



### 3. Survivance Narratives

“What boy would not be an Indian for a while when he thinks of the freest life in the world? This life was mine,” wrote Charles Alexander Eastman in *From the Deep Woods to Civilization*. “Every day there was a real hunt. There was real game. Occasionally there was a medicine dance away off in the woods where no one could disturb us, in which the boys impersonated their elders.”<sup>1</sup>

#### **Natives of Appomattox**

The Civil War ended with the surrender of General Robert E. Lee at Appomattox Court House in Virginia on April 9, 1865. The carnage had been horrific, but the republic survived with a wounded spirit. Then, Abraham Lincoln, the sixteenth president, was assassinated four days later.

Native American Indians have been rived, deracinated, and removed by constant colonial, cultural, and territorial conflicts, but the total, bloody war between the Union and the Confederacy forever abated an original native sense of presence, cultural sovereignty, and continental liberty.

Francis Paul Prucha pointed out in *American Indian Treaties* that at the end of the Civil War the federal government was “intent on dealing strongly” with those natives who had “disowned their treaty obligations” and “formed alliances” with the Confederacy.<sup>2</sup> An estimated twenty thousand natives fought in the Civil War, slightly more for the Confederacy than for the Union.

Prucha argued in *The Indians in American Society* that by the time natives were “crushed militarily, they had already lost status as independent political entities” to negotiate treaties with the United States. Ely S. Parker, the first native to serve as commissioner of Indian Affairs, insisted that the “treaty system be scrapped, since it falsely impressed upon the tribes a notion of national independence. ‘It is time,’ Parker said, ‘that this idea should be dispelled, and the government cease the cruel farce of thus dealing with its helpless and ignorant wards.’” Native “dependency increased,” observed Prucha, “as the traditional means of survival were weakened and destroyed in the passage of time.”<sup>3</sup>

The military, however diminished, moved against natives on the western frontier at the end of the Civil War. Railroads were soon built across the continent, natives were deceived by treaties and removed to reservations, and bison, the primary source of food and income for natives, were slaughtered by the millions in the hide trade.

The Civil War was not the first act of savagery to rouse a native sense of survivance—the sensibilities of diplomatic, strategic resistance, and the aesthetics of literary irony. The new warriors of survivance had a vision of futurity. Natives created many spirited narratives in the very ruins of racism

and chauvinistic crusades on the elusive frontier of a constitutional democracy.

Colonel Ely S. Parker, for instance, a Seneca sachem of the Iroquois Confederacy, was military secretary to General Ulysses S. Grant and transcribed the actual surrender terms that ended four years of war. Parker was born in 1828 at Indian Falls on the Tonawanda Reservation in New York. Thirty-seven years later he was present for the surrender of Robert E. Lee at Appomattox Court House.

Robert Utley wrote in *The Indian Frontier of the American West* that Parker “loyally served his chief as adjutant, military secretary, and aide-de-camp,” and two years later he directed a “comprehensive plan of Indian management, including transfer of the Indian Bureau to the War Department.” The plan “won strong support in the Congress.”<sup>4</sup>

Jay Winik noted in April 1865 that after the two generals had “signed the preliminary papers, Grant proceeded to introduce Lee to his staff. As he shook hands [with Parker], Lee stared for a moment and finally said, ‘I am glad to see one real American here.’ If this account is true, Parker responded to the general, ‘We are all Americans.’” There is, of course, “some debate as to whether this exchange ever actually happened,” observed Winik. “It has also been speculated that Lee at first may have thought Parker was a black man.”<sup>5</sup> The irony is doubled either way.

Grant was elected president four years later and appointed Parker the commissioner of Indian Affairs. Parker wrote that General Grant “showed his love for his military family by doing kindness for them whenever he could.” As president “he sought them out, and without solicitation on their part, provided for many of them.” Grant “never forgot a

60 favor rendered him when he was poor and he was kind to such people when he had the power.”<sup>6</sup>

Appomattox, the actual place of the surrender, is derived from a native word. The name was first recorded about four centuries ago and has now become a part of a national narrative history. John Smith observed in “The Description of Virginia,” his seventeenth-century adventure stories, the “pleasant river of Apamatuck” and some thirty “fighting men” of that name.

