

**In The Shadow of Giants: Persistent Revitalization Principles in the Old Northwest,
1813-1832**

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Introduction

Tecumseh's dream of living in a world free of American influence slipped away as he died in the dirt of what would become Ontario, Canada. The pan-Indian alliance, which had dealt devastating defeats to the American army, collapsed under the force of the army of William Henry Harrison near the Thames River on October 5, 1813.¹ The crushing blow at the Battle of the Thames effectively closed the western theater of the War of 1812 and the last serious British support of Indian military efforts in the Old Northwest.² The multi-tribal force that lay in tatters was once fueled by Tecumseh's younger brother, Tenskwatawa, who spent the previous nine years preaching a Revitalizationist spiritual program that emphasized forming a new united Indian identity against American imperialism. Unlike his brother, however, Tenskwatawa survived the Battle of the Thames, accompanied by fragments of the Indian confederacy. They fled with no hope of removing the United States from the Old Northwest but continued with embers of Revitalization burning in them. They escaped with the knowledge and experience of decades of resistance and Revitalization movements aimed to counter American imperialism.³ Along with thousands of other American Indians living in the Old Northwest, they would take this knowledge into an uncertain world where, for the first time, American expansion had no significant British or Native counterbalance.

Over the next fifteen years, the American government viciously attempted to stamp out Native title to the Old Northwest and take exclusive control of the lands east of the Mississippi. After the war, white settlers came into the Old Northwest in droves, swinging the demographic balance against the Native tribes. The retreat of militancy in the Old Northwest obscured the

¹ R David Edmunds, *The Shawnee Prophet*, (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1983).

² Colin G. Calloway, "The End of an Era: British-Indian Relations in the Great Lakes Region after the War of 1812", *Michigan Historical Review*, Vol. 12, No. 2, (Fall, 1986): 9.

³ R David Edmunds, *The Shawnee Prophet*.

continuing prominence of Revitalization movements and ideas, particularly to Indian agents working at the time. Today's scholarship reflects the dearth of sources. Most studies of Revitalization end with the death of Tecumseh.⁴ After the defeat of Tecumseh at the Thames, Revitalization receded from the forefront of Native resistance movements and life, yet it was not stamped out completely. Today's scholarship often does not follow the continuing power, vitality, and influence of these movements.

“In The Shadow of Giants” will examine how Shawnee, Kickapoo, Miami, Ho-Chunk, Sauk, Fox, Ottawa, Chippewa, and Potawatomi Indians, who were integral to the Revitalization movements of Neolin and Tenskwatawa, responded to the fifteen years between the Battle of the Thames and the Black Hawk War and how these ideas continued to drive a resistance that was no longer militant in nature. The defeat of Tecumseh and Tenskwatawa was more than the defeat of two men; rather, it was the end of a far-reaching movement that sparked cultural revitalization, religious revival, and militantism across the Old Northwest.⁵ This essay will examine how the individuals, bands, and tribes in the Old Northwest who had to interact with the United States after the War of 1812 were influenced by their participation in Revitalization movements. The prevailing Revitalizationist rhetoric during the War of 1812 inculcated a generation of American Indians in the language of Revitalization, and the change in leadership did not extinguish that knowledge but continued to shape post-war Native culture.

Some scholars term these movements “Nativist.” While this is an apt description for the early Prophets, the term does not capture the movement's evolution after the War of 1812. The movement no longer promoted traditional nativist rhetoric and was not as openly hostile to the

⁴Gregory Dowd, *A Spirited Resistance: The North American Indian Struggle for Unity, 1745-1815*, (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992). Robert Owens, *Red Dreams, White Nightmares: Pan-Indian Alliances in the Anglo-American Mind, 1763-1815*, (Norman, Ok: University of Oklahoma Press, 2015)

⁵Dowd, *A Spirited Resistance*.

United States, at least to the extent white settlers understood.⁶ I will classify these movements as what anthropologist Anthony F. C. Wallace called Revitalization movements. Revitalization movements are the process in which individuals in a community respond under traumatic stress. Individuals navigate and plan their future through what Wallace deems a “mazeway.” Under stress communities are no longer able to effectively see a mazeway of their future and society begins to break down as individuals lose hope, further perpetuating the cycle. In response an individual can have visions and dreams, often of a religious nature, which radically shift the way they see the future. As they perpetuate their new spiritual program they change culture to create an effective mazeway to address the evolving circumstances. This often includes religious elements assumed through transculturation and well as conservative elements meant to rapidly respond to social pressures. Tenskwatawa and Neolin both employed these strategies when formulating their Revitalization movements to create a new cultural and religious narrative that fit the challenges of the time. The final stage of Revitalization occurs when untenable elements of the movement are shed away, and the remaining elements receive general societal acceptance.⁷

The immediate cultural impacts of Revitalization movements at their height are well understood, but the final stage, lasting cultural persistence, is not. Even without viable militant resistance in the Old Northwest, Native groups continued to resist American imperialism through other means. One of the means of resistance was to preserve Native culture despite America's efforts to destroy it. By ending the study of Revitalization when militant resistance was no longer viable, the field had missed out on valuable elements of the Revitalization program that emphasized cultural resistance and continued to be applicable well beyond the War of 1812. Moreover, this study will shed light on the cultural development of the Natives of the Old

⁶Ibid, xxi-xxii

⁷Anthony F. C. Wallace, “Revitalization Movements,” *American Anthropologist* 58, no. 2 (1956): 264–81, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/665488>.

Northwest during this period of upheaval. The embers of Revitalizationist rhetoric during this period sparked ideas and actions that reverberated throughout the nineteenth century and beyond, influencing resistance movements, such as the Ghost Dance movement in the 1870s.⁸

“In the Shadow of Giants” is primarily a study of culture. While anthropologists often attempt to capture a culture at a moment in time, I will assume and track cultural change and evolution. Even if general attitudes remain largely constant over time, what individuals and groups chose to emphasize changes. Diverse groups and people highlighted different cultural elements to appeal to the sensibilities of the day. The ethnographers of the day who attempted to capture what they saw as a waning Native culture actually captured a culture in rapid flux. Often, unwittingly, Colonial officials who did not take a purely academic view and interacted with Native culture captured the shifting dynamics of Revelation as syncretic principles settled into Native cultural understanding. Through the reports of ethnographers and colonial officials, latent Revitalizationist principles emerged that remained in the stories and rhetoric of a wide range of Native actors. Through this analysis, I have identified the persistent Revitalization principles that continued to serve the spiritual and temporal lives of Native communities in the Old Northwest.

Capturing the perspective of a wide-ranging group of Shawnee, Kickapoo, Miami, Ho-Chunk, Sauk, Fox, Ottawa, Chippewa, and Potawatomi Indians is not a small feat. Luckily, during this period, amateur ethnographers flooded into the Old Northwest to capture what they believed was a disappearing culture. They attempted to capture the history, stories, cosmology, and belief systems of Native Americans through interviews. While these sources must be viewed critically, the many stories they collected provide insight. Alongside modern anthropologies, the records of American Indian agents, and the sparse Native sources of the time, I attempt to parse together an accurate recounting of the culture of Shawnee, Kickapoo, Miami, Winnebago, Sauk,

⁸James Mooney *The Ghost-Dance Religion and Wounded Knee* (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2011), 895-902.

Fox, Ottawa, Chippewa, and Potawatomi Indians in the moments after the War of 1812 and before the Black Hawk War.

The shadow that Revitalization prophets cast was influenced by centuries of white and Native interaction. Richard White observed that in the mid-seventeenth century, the French used the language of mediation calling on syncretic principles to form an alliance that protected Algonquian autonomy and promoted French interests in the Great Lakes Region.⁹ After the French left North America after the Seven Years War these syncretic principles would form the basis for a series of Revitalization movements emerging amongst Algonquian groups spanning the length of the United States. In *A Spirited Resistance*, Gregory Dowd argues that what he described as Nativist prophets provided a political counterweight to the “accommodationist” leaders who wished to compromise with the Europeans over land boundaries. Revitalization movements offered an attractive alternative to progressives by providing a nuanced conservative program that resonated with Algonquians throughout the territory east of the Mississippi. R. David Edmunds and Alfred Cave have detailed the accounts of individual prophets such as Tenskwatawa, Neolin, and Handsome Lake and provided additional context on how charismatic prophets tapped into latent Native spirituality to inspire large movements.¹⁰ Revitalization movements often became the catalyst for what Robert Owens, in *Red Dreams White Nightmares*, called “pan-Indian” resistance movements designed to exploit a common Indian identity to fight imperialism.

Due to the infeasibility of militantism after the war of 1812, most scholars ended their studies when Revitalization no longer offered a large-scale framework for resistance. They leave

⁹Richard White, *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650–1815* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 1991).

