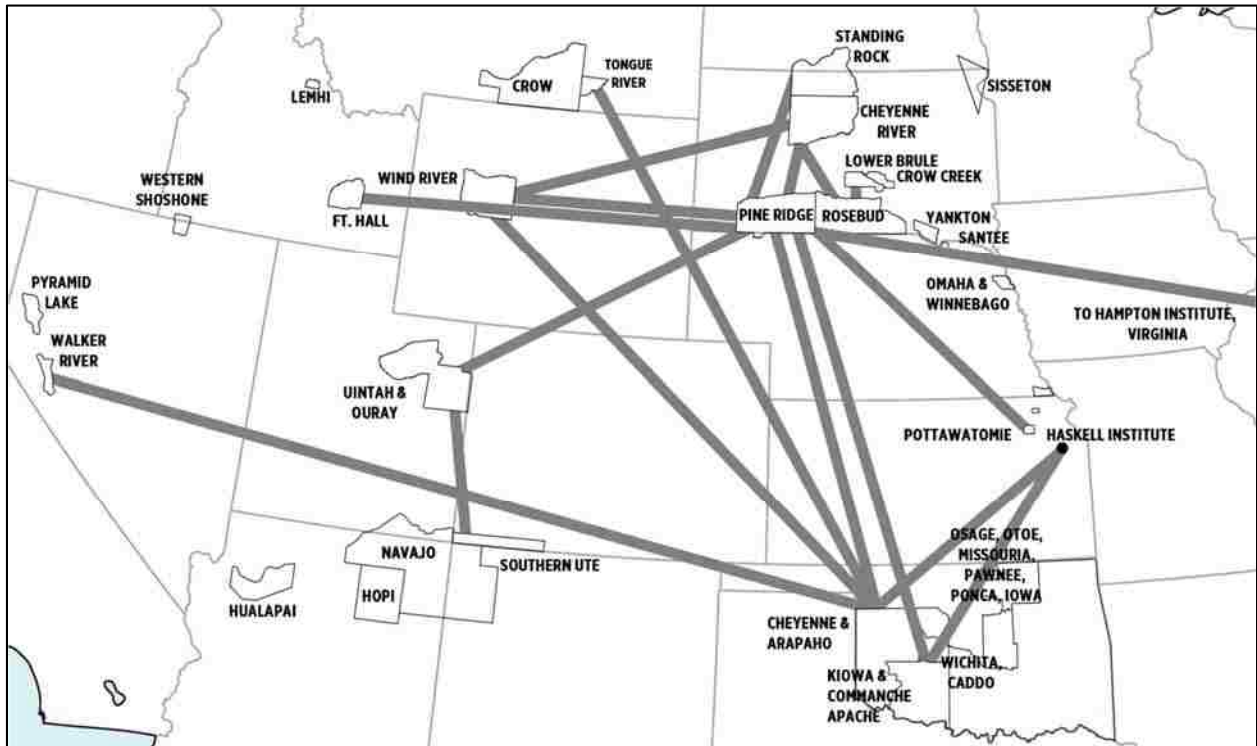
McLaughlin reported a surge of belief in October 1890. He thought the movement had been “engrafted” to Standing Rock from Pine Ridge and Rosebud. The “infection has been wonderful and so pernicious that it now includes some of the Indians who were famously with the progressives and more intelligent,” he wrote, “their inherent superstition having been thoroughly aroused.”¹¹ McLaughlin and other agents wanted to intercept the letters they thought could create conflict at their reservations. One letter intercepted at the Standing Rock agency office (post marked at Pine Ridge on December 7, 1890) came from Spotted Mountain Sheep (Wecinskayapigleska) intended to be read by his brother-in-law Kills Standing and Luke Najinhkte. Spotted Mountain Sheep told the Standing Rock men that there were twenty companies of soldiers at Pine Ridge. “We thought of fighting them,” he wrote, “but gave it up until the spring. Then is the time we decided on fighting.”¹² McLaughlin did not want information about a possible uprising being sent to his reserve. To make matters worse, Spotted

¹¹ Agent James McLaughlin to CIA, October 17, 1890, RBIA, RG 75, SC 188, Box 199, NARA (DC).

¹² Spotted Mountain Sheep to Kills Standing, December 7, 1890, reproduced in Stanley Vestal, *New Sources of Indian History*, 41-42. Spotted Mountain Sheep closed his letter with: “Now my Brotherinlaw I wish to ask you for some sweetgrass, so if you can let me have it I wish you would write me a letter. That is all I have to say.”

Mountain Sheep exaggerated the number of Brulé (10,100 lodges) that arrived from Rosebud to support the dance, a point that probably concerned McLaughlin.

FIGURE 25: LINKS OF CORRESPONDENCE CONCERNING THE GHOST DANCE, 1889-1894¹³



Natives used another form of the printed word to keep informed about the dance and the government’s response to it. Newspapers were eagerly printing sensational reports on the “messiah craze,” as it became known. The dancers at the Cherry Creek camp at Cheyenne River, which the government thought to be full of hostiles, regularly sent “educated Indians” to Pierre to buy newspapers to discover the latest news.¹⁴ From Standing Rock, Agent McLaughlin told Commissioner Morgan in November 1890, “there are now so many of our Indians who speak

¹³ The links represent one or more than one letters about the ghost dance connecting Natives on different reservations or at Indian schools.

¹⁴ “The Scare Subsiding,” *Sacramento Daily Union*, November 30, 1890.

English and read the newspapers that current news is soon known to them.”¹⁵ Officials noticed that English literacy seemed to be giving the Natives an unforeseen advantage in strategizing against agency and military tactics to end the ghost dance. Papers throughout the country reported on November 18, 1890 that General Nelson Miles was hesitant to release troop movements to the press because Indians were reading about it in the newspapers and adjusting accordingly. “Anything I might say would be telegraphed all over the country and tomorrow would be in the Indian camps,” General Miles told the reporter, “I have nothing to say now beyond the fact that there is reason for grave apprehensions of trouble with the Indians on the plains.”¹⁶ Miles was reticent with the press on November 18 for a reason; he ordered troops onto Pine Ridge and Rosebud on the 19th. The Indians did not see it coming.¹⁷

The army hoped to be able to weed out the “hostile,” ghost dancing Indians from the “friendlies,” but it proved difficult.¹⁸ Frederic Remington, who was emerging as America’s great artist of Western themes, reported in *Harper’s Weekly* that the military did not anticipate the Natives’ ability to read. The Lakota were able to gather intelligence by glancing at a front page. “The thing that is most remarkable about this concentration of troops,” Remington observed, “is that the white people of the country read it in the evening papers, and with the first rays of tomorrow’s sun the Ogallalas, the Cheyennes, and the Sitting Bull people will see it with their own

¹⁵ James McLaughlin to Commissioner Morgan, November 15, 1890, *James McLaughlin Papers*, Reel 21 (Richardson, ND: Assumption College, 1968).

¹⁶ “General Miles’ Reticence,” *Omaha Daily Bee*, November 18, 1890. The *Omaha Bee* also reported, just below the Miles interview in the November 18 edition, that armed Indians in North Dakota were coming south to kill white settlers, an outrageous claim that never occurred, like many other reports during those months.

¹⁷ Rani-Henrik Andersson, *The Lakota Ghost Dance*, 137.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 138.

eyes.”¹⁹ Remington wondered, “Why did not the white people know it before?” “The reason is this,” he wrote:

Not until late years could the Indians read English, but now the school-boys and squaw men can, and I have picked up copies of the New York and Chicago papers on the counters of an Indian trader’s store, where a room was full of Indians, three or four of whom could probably read as well as most men. The cause of the secrecy is at once apparent. . . In these days a military officer has to conduct his operations as secretly in Indian war as he would in a civilized case.²⁰

Remington proposed that an Omaha paper should print misinformation about troop numbers to trick the hostiles into rushing into an unwinnable battle. “That paper would be on the counter in a trader’s store inside of a day and a half, and the Ogallalas in all probability, would be scampering over the plains on the way to meet the northern Cheyennes and join issue with Uncle Sam’s troops,” he wrote.

But Natives did not believe everything they read in the papers. They knew reports were typically inaccurate. A few weeks after the troops arrived, an “Indian spy” named Ghost Horse reported to the *Chicago Tribune* (in a story titled, “Hostiles are Well Posted”) that a number of educated Indians from the Cherry Creek dancing camp came to Pierre, South Dakota regularly to buy the daily newspapers in order to interpret the reports for their council. Great Horse told the *Tribune* that the Indians laughed “heartily when they heard of the great alarm everywhere. . . It seemed to strengthen their belief that the Messiah was coming and that the whites were becoming afraid and getting ready to die off or flee and leave the lands to the Indians.”²¹

Historians have studied how the press shaped the national perception of the “messiah craze” and created white anxiety that led to events like the Wounded Knee tragedy, but little has

¹⁹ “The Art of War and Newspaper Men,” *Harper’s Weekly*, December 6, 1890.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ “Hostiles are Well Posted,” *Chicago Tribune*, November 30, 1890; “The Cherry Creek Hostiles,” *Omaha Daily Bee*, November 30, 1890.

been said about the Native reaction to the sensationalization of their beliefs.²² Beginning in the summer of 1890 and peaking in the fall of 1890, newspapers printed plenty of false rumors of Indian outbreaks and violence, some that prompted fear in the white populations surrounding reservations. Reporters often printed outright lies to dramatize their papers' coverage. As early as June 1890, some Natives were afraid of the effect the press was having on white minds. Frank Locke, a twenty-four-year-old Brule at Rosebud, wrote that his people were "very much fear that our friends in East will hear the report of the outbreak of the Rosebud which will be a story."²³ Locke said this outbreak was only "a little confusion" between the Indians and the police about a man who ran away from the guard house. Everything was quiet at Rosebud, according to Locke, but they were "afraid that newsman will make too big a picture of that might excite our friends." By December 1890, Locke's fears were realized. He blamed the newspapers, who were heavily invested in the "messiah craze," for the troubles on the South Dakota agencies. Locke believed the reporters intentionally frightened the public because they were only interested in getting paid.²⁴ Edgar Fire Thunder at Pine Ridge reported in late November that there was little worry there, only "some of the Indians had Ghost Dance, but think they will stop now."²⁵ A "good

²² See Elmo Watson, "The Last Indian War, 1890-91 – A Study of Newspaper Jingoism," *Journalism Quarterly* 20 (September 1943): 205-219; Todd Kerstetter, "Spin Doctors at Santee: Missionaries and the Dakota-Language Reporting of the Ghost Dance and Wounded Knee," *The Western Historical Quarterly* 28, no. 1 (Spring 1997): 45-67; Rani-Henrik Andersson, *Lakota Ghost Dance of 1890*, 192-250; Karen A. Bearor, "The *Illustrated American* and the Lakota Ghost Dance," *American Periodicals* 21, no. 2 (2011), 143-163; John M. Coward, *The Newspaper Indian: Native American Identity in the Press, 1820-90* (University of Illinois Press, 1999).

²³ Frank Locke to R.H. Pratt, June 23, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 22502, Box 644, NARA (DC); Rani-Henrik Andersson, *The Lakota Ghost Dance of 1890*, 192-250.

²⁴ *The Indian Helper*, December 26, 1890.

²⁵ Ibid.; R. H. Pratt to Edgar Fire Thunder, December 2, 1890, Richard Henry Pratt Papers, MSS S-1174, Outgoing Letters, Box 10, Folder 4, Yale Collection of Western Americana, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

many soldiers” had arrived because “the newspapers told that the Indians wanted to fight white men.” “That’s all a mistake,” he wrote. Frank Twiss, also at Pine Ridge, blamed the newspapers as well.²⁶ Two Strike and Little Wound, both dance leaders, told the *Omaha Daily Bee* that they did not appreciate how they were being portrayed in the newspapers as bad people. They were simply practicing their religion.²⁷

An Indian named John Daylight (Masse-Hadjo) wrote a letter to the *Chicago Tribune* defending the ghost dance movement.²⁸ Responding to an editor who mocked the movement, Daylight presented a blistering critique of American Christianity, accusing whites of hypocrisy and cruelty. From the Quapaw Mission in Indian Territory, he wrote:

You say: ‘If the United States army would kill a thousand or so of the dancing Indians there would be no more trouble.’ I judge by the above language you are a ‘Christian’ and are disposed to do all in your power to advance the cause of Christ. You are doubtless a worshiper of the white man’s Savior, but are unwilling that the Indians should have a ‘Messiah’ of their own. The Indians have never taken kindly to the Christian religion as preached and practiced by the whites. Do you know why this is the case? Because the Good Father of all has given us a better religion – a religion that is all good and no bad, a religion that is adapted to our wants. You say if we are good, obey the ten commandments, and never sin any more we may be permitted eventually to sit upon a white rock and sing praises to God forevermore and look down upon our heathen fathers, mothers, brothers, and sisters who are howling in Hell. It won’t do. The code of morals as practiced by the white race will not compare with the morals of the Indians. We pay no lawyers or preachers, but we have one-tenth part of the crime that you do. If our Messiah does come we shall not try to force you into our belief. We will never burn innocent women at the stake or pull men to pieces with horses because they refuse to join in our ghost dances. You white people had a Messiah, and if history is to be believed nearly every nation has had one. You had twelve Apostles; we have only eleven, and some of those

²⁶ *The Indian Helper*, December 26, 1890.

²⁷ Rani-Henrik Andersson, *The Lakota Ghost Dance of 1890*, 211.

²⁸ *Chicago Tribune*, “An Indian on the Messiah Craze,” December 6, 1890. Daylight seems to be a Quapaw, but other studies have called him (probably incorrectly) a Sioux or even an Oglala, see W. Fletcher Johnson *The Red Record of the Sioux* (Edgewood Publishing Company, 1891), 267; David A. Rausch and Blair Schepp, ed., *Native American Voices* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1994), 140; Wayne Moquin, ed., *Great Documents in American Indian History* (New York: Praeger, 1973), 90.

are already in the military guard-house. We also had a Virgin Mary and she is in the guard-house. You are anxious to get hold of our Messiah so you can put him in irons. This you may do – in fact you may crucify him as you did that other one, but you cannot convert the Indians to the Christian religion until you contaminate them with the blood of the white man. The white man’s Heaven is repulsive to the Indian nature and if the white man’s Hell suits you, why you keep it. I think there will be white rogues enough to fill it. Hoping that our Messiah will come soon and prove all that his prophets have proclaimed him, I remain you most obedient, Masse-Hadjo, or John Daylight.

Daylight believed that the Indians’ religion was superior to the white man’s because it was peaceful and uncorrupted. It was “adapted” to the Indians’ “wants.” Daylight’s letter was reprinted in papers throughout the country; the *Sacramento Daily* said it ranked with the “speeches of Tecumseh, Phillip, Black Hawk and Logan” for its “pathos and satire and rhetorical eloquence.”²⁹ The letter was also featured in Sophia Alice Callahan’s 1891 novel *Wynema, A Child of the Forest*, the first novel written by a woman of Native American descent. Callahan used “Old” Masse Hadjo’s letter to present a Native’s perspective in the aftermath of Wounded Knee and to demonstrate the usefulness of Native literacy. Indians could combat the glorified colonial narrative that filled newspapers across America.³⁰

Indians at the Cheyenne and Arapaho and the Kiowa, Comanche, and Wichita agencies also stayed informed by reading the papers.³¹ After Wounded Knee, officials were concerned that outbreaks might begin on the other reserves across the west. Lt. H.L Scott was worried that the information in the papers, the “stories about the arming of the settlers in Oklahoma and Texas and the disarming of the Indians, the fighting with the Sioux,” might “excite” the Indians

²⁹ *Sacramento Daily*, December 27, 1890; *Salt Lake Tribune*, December 7, 1890.

³⁰ James H. Cox, *Muting White Noise: Native American and European American Novel Traditions* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2006), 36-37.

³¹ Maj. Wirt Davis to Asst. Adj. General, December 23, 1890, RBIA, RG 75, SC 188, Box 199, NARA (DC).

in Oklahoma more than they already were.³² He noted that the papers were read at the Kiowa, Comanche, and Wichita Agency by the graduates of eastern boarding schools. At those boarding schools, pupils heard news from letters, their teachers, and from newspapers. Soon after Wounded Knee, the superintendent at White's Indian Training School in Indiana reported that his students were "anxious about the action and fate of their people in the present Indian trouble."³³

Some Native groups received the bulk of their information about the movement through newspaper accounts. The Nez Perces' agent claimed that "no emissaries of the faith" had visited his reserve by late November, but the Nez Perces were learning about the "craze" from the papers, just like he was.³⁴ Newspapers allowed tribes outside of South Dakota to follow the troubles the Lakota were having in late 1890. A couple of Uintah chiefs in Utah told their agent that they heard the Lakota news from the papers but they could not understand "what it all meant."³⁵ The agent did not think the chiefs had much interest in the ghost dance, but he told the Commissioner that if "emissaries from the hostile tribes" made it to the Uintah Agency the people there might show interest. "I am fully aware that the Indian disposition is fickle," he wrote. The Tongue River agent did not notice any ghost dancing in November 1890, but reported that the Indians were "fully informed on the disturbances existing elsewhere."³⁶ The

³² Lt. H. L. Scott to Post Adjutant Ft. Sill, January 18, 1891, RBIA, RG 75, SC 188, Box 200, NARA (DC).

³³ O. H. Bales to Agent Charles Adams, January 7, 1891, RBIA, RG 75.19.50, Kiowa Comanche and Wichita, White's School, Reel 93, NARA (OHS).

³⁴ Agent Warren Robbins to Gov. George Shoup, November 26, 1890, RBIA, RG 75, SC 188, Box 199, NARA (DC); Agent Warren Robbins to CIA, December 3, 1890, RBIA, RG 75, SC 188, Box 199, NARA (DC).

³⁵ Agent Robert Waugh to CIA, December 2, 1890, RBIA, RG 75, SC 188, Box 199, NARA (DC).

³⁶ Agent John Tally, December 8, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 38945, Box 687, NARA (DC).

Wind River agent and the Fort Belknap agent had similar reports in December 1890 and January 1891 respectively.³⁷ A Sac and Fox council purportedly laughed at an article that falsely claimed they were dancing.³⁸

Some learned of false newspaper reports through letters from other tribes. In June 1890, the Southern Utes in Colorado (Buckskin Charley, Ignacio, and others) informed the Northern Utes at the Uintah and Ouray Agency in Utah that they learned of reports that the Utes intended to make trouble with white settlers. Of course the reports were not true, and the Uintah and Ouray responded with shock. They replied to their southern brethren:

We feel bad that a report has been circulated that we want to fight and make trouble. We have not thought of such a thing, we the same as you want to be at peace with all, we are farming and attending to our cattle and horses and do not want trouble, the first we heard of our wanting to fight was in your letter of June 4, we all of us want peace and do not like it when we are reported as making trouble, we are friends of all the whites about here and are getting along well, and want to do what Washington tells us to do, and there is no truth in the reports that the Ouray and Uintah Utes want to make trouble, When are the Utes from here coming home, let us know, Your friends...³⁹

Six months later, in December, the Uintah and Ouray wrote to Sevaro of the Southern Utes that the “Sioux trouble” was “too far away for us to pay attention to it, their affairs should not bother us.”⁴⁰

Indian leaders in Nevada had to ensure the white citizens of Nevada that their people were not planning for war against them. Newspapers in Nevada, like the *Walker Lake Bulletin*

³⁷ Agent John Foshier to CIA, December 3, 1890, RBIA, RG 75, SC 188, Box 199, NARA (DC); Agent A. O. Simmons to CIA, January 5, 1891, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 528, Box 693, NARA (DC).

³⁸ Sac & Fox Agent to CIA, January 9, 1891, RBIA, RG 75, SC 188, Box 200, NARA (DC).

³⁹ Elk, et al. to Buckskin Charley, et al., June 21, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.19.18, Consolidated Ute, Decimal Files, Box 2, NARA (Denver).

⁴⁰ Cherich Ignacio, Red Moon, et al. to Sevaro, December 27, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.19.18, Consolidated Ute, Decimal Files, Box 2, NARA (Denver).

and the *Nevada State Journal*, stirred the fears of settlers by reporting exaggerated rumors of imminent violence. The U. S. Army did not occupy the territory in great numbers in Nevada like it did on the Great Plains. It would only take a few hundred Indians, the *Nevada State Journal* warned, to “lay waste hundreds of homes and massacre their occupants before relief could reach them.”⁴¹ Responding to white fears, the Shoshone headman Captain John offered to help to defend the residents of Nye County in the rare event of an attack from another tribe.⁴² But Nevada whites remained unconvinced, especially after Wounded Knee. The *Journal* told its readers that Indians, being “ignorant and untutored,” could not “be expected to maintain their mental balance” when their heads were turned “by the harangues of fanatics,” unlike whites who had a “civilized community.”⁴³

In late November 1890, a newspaper in Arizona reported that trouble from the Hualapais was not anticipated, but there was “no doubt” that they were “in direct communication with all the tribes” north of Arizona.⁴⁴ But on December 10, a group of Mohave County, Arizona citizens petitioned the governor of Arizona for protection from the Hualapai ghost dancers, who they claimed had become “impertinent and ugly” after they “contracted” the “Messiah Craze.”⁴⁵ The petitioners knew Hualapai chief Surrum had recently returned from a visit with the Paiutes in Nevada. They feared he had manifested a “very determined and vicious spirit” while

⁴¹ Sally S. Zanjani, "The Indian Massacre That Never Happened," *Nevada Historical Quarterly* 31 (Summer 1988): 119-129.

⁴² *Belmont Courier*, November 15, 1890; *White Pine News*, November 28, 1890. See Sally S. Zanjani, "The Indian Massacre That Never Happened," 123.

⁴³ *Nevada State Journal*, January 14, 1891. See Sally S. Zanjani, "The Indian Massacre That Never Happened," 122.

⁴⁴ "The 'Ghost Dance' of the Walapais," *Mohave County Miner*, November 29, 1890; *Mohave County Miner*, December 6, 1890.

⁴⁵ William Lake, et al, to Hon. Nathan Oakes Murphy, December 10, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 39770, Box 688, NARA (DC).

consulting with the messiah. The dancers were “becoming crazed with excitement, passion, and fanaticism, brought about by the senseless incantations of the medicine men.” If nothing was done, the petitioners argued, the Hualapais would “undertake the destruction of the pale faces.” They hoped that more beef and flour could be purchased for the Hualapais, which might “divert them until other measures could be adopted, or the danger is passed.” But nothing close to an outbreak took place in Arizona even though newspaper suggested the possibility in early 1891.⁴⁶

For some Natives, combating false reports of outbreak was a constant struggle. As the press converged onto Pine Ridge and Rosebud in November 1890 and white authorities and settlers grew nervous, reports of angry, conniving Indians were widespread. In late November, Dr. Charles Eastman, a Santee Dakota physician employed at Pine Ridge, tried his best to dispel rumors of outbreak there. He wrote to Frank Wood, a white Bostonian who was active in the Indian rights movement, that there was no danger of violence and nearly all of the Indians were willing to give up the ghost dance (only Little Wound and thirty families were out dancing). He was treating the sick among the ghost dancers just the same as the non-believers.⁴⁷ Red Cloud told Eastman that he thought the dance would “melt away like a spring snow.”⁴⁸ Quanah Parker, the Comanche chief at the Kiowa, Comanche, and Wichita reserve, had to denounce a newspaper that reported his involvement in the dance with Sitting Bull (the Northern Arapaho) and his desire to incite “various tribes to mischief.” Parker wrote to the editor:

I will say the whole statement is a fabrication. What design anybody could have in making such statements, I cannot see. I will state for the benefit of the anxious public, that I have not attended any ghost dances with the Cheyenne,

⁴⁶ “Indians in Southern Nevada, Their Movements Alarm Settlers,” *Daily Nevada State Journal*, January 17, 1891; “The Indian Situation,” *Daily Nevada State Journal*, January 14, 1891.

⁴⁷ Frank Wood to Acting Comm. R. V. Belt, November 28, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 36857, Box 681, NARA (DC).

⁴⁸ Charles Eastman to Frank Wood, November 11, 1890, RBIA, RG 75, SC 188, Box 199, NARA (DC).

nor have I been to visit my red brother of the North (Sitting Bull), or know any more about the Indian on the Cheyenne reservation or in Sitting Bull's tribe, except what I am told, than if they were on the other side of the big water, and will say that but few of the Comanche Indians pay any attention to the Messiah craze, and those who do are crazy. Some of the Kiowa are taking the craze, but I don't know to what extent, and as for inciting various tribes to mischief, it would be like a crazy man to even think of such a thing with the little handful of warriors that all the tribes could combine and turn out.⁴⁹

Even the Kiowas that were ghost dancing were worried that the Lakota troubles were causing bad publicity for the movement. Some told Lt. H. L. Scott that the Lakotas were always "too excitable."⁵⁰ They wondered why the Lakotas did not just wait until the "change is made," when Wovoka's prophecy of a new world came about. It would all happen, it would "be all right without fighting." Lt. Scott stated that the Kiowas believed that "their prophet wants them to live at peace with all men."

White observers on the Lakota reservations interpreted the ghost dance differently. Most believed that ghost dance leaders were using the movement for malicious purposes. Bishop W. H. Hare described a united Indian effort to support the ghost dance at separate locations, held together by the communication between its leadership. In a letter sent to church supporters, friends of the Indians, and the press, Bishop Hare wrote:

The situation is in some respects critical and alarming. The old heathen chiefs and medicine men are making a desperate effort to retrieve their losses and regain their pristine power. They have for years kept themselves in communication by runners and have managed lately to bring the excitement to a focus at certain centers; one on the Standing Rock Reserve, one on the Cheyenne, one on the Rosebud and one on the Pine Ridge Reserve; these last two having coalesced within the last few weeks.⁵¹

⁴⁹ Quanah Parker to Editor Gazette, December 7, 1890, RBIA, RG 75, SC 188, Box 199, NARA (DC).

⁵⁰ Lt. H. L. Scott to Com'd Officer Fort Sill, December 9, 1890, RBIA, RG 75, SC 188, Box 199, NARA (DC).

⁵¹ *Sioux Falls Press*, December 16, 1890; "A Second Letter from Bishop Hare Concerning the Indian Troubles," *The Churchman*, December 27, 1890.

Hare saw the situation as the consequence of a long-building conspiracy devised by the non-progressive leaders.

After troops arrived at the Lakota agencies, tensions rose between the ghost dancers and the government and both believers and non-believers throughout the west felt it. Some Natives tried to convince others not to instigate conflict. A group of Northern Arapahos under Black Coal at Wind River sent word to other tribes that they were “peaceful” and they wanted “all,” both Native and white “to keep the peace.”⁵² While some messengers were sent out to impart a message of peace, it seems others tried to stop dancing altogether. According to one newspaper report from Oklahoma, the Iowas received many visitors from the Cheyennes, Arapahos, Creeks, and “two messengers from the Sioux,” who would “do all in their power to allay, as far as possible, the Messiah craze.”⁵³ It is not known why those messengers wanted the Iowas to stop believing, but their visits occurred as troops were gathering at Pine Ridge and Rosebud to prevent an outbreak. Some were afraid of the consequences the dance’s persistence might bring. Luther Standing Bear, a progressive Lakota schoolteacher at Rosebud, warned others not to dance because the government would stop them with force.⁵⁴

Some Lakota dancers blamed non-believing progressives for intentionally misrepresenting the ghost dance as a militant movement to their agents with the hope the dancing would be suppressed. Issowonie, an Oglala, told Short Bull that his own people’s lies about the dance “caused the soldiers to come here.” Crow Dog, the infamous Brulé murderer of Spotted Tail, blamed the interpreters at Rosebud for lying to the agent, telling him “that the Ghost Dance

⁵² Ignatius Panken to Sect. of Interior, December 10, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 39955, Box 689, NARA (DC); Agent John Foshier to CIA, December 3, 1890, RBIA, RG 75, SC 188, Box 199, NARA (DC).