Brigadier General Stand Watie is another significant name in the history of the Civil War. Cherokee by birth and politics, he was the only native general in the Confederacy. Praised and promoted for his raids on federal supply lines, he was the last officer to surrender his forces in June 1865. Educated at the Moravian Mission School in Georgia, he supported the removal of the Cherokee to Indian Territory in what is now Oklahoma.

Utley pointed out that Stand Watie “set up a rival Cherokee government with himself as chief.”<sup>7</sup> Several tribes were divided by their loyalties to the Union and the secession of the Confederacy. Watie supported slavery and was a member of the Knights of the Golden Circle, an association that countered the abolition movement. Many southern natives were slavers and enlisted in the cause of the Confederacy.

Native American Indians served as scouts for colonial regimes, and much later for the army on the frontier and in other countries. Their military service was obviously an escape from reservations. Thomas Britten argued in *American Indians in World War I* that native veterans were more experienced, and “more effectively” resisted the “encroachments

on their lands, cultures, and liberties.” Natives served in the military to ensure their survivance, however ironic, and as warriors to “obtain security, honor, prestige, and wealth, and to enact revenge on enemies.”<sup>8</sup> Most natives served in integrated military units.

Britten pointed out that the War Department “continued its policy of conscious assimilation of Indians into white units.” Natives fought in integrated units in the Spanish American War, the Filipino Revolution, and the Boxer Rebellion in China.<sup>9</sup> The narratives of their service as common soldiers were seldom included in war histories.

Ten thousand natives served in the American Expeditionary Force during the First World War. Britten wrote that many native soldiers returned with “emotional scars” and memories of horror, but “others gained a sense of purpose, discipline, and pride.” The Society of American Indians and many native progressives of the time supported the war and encouraged natives to serve their country to “win respect and high valuation in the estimation of the world.” Meanwhile, natives were forever burdened by the corruption and bureaucratic abuses of federal agents at home on reservations. A Lakota elder told an ironic story about the war and torment of reservation policy. The German Kaiser, said the elder, should be confined on a reservation, and the federal agent should say to him, “Now you lazy bad man, you farm and make your living by farming, rain or no rain; and if you do not make your own living don’t come to the Agency when you have no food in your stomach and no money, but stay here on your farm and grow fat till you starve.”<sup>10</sup>

### Newspaper Indians

“The Civil War changed American journalism,” declared John Coward in *The Newspaper Indian*. The number of readers increased, there was more “competition between urban newspapers,” and there were new economic incentives to report and publish the news promptly. Coward pointed out that the “telegraph helped put speed ahead of accuracy.”<sup>11</sup>

Indian news reports were “distributed more efficiently and consistently,” and as a consequence of speed and consolidation, the news was standardized.<sup>12</sup> Native cultures, resistance, wars, and removal were reported in simplistic, descriptive, and romantic narratives. Many news stories contributed to the simulation of native images in the dominant culture.

The Civil War “set a pattern for news coverage of the Indian wars,” noted Coward. “In both cases, reporters sometimes resorted to inventing sensational or dramatic details in order to improve the copy.”<sup>13</sup>

Charles Sanford Diehl, for instance, reported on the surrender of the Nez Perce for the *Chicago Times*. Many newspapers at the time reported daily on the military pursuit of the Nez Perce by General Nelson Miles, and covered the surrender of Chief Joseph on October 5, 1877, at the Bear Paw Mountains in Montana.

Chief Joseph, the Nez Perce diplomat and political leader, was reported to have said at surrender, “Hear me, my chiefs. I am tired. My heart is sick and sad. From where the sun now stands, I will fight no more forever.”<sup>14</sup> That eloquent statement was reported widely, and has become a romantic signifier of a native vanishing point in art, literature, and history.

Lieutenant Charles Erskine Scott Wood may have construed the speech, but there is no secure record or document to explain how or when the actual surrender sentiment was transcribed and translated from an emotive oral expression to a written language. Wood, an acting aide-de-camp at the time of the surrender, was named the transcriber, but the handwritten evidence does not support his story.