¹⁰Edmunds, *The Shawnee Prophet*. Alfred Cave, *Prophets of the Great Spirit: Native American Revitalization Movements in Eastern North America*, (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 2006).

plenty of room to study the lasting cultural effects of Revitalization after the end of the movement pioneered by Tecumseh and Tenskwatawa. “In the Shadow of Giants” will focus on the lasting impact of these movements and messages. Cave and Edmunds tracked the consistency in prophetic messaging over time, and I will build on their work to investigate how the Revitalization messages continued to influence how everyday people understood their identity in the face of imperial expansion. Dowd details how Revitalization movements persisted after significant defeats, and I will examine how Revitalization persisted after the defeat at the Battle of the Thames.¹¹

My work will build on Patrick J. Jung, who, in *The Black Hawk War of 1832*, argues that the same anti-American sentiments that drove the Native resistance in 1812 led to the Black Hawk War of 1832. Jung attributes the Revitalizing forces that fostered the anti-American sentiment to a prophet named Wabokieshiek. Wabokieshiek’s movement, however, was insular, and little is revealed about his teachings in the book.¹² Jung acknowledges the latent power that Revitalization held after the Battle of the Thames but does not investigate how the Natives of the Old Northwest maintained that power. Jung focuses on a single Prophet, whom we know little about, instead of the cultural environment which enabled Wabokieshiek to build a movement. It is noteworthy that no major prophets carried on the message of Revitalization between the War of 1812 and the Black Hawk War, and I will investigate what kept the soil of Revitalization so fertile that it allowed the movements of Wabokieshiek and Black Hawk to take root.

Revitalization prophets catalyzed movements that offered Native responses to the evolving crises posed by colonization. In the aftermath of the War of 1812, Native communities continued to face many of the same existential challenges, making the messages of Revitalization

¹¹Dowd, *A Spirited Resistance: Owens, Red Dreams, White Nightmares*.

¹²Patrick J. Jung, *The Black Hawk War of 1832*, (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2008).

leaders enduringly resonant. The ideologies they espoused, rooted in spiritual renewal, cultural preservation, and resistance to encroaching settler influence, became deeply embedded in Native political and cultural discourse. Rather than fading with time, these principles adapted to shifting conditions and fused with longstanding traditions, helping to forge a resilient, syncretic Native identity. It empowered Native communities to maintain coherence and continuity in the face of relentless American expansion, offering a durable framework for interpreting and resisting imperialism.

“In the Shadow of Giants” echoes and builds upon the theory elaborated by Gerald Vizenor when he coined the term *survivance*. Survivance is the combination of survival and resistance in the face of colonial assaults on Native sovereignty—doing what is necessary to stave off colonial violence while preserving culture. In a world where military resistance was not a viable option, survival was essential in not capitulating to colonial pressure. To truly survive, however, the Natives needed to continue to retain their culture.¹³ My work also aims to show that the Native rhetoric, simply by perpetuating Native culture in a rapidly changing world, played a critical role in resistance. By nurturing the cultural elements of Revitalization Native communities continued to persist and resist imperialism.

Growing Syncretism

The British forced the French out of North America in 1759 which resulted in a tectonic shift for the Natives who lived there, especially those of the Upper Great Lakes. While the sparse French population and mediation of the French governor “Onontio” allowed many of these tribes to benefit from colonial interaction, creeping British encroachment into the Ohio River valley throughout the eighteenth century began to threaten the autonomy of Natives in the Great Lakes

¹³Gerald, Vizenor. *Manifest Manners: Postindian Warriors of Survivance*, (Middletown, CT: wesleyan university press, 1993).

and Ohio Valley region. The exit of the French marked the complete collapse of any European counterweight to British imperialism and a dire threat to the autonomy of the Shawnee, Kickapoo, Miami, Ho-Chunk, Sauk, Fox, Ottawa, Chippewa, and Potawatomi Indians of the Upper Great Lakes. The British scaled back the French strategy of mediation that included the distribution of presents the French had employed to gain Native allies, causing economic hardships in Native communities. Furthermore, Colonists, who had just fought a war to open the Ohio Valley for settlement, were eager to reap the rewards of their efforts.¹⁴ Practical solutions that Natives had implemented for centuries were no longer as effective as they once had been. This plunged the Natives of the Great Lakes into what Wallace describes as “The Period of Increased Individual Stress” where the existential stress caused by loss of land and settler expansion results in far reaching societal pressure.¹⁵

Eastern Woodland religion served the spiritual needs of those Natives for centuries, but under the rapidly changing circumstances their beliefs no longer maintained the same resonance. Traditional beliefs surround a concept of power that permeated all aspects of life. Different Spirits, Manitou, and G-d’s stewarded power over the narrow realms they controlled. Through a series of rituals and celebrations people honored these spirits. With these rituals people gained the favor of the spirits and the realms they controlled. Much like the diversity of spirits, various groups of people maintained power in different areas of life. Men, who had power over hunting, had to strictly adhere to different rituals for certain spirits to grant them success. While, women, who held power over childbirth, had to maintain strict rituals over menstruation or threaten the wellbeing of the community.¹⁶

¹⁴White, *The Middle Ground*, 230-270.

¹⁵Wallace, “Revitalization Movements”

¹⁶Dowd, *A Spirited Resistance*, 1-20.

As early as 1737, there were reports of drastic changes in Native religious understanding. Native prophets emerged among the Eastern Woodland tribes who called on a unique spiritual power in evolving times.¹⁷ The most prominent of these prophets became the Delaware prophet, Neolin. Neolin was a Delawaer Indian who had likely spent time with Jesuit missionaries and drew on that knowledge to form his new spiritual movement.¹⁸ In 1760, Neolin was contemplating the issues that faced his people sitting near a fire when “the appears [sic] of a man who came to him...told him these things he was thinking of were right and that all who follow evil ways should goe [sic] to a miserable place after they die.” To avoid eternal punishment by the Great Spirit, the Natives must embrace a past and purportedly superior version of their culture and “learn to live without white people, clothing, and supporting themselves as their forefathers did.”¹⁹ According to Gregory Dowd, spiritual journeys are an essential element of Native culture, these journeys ushered in changes in Native spirituality while remaining consistent with Native culture as a whole.²⁰ Yet Neolin’s journey was not a journey of personal discovery or one that changed small doctrinal elements. It marked the beginning of a rapid cultural shift and began what Wallace called the “period of Revitalization.” Once traditional responses to stress failed, Neolin discovered a new way to address Native spiritual needs. A rejection of modern Native culture in favor of a dynamic mix of conservative doctrine and elements assumed through transculturation that responded to the societal stressors brought upon by Anglo-American imperialism.²¹

¹⁷Ibid, 27-32.

¹⁸Gregory Evans Dowd, *War under Heaven: Pontiac, the Indian Nations, and the British* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), 99.

¹⁹ Edwin Gaustad, Charles Beatty, and Guy Klett, “Journals of Charles Beatty, 1762-1769,” *The William and Mary Quarterly* 21, no. 1,(1964): 55.

²⁰Dowd, *Spirited Resistance*, 2.

²¹Wallace, “Revitalization Movements”

While Neolin's spiritual journey was distinctly Native, he called upon syncretic beliefs derived from white colonists. To formulate a succinct message, Revitalization movements often rely on a singular divine messenger.²² While Native religion incorporated a diverse set of creation stories, the creators were often aloof and not actively involved in daily Native life. While the Great Spirit would have been a familiar concept to many Natives, not in the form Neolin used. A Judeo-Christian form of a vengeful all-powerful Jehovah proved an effective model for the divine messenger utilized in a Revitalization movement.²³ Only upon contact with Europeans did references to the active and all powerful spirit, like that referenced by Neolin, become ubiquitous. The prophets used an essentially foreign concept of an all powerful creator to call for a return to traditional Native power. By adhering to syncretic beliefs that called on a shared Native past, Neolin formed a new movement that had a broad base of appeal across the Ohio Valley.²⁴ In 1763, Neolin's Revitalization rhetoric sparked a widespread Indian uprising against Anglo-American imperialism. Named after one of the most prominent war leaders, Pontiac's rebellion, rocked British control of the Ohio Valley and Great Lakes.

After the American Revolution began in 1775, the dynamics of the Great Lakes again shifted, and the Eastern Woodland Indians found that their erstwhile British enemies were now their allies in resisting American colonists' efforts at independence. The Eastern Woodland and British soldiers fought against the unruly American colonists until the British left the war in 1783.²⁵ Despite the text of the Treaty of Paris surrendering all British land east of the Mississippi, the Great Lakes region was not British land to give. One Native leader conceptualized Native connection to land through a Revitalizationist lens by connecting Native

²²Ibid.

²³Cave, *Prophets of the Great Spirit*, 2-10.

²⁴Dowd, *Spirited Resistance*, 36.

²⁵Owens, *Red Dreams, White Nightmares*, 71-88.

sovereignty to a singular all powerful creator; when protesting the Treaty of Paris by proclaiming that the land given to the Americans by the British was a “ Gift of the Great God who made all things to us.”²⁶ Even with the continued spiritual backing of Revitalization, the exit of the British from the war dealt a serious blow to Native resistance and British credibility in the Great Lakes. While they continued to rely on the British for logistical support, Natives could no longer rely on direct European assistance to fend off American imperialism and again had to develop Native solutions to resist expansion.²⁷

Beginning in 1785, a coalition led by the Miami Little Turtle and Shawnee Black Hoof organized to continue the resistance against the United States. Even when political leaders took center stage, spiritual connection to the land remained an essential element of resistance. During that time, Black Hoof and Little Turtle obtained spiritual backing from a female Prophet named Coccochee.²⁸ Under the stress of American expansion, Coccochee’s revelations, like Neolin’s, used a prophetic message to encourage rapid change in Native culture and, at the same time, motivate the Natives’ push for sovereignty and autonomy. The Revitalization message was reflected in what an Algonquian man told a missionary, “the Ohio [river] is the boundary, but you [the Americans] are encroaching on the grounds given to us by the Great Spirit.”²⁹ Despite early victories, the American “Mad” Anthony Wayne forced a large council of Natives to sign the Treaty of Greenville on August 3, 1795, which compelled the confederacy to acknowledge American claims to much of the Ohio Country.³⁰

²⁶Alex McKee, response given to a speech given by Alex McKee by Six Nation Indians, Ed. Agness Burton, vol 20, (Ann Arbor, Mi, Michigan Pioneer and historical society, 1912),176.