⁵³ “Indians in Indian Territory to Have a Ghost Dance,” *Sacramento Daily*, December 25, 1890.

⁵⁴ Sam Maddra, *Hostiles?*, 47.

was really a war dance.”⁵⁵ According to these men, progressives helped convince the government that the Lakota ghost dance was not just a harmless religious movement. It would lead to trouble. Relations between the dancers and the non-believers fell apart in November. Elaine Goodale saw many families divided over the movement, “and feeling was intense.” Some dancers vandalized the abandoned homes of the progressives at Pine Ridge and Rosebud, destroying farming tools and stealing horses and cattle.⁵⁶ Swift Bear, a progressive Brulé chief who sought shelter at Fort Randall, did not want to come in to the agency for his rations, fearing retribution from dancers (and U.S. army soldiers).⁵⁷

Some Indians were worried that federal officials might receive inaccurate information that their people were growing antagonistic. Wolf Chief at Fort Berthold, a Mandan who wrote to officials frequently, wanted President Harrison and Commissioner Morgan to know that the Mandans and Gros Ventres were “good people,” they did not want to fight the white man or the Sioux. “We are a good friend to the Whites,” Wolf Chief assured them, “We very few Indians and we are very Poor.”⁵⁸ When Wolf Chief heard that Sitting Bull “want to fight white mans,” he thought it was “very foolish.” The Mandans and Gros Ventres were struggling to find enough

⁵⁵ Ibid., 46.

⁵⁶ Jeffrey Ostler, *The Plains Sioux*, 311-312.

⁵⁷ Captain 15th Infantry to Agent J. George Wright, December 13, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.19.96, Rosebud, Letters Received, Box 5, NARA (KC); Capt. 15th Infantry to Agent E. W. Foster, December 13, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 39424, Box 688, NARA (DC); CIA to J. George Wright, December 26, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Sent, Land Division, Letter Books 209-210, NARA (DC); J. George Wright to CIA, January 2, 1891, RBIA, RG 75.19.96, Rosebud, Copies of Letters Sent, Volume 20, NARA (KC); J. George Wright to Whom it May Concern, January 7, 1891, RBIA, RG 75.19.96, Rosebud, Copies of Letters Sent, Volume 20, NARA (KC); J. George Wright to J. Farnsworth, January 9, 1891, RBIA, RG 75.19.96, Rosebud, Copies of Letters Sent, Volume 20, NARA (KC).

⁵⁸ Wolf Chief to the Great Father, December 8, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 39465, Box 688, NARA (DC). Wolf Chief also wanted to sell metallic cartridges at his store, but he was not allowed.

to eat that winter. They did not know what they would do for food. Wolf Chief seemed to be worried that their rations might be held back because of the events at Pine Ridge and Rosebud. He assured the President that they had no part in it. They were not “dangerous tribes.” Wolf Chief wrote a similar letter to Commissioner Morgan a month later, after Wounded Knee.⁵⁹

Ring Thunder, a Brulé headman at Rosebud who did not believe in the dance, was sent by his agent to counsel with the dancers at Black Pipe Creek to try to convince them to stop. But the dancers would not listen to Ring Thunder and they called him a fool. They told him that if he joined them, he “would never have any more pain or sorrow,” but if he “followed after the ways of the white men,” his “path would be hard and full of trouble.”⁶⁰ But Ring Thunder told the dancers that he was once “one of their bravest warriors,” but that time was past. He did not want to fight; his heart was “not with them.” Ring Thunder wrote his former agent Lebbeus Foster Spencer that “the ways of the white man seem hard at times,” but if the government would give them back their beef and rations, all would be well with them. Good Voice, a progressive Brulé headman (Isanyati band) from Rosebud, responded to a letter from Spencer on December 15. He told Spencer that he did not join the ghost dancers because he believed in the “good people of the Church and the good Book that tell us there is only one God and that God dont like bad people.” He was “not going to be foolish and join the Dancers.”⁶¹ One Hunkpapa Lakota who had joined

⁵⁹ Wolf Chief to the Great Father, January 4, 1891, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 1535, Box 695, NARA (DC).

⁶⁰ Ring Thunder to L. F. Spencer, December 5, 1890, Lebbeus Foster Spencer Papers, MSS 596, History Colorado Stephen H. Hart Library and Research Center. D. W. Parmelee wrote the letter for Ring Thunder. Parmelee said that Ring Thunder, the old man, “stands as firm as a rock so far,” even though the hostile Indians said every mean thing about him. See D. W. Parmelee to L. F. Spencer, December 5, 1890, Lebbeus Foster Spencer Papers, MSS 596, History Colorado Stephen H. Hart Library and Research Center.

⁶¹ Good Voice to L. F. Spencer, December 15, 1890, Lebbeus Foster Spencer Papers, MSS 596, History Colorado Stephen H. Hart Library and Research Center.

the dancers expressed regret in a letter to his agent. Little Soldier told Agent James McLaughlin that he was going to follow the advice of his uncle Grey Eagle and listen to the Great Spirit, the Great Father, and the agent. "From this on, I will always look to you," Little Soldier wrote McLaughlin, "I want to work and be able to buy horses... So Father my heart is good to think I will be able to follow my own judgement and be happy."⁶²

Many scholars have asked what the ghost dance movement meant to those who danced. Was it a dance of desperation or commemoration? Did Native Americans dance to preserve their identity or simply to perform a task they believed they were destined to do? Most often, scholars wonder if the dance was militant or peaceful. Did they really believe that their dance would cause the whites to suddenly disappear or would they physically die, perhaps at the hand of the Indians themselves? These questions are difficult to answer for many reasons. The ghost dance movement may have originated in the mind of one man, but his ideas were not canonized. There was no ghost dance handbook. As the movement spread from group to group, individual to individual, it became what the adoptee wanted it to become. Anthropologist Anne Smith speculated that the Southern Utes "tried the Ghost Dance" because "of their very real despair at this period, even though their culture feared the dead."⁶³ She assumed that desperation outweighed fear. But Smith did not consider that the Southern Utes danced because they were convinced that it was a reasonable idea.

⁶² Little Soldier to Agent James McLaughlin, December 31, 1890, copy in Walter S. Campbell Collection, Box 104, Folder 6, Western History Collections, University of Oklahoma Libraries. This is probably Eugene Little Solider, a private in the Indian police at Standing Rock. He was twenty-seven years old in 1890. Grey Eagle was against the ghost dance, he volunteered to accompany the police who went to arrest Sitting Bull. Little Soldier was also a part of the arresting force.

⁶³ Anne M. Smith, *Ethnography of the Northern Utes*, Museum of New Mexico Papers in Anthropology No. 17 (Santa Fe: Museum of New Mexico Press, 1974), 219.

Even the most recent study of the Wounded Knee Massacre boldly claims that the Lakota “sought deliverance through religion...out of desperation.”⁶⁴ “Precedent lay in history,” Jerome Greene argues in *American Carnage*, “wherein populations facing ominous circumstances beyond their mean turned to deities as their ultimate last hope.”⁶⁵ In a narrow understanding of religion, Greene describes the ghost dance as “the poignant dance of desperation.”⁶⁶ Like any other belief, Native American adoption of the dance was complicated.⁶⁷ Short Bull, a Lakota ghost dance leader, may have adopted the dance as act of peaceful resistance.⁶⁸ On another hand, John Daylight seems to have believed in the movement because it was created for his people. “The Good Father of all has given us [Indians] a better religion,” Daylight wrote to the *Chicago Tribune*, “a religion that is adapted to our wants.”⁶⁹ Undoubtedly, both Short Bull and John Daylight had more than just one motivation to dance. Neither attributed it to only desperation.

The atmosphere at the Lakota agencies took a turn for the worse after the death of Sitting Bull (the Hunkpapa Lakota) at the hands of the Standing Rock Indian police on December 16, 1890 just a week after Quanah Parker, the Kiowa dancers, and Wolf Chief expressed their displeasure with the Lakota. Sitting Bull refused to instruct his people to stop ghost dancing, a decision that angered his agent James McLaughlin, who already detested him. Sometime in

⁶⁴ Jerome A. Greene, *American Carnage*, 65. For a more nuanced discussion on the ghost dance as a revitalization movement, see Alexander Lesser, “The Cultural Significance of the Ghost Dance,” *American Anthropologist* 35, No. 1 (1933).

⁶⁵ Jerome A. Greene, *American Carnage*, 65.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 75.

⁶⁷ For a look at the complexity of meaning in the ghost dance, see Thomas Overholt, “Short Bull, Black Elk, Sword, and the Meaning of the Ghost Dance,” *Religion* 8, No. 2 (1978): 171-195.

⁶⁸ Sam Maddra, *Hostiles?*, 186-190; James Mooney, *The Ghost-dance Religion*, 797.

⁶⁹ “An Indian on the Messiah Craze,” *Chicago Tribune*, December 6, 1890.

December, Sitting Bull received a letter from the Pine Ridge ghost dancers. They wanted him to travel to Pine Ridge because, as Lieutenant of Police Bull Head explained it, “God was to appear to them.”⁷⁰ Although the letter Bull Head referred to no longer exists, a similar letter written to Sitting Bull around the same time has been preserved. Brings Plenty, a Standing Rock Hunkpapa roaming at the Pine Ridge Agency, urged Sitting Bull to join him at Pine Ridge and help prepare for a “big fight” in the spring.⁷¹ The letter, written in English, was delivered to Sitting Bull by He Bear:

Brother I am going to write to you today. I want you to come back but you didn't. I want you to come this time. There is lots fight going on at Black Hill I am in it all of them. We Kill lots white people and take away every thing they got. We are at Pine Ridge Agency. The Rosebud Indians are very bad. if any body comes over the hill they Kill him so they are very dangerous. the main fight is going to be in spring so I am telling you this. so Keep a gun be ready for action. What I said is truth I have told you come but you didn't while the fight is last. I have three war horses but two of them died. the one race have still alive Lower Brule Crow Creek Rosebud Chyennes and other tribes are coming to Pine Ridge Agence in the Spring, and they going have a big council. relations think about this and make some saddle and be ready we going have a big fight. I shake hands with you all. Brings Plenty
He Bear uncle try and come back. I remember my grandmother try and Keep a gun and to defend yourself. Brings Plenty. I am.

Brings Plenty's letter describes events that never happened (like the killing of “lots” of white people) perhaps in an effort to persuade Sitting Bull, but most likely, Brings Plenty was just describing events that might happen in the future. His certainty that a big council would gather in the spring coincided with the belief among the ghost dancers that Wovoka's prophesied

⁷⁰ John M. Carnigan to James McLaughlin, December 14, 1890, RBIA, RG 75, SC 188, Box 199, NARA (DC).

⁷¹ Brings Plenty to Sitting Bull, undated, reproduced in Stanley Vestal, *New Sources of Indian History*, 39-40.

changes would occur when the grasses turned green. Weeks later, Brings Plenty was wounded at Wounded Knee but survived.⁷²

It seems Sitting Bull decided to visit Pine Ridge to “learn more about” the movement, but he was killed before he got the chance.⁷³ On December 11, 1890, he sent a letter (with the help of a literate Hunkpapa) to his agent at Standing Rock, James McLaughlin, to ask permission to travel. Sitting Bull expressed his disappointment with the government’s stance on the ghost dance. He questioned McLaughlin’s power to suppress the basic right of prayer.

Dear Sir

I want to write to few line to day & to let you know Some thing. I meeting with all my Indians to day. & writing to you this order. God made you all the white rase & also made the Red rase & give they both Might & Heart to know every thing on the whlod; but white High then the Indians; but to day, our farther is halps us the Indians So well all the Indians Knowing. So I thing this way. I wish no one come to in my Pray with they gund or knife: So all the Indians Pray to god for life & try to find out good Road & do noting wrong. In they life: This is what we want & Pray to god but you did not bleaven us – So you must not say anything about our Pray: because did not Say nothing about your Pray. because you pray to god: So we all Indians, while: we both Pray only one god to make us: & you my friend to day. you thing I am fall: I you take some wise man among my people. & you let them know back East. the white people. So I knowing that. but I thing that is all right. because I am fall to pray to God. So you dont like me: My friend. I dont like my self. when some one is fall: I like Him; So you are the Same. you dont like me because I am fall; & If I did not Here. then the Indians will be civilization: but because I am Here. & all the Indians fall, & I know this is all you put down on news papers back East. So I Seeing the paper but I thing it is all right: & when you was Here. in my camp. you was give me good wlod about. my Pray: & to day you take all back from me: & also I will let you know some thing. I got go to (Pine Rodge Agency) & to know This Pray: So I let you know that & the Police man. told me you going

⁷² Richard E. Jensen, “Big Foot’s Followers at Wounded Knee,” *Nebraska History* 71 (1990): 202.

⁷³ Aaron Beede Journal, Orin G. Libby Papers, MS 10085, Box 37, State Historical Society of North Dakota, Bismarck. Sitting Bull told Rev. Aaron Beede that he did not want to keep children out of school during that winter: “I want them to go to school, but they must learn this religion wocekiye – as soon as they have learned this religion they shall go back to school.”

to take all our Poneys, gund, too; So I want you let me know that. I want aswer back Soon. SITTING BULL⁷⁴

There was still a communication barrier between the men even though Sitting Bull's letter to McLaughlin was written in English, but most of Sitting Bull's arguments would have been understood by McLaughlin. The greatest barrier between them however was cultural. Sitting Bull knew what was being written in the newspapers about the ghost dance, particularly what McLaughlin was reporting. Sitting Bull's argument was similar to Big Tree's "different roads" argument from the previous chapter. Sitting Bull did not understand how the government could stop a man from finding a "good road" through prayer. It was a different form of prayer than the white man's, but they were both praying to God. Sitting Bull told McLaughlin that he had to go to the Pine Ridge Agency to "know" the prayer.

Unfortunately, McLaughlin was unconvinced, his truth was incompatible with Sitting Bull's. His heart did not melt like Inspector Junkin's did after hearing Big Tree's plea. McLaughlin received the letter on December 12 at 6:00 PM. On the same day, McLaughlin was instructed by the post commander at Fort Yates to arrest Sitting Bull as part of the government's effort to curb the ghost dance. He replied to Sitting Bull's letter the next day, on December 13. McLaughlin called himself Sitting Bull's friend. He told Sitting Bull that he did not dislike him (which was a lie, McLaughlin disliked Sitting Bull deeply), he reminded Sitting Bull that he helped him stay out of the guard house at Fort Randall in 1883, and had given him good advice in the past. The government was Sitting Bull's true friend, McLaughlin said, there was "no other

⁷⁴ Sitting Bull to James McLaughlin, December 11, 1890, copy in W.S. Campbell Collection, 114, Western History Collections, University of Oklahoma, Norman. March Diedrich offers a more readable version of the letter in *Sitting Bull: The Collected Speeches* (Rochester, MN: Coyote Books, 1998), 181.

government in the civilized world that would have treated a conquered foe so humanly.”⁷⁵ But McLaughlin ignored many of Sitting Bull’s arguments. He did not consider that the ghost dance was a viable form of religion:

The Ghost dance that some are now engaged in is hurtful in many respects, no good can come from it and if not soon discontinued bad results will certainly follow. The over credulous and ignorant Indians are being induced to join the dance which is an injury to them, and you older men who should know better but who have been led into this absurd craze should now stop it and advise the people to return to their homes and make their houses comfortable for winter.

McLaughlin told Sitting Bull that he did not know what would happen to his people if they continued to dance in “open violation of the department regulations,” but it would not be allowed to continue much longer. Although McLaughlin never told Sitting Bull that the army wanted him arrested, he warned him not to visit any other agencies.

McLaughlin decided to wait until December 20, ration day, to make the arrest in order to avoid conflict (he knew that Sitting Bull was the only one at his camp who did not go to the agency on ration day). But on December 14, Lt. Bull Head reported to McLaughlin that Sitting Bull would soon head to Pine Ridge with or without permission, which made McLaughlin hasten the arrest. He sent two copies of a letter meant for Sitting Bull with his Indian police on their infamous mission to arrest Sitting Bull on December 15, 1890, one written in English and one in Lakota, perhaps to ensure Sitting Bull understood the situation.⁷⁶ Sitting Bull along with seven

⁷⁵ James McLaughlin to Sitting Bull, December 13, 1890, James McLaughlin Papers, Microfilm Roll 20, Assumption College (Richardson, ND), 1968.

⁷⁶ Agent James McLaughlin to CIA, December 24, 1890, Reports and Correspondence Related to the Army Investigations of the Battle at Wounded Knee and to the Sioux Campaign of 1890–1891, National Archives Microfilm Publications (Washington: National Archives and Records Service, 1975), Roll 1, Target 3, Jan. 1891, File 2.

of his followers were killed during the arrest attempt. Lt. Bull Head and seven policemen also died.⁷⁷

Skirmishes broke out between the Indian police and members of Sitting Bull's stunned band. The military tried to control the situation, but it only grew worse. In what Jeffrey Ostler called "an important turning point in the army's campaign," Sitting Bull's death "substantially increased the volatility of the situation."⁷⁸ Nearly five hundred men and women from Standing Rock fled their reservation out of fear and frustration. On December 16, the day after Sitting Bull was killed, Louis Breast at Cheyenne River told his agent that some of Sitting Bull's camp had arrived on his land from Standing Rock that morning. "The Indians fight with policemen and kill each other," he wrote, "they run away from the fight...last night some got here."⁷⁹ Breast was worried what they might do. He could not inform his agent in person because he was guarding his horses, so he sent the letter and asked for five or six policemen to come. Others wanted to get information from Agent McLaughlin about the events. In late December 1890,

⁷⁷ James McLaughlin to Herbert Welsh, January 19, 1891, The Indian Rights Association Papers, 1864-1973, Microfilm Roll 17, Historical Society of Pennsylvania; Louis Primeau to Afraid of Bear, December 12, 1890, copy in W.S. Campbell Collection, 114, Western History Collections, University of Oklahoma, Norman; Agent James McLaughlin to Lt. Bull Head, December 14, 1890, copy in W.S. Campbell Collection, 114, Western History Collections, University of Oklahoma, Norman; Jeffrey Ostler, *The Plains Sioux*, 320-326. As a satire, *The Daily Huronite* featured a letter written by a dead Sitting Bull to a Col. A. W. Bradley, it read: (Un)Happy Hunting Grounds, Dec. 15 – Dear Bradley: Whoop! Reached Happy Hunting Ground this evening. Messiah gave me heap reception with big fireworks and big dance. I have not entered dance yet, but man who says he is the true Indian Messiah is telling me stories at the gate. I see many old time friends in the dance. No pemmican here, but much fire. Pretty d-----d hot. Hair burn off while I talk with Messiah at the door, but he say, 'that's nothing when you get used to it.' When we dance ghost dance on earth, white people pray for snow blizzard. I just got one foot in dance. Whoop! If this Messiah could only take his red tepee to Standing Rock think he could raise heap h---l with our enemies. Remember me to Buffalo Bill. Signed: SITTING BULL. See "He Visited Huron," *The Daily Huronite*, January 15, 1891.

⁷⁸ Jeffrey Ostler, *The Plains Sioux*, 326.

⁷⁹ Louis Breast to Agent Perain Palmer, December 16, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.19.11, Cheyenne River, Box 251, NARA (KC).

Pawnee Tom at the Pawnee Agency in Oklahoma wrote to McLaughlin at Standing Rock to learn “all about the fighting with Sitting Bull and how it commenced.”⁸⁰ It is not known if McLaughlin responded to Pawnee Tom, but the two men seemed to be acquainted. Pawnee Tom asked McLaughlin for one of his pipes and closed with “I am as ever you friend.”

Some from Sitting Bull’s camp ended up at Big Foot’s Miniconjou ghost dancing camp at Cherry Creek on the Cheyenne River reserve, others made it to the dancing camps in the Badlands with Kicking Bear and Short Bull. The sight of traveling Indians frightened white settlers, especially the residents of Cheyenne City who abandoned their town after Narcisse Narcelle warned them of certain danger.⁸¹ Members of the Twelfth infantry were sent out to prevent the Hunkpapa from joining Big Foot’s camp and the camps in the Badlands. Big Foot’s camp was surrounded. With Hump serving as the mediator, the soldiers tried to persuade Big Foot’s people to return to Cheyenne River. Some surrendered to the army, others stayed with Big Foot.⁸² Big Foot, sick with pneumonia, was told to give up or be attacked. He was afraid that the army would attack no matter what he did. In two weeks’ time, over two hundred of Big Foot’s band would be killed at Wounded Knee Creek on the Pine Ridge reserve.

Oglala leaders from Pine Ridge sent letters urging the holdouts in the Badlands to come in peacefully.⁸³ They wrote to Big Foot asking him to come in to Pine Ridge to discuss the

⁸⁰ Pawnee Tom to Agent James McLaughlin, December 27, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.19.113, Standing Rock, Misc. Corres. Received, Box 33, NARA (KC).

⁸¹ James Mooney, *The Ghost-dance Religion*, 861.

⁸² Louis Egna to William Hodgkiss, December 18, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.19.11, Cheyenne River, Box 581, NARA (KC); William Hodgkiss to Agent Perain Palmer, December 19, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.19.11, Cheyenne River, Box 581, NARA (KC).

⁸³ For a more detailed look at this negotiation process, see Jeffrey Ostler, *The Plains Sioux*, 327-337. American Horse was told by one returned “hostile” sometime before December 22 that half of those in the Badlands “would come way but the other half threatn them so they could not come,” see American Horse to James Landy, December 22, 1890, American Horse Papers, MSS

trouble the dance was causing. According to Hump, Big Foot initially thought the letters were invitations to come to Pine Ridge to fight.⁸⁴ But a particular letter from Red Cloud, No Water, Big Road, and several others, made it obvious that these “overtures” to Big Foot’s camp, were trying to convince the dancers to “join with the friendly Indians and help make peace.”⁸⁵ According to Joseph Horn Cloud, this letter finally convinced Big Foot to go to Pine Ridge. Dewey Beard (Iron Hail), a Miniconjou Lakota ghost dancer who was twenty-two years old at the time, later recalled that the letter read: “My Dear Friend Chief Big Foot. Whenever you receive this letter I want you to come at once. Whenever you come to our reservation a fire is going to be started and I want you to come and help us to put it out and make a peace. Whenever you come among us to make a peace we will give you 100 head of horses.”⁸⁶ Big Foot agreed and replied to the Pine Ridge headmen with a letter of his own (one that Dewey Beard did not see).

On December 26, 1890, Sky Bull, a Brulé headman at Rosebud, wrote to his former agent, Lebbeus Foster Spencer, to tell him what was going on at his old reserve with the hope of some assistance. “My friend we have much trouble since you threw us away,” Sky Bull wrote from Rosebud. He blamed both the hostiles and the soldiers for the disorder there. Short Bull, Two Strike, and Crow Dog had “made many of our young men foolish and taken them away.” Sky Bull told Spencer that the recently arrived soldiers “spoil our girls.” “Wont you tell the Great Father about it,” he asked, “Many of the Indians think the Great Father has sent his

S-903, Yale Collection of Western Americana, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

⁸⁴ “The Indians’ Side,” *Washington Evening Star*, January 28, 1891.

⁸⁵ Richard E. Jensen, ed., *The Indian Interviews of Eli S. Ricker, 1903-1919* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2005), 195. Joseph Horn Cloud, who around nineteen years old in 1890, recalled this in 1906.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 208-209

children to starve us. I do not believe that for we now get the rations Genl Harney promised us.”⁸⁷

Two days later, and one day before the Wounded Knee Massacre at Pine Ridge, Pretty Eagle, also a Rosebud headman, wrote (with the help of John Stephen Lance) to Spencer:

I will tell you something you had knew us how the people here at Rosebud we don't want to any trouble here in this country. The Great Father says he will make us alright you had told me mine your ward so I do so. My friend will you help us...Short Bull makes run off half of my people, this the reason I want to hear some word from the Great Father about it. No will you help me, I wish you would help me all you can...⁸⁸

Sky Bull and Pretty Eagle did not join Short Bull, but they were both worried about the trouble that might arise because of the ghost dance. In another letter to Spencer, sent in the days after Wounded Knee, Sky Bull, Pretty Eagle, and He Dog wanted their apologies conveyed to President Harrison on behalf of their people. The headmen wanted to the President to know that the Rosebud Brulé who ran off to Pine Ridge with their families did so because they were afraid of the soldiers who had arrived at the agency. The men also hoped that the President could help

⁸⁷ Sky Bull to L.F. Spencer, December 26, 1890, Lebbeus Foster Spencer Papers, MSS 596, History Colorado Stephen H. Hart Library and Research Center. Sky Bull referred to General William S. Harney who created the peace proposal following the Sioux Expeditions of 1855-56. After over eighty Brule were killed in the Harney Massacre (Battle of Blue Water), the federal government agreed to restore Brule annuities and prevent white intrusion, see Richmond L. Clow, “Mad Bear: William S. Harney and the Sioux Expedition of 1855-56,” *Nebraska History* 61 (1980), 132-151. Others complained about soldiers sexually abusing Indian girls and women. One white father of two girls of mixed descent told his daughters to stay away from Pine Ridge because “nine out of every ten girls that come back here have gone to ruin...the soldiers are here and it has a demoralizing effect on them,” see John Y. Nelson to Daughters, December 26, 1890, copy in RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 1386, Box 695, NARA (DC). Mary Cox told the Commissioner that two girls were begging to be sent back to the Lincoln Institute because of the soldiers, see Mary McHenry Cox to CIA, January 9, 1891, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 1386, Box 695 NARA (DC).

⁸⁸ Pretty Eagle to L.F. Spencer, December 28, 1890, Lebbeus Foster Spencer Papers, MSS 596, History Colorado Stephen H. Hart Library and Research Center.

them reopen the schools at Rosebud. They trusted Spencer, their former agent, to pass their concerns to Washington.⁸⁹

As 1890 drew to cold end, it seemed that trouble would be avoided, but some expected things to get worse after the snow melted.⁹⁰ On Christmas Day, William C. Curtis, the postmaster at Rosebud, said he expected “hell in the spring, unless a large force of troops remain in the field.”⁹¹ Unfortunately, because of that large force of troops, hell came early. On December 29, Big Foot’s Miniconjou band headed toward Pine Ridge, but they were confronted enroute by the Seventh Cavalry, who had been ordered to disarm the people before they reached the agency. The Miniconjous, already afraid of military retribution, accepted disarmament, but a shot was fired during the tense process and soldiers began firing into the crowd of men, women, and children. Soldiers chased the fleeing people, shooting many in the back, while machine guns positioned atop a hill blasted round after round. The official army report counted one hundred and seventy-six Sioux dead, but the actual number was undoubtedly higher.⁹²

⁸⁹ Sky Bull, Pretty Eagle, and He Dog to L. F. Spencer, (undated) 1891, Lebbeus Foster Spencer Papers, MSS 596, History Colorado Stephen H. Hart Library and Research Center. The letter was written by John Stephen Lance.

⁹⁰ A. J. Stelzer to L. F. Spencer, Lebbeus Foster Spencer Papers, MSS 596, History Colorado Stephen H. Hart Library and Research Center. Stelzer thought that the “war” would “soon be over” since their “friends” Crow Dog and Two Strike had come in to the agency. He also reported that three of the Indian police had left the force, two of them deserted and joined the hostile camp in the Badlands.

⁹¹ William C. Curtis to L. F. Spencer, December 25, 1890, Lebbeus Foster Spencer Papers, MSS 596, History Colorado Stephen H. Hart Library and Research Center. Curtis was an English-born trader at Rosebud, married to Emma War Bonnet, an Oglala. He was a postmaster at Rosebud for twenty-nine years, see Gladys Jorgensen, *Before Homesteads in Tripp County and the Rosebud* (Freeman, SD: Pine Hill Press, 1974), 108; 1880 United States Federal Census, June 1, 1880, Rosebud Agency, Meyer, Dakota Territory, Household ID: 8,732,153.