Mark Brown noted in *The Flight of the Nez Perce* that the “story that Joseph surrendered his rifle with this touching little speech, while Wood stood by ‘with a pencil and a paper pad’ to record it does not have a word of truth in it.” Brown observed that the “formal surrender took place near evening” and only a “small group were present to receive the surrender.”<sup>15</sup>

Thomas Sutherland, a correspondent for several newspapers, including the *San Francisco Chronicle* and the *New York Herald*, described the scene of surrender in somber, tragic metaphors. “As the sun was dropping to the level of the prairie and tinging the tawny and white land with waves of ruddy lights, Joseph came slowly riding up the hill,” wrote Sutherland. Joseph raised his head and “with an impulsive gesture, straightened his arm toward General Howard, offering his rifle, as if with it he cast away all ambition, hope and manly endeavors leaving his heart and his future down with his people in the dark valley where the shadows were knitting about them a dusky shroud.”<sup>16</sup>

Bruce Hampton argued in *Children of Grace* that Lieutenant Wood later disavowed an earlier account and claimed that Chief Joseph had delivered the surrender notes. “Still, there is a resonance to the speech that closely resembles other declarations attributed to Joseph. If not his explicit



should have equal rights upon it. You might as well expect the rivers to run backward as that any man who was born a free man should be contented not penned up and denied liberty to go where he pleases.

When I think of our condition my heart is heavy. I see men of my race treated as outlaws and driven from country to country, or shot down like animals. I know that my race must change. We cannot hold our own with the white men as we are. We only ask an even chance to live as other men live. We ask to be recognized as men. We ask that the same law shall work on all men.

Whenever the white man treats the Indian as they treat each other, then we shall have no more wars. We shall be all alike—brothers of one father and one mother, with one sky above us and one country around us, and one government for all. Then the Great Spirit Chief who rules above will smile upon the land, and send rain to wash out the bloody spots made by brothers' hands upon the face of the earth. For this time the Indian race are waiting and praying. I hope that no more groans of wounded men and women will ever go to the ear of the Great Spirit Chief above, and that all people may be one people.<sup>21</sup>

Congress received fourteen petitions of support for the cause of Chief Joseph. Otis Halfmoon noted in the *Encyclopedia of North American Indians* that on “May 22, 1885, the Nez Perce boarded railroad cars in Arkansas City to return home to the reservation. The charisma and diplomacy of Chief Joseph had prevailed.” Sadly, the Nez Perce were not allowed to return to the Wallowa Valley in Oregon. They were removed to the Colville Reservation in Washington where Chief Joseph died on September 21, 1904.<sup>22</sup>

Robert Utley pointed out in *Frontier Regulars* that Chief Joseph “refused to give up hope of returning to his beloved Wallowa Valley in Oregon.” Once more, in 1897, “he journeyed to Washington and urged his cause on President McKinley.” General Nelson Miles and other military leaders supported his initiative, but the “whites of the Wallowa refused to part with any land for Indian occupancy.”

The Nez Perce created a great narrative of resistance, tragic retreat, surrender, and survivance. Utley wrote, “Their just cause, their unity of purpose and action, their seemingly bottomless reservoirs of courage, endurance, and tenacity, their sheer achievement and final heartbreaking failure when on the very threshold of success, have evoked sympathy and admiration for almost a century.”<sup>23</sup> The Nez Perce are truly the patriots of a continental native liberty.

### Higher Civilization

“The novelty of a newspaper published upon this reservation may cause many to be wary in their support, and this from a fear that it may be revolutionary in character,” announced Theodore Beaulieu, the native editor of *The Progress*, the first newspaper published on the White Earth Reservation in northern Minnesota, March 25, 1886. “We shall aim to advocate constantly and withhold reserve, what in our view, and in the view of the leading minds upon this reservation, is the best for the interests of its residents. And not only for their interests, but those of the tribe wherever they now are residing.