²⁷Calloway, “The End of an Era”

²⁸O.M Spencer, *Indian Captivity* (Chicago: R.R. Donnelley, 1917), 103.

²⁹Colin Calloway, *The Shawnees and the War for America* (New York, NY: Viking, 2007), 81-82.

³⁰Dowd, *Spirited Resistance*, 113-114.

With that treaty, after forty years of war, relative peace fell over the Old Northwest, but it was not to last. The United States wanted to sell the land of the Northwest Territory to gather much-needed revenue. The Federalist administrations of George Washington and John Adams hoped to accomplish this in a gradual, orderly fashion by “civilizing” and eventually assimilating Native peoples into the American population. President Thomas Jefferson retained the civilization policy but was more aggressive in its application. He outlined his vision to William Henry Harrison, Governor of Indiana Territory, on February 27, 1803, telling Harrison to take advantage of the decreased game in the Old Northwest and to “draw them to agriculture, to spinning & weaving.” As a means of inducing land cessions and narrowing reliance on traditional means of hunting and agriculture³¹ Driving men to agriculture versus their traditional roles as hunters resulted in the further erosion of traditional Native culture to serve the United States’ expansionist goals.³²

In 1804, during this period of aggressive American expansion, inside his tent in a small Indian village in Ohio, a Shawnee man named Lalawethika, or “The Rattle,” collapsed. He woke up with a start. But the man who woke up was not the same man who had collapsed. He was now Tenskwatawa, or “The Open Door.” Tenskwatawa’s message mirrored that of Neolin's forty years before. In his vision, the Shawnee Prophet embarked on a spiritual journey of his own. Guided by the Master of Life he saw a fork in the road: “those who took the right hand way quit everything that was wicked and became good. But the left hand road was for such as would go on and be bad after they were shown the right way.” Yet the Master of life takes a much more active role in this journey than traditional stories. He became a vengeful Jehovah empowered to

³¹Thomas Jefferson, “Letter from Jefferson to Harrison”, February 27, 1803, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, DC.

³²Robert Owens, *Mr. Jefferson's Hammer: William Henry Harrison and the Origins of American Indian Policy* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 2011), 88-92, 200-208.

punish those who did not adhere to the principles disseminated by Tenskwatawa. Those sent down the left side of the road were “under different degrees of judgment and misery.” But the worst punishment was saved for one of the newest and most destructive elements of white imperialism, alcoholics. They were given cups filled with liquid that “resembled melted lead” and forced to drink.³³ Over the following months, Tenskwatawa had several other visions that began to clarify his message. He promised, “while we yield an entire obedience to these commands of the great spirit... we shall remain happy and protected.”³⁴ Through his visions and preaching, Tenskwatawa saved Revitalization from the ashes of defeat and reinvigorated the message that had motivated a generation of Natives before him.

In 1809, tensions with the Americans increased, and, in turn, Tenskwatawa's movement exploded in popularity. A vast array of Potawatomi, Kickapoo, Ho-Chunk, Sauk, and Fox Indians flocked to Tenskwatawa's new base of power at Prophetstown on the forks of the Tippecanoe and Wabash rivers. Although there were sound military reasons for Tecumseh's move, he articulated a religious rationale for the move, when he said, “The great spirit above has appointed this place for us to light our fires, and here we shall remain.”³⁵ The religious backing of the newly formulated, all-powerful Great Spirit was a useful tool to usher in change through spiritually acceptable means and became a useful tool for Tenskwatawa while he was leading his movement. While Christian elements such as a unitary G-d remained a powerful rhetorical strategy, Tenskwatawa shaped a movement designed to respond to imperialism on Native terms. He did not intend to replace Native culture with western concepts, but shift cultural understanding to fortify it during a tempestuous period. When possible Tenskwatawa drew on

³³J.P Maclean, *Shaker Mission to the Shawnee Indians* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1987), 223.

³⁴John Tanner, *A Narrative of the Captivity and Adventures of John Tanner, during Thirty Years Residence among the Indians in the Interior of North America* (New York: G. and C. and H. Carvili, 1830), 156.

³⁵Lyman Draper, *Notes of Lyman Draper Manuscripts*, 12 yy 52.

entirely Native language and principles to formulate a response to the United States. Using an entirely Native understanding of evil and nefarious spirits he described white settlers as “an ugly crab which had crawled from the sea.”³⁶ At Prophetstown, Tenskwatawa continued to remain connected to his traditional message of pan-Indian unity, cultural Revitalization, and resistance.³⁷

The Prophet’s growing movement was bolstered by geopolitical events, specifically the growing tension between the United States and Great Britain, which would ultimately lead the United States to declare war on June 18, 1812. The War of 1812 again brought British aid to the Indians as the British worked to bring them into the fight against the Americans. With British aid and logistical support, more Natives took military actions led by Tecumseh. Initially the Native forces scored major victories but these were to be the final gasps of effective Native military resistance in the Great Lakes. In May 1813, William Henry Harrison broke the Native and British siege of Fort Meigs in Ohio and began moving north, reversing the gains that the British and Tecumseh had made at the beginning of the war. As Harrison chased the force back into Canada, Tecumseh began shedding Native combatants. On October 5, 1813, Harrison defeated the last remnants of the alliance at the Battle of the Thames.³⁸

Residual fear

After the defeat of Tecumseh, many Natives remained committed to resistance against the United States. In May 1815, acting Governor of Michigan William Woodbridge wrote a letter concerning a meeting he had held with chiefs near Detroit, reporting that “since it had become known that the British are to come into the possession of the opposite county again, they exhibited a tone very different than they had lately manifested.”³⁹ During the war, the United

³⁶Edmunds, *The Shawnee Prophet*, 38.

³⁷Ibid, 70-71.

³⁸Ibid, 184.

³⁹William Woodbridge, “Letter to Josiah Meigs”, May 1815. The Territorial Papers of the United States. Washington: United States Government Printing Office

States conducted a war of devastation, destroying friendly and hostile villages alike. Without European support, the threat of American military retaliation made nominally friendly relations with the United States necessary. Yet, the chiefs did not stop harboring resentment against the United States and hoped for British aid to empower direct military resistance. Thomas Forsyth, agent to the Sauk and Fox Indians, noted in a letter to Governor of the Missouri Territory William Clark in 1818, “The Sauks who went to Drummond Island were very cordially received” by the British. Forsyth later blamed the British for instigating the Sauks to steal American horses during these visits. Throughout his time as agent to the Ottawas and Chippewa in the 1820s, Henry Schoolcraft constantly complained about the Natives of his agency going to visit the British in Canada against his instructions.⁴⁰ Despite American fears, after years of fighting in North America and Europe, the British did not want to pay to supply the Natives and certainly did not want to start another war with the United States. As a result, the British limited their aid to small presents.⁴¹ The lack of British logistical support and increasingly unfavorable demographic shifts made large-scale militant resistance in the Upper Great Lakes infeasible. The years of devastating war further demonstrated the untenable cost of Native militant resistance to the United States in the Old Northwest.⁴²

Despite this, the fear of renewed war on the frontier drove the United States to attempt to reinvigorate the language of mediation employed by the French. Outlining the problem the government faced, Forsyth predicted in the fall of 1815 that “We will always have Indians as enemies” unless the United States “establish a permanent Department of Indian affairs in this

⁴⁰Henry Rowe Schoolcraft, *Personal Memoirs of a Residence of Thirty Years With the Indian Tribes on the American Frontiers: With Brief Notices of Passing Events, Facts, and Opinions, A. D. 1812 to A. D. 1842* (Philadelphia, PA: Lippincott, Grambo and Co., 1851), 66, 146. Thomas Forsyth, “Letter to William Clark”, September 30, 1818, Draper Manuscripts: Thomas Forsyth Papers, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, WI.

⁴¹Calloway, “The End of an Era” 9.

⁴²Ibid, 4-7.

country where a principal-agent ought to reside.” This agent should speak the language and understand the culture of the tribes they worked with.⁴³ Native populations now had to reckon with a less overtly hostile, but still very real threat to their existence. The new found American goal to mediate may have temporarily revealed pressure, but did not drastically alleviate the threat to Native culture posed by colonial expansion.