⁹² The events that led to the Wounded Knee Massacre have fascinated historians and study after study has analyzed the motivations and actions of agents, politicians, generals, and ghost dancers in an attempt to explain how seemingly peaceful dancing led to the deaths of hundreds. See Jerome Greene, *American Carnage*; Robert Utley, *The Last Days of the Sioux Nation*; Heather Cox Richardson, *Wounded Knee: Party Politics and the Road to an American Massacre* (New

Henry Eagle Horse described the events at Pine Ridge:

And then there was a thing growing and makes every body craze on this Agency and now there was about half of the Indians went away towards the bad land account of that Ghost dance but I know that was not worthy to go to So I don't go to that dances at all, but the great father and the agents we always have on this agency wanted us live in the world, So that is all I looked into it, about the land and the other things we have heard from the great father, and then there was only a few persons went off with the Ghost Dancers, and all the rest of them were come to camp at the Little White River with men, that is all about that part and then I am going to tell you about they have had a fighting at Pine Ridge Agency they had the fight on the 28th day of Dec. at Wounded Knee Creek right at the big crossing and 25 Soldiers were killed and many of them were wounded and they fight again on the 29th right at the Pine Ridge Agency only one soldier killed and four wounded. . .and them some the Indians killed too, Turning Bear, Ed White Horse, Little Chiefs brother in law, Brave Bear's son and two of the Short Bulls brothers were killed too...⁹³

Following the massacre, ghost dancers who had surrendered at Pine Ridge fled back to the Badlands, committing depredations along the way. Out of fear and anger, cattle were killed or stolen, homes of progressives and mix-bloods were vandalized, and one school house at Pine Ridge was burned.⁹⁴ Skirmishes between the hostiles and soldiers lasted for a few weeks.

Agents ordered Indian police, agency employees, and the “friendly” Indian populations to be on the watch for roaming hostiles and any “rumors of strangers.”⁹⁵ The Lakota reservations were

York: Basic Books, 2010); John Vance Lauderdale, *After Wounded Knee* (Lansing: University of Michigan State Press, 1996); William S. E. Coleman, *Voices of Wounded Knee* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2000); Richard E. Jensen, R. Eli Paul, John Carter, ed., *Eyewitness at Wounded Knee* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1991); Sam Maddra, *Hostiles?*, 45-62; Jeffrey Ostler, *The Plains Sioux*, 294-306; Rani-Henrik Andersson, *The Lakota Ghost Dance of 1890*.

⁹³ Henry Eagle Horse to L. F. Spencer, January 9, 1891, Lebbeus Foster Spencer Papers, MSS 596, History Colorado Stephen H. Hart Library and Research Center.

⁹⁴ Agent R. F. Royer to CIA, January 5, 1891, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 1214, Box 694, NARA (DC); C. J. Davis to Agent R. F. Royer, Report of Wounded Knee District, January 1891, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 4922, Box 702, NARA (DC).

⁹⁵ Agent J. George Wright to CIA, telegram, January 6, 1891, RBIA, RG 75.19.96, Rosebud, Copies of Letters Sent, Volume 20, NARA (KC); Agent J. George Wright to CIA, telegram,

temporarily handed over to military control. Officers replaced agents as the decision makers. By the end of January, however, most of the ghost dancing hostiles returned to Pine Ridge peacefully. But because government officials believed Wovoka had prophesized that the great changes would occur in the spring of 1891, there was concern that the Lakota dancers might once again cause trouble. A number of Lakota and Cheyenne ghost dance leaders were sent to a prison for several months to keep them off the reserves until Wovoka's prophecies were proven wrong.⁹⁶

At Cheyenne River, the agent had his district farmers watch the camps to make sure that the non-dancing families and the "Christian camps" were not "disturbed" by the "hostiles" and to prevent Indians from passing from one camp to another. All were told to stay at their homes and to send away any visitors. The Cheyenne River Indian police had the enormous task of traversing the reserve, often riding one hundred and twenty miles without resting, to carry messages between an agency employee at the ghost dancing camp and the troops. The Cherry Creek camp at Cheyenne River eventually pledged their loyalty to the government in April 1891 (they also asked for a boarding school to replace the day schools on the agency). They appointed a "committee," as the Cheyenne River agent called it, to "to send word" of their decisions "to other agencies," probably by letter.⁹⁷

Two Strike, the Rosebud Brulé headman and proponent of the dance who had led several hundred Brulé and Oglala into the Badlands and established a camp there with Short Bull and Kicking Bear in late November 1890, surrendered his "hostile" party in January 1891. During

January 4, 1891, RBIA, RG 75.19.96, Rosebud, Copies of Letters Sent, Volume 20, NARA (KC).

⁹⁶ Richmond L. Clow, "The Lakota Ghost Dance after 1890," *South Dakota History* 20 (1990): 324-326.

⁹⁷ Agent Perain Palmer to CIA, April 25, 1891, RBIA, RG 75, SC 188, Box 200, NARA (DC).

that spring, Two Strike hoped to convince authorities and other tribes that his people would not cause any more trouble, despite the rumors that said otherwise. In April, he replied to a letter (with the help of an army officer) from R. H. Pratt, superintendent at Carlisle, who asked Two Strike if any mischief was planned for the spring. Two Strike denied any intentions for trouble and gave his version of events the previous fall and winter. He said that his party of dancers “did not have anything to do” with Wounded Knee, but it gave them “a lesson.”⁹⁸ “We did not want to fight in the first place but somebody called for troops,” he argued, placing the blame on a rash decision by the government. “All we think about now is to farm,” he claimed.

Letters allowed the Lakota to navigate the stories that spun in newspapers and on the reservations after Wounded Knee. Two Strike also received letters from Indians at the Lower Brulé Agency and from “a young man from Standing Rock,” asking about the rumors of additional trouble. He told them that the Rosebud Brulé “were not going to make any more trouble and they must not pay attention to such talk. This talk gives me much trouble and I do not like it.”⁹⁹

⁹⁸ “Letter from Two Strike,” *Omaha Daily Bee*, April 30, 1891; “Want No More Trouble,” *The McCook Tribune* (Neb.), May 8, 1891. Some of progressives, or “friendlies,” at Pine Ridge and Rosebud thought that Two Strike would continue to be “obstinate and misleading,” see Louis Primeau to T. W. Blackburn, March 3, 1891, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 10173, Box 714, NARA (DC). Louis Primeau, the Standing Rock interpreter and a man of mixed descent, believed that there was a “danger” of violence between the two factions, the non-progressives and the “friendlies,” during the spring at Rosebud and Pine Ridge. The growing rift between the two sides after Wounded Knee has largely been unexplored by historians. One of many differences between them, the progressive “friendlies” felt hurt for not being selected to travel to Washington DC after Wounded Knee. See Red Cloud to Hon. W. J. Pollock, February 5, 1891, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 5164, Box 703, NARA (DC); Red Cloud to R. V. Belk, January 26, 1891, RBIA, RG 75, SC 188, Box 200, NARA (DC); Good Lance to CIA, January 30, 1891, RBIA, RG 75, SC 188, Box 200, NARA (DC); J. George Wright to CIA, January 23, 1891, RBIA, RG 75.19.96, Rosebud, Copies of Letters Sent, Volume 20, NARA (KC).

⁹⁹ “Want No More Trouble,” *McCook Tribune* (Neb.), May 8, 1891.

Other Lakota believers were disappointed that the true nature of their religion was never understood by the government. A group of Lakota headmen, who were about to head off as part of a delegation to Washington D.C., agreed to speak with the *Washington Evening Star* in late January. They knew the newspaper was published in the nation's capital and hoped that politicians would read their side of the story. Big Road told the reporter:

I want to say something about the ghost dance. Many people do not understand it because the truth has not been told them. Most of the Indians here belong to the church; we have many church house. This dance was like religion; it was religion. Those who brought the dance here from the west said that to dance was the same as going to church. White people pray because they want to go to heaven. Indians want to go to heaven, too, so they prayed...Heaven must be a nice place or the white men would not want to go there. That was why the Indians would like to go. We danced and prayed that we might live forever; that everything we planted might grow up to give us plenty and happiness. There was no harm in the dance. The Messiah told us to send our children to school, to work on our farms all the time and to do the best we could. He also told us not to drop our church. We and our children could dance and go to church, too; that would be like going to two churches. I never heard that the Messiah had promised that the Indians should be supreme or that the white men should be destroyed. We never prayed for anything but happiness. We did not pray that the white people should be all killed...All the dance trouble here was caused by Agent Royer and his policemen telling stories about us that were not true.¹⁰⁰

Little Wound agreed with Big Road's assessment, "Many lies have been told about some of the Indians who were in the dance." These men thought the government's decision to use the military was based on bad intelligence. Their dancing was not a security threat, they were not praying to have the white race destroyed, they were only dancing and praying so that they might "live forever," just like white Christians. Big Road was doing what Wovoka had told the Lakota delegates nearly twelve months before: "Send our children to school," "work on our farms," "go to church," and pray for "happiness."

¹⁰⁰ "The Indians' Side," *Washington Evening Star*, January 28, 1891. This interview with Young Man Afraid of His Horses, Big Road, Little Wound, Crow Dog, Two Strike, Long Bull, and Hump was reprinted in other papers.

Despite the tragedy at Wounded Knee, letters continued to be used by Lakotas to spread information about the ghost dance. A captain in the 9th Infantry reported that there was correspondence between the “disappointed Indians at different agencies” who did not trust the promises made by the government after Wounded Knee. One of these letters, written in Lakota, was acquired by an interpreter at the Rosebud Agency for \$100. It was sent from Bad Water in Rump from Pine Ridge to his relative White Back at Rosebud in March 1891. It read:

March 30, 1891.

White Back or Spike: My brother, I will write you this day, lately we received letter from Spaniard and Cheyenne also. The Cheyenne written to Red Cloud saying that Spaniard will come to Black Hills this summer. They say all the Indian Nation will come to Black Hills, and the Indians on Missouri River also, will come to Black Hills, and he told me, make plenty arrows. And now I will tell another thing: lately there is a man died and come to life again and he say he has been to Indian Nation of Ghosts and tells us: dead Indian Nation all coming home. The Indian Ghost tell him, come after his War Bonnet; the Indian gave him his War Bonnet and he died again. He tells us he prepared every day before he died again. This man is Ogallalla man – that is the one who makes the prediction.

I want you to tell me how you all living at Rosebud Agency or how you all getting on. I heard you making Govt. soldiers for sure. As soon as you get this letter write me and let me know all the news. My relation I shake hands with you with a good heart. Good Boy or Bad Water in Rump

To White Back or Spike. My Brother: hand me your hand, and I will tell you I am very miserable – but my old man is still more miserable. The old man is blind; that I tell you of it. I am Shot with plenty arrows or Sledge Rock.¹⁰¹

Bad Water in Rump relayed the information his people received from the Cheyennes to White Back and his people at Rosebud. He believed that an Oglala prophet was keeping the dance alive

¹⁰¹ Bad Water in Rump to White Back, March 30, 1891, translated copy in Capt. Jesse M. Lee to Asst. Adj. General, April 20, 1891, RBIA, RG 75, SC 188, Box 200, NARA (DC).

for the sake of the “Indian Nation” and that a large gathering of all tribes would take place in the Black Hills in the summer. It was a Pan-Indian mission.

In another letter, Many Eagles (or Plenty Eagles), an Oglala Lakota living at Pine Ridge, wrote to his sister on March 5, 1891 advising her to believe in the dance:

My Sister we have always lived in tribulation, still you remembered me even though I have left you. It gives me great pleasure to receive a letter from you as it is just as if I had seen you. In addition to answering your letter I would like to inform you of something. It is in regard to the dance which created a commotion up there. It is the truth and will surely come to pass...Now you must use every effort to come in possession of some Eagle's-down, and have them in readiness. From the time the grass starts you must be on the lookout and when a thunder storm comes you must attach them to your hair. Take care that you heed what I say. These five camps of Ogalallas who have inlisted in the U. S. Army. It is a plot amongst the people, for the sole purpose of arming themselves. Try to get arrows, at least. That is all I have to say.¹⁰²

According to Many Eagles, the eagle-down would protect her from a flood that would submerge the non-believers. His sister received his letter ten days later. While dancing was curbed at the Lakota agencies, the belief in the promise of the dance remained. At Rosebud, a group under Black Moon and Little Thunder was dancing in secret in March 1891. They were worried about the repercussions from the government and from their own people. Little Thunder's son received more than thirty visions, during which he and could see Short Bull (who was in a federal prison at the time). He saw “Christ” seven times. The christ told him that another world was coming soon.¹⁰³

¹⁰² Many Eagles to His Sister, March, 5, 1891, reproduced in Stanley Vestal, *New Sources of Indian History*, 60. Vestal records a slightly different translation in W. S. Campbell Collection, Box 114, Folder 6, Western History Collections, University of Oklahoma, Norman. Vestal said he acquired the letter in 1929 in Agent James McLaughlin's papers, see W. S. Campbell to R. B. Roberts, August 4, 1939, W. S. Campbell Collection, Box 108, Folder 14, Western History Collections, University of Oklahoma, Norman.

¹⁰³ Richmond L. Clow, “The Lakota Ghost Dance after 1890,” 327-330. John Stands in Timber remembered that after ghost dancing was banned at Pine Ridge, some believers began fasting in

Belief persisted in South Dakota and some figured that it would eventually lead to more trouble. Whites tried to piece together the secret plans of the Lakotas and rumors of a grand conspiracy between the Lakota tribes emerged. In late February 1891, an agent of the Indian Rights Association, Rev. William Cleveland, reported that there was little doubt that prominent Lakotas were planning hostilities for the upcoming spring. He was given “free access to all papers, letters, people, etc.” at Pine Ridge by the acting agent.¹⁰⁴ Cleveland pointed to Spotted Mountain Sheep’s letter to Sitting Bull as proof of the conspiracy. He also was told by Soldier Star, a “half-breed” scout, that around June 1890, Red Cloud, No Water, and He Dog at Pine Ridge received a letter (written in Lakota) from Sitting Bull at Standing Rock. Soldier Star read the letter to the men, which stated (according to Cleveland’s report):

My friends I have formed a purpose today, and will tell it to you plainly. I can to-day no longer endure the way in which the whites make me suffer. I send this thought to you from house to house...Next spring we will all meet at the Hill-in-the-woods.¹⁰⁵

That meeting place, according to Cleveland, was “a point near the White River, five miles below the mouth of White Clay Creek in the bad-lands, on the left and near the road from Cheyenne River to Pine Ridge.” The chain letter was meant to be forwarded to Big Foot at Cheyenne River, then to Big Mane at the Lower Brule Agency, then to Two Strike and on to Short Bull at Rosebud, and then to No Water, Red Cloud, American Horse, and Young Man Afraid of His Horses at Pine Ridge. Soldier Star supposed that if Sitting Bull had not been killed, plans for a spring outbreak would have been “fully matured” by February 1891. Despite Soldier Star’s

secret, see John Stands in Timber and Margot Liberty, ed., *A Cheyenne Voice: The Complete John Stands in Timber Interviews* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2013), 154-157.

¹⁰⁴ William J. Cleveland to Herbert Welsh, February 24, 1891, copy in Herbert Welsh to CIA, March 2, 1891, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 8149, Box 709, NARA (DC).

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

belief, there was no malicious plan or hostile strategy in the letter. There was only a vague proposal to meet. But Cleveland agreed with Soldier Star and he told the Indian Rights Association that “all Indian communications on similar subjects” were purposely vague, written “in the blind manner,” and had to be read between the lines.

Cleveland also claimed that Afraid of Bear at Pine Ridge, the brother of George Sword, received a letter from some Crows at the Crow Agency in Montana that wanted to know when “the fighting with the whites” was to begin at Pine Ridge. The Crows pledged they would begin fighting “up here at the same time.” The Indian Rights Association forwarded Cleveland’s report to Indian Affairs.

Because of these reports and letters written by the Lakotas, Indian Affairs became concerned about possible trouble that spring on the Sioux reserves. On March 17, the acting agent at Pine Ridge, Capt. Charles Penny reported to his superior officer that more troops were needed to suppress the growing “hostile element.”¹⁰⁶ He hoped that additional troops would allow him to better surveil the suspicious. Penny believed that some Oglalas wanted to resume their ghost dancing and were “privately and among themselves in secret councils” preparing for war in the spring. Much of Penny’s intelligence on the matter came from the personal letters written and received by the hostile Lakota “prisoners of war” now held at Fort Meade, South Dakota. The commanding officer at Fort Meade, Lt. Col. Edwin Sumner, forwarded all of the POWs’ letters directly to Capt. Penny, so that he could read them first and use his “discretion in regard to the propriety of delivery.”¹⁰⁷ One letter in particular aroused Sumner’s suspicion and

¹⁰⁶ Capt. Charles Penny to Asst. Adj. Gen. Div. of the Missouri, March 17, 1891, Letters Sent to the Office of Indian Affairs by the Pine Ridge Agency 1875-1914, Microfilm Publication M1282, Roll 11 (Washington DC: National Archives, 1985).

¹⁰⁷ Lt. Col. Edwin V. Sumner to Acting Agent Capt. Charles Penny, March 1, 1891, RBIA, RG 75.19.85, Pine Ridge, Misc. Corres. Received, Box 31, NARA (KC).

he forwarded it to Capt. Penny. Unfortunately, that letter is no longer in the Pine Ridge records, but Sumner told Capt. Penny that some of the letters written by the relatives of the prisoners “indicate that the Ghost dance is still going on or about to commence.”¹⁰⁸

An Indian alliance seemed to be a threat to government sovereignty. During the spring 1891, agents began to make an effort to stop the transmission of information between groups. Agents thought that a network between the non-progressive elements enabled their coordination during the previous winter and they knew that letters and visitors were the primary vehicles of communication. On March 20, 1891, the Rosebud agent, J. George Wright, telegraphed Indian Affairs to have the acting agent at Pine Ridge immediately send all of the Rosebud Brulé, who had been at Pine Ridge since December, back to Rosebud. The Commissioner, however, could not understand Agent Wright’s “anxiety about this matter.”¹⁰⁹ Wright believed that if the Brulé remained any longer at Pine Ridge, where they could commune with the Oglalas, trouble might arise in the future. Similarly, Agent Palmer at Cheyenne River believed it was in the best interest of the Sioux if the government stopped “as far as possible the visiting and transferring from one agency to another.”¹¹⁰ Any communication between Indian groups was seen by whites with apprehension. A press report out of South Dakota in March 1891 warned that the Rosebud

¹⁰⁸ Lt. Col. Edwin V. Sumner to Acting Agent Capt. Charles Penny, March 13, 1891, RBIA, RG 75.19.85, Pine Ridge, Misc. Corres. Received, Box 31, NARA (KC).

¹⁰⁹ CIA to Acting Agent Charles Penny, telegram, March 20, 1891, RBIA, RG 75.19.85, Pine Ridge, Telegrams Received, Jan. 1, 1891 – Dec. 15, 1895, Box 721, NARA (KC).

¹¹⁰ Agent P. Palmer to CIA, March 2, 1891, RBIA, RG 75, SC 188, Box 200, NARA (DC). The agent at Cheyenne River thought a share of the blame for the unrest should be placed on the “squawmen” (white men married to Native women who might be living at the agencies) and the “half-breeds” (persons of Native and European ancestry who might be living at the agencies), two groups who were commonly blamed for interfering in the government’s Indian plan. Agent Perain Palmer accused the squawmen and half-breeds of communicating with the Indians on “all subjects pertaining to the treaties” and giving them information in an effort to assure that they received their deserved annuities (which squawmen and half-breeds also received in part).

Indians were preparing for an outbreak using “secret conferences.”¹¹¹ The dissatisfied Brulé were supposedly planning to meet up with the Crows and Cheyennes in Wyoming and raid white settlements as they pass. Indian Affairs instructed the agent at Tongue River to investigate the press report “in a quiet manner and so as not to excite [the Cheyenne’s] minds on the subject,” but there was nothing to the rumors.¹¹²

In late March, an Indian scout named Charles Whitebull reported that the Pine Ridge Indians had received letters from other Indians “out west” that said that “they would help them if they broke out.”¹¹³ Whitebull was tasked to gauge the attitude of the Lakotas and Cheyennes at Pine Ridge and Rosebud. During his thirty-day investigation, Whitebull spoke with friends and informants and his relatives about the dance and the possibility of any further trouble. Some at Pine Ridge would not talk to Whitebull, while others said that they were going to go to war with the whites. Whitebull’s relatives, who thought that another outbreak might be near, were afraid that Whitebull might be murdered for poking around. Whitebull’s findings were forwarded to the agent at Pine Ridge, but nothing amounted to his concerns.

In May 1891, Agent Wright at Rosebud, heard reports that “many letters” were being received by Indians from other agencies. These communications were promoting the rumor that troops were coming to disarm the Indians and take away their horses. Troops were in fact scheduled to arrive at Rosebud, an event that now worried the Rosebud agent. He expected no

¹¹¹ Acting Commissioner to Agent John Tully, April 1, 1891, RBIA, RG 75.19.117, Tongue River, Letters Received 1890-1924, Box 5, NARA (Denver).

¹¹² Acting Commissioner to Agent John Tully, April 1, 1891, RBIA, RG 75.19.117, Tongue River, Letters Received 1890-1924, Box 5, NARA (Denver).

¹¹³ Lt. Col. W. F. Drum to Asst. Adj. Gen. Dept. of Dakota, April 29, 1891, copy in Asst. Adj. Gen. to Agent Charles Penny, May 15, 1891, RBIA, RG 75.19.85, Pine Ridge, Misc. Corres. Received, Box 28, NARA (KC). The Rosebud Brule appeared to be more cooperative, Two Strike told Whitebull that he was going to change his ways and even advise his people to live in the white man’s ways.

future trouble at Rosebud, unless the Indians were “excited or frightened by the arrival of troops and the rumors circulated.”¹¹⁴ The agent did not trust the accuracy of the Indian communications and was concerned that they might cause conflict. Also in May, the acting agent at Pine Ridge got a hold of a letter sent by a Rosebud man visiting the Crow Creek Agency to his brother, an army interpreter at Pine Ridge. A copy of that letter no longer exists, its contents are not known, but it was deemed important enough to be sent to the acting agent at Rosebud in case he wanted to have the letter writer arrested. Agents were willing to imprison those who spread rumors deemed dangerous.¹¹⁵ They realized that the communication between the Lakotas, particularly the news of the troop arrival at Pine Ridge in December, contributed to the "hostilities" of the past winter.

Officials also blamed intertribal visiting for the troubles. The amount of movement between tribes was obvious. On a ration day in mid-December 1890, at least twenty-seven Cheyenne River Sioux were off at other agencies like Rosebud, Pine Ridge, and Standing Rock without permission.¹¹⁶ “Strolling Indians,” a white reporter explained, were “constantly moving from band to band within the limits of each tribes to make distant pilgrimages to visit other tribes.”¹¹⁷ Agents were worried about the information that visiting Indians might bring to their reserves. “The importance of stopping visits at this time has been fully appreciated,” the Rosebud agent assured the Commissioner, and every means in my power has and is being used

¹¹⁴ Agent J. George Wright to CIA, May 18, 1891, RBIA, RG 75.19.96, Rosebud, Copies of Letters Sent, Volume 20, NARA (KC).

¹¹⁵ Capt. Charles Penny to Capt. C. Earnest, May 30, 1891, RBIA, RG 75.19.85, Pine Ridge, Copies of Misc. Letters Sent, Box 54, NARA (KC).

¹¹⁶ “Number and names of Indians absent and not drawing Rations at Cheyenne River Agency SD,” December 22, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.19.11, Cheyenne River, Box 364, NARA (KC).

¹¹⁷ *The Malvern Ledger* (Iowa), March 12, 1891.

to effectually stop such.”¹¹⁸ After Wounded Knee, one reporter criticized the Sioux agencies for not creating a “system of the strictest surveillance” that would have prevented the “hostile,” “prying” “spies” from “constantly” visiting those who had not been affected by the dance.¹¹⁹ It “should have been inaugurated weeks ago,” the reporter wrote.

At the Western Shoshone Agency in Nevada, the agent felt that the “craze” was “losing ground” in December 1890, but visiting Indians from other tribes and reservations were keeping up the excitement.¹²⁰ The agent told the Shoshone that he would hold a “big feast” on Christmas if they stopped dancing, while reminding them that continued dancing at the Sioux agencies resulted in the arrival of troops. The Shoshone decided to stop their dancing after two days of debates. They “hoped their dead friends would come back and believed that dancing would help to bring them,” according to their agent, but they were committed to remain “friends of the government.”¹²¹ The agent had “no hope of breaking up their dances altogether,” however, he only hoped he could control them.

John Mayhugh, the former Western Shoshone agent, also noticed the surge in visitors coming to Nevada in early January 1891. He wrote to President Harrison that there had been an “unusual number of dances,” which were caused by the “visiting delegations of Indians from several tribes,” especially from the Fort Hall Agency.¹²² In fact, some messengers sent by

¹¹⁸ Agent J. George Wright to CIA, May 18, 1891, RBIA, RG 75.19.96, Rosebud, Copies of Letters Sent, Volume 20, NARA (KC).

¹¹⁹ *Omaha Daily Bee*, January 8, 1891.

¹²⁰ Agent William Plumb to CIA, December 6, 1890, RBIA, RG 75, SC 188, Box 199, NARA (DC).

¹²¹ Agent William Plumb to CIA, January 10, 1890, RBIA, RG 75, SC 188, Box 200, NARA (DC).

¹²² John Mayhugh to the President, January 9, 1891, RBIA, RG 75, SC 188, Box 200, NARA (DC). Other reports of Nevada dancing in January: “Snakes and Shoshone Dance,” *Salt Lake Tribune*, January 9, 1891. See also, John Mayhugh to CIA, November 24, 1890, RBIA, RG 75, SC 188, Box 200, NARA (DC).

headmen at Fort Hall (probably Shoshones) asked Mayhugh to visit them to discuss the ghost dance. The Fort Hall headmen knew Mayhugh had been to Walker Lake to investigate Wovoka and they wanted to learn more.

Indians continued to seek information about the dance despite the violence at Wounded Knee. Between eighty and one hundred Indians visited Wovoka during the first half of 1891 alone.¹²³ The dances made some Nevada residents nervous and they wanted these intertribal gatherings to end. The *Elko Independent* in Elko, Nevada thought it “was wrong” for the railroad companies to allow “Indians to ride on the trains at this time, as without that means of conveyance they could not possibly assemble in such multitudes on so short notice.”¹²⁴ Without the trains, the newspaper reasoned, the Indians could not come together.

The Lower Brulé and Crow Creek agent, A. P. Dixon, thought that the Lower Brulé Sioux, but not the Crow Creek Sioux, were “impregnated with the pernicious belief,” which led formerly content Indians to become hostile. The “messiah craze had taken root elsewhere,” he contended, “and spread to this agency.” In his mind, the disorder was only carried to the Lower Brulé.¹²⁵ But Dixon’s assessment ignored the fact that the Crow Creek Sioux also heard about the dance from the Oglalas, Rosebud Brulé, and Miniconjous, although acquiring knowledge about the movement did not guarantee full acceptance of it. The Crow Creek Sioux (and the Yankton) did not take part in the dance, despite being in “constant communication” with the other Sioux groups.¹²⁶

¹²³ Michael Hittman, *Wovoka*, 273.

¹²⁴ *Elko Independent*, January 10, 1891.

¹²⁵ Agent A. P. Dixon to CIA, April 10, 1891, RBIA, RG 75, SC 188, Box 200, NARA (DC).

¹²⁶ James Mooney, *The Ghost-dance Religion*, 817.