“We may be called upon at times to criticize individuals and laws, but we shall aim to do so in a spirit of kindness and justice. Believing that the ‘freedom of the press’ will

be guarded as sacredly by the Government on this reservation as elsewhere, we launch forth our little craft, appealing to the authorities that be, at home, at the seat of government, to the community, to give us moral support, for in this way only can we reach the standard set forth at our mast-head." *The Progress* was dedicated to "A Higher Civilization: The Maintenance of Law and Order."<sup>24</sup>

The United States Indian Agent confiscated the press and ordered the editor and Augustus Beaulieu, the publisher, both of whom were tribal members, removed from the White Earth Reservation. The Indian Agent alleged that *The Progress* printed "false and malicious statements concerning the affairs of the White Earth Reservation, done evidently for the purpose of breaking down the influence of the United States Indian Agent with the Indians."<sup>25</sup>

The second issue of *The Progress* was published more than a year later on October 8, 1887, after a hearing in federal court and a government investigation. Theodore Beaulieu observed, "We began setting type for the first number of *The Progress* and were almost ready to go to press, when our sanctum was invaded by T. J. Sheehan, the United States Indian Agent, accompanied by a posse of the Indian police. The composing stick was removed from our hands, our property seized, and ourselves forbidden to proceed with the publication of the journal." Beaulieu continued, "We did not believe that any earthly power had the right to interfere with us as members of the Chippewa tribe, and at the White Earth Reservation, while peacefully pursuing the occupation we had chosen. We did not believe there existed a law which should prescribe for us the occupation we should follow. We knew of no law which could compel us

to become agriculturists, professionals, 'hewers of wood and drawers of water,' or per contra, could restrain us from engaging in these occupations. Therefore we respectfully declined obeying the mandate, at the same time reaching the conclusion that should we be restrained we should appeal to the courts for protection.

"We were restrained and a guard set over our property. We sought the protection of the courts, notwithstanding the assertion of the agent, that there could be no jurisdiction in the matter. The United States district court, Judge Nelson in session, decided that we were entitled to the jurisdiction we sought. The case came before him, on jury trial. The court asserted and defended the right of any member of the tribe to print and publish a newspaper upon his reservation just as he might engage in any other lawful occupation, and without surveillance and restrictions. The jury before whom the amount of damage came, while not adjudging the amount asked for, did assess and decree a damage with a verdict restoring to us our plant."<sup>26</sup>

*The Progress* was the first newspaper published on the White Earth Reservation, and it was the first native newspaper seized by federal agents in violation of the Constitution of the United States. *The Progress* was published weekly for two years; the newspaper was enlarged and the name was changed to *The Tomahawk*. The native editor and publisher remained the same; both newspapers published reservation, state, and national news stories, and critical, controversial editorials. The newspapers opposed the federal act that allotted collective native land to individuals. One article, for instance, carried this headline on the front page: "Is it an Indian Bureau? About some of the freaks in the

employ of the Indian Service whose actions are a disgrace to the nation and a curse to the cause of justice. Putrescent through the spoils system.”<sup>27</sup>

### **Messiah of Survivance**

Wovoka was a shaman, an envoy of the sacred world. His concise narrative envisioned the resurrection of native reason and a sense of presence. He revealed new, crucial ceremonies that would exalt the ancestors to return, revive the bison to the prairie, and restore a native continental liberty.

Wovoka, or Jack Wilson, a Northern Paiute who was born near Smith Valley, Nevada, inspired thousands of natives by his direct, temperate, and humane instructions to wear sacramental paint, dance in a circle for five days, bathe in the river, feast, and “not refuse to work for the whites and do not make any trouble with them until you leave them. When the earth shakes do not be afraid.”

The native dead would be resurrected by the dance, and the “great change will be ushered in by a trembling of the earth, at which the faithful are exhorted to feel no alarm,” observed James Mooney in *The Ghost-Dance Religion and the Sioux Outbreak of 1890*. “The moral code inculcated is as pure and comprehensive in its simplicity as anything found in religious systems from the days of Gautama Buddha to the time of Jesus Christ.”<sup>28</sup>

Wovoka asked Mooney to present a copy of his narrative to government officials in Washington. The purpose was “to convince the white people that there was nothing bad or hostile in the new religion.”<sup>29</sup>

The Arapaho version, the first transcription of the nar-

rative, begins with the direct advice of the messiah of survivance: “What you get home you make dance, and will give the same. When you dance four days and one day, dance day time five days and then fift, will wash for every body.”