The United States may have invested in mediation in the Old Northwest, but settlers were still hungry for land. In 1821, Secretary of War John C. Calhoun wanted to extend the reach of the United States and ordered Governor of Michigan Territory Lewis Cass to organize a treaty council with the Chippewa, Ottawa, Ojibwe, and Potawatomi Indians to obtain a tract of land between Chicago and Detroit. On August 17th, over three thousand Natives trudged to meet under the guns of Fort Dearborn to have a treaty council that Cass believed would end quickly.⁴⁴ Attending the council was a Potawatomi Chief named Metea, who had grappled with the Americans at Chicago before. While little is known about Metea before the War of 1812, he flocked to join the Revitalization movement of Tecumseh and Tenskwatawa when the war began. In the war, Harrison described the Potawatomi as “the United States' most inveterate enemies,” and Metea remained at the forefront of Potawatomi resistance. He played an integral role in the decisive victory at the Battle of Fort Dearborn on August 15th, 1812. Later, in April 1813, he was permanently disfigured in the Battle of Fort Meigs before he, along with the rest of the Potawatomis, was forced to make peace with the United States.⁴⁵

⁴³Thomas Forsyth, “Letter to Edward Kaskaskia”, September 22, 1818, Draper Manuscripts: Thomas Forsyth Papers, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, WI.

⁴⁴R. David Edmunds. *The Potawatomis: Keepers of the Fire* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1987), 221.

⁴⁵Thomas McKenney, Et. All. *History of the Indian Tribes of North America, with Biographical Sketches and Anecdotes of the Principal Chiefs. Embellished with one hundred and twenty portraits from the Indian Gallery in the Department of War, at Washington* (Philadelphia, PA: Published by Daniel Rice and James G. Clark, 1844). 70-76.

At the beginning of the Council, Cass distributed goods to the assembled Indians and asked them to consider the proposed land cessions. In exchange for a quick resolution, Cass told the crowd, “We have brought with us a large amount of goods to be distributed among you; and we shall also stipulate to pay a certain sum annually.” The next day, Metea rose, bearing the scars he received from fighting the Americans, and called on the divine power invoked by the Revitalization movements before him. He said to Cass that “the country had been given to us by the Great Spirit... and he should never forgive us if we gave it away.” The Great Spirit Metea called upon was not the passive and aloof creator present in traditional Native culture, but more akin to the all-powerful Jehovah of the Christians. A concept Cass may not have respected but could have at least understood while they negotiated. Metea continued in addressing concerns Cass brought up about disappearing game by saying, “The Great Spirit has given us our land we trust he will take care to keep something upon them, so long as we want them.”⁴⁶ As opposed to delving into the pantheon of Manitous, beings, and spirits that empowered past generations of Natives hunters, Metea wielded the power of the unitary Great Spirit. In Metea's recounting, Native hunters only needed to persist on the land to gain the favor and sustenance of the Great Spirit. This created more than a path forward but an imperative for Natives to remain on the land if they had any hope of using the Great Spirit to counter the pressure imposed upon them by the United States.

This can be aptly explained through Wallace's theory of Revitalization. After the initial period of upheaval when a new Revitalization movement subsided ineffective elements were shed away while the new operative principles became ingrained in the culture. The followers of the prophets were drawn to the Revitalization movements because they effectively answered the

⁴⁶Henry Rowe Schoolcraft, *Travel in the Central portion of the Mississippi Valley* (New York: Collins and Hannay, 1825) 341, 350.

existential stress Native communities faced. Many of those problems persisted, and intensified, as Revitalization movements subsided. Even without the direct line prophets provided, the Great Spirit continued to provide a cultural boon for Native communities in turbulent times.⁴⁷ The innovative ideals of Revelation were no longer novel, but incorporated into the core of Native understanding. This rhetorical strategy of invoking the Great Spirit radiated beyond Metea and became ubiquitous in many treaty councils of the day, serving sometimes, as in Metea's case, as a keystone of the argument to galvanize Native support.⁴⁸

Metea's rhetorical strategy initially worked, unifying the assembled Chippewa, Ottawa, Ojibwe, and Potawatomi to resist the cession. Still, it was not enough. Metea proved a shrewd negotiator at Chicago, but Cass had presidential ambitions and did not relent. Cass continued to negotiate with Metea for two weeks, longer than Cass expected, but under pressure, the Native coalition began to fracture. The Chippewa, resentful of the Potawatomis for previous land cessions, began to question Metea openly. Soon, other Potawatomis, tired of the lengthy negotiations, began questioning the logic of opposing the cession. Native resolve faintly collapsed when a Potawatomi chief asked for whiskey in exchange for the desired land cessions.⁴⁹

Although Metea was ultimately unsuccessful, the power of the Great Spirit continued to permeate beyond treaty councils with white officials. The following year, in July of 1822, agent to the Chippewa, Henry Schoolcraft, traveled the territory taken in the Treaty of Chicago with a Chippewa chief named White Bird. White Bird told Schoolcraft his collaboration with Schoolcraft was making him unpopular in his community because "the Great Spirit did not

⁴⁷Wallace, "Revitalization Movements."

⁴⁸Lætitia Moon Conard, "The Idea of God Held by North American Indians," *The American Journal of Theology* 7, no. 4 (1903): 602–617.

⁴⁹R. David, Edmunds. *The Potawatomis Keepers of the Fire* (Norman, OK: Oklahoma University Press, 1987) 218-221.

approve” of the help he was giving the Americans.⁵⁰ The Great Spirit White Bird believed in held power over the totality of Native life- with this power the Great Spirit called for specific and directed action against the Americas, or in this case inaction. White Bird’s community believed the power of the Great Spirit was leveled against imperial officials, and provoking his anger invited social ostracism. The fear of retribution from the Great Spirit fomented the opposition to collaboration with colonizers and provided a framework for resistance previously not available to a Native population that encouraged mediation with French officials.

The spiritual approach taken by White Bird and Metea remained an effective strategy, but it was only one in the multitude of options for resistance employed by Native actors. In the spring of 1822, Forsyth traveled to Illinois to distribute annuities to the Sauk and Fox Indians of his agency, but did not receive the reception he expected. When Forsyth offered a Sauk chief a present, the chief refused and said that he “would not allow any of the poor and needy of his nation to receive the value of a needle by way of presents.”⁵¹ Despite the evolving American strategy to find common ground with Native actors, the American use of presents to incentivize land cessions left a lasting impact. The rejection of annuities and presents had become a tenet of Native resistance throughout the history of interaction with the United States. In conversation with Harrison in 1810, Tecumseh rejected the legitimacy of annuities and presents given by saying, “By taking presents from you, you will hereafter say that with them you purchase another piece of land from us.”⁵² By not taking these gifts, this chief signaled that the Indians were united in their resistance to the American approach.

⁵⁰Schoolcraft, *Personal Memoirs*, 67.

⁵¹Thomas Forsyth, “Letter to William Clark”, April 3, 1823, Draper Manuscripts: Thomas Forsyth Papers, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, WI.

⁵²Dowd, *Spirited Resistance*, 140.

The tactics employed by this one chief grew in popularity, and the next year, Forsyth encountered a whole council of Sauk and Fox chiefs who refused to accept the annuities Forsyth meant to deliver. Even though Forsyth insisted, in July of 1823, he wrote to Second Auditor of the Treasury William Lewis that a council of Sauk and Fox Indians, “all refused to sign any paper or receive there [sic] annuities.” Even though some of the Sauk and Fox Indians agreed to accept the annuities, they would not sign the receipts. Forsyth concluded his letter saying “that no receipt of any kind at all is to be taken from any Indian in this quarter.”⁵³ Although they were not appealing directly to the Great Spirit to make their case, these chiefs rallied their people to resist American inducements to cede territory through other means.

Revitalization Stories

The cultural impact of Revitalization movements extended beyond the conceptualization of an all-powerful creator. Basic elements of Revitalization transitioned from the fringe of society to influence Native cultural norms during this period. Following the War of 1812, amateur ethnographers and missionaries entered the Old Northwest in large numbers, aiming to document what they believed to be a vanishing way of life and to convert Native peoples to Christianity. Missionaries, motivated by the fervor of the Second Great Awakening, sought to spread Christian doctrine, while the ethnographers assumed that the land would inevitably be overtaken by white settlers. Their goal was to collect a salvage ethnography of the final stages of a culture destined to “modernize” or die off.

The observations of the Ethnographers, however, revealed something far more complex and dynamic. Rather than documenting the final moments of ancient, stagnant cultures, they encountered communities actively responding to rapid change. Revitalization movements sought

⁵³Thomas Forsyth, “Letter to William Lewis,” July 3, 1823, Draper Manuscripts: Thomas Forsyth Papers, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, WI.

to radically reform individuals' cultural understanding in order to navigate deteriorating conditions brought about by colonization and displacement. These movements did not simply cling to the past; instead, they adapted, reinterpreted, and often integrated new elements. The stories collected by missionaries and ethnographers offer a valuable lens into how Native cultural frameworks shifted after large-scale Revitalization movements. Sometimes these changes resulted in syncretic practices blending Native and Christian elements; at other times, they reinforced purely Native traditions. In all cases, the remains of Revitalization served the same purpose: to reshape cultural principles in ways that would help Native communities survive and resist the pressures of white expansion.