In May 1891, the Pine Ridge agent, Capt. Charles Penny, told the Rosebud agent that “quite a number” of his Indians were still coming to Pine Ridge without passes, a complaint he first made in April. He had already arrested three of the men, William Red Deer (also known as Ears) and two other Brulé, but he did not think that it amounted to “anything more than a desire to create a sensation and add thereby to their own personal importance.”¹²⁷ Only two weeks before, the Rosebud agent, J. George Wright, told the Commissioner of Indian Affairs that those who were traveling to Pine Ridge went without any hostile intent. They were not going “for the purpose of ‘talking trouble,’” the agent reasoned, they were only trying to retrieve their friends and family who fled to Pine Ridge during the previous winter’s “excitement.”¹²⁸ He did admit, however, that some Indians left Rosebud “without being detected.” But Capt. Penny arrested William Red Deer and his friends for “going about the country...spreading rumors and gossip not consistent with peace and good order,” not because they were looking for their family.¹²⁹ Red Deer was held at the agency guard house in late May, five months after Wounded Knee, because the information they were spreading was considered dangerous.

Many histories of the movement, particularly those focused on the Lakota ghost dance, end their stories contemplating the destructive effect Wounded Knee had on the dance. Ghost dancing on the Lakota reserves did become a rare event (at least for white eyewitnesses), but on

¹²⁷ Capt. Charles Penny to Capt. C. Earnest, May 30, 1891, RBIA, RG 75.19.85, Pine Ridge, Copies of Misc. Letters Sent, Box 54, NARA (KC); Capt. Charles Penny to Agent J. George Wright, May 28, 1891, RBIA, RG 75.19.85, Pine Ridge, Copies of Misc. Letters Sent, Box 54, NARA (KC).

¹²⁸ Agent J. George Wright to CIA, May 18, 1891, RBIA, RG 75.19.96, Rosebud, Copies of Letters Sent, Volume 20, NARA (KC).

¹²⁹ Capt. Charles Penny to Agent J. George Wright, May 28, 1891, RBIA, RG 75.19.85, Pine Ridge, Copies of Misc. Letters Sent, Box 54, NARA (KC).

several other reservations, the ghost dance actually peaked during 1891 and 1892. At the Pawnee and Ponca Agency, large dancing was held November 1891 through January 1892 and continued in some form for years. A Pawnee named Frank White was his tribe's dance leader. White became a disciple of Sitting Bull (the Arapaho) while participating in a ghost dance at the Kiowa, Comanche, and Wichita Agency with the Wichitas, Caddos, and three hundred Pawnees in the late summer 1891. White convinced the Pawnee leadership that the dance was compatible with their traditions and instructed the Pawnees in the dance and its songs.¹³⁰

The Secretary of the Interior scolded Agent J. M. Wood at the Pawnee and Ponca Agency for his inability to detect the "disturbance" even though "all the adult members of the tribe" were participating.¹³¹ The Pawnees and Poncas were able to organize at least three large dances without their agent's knowledge, something "unpardonable," the Secretary thought. But Agent Wood was not fully at fault, and while he blamed much of the business on exaggerated press reports, the Pawnees and Poncas were careful not to advertise their intentions to dance. In fact, Agent Wood wrote a letter directly to Frank White, ordering him to leave the reservation (and return to the Wichitas at the Kiowa, Comanche, and Wichita Agency where he had been living for the past three to four years):

Reports have reached this office that you are upon the Pawnee reservation engaged in leading the Pawnee Indians away from civilization, and introducing certain customs that are considered by our Government as obnoxious to good Government. You will therefore cease your unlawful practices and return to your home at once and save me further trouble.¹³²

¹³⁰ Martha Royce Blaine, *Some Things Are Not Forgotten: A Pawnee Family Remembers* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997), 56-59.

¹³¹ John W. Noble to Agent J.M. Wood, January 15, 1892, RBIA, RG 75, SC 188, Box 200, NARA (DC).

¹³² Agent D. J. M. Wood to Frank White, December 19, 1891, RBIA, RG 75.19.77, Pawnee Ponca Otoe, Reel 18, NARA (OHS).

White did not leave the reservation, but Agent Wood did not want to aggravate the situation. He told Commissioner Morgan that whatever dance the Pawnees were doing, they “had best be left alone as opposition breeds trouble.”¹³³ According to Wood, the ghost dance was “harmless,” despite what newspapers were writing about the movement. It was the “spreading of such falsehoods that do more than all else to retard the true advancement of the Indian.” Especially considering that “a great many of the Indians who are educated read the daily papers and then tell the other Indians” about false reports, “which makes the Indians dissatisfied.” Agent Wood thought that the whites should learn to “mind their own affairs” and not to “seek to plunge Indians in trouble and create animosity among the Indians.”

A few weeks later, in January 1892, Frank White and the Pawnee dancers told Agent Wood that their dance was “their way to worship Christ,” they “believed the Indian religion and the white man’s religion was the same.”¹³⁴ They wanted to be left alone, they would quit dancing when it was time to work, and they believed that Christ would soon come and save the “Indians and whites.” Pressured by the Commissioner to end the dancing, Agent Wood told the dancers that it was not necessary to dance to “worship God in the heart” and he instructed Frank White to leave the Pawnees. Wood thought the Pawnees left the meeting “in good humor,” but none of them promised that the dancing would stop. A few said they would die before they would stop. The dance was so popular among the Pawnees that the Indian police refused to help prevent it. White planned a dance with the Otoes in late March, but Agent Wood, now tired of White’s disobedience, had White arrested. White was charged with insurrection and sent to a

¹³³ Agent D. J. M. Wood to CIA, January 15, 1892, RBIA, RG 75, SC 188, Box 200, NARA (DC).

¹³⁴ Agent D. J. M. Wood to CIA, January 26, 1892, RBIA, RG 75, SC 188, Box 200, NARA (DC).

federal prison in Wichita, Kansas, but was released after he agreed never to participate in the ghost dance again. Before a U.S. commissioner, White signed this letter:

I, Frank White, a Pawnee by birth, and a full blood, being born on the Pawnee reservation, have the honor to say that my intention in coming back to the Pawnee reservation is to reside with my people and to make the Pawnee reservation my home, and that I promise and swear that I will not incite my people to practice the Ghost Dance in any manner, but that I will encourage them in every manner that I can to cultivate their farms and to enlarge and beautify their homes and that I will do all I can to preserve order in the tribe and assist in every possible way to benefit my tribe, that I will open a farm of my own and settle down to an honest life among my people, striving to set before them an example worthy of emulation.

Despite signing the paper, White still tried to maintain his influence among the dancers, but was superseded by others who visited the Cheyenne and Arapaho Agency to visit Sitting Bull (the Arapaho) and returned with what they called a more authentic vision of the dance. White died in January 1893, but the ghost dance persisted at the Pawnee reservation well into the twentieth century.¹³⁵ Secrecy was practiced to avoid trouble with the agent, dances were held in remote areas, sometimes in deep snow. Pawnee dancers were intentionally quiet, they softened their voices, and as one Pawnee remember, they “began to hide around to do it.”¹³⁶

The *Omaha Daily Bee* attributed the wide dissemination of the ghost dance to the superstitious and naive nature of the Indians. “It is easy to believe,” the paper commented, “that the prophecy has been passed around among all the tribes of the northwest...being generally accepted as a true forecast of what is come to pass.”¹³⁷ But of course not everyone who heard the messiah’s story became a believer. Many white Americans assumed that the Indians’

¹³⁵ Alexander Lesser, *Pawnee Ghost Dance Hand Game*, 62-102; Martha Royce Blaine, *Some Things Are Not Forgotten*, 72-79.

¹³⁶ Martha Royce Blaine, *Some Things Are Not Forgotten*, 66-67, 74-75.

¹³⁷ “An Indian Prophecy,” *Omaha Daily Bee*, April 12, 1890.

inherent naïveté assured the success of the ghost dance movement. It was thought that skepticism was not a part of their uncivilized minds and Indians accepted, without reasoning, religious ideas short of evidence. One reporter proclaimed that “no stronger proselyting power is possessed by any people or class in the world than that of Indian over Indian.”¹³⁸ They were too trusting of their own kind, he thought. They believed what they heard.

Unfortunately, this nineteenth century presumption bled into twentieth century scholarship. Scholars have long tried to discover why Natives believed Wovoka’s claims, theorizing about the Indians’ internal motivations. They have mostly assumed that dissemination led to devotion. But studies have ignored an equally important question: Why did most Indians decide not to dance? While the movement reached the minds of thousands of Indians, not all of them were changed. The majority of those who learned about the ghost dance movement, in fact, did not become devoted dancers. And although it is impossible to gauge the level of acceptance of the movement’s ideas in the minds of the thousands of Native people, it is clear that many Natives were skeptics and they used the same methods of communication to investigate and express their concerns. Letter writing and intertribal visitation also gave Natives the ability to denounce the legitimacy of the ghost dance. The narrative of the movement’s spread has traditionally been told as a search for hope.¹³⁹ Some scholars have repeated the sentimental and simplistic story that a group of miserable people were just looking for something to believe in.¹⁴⁰ But this narrative ignores the fact the many Natives went to great lengths to find

¹³⁸ *Omaha Daily Bee*, January 8, 1891.

¹³⁹ Bernard Barber, “Acculturation and Messianic Movements,” *American Sociological Review* 6, No. 5 (Oct. 1941): 663-669; John Greenway, “The Ghost Dance, Some Reflections, with Evidence, on a Cult of Despair Among the Indians of North America,” *The American West* 6, No. 4 (1969): 42-47.

¹⁴⁰ Jerome A. Greene, *American Carnage*, 65, 75.

and evaluate evidence. Indians collected information, they sent delegations to investigate, and some criticized the movement. Shouldn't this narrative then, be told as a search for truth?

The majority of Plains Indians did not participate in the ghost dance, but these non-believers also used letter writing to send news about the movement to friends and family. Lawrence Industrious (Blihica), an eighteen-year-old Hampton graduate at Pine Ridge, answered his cousin's questions about the state of affairs at Pine Ridge in a letter. According to Industrious, the hostiles never intended to return to their agencies after they fled, "they had made up their minds to fight the whites as long as they lasted and consequently burned up their former homes killed all their cattle and burned all the hay they had, and now that peace has been restored they are suffering very much."¹⁴¹ But he also noted that it was good to see "the Indian camped as in early life...it would make you feel good to see them." Industrious told his cousin, One Bull at Standing Rock (the adopted son of Sitting Bull) to bear in mind that Kicking Bear would possibly be allowed to dance again.¹⁴² "Keep your ears open this way I say this to you on the quiet," he advised.

Some Indians used the mail to condemn Indian Affairs for not doing enough to end the ghost dance. A group of twenty-nine former Hampton students from the Crow Creek and Lower Brulé agencies asked their agent, through a petition, to suppress dancing "of any class" on the reserves because they were a "hindrance to their and our progress toward civilization."¹⁴³ Lewis

¹⁴¹ Lawrence Industrious to One Bull, March 4, 1891, reproduced in Stanley Vestal, *New Sources of Indian History*, 59. Vestal records a slightly different translation in W.S. Campbell Collection, 114, Western History Collections, University of Oklahoma, Norman.

¹⁴² For more on One Bull and Sitting Bull, see Stanley Vestal, *Champion of the Sioux* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1987), 313.

¹⁴³ John Pattee, et al, to Agent A. P. Dixon, October 28, 1891, RBIA, RG 75, SC 188, Box 200, NARA (DC). The Hampton Students Association met "to discuss such matters are beneficial to the welfare of our people and to undertake to remove any existing obstacle that may hinder them."

Miller, a Southern Arapaho at the Haskell Institute, was so concerned about the continuation of the dance at the Cheyenne and Arapaho Agency that he wrote a letter to President Harrison asking for troops to stop the dance. Miller wrote that the agent's lack of concern about the movement allowed the dances to persist.¹⁴⁴ Likewise, Swift Bird at Cheyenne River wrote to his agent to ask him to replace the lieutenant of police there because he did not try to prevent the dancers from going to Pine Ridge the previous autumn.¹⁴⁵

Non-believers continued to distance themselves from the dancers, particularly the Lakotas, in an effort to retain good relations with federal officials. The Shoshone chief Washakie at Wind River ensured the President and Commissioner Morgan that they had “always been the friends of the white men,” they had never given the “Chiefs at Washington any trouble at all.” His people did “not know why the Sioux are so foolish as to want to fight with the people.”¹⁴⁶ It was “impossible,” the Shoshone thought, to clean out the white men. Likewise, Black Coal's Northern Arapahos, who had been trying to convince Indian Affairs to give them an agency separate from the one they shared with the Shoshones at Wind River, were quick to tell the Secretary of the Interior that they would not harbor any “malcontents” or allow anything wrong in their camps.¹⁴⁷ The group knew that their campaign for their own reserve could be ruined if the government thought they were a source of ghost dance trouble. Black Coal, who,

¹⁴⁴ Lewis H. Miller to Pres. Harrison, November (undated) 1891, RBIA, RG 75, SC 188, Box 200, NARA (DC).

¹⁴⁵ Swift Bird to Agent Perain Palmer, November 20, 1891, RBIA, RG 75.19.11, Cheyenne River, Box 570, NARA (KC).

¹⁴⁶ Washakie, et al. to the President, January 31, 1891, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 5896, Box 704, NARA (DC); Agent John Foshier to CIA, December 3, 1890, RBIA, RG 75, SC 188, Box 199, NARA (DC)

¹⁴⁷ Ignatius Panken to Sect. of Interior, December 10, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 39955, Box 689, NARA (DC); “An Interview with Chief Black Coal Regarding His People,” *Omaha Daily Bee*, February 8, 1890.

according to Mooney, had suspicions about the dance from the beginning, sent his own delegation, partway by rail, to see Wovoka in late 1890. Yellow Eagle, a Northern Arapaho and former Genoa student, led the investigation (joined by Goes in Lodge, Black Bear, Washington, and Michael Goodman) and concluded that the movement was disingenuous upon their return to Wind River in early 1891. However, those Northern Arapahos outside of Black Coal's influence, such as the followers of Sharp Nose, continued to believe in the dance.¹⁴⁸ The Wind River agent reported that they were led by a "few fanatics," but they were not insubordinate or ill tempered.¹⁴⁹

The most effective Native critic of Wovoka was a Kiowa named Apiatan. Because of his testimony, many Kiowas rejected the dance in February 1891. Back in September 1890, Apiatan journeyed to the northern reservations (partly by rail) to examine the validity of the ghost dance and sit face to face with Wovoka. His agent, Charles Adams, eventually encouraged the trip, believing that Apiatan's investigation would prove the messiah a fraud. Apiatan was not a headman (it seems even Agent Adams did not know much about him) and his plan to visit Wovoka was not revealed to government officials until after he had already made it to Pine Ridge. The Commissioner of Indian Affairs allowed Apiatan to go to Pine Ridge because he was only told that Apiatan planned to visit his relatives.¹⁵⁰

James Mooney described Apiatan as a downtrodden, grieving man who had recently lost a child. He "was moved by parental affection, which is the ruling passion with an Indian" to

¹⁴⁸ "Denounced the Messiah," *Omaha Daily Bee*, February 10, 1890; James Mooney, *Ghost-dance Religion*, 808; Loretta Fowler, *Arapahoe Politics*, 122.

¹⁴⁹ Agent John Fosher to CIA, December 3, 1890, RBIA, RG 75, SC 188, Box 199, NARA (DC)

¹⁵⁰ CIA to Agent Charles Adams, September 8, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.19.50, Kiowa Comanche and Wichita, Letters Received, Reel 40, NARA (OHS); Agent Charles Adams to CIA, March 21, 1891, RBIA, RG 75.19.50, Kiowa Comanche and Wichita, Letters Sent, Reel 19, NARA (OHS).

make the journey, hoping to be able to see his departed child in a vision initiated by Wovoka.

The Kiowa headmen were convinced by Apiatan to fund his efforts, which would clearly answer the questions about Wovoka's legitimacy. Most of the Kiowas went to the agency to see Apiatan off, an event that is recorded on the Kiowa calendar along with his return five months later.¹⁵¹

Once Apiatan made it to Pine Ridge in October, he informed Agent Adams that he wanted to investigate the messiah further west at the Wind River Agency. Agent Adams agreed and mailed \$47.00, raised by the Kiowas, to the Pine Ridge agent to give to Apiatan for his eventual train ride back home.¹⁵² The Kiowa were anxious to find some tangible evidence. They wanted the trip to be as quick as possible. Apiatan took the Union Pacific west with a pass provided by the Pine Ridge agent. Because Wind River sat one hundred miles north of the tracks, Apiatan did not reach the agency by November 19.¹⁵³ Writing from St. Stephens Mission in Fremont County, Wyoming, presumably with the help of a priest, Apiatan let his friends back home know how his trip was going.

To Chief Big Tree

Kiowa Nation

Indian Territory

And Also Big Head + Lone Wolf

November 17, 1889

My Dear Friends: I write you three this letter and you will also kindly show it to our Agent. After I left home my first visit was to the Sioux Reservation at Pine Ridge Dakota. I found everything good, and all the people very kind. My Second visit was to the Arapahoe + Shoshone reservation and I have the pleasure of shaking hands with all the people who were also very kind to me. I am still at this reservation but would like to make still further visits to Fort Hall where the Bannock Indians are living – For this purpose I beg of you and our Agent to send me another pass for this purpose, and to send it as soon as possible. Before leaving home, our agent gave me some good advice regarding

¹⁵¹ James Mooney, *The Ghost-dance Religion*, 908-909.

¹⁵² Agent Charles Adams to Agent H. D. Gallagher, October 10, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.19.50, Kiowa Comanche and Wichita, Letters Sent, Reel 19, NARA (OHS).

¹⁵³ Agent John Fosher to Agent Charles Adams, November 19, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.19.50, Kiowa Comanche and Wichita, Letters Received, Reel 40, NARA (OHS); Hugh Lenox Scott, *Some Memoirs of a Soldier* (New York: Century Co., 1928), 149.

my conduct amongst the strangers whom I should visit. I write to inform him that I have strictly adhered to his advice. My only desire's to get along with all the parties and see all the different Indian tribes I can. When I left Pine Ridge to come to this reservation, I had to hire an Indian as guide to come with me. Of course I had to pay his way on the railway cars. This has now left me short of money and so I ask you to send me some more to help me through – As you may not have time to get the money at once, I wish you to send me the pass right away, and send the money afterward to this mission, in care of the priests, so that I may get it to go home on when I come back here.

Now, my friends, you must not look for me home very soon – In this country the winter has already set in and it is pretty cold – hence I am taking my time in traveling taking advantage only of the fine weather whenever we have any – I think I cannot be home again until about Spring when the grass is beginning to grow. If you send me the pass to go on to Fort Hall, I will hire an Arapahoe or a Shoshone from this place to guide me through – The Sioux Indian from Pine Ridge is tired and is going to leave from here – Although I am a stranger to all these people, they are all glad to see me, and treat me very kindly both Whites and Indians – So far, I have had perfect health – So it is with all the Indians I have met in my travels – they are all a good healthy people. When you get this letter I hope you will write to me at once and give me all the news you can about our home, as nothing can give me more pleasure. I am staying here with Chief Black Coal of the Arapahoe tribe – He wishes me to let you know how glad he is to see me here. He says he is very much pleased to hear of the great prosperity of the Kiowa tribe. He is pleased to hear that so many of our children are going to school. He says also that he is glad to hear that we are doing so much farming, and advises us to continue more and more. He hopes you will all listen to what I say to you – He wishes to shake hands with our people in the Indian Territory – With kind regards to all our people I remain yours Sincerely – Ahpiatan Kiow Chief¹⁵⁴

The agent at Wind River, John Foshier, asked Apiatan on his arrival if he came there to investigate the “second coming of Christ.” For reasons unknown, Apiatan told Foshier that he had not, but he still asked permission to continue further west to the Fort Hall Agency. Foshier informed Agent Adams back at the Kiowa reserve that Apiatan was at Wind River and that he wanted an extension on his pass.¹⁵⁵ Agent Adams asked Foshier to extend it and admitted that

¹⁵⁴ Apiatan to Big Tree, et al, November 17, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.19.50, Kiowa Comanche and Wichita, Letters Received, Reel 39, NARA (OHS).

¹⁵⁵ Agent John Foshier to Agent Charles Adams, November 19, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.19.50, Kiowa Comanche and Wichita, Letters Received, Reel 40, NARA (OHS).

Apiatan was indeed seeking out the messiah. The investigation could “do no possible harm,” Adams explained.¹⁵⁶

Apiatan made it to Fort Hall and the agent there allowed two Bannock men to guide him to Mason Valley in Nevada to see Wovoka.¹⁵⁷ On the day before Christmas, 1890, Apiatan’s party, now made up of five men, arrived at the Nevada Agency and was “treated Royally” with a “Big Eat” and new clothes.¹⁵⁸ Before they visited Wovoka’s home near the Walker River reserve, Nevada agent C. C. Warner passed along Apiatan’s message to the Kiowas. Apiatan wanted his father and friends to know about the letter right away so that they could send him news from home (which “they were anxious to hear.”) Apiatan said the Paiutes were glad they came, they treated them kindly, and he felt that the Kiowas and the Paiutes were “like brothers.” He promised to send a report about Wovoka (Jack Wilson) as soon as he could. Agent Warner sent Apiatan to Walker River with a letter that would ensure good treatment on arrival. In the *Daily Nevada State Journal*, Agent Warner called each member of Apiatan’s party “intelligent” Indians who “fully understood the import of their important mission.”¹⁵⁹

Unfortunately, Apiatan was disappointed with his meeting with Wovoka, which took place sometime in the first half of January 1891.¹⁶⁰ He expected Wovoka to be all the things that were said about him, a man with powerful medicine. He hoped that Wovoka, being omniscient, would already know why he was there, but he did not. He thought he would be able to

¹⁵⁶ Agent Charles Adams to John Fosher, November 1890, date illegible, RBIA, RG 75.19.50, Kiowa Comanche and Wichita, Letters Sent, Reel 19, NARA (OHS).

¹⁵⁷ Agent Fisher to Agent Charles Adams, August 15, 1891, RBIA, RG 75.19.50, Kiowa Comanche and Wichita, Letters Received, Reel 50, NARA (OHS).

¹⁵⁸ Agent C. C. Warner to Agent Charles Adams, December 26, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.19.50, Kiowa Comanche and Wichita, Letters Received, Reel 39, NARA (OHS).

¹⁵⁹ “The Indian Situation,” *Daily Nevada State Journal*, January 14, 1891.

¹⁶⁰ “Coming to See the ‘Messiah,’” *Daily Territorial Enterprise* (Nev.), January 3, 1891; Lt. H. L. Scott to Post Adj. Fort Sill, February 22, 1891, RBIA, RG 75, SC 188, Box 200, NARA (DC).

understand the Kiowa language, but a Shoshone had to interpret. Apiatan found Wovoka in his bed covered with a blanket singing to himself, looking like an ordinary man, a little demoralized. Wovoka did not, however, deny being the man Apiatan was looking for. Apiatan asked if he could see his dead relatives, his recently deceased child especially, but Wovoka told him there were none to see. Also, Wovoka did not have the scars of crucifixion, like some said he would have, and Apiatan concluded there was nothing divine about Wovoka.¹⁶¹ The meeting took place in the days after the Wounded Knee massacre and Wovoka, probably devastated about the events in South Dakota, told Apiatan that the Sioux had distorted the things he told them. According to James Mooney and Lt. H. L. Scott, Wovoka told Apiatan that he better go home and tell his people to quit the dancing before they also got into trouble.¹⁶²

Agent Warner said Kiowa visitors looked “upon the ‘Messiah’ as a great ‘humbug’” and would report as much at their respective agencies when they got home.”¹⁶³ After leaving Nevada, Apiatan and his guides reported their disappointment to the Bannocks and Shoshones at Fort Hall.¹⁶⁴ The bad news was also sent via letter to the Kiowa reserve. Through an interpreter at the St. Stephen’s Mission in Wind River, Apiatan wrote on January 26, 1891 to Agent Adams:

I am just back from a visit to Fort Hall, Idaho and Walker Lake Agency, Nevada, and have received your letter, containing the remittance of \$40.00 forty dollars. I thank you most sincerely for your kindness in taking so much interest on my behalf. I also ask you to thank the good people for me who have contributed the money. I am leaving here in three days to go to Pine Ridge Agency to tell the Sioux what I saw and heard in Nevada where the great Indian

¹⁶¹ For an example of the descriptions of Wovoka that reached Indian Territory, see Abe Somers to Dear Friends, undated, copy in Charles Meserve to CIA, January 27, 1892, RBIA, RG 75, SC 188, Box 200, NARA (DC); Albert S. Gatschet, “Report of an Indian Visit to Jack Wilson, The Payute Messiah,” *The Journal of American Folklore* 6, No. 21 (Apr.-Jun., 1893), 108-111.

¹⁶² Lt. H. L. Scott to Fort Adjutant Ft. Sill, January 30, 1891, RBIA, RG 75, SC 188, Box 200, NARA (DC); James Mooney, *The Ghost-dance Religion*, 913.

¹⁶³ “The Indian Situation,” *Daily Nevada State Journal*, January 14, 1891.

¹⁶⁴ Agent Fisher to Agent Charles Adams, August 15, 1891, RBIA, RG 75.19.50, Kiowa Comanche and Wichita, Letters Received, Reel 50, NARA (OHS).

Prophet lives, and where I went to see along with other Indians. We found him to be an immense fraud who has been imposing on the credulity of the ignorant and given plenty of trouble – No is now found out to be a fraud and a cheat and so his game is all up – I think I shall be able to leave for home about the month of March. In the meantime please give my affections to my wife and family and to all my people. Accept my thanks and kindest regards. I am enjoying very good health now although I was not too well during part of the winter. Yours very respectfully, A-pe-a-tone¹⁶⁵

On February 10, at least six days after receiving Apiatan's letter, Agent Adams replied.

Regrettably, Adams did not send the letter to Pine Ridge, he sent it to St. Stephen's, even though Apiatan told him he was about to go to Pine Ridge. The letter read:

Dear Friend: I received your letter a few days ago, and was especially glad to know that you have lost all confidence in the so called Messiah. Your people were glad to hear from you and believe what you say. Now I think it is about time for you to return home and get ready for summer work on the farm, so I will look for you shortly. Your people all send love. Your friend, Chas. E. Adams Indian Agent, Kiowa.¹⁶⁶

James Mooney claimed he was present when a letter sent by Apiatan while he was at Fort Hall (which would have predated the letter from St. Stephen's) was read to the Kiowa by his sister Laura Dunmoi, a former Carlisle student. Mooney said the crowd was divided, some felt "that the ground had been taken from under them," while others stayed faithful.¹⁶⁷ Although many Kiowa dancers were convinced by the letters and stopped believing, others persisted because they knew Apiatan's letter came to them through two white men. Apiatan's January 26th letter did not offer any details about why he reached his conclusions. And the dancers knew Apiatan spoke little English (the letter must have been transcribed by a translator) so they decided to wait until Apiatan's return before changing their minds about the messiah. Lt. H. L. Scott reported

¹⁶⁵ Apiatan to Agent Charles Adams, January 26, 1891, RBIA, RG 75.19.50, Kiowa Comanche and Wichita, Letters Received, Reel 50, NARA (OHS).

¹⁶⁶ Agent Charles Adams to Apiatan, February 10, 1891, RBIA, RG 75.19.50, Kiowa Comanche and Wichita, Letters Sent, Reel 19, NARA (OHS).

¹⁶⁷ James Mooney, *The Ghost-dance Religion*, 912-913.

that even though “a number” of Kiowas put aside “the doctrine of the new earth,” they hoped to continue the dances as a way to worship the “‘Christ’ who is in heaven” and “to pray to him for what they need.”¹⁶⁸ They still wanted to hold a large dance in the spring.