Wovoka told the concise stories of his vision to several native translators. Casper Edson, an Arapaho who had studied at the federal Carlisle Industrial Indian School, translated and transcribed the first narrative into English, and that became the ironic lingua franca of the Ghost Dance Religion. That original narrative was later translated into other native oral languages on reservations, but the initial doctrine and other renditions were communicated in English. More than twenty thousand natives in some thirty western tribes actively participated in the Ghost Dance.

“No white man had any part, directly or indirectly,” in the first translation and production of the narrative. Nor was the doctrine of the messiah “originally intended to be seen by white men,” wrote Mooney. “In fact, in one part the messiah himself expressly warns the delegates to tell no white men.”

Mooney, who had several conversations with Wovoka, years after his shamanic vision, pointed out in a rather reductive manner that while the messiah was “sick there occurred an eclipse of the sun, a phenomenon which always excites great alarm among primitive peoples. In their system the sun is a living being, of great power and beneficence, and the temporary darkness is caused by an attack on him by some supernatural monster which endeavors to devour him, and will succeed, and thus plunge the world into eternal night unless driven by incantations and loud noises.”<sup>30</sup>

Wovoka stated that he was “stricken down by a severe fever” and experienced an ecstatic, shamanic vision. “When the sun died”—a reference to a solar eclipse—he was entranced and taken to heaven. Later he returned from the spirit world with a revelation. Wovoka was probably in his early thirties at the time of his vision, a cosmic ideation, and a total eclipse on January 1, 1889.

Mooney pointed out that there were three early versions of the translated narrative in English: Arapaho, Cheyenne, and the third, a free rendering, the most familiar version of the transcribed narrative. Here is the free rendered version of the entire narrative. The “good cloud” probably refers to rain, and “each tribe there” suggests reservations and native country. The reference to a “young man” is probably the first translator of the narrative, Casper Edson.

*When you get home you must make a dance to continue five days. Dance four successive nights, and the last night keep up the dance until the morning of the fifth day, when all must bathe in the river and then disperse to their homes. You must all do in the same way.*

*I, Jack Wilson, love you all, and my heart is full of gladness for the gifts you have brought me. When you get home I shall give you a good cloud which will make you feel good. I give you a good spirit and give you all good paint. I want you to come again in three months, some from each tribe there.*

*There will be a good deal of snow this year and some rain. In the fall there will be such a rain as I have never given you before.*

*Grandfather says, when your friends died you must not cry. You must not hurt anybody or do harm to anyone. You must not fight. Do right always. It will give you satisfaction in life. This young man has a good father and mother.*

*Do not tell the white people about this. Jesus is now upon the*

earth. He appears like a cloud. The dead are all alive again. I do not know when they will be here; maybe this fall or in the spring. When the time comes there will be no more sickness and everyone will be young again.

Do not refuse to work for the whites and 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 dance every six weeks. Make a feast at the dance and have food that everybody may eat. Then bathe in the water. That is all. You will receive good words again from me some time. Do not tell lies.<sup>31</sup>

Many natives wrote letters to the messiah of survivance. The letters were translated from dictation by the first generation of natives who had attended federal and mission schools. Several letters were published in *I Wear the Morning Star*, an exhibition catalog on the Ghost Dance, published by the Minneapolis Institute of Arts. Cloud Horse, for instance, sent his letter to the messiah on April 11, 1911, from Pine Ridge, South Dakota:

Jack Wilson,

Dear Father: Why do you not write to me. I sit with you and I write to you this letter. I hope I will come to see you. I send you a dollar bill. Why dont you answer me?

When you get this letter answer soon, Father. This man writing a letter for me but he lives far and this man write for me this letter.

This man a good man write for me this letter. I sit with Cloud horse and we write this letter.

Your loving son, I shake hands with you, Answer quick when you get this letter.

Cloud Horse

Address answer to Red Star

Pine Ridge, So. Dak.

The English language and the postal service became the primary means of communicating the Ghost Dance Religion. Cloud Man Horse wrote this letter to Jack Wilson from the Kyle Post Office, South Dakota, on December 13, 1911:

Dear Father:

Your letter has been received and I was very glad indeed to hear from you dear father

Now I am going to send you a pair of mocissions but if they are not long enough for you when you write again please send me you foot measure from this day on—I will try to get the money to send to you. I wish I had it just at present I would send it wright away.