The men who wished to capture the culture of the Native tribes came from many different backgrounds. Henry Schoolcraft was from a family of school teachers and saw himself as “the savior of the red man.” He used his connections to get a contract to publish geological surveys of the Michigan Territory. Once there, he became friends with Lewis Cass and received a commission to act as an agent for the Chippewa and Ottawa Indians. He spent his life dedicated to studying the culture and language of the Chippewa and Ottawa Indians and became one of the premier scholars on the subject. C.C. Trowbridge was a New Yorker who was active in politics and good friends with Lewis Cass. Cass contracted Trowbridge to create ethnographies of a wide array of tribes of the Old Northwest. Finally, Isaac McCoy was a Pennsylvanian and the child of a Baptist minister. He was driven to go into the Old Northwest to save the souls of Indians with the Baptist society.⁵⁴ These ethnographers were wholly untrained, but remain credited mainly with collecting accurate accounts. The stories they collected became the primary source of

⁵⁴Saunt, *Unworthy Republic* 3-7; Schoolcraft, *Personal Memoirs*, 2; C.C. Trowbridge. *Indian Tales of C. C. Trowbridge: Collected from Wyandots, Miamis, and Shawanoes* (Green Oak Pr, 1986), 1-5.

information cited in *The Handbook of American Indians* and other modern anthropologies of the tribes of the Old Northwest.⁵⁵

As Native peoples lost control of their territory and traditional ways of life, Revitalization ideals and stories - often infused with belief in a higher power - again responded to broader moral questions. When an informant described the inception of Miami religion, he recounted the beginning of a typical Native spiritual journey “many, very many ages ago, [when] a young Miami died and after traveling west arrived [at] a place where the roads forked.” At this fork, rather than encountering the decentralized, polytheistic spiritual forces typical of earlier Native traditions, the traveler faced a moralized cosmology more aligned with a Christian belief in heaven and hell, “One of these roads led to a house where a large fire was kept up to punish by burning, all those who had been guilty of heinous offenses on earthe [sic].” The informant reports a growing belief in a Great Spirit dealing punishments to those in the afterlife. The invocation of a strict dichotomy of divine punishment for earthly sins echoed how Revitalization-era prophets chose to address the new social concerns of their era, particularly issues such as alcohol abuse and land fraud. Many similar social ills plagued the Natives of the post-War of 1812 period, and the new cosmology provided answers to communities of the time who were searching for solutions to social disruption. The strategy continued to form a valuable tool in shaping Native behavior in this world out of fear of what would happen in the next.⁵⁶

In another example, an Ojibwe chief told the story of Mashkwashakwong, who fled punishment from his tribe after killing his adulterous wife, putting his family in crisis. Although the story suggests he is justified in killing his wife, he must flee the village to survive the rage of

⁵⁵Charles Callender, *Handbook of North American Indians*, Ed. Bruce Trigger Vol 15 (Washington:Smithsonian Institution,1978); Schoolcraft, *Personal Memoirs*, 15.

⁵⁶C. C. Throwbridge, *Meearmear Traditions*, (Ann Arbor, MI:University of Michigan Press, 1938). 46-53; Cave, *Prophets of the Great Spirit*, 27-29.

the community. Before leaving, he gave his children instructions on how to follow him to an appointed location. After distracting the village members, the children embark on a spiritual journey. In keeping with the structure of traditional Native spiritual journeys, they followed the ritualized instructions the father gives by traveling for the correct number of days, to purify themselves and find the proper location.⁵⁷ For their loyalty, they were appointed chiefs in the new village. As they establish the village, the story of a traditional spiritual journey transforms to convey a succinct message reminiscent of Old Testament, not Native belief. Instead of instilling the result of worldly actions in the next life, a divine messenger gives a program of how the Ojibwe must act in this life to please a higher power. As the new village grew, “a person in the shape of a human came down from the sky; his clothing extremely pure and white.” The spirit that appears is an all-powerful singular authority, prepared to foment rapid change in the village. By invoking his singular authority, “the divine messenger then gave to the Indians laws and rules,” such as being charitable, hospitable, and a series of other rituals to follow, including the worship of a singular deity.⁵⁸ By integrating Christian beliefs into a traditional Native spiritual journey, the story becomes both accessible to Native audiences and a spiritually legitimate means to introduce reforms. The strategies pioneered by Revitalization prophets to address social change had transitioned from direct proselytizing to persistent myths and stories that reflected the same values. In this story, the reforms brought by a Spirit and influenced by Christian values outline a new way of living that differed from traditional Native values. This spiritually sanctioned, but swift change, in Native understanding allowed Native communities to rapidly incorporate different values into their culture necessary to counter the dire changes in their lives.

⁵⁷Dowd, *A Spirited Resistance*, 3-15.

⁵⁸Henry Rowe Schoolcraft, *The American Indians Their History, Condition and Prospects, from Original Notes and Manuscripts* (Buffalo, NY: Rochester, Wanzer, Foot and co., 1851) 109-115.

The Revitalization prophets formulated their messages to address deep social problems in Native communities, yet they were acutely aware that these crises were caused by the encroachment of white settlers. Tenskwatawa applied a dichotomy of good and evil, rooted in a singular Creator, to portray white settlers as a bastion of pure evil. He preached a doctrine of separate creation, claiming that Natives were created by the Master of Life, while whites were created by the nefarious Great Serpent with the express purpose of thwarting the plans of the Great Spirit.⁵⁹ In contrast, an Iowa cosmology discards the idea of separate creation, yet still employs a moral framework defined by the Great Spirit to articulate the spiritual and existential threat posed by white settlers. Although the Iowa were a Siouan-speaking group living west of the Mississippi River, they maintained close ties with their Ho-Chunk relatives, from whom they had split after migrating from the Upper Great Lakes region.⁶⁰

The creation story they recount diverges from many traditional Native narratives, which often portray human origins as the work of a sentient or anthropomorphic being.⁶¹ In this account, the Master of Life unilaterally creates animals and elements of the natural world. However, much like the biblical Jehovah, he eventually tires of working solely with nature, and “the idea grew into his mind that at some tune [sic] he would create a creature who should be made not after the things on earth, but after himself.” This marks the beginning of his efforts to create the first Indian. Before creating the first Indian, however, he created an apparent allegory for white people living on the East Coast, setting the story on what would become Long Island. He combines different parts of various animals to form a creature destined to “thawt [sic] the plans of the Master himself.” Though initially contained, “life had grown within it.” The new

⁵⁹Edmunds, *The Shawnee Prophet*, 38.

⁶⁰Cave, *Prophets*, 9.

⁶¹William, Sturtevant, *Handbook of North American Indians, Volume 13: Plains* (Washington:, DC: Smithsonian Institution Scholarly Press, 2001) 432-440.

creator rapidly expanded westward, and “everything fled before him.”⁶² This being- evoking both the devil and a white man- embodies pure evil and serves as a spiritual explanation for the chaos and suffering wrought by settler colonialism. The story ultimately becomes a call to resist the moral and cultural destruction imposed by white imperialism through a religious framework that is adopted by Revitalization Prophets from Christian ideals.

Even though Revitalization prophets almost always stood against Anglo-American settlers, white people, in general, were not universally hated in the Revitalization framework. Many Native groups in the Upper Great Lakes region held positive views of the French and their past role as mediators while they controlled French Canada. While Tenskwatawa portrayed all white people as evil in his teachings, Neolin, through his spiritual message, sought a return of French influence, envisioning the restoration of Onontio as the colonial administrator of the region. Neolin integrated this idea into his spiritual message, referring to the French as “Brothers” and preaching a spiritually sanctioned return to French rule.⁶³ This connection between Native spiritual revitalization and the French presence persisted long after Neolin stopped preaching. In 1826, an elderly Ottawa man-who would have been a young adult during or shortly after Neolin’s movement-reaffirmed this enduring link between certain whites and the concept of societal renewal. The man described a past that mirrored contemporary struggles facing Native communities: “they had no vessel in which they could prepare their food,” and “men were hungry in want of a vessel.” In response to this need, “a spirit appeared to one of them in a dream.” In frustration, the man cried out, “Why did you create me here to suffer in poverty?” The spirit offered a solution, but not one grounded in traditional Native understanding. Instead, the spirit directed the man to Quebec, where he encountered the French. They gave him

⁶²Schoolcraft, *The American Indians*, 121-126.

⁶³Dowd, *War under Heaven* 97.

a pot and “other useful articles of which they had been destitute.”⁶⁴ Rather than forging a connection between the spiritual realms of Natives and whites, this story established a link between Native spirituality and the temporal, material world of the French. Though rooted in an earlier form of revitalization, this story echoes Neolin’s spiritual legacy, adapted for a new generation. No longer constrained by the doctrinal limits of a single prophetic movement, revitalization had become a flexible framework. It allowed individual Natives to draw from a wide range of teachings to attempt to provide solutions to a wide range of personal spiritual and cultural needs.

The fifty years of diverse strategies pioneered by Revitalization prophets to address social change facilitated a variety of new ways for Native communities to view the world. Yet, Revitalization did not, and could not, supplant Native cultural belief or understanding. Elements received through transculturation provide valuable new tools, but need to remain grounded in traditional concepts. Revitalization was integrated into traditional Native culture, shifting some elements while leaving other parts unchanged. This created a last culture that shifted with changing circumstances, but remained coherent. Unwittingly, Schoolcraft noted the integration when he claimed that while Natives “believed in as many [G-ds] as he worshiped but one, The Great Spirit.”⁶⁵ As opposed to a confused or contradictory culture, Schoolcraft was observing a shift to incorporate cogent Revitalization elements, but remain grounded in long-standing traditions.