Agent Adams told the Commissioner of Indian Affairs that he believed the dance was “a bad thing...physically, morally, and financially.”¹⁶⁹ He had “no sympathy whatever with a sentimental or theoretic view of the matter.” Adams tried to deprive Kiowa, Caddo, and Wichita dancers of certain privileges, which Sitting Bull’s (the Arapaho) followers resented, but Adams thought effective. Adams wanted to use extra police and troops to stop the dancing at his reserve (and disarm the Indians) the previous November and December, but Indian Affairs and the military resisted.¹⁷⁰ Adams did become less anxious about the dance in January, reporting to the Commissioner that the Kiowas, most of whom were still “faithful believers,” were “behaving themselves remarkably well considering the conduct of their brethren in other parts of the country, and their naturally wild, nomadic dispositions and the pressure brought to bear upon them by sensational reports and bad advice, which they, no doubt receive from the North.”¹⁷¹

After five months absent, Apiatan arrived home in February 1891. The Fort Hall agent helped Apiatan raise some money to get him there.¹⁷² Apiatan’s testimony and recommendation to end the dances would greatly reduce the popularity of the movement among the Kiowas.

¹⁶⁸ Lt. H. L. Scott to Fort Adjutant Ft. Sill, January 30, 1891, RBIA, RG 75, SC 188, Box 200, NARA (DC).

¹⁶⁹ Agent Charles Adams to CIA, February 4, 1891, RBIA, RG 75, SC 188, Box 200, NARA (DC).

¹⁷⁰ Agent Charles Adams to CIA, November 29, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 37264, Box 683, NARA (DC); Hugh Lenox Scott, *Some Memoirs of a Soldier* (New York: Century Co., 1928), 149.

¹⁷¹ Agent Charles Adams to CIA, January 14, 1891, RBIA, RG 75, SC 188, Box 200, NARA (DC).

¹⁷² Agent Fisher to Agent Charles Adams, August 15, 1891, RBIA, RG 75.19.50, Kiowa Comanche and Wichita, Letters Received, Reel 50, NARA (OHS).

Hundreds of Indians attended a scheduled council on February 19 where Apiatan recounted his journey and confronted Sitting Bull, the Arapaho who had spent weeks propagating the movement in Indian Territory. Agent Adams called for the council, knowing that Apiatan would influence a good percentage of the Kiowas. However, Sitting Bull also claimed to have met Wovoka in the summer 1890 and his story was much different than Apiatan's. It proved to be a monumental debate and an important event in Kiowa history.

Sitting Bull held a lot of influence with the southern tribes. Incredibly, in late January 1891, a month after Wounded Knee, Charles Ashley, the Cheyenne and Arapaho agent allowed Sitting Bull to visit the Wichitas and Caddos, unconcerned about his influence as "a teacher of this faith."¹⁷³ Laura Tatum, a Wichita, and Thomas Wooster, a Caddo, traveled from the Kiowa, Comanche, and Wichita Agency to Agent Ashley's office, at least fifty miles, to ask him if Sitting Bull could come to their homes. Ashley told their agent that Sitting Bull was a "good Indian," he had "no trouble with him," and he did not object to the visit.

At the February 19 council, Apiatan challenged Sitting Bull's beliefs. Every word of the debates was translated into English, Kiowa, Comanche, Caddo, Wichita, and Arapaho, a slow process according to James Mooney who attended the gathering. Agent Adams and different headmen asked Apiatan about his experience before Sitting Bull was given the chance to defend himself. Apiatan accused Sitting Bull of deceiving Indian Territory for economic gain. He had been given horses and other gifts by believers, but Sitting Bull said he never asked for anything and would return everything if asked (Apiatan reminded him that the Kiowa would never take

¹⁷³ Agent Charles Ashley to Agent Charles Adams, January 31, 1891, RBIA, RG 75.19.10, Cheyenne and Arapaho, Letters Sent, Reel 32, NARA (OHS).

back what had been given).¹⁷⁴ The Kiowas had heard stories like Apiatan's before, from both Black Coyote and Sitting Bull, but Apiatan's story was perhaps the first that denied the truth of the movement. Most of the Kiowa accepted Apiatan's version, but the Caddos and Wichitas continued to dance at the reservation. Those who attended the council remembered it as one of the worst days in Kiowa history.¹⁷⁵ In the years that followed, however, particularly in 1894, the Kiowas did experience periodic revivals of the dance and its songs.¹⁷⁶

Because of his "services to the Government" during the "Messiah craze," Apiatan was given a silver medal with the likeness of President Benjamin Harrison on one side and "figures emblematic of the Indians' progress in the ways of advancement and civilization" on the other.¹⁷⁷ The Commissioner hoped that the token would inspire Apiatan to renew the effort "in the further enlightenment of his people." In 1930, Indian Affairs spent five hundred dollars painting and repairing the seventy-three year old Apiatan's house "to redeem a promise made by Commissioner Morgan in about 1890."¹⁷⁸

In August 1891, the Fort Hall agent wrote to Agent Adams at the Kiowa reserve curious to know if Apiatan did in fact denounce Wovoka as a fraud.¹⁷⁹ During the previous month, the Fort Hall agent hosted a new delegation from the south, this time from the Southern Arapahos.

¹⁷⁴ Lt. H. L. Scott to Post Adj. Fort Sill, February 22, 1891, RBIA, RG 75, SC 188, Box 200, NARA (DC); James Mooney, *The Ghost-dance Religion*, 913-914.

¹⁷⁵ Benjamin R. Kracht, "The Kiowa Ghost Dance, 1894-1916: An Unheralded Revitalization Movement," *Ethnohistory* 39, No. 4 (Autumn, 1992): 452-477.

¹⁷⁶ James Mooney, *The Ghost-dance Religion*, 914; Benjamin R. Kracht, "The Kiowa Ghost Dance," 459; James Mooney, "The Indian Ghost Dance," *Collections of the Nebraska Historical Society*, No. 16 (1911), 173.

¹⁷⁷ CIA to Agent George Day, March 26, 1892, RBIA, RG 75.19.50, Kiowa Comanche and Wichita, Letters Received, Reel 50, NARA (OHS).

¹⁷⁸ District Supt. In Charge to CIA, September 30, 1930, RBIA, RG 75.19.50, Kiowa Comanche and Wichita, Letters Received, Reel 50, NARA (OHS).

¹⁷⁹ Agent Fisher to Agent Charles Adams, August 15, 1891, RBIA, RG 75.19.50, Kiowa Comanche and Wichita, Letters Received, Reel 50, NARA (OHS).

In July 1891, Casper Edson, a former Carlisle student, joined two other Southern Arapahos from the Cheyenne and Arapaho Agency, Little Raven and Red Wolf, on their own self-funded investigative mission similar to Apiatan's.¹⁸⁰ They left with permission under the guise of visiting friends and relatives at the Wind River Agency, not telling their agent the true purpose of the trip.¹⁸¹ The agent was glad to allow Edson the opportunity, after all he was employed at the Arapaho agency school and considered "one of the brightest and best of the returned students." Little Raven and Red Wolf were "of the best of the uneducated Indian young men." The Carlisle school paper, *The Indian Helper*, described Edson as "one of our earnest, thoughtful students," and was sure the he would "do well in whatever he finds to do, whether it be upon the reservation or away from it."¹⁸² Unlike Apiatan's journey, Edson's would give more credence to Wovoka's dance.

A previous delegation from the Cheyenne and Arapaho Agency visited Wovoka in early 1891, led by Tall Bull, the captain of the Southern Cheyenne police.¹⁸³ The Southern Arapaho scout Arnold Woolworth (Bagugi or Big Boy), another former Carlisle student, interpreted for the group, which included a woman.¹⁸⁴ They participated in a ghost dance with the Paiutes under the direction of Wovoka and brought home balls of Wovoka's sacred red ochre. Not much else is known about the Tall Bull's journey, but Casper Edson's group decided to head north soon after their return.

¹⁸⁰ Casper Edson left Carlisle in November 1890 after spending the better part of a decade there. See "Casper Edson," RBIA, RG 75.20.3, Carlisle, Entry 1327, Box 3, Card 138.

¹⁸¹ Agent Charles Ashley to CIA, August 22, 1891, RBIA, RG 75, SC 188, Box 200, NARA (DC).

¹⁸² *The Indian Helper*, November 14, 1890. See also *The Indian Helper*, December 19, 1890.

¹⁸³ James Mooney, *The Ghost-dance Religion*, 900.

¹⁸⁴ An orphan and member of Left Hand's band, Woolworth was at Carlisle from 1881 to 1887. He worked as a scout at Fort Reno for \$25 a month in 1890 and lived in his sister's tepee, see *The Red Man*, June 1890 and Loretta Fowler, *Wives and Husbands*, 134.

Edson, Little Raven, and Red Wolf traveled by trail from Darlington (near present-day El Reno, OK) to Fort Hall where they met a group of English-speaking Shoshones and Bannocks at the Pocatello train station. After becoming acquainted, they were led to the house of Tighee, a Bannock chief, at Fort Hall and joined them in a council that lasted all day. At the request of the Fort Hall agent, Lt. W. H. Johnston, who happened to be a recruiting officer, gave the trio a tent and rations, but only after Casper Edson, who spoke fluent English, agreed to “induce these Indians to enlist” in the army.¹⁸⁵ The men lied to the lieutenant, telling him that they were “traveling for pleasure to the Pacific Coast” and that it was only by accident that they met the Shoshones and Bannocks at Pocatello.

Edson, Little Raven, and Red Wolf stayed at Lt. Johnston’s camp for five days and visited Tighee’s house occasionally. “They seemed very intelligent,” the Johnston observed, “yet talked only with the wildest and most ignorant Bannocks; avoiding the more progressive Shoshones.”¹⁸⁶ On July 28, the men told Lt. Johnston that they were going to board a north-bound train to Montana, but Johnston saw them hiding in a baggage car that was heading south with other blanketed Indians. The lieutenant tried to speak to the men, but they ignored him. Confused, Lt. Johnston questioned those who made contact with the men and discovered that they really were on their way to the Walker River Agency to meet Wovoka. They had stopped at Fort Hall intending to meet some Crow Indians to travel the rest of the way with.

On August 13, the Fort Hall agent, S. G. Fisher, wrote to the Arapahos’ agent as well as the Nevada agent, C. C. Warner, to inform them. Agent Warner reported that the group arrived

¹⁸⁵ Lt. W. H. Johnston, Jr. to Asst. Adj. Gen. Dept. of the Platte, August 13, 1891, RBIA, RG 75, SC 188, Box 200, NARA (DC).

¹⁸⁶ Lt. W. H. Johnston, Jr. to Asst. Adj. Gen. Dept. of the Platte, August 13, 1891, RBIA, RG 75, SC 188, Box 200, NARA (DC).

there, in Elko, Nevada, on August 1 and that Edson told him that the men were on a vacation, wanting to see that part of the country. Warner gave them passes to Walker River and asked the Central Pacific Railroad to give them passes back east, all the way to Ogden, Utah, when they were ready to leave. Warner did all of this before he knew the “sole mission” of the Southern Arapaho was to see Wovoka. He admitted that he would not have permitted them to go to Walker River if he had known. Warner told Agent Fisher that intertribal visitation did “no good” and he thought “it would be best for all concerned if the agents of distant tribes would curtail this visiting privilege, or better still abolish it altogether, except in very extreme and extenuating circumstances.”¹⁸⁷ Brigadier General John R. Brooke “strongly” approved of Warner’s recommendation.

Nevertheless, Edson, Little Raven, and Red Wolf made it to Wovoka’s camp. James Mooney reported that two other Southern Arapahos, Black Coyote, a policeman, and Grant Left Hand, the son of Left Hand and one of the first students at Carlisle, and two Southern Cheyennes, Black Sharp Nose and Standing Bull, were also at that meeting, probably as members of Edson’s delegation.¹⁸⁸ Black Coyote, who had brought instructions for the dance to the Southern Arapahos after he made an earlier trip to the Northern Arapahos at Wind River, told Mooney that Wovoka demonstrated his power after he waved eagle feathers over his empty hat. Inside, Black Coyote “saw the whole world.”

Casper Edson and Grant Left Hand interpreted and wrote down, on the spot, in English, what Wovoka told them. That written message was brought home to the Cheyenne and Arapaho

¹⁸⁷ Agent C. C. Warner to Agent S. G. Fisher, August 19, 1891, RBIA, RG 75, SC 188, Box 200, NARA (DC).

¹⁸⁸ James Mooney, *The Ghost-dance Religion*, 900. Government documents never mention the additional members of Edson, Little Raven, and Red Wolf’s delegation.

reservation by Edson, confirming the truth of the movement while relaying Wovoka's instructions east. James Mooney was able to read this message, he called it the "Messiah Letter," even though Wovoka explicitly told the men not to show his words to a white man. Black Sharp Nose trusted Mooney enough to show him the letter because Mooney himself visited Wovoka in January 1892. Historians can only wonder what other letters were kept secret, but Edson's transcript remains. The letter read (Mooney's clarifications in brackets):

When you get home you make dance, and will give you the same. when you dance four days and in night one day, dance day time, five days and then fift, will wash five for every body. He likes you for you give him good many things, he heart been satting feel good. After you get home, will give good cloud, and give you chance to make you feel good. and he give you good spirit. and he give you al a good paint.

You folks want you to come in three [months] here, any tribs from there. There will be good bit snow this year. Sometimes rain's, in fall, this year some rain, never give you any thing like that. grandfather said when he die never no cry. no hurt anybody. no fight, good behave always, it will give you satisfaction, this young man, he is a good Father and mother, dont tell no white man. Jueses was on ground, he just like cloud. Every body is alive again, I dont know when they will [be] here, may be this fall or in spring.

Every body never get sick, be young again, - (if young fellow no sick any more,) work for white men never trouble with him until you leave, when it shake the earth dont be afraid no harm any body.

You make dance for six weeks night, and put you foot [food!] in dance to eat for every body and wash in the water. that is all to tell, I am in to you. and you will received a good words from him some time, Dont tell lie.

On the reverse side of the "Messiah Letter," Black Sharp Nose's daughter rewrote Edson's transcript into clearer English, Mooney called this the "Cheyenne version:"

When you get home you have to make dance. You must dance four nights and one day time. You will take bath in the morning before you go to yours homes, for every body, and give you all the same as this. Jackson Wilson likes you all, he is glad to get good many things. His heart satting fully of gladness, after you get home, I will give you a good cloud and give you chance to make you feel good. I give you a good spirit, and give you all good paint, I want you people to come here again, want them in three months any tribe of you from there. There will be a good deal of snow this year. Some time rains, in fall this year some rain, never give you any thing like that, grandfather, said, when they were die never cry, no hurt any body, do any harm for it, not to fight. Be a

good behave always. I will give a satisfaction in your life. This young man is a good father and mother. Do not tell the white people about this, Juses is on the ground, he just like cloud. Every body is a live again. I don't know when he will be here, may be will be this fall or in spring. When it happen it may be this. There will be no sickness and return to young again. Do not refuse to work for white man or do not make any trouble with them until you leave them. When the earth shakes do not be afraid it will not hurt you. I want you to make dance for six weeks. Eat and wash good clean yourselves [The rest of the letter had been erased].

Wovoka's message had to be written down in English because there was no written form of the Cheyenne or Arapaho languages. The message was carried from Wovoka's lips, through an interpreter that understood Paiute and Arapaho, to Casper Edson who translated the translator's words into written English. Casper Edson, the former Carlisle student, used what he learned in a school that existed only to eradicate Indianess to propagate religious ideas that embodied Indianess. Belief or non-belief in the ghost dance movement did not hinge on an Indian's level of white education. Apiatan, the Kiowa who denounced the movement, was not educated like Edson.

CHAPTER 6 – “I See the New Land Coming”: Educated Dancers and the Friends of the Indian

The ghost dance convinced many whites, even some who identified themselves as a “friends of the Indian,” that Indians were simply too different to be reformed. At the 1891 Lake Mohonk Conference, an event organized annually by whites to discuss Indian education and rights, Merrill Gates, the president of the conference and of Amherst College, expressed his pessimism in the aftermath of the Wounded Knee:

I believe that the Dakota disaster shows that we shall not need to have taught us again the lesson of the difference between savagery and civilization. As we watched the progress of the dances that began these disorders, as the reports of eye-witnesses came to us, we saw the evidences of that peculiar narrowness in the field of vision that must attend upon savagery. We saw, when the passionate, superstitious sense that they had been wronged took possession of these men, it shut out everything else. We saw that for one brought up in the atmosphere of Christian civilization to enter the consciousness of the savage at such a time is almost as impossible as it is for us to get behind the great, blue limpid eyes of the ox as he chews his cud in the pasture, and know how the world looks to him.¹

Gates saw only “savagery” in the ghost dance. It was a “superstitious” movement, the antithesis of modern, that only a narrow-minded man could believe in. Those “brought up in the atmosphere of Christian civilization,” like himself, could not comprehend the mind of a ghost dancer just as a man cannot understand what is going on in the mind of an animal.

But what about those Indians who had spent years within the artifice of a Christianizing, civilizing boarding school? Were they immune to the “savagery” of the ghost dance? Some educated Indians were deemed to be civilized by white observers, but they became ghost dancers nonetheless. Paul Boynton, a Southern Arapaho (of Cheyenne and Arapaho descent) described

¹ *Proceedings of the Ninth Annual Meeting of the Lake Mohonk Conference of Friends of the Indian 1891* (The Lake Mohonk Conference, 1891), 8.

as a "proficient" typesetter and a "good penman," was a clerk at the Cheyenne and Arapaho Agency in 1890 and 1891. He attended Carlisle off and on from 1880 to 1889. A white missionary named John Seger saw Boynton at the agency in December 1890 or January 1891 and reflected on how much Boynton had changed while at Carlisle. He was once a boy with long hair dressed in "Indian costume," now he sat with pen in hand at his own desk in the agency office. Seger saw that Boynton's "knowledge of the English language" made him a good fit to be a clerk. Seger's observations led him to believe that Boynton and the other Carlisle students there were "trying to exterminate the Indians within themselves by leading industrious lives."² But Seger did not know that Boynton and some other boarding school returnees were actively involved in the ghost dance on the reservation. Boynton, in fact, as a member of a Presbyterian church, had joined a Comanche Peyote society in 1884 and was an active peyotist for years to come.³ He experienced the ghost dance like many others; he once fell into a trance and talked with his dead brother (James Mooney suspected that Sitting Bull hypnotized Boynton). Boynton wrote a song about the encounter in Arapaho, Mooney translated:

When first our father came – Ahe'ey'!
 When first our father came – Ahe'ey'!
 I prayed to him, I prayed to him –
 My relative, my relative –
 He'yahe'eye'!⁴

² "A Peep at the Cheyenne Agency, I.T.," *The Indian Helper*, January 16, 1891; "Paul Boynton," RBIA, RG 75.20.3, Carlisle, Entry 1327, Box 3, Card 132. For more on Seger, see Dan Perry, "The Indians' Friend, John H. Seger," *Chronicles of Oklahoma* 10, No. 4 (December, 1932), 570-590; Henrietta Mann, *Cheyenne and Arapaho Education*, 28-32, 97-100.

³ Omer Stewart, *Peyote Religion*, 107. For more on Boynton, see Donald J. Berthrong, *The Cheyenne and Arapaho Ordeal: Reservation and Agency Life in the Indian Territory, 1875-1907* (Norman, University of Oklahoma Press, 1976), 313-314.

⁴ James Mooney, *The Ghost-dance Religion*, 972-973.

Boynton, like most Indian students, never met white expectations for education.⁵ Indian students gathered knowledge, learned how to read and write, but they never intended to “exterminate the Indians within themselves.” Educators’ rhetoric never became reality. Even the educated participated in the ghost dance and some used their ability to read and write to propagate the movement.

“These Indians are well learned and highly advanced and it has been thought that they would not be led away by the Messiah craze that is now causing so much excitement among the Indians west of the river. But a talk with them brings forth the fact that they also believe in the coming of the Indian Messiah who will wipe the whites from the face of the earth.” – Press dispatch from Chamberlain, South Dakota, November 20, 1890.⁶

Government officials knew that educated Indians were among the ghost dancers. By 1890, there were thousands of educated Natives living on Plains reservations, but officials were concerned that graduates of the government’s most prominent Indians schools, Carlisle and Hampton in particular, might be using their education to help promote the ghost dance. A government inquiry was made, spurred by an American public concerned with the effectiveness of those tax-funded schools. Many wondered if Indian schools could truly civilize Native students: If educated Natives supported the ghost dance, a movement that symbolized

⁵ Carlisle superintendent R. H. Pratt kept in touch with Boynton after he returned to the Cheyenne and Arapaho Agency. After reading a letter from Boynton in 1889, Pratt suspected that his former pupil had two wives, one Arapaho and one Cheyenne, and was being pulled down by the “influence of the old men of the tribes.” Pratt could not accept that Boynton was not transformed by his Carlisle education. Instead, he assumed that Boynton was pressured by the older generation to maintain the Arapaho way of life. See R. H. Pratt to CIA, December 6, 1889, Richard Henry Pratt Papers, MSS S-1174, Outgoing Letters, Box 10, Yale Collection of Western Americana, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

⁶ “The Indian Scare,” *Boston Evening Transcript*, November 20, 1890; *Indianapolis Journal*, November 20, 1890.

regression, how successful were Indian schools? Schools were believed to be the most critical piece of Indian Affairs' civilizing mission.

Thomas Jefferson Morgan, who was appointed Commissioner of Indian Affairs in late 1889 by President Benjamin Harrison, gave special attention to education.⁷ He believed that education was the Indians' "only salvation."⁸ With education, Indians would "become honorable, useful, happy citizens of a great republic, sharing on equal terms in all its blessing," but without it, they were "doomed either to destruction or to hopeless degradation." For Morgan and many of his contemporaries, educating the Indian seemed to be a matter of life or death. Because of this, any criticisms directed toward Indian education was mightily refuted by Indian Affairs. Indian educators denied the involvement of their former students in the ghost dance movement. The government eventually accepted that narrative, but educated Indians, even those from Carlisle and Hampton, were undoubtedly proponents of the movement.

In his first year as commissioner, Morgan had a plan to reform and reenergize the Indian schools by modeling it on the common school systems, a strategy that depended on additional funding from the government. He argued that the government should finally "complete this work" and accomplish "all that can be desired" by opening the "overflowing Treasury." After all, Morgan reasoned, the United States government was "one of the richest on the face of the earth," the country would not feel the burden of educating the Indian. It should command its

⁷ See Frederick Hoxie, "Redefining Indian Education: Thomas J. Morgan's Program in Disarray," *Arizona and the West* 24, no. 1 (Spring, 1982): 6-8.

⁸ *ARCIA*, 1889, 93-95.

“unlimited means.” But Indian Affairs was never given a blank check by Congress, it had to justify its spending like every other governmental agency.⁹

Commissioner Morgan took a three month leave from Washington D. C. to tour reservations across the west in the fall of 1890, in large part to inspect agency schools. Congress would soon give attention to a new Indian appropriation bill and Morgan hoped to determine where additional funds should be directed. Morgan wanted to increase the annual budget for the two hundred and forty-six Indian schools in the country (ninety-four of which were contract schools) and their twelve thousand students from \$1,842,000 to around \$2,500,000 (and eventually get it up to three million dollars for twenty-two thousand students). News of Commissioner Morgan’s plans to increase spending reached the newspapers as the ghost dance troubles captured the nation’s attention.¹⁰ To many, Indian Affairs seemed to have lost control of their responsibilities, which made the prospect for additional appropriations a sensitive topic. Educators had been begging for more money from Congress throughout the 1880s, but they never were satisfied with the appropriations given. Democrats and Western Congressmen were hesitant to invest more into what they considered failing idealism.¹¹ Senator John J. Ingalls of Kansas argued that Indian education meant wasted funds, it was “absurd,” he told Congress in 1884, “and would be as futile in its results as it would be to go among a herd of Texas broadhorn

⁹ For more on Morgan and his mission, see Francis Paul Prucha, *American Indian Policy in Crisis: Christian Reformers and the Indian, 1865-1900* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1976), 292-327. Congressional appropriations for Indian education in 1877 was only \$20,000. By 1892 it was \$2,291,650, see Herbert Welsh, “A Crisis in the Cause of Indian Education.”

¹⁰ “Indian Educational Work,” *The Omaha Daily Bee*, December 27, 1890.

¹¹ Frederick E. Hoxie, “The End of the Savage: Indian Policy in the United States Senate, 1880-1900.” *Chronicles of Oklahoma* 55 (Summer 1977): 157-179.

steers and endeavor to turn them into Durhams and thoroughbreds by reading Alexander's herd book in their cattlepens at Dodge City or Wichita."¹²

Morgan supported eastern boarding schools like Carlisle and Hampton for what he believed they had accomplished, but in order to protect the undertaking, Indian Affairs needed to demonstrate that their tax-supported efforts resulted in real progress.¹³ Carlisle superintendent R. H. Pratt and Morgan wanted to believe that their educational methods were working. They needed to know what kind of lives former pupils were leading on their reservations. For years educators hoped to find better ways to prevent pupils from "returning to the blanket" once they exited the boarding school system.¹⁴ Pratt frequently asked agency officials about his former students, hoping to hear the success stories that he used to defend Carlisle against its critics, but the stories he heard were rarely ideal. In the spring of 1890, as the ghost dance was affecting most reservations in the west, Pratt sent out a circular letter, at the suggestion of Morgan, asking his former students to write him and give him an update on their progress. The Hampton Institute also sent out a similar questionnaire to their former students. Commissioner Morgan wanted to know if students were finding work (which was not an easy prospect on reserves),

¹² U.S. Congress, *Congressional Record*, 48th Congress 1st Session (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1884), 4074.

¹³ Congressmen opposed to additional appropriations for Indian education had long claimed that returned eastern boarding school students "drop back at once into the savage condition," see *Are the Eastern Industrial Training Schools for Indian Children a Failure?* (Philadelphia, Indian Rights Association, 1886) in The Edward E. Ayer Collection, Ayer 386 .A6 1886, The Newberry Library (Chicago), 23.

¹⁴ Ruth Spack, *America's Second Tongue*, 24. For a look at how boarding schools tried to keep track of their returned students, see *ARCIA*, 1887, 270-217.

living in houses, getting married, wearing “citizen’s clothes,” or helping their people advance.¹⁵ Many of the students had been back home for years, others for only months.

The students’ responses revealed the impossibility of Indian Affairs’ educational goals. Each one of the one hundred and twenty-seven respondents conveyed the complexities of actual life, not the one-dimensional predictions of misguided policy makers. Educators told students that hard work, devotion to God, (both not unlike Wovoka’s message) and a rejection of traditional ways would give them and their people a better life, but the absurdity of those claims became apparent when students exited the boarding school bubble and returned to the real world. Some were optimistic about their future, they bragged that they were using English regularly and reading and writing better than ever before, that they had nice jobs, houses and farms and families.¹⁶ One former Carlisle student told Supt. Pratt that all people, “no matter what color, red and white and black,” found knowledge useful. He thought that his race was ready to become educated.

¹⁵ See files 10998, 17402, 18284, 18556, 20195, 21249, 22502 in RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Boxes 609, 629, 632, 633, 637, 640, 644, NARA (DC) and Questionnaire to Hampton Students, March 28, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 13928, Box 619, NARA (DC). At least one hundred and twenty-seven former Carlisle students, spread over every Plains reservation, responded to Pratt’s questions. These letters were forwarded to Commissioner Morgan for his consideration.

¹⁶ Harriet Stuart Lapwai to R. H. Pratt, June 4, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 18556, Box 633, NARA (DC); Joshua Given to R. H. Pratt, June 27, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 22502, Box 644, NARA (DC); Luther Standing Bear to R. H. Pratt, June 6, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 18284, Box 632, NARA (DC); Kias Williams to R. H. Pratt, June 1, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 17402, Box 629, NARA (DC); Wallace Charging Shield to R. H. Pratt, June 18, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 20195, Box 637, NARA (DC); Lucy Day to R. H. Pratt, June 26, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 22502, Box 644, NARA (DC). Henry North, a Southern Arapaho who would later admit to admiring some aspects of the ghost dance movement, thought it might be a good idea to send the old chiefs, their dog soldiers, and the medicine men to Carlisle for ten years, see Henry North to R. H. Pratt, June 9, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 18556, Box 633, NARA (DC).