I think I might get the money soon enough to send it so that is why I say that so. I will get it just as soon as possible and be sure to send it so if you get a letter from me I may have the money in that letter so dear Father this will be all. I can answer you so for your sake all the Indians out here make fun of me but I allways think dear Father that around me you would give me strength. so if you get the money I want that medican and some good feathers & that paint so that is what I want you to send me.

So this is all for this time. I give a good & hard shaking of the hands to you I hope you have pity on me

I remain your son

Cloud Man Horse<sup>32</sup>

Wovoka was a storier of transcendence and survivance, a clairvoyant of the weather and, in at least one instance, an apparent seer of familial futurity. Harlyn Vidovich, his grandson, became a pilot and fulfilled a prophecy.

Michael Hittman wrote in *Wovoka and the Ghost Dance* that the messiah said his grandson would attend school, become a “credit to his people” and fly. Harlyn, born in 1919, was the son of Andrew Vidovich, a Death Valley Shoshone,

and Alice Wilson, the illegitimate daughter of Jack Wilson. Wovoka said at the baptism, according to Andrew, that Harlyn would be “flying in the skies.” Andrew pointed out that there were few airplanes at the time of his prophecy. Wovoka continued, “And then he’s going to join the United States Flying” and “lead the white men in the skies. He will become a great captain.”

Hittman reported that Harlyn Vidovich was “posthumously awarded” the Distinguished Flying Cross as a fighter pilot in the Flying Tigers.<sup>33</sup> Captain Vidovich, however, was listed in official Air Force records as a pilot in the 74th Fighter Squadron, Flying Tigers, in China, but not the earlier American Volunteer Group, Flying Tigers, under the celebrated commanded of General Claire Lee Chennault.

### **Wounded Knee**

Wovoka, Charles Alexander Eastman, Luther Standing Bear, and Sophia Alice Callahan were born in the era of migrations, treaty reservations, and moral duplicities of the Civil War. They matured at a time of monstrous cultural burdens, military vengeance, and state violence; a native generation forsaken at the end of a great continental liberty, and yet they created narratives of chance and survivance.

Lakota Ghost Dancers were on the move that winter with visions of native survivance. Big Foot and his escorts had resisted removal to reservations and were pursued with a vengeance by the military. Fourteen years after the defeat of General George Custer at the Little Bighorn River the Seventh Cavalry massacred destitute men, women, and children at Wounded Knee Creek, South Dakota, on December 29, 1890.

“No one on either side that morning had any thought of a fight. Certainly not the Indians, as the army later charged; they were outnumbered, surrounded, poorly armed, and had their women and children present,” argued Robert Utley in *The Indian Frontier of the American West*. “Wounded Knee assumes a larger significance, for it marks the passing of the Indian frontier.”<sup>34</sup>

The bodies of the dreamers were frozen in the snow; some three hundred natives were slaughtered, and more than a hundred of the dead were buried in a mass grave. Big Foot, the traditional elder, weakened by pneumonia, was wounded and did not survive the massacre. His frozen head, shoulders, and arms were raised and braced in the snow, an enervated simulation by a mercenary photographer.

William Coleman wrote in *Voices of Wounded Knee* that Dewey Beard saw the soldiers murder the Ghost Dancers. Beard was wounded and “surrounded by soldiers.” He “fought his way toward the ravine.” Beard said, “I saw my mother standing and singing. She was waving a pistol. She told me to take it, she was dying. I cried and helped her sit down. I felt like I couldn’t get up, I looked down and saw I had been shot again, in the lap.

“I was badly wounded and pretty weak too. While I was lying on my back, I looked down the ravine and saw a lot of women coming up and crying. When I saw these women, little girls, and boys coming up, I saw soldiers on both sides of the ravine shoot at them until they had killed every one of them.”<sup>35</sup>

Turning Hawk said, “Those who escaped that first fire got into the ravine, and as they went along up the ravine for a

long distance they were pursued on both sides by the soldiers and shot down, as the dead bodies showed afterwards.”<sup>36</sup>

Celene Not Help Him survived the