Looking at Native stories from this period, tales that upheld entirely traditional values continued to provide a touchstone with the past and frame revitalization on purely Native terms. In the story of “Thrown Away” or Pukeelauwau, the chief “Peeataukoothaumoia, or the rising

⁶⁴ McCoy, *History of Baptist Indian missions*, 304.

⁶⁵ Schoolcraft, *The American Indians*, 121.

sun, became much dissatisfied with his youngest son, and was anxious to rid himself of him.” To get rid of Pukeelauwau, the chief orchestrates a move from the village without letting his son know. In order to reverse the misfortune he is experiencing, Pukeelauwau must go through a total transformation to reclaim his palace as a chief’s son. To achieve this, he looks to distinctly traditional means - he employs the power and spiritual guidance of a dog. After giving a series of instructions to Peeaataukoothaumoia, the dog tells him, “Good fortune awaits us. I smell a bear, and we shall overtake him.” After following the ritual outlined by the dog, he killed the bear and returned to his village, where he was accepted by the community. Upon his return, he continued to utilize the power of the dog to further grow in prestige and “became invested with the power and authority which his father had long possessed.”⁶⁶ “Thrown Away” does not just demonstrate the possibility of social change but also outlines a program for achieving it. To thwart the psychological pressure placed on Native communities by white expansion, reinforcing the traditional power of spirits and the natural world provided a potent means of providing hope. Far from a culture doomed to die or assimilate, many traditional Native cosmologies maintained relevance to satisfy the spiritual needs of Native communities.

Rediscovering the importance of ritual in order to obtain broad societal revitalization appeared in the story of “The Gambler” or Tolewautee Wee Linnee, which spread near Detroit. In the story, “an old man, a bachelor, who lived alone and who had no eyes, went about with three small birds fastened to each ear.” Tolewautee Wee Linnee’s trust in the ability of the birds sustained him. The birds provided directions to Tolewautee Wee Linnee and made him an expert hunter. Even in his impaired state, the power of the natural world provided an avenue to Tolewautee Wee Linnee to achieve societal revitalization. One day, the birds led Tolewautee Wee Linnee on a journey to the village where “the chief of the village, who was a great gambler, and

⁶⁶Trowbridge, *Indian Tales*, 55-67.

who enticed persons from distant villages to come and play with him and after having beaten them, caused them to be killed.” Tolewautee Wee Linnee challenged the chief to a series of games to free the village from tyranny and abuse. After winning, he placed the chief “upon a log and cut off his head.”⁶⁷ Tolewautee Wee Linnee used faith in a traditional Native understanding of the natural order to liberate the oppressed. An appealing concept to a population of Natives subjected to the oppression and abuse of a Colonial population. The storyteller articulates the hope for change not with syncretic, but with traditional values. Using the same formula to express the conservative elements in Revitalization, Native communities counterbalanced quickly changing movements in concepts from the past.

While ethnographers entering the Upper Great Lakes believed they were capturing the decline of a Native culture, they were, in fact, documenting a culture in flux—a snapshot taken in the aftermath of a seismic shift in Native life and worldview. Under the violent pressures of American imperialism, Native prophets could no longer openly espouse militant or overt nativist resistance to the United States. Yet, the core elements of cultural Revitalization endured. Unwittingly, these observers were witnessing the final stage of Revitalization. For Native communities, this resulted in the continued development of both syncretic elements co-existing beside traditional religious programs, shaping adaptive strategies for cultural survival in a transformed world.

An Evolving Meaning

In their role as ethnographers, the men collecting Native stories purportedly took a passive role while observing the cultures they studied. As best they could, they acted as the diligent hikers, leaving no trace of their journey in the ancient stories they collected. Yet, the continued Native cultural vitality confronted white officials who were actively engaging with

⁶⁷Ibid, 9-18.

Native communities with a confusing array of shifting cultural standards they were ill-equipped, and unwilling, to understand. Even if they were unwilling to truly internalize it, American officials found the culture that was supposed to be dying was not only thriving but in many ways resembled their own. While Native communities retained many traditional elements, they had also integrated Western concepts and ideals derived from Revelation into their culture, creating a confusing array of familiar and foreign beliefs for officials to contend with.

McCoy, who entered the Old Northwest looking to convert souls, was acutely invested in the spiritual lives of the Natives in relation to Christianity. While he often failed to grasp the subtleties of the transformation occurring before him, McCoy understood the Indians as having distinct yet comprehensible values. In 1824, while McCoy was traveling to find the spot for a new mission, he found a Potawatomi Chief named Old Topinabee, whom McCoy believed was a Christian. Despite McCoy's hopes, Topinabee had also fought in the Revitalization movement of Tenskwatawa and appeared to retain those Revitalization values. McCoy viewed Old Topinabee's deference to the Great Spirit as proof he had converted to Christianity and extolled the success of his mission, but also recognized some unfamiliar Native values. As opposed to converting, however, Old Topinabee had integrated the elements of Revitalization, not Christianity, into his personal life. Beyond mentions of the Great Spirit, he retained many of his Native cultural elements, insisting on doing a medicine dance for his sick child. The often self-satisfied McCoy overlooked the discrepancy in belief, and he did not question why a true Christian continued to partake in what he saw as "pagan" rituals.⁶⁸ Although McCoy did not question the cultural exchange he was witnessing, he described the complexity of the revitalized Native culture as a spiritual system not Christian nor purely "Native" which continued to shape the spiritual lives of those who embraced it.

⁶⁸McCoy, *History of Baptist Indian missions*, 235; Edmunds. *The Potawatomis*, 186.

Throughout his time converting Native Americans, McCoy continued to view the Great Spirit as the Native articulation of G-d, but failed to grasp many subtleties of Native belief. One Sauk man “prayed for the blessing of the Great Spirit” for McCoy. While McCoy is often satisfied that the Natives praising the Great Spirit were Christian, he encountered many other Natives who praised Jesus and G-d by name. He never considers if there was a distinction between the two groups of Natives.⁶⁹ While those Natives praising Jesus had, in all likelihood, converted to Christianity, those honoring the Great Spirit and holding onto rituals may not have. They continued to embrace Revitalization's emphasis on one Great Spirit as a concept integrated into their own belief system and not, as McCoy would have liked to believe, slowly accepting western “civilization.”

A former Ottawa prophet who converted to Christianity recognized the fundamental differences between Native religion and Christianity, yet also understood that the boundary between the two could be porous. He initially described the Great Spirit in terms reminiscent of the Christian Jehovah - a creator figure “the master of life, who had made men and beasts.” However, after his wife’s conversion, he came to believe that the Great Spirit was, in fact, an “evil spirit,” reminiscent of the Devil, and accepted that the true creator was the Christian G-d. Tormented by spiritual conflict, he found relief only when he “knelt down and prayed to God,” which allowed him to resist the mental pressure of what he now saw as the Evil Spirit. Though he initially integrated Christianity through a syncretic lens, he ultimately went further, fully embracing Christian doctrine over his Native traditions. Yet, his personal decision did not represent a wholesale rejection of Native religion. Rather, it reflected a complex and evolving Native spiritual understanding shaped by both transculturation and enduring Native beliefs.

⁶⁹ For examples of prayer to the Great Spirit see McCoy, *History*, 64, For examples of reference to G-d see McCoy, *History*, 249, 298 For examples of Christ see McCoy, *History*, 170.

Contrary to Henry Schoolcraft's suggestion that he was illustrating "the intellectual chain between Paganism and Christianity," this Ottawa man was instead expressing the blurred distinctions between the Great Spirit and the Christian G-d.⁷⁰

In the 1820s, Kennekuk, or the Kickapoo Prophet, provided a powerful example of how the Revitalization movement manifested itself in the new Native reality, how this confused the white officials and how the Native actors capitalized on this confusion. Kennekuk was born in the conflagration that was the Northwest War in 1790 or 1791 as part of the Vermilion River Band of Kickapoos. When he was young, he was described as a "bad man" and was chased out of his village after being accused of killing his uncle. When he left his original village, he moved in with a missionary who taught him the doctrines of Christianity. After learning from the missionary, he returned to his village in 1822. When he came back, the specter of removal loomed large over the village. In 1819, American officials coerced a land cession from the Kickapoo at Fort Harrison, which ceded all their land in Indiana. While the treaty had not been enforced, in the eyes of the government, the Kickapoos no longer had any claim to the land they lived on.⁷¹

Kennekuk hoped to reassert Kickapoo control over the territory. He claimed to be the "spiritual successor of Tenskwatawa," but he spread a very different message. Kennekuk did not preach military resistance against the United States; rather, he focused almost entirely on social revitalization. He banned drinking and encouraged strict adherence to the Great Spirit. He expanded his following past tribal boundaries, and a large contingent of Potawatomis could be counted among his followers.⁷² Even though he strictly adhered to the Great Spirit, he adopted many different elements of Christianity. He was deeply affected by his time living with a

⁷⁰Schoolcraft, *The American Indians*, 206-209.