But many expressed the complications of returning to reservation life. Work was hard to find. There were not enough farming tools for them to use. Some admitted, often remorsefully, to once again dressing like an Indian and living in teepees with their families because there was nowhere else to go. Many reported that other returned students were “going back Indian,” falling back on old ways.¹⁷ Marcus Poke, a Comanche, said he had been wearing the blanket for some time, but it was not his fault. He married “a camp Indian,” but he thought he was “getting along alright.”¹⁸ Percy Kable, a Southern Cheyenne, told Pratt that “we returned pupils have no place what we would call a home, no matter how much we may educated after return here we have no means of progress.”¹⁹ Henry Roman Nose, another Southern Cheyenne, wrote that he “move step between the white and Indian,” living partially within both worlds, but not entirely in either.²⁰ He was “not able to help” any whites or Indians. His people would not “listen...about the right way of the whites road” and the whites were not giving them what they needed. Florence Little Elk, a twenty-one-year-old Southern Cheyenne woman who spent one year at

¹⁷ Emily Jackson to R. H. Pratt, June (undated) 1890, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 20195, Box 637, NARA (DC); Jack Bull Bear to R. H. Pratt, June 8, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 18556, Box 633, NARA (DC); William Paisano to R. H. Pratt, June 11, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 21249, Box 640, NARA (DC); Jennie Tyler to R. H. Pratt, June 13, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 21249, Box 640, NARA (DC); Marshall Hand to R. H. Pratt, June 2, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 20195, Box 637, NARA (DC); Emma Hand Means to R. H. Pratt, June (undated) 1890, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 20195, Box 637, NARA (DC).

¹⁸ Marcus Poke to R. H. Pratt, June 30, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 22502, Box 644, NARA (DC).

¹⁹ Percy Kable to R. H. Pratt, June 13, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 18556, Box 633, NARA (DC).

²⁰ Henry Roman Nose to R. H. Pratt, June 3, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 17402, Box 629, NARA (DC).

Carlisle, only wrote: “Dear sir. I am sorry to say that I am Indian away all the times. I cannot do answered questions and the other girls all go Back in Indian ways too, that is all.”²¹

Joshua Given, the ordained Kiowa who had spent years at eastern boarding schools, told Commissioner Morgan that “the majority of the returned Carlisle pupils” at the Kiowa, Comanche, and Wichita Agency had “gone back to dirt and heathenism.”²² He did not think that students spent enough time at boarding schools. A meeting of returned pupils at Given’s home agreed that “three or five years education would not solve the Indian question nor civilize the race,” only ten years would do it. The students had good intention when they returned home, Given wrote, but there was little encouragement or opportunity to work at the agency, so they “fall back to their only ground of living; put on blankets, paint their faces in a most hideous fashion, join their relatives.” Given also warned the Commissioner about “a number of Kiowa” who wanted to visit the Sioux in order to “go from there to the Crow Agency and pay their respects to the Indian Christ.”

Besides Given, none of the students gave Pratt or Commissioner Morgan any specifics about the ghost dance. But by mid-summer 1890, word reached Pratt that there were some former boarding school students who were involved in the movement. Pratt, like others in Indian Affairs, wanted to find some credible information about the dance - the government was still not sure who the prophet even was – and verify the rumors about his students. Pratt sent a series of questions regarding the movement to Indian agents and other authorities in the west. He wanted

²¹ Florence Little Elk to R. H. Pratt, June 20, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 22502, Box 644, NARA (DC). See also “Florence Little Elk,” RBIA, RG 75.20.3, Carlisle, Entry 1327, Box 46, Card 2299.

²² Joshua Given to CIA, September 9, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 28577, Box 661, NARA (DC).

to protect his school from any criticism that might arise if those rumors were true. The questionnaire asked:

- First – Its origin and the tribes involved.
- Second – The mission of this new Saviour.
- Third – Its effect upon the tribes.
- Fourth – The candor and effect upon the Indians in the acceptance of the supposed new religion.
- Fifth – Do the educated Indians believe in it?
- Sixth – What gave rise to the new belief?
- Seventh – Was it a misapplication or misconstruction of religious Bible truths imperfectly taught by inexperienced teachers or missionaries?
- Eight – Give you own opinion.

John Seger, an Indian missionary and educator at the Cheyenne and Arapaho Agency, and Maj. John D. Miles, a former agent at the same reserve, were two of the men that responded to Pratt's query in August 1890. Carlisle's own bi-monthly publication, *The Red Man*, printed Seger's report in their October/November issue, a somewhat surprising decision, because it contained information that would damage Carlisle's and Pratt's reputation.²³ On November 24, 1890, the *New York Times* printed Seger and Miles' responses to the survey, most likely to bolster their coverage of the "Messiah Craze" while it was a hot topic. In November and December, articles about the dance could be found on the front page of most newspapers around the country daily. Only two days before, the *Times* reported that several students at the Haskell Institute had received letters from relatives back home in Indian Territory about the messiah. The paper was interested in connecting education and literacy with the movement's spread.

Seger and Miles' reports made it clear that educated Cheyennes and Arapahos were involved. Seger told Pratt that White Buffalo, a former Carlisle student, had brought back news

²³ *The Red Man*, October/November 1890.

of the messiah from his visit with the Northern Cheyennes at Tongue River, which “awakened a great deal of interest.”²⁴ Moreover, “very few” of the school children there did not believe in the movement. Some were claiming that the new christ “had written a letter to President Harrison, giving him two years to take the white men back across the salt water, and if he did not do this the white people must take the consequences.” The *Times* also published Crooked Nose’s letter to his brother, mentioned in Chapter 5 of this study, which sent information about the messiah from Pine Ridge to the Cheyenne and Arapaho Agency. Seger obtained a copy and forwarded it to Pratt. Maj. Miles offered a similar report. He found that all of the “non-progressive” Indians believed in the “appearance of this Jesus” and that there were “very few of the educated, industrious Indians who will say that they do not believe in it.”²⁵ Miles found only three educated Indians who would “frankly say they do not believe in this Jesus, and it was with some urging that I got them to commit themselves.”

The report from the Cheyenne and Arapaho Agency seemed grim for educators who hoped that their efforts would limit the acceptance of such ideas. And the publication of a letter propagating the ghost dance, written by an Indian using a skill that was taught in every Indian school in the country, brought negative attention. Four days after the *Times* report, Pratt answered questions from *New York Tribune* reporter James B. Wasson about the effectiveness of boarding schools like Carlisle. Wasson wondered “how much truth, if any, is there in the oft repeated assertion that the Indian boys educated at the school nearly all relapse into barbarism?”²⁶ Pratt admitted that there were “relapses,” but the proportion of those cases was

²⁴ “The Messiah Craze,” *New York Times*, November 24, 1890.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ R. H. Pratt to James B. Wasson, November 28, 1890, Richard Henry Pratt Papers, MSS S-1174, Outgoing Letters, Box 10, Yale Collection of Western Americana, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

“not great.” He claimed that a missionary in Indian Territory told him that only one of the sixty students he knew could be considered a “failure.” Most all of the students, Pratt thought, were doing “most excellent work in the face of the greatest difficulty, teaching school, farming, working at their trades.” He offered Wasson several letters from his former students, which he received “almost daily,” as proof of their success. However, Pratt did not address any questions about his former pupils being involved in the ghost dance.

A few days later, Pratt responded to a letter from Edgar Fire Thunder at Pine Ridge, telling him that he sincerely hoped that all of the Carlisle students there would “keep entirely clear of the Messiah craze.”²⁷ “Our boys and girls are not at all affected by what they see,” Pratt claimed, “except to be amused that some of their people are still so foolish.” Fire Thunder did not admit to dancing, but said that some others were. He did not specify if they were educated.²⁸ On December 4, Pratt wrote to George Means at Pine Ridge, a recent Carlisle graduate, in order to obtain as much information as he could about the events there. He was “greatly interested and anxious” to know if any of his former students were “with the Messiah craze people.”²⁹ Pratt, who asked Means to give him details about each Carlisle student at Pine Ridge, also investigated the situation at other Lakota reservations, including Rosebud.³⁰

²⁷ R. H. Pratt to Edgar Fire Thunder, December 2, 1890, Richard Henry Pratt Papers, MSS S-1174, Outgoing Letters, Box 10, Yale Collection of Western Americana, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

²⁸ *The Indian Helper*, December 26, 1890.

²⁹ R. H. Pratt to George W. Means, December 4, 1890, Richard Henry Pratt Papers, MSS S-1174, Outgoing Letters, Box 10, Yale Collection of Western Americana, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

³⁰ Samuel Little Hawk at Rosebud also told Pratt that he was not involved in early December 1890, see R. H. Pratt to Samuel Little Hawk, December 8, 1890, Richard Henry Pratt Papers, MSS S-1174, Outgoing Letters, Box 10, Yale Collection of Western Americana, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

Pratt saw the ghost dance as the antithesis of education, it flourished “only in the soil of superstition.” The educated, he assumed, could not believe in such things. It was the old, with their “superstitious tendencies” and their “hope for miracles” who trusted the promises of prophets. Pratt blamed the reservation system for allowing the movement to progress. The agents, employees, and missionaries did “very little” to “disturb...the onward flow of superstition and savage rites.” According to Pratt, Indians were living in a “condition of enforced idleness,” they only sat around camp fires talking about their past, “simply because there is little or no future for them to talk about.” The educated Indians were not idle, they had a future, and they were not susceptible to the movement’s lies.

Conversely, the agent at Pine Ridge, R. F. Royer, thought that even the educated were being drawn into the movement because they were as idle as the rest of the population. He told the Commissioner that the returned boarding school students were “eager to continue in their advancement” but there were no jobs for them on the reservation.³¹ Instead, the students were “compelled to return to their parental lodge, live in a tepee in idleness, and in this condition they soon drift back to the blanket and their former habits.” In fact, a former Carlisle student, who Royer considered a “hostile,” had been killed near the dancing camps in the Badlands by a rancher in December. The young man, Edgar White Horse (Little Bull), reportedly had left the camp with several others to go buy some supplies, perhaps sugar, at a nearby ranch, but was shot from a distance by some anxious white cowboys as the group walked toward Dailey’s ranch.³²

³¹ R. F. Royer to CIA, December 20, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 40041, Box 689, NARA (DC).

³² William J. Cleveland to Herbert Welsh, March 4, 1891, in *The Civil Service Chronicle*, Vol. 1, no. 25 (March 1891), 217-218; W. C. Courtis to L. F. Spencer, December 19, 1890, Lebbeus Foster Spencer Papers, MSS 596, History Colorado Stephen H. Hart Library and Research Center; *The Indian Helper*, February 20, 1891; George Crager, “As Narrated by Short Bull.”

Early reports called White Horse and his party horse thieves, a mistake that did not ease the tensions at Pine Ridge.³³

It is important to note that former boarding school students were not the only literate Indians on reservations. Agency schools taught hundreds of students on the reservations and many of them became fluent in English and learned how to read and write.³⁴ There are stories of specific Indians who were educated on the reservations that participated in the movement. John Stand in Timber recalled that “two educated boys” from Tongue River, Eugene Fisher, “who was just a young boy,” and Red Water, joined a Cheyenne ghost dance at Pine Ridge.³⁵ The pair danced as other dancers “fainted” all around them, where they would see visions of the dead, but the boys never fainted themselves. Eventually they gave up. Fisher said he “didn’t believe this,” and the two decided to go back to the agency to find some work. Before they left they checked the belt of Vanishing Head, who had fainted during the dance, for money. As they walked away from Vanishing Head’s seemingly unconscious body with his cash, the man sat up and asked for his money back. The boys decided that Vanishing Head was just pretending to be under the influence of the dance.

Short Bull told Cramer that the young man that was killed was his nephew Circle Elk, also a Carlisle student. He was sent with four others because he could speak English.

³³ “They Turned Ghost Dancers,” *The Indiana Gazette*, January 28, 1891.

³⁴ Some Lakota dancers took their children out of school on their way to join the hostile camps. One boy in particular, Arch Little White Bull, who spoke English “very well,” was at the Cherry Creek camp. On January 6, 1891, it was reported that his father was thought dead, perhaps at Wounded Knee, and his mother was sick. A superintendent wanted the boy to be sent off to a boarding school because he thought it would make the “very bright boy” a “good man.” See G. W. Wroten to Agent P. Palmer, RBIA, RG 75.19.11, Cheyenne River, Box 581, NARA (KC).

³⁵ John Stands in Timber and Margot Liberty, *A Cheyenne Voice*, 153-155; John Stands in Timber and Margot Liberty, *Cheyenne Memories*, 258-259. Eugene Fisher would later attend Carlisle, from 1898 until he was expelled in 1904. He would later become a president of the Northern Cheyenne Tribal Council. See “Eugen Fisher,” RBIA, RG 75.20.3, Carlisle, Entry 1327, Box 7, Card 308.

There is no doubt that some former eastern boarding school students played a large role in the ghost dance. As discussed in the previous chapter, Casper Edson and Grant Left Hand brought information about Wovoka back to Indian Territory all the way from Nevada in the form of a letter. Another, Smith Curley, a Southern Arapaho who was said to be a “Carlisle boy” (although no record of his attendance, or much of his life, exists), was called Sitting Bull’s (the Arapaho) “lieutenant” by Lt. H. L. Scott.³⁶ It is not clear what role a lieutenant might serve for Sitting Bull, he may have served as an interpreter and letter writer, but Scott thought it was an important one. Scott obtained five Arapaho “Messiah songs” from a “Carlisle boy,” in early January 1891 and it was probably Curley. Because of Sitting Bull’s influence, most of the dance songs were sung in the Arapaho language, even by the Kiowas and other Southern Plains tribes. Three of those songs, translated into English, follow:

Crow he holloa at me
Crow he holloa at me
When God send for me
When God send for me
I hear his voice
I hear his voice

I see the new land
I see the new land
Coming
Our father’s land

My children
I am flying around the earth
I am flying around the earth
Here’s the feather I got to fly around
Here’s the feather I got to fly around³⁷

³⁶ Lt. H. L. Scott to Fort Adjutant Ft. Sill, January 30, 1891, RBIA, RG 75, SC 188, Box 200, NARA (DC). Smith Curley was murdered in 1905, see *The Wichita Daily Eagle*, June 7, 1905.

³⁷ Lt. H. L. Scott to Fort Adjutant Ft. Sill, January 30, 1891, RBIA, RG 75, SC 188, Box 200, NARA (DC).

Another former Carlisle student, Raymond Stewart (White Bull), a Rosebud Brulé, also played an important role. William C. Courtis, the postmaster at Rosebud, reported that Stewart was serving as Short Bull's "private secretary" while Short Bull, Kicking Bear, and their followers were dancing in the Badlands in late November and December 1890.³⁸ Courtis hoped that Stewart would one day "furnish us with a 'History of the Sioux Rebellion of 1890.'" Unfortunately, Stewart never wrote his side of the story. Stewart's letters written for Short Bull have not survived. We do not know what he was writing for the ghost dance leader, but the fact that Short Bull used Stewart's abilities while camped in the Badlands alters our understanding of the hostilities at Pine Ridge.

As luck would have it, Stewart corresponded with R. H. Pratt in early November 1890, only weeks before he joined Short Bull's camp as they fled Rosebud for the Badlands. Stewart told Pratt that he had a job at Rosebud (painting and helping the agent with things), which pleased Pratt, but he wrote nothing about the ghost dance. He did mention however that some of the former Carlisle students were wearing Indian clothing and were living in camps (rather than on homesteads near the agency). Pratt said he was sorry to hear about that, it was "bad for them," but "it need not hurt you nor me nor others."³⁹ Stewart's letter surprised Pratt. He told Stewart that he "had about made up my mind that you had forgotten Carlisle when your letter

³⁸ W. C. Courtis to L. F. Spencer, December 19, 1890, Lebbeus Foster Spencer Papers, MSS 596, History Colorado Stephen H. Hart Library and Research Center; Gladys Jorgensen, *Before Homesteads in Tripp County and the Rosebud* (Freeman, SD: Pine Hill Press, 1974), 108; 1880 United States Federal Census, June 1, 1880, Rosebud Agency, Meyer, Dakota Territory, Household ID: 8,732,153.

³⁹ R. H. Pratt to Raymond Stewart, November 11, 1890, Richard Henry Pratt Papers, MSS S-1174, Outgoing Letters, Box 10, Yale Collection of Western Americana, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University; *The Indian Helper*, November 14, 1890.

comes to tell me that you still remember us.” It was a cordial reply. Pratt seemed happy to hear from Stewart, but the two men did not have an amicable past.

Raymond Stewart was at Carlisle for periods between October 1879 and July 1889. He was fifteen years old when he left Rosebud and twenty-five years old when he returned home for good. He did not speak any English when he arrived with the first students Carlisle ever received, which, Stewart recalled in 1912, was “pretty hard” for him and the other Sioux students.⁴⁰ In the summer of 1882, Stewart was allowed to go home, but he reentered Carlisle in November 1883. By Pratt’s account, Stewart was not the best student. He told the Commissioner of Indian Affairs that Stewart was “not a good boy and never has been.”⁴¹ Stewart gave the teachers “trouble throughout his entire course,” even “leading a slight mutiny” on one occasion. In January 1887, Pratt sent Stewart to live on a farm with a white family to learn agricultural work, something every Carlisle student did as part of Pratt’s “outing system.” Stewart did well there, according to Pratt, but something happened. “He behaved very badly,” Pratt reported to Commissioner Morgan, “his employer was compelled to tell him he did not want him any longer.” It is not exactly known what Stewart did, he may have left the farm to head back to Rosebud, but he was sent off to the Educational Home in Philadelphia until Pratt brought him back to the Carlisle campus in early April 1887. The school put Stewart on trial for his behavior. Pratt decided to punish Stewart in part by not allowing him to return to Rosebud for at least a year.

But Stewart would not accept Pratt’s ultimatum. He wanted to go home. On April 9, 1887, Stewart wrote directly to the Office of Indian Affairs, hoping they would ensure his release

⁴⁰ “Raymond Stewart,” RBIA, RG 75.20.3, Carlisle, Entry 1327, Box 37, Card 1812.

⁴¹ R. H. Pratt to CIA, April 12, 1887, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 9605, NARA (DC).

from Carlisle. Stewart argued that he had been at Carlisle long enough, that his father had died, and his mother needed him home.

Let me ask you something about how we Indians come this great School for as far I know that Capt Pratt said that the Indians have opportunity in this school but I am not favor for that because I have been here since start this school that was Oct 5, 1879 but I don't see how they have opportunity it seem to me they have chance for punish that's way far as I know of it. Also I am not feeling like here any more so I thought I would like to say somethings to you this morning also let you know how I am thinking this spring toward to west The reason is because I have been here a good while enough so I feel proud back my relation this spring because sometime ago I got letter from one of my Uncle and saying that my father was died a few months ago and my mother was lonesome and they want me proceed back home as soon as I get that letter so I did sent to Capt Pratt that was I staid on farm but he did not say a words to me what I am going to do he if said I can not go home just once that's all right but he did not say anything about so better for me to ask you what you got to say about...⁴²

Stewart continued, telling the Commissioner's office that he came to Carlisle to get a good education, not to live his entire life there. He had not been home in four years, he was already twenty-three years old, and it was time for him to return to the reservation.

After receiving Stewart's letter, Commissioner Morgan asked Pratt how long Stewart had been at Carlisle (a man "his age!" Morgan exclaimed) and wondered if he would be among those sent home that spring. Pratt explained the situation to Morgan, keeping Stewart at Carlisle was for "his own good and the consequent good of the tribe will be best served by executing the sentence imposed by the Court."⁴³ Stewart would remain at Carlisle for another twenty-seven months. His letter had little effect on the decision.

⁴² Raymond Stewart to J. W. B. Atkin, April 9, 1887, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 9339, NARA (DC).

⁴³ R. H. Pratt to CIA, April 12, 1887, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 9605, NARA (DC).

In February 1891, Stewart wrote another letter to Pratt to tell him about the tragic death of Edgar White Horse (Little Bull). A copy of that letter no longer exists, but *The Indian Helper* published its details. The editor of the paper, Carlisle staff member Marianna Burgess (who used the pseudonym “Man-on-the-band-stand”), told her readers that Stewart had been an interpreter for the ghost dancers, but he “seemed ashamed of the fact that he was with the ghost dancers.”⁴⁴ Burgess hoped that “the severity of the lesson learned” (the consequences of Wounded Knee) would help Stewart “do right hereafter...The foolishness of the ghost dancing has brought great sorrow upon his people, and this no doubt he sees.” It is impossible to know if Stewart was truly “ashamed” of his beliefs. Burgess would not have admitted otherwise. But Stewart, a man who rarely toed the line drawn by educators, was involved in the ghost dance and he used his education to further the movement.

Another Carlisle ghost dancer, Mack Kutepi, a Pine Ridge Oglala, wrote to Pratt in June 1890. In broken English, Kutepi explained that he remembered Carlisle fondly because he learned many things, but “some of the boys” returned from Carlisle, “cannot get in to working.”⁴⁵ Since he came back, though, he had “no trouble.” There was no mention of the ghost dance. Kutepi was a harness maker at Pine Ridge, but a “misunderstanding and what he considered harsh treatment after having broken a rule” led to his resignation, probably sometime after October 1890.⁴⁶ He got his position back in February 1891.

⁴⁴ *The Indian Helper*, February 20, 1891. For more on Burgess, see Jacqueline Fear-Segal, “Eyes in the Text: Marianna Burgess and The Indian Helper,” in *Blue Pencils & Hidden Hands: Women Editing Periodicals, 1830-1910*, ed. Sharon Harris (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2004), 123-145.

⁴⁵ Mack Kutepi to R. H. Pratt, June 10, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 18556, Box 633, NARA (DC).

⁴⁶ *The Indian Helper*, November 13, 1888; *The Red Man*, February/March 1891; Acting CIA to Agent H. D. Gallagher, October 4, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Sent, Accounts Division, Vol. 114, NARA (DC).

After Big Foot's group was massacred at Wounded Knee on December 29, 1890, groups of angry Lakotas, mostly from Rosebud and Pine Ridge, continued to resist Maj. Gen. Nelson Miles' demands to stand down. The nation was gripped by the news coming out of Pine Ridge. The "hostile" Lakotas, seemingly crazed by their new ghost dance according to the press, were putting up one last fight. Reports surfaced that some of these hostiles were former eastern boarding school students, news that threatened the future of Indian education. Educators prepared their defense against the inevitable criticism by investigating the reports.

A missionary at Rosebud, James Cross, reported to *The Indian Helper* that the Carlisle students had "done good work in keeping friends and parents quiet at home," they were not leading ghost dances. *The Indian Helper* lamented, however, that Cross' observation would never make national news. "If there be a possible one or two... who have been over persuaded by their parents to join the hostiles, the fact is spread abroad," the paper reasoned, "while a small circle of pessimists sit back in their comfortable chairs and sneer at the whole system of education of Indian youth." Pratt believed that the reputation of his school and Indian education as a whole was being unfairly damaged by reports of ghost dancing students who were simply listening to the instructions of their uneducated parents. He argued that if the government had been more committed to sending a "hundred times as many Sioux boys and girls" to boarding schools, "away from their tribes," that Wounded Knee would have never happened.⁴⁷

The December/January issue of *The Red Man* claimed that the eight hundred students at Carlisle, even those from the "Apaches, Sioux, Cheyennes, Comanche, and other nomadic

⁴⁷ "Carlisle Pupils at the Seat of War," *The Indian Helper*, January 16, 1891.

tribes,” had “greatly deplored the dance movement throughout.”⁴⁸ But the information coming out of Pine Ridge made it difficult for Pratt to make the same claim for the dozens of students no longer at Carlisle. On January 16, *The Indian Helper*, Carlisle’s newspaper, reported that they had learned through letters from Pine Ridge that former student Clayton Brave was wounded and Edgar White Horse (Little Bull) and Mack Kutepi were killed before Wounded Knee or during its aftermath.⁴⁹ *The Indian Helper* insisted that the letters did not state whether the men were among the “hostile or friendly Indians,” but they were among the dancers.⁵⁰ The report about Kutepi, however, proved to be inaccurate. He had not died, he was only a participant in the movement.⁵¹

After Wounded Knee, Pratt could not give a detailed count of Carlisle participants, and he probably did not want to give it. More reports implicated former Carlisle students with the troubles and the press turned its attention toward Pratt and the school. On January 26, it was reported in newspapers across the country (under the headline “THEY TURNED GHOST DANCERS. Pupils from the Carlisle Indian School Among the Hostiles”) that Raymond Stewart, Arthur Two Strike (son of Two Strike), Paul Eagle Star, Brulé Iron Eagle Feather, Edgar White Horse, and Plenty Living Bear were all Rosebud ghost dancers.⁵² On the same day that news

⁴⁸ *The Red Man*, December 1890/January 1891.

⁴⁹ Clayton Brave corresponded with Pratt from Pine Ridge in June 1890, informing Pratt that he was in good health and had worked in “show business” in San Francisco. He walked the slack wire and did “fancy rifle shooting” for \$25 a week. He wrote that he traveled often, “always never stay one place either,” see Clayton Brave to R.H. Pratt, June 18, 1890, RBIA, RG 75.4, General Records of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, Letters Received, Letter 20195, Box 637, NARA (Washington, DC).

⁵⁰ *The Indian Helper*, January 16, 1891.

⁵¹ George Means to R. H. Pratt, January 24, 1891, in *The Indian Helper*, January 30, 1891.

⁵² *Pittsburg Daily Post*, January 26, 1891; “They Turned Ghost Dancers,” *The Indiana Gazette*, January 28, 1891. See “Raymond Stewart,” RBIA, RG 75.20.3, Carlisle, Entry 1327, Box 37, Card 1812; “Brule Iron Eagle Feather,” RBIA, RG 75.20.3, Carlisle, Entry 1327, Box 37, Card

broke, the *Harrisburg Daily Independent* out of Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, the nearest city to Carlisle, offered a defense of Pratt and Carlisle without mentioning the ghost dancers. It reminded its readers that because of Pratt's "judicious management," the school was only costing tax payers \$120 per pupil per year.⁵³ The puff piece was no coincidence, Pratt was defending his school in the press. But two days later, Pratt had to admit to the *Washington Post* that a dozen of his former pupils may have been involved in the trouble around Pine Ridge.⁵⁴ There was no evidence to suggest otherwise and because his investigation relied on hearsay, Pratt could never nail down a definitive number. Earlier in the month, he told an acquaintance that seven was the number, and all were led to participate because of "parental and family pressure."⁵⁵

The revelation made Carlisle look bad and criticism aimed at Indian education mounted in the weeks to come. In late 1889 Commissioner Morgan had called education "the medium through which the rising generation of Indians are to be brought into fraternal and harmonious relationship with their white fellow-citizens."⁵⁶ Instead, it seemed education was being used to generate dissent against white authority. The effectiveness of an Indian education was being questioned by the press and an unrelated scandal involving a Carlisle student generated more concern. In early January 1891, a Carlisle educated Apache named Modoc Wind, a clerk at the San Carlos Agency in Arizona, was arrested for forging Agent John Bullis' name on an agency

1789; "Plenty Living Bear," RBIA, RG 75.20.3, Carlisle, Entry 1327, Box 37, Card 1797. Paul Eagle Star was killed while performing in the Buffalo Bill Wild West Show in August 1891, see "The Death of 'Eagle Star' in Sheffield," *Sheffield & Rotherham Independent*, August 26, 1891.

⁵³ "Carlisle Indian School," *Harrisburg Daily Independent*, January 26, 1891.

⁵⁴ *Washington Post*, January 28, 1890.

⁵⁵ R. H. Pratt to Josiah W. Leeds, January 7, 1891, Richard Henry Pratt Papers, MSS S-1174, Outgoing Letters, Box 10, Yale Collection of Western Americana, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

⁵⁶ *ARCIA*, 1889, 94.

check. He and two other Apaches, both educated at the San Carlos school, supposedly needed the one hundred and twenty-five dollars because they were addicted to poker (and drank whiskey). Several newspapers picked up the scandal and featured it alongside their ghost dance coverage. One paper sardonically headlined the story: “The Effect of Educating Indians.”⁵⁷ It seemed to one reporter that Wind “was rapidly assimilating the vices as well as the virtues of civilization.”⁵⁸ Another: “Uncle Sam has educated an Indian until he is a very clever forger and has taken liberties with the checks of one of Uncle Sam’s departments. The Indian is advancing.”⁵⁹

But the most damaging scandal for Carlisle came out of the Pine Ridge hostilities. On January 7, Plenty Horses, a former Carlisle student from Rosebud, unexpectedly killed Lt. Ned Casey, a young and well liked commander of a group of Cheyenne scouts. Lt. Casey approached a “hostile” camp a few miles from the Stronghold in the Badlands, guarded by Plenty Horses and some others, to talk with the people there. He was told that it might be dangerous, but Lt. Casey began a conversation with the guards. Plenty Horses shot Lt. Casey in the back of the head and was eventually arrested. Newspaper reports of the murder made it clear that Plenty Horses had been educated at Carlisle, offering proof that boarding school students were not only dancing, but murdering soldiers.⁶⁰

⁵⁷“Clever Forgery,” *Sacramento Daily Union*, January 10, 1891; “Indians Held for Forgery,” *Daily Nevada State Journal*, January 10, 1891; “Copied the White Man’s Vices,” *The Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, January 11, 1891.

⁵⁸ “Indian Forgers Held to Answer,” *Arizona Silver Belt*, January 17, 1891; “Forgery,” *The St. John’s Herald* (AZ), January 22, 1891.

⁵⁹ “Topics of the Times,” *The Columbus Journal* (NE), March 4, 1891.

⁶⁰ See Robert M. Utley, “The Ordeal of Plenty Horses,” *American Heritage* 26, Issue 1 (December 1974): 15.

The initial reports about Lt. Casey's murder mistakenly identified Plenty Horses as No Water's son. Plenty Horses was only part of No Water's camp of dancers, but not related to the man.⁶¹ Supt. Pratt adamantly denied ever enrolling a son of No Water at Carlisle, which was true. Carlisle's *The Indian Helper* published their defense in late January: "The despatch which has been sent out over the county, saying that a son of No-Water, 'and a graduate of the Carlisle School,' was the slayer of Lieut. Casey, is utterly false, so far as it relates to Carlisle. No-Water's son has never been a student of this school, and inquiry among our Sioux students has developed the fact that No-Water has never sent his children to school anywhere. Furthermore, there are but two Sioux in the county, who can produce diplomas of graduation from Carlisle school."⁶²

After it was made clear that Plenty Horses was the name of the culprit, Pratt and his Carlisle employees continued to deny that he was ever a student, even though he had been. It is plausible that their denial was a mistake. Plenty Horses was enrolled at Carlisle from 1883 to 1889 under a different name: Plenty Living Bear (Living Bear was his father).⁶³ Whether it was an honest mistake or a cover-up, it is impossible to know, but papers had just recently reported that a former Carlisle student named Plenty Living Bear was among the ghost dancers.⁶⁴ Pratt would have undoubtedly seen that article, but he did not make the connection between Plenty Living Bear and Plenty Horses. On January 31, 1891, an article about Pratt's denial reached papers across the country. He maintained that one hundred and twenty seven former students at Rosebud and Pine Ridge did not participate in the dances, but admitted that seven did, including

⁶¹ James Mooney, *The Ghost-dance Religion*, 823, 846.

⁶² *The Indian Helper*, January 30, 1891.

⁶³ "Plenty Living Bear," RBIA, RG 75.20.3, Carlisle, Entry 1327, Box 37, Card 1797.

⁶⁴ *Pittsburg Daily Post*, January 26, 1891.

the wounded Clayton Brave.⁶⁵ Only three days before, Pratt told a reporter that twelve were involved.⁶⁶

Plenty Horses' story met with great interest from the public. It became a symbol of the problems of Indian Affairs and the struggle educated Indians faced on the reservations. Plenty Horses was portrayed as a lost soul who could not find his place with his people after spending years in the east being educated. His crime was an expression of his struggle to exist between the white and Indian worlds.⁶⁷ In March, defending himself in front of a grand jury in Deadwood, South Dakota, Plenty Horses reportedly said:

I am an Indian. Five years I attended Carlisle and was educated in the ways of the white man...I was lonely. I shot the lieutenant so I might make a place for myself among my people. Now I am one of them. I shall be hung and the Indians will bury me as a warrior. They will be proud of me. I am satisfied.

Plenty Horses' court cases kept the deficiencies of an Indian education in the spotlight throughout the spring 1891.⁶⁸

On January 20, 1891, a concerned Commissioner Morgan asked for a report from each of the Sioux agencies about the participation of Indian students in the hostilities.⁶⁹ Any information coming out of the investigation was handled carefully. In January 1891, Pennsylvania Congressman Charles O'Neill, on behalf of a Quaker constituent, inquired into the participation

⁶⁵ "None of Her Pupils Took Part in the Ghost Dance," *Omaha Daily Bee*, February 1, 1891.

⁶⁶ *Washington Post*, January 28, 1890.

⁶⁷ One article stated that Lt. Casey's killer was a Carlisle student who "could read and write, but there was no place for him when he got back West. He was an Indian. Every door was closed to him." See "War Whoops," *Boston Daily Globe*, February 23, 1891.

⁶⁸ Plenty Horses was not convicted of murder because his actions were deemed to have taken place during wartime.

⁶⁹ Capt. F. E. Pierre to CIA, February 6, 1891, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 5287, Box 703, NARA (DC).

of any former Carlisle or Hampton Sioux students. Capt. William Dougherty, who was temporarily in charge at Pine Ridge, told O'Neill that he could not help him with his inquiry. "I do not think that would be quite proper for me to send out any information on this subject without the knowledge and consent of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs," Dougherty wrote the congressman.⁷⁰ He did not want to release any details until an official report was made.

On February 6, 1891, the acting agent at Pine Ridge officially responded to Commissioner Morgan's directive. His findings accused ten young men and one young woman of participating in the hostilities there. It was sent to Commissioner Morgan under the heading "List of Indian boys who have attended Eastern Schools and who were associated with the hostile Indians during the late trouble at Pine Ridge Agency, South Dakota."⁷¹ From Rosebud: Edgar White Horse, Arthur Two Strike (son of Two Strike), Plenty Living Bear (Plenty Horses, son of Living Bear), and Julia Walking Crane (daughter of White Walking Crane). From Pine Ridge: Edward Star (son of Black Kettle), George Little Wound (son of Little Wound), Mack Kutepi (son of White Cow Killer), Robert White Cow Killer (son of White Cow Killer), Isaac Bear, Clayton Brave (husband of Julia Walking Crane), and Howard Goes Flying (nephew of Goes Flying). However, Pine Ridge's investigation was not complete, the acting agent admitted as much to the Commissioner, and some names, like Raymond Stewart, were left off the report. The reservation was still in a chaotic state, around six thousand Oglalas and Cheyennes were trying to return to their normal routine and hundreds of men and women from other agencies were still scattered over Pine Ridge. Indian Affairs never knew exactly how many "hostiles"

⁷⁰ Capt. William Dougherty to Charles O'Neill, January 24, 1891, RBIA, RG 75, SC 188, Box 200, NARA (DC).

⁷¹ Capt. F. E. Pierre to CIA, February 6, 1891, RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 5287, Box 703, NARA (DC).

gathered at Pine Ridge and calculating a precise number of ghost dance believers was impossible. But the government kept a watchful eye on the returned pupils at Pine Ridge. In May 1891, the acting agent at Pine Ridge, Capt. Charles Penny, instructed his agency employees to direct all the returned pupils who had attended Carlisle, Hampton, Genoa, and the Lincoln Institute to report to his office within three days, although it is not clear why.⁷²

On February 27, 1891, Carlisle revealed what it considered an accurate count of their educated hostiles. Its number was more modest than Pine Ridge's. Using the findings of a visitor to Pine Ridge, *The Indian Helper* published a story confidently headlined: "Now We Have the Truth. What the Pine Ridge Boys and Girls Really Have Been Doing Since They Went Home. Our Readers may Judge for Themselves How Many of the Sixty-three are Worse than Before They Were Educated, as some Smart Correspondents have Stated."⁷³ The paper published the whereabouts and recent activities of sixty-three former students at Pine Ridge, only one of whom actually graduated from Carlisle, George Means. Out of the forty-four students that were still alive and still at Pine Ridge, six were "classified" as being involved with the hostiles: Isaac Kills Hard, Julia Walking Crane and her husband Clayton Brave, Edward Kills Hard, Robert White Cow Killer, and Mack Kutepi. Clayton Brave and Edward Kills Hard denied "taking any part," but were counted as hostiles nonetheless. For R. H. Pratt, this count demonstrated that most of his students remained compliant to the government's wishes. But his investigation only encompassed Pine Ridge, the reservation that saw the bulk of the hostilities. He never identified Carlisle dancers from other reservations, but they were everywhere.

⁷² Charles Penny to C. A. Craven, May 14, 1891, RBIA, RG 75.19.85, Pine Ridge, Copies of Misc. Letters Sent, Box 54, NARA (KC).

⁷³ *The Indian Helper*, February 27, 1891; *The Red Man*, February/March 1891.

Pratt grew tired of the press placing blame on his students for the trouble at Pine Ridge. In his mind, it drew attention away from all of Carlisle's success. In an editorial in *The Red Man* titled "Our Answer," Pratt claimed that "prominent army officers and recently conspicuous Catholic priests," having had a "free run of the press," were the ones spreading false reports that "returned Carlisle students were leaders among the hostiles."⁷⁴ He denied that Carlisle students made any impact on the troubles, noting that there were "several times" as many former Carlisle students who were scouts and police at Pine Ridge and Rosebud than who were dancers. "The avalanche of information and misinformation predicated on the public" from Carlisle's enemies did not mention the credit Carlisle should have been given for keeping most out of the dancing. Pratt thought that his school was under attack from those skeptical of his "outing system," a unique aspect of Carlisle's curriculum that made students live with white families off-campus, learning trades or farm work. Catholic educators had been critical of it (to Pratt's dismay) and Pratt thought that those Catholics were intentionally trying to damage his school.⁷⁵

In the midst of the controversy, Congress decided to conduct their own investigation. On February 28, the Senate passed a resolution submitted by Sen. Henry Dawes that directed the Secretary of the Interior to send the Senate a list of names of all the Indians who had entered the Hampton, Lincoln, Wabash, Santee Normal Training, Rensselaer, and St. Ignatius schools since they were established. Carlisle was conspicuously absent from the list. Dawes wanted to know some basic statistics about each student, how much it cost to educate each pupil, why they left

⁷⁴ *The Red Man*, February/March 1891.

⁷⁵ For a look at how R. H. Pratt blamed the Catholic Indian schools he despised for the ghost dance and Wounded Knee, thus deflecting responsibility off his former students, see Lisa Tatonetti, "Catholics, Carlisle, and Casting Stones: Richard Henry Pratt and the 1890 Ghost Dance," *Nineteenth-Century Contexts* 33, no. 3 (July 2011): 267-287.

their respective schools, what work they did outside of the school while enrolled, and what work they had done at home since leaving.⁷⁶ The resolution led to a monumental investigation, a task that required months of correspondence and surveys. After nearly a year, the Hampton Institute reported their findings: of the three hundred and eighteen who had attended during the school's thirteen years educating Indians, seventy-two former pupils had an "excellent" record since leaving the school, one hundred and forty-nine had a "good" record, sixty-two "fair," two hundred and eighty-three "satisfactory," twenty-three "poor," and twelve were estimated to have a "bad" record. The "good" were those who were "doing their best and exerting a decidedly good influence," they had married legally, were "honest, industrious, and temperate."⁷⁷ The "bad" were those who had "done wrong knowing better."⁷⁸ Similarly, in December 1891, the Pine Ridge agent sent Pratt, at his request, a list of his former students with comments about their jobs, living situations, and current character. Some were deemed to have "excellent" or "very good" character, while others were "not strong" or "poor."⁷⁹

Commissioner Morgan thought Hampton's report showed striking progress. Hampton published a revised version of their findings as a testament to their accomplishments the following year. Unfortunately, the report side-stepped the ghost dance controversy. While

⁷⁶ *The Journal of the Senate of the United States of America, Being the Second Session of the Fifty-first Congress, Begun and Held at the City of Washington December 1, 1890* (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1891), 188.

⁷⁷ "Letter from the Secretary of the Interior in Response to Senate Resolution of February 28, 1891, Forwarding Report Made by the Hampton Institute regarding its returned Indian Students," *Executive Documents of the Senate of the United States for the First Session of the Fifty-Second Congree, 1891-'92*, Vol. 1 (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1892). Detailed descriptions of many of the former students' lives are provided in the report.

⁷⁸ According to the report, only one of those twelve "bad" students was a "full-blooded Indian." Two others were "half-bloods" and the rest were "all very nearly white."

⁷⁹ Agent in Charge to R. H. Pratt, December (illegible date), 1891, RBIA, RG 75.19.85, Pine Ridge, Copies of Misc. Letters Sent, Box 55, NARA (KC).

conducting his investigation, Samuel C. Armstrong, superintendent at the Hampton Institute, told Agent McLaughlin that he wanted “a clear idea of the conduct of our returned Hampton Indians at Standing Rock,” but the school’s official report did not offer much clarity.⁸⁰ Only a few students were acknowledged to have been involved. One man was pegged as playing a critical role for Sitting Bull (the Lakota). Others were vaguely identified as dancers. Thomas Frost of Standing Rock was mentioned. Edgar Lee, a Yankton, had been contradictorily “preaching civilization” while also “dancing with the Indians.” Jack Blue Boy at Standing Rock was “numbered among the ‘progressives,’” but went to the dances. Frank Pamani at Crow Creek was described as a devoted leader in the “Indian dance.” The report acknowledged that Andrew Fox of Standing Rock, Pamani’s brother who spoke very good English, became “something of a secretary” to Sitting Bull. He fled after Sitting Bull was killed but was later captured and imprisoned. Fox would later be identified as the only former Hampton student from Standing Rock that did not “remain loyal to the Government,” which was not true.⁸¹ Fox became a scapegoat and was vilified for his service to Sitting Bull; Standing Rock agent James McLaughlin called Fox a “naturally worthless fellow.”

Other schools also denied that their students took part. The superintendent of the Genoa School pointed out “with pride” to Commissioner Morgan that not a single one of his three hundred and five former students on the Sioux reservations joined “the hostiles during the late unpleasantness,” at least according to the investigation of the Genoa physician while he was at Rosebud for a few days.⁸² The report, conducted before the Senate mandate, claimed that Genoa

⁸⁰ Samuel C. Armstrong to Agent James McLaughlin, March 3, 1891, RBIA, RG 75.19.113, Standing Rock, Misc. Corres. Received, Box 34, NARA (KC).

⁸¹ *Twenty-two Years’ Work*, 489.

⁸² W. B. Backus to CIA, February 11, 1891, RBIA, RG 75, SC 188, Box 200, NARA (DC).

students “remembered the principles taught them while at this school, and were true to themselves and loyal to the Government.”

The Genoa superintendent proudly sent the Commissioner a newspaper clipping of a story about Yellow Eagle’s (the Northern Arapaho, former Genoa student) investigation and public criticism of Wovoka, meant to show the Commissioner “what an influence a Genoa boy has among his people.”⁸³ Other former boarding school students did, in fact, investigate and criticize the movement, and in the process helped spread information about it. Sometime in 1890, Abe Somers, a twenty-two-year-old Southern Cheyenne who had spent five years at Carlisle, visited the Northern Cheyenne at the Tongue River reserve in Montana for an extended period. He became a trusted interpreter for the Northerners.⁸⁴ Somers’ cousin, Ridge Walker, had accompanied Porcupine and Big Beaver on their journey to see Wovoka in early 1890. The three Northern Arapahos, Porcupine most prominently, became teachers of the dance at Tongue River. Somers, doubtful of its truth, relayed their explanation of the movement south to the Cheyenne and Arapaho reserve in Oklahoma, acting as one of the many connections between the Northern Cheyennes and the Southern Cheyennes. But before he returned home to the Cheyenne and Arapaho reserve, Somers made a stop at the Haskell Institute in Lawrence, Kansas in February 1891, where he became a source of information for students from several tribes. He imparted what he had learned about the ghost dance to the Haskell students, including Henry

⁸³ Ibid.; “Denounced the Messiah,” *The Omaha Daily Bee*, February 10, 1890. Fenton Antelope, an Arapaho who studied for three years at Haskell said, “The boys who have been away to school...know better than to believe in a Messiah,” see Donald J. Berthrong, *The Cheyenne and Arapaho Ordeal*, 216.

⁸⁴ See Bob Tail Horse’s comments about Abe Somers (Summers) in “Proceedings of a Council held April 15, 1890,” in RBIA, RG 75.4, GRBIA, Letters Received, Letter 19493, Box 635, NARA (DC). Bob Tail Horse said: “The Agent don’t tell us any of the news that comes from Washington. We don’t know what the White Father does or says about us. We want this man (pointing to Abe Summers) to talk for us. I am afraid this man (Jules) don’t talk straight for us.”

Dawson North (Henry Shave Head), a Southern Arapaho, and put it on paper to be read.

Somers, still doubting the legitimacy of the dance, wrote:

Dear Friends, one and all: Don't force your and others' minds on this letter, but resist it and keep your minds from it. I simply want to tell you just what I learned from Mr. Porcupine, Big Beaver, and I am sorry to say from one of them, a cousin of mine, Ridge Walker, son of Beaver Claws. I expect many of you are wishing to know, and perhaps many of you have already heard about it. I have met them face to face, and have questioned them personally when I met them; and so I learned from them some of their Messiah ideas. I try to make an account of just what I have learned from these three persons.⁸⁵

Next, Somers recounted Porcupine's narrative of his experience with "the Messiah" at Walker Lake. Porcupine claimed that Wovoka said: "I have sent for you and I am glad that you have come, and I am going to talk to you after a while about our relations who are dead and gone. My children, I want you to listen to all I have to say, and I will teach you how to dance a dance, and I want you to dance it; get ready for the dance, and then when the dance is over I will talk to you." Wovoka later told Porcupine and the gathering of men from many tribes that he was the son of God, that the earth was "getting old and worn out, and the people getting bad," and that he was going "to renew everything as it used to be, and make it better." The dead would be "resurrected" and the earth would be made large enough to contain "us all." The "youth of everyone would be renewed in the spring." Porcupine told Somers that Wovoka condemned fighting, it was "bad and we must keep from it," and "the earth was to be all good hereafter; that

⁸⁵ Abe Somers to Dear Friends, undated, copy in Charles Meserve to CIA, January 27, 1892, RBIA, RG 75, SC 188, Box 200, NARA (DC); Charles Meserve to CIA, January 25, 1892, RBIA, RG 75, SC 188, Box 200, NARA (DC); Albert S. Gatschet, "Report of an Indian Visit to Jack Wilson, The Payute Messiah," *The Journal of American Folklore* 6, no. 21 (Apr.-Jun., 1893): 108-111. It seems Somers made two trips to Tongue River and two trips to Haskell between late 1890 and January 1892. Albert S. Gatschet wrote that Somers was at Haskell in February 1891 and Supt. Meserve told the Commissioner that Somers had "entered" Haskell in January 1892 after spending time in Montana with the Northern Cheyennes.

we must be friends with one another.” Wovoka told them that they “must tell all the people we meet about these things.”

Somers wrote that there were “many other things wonderful” which he could not describe, but he did not believe them. “Please don’t follow the ideas of that man,” Somers pleaded, “He is not the Christ. No man in the world can see God at any time. Even the angels of God cannot.”⁸⁶ Somers was not a proponent of the dance, but he communicated its meaning to others and some found truth in its message. Henry Dawson North, the Southern Arapaho at Haskell, attended ghost dances in the fall of 1891 after he returned to the Cheyenne and Arapaho reserve. In early 1892, North’s former superintendent at Haskell, Charles Meserve, asked North to write down what he knew about the dance in Oklahoma.

North admitted that he had learned “a little about it” from Sitting Bull, the Northern Arapaho proponent of the dance. The movement had “always seemed” to him “a good step in way of making Indians religious... Their former ways of trying to be wonderful medicine men are put aside.”⁸⁷ According to North, Sitting Bull explained to the dancers that the white race would not “be banished or sent away,” only that “the Indians of all tribes” would live in a “separate place, as has been in the past.” The dance did not “mean harm,” it did not “try to make

⁸⁶ Abe Somers to Dear Friends, undated, copy in Charles Meserve to CIA, January 27, 1892, RBIA, RG 75, SC 188, Box 200, NARA (DC); Albert S. Gatschet, “Report of an Indian Visit to Jack Wilson, The Payute Messiah,” *The Journal of American Folklore* 6, no. 21 (Apr.-Jun., 1893): 108-111. Somers enrolled at Carlisle in August 1882 at the age of sixteen and became a member of the First Presbyterian Church of Carlisle in early 1884. He left Carlisle in July 1888. See “Henry North,” RBIA, RG 75.20.3, Carlisle, Entry 1327, Box 4, Card 151; Andrew Cowell, ed., *Arapaho Stories, Songs, and Prayers* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2014), 8-9.

⁸⁷ Henry Dawson North to Charles Meserve, undated, copy in Charles Meserve to CIA, January 27, 1892, RBIA, RG 75, SC 188, Box 200, NARA (DC). Henry North, also known as Henry Shave Head, Kettle, and Funny Little Man, enrolled at Carlisle in October 1879 at age 11 and left in 1886. He enrolled at Haskell in September 1890 and returned home in March 1891. See “Henry North,” RBIA, RG 75.20.3, Carlisle, Entry 1327, Box 4, Card 151.

a fuss.” But North could not understand why some dancers starved themselves or how the “foolish” ones claimed to see their dead relatives. And he also thought Sitting Bull and the “fore-runner,” as they called the messiah, were probably trying to profit from the movement. Despite its benefits, North still hoped that the dancing would end.

In late 1891, James Murie, a Hampton graduate of both Pawnee and white descent who became an important ethnologist, took part in the dances at the Pawnee agency. He wrote to the Pawnee agent about the dance, offering an explanation for his participation. The letter demonstrates the need that some felt to experience the dance before judging its significance. It also places us into the mind of a Pawnee man who had a deep connection to white culture who also needed to be a part of his people’s community. He wrote:

I have for some time been thinking of writing you a short letter in regard to the so-called Ghost Dance. No doubt what you have heard is that I took part in the dance – understand not that I believed in it, but that I was curious to find out what good there was in it, and if it was wrong [illegible] if good and God’s work wanted to help it make it a success, but if wrong to help run it down and expose it. You know the way to find this or that out, I just go into it myself and find out. I was with them 3 days, and it had no effect on my mind or physical power, nor my will power. I saw while with them that those who are weak minded were effected and thrown to the ground. All through the dancing they are told to have one mind upon Christ and the deceased Ghost relation. Major I am glad to say that I found some good true hearts who only put their trust in our God and his son, Christ. They would not put their whole trust and faith in this unknown God....⁸⁸

Murie continued, telling his agent that he tried to convince some that there was only one true God, offering his opinion on the dance’s psychological powers of mesmerism, and concluding

⁸⁸ James R. Murie to Agent Wood, December 6, 1891, RBIA, RG 75.19.77, Pawnee Ponca Otoe, Reel 19, NARA (OHS).

that he wanted to go dance again in order to learn more.⁸⁹ He asked the agent to save his letters so that he could “make a report of it to some newspaper.”⁹⁰

By the end of 1891, the narrative had shifted. Hampton eventually proclaimed that their educated pupils resisted the dance, their conversion “received its test in the ghost craze of ’91 and came out victorious; light and truth had triumphed over darkness and superstition in a way to surprise even the most sanguine.” In its publication *Twenty-two Years’ Work of the Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute*, Hampton printed the responses of Indian educators and missionaries to refute the charge that boarding school students were prominent participants in the dance. Rev. Reed called the conduct of the Hampton students “admirable” at Standing Rock, they “had a marked influence which kept their parents out” of the troubles.⁹¹ Rev. Cleveland found that all at Standing Rock (except for Andrew Fox) “stood their ground and tried faithfully to convince their people of untruth, dancer and evil of the craze.”⁹² Bishop Hare said that he would not ignore the “incalculable service which well conducted Eastern boarding schools have done the Indians” and he was afraid when he heard some suggest that the schools’ work should be “discontinued or crippled.”⁹³ The returned students had been of “great service intellectually, morally and practically to their people.” Mary Collins did not think the Hampton students had any reason to be ashamed; if there were a hundred Hampton students for every one, she thought,

⁸⁹ Martha Royce Blaine thought that Murie’s “strong words about leading his people on the true path of Christianity may have been sincere, but they also appear to be aimed at obtaining the agent’s approval.” see Martha Royce Blaine, *Some Things Are Not Forgotten*, 64.

⁹⁰ James R. Murie to Agent Wood, December 6, 1891, RBIA, RG 75.19.77, Pawnee Ponca Otoe, Reel 19, NARA (OHS).

⁹¹ *Twenty-two Years’ Work*, 489.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 489.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 489-490.

then there would be “no Indian problem and soon we missionaries could go home.”⁹⁴

Commissioner Morgan thought that Hampton students had represented “a force uplifting, strong and enduring enough to prove the value of their education from every standpoint.” They were “powerful levers in the uplifting of their respective tribes.”⁹⁵

The Indian Rights Association reached a similar conclusion. In January 1892, the organization produced a four page publication titled “A Crisis in the Cause of Indian Education” that addressed the “attack on Indian Education” that was threatening “the great advance made...during the last decade.”⁹⁶ Herbert Welsh, head of the Indian Rights Association, was worried that Congress would soon reduce Indian appropriations by two million dollars, which would destroy Indian schools. He presented the same findings that Carlisle and Hampton used to demonstrate the effectiveness of their education on returned students. According to the pamphlet, Indian education actually saved the government money, it was the “cheapest as well as the only humane and honest solution” to the Indian problem. The “Indian uprising” of 1890/1891 was caused by “the ignorance and savagery of those Sioux Indians who we had left without education” (along with “other dangerous elements” like “hunger, spoil-system Agents, etc.”) If the Indians were better educated, Welsh reasoned, then they would no longer believe in superstitious religions and they would not resist the government.⁹⁷ It was an effective sleight of

⁹⁴ Ibid., 490-491.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 492.

⁹⁶ Herbert Welsh, “A Crisis in the Cause of Indian Education.”

⁹⁷ *Eighth Annual Report of the Executive Committee of the Indian Rights Association, for the Year Ending December 15th, 1890* (Philadelphia: Indian Rights Association, 1891), 4-5; *Ninth Annual Report of the Executive Committee of the Indian Rights Association, for the Year Ending December 15th, 1891* (Philadelphia: Indian Rights Association, 1892), 3-4. Welsh argued that an education would “give the Indian the ability to maintain himself independently of Government aid would also dispose him to take other means than violence to right his wrongs, and would also place such means within his hands.” He also thought that the government would save money by

hand by Welsh, he placed blame for the ghost dance on the politicians who opposed funding for Indian education while concealing the involvement of educated Indians.