⁷¹ Joseph B. Herring, *Kennekuk the Kickapoo Prophet* (Lawrence KS: University Press of Kansas, 1988), 22, 26

⁷² McCoy, *History of Baptist Indian missions*, 457; Mooney *The Ghost-Dance Religion*, 692-698.

missionary and drew on his time to expand his movement. For instance, he preached on Sundays and encouraged respect for the Christian Sabbath.⁷³ He so effectively adapted the ideals of Christianity that when ethnographer George Catlin first visited Kennekuk, he thought that he was a “devoted Christian” and extolled that he was “exporting them to a belief in the Christian religion.” Catlin was unable to grasp the nuances of the emerging Native religion or to see beyond the framework of Christian concepts. While Kennekuk certainly deliberately emphasized his connection to Christianity, particularly to white officials, Catlin missed how Revitalization ingrained a diverse set of cultural values into Native belief systems. McCoy, inadvertently, was much closer at recognizing the true depth of Kennekuk’s Revitalization beliefs when he claimed he was not Christian, but that Kennekuk built his movement with Christian “divine inspiration.”⁷⁴

Kennekuk used his power adroitly, capitalizing on the good feelings of the surrounding area to resist removal. In 1827, when Clark tried to enforce the treaty of 1819, Kennekuk tried to solidify his connection to his land, telling Clark, “When I talked to the Great Spirit. He did not tell me to sell my lands.” Even as the United States removed other Kickapoos, Kennekuk remained in Illinois. Kennekuk's followers did not drink and worked hard to appear as if they assimilated to the Christian practices of their white neighbors. Even the Indian hatting frontiersmen respected his followers and did not push for removal.⁷⁵ Kennekuk drew on the social power of Revitalization instead of overtly resisting the United States. He emphasized mutually exclusive elements to ingratiate himself and make Revitalization palatable to white neighbors in order to survive on his native lands and preserve his native culture. He shifted the

⁷³Herring, *Kennekuk the Kickapoo*, 29-36.

⁷⁴McCoy, *History of Baptist Indian missions*, 457; George Catlin, *Manners, Customs, and Conditions of the North American Indians, Volume II*. (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 1973), 97.

⁷⁵Herring, *Kennekuk the Kickapoo Prophet*, 38.

focus of Revitalization from an unattainable emphasis on military resistance extolled by previous prophets to an entirely peaceful movement. He utilized the persistent value of Revitalization principles to encourage social renewal as a means to resist the United States without the option of military action.

The Weas, Delaware, and Miami Indians, with whom Isaac McCoy interacted, could have inadvertently shared the same message of Kennekuk. The concept of a heaven and hell, one Great Spirit, and the concept of a soul were Revitalization beliefs that whites would understand. Settlers inclined to believe Native culture was a primitive set of superstitions did not know how to interpret a belief system that seemed to take elements from their own. Any settler who did not examine Revitalization preaching with a critical eye could be mistaken into believing that they were promoting Christian beliefs as opposed to Native ones. Through this confusion, McCoy even found elements of Christianity among the Natives who had not, in his estimation, converted. He maintained that “their belief in the existence of God” confirmed the common myth “that they were descendants of Israel.”⁷⁶ McCoy may not have been willing to attribute Native beliefs as truly Christian, but the Natives who shared Revitalization stories did impress upon him the effects of transculturation and syncretism. These white settlers captured the complex and evolving belief system of Revitalization and not the stagnant one the ethnographers hoped to study.

Push for Expansion: The Black Hawk War

Despite the initial effectiveness of the American “New Onontio” in negotiating with Native actors, the realities of territorial expansion soon overtook any era of good feeling between white officials and the Native tribes.⁷⁷ McCoy's sanguine feelings for the Natives, whom he

⁷⁶McCoy, *History of Baptist Indian missions*, 13.

⁷⁷Hall, *Uncommon Defense*, 6-12.

believed he was Christianizing, quickly soured, and he vigorously endorsed the removal program to make way for new settlers.⁷⁸ McCoy was not the only one, and calls for removal became louder in the Old Northwest and in Washington City.⁷⁹ Initially, the remoteness of the outer reaches of the Michigan and Illinois territories spared many of the Natives of the upper Great Lakes region from the aggressive territorial push of the United States. Interaction with white officials in these areas was initially cordial, with agents such as Forsyth and Schoolcraft genuinely interested in the conditions of the people in their agency, but white miners and settlers did not maintain the same standard of geniality. The trickle of white settlers that began in the early 1820s exploded in 1826 and 1827 as miners looked for a fortune in the Michigan and Missouri Territories.⁸⁰ In 1827, agent at Prairie du Chien, Joseph Street proclaimed that “the land was filled with lead mineral” around this agency, and any miner could make a fortune pushing into the territory.⁸¹ While the United States government scrambled to take titles to the land, miners often did not respect Native sovereignty. In 1826, in a series of letters Forsyth sent complaining to Clark about the unchecked white expansion he wrote that white miners were getting dangerously close to the Ho-Chunk lands and warned, “difficulties must and will arise between the whites and the Indians”⁸² Making matters worse, far from wanting to calm hostilities, the miners seemed intent on starting a violent confrontation, believing a war on the frontier would facilitate more settlement. When Forsyth requested that illegal settlers leave Ho-Chunk land the settlers refused. A white settler was convinced, “You must remain there until

⁷⁸Saunt, *Unworthy Republic*, 4-7.

⁷⁹John P. Bowes, *Land Too Good for Indians* (Norman, OK:Oklahoma University Press, 2016), 8-12.

⁸⁰ Hall, *Uncommon Defense*, 74

⁸¹Joseph M. Street, “Describing Country and Conditions at Prairie du Chien”, December 11, 1827, Joseph Street Papers, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, WI.

⁸²Thomas Forsyth, “Letter to William Clark”, August 15, 1826, Joseph Street Papers, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, WI.

blood is spilled, then something will be done” to remove the Native population and allow him to expand.⁸³

Pressure from continued encroachment on Native lands and goading from white colonists caused one Ho-Chunk man's frustrations to boil over on July 27th, 1827, when, after two days of drinking, the Ho-Chunk chief Red Bird set out to kill some “white people.” Two days later, Red Bird realized his goal when his band of 150 Ho-Chunks fired on two longboats at the mouth of the Bad Axe River.⁸⁴ This set off a panic across the region, with the scattered miners “flocking to Galena for safety.” Although the small force of disgruntled and disorganized Ho-Chunks only killed nine people, fear exploded across the frontier. In response, the United States called up regular soldiers, but the small force disbanded quickly when the Governor of Illinois, Ninian Edwards, threatened to call up a militia, which had a reputation for committing violent atrocities. After the hostilities, the small conflict was a useful excuse for miners to justify aggressively expanding territory. Street said that after the war, “ a great deal of money is being made at the led [sic] mine,” and he was “confident there is a great opening for a man with a small enterprise to make a fortune” in new mines.⁸⁵ The settlers' prediction turned out to be prophetic when, in August 1827, Cass pushed the local Ho-Chunks to cede lands to protect the miners of the Michigan Territory.⁸⁶

Despite Red Bird's call to resist the United States violently, his disorganized force did not receive widespread support, even from Revitalization leaders. In the midst of the fighting, a Ho-Chunk medicine man named Wabokieshiek, or the Winnebago Prophet, visited Forsyth at his

⁸³ Thomas Forsyth, “Letter to William Clark”, July 20, 1827, Draper Manuscripts: Thomas Forsyth Papers, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, WI.

⁸⁴Bethel Saler, *The Settlers' Empire: Colonialism and State Formation in America's Old Northwest* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014), 162.

⁸⁵Joseph M. Street, “Letter to William Clark”, May 10, 1829, Joseph Street Papers, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, WI.

⁸⁶Saler, *The Settlers' Empire*, 163.

agency. Wabokieshiek was born in what would become Illinois in the 1790s to a Ho-Chunk mother and a Fox father. While little is known about his childhood, by 1827, he led a small band of Ho-Chunks, preaching the importance of returning to traditional beliefs through spiritual means.⁸⁷ He remained a thorn in the side of Forsyth, committing small acts of resistance against the United States, such as stealing horses, but even Wabokieshiek balked at war with the United States, during the conflict telling Forsyth “the Winnebagos of Rock River were for peace.” Even though he was no friend to the Americans, Wabokieshiek managed to navigate the period of American violence without drawing the ire of the American military. He persisted in preaching his spiritual program even under the increased pressure of the United States. After the war, in October, Wabokieshiek told Forsyth he was “happy that an end had been put to those troubles,” but made it clear he would not sign over any more lands.⁸⁸ Even to Revitalization leaders, it was apparent that militant resistance in the Old Northwest was not a viable response to American expansion, but that did not necessitate capitulating to American imperialism. Wabokieshiek continued to resist imperialism by preventing cessions and preaching fidelity to Revitalization principles while remaining nominally loyal to the United States. This stayed the hostility of the United States and allowed a degree of co-existence between whites and the Ho-Chunks who followed Wabokieshiek.

A year after the Winnebago War, in the election of 1828, the Westerners who were pushing for more land in the Old Northwest flexed their might by elevating one of their own to the White House. The Democrat Andrew Jackson, who rose to national prominence fighting the Red Stick Creeks in the War of 1812, and served as a judge and senator from Tennessee. In 1828,

⁸⁷ Dowd, *Spirited Resistance*, 192-193.

⁸⁸Thomas Forsyth, “Letter to William Clark”. August 7, 1827, Draper Manuscripts: Thomas Forsyth Papers, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, WI. Thomas Forsyth, *Letter to William Clark*. October 15, 1827, Draper Manuscripts: Thomas Forsyth Papers, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, WI.