Educators successfully dispelled the notion that educated Indians were a part of the “Messiah Craze.” In fact, they said education actually helped prevent more Indians from dancing. Their opinions seemed to convince most. In 1891, *The Journal of American Folklore* published an assessment of the ghost dance by ethnologist Alice C. Fletcher, one of earliest scholarly publications about the movement. Fletcher inaccurately reported:

It is an interesting fact that this craze is confined almost exclusively to the uneducated. The Indians affected belong to tribes which formerly lived by hunting, and knew almost nothing of raising Maize. It is not unlikely that the ‘craze’ would have died out without any serious trouble, having been overcome by the quiet, persistent influence of the progressive and educated part of the people; but the non-progressive and turbulent elements have sought to use this religious movement for their own ends, while conjurers, dreamers, and other dangerous persons have multiplied stories and marvels, growing greater with each recital. Thus a distrust has grown up around the infected tribes, and a situation of difficulty and delicacy has come about.⁹⁸

Like most of her contemporaries, Fletcher detached the elevating effects of education from the “craze.” Despite evidence to the contrary, educated Indians were left out of the narrative of the ghost dance. The intrusion of government policy never halted Native American cultural innovation. Natives knew that the new forms of communication taught at schools could spread their ideas on a mass scale, bringing them closer together. Literacy was used to foster their Native culture, not destroy it.

educating the Indians - millions of dollars would have been saved if the U.S. Army was never called to Pine Ridge and Rosebud.

⁹⁸ Alice C. Fletcher, “The Indian Messiah,” *The Journal of American Folklore* 4, no. 12 (Jan. – March 1891): 59-60. James Mooney wrote in his influential *The Ghost-dance Religion* that “none of the Christian Indians took any part in the disturbance” on the Lakota reservations, see page 852.

CONCLUSION: “We Are All One People Now”

The long held interpretation that the ghost dance movement was opposed to assimilation, civilization, and white culture have undoubtedly masked the innovative ways in which the dance was spread.¹ This study wonders how fundamental the rejection of white society was to those Native Americans who danced considering that many of them used features of white society, such as literacy and railroads, to propagate the movement. Scholars may have disregarded the usefulness Indians found in literacy to spread the ghost dance because the impulse to cast off other aspects of reservation life is readily apparent.² Mooney reported that Wovoka told his followers to return to “the Indian dress and manner of life” (although Wovoka himself regularly wore white man’s clothes and his “Messiah Letter” does not mention rejecting white ways) and some Indian agents complained that some of their residents seemed to be reverting to their old ways of life during the height of the dance.³ “The object of the whole movement, of course,” Robert Utley gathered, “was the restoration of the old savage life and its dominant values.”⁴ It has yet to be asked whether there was a place for literacy in those “savage” values. There is no

¹ Bernard Barber, “Acculturation and Messianic Movements,” *American Sociological Review* 6 (1941): 663-669; Alexander Lesser, “Cultural Significance of the Ghost Dance,” Russell Thornton, *We Shall Live Again*; Anthony Wallace, “Revitalization Movements,” *American Anthropologist* 58 (1956): 264-281.

² Of course, one of the most common and persistent beliefs in the movement was the idea that the white man would eventually disappear from the earth, or at least America. Whether more useful remnants of white society would survive was not made clear, but many Indians understood the movement in this context. For some scholars, this belief seems to be the ultimate rejection of white society.

³ James Mooney, “The Indian Ghost Dance,” 176. Short Bull and others claimed that Wovoka encouraged education and farming, see Sam A. Maddra. *Hostiles?*, 48-50. Maddra also addresses the Lakota’s prohibition of iron in the dance ceremony.

⁴ Robert Utley, *Last Days of Sioux Nation*, 70.

evidence of dancers rejecting literacy for the sake of the movement.⁵ In November 1890, the *New York Times* declared: “The picture which is drawn by the preachers of this new delusion appeals very strongly to the race feeling of the red men, and particularly to those who oppose civilized life. Never has unadulterated native Americanism been carried further.” The ghost dance movement was never thought to be compatible with American modernity, but modern methods were used by natives to learn about and propagate it before and after Wounded Knee.

In the years after his revelation, Wovoka received letters from distant Indian groups in “considerable numbers.”⁶ Ed A. Dyer, who operated a general store in Mason Valley, frequently translated and answered these letters. Dyer stated that many were from Grant Left Hand and postmarked Darlington, Oklahoma, site of the Cheyenne and Arapaho Agency. Left Hand, the former Carlisle student who met Wovoka in 1891, seemed to be a “scribe for most of the Indian Nations” as he invariably sought invitations for others to see Wovoka. He also requested multiple sacred items from Wovoka. Wovoka made a habit of sending visiting delegates back with balls of red ochre (which was mined near his home and used to make paint), magpie feathers, rabbit furs, and other religious tokens. This led others to want balls of red ochre of their

⁵ Although some Indian schools on the agencies saw lower attendance during the peak months of the dance, those declines were not always a product of rejection. Ghost dance leader Little Wound (whose children were at boarding school) said the children left because of hunger. Young Man Afraid of His Horses said that it was not strange for children to run away from school, even white children did it. In fact, George Sword reported that his people, the Oglala Sioux, were told by “the messiah” to “go to farming and send all your children to school” on their return to the agency from Nevada. See “The Indians’ Side,” *The Washington Evening Star*, January 28, 1891; James Mooney, *The Ghost-dance Religion*, 797.

⁶ Ed A. Dyer, “The Jack Wilson Story,” Special Collections, University Libraries, University of Nevada Libraries, Reno. Grant Left Hand, the son of Arapaho Chief Left Hand (the younger) and brother of Chief Circle Left Hand, was a “firm believer in the doctrine and the dance,” according to James Mooney, “and the principal organizer of the ‘auxiliary’ crow dance in his own tribe.” His wife Moki was a Cheyenne who composed “a dozen or more” ghost dance songs. See James Mooney, *The Ghost-dance Religion*, 1038-1039.

own. Wovoka obliged, sending and usually selling magpie feathers, paint balls, and items of his worn clothing, particularly shirts and hats. Just as Sears-Roebuck was ramping up their mail order business, Wovoka was selling a great many “Texas Plaza Hats” for twenty dollars apiece and shipping them fifteen hundred miles through the United States Postal Service. The “Father,” as the letters addressed him, received all kinds of gifts of “Indian finery:” moccasins, vests, gloves, shirts, pants, and headdresses, particularly from the Bannocks in Idaho. Wovoka, with the aid of Dyer, would reply with gratitude and most likely a word or two about his dance.⁷ However, Western writer Paul Baily learned from Dyer that Wovoka, for a time, responded to these letters with unusual secrecy. He would sneak into Dyer’s grocery store at night, have the letters read to him, and have Dyer prepare the proper packages in response.⁸

The Postal Service remained the link of communication across the Rockies for Wovoka and his followers for years following Wounded Knee. But because of the violent results of the “Messiah Craze” at Pine Ridge, whites continued to fear the dissension native communication could create on western reservations. Wovoka knew the negative attention his activities were drawing. In the fall of 1892, Agent C. C. Warner at the Nevada Agency grew concerned with the claims of newspaper reports that Wovoka (Jack Wilson) was having “an evil influence” on the

⁷ Ibid; Ed A. Dyer, Tape 17, Margaret M. Wheat Papers, 83-24, Special Collections, University Libraries, University of Nevada Libraries, Reno, transcribed in Michael Hittman, *Wovoka*, 256. Wovoka continued to receive similar letters until at least 1911. Twenty of such letter sent between 1908 and 1911 were preserved, see Grace Dangberg, “Letters to Jack Wilson, The Paiute Prophet,” *Anthropological Papers, Number 55*, Bureau of American Ethnology, Bulletin 164 (1957): 279-96.

⁸ Michael Hittman, *Wovoka and the Ghost Dance*, 25-26. It seems Wovoka “went underground” after he spoke with after army scout A. I. Chapman interrogated him in December 1890. By the time James Mooney visited him in 1892, Wovoka, according to Dyer, “was not exactly hiding nor had he run away,” he had “prudently...remove[d] his camp to the sound end of the valley...in a brush big enough to hide from the casual observer,” see Michael Hittman, *Wovoka and the Ghost Dance*, 21.

Indians that visited him.⁹ Warner was “fearful of its results abroad.” He told the farmer in charge at Walker River to conduct a more thorough investigation of Wovoka in November 1892. The farmer found that there had been several delegations “from eastern tribes” that came to “interview the Messiah.”¹⁰ Some were “pleased” with Wovoka and some were not. Wovoka himself was not pleased with the visits, according to the farmer, and was no longer advocating ghost dancing there or anywhere. During that fall of 1892, a group from the Cheyenne and Arapaho agency (four Arapahos, Sitting Bull, Washee, Black Bear, and Hanatcha-thiak, and one Cheyenne “half-blood” named Edward Geary) visited Wovoka in Nevada.¹¹ It was Sitting Bull and Washee’s second trip.

White suspicion, which lasted for months and even years after Wounded Knee, persisted because the ghost dance did not die the natural death that many expected. In June 1891, an army scout, Frank Grouard, heard from a friend at Fort Washakie (at the Wind River Agency) that visiting Cheyennes believed that the Lakotas were sending delegates to other reservations “trying to get all the tribes to go into a general outbreak.”¹² Grouard got permission from his superior to investigate the danger at reservations the Lakotas were said to have visited and found that the Lakotas had in fact contacted the Cheyennes about the plan. At the Crow Agency, he was told that a Pine Ridge Oglala was sent there to see what the Crows would think about a joint outbreak. Three Gros Ventres, who happened to be at the Crow Agency, told Grouard that some

⁹ Agent C. C. Warner to CIA, December 7, 1892, RBIA, RG 75, SC 188, Box 200, NARA (DC).

¹⁰ Farmer in Charge to Agent C. C. Warner, November 22, 1892, RBIA, RG 75, SC 188, Box 200, NARA (DC).

¹¹ Albert S. Gatschet, “Report of an Indian Visit to Jack Wilson, The Payute Messiah,” *The Journal of American Folklore* 6, no. 21 (Apr.-Jun., 1893): 111. Edward Geary was probably Edmund Gasseau Choteau Le Guerrier.

¹² Frank Grouard to Post Adjutant Fort McKinny, June 19, 1891, RBIA, RG 75, SC 188, Box 200, NARA (DC).

Standing Rock Hunkpapas made the same proposal to the Gros Ventres and Mandans. Lakota runners were sent out, according to Grouard, to all the tribes as far west as the Piegans. The Lakotas supposedly were going to resist government control whether others joined them or not. “All of this is being kept very quiet,” Grouard insisted. Only his friends offered the intelligence, there was “no doubt about the attempt to arrange for an outbreak.” But the agents at Cheyenne River, Crow Creek, Rosebud, and Standing Rock all denied that their Lakotas had sent out runners.¹³ The Cheyenne River and Rosebud agents maintained that their Indian police would have heard of such a plot. The Standing Rock agent attributed it to the “idle boasting of some non-progressive Indians.”¹⁴ Each of the agents reported to the Commissioner that they had been limiting visitation to only deserving Indians and Indian police. The Standing Rock agent blamed the Pine Ridge agent for giving passes to several Indians who reached his reserve and reported “a lot of nonsense about their better treatment and greater freedom at Pine Ridge,” which created “dissatisfaction and uneasiness in the minds of some whom they have tried to induce to transfer to that agency.” Such visits should not be permitted, the agent complained, they gave the Indians “an importance which they otherwise would not have.” “It is usually the more worthless Indians who are constantly thus traveling,” he argued. The ideas entering his reservation from those types were not helpful.

The agent at Pine Ridge, Capt. Charles Penny, had his own battle with visitation. The Commissioner allowed a party led by Flat Iron to visit the Arapahos at Wind River in September

¹³ Agent Perain P. Palmer to CIA, July 29, 1891, RBIA, RG 75, SC 188, Box 200, NARA (DC); Agent A. P. Dixon to CIA, August 10, 1891, RBIA, RG 75, SC 188, Box 200, NARA (DC); Agent J. George Wright to CIA, August 20, 1891, RBIA, RG 75, SC 188, Box 200, NARA (DC).

¹⁴ Agent James McLaughlin to CIA, September 11, 1891, RBIA, RG 75, SC 188, Box 200, NARA (DC).

1891, but he also reminded Penny about the restrictions regarding intertribal visiting. Penny told the Commissioner that it was not possible for him to enforce those restrictions because his police force was “inefficient,” they were not in “a good state of discipline.”¹⁵ According to Penny, the Indians at Pine Ridge were in a “state of uneasiness and evinced a disposition to leave the Agency and wander about in search of gossip and news.” He thought this indicated that the people wanted to resume the “Messiah craze, the ghost dancing and consequent trouble.”

In October 1891, the Penny reported that he was constantly being pressured to grant passes for hunting in Utah, Montana, and Colorado, which made him suspect that those Indians, who were non-progressives, really wanted to “search for, and bring back, news of the Messiah.”¹⁶ There were indications that dancing was occurring in seclusion at night and rumors were swirling from unknown sources. The agent found it “impossible” to find reliable information about the secret doings of the Pine Ridge Indians, even his Indian police were “useless.” Desperate to secure “definite information,” he asked the Commissioner to allow him to spend no less than fifty dollars a month as a “secret service fund” that would allow him “to ascertain definitely, and secretly, exactly what is going on all over the reservation.” Paranoia surrounded the so-called secret communications across reservations.

Agents throughout the west continued to chase down rumors of ghost dancing. They assumed communication between tribes, secret or otherwise, could carry plans for dancing. In the late winter of 1892, an employee at Pine Ridge reported that ghost dancing had resumed at the White Clay District. Agent Penny recommended that the Indians who were on his

¹⁵ Capt. Charles Penny to CIA, September 24, 1891, RBIA, RG 75, SC 188, Box 200, NARA (DC).

¹⁶ Capt. Charles Penny to CIA, October 15, 1891, RBIA, RG 75, SC 188, Box 200, NARA (DC).

reservation without permission should be sent back to their “legal homes,” which would stem the spread of information.¹⁷

Rumors of secret letters propagating the ghost dance reached the agents at the Dakota reserves. Agent James McLaughlin at Standing Rock blamed the “fairy tales” about the revival of the dance that were being circulated at his agency on the “numerous letters” received from Pine Ridge.¹⁸ The letters gave “glowing accounts of their gaudy Indian costumes and privileges enjoyed and importuning their friends to transfer” to Pine Ridge. McLaughlin recommended stopping “to some extent the carrying of messages and circulation of rumors among the tribe detrimental to the general good,” although he offered no strategy to limit the communication. He was worried the “non-progressive” minority might exert an unwarranted influence over the majority because of the letters.

But in March 1892, a special agent determined that letters reaching Cheyenne River had nothing to do with a ghost dance revival. His investigation found that Tall Bull, a Cheyenne River Lakota who had settled at Pine Ridge without permission, wrote to Hump at Cheyenne River and Running Antelope at Standing Rock inviting them to come to Pine Ridge to join his people in a “strike for their rights of which they had so long been deprived.”¹⁹ Although Tall Bull was pushing a non-progressive message, it did not seem to be related to dancing.

Because of the white hostility toward the dance and their perception that the movement was militant, it is no surprise that many Indian believers kept their dancing secret in the years after Wounded Knee. When James Mooney visited the Northern Arapahos at Wind River in

¹⁷ Acting Agent to CIA, March 3, 1892, RBIA, RG 75, SC 188, Box 200, NARA (DC).

¹⁸ Agent James McLaughlin to CIA, April 2, 1892, RBIA, RG 75, SC 188, Box 200, NARA (DC).

¹⁹ Charles Thompson to CIA, March 30, 1892, RBIA, RG 75, SC 188, Box 200, NARA (DC).

1892, the agent told him that the Indians were no longer dancing because of his efforts to curtail it. The agency clerk and interpreter even took Mooney out to a camp to talk with some Arapahos “over a pipe and a cup of coffee,” and all of the men “were so ignorant” about the ghost dance “that they wanted to know what it meant.”²⁰ But later that night, as Mooney traveled to another camp with the interpreter, they heard “the familiar cadence of the ghost songs.” The interpreter, Henry Reed, of Cheyenne, Arapaho, and white descent, finally admitted to Mooney: “Yes, they are dancing the Ghost dance. That’s something I have never reported, and I never will. It is their religion and they have a right to it.”²¹

Others were able to convince the authorities that their ghost dancing was harmless. In December 1891, Southern Arapaho headman Row of Lodges told Agent Charles Ashley that their ceremony was a prayer to the Great Spirit “to make them a better people and teach them the ways of the white man, they might grow to be a prosperous, happy and powerful people; that the songs they sang were similar, in sentiment, to those sung by the Indian children in school.”²² Suspicious of Row of Lodges’ claim, Ashley asked “the educated young Indians of the tribe” if that was the purpose of their ghost dancing. They said that it was. Because of Row of Lodges’ description, Ashley reported to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs that the ghost dance as practiced by the Southern Arapahos was “a long step in the direction of true religion, as compared with their former customs of worship.” It resembled the religion that Agent Ashley recognized, something closer, in his mind, to Christianity. In Ashley’s opinion, it promoted progressive ways and did not “interfere with their industrial pursuits to any considerable extent.”

²⁰ James Mooney, *The Ghost-dance Religion*, 808.

²¹ James Mooney, *The Ghost-dance Religion*, 809; Loretta Fowler, *Arapahoe Politics*, 124.

²² Agent Charles Ashley to CIA, December 29, 1891, RBIA, RG 75, SC 188, Box 200, NARA (DC).

Even some of the Arapahos at the Seger Colony were dancing in late 1891. Row of Lodges may have been telling Ashley what he wanted to hear, but the ghost dance meant many things to many different people. The agent at the Kiowa, Comanche, and Arapaho Agency was not as tolerant as Ashley, however. In November 1892, a Kiowa at the Haskell Institute wrote home to his agent to let him know that things were going alright. He asked the agent how the boys that came home the previous fall were doing. He already knew that some of them were dancing (he must have learned it through correspondence with someone else at the Kiowa Agency) and was “very sorry” to hear it.²³

Newspapers also assumed that communications between tribes meant they were scheming in secret. A Nevada paper reported in January 1891 that the Bannocks of Idaho were “closely allied” with the Paiutes and were “in constant communication with each other, with a probability of massing forces shortly.” That probability was near zero, of course. There was never any violence in the Great Basin resulting from the ghost dance. Whites who had settled near reservations worried about uprisings of angry Indians and newsmen printed baseless rumors that preyed on those fears. In February 1893, the Associated Press reported troubles at Pine Ridge after the murder of three white men at a beef contractor’s camp on the reserve. The article suggested that further trouble might be imminent, perhaps even an outbreak and former agent Valentine McGillicuddy told a reporter that talk of the messiah was common at Pine Ridge. But “the most significant” sign of trouble, according to the Associated Press, was “the fact that there has been communication between the various Indian tribes all during the past year of a secret and apparently important nature.”²⁴ There was even a “line of communication well established and

²³ Unknown Student to Agent, November (undated) 1892, RBIA, RG 75.19.50, Kiowa Comanche and Wichita, Haskell, Reel 92, NARA (OHS).

²⁴ *The Los Angeles Herald*, “Trouble at Pine Ridge,” February 5, 1893.

constantly used between Indian Territory and British America.” Because of this network, “the Indians all along the line understand that the other bands are kept posted.” Nothing came out of these reports of course, but they demonstrate the suspicion whites held about any association among the tribes of the west.

Paranoia reached new heights perhaps in early 1895. Crow agent J. W. Watson crafted an elaborate plan to discover what his people knew about the ghost dance and what information was being shared with the Lakotas. By the end of 1894, Watson became worried about the work of Bad Belly, the ghost dance proponent who received permission to visit Pine Ridge and Rosebud back in August 1890, but never returned to the Crow Agency permanently. Bad Belly (a “half witted, worthless Crow Indian” according to Watson) had been teaching and spreading the movement for several years, traveling around so much that the Agent Watson could not track him down. His beliefs had “taken some slight hold on the Crows, but not to amount to anything worth considering seriously.”²⁵ But Watson wanted to know if Bad Belly’s teachings and influence was “widespread or spread to any extent at all outside of the Reservation.”

Agent Watson had a plan to discover Bad Belly’s influence with the Lakotas, but the plan would require the involvement of Agent Penny at Pine Ridge. He proposed to Penny that a group of Crows should be allowed to visit the Oglalas at Pine Ridge. While there, Watson suspected that the Crows and the Oglalas would discuss “the Messiah matter” and they might even talk about Bad Belly and his teachings. The Pine Ridge police would later ascertain, by questioning the Oglalas, “pretty accurately how far, if at all,” the Oglalas “were affected in this ghost dance and ‘Messiah’ matter.” In order to learn “valuable information” about the dance,

²⁵ Agent J. W. Watson to Agent Charles Penny, January 3, 1895, RBIA, RG 75, SC 188, Box 200, NARA (DC).

“whether the Messiah craze has spread any or is likely to spread,” Watson wanted information about the dance to be shared with the Oglalas. Watson did not think any harm would come from the visit, but he did not see the need to request permission for the scheme from the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, as was required by Indian Affairs regulations. As long as the Crows did not hunt on their way south, and as they “would come nearly the whole distance by rail,” the visit should “be an easy matter.” It is not known how successful Watson’s plan turned out to be. It is clear, however, that Watson knew that the ghost dance would not have been disseminated without the intertribal connections that developed during the 1880s. Watson’s plan sounds outrageous, but it would have seemed impossible to a Crow agent before the 1880s. The Crows and the Oglalas were bitter enemies before the reservations years. By 1895, there was a strong connection between the tribes.

The overwrought reaction to intertribal communication is understandable. Agents did have real reason for concern. There were communications between tribes that expressed a strong anti-government opinion. As we have seen in this study, early notions of Pan-Indianism were often nurtured through a common opposition of Indian Affairs policies. The ghost dance became that common cause, as evident in this November 1894 letter to Kicking Bear, one of the former ghost dance leaders among the Lakota, from two Shoshone at the Fort Hall Agency. The letter, written in English, was given to the agent at Pine Ridge by Kicking Bear and several other head men.²⁶ The agent forwarded the letter to the Commissioner because he “had no doubt” that “its real meaning” was to “revive the Ghost Dancing” at Pine Ridge.

It read:

²⁶ Agent Penny to CIA, November 22, 1894, RBIA, RG 75, SC 188, Box 200, NARA (DC). It is not clear why the men gave the agent the letter, the agent only states that it was done for his “information.”

Sioux Chiefs:

We the undersigned chiefs and head men of the Shoshone and Bannock tribe of Indians, hereby write you our appreciation of the visit of your people to our Reservation. You people have seen with their own eyes what we are doing out here in the west. We still have all our old customs, providing such dances and sports do not in any way interfere with our work etc.

We believe there is time for everything in this world – time for work, time for dancing and pleasure, and time for sleep.

We understand that out in your country, all old Indian games customs are abolished. We fail to see the humanity and justice in abolishing all our time immemorial pastimes and forms of worship. We see no harm in indulging in worshipping the Great Spirit in our old way, and also see no harm in our old games and sports, long as they do not interfere with our work.

We earnestly hope you shall explain to your Agent and prove to him there is no evil in your customs of worship and dances etc.

Yours truly, James Bollard, Prin. Chief, Joe Wheeler, Chief Justice Court Indian Offences.²⁷

The Shoshones and Bannocks made a connection with the Lakotas that visited their reservation and they hoped to maintain it. The Lakotas “had seen with their own eyes” what the Fort Hall Indians were doing and now could read about it. James Bollard and Joe Wheeler hoped the Lakotas would challenge the authorities and convince their agents that there was “no evil” in their religion. It was a letter of encouragement.

Although thousands of Indians participated in the ghost dance, the majority of those who heard Wovoka’s message did not believe it. But most of the Indians living at the Walker River, Pyramid Lake, Western Shoshone, Fort Hall, Wind River, Tongue River, Pine Ridge, Rosebud,

²⁷ James Bollard and Joe Wheeler to Sioux Chiefs, September 17, 1894, copy in Agent Penny to CIA, November 22, 1894, RBIA, RG 75, SC 188, Box 200, NARA (DC). Joe Wheeler’s agent called him the “wealthiest and one of the most influential” Shoshones at Fort Hall, “he dresses wholly in citizens’ clothes, favors schools and civilization, and is a man of honesty and integrity,” see *ARCIA*, 1890, 77.

Standing Rock, Cheyenne River, Crow Creek, Yankton, Crow, Fort Berthold, Fort Belknap, Fort Peck, Santee, Omaha, Winnebago, Cheyenne and Arapaho, Kiowa, Comanche, and Wichita, Pawnee and Ponca, Caddo, Hualapai, Uintah and Ouray, Southern Ute, and other agencies did learn about it. The ghost dance became a common purpose for the diverse Indian groups of the west - a purpose not solely to propagate the movement, which many did, but simply to inform others about it, regardless of tribal bonds or kinship.

If the definition of a community is a group that interacts and shares ideas and ways of life, then Native Americans were building a Pan-Indian community in the 1880s. An idea originating on a reservation in the Great Basin could be transmitted to every reservation in the west, not because individuals were waiting for news of a savior, but because a community actively spread the idea. Natives shared kinship and the sentiment of belonging to a similar culture. They were similar people hoping for a similar outcome, all facing a common, unyielding challenge. Because of the rise of communication between them, they could express these things with each other. By the late 1880s, before the ghost dance swept the Plains, a network – a web of interconnectedness – had formed between the tribes of the west. Geographic isolation was overcome. Reservations were bridged together by mail and rail, allowing men and women to communicate efficiently across the distances that separated them from other tribes. By the time Wovoka hoped to spread his vision for the world, intertribal communication, reinforced by the popularity of visitation and correspondence, had become a normal part of Indian life.

The story of reservation life and the ghost dance should be told as a story of innovation and activity. This study has shown how Indians acquired literacy and made it their own in the 1880s, aggressively seeking to connect with other groups. Intertribal visitation allowed tribes

without a previous relationship to forge new bonds and enabled those with a history of conflict to make peace. Visitation and correspondence brought the news of the ghost dance out of the Nevada agencies to the Plains reservations. Indians communicated with a purpose – to make political and religious change. And perhaps most importantly, connections among tribes continued to increase in the years after the ghost dance. In September 1893, five Kiowa men, Little Bow, Big Bow, White Wind, Lance Bear, and Poor Buffalo, visited the Utes at the Uintah Agency in Utah, around one thousand miles from their home near Anadarko, Indian Territory. They spent their nights visiting different camps, communing with as many Utes as they could. The Uintah agent noticed that a “great many” Utes traveled to the agency headquarters to meet the “guests of the tribe.” While at the headquarters, the Kiowas took the opportunity to write home, with the help of the Uintah agent, to let their people know that they were fine, but they were out of money. They needed one hundred dollars in order to continue their journey to see the Navajos. Also in the letter, a Uintah headman named Catoomp enclosed his own message to the Kiowas back in Oklahoma. He wrote:

Our old beloved Chief Ouray told us to be friendly with all the Indians, we are happy to see these our Indian brethren among us, they are strangers to us. All the Indians are glad to see them. This is an Indian Reservation like all the other reservations, any Indian can come here, and we will be glad to see him. We are all one people now, under one government. I am glad to see this, it is better than before when we were always at war with different tribes.²⁸

²⁸ Acting Agent James Randlett to Kiowa Agent, September 26, 1893, RBIA, RG 75.19.50, Kiowa Comanche and Wichita, Letters Received, Reel 39, NARA (OHS).

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ABBREVIATIONS

ARCIA – The Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs

CIA – Commissioner of Indian Affairs

DC – The National Archives at Washington, DC

GRBIA – General Records of the Bureau of Indian Affairs

KC – The National Archives at Kansas City, MO

NARA – National Archives and Records Administration

OHS – The National Archives Collection at the Oklahoma Historical Society, Oklahoma City

RBIA – Records of the Bureau of Indian Affairs

RG – Record Group

SC – Records of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, Special Cases, 1821-1907

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