Jackson soundly defeated John Quincy Adams after running on a platform of Indian removal.⁸⁹

To further his aims of removal, when Jackson was elected, he fired many of the agents, including Forsyth, whose relationships with the Natives of their agency were integral to maintaining stability on the frontier. Jackson replaced agents like Forsyth with agents who were often ignorant of Native culture but aggressively loyal to Jackson's policy of removal.⁹⁰

Amid the fervor for expansion, the United States began to enforce an over-two-decade-old treaty against the Sauk Indians. In 1804, a contingent of Sauks traveled to St. Louis in order to secure the freedom of one man who was accused of murder. After negotiations with William Henry Harrison, the men, likely unwittingly and certainly without authority, signed over massive cessions of territory west of the Mississippi.⁹¹ When the United States tried to enforce the treaty in 1830, it sparked a political struggle in the Sauk tribe between the accommodationist Keokuk and Black Hawk.

Black Hawk was born in the 1770s near the Rock River. He grew up as a warrior and fought against the United States in the War of 1812. After the War, he made peace with the United States and moved back to his village on the Rock River, where he intended to remain. As the United States moved closer to the Sauk villages, Keokuk accepted the authority of the Treaty of 1804 in 1829 and agreed to move across the Mississippi.⁹² Black Hawk would not. In June of 1831, Black Hawk and his band attempted to return to their villages in Illinois, only to find the fields destroyed and the village occupied by white settlers. Black Hawk's return evoked fear, and Gen. Edmund Gaines moved to force Black Hawk to return across the Mississippi. With the threat of overwhelming American military force, Black Hawk and his followers' strength waned,

⁸⁹Bowes, *Land Too Good for Indians*, 8.

⁹⁰Hall, *Uncommon Defense*, 102-103.

⁹¹Jung, *Black Hawk War*, 19-21.

⁹²Ibid, 53.

and Gaines got Black Hawk to sign the so-called Corn Treaty, which gave Black Hawk and his band food in exchange for returning across the Mississippi.⁹³

In the summer of 1832, Black Hawk no longer pushed to go back to his village on the Rock River but employed the help of Revitalization to undermine the United States. In what Black Hawk hoped would be a peaceful act of defiance, his multi-tribal band crossed the Mississippi River in 1832 with the express purpose of moving to Wabokieshiek's village in Illinois, where he had continued to preach a Revitalizationist message. Wabokieshiek insisted to Black Hawk, "If we remained at our village, the whites could not trouble us." Invigorated by the belief that "the Great Spirit had given [the land] to us to live on,"⁹⁴ Emboldened by the power and support of the Great Spirit, Black Hawk crossed the Mississippi. When he did, he walked a fine line of resistance; he intended to remain peaceful but risked provoking the Indian hating settlers of Illinois who saw the threat of Indian conspiracy and invasion behind every action.

Despite Black Hawk's peaceable intentions, the sight of a large band of armed Natives crossing the Mississippi sparked terror in the Old Northwest. The government officials, who were apt to see British conspiracies behind everything, called Black Hawk and his group "the British band" and called up the militia to stop him. A detachment of militia under the command of Isaiah Stillman met Black Hawk and his band near what would become Stillman Valley, Illinois, on May 14, 1832. Black Hawk intended to express his true intentions, but Stillman ignored a white flag of truce and fired on Black Hawk's envoys while they were looking to make peace. Black Hawk returned fire, which sparked a massive conflict in the Old Northwest. Now, Secretary of War Lewis Cass ordered Brig. Gen. Henry Atkinson to chase down Black Hawk and

⁹³Ibid, 60-64.

⁹⁴ Black Hawk, *Life of Black Hawk, or Ma-ka-tai-me-she-kia-kiak: Dictated by Himself* (London, UK: Penguin Classics, 2008), 79.

his followers.⁹⁵ In response to the white onslaught, Black Hawk hoped to receive pan-Indian and British assistance but received little support from either. The United States exploited the role of mediator that they had played for the previous fifteen years and even employed Native scouts to try and track down Black Hawk and his band. After months of fighting and running short of supplies, Black Hawk began to move toward the Mississippi River to return west. Atkinson pursued Black Hawk's band, which included women, children, and the elderly, from Wisconsin to the Mississippi River until he met Black Hawk on August 1, 1832, near the Bad Axe River and massacred most of the starving band over the next two days.⁹⁶

The end of the Black Hawk War sparked an increased push by the United States government to remove Native east of the Mississippi River. This push, combined with calls from the Jackson administration to continue to expand west, caused a calamity for many remaining Natives. Kennekuk, who previously navigated the imperial ambitions of the United States government, was forced to move east of the Mississippi River with William Clark writing to him on August 31, 1832, to seize "this opportunity to leave a country where you have been viewed upon with suspicion."⁹⁷ Despite the maneuvering of Native actors, they could not overcome white fears and hunger for land. Regardless of the mutually intelligible messaging Revitalizationists like Kennekuk attempted to spread, the United States would not listen and tried to push Natives off their land. While Revitalization fortified Native culture, without the option of military resistance, many groups had to submit and be removed to lands west of the Mississippi.⁹⁸

Conclusion

⁹⁵ Hall, *Uncommon Defense*, 133-144.

⁹⁶Ibid, 1-2.

⁹⁷ Herring, *Kennekuk the Kickapoo Prophet*, 72.

⁹⁸Bowes, *Land Too Good for Indians*, 3-18.

After the War of 1812, pan-Indianism and Revitalization were no longer viable options to inspire militant resistance in the Old Northwest. The demographic imbalance became too extreme, and the United States extended its military power to achieve true suzerainty over the Old Northwest. Even without the militant rhetoric, Revitalization remained an important political idea. Fifty years of preaching from charismatic prophets wove the principles of Revitalization into the fabric of culture and belief. The stories, lessons, and morals remained prevalent in the everyday parlance of the tribes of the Old Northwest by drawing on enduring Native beliefs and updating them to respond to changing circumstances. Native Prophets inspired a spiritual program that could perpetuate itself after they had finished preaching to a large audience.

Even though Revitalization could no longer muster armies to fight the Americans, it remained an essential tool in countering American expansion. The stories that retain Revitalization principles reinforce the importance of trusting the magisterial power of the Great Spirit and faith in ritual. They sparked hope in revival and liberation even when the prospects of defeating the United States looked scant. The stories, cosmologies, and myths maintained a strong connection to Native land, which galvanized resistance to land cessions and inspired movements to retain land. After all, Black Hawk and his multi-tribal band were inspired by Wabokieshieks' preaching to enter the teeth of the American frontier and recapture the land that the Great Spirit had given them.

Just by retaining Native culture and principles, the Natives of the Old Northwest resisted American imperialism. In the face of an imperial power that was insistent on expansion and Native erasure, continuing to perpetuate the stories and cultural elements of Revitalization remained a potent form of resistance. By creating relevant spiritual programs, the Revitalization Prophets induced Natives to resist assimilation into the culture of the United States. They were

fortified by beliefs and ideals, which continued to maintain their relevance even as their surroundings changed. Holding onto those Revitalization principles remained a potent strategy that Natives utilized to undermine the ambitions of the United States to assimilate Native culture and purloin Native land. The issues Revelation addressed continued to plague Native communities and the spiritual ideas first discovered by the prophets still maintained their relevance.

While the United States removed many of the Natives of the Old Northwest, many other Native groups continued to resist and persist in the Old Northwest. Using a variety of strategies of survivance which facilitated their continued existence on their native land. Stephen Kantrowitz outlines how the Ho-Chunks resisted removal and created a lasting homeland in Wisconsin. While they did not follow the spiritual guidance of Wabokieshiek, the Ho-Chunks attempted to resist white imperialism on white terms. After the Civil War, the definition of a citizen became much more complex. While previously, individual states could form their own definitions, the 14th Amendment created a new standard for citizenship that was little understood. The Ho-Chunks capitalized on the confusion and sued the federal government for citizenship. The Ho-Chunks won their citizenship, and the government allowed them to continue to live on their Native lands.⁹⁹ In the chaotic period after the War of 1812, every Native group had to find a different way to facilitate resistance. While Revitalization was a practical option for many, the Ho-Chunks took a different but related approach. They, too, drew on Native connection to the land and white cultural principles to enforce their connection and sovereignty to the land, but made their stands in the courts.

⁹⁹ Stephen Kantrowitz, *Citizens of a Stolen Land: A Ho-Chunk History of the Nineteenth-Century United States* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2023).

While the Natives of the Old Northwest only drew on fragments of Revitalization, West of the Mississippi, more powerful Revitalization movements persisted. One of the most prominent religious movements was the Ghost Dance religion, led by the shaman Wovoka. In the 1880s, Wovoka had a vision that called him to spread a message of peaceful resistance to the United States. Much like Black Hawk, as Wovoka's message spread, it inspired Natives and terrified whites. The Ghost Dance religion spread across the western United States and was practiced among the victims of the Wounded Knee Massacre.¹⁰⁰ Wovoka serves as a potent reminder of the residual power that Revitalization held even after the War of 1812. The rhetoric that began with Neolin continued to serve the spiritual needs of Natives across the country and remained a rallying cry of resistance.

¹⁰⁰ John Hall. "Nativism, Indian." In *The Encyclopedia of North American Indian Wars 1607-1890 A Political, Social and Military History*, (Vol 1, Oxford UK: ABC-CLIO 2011).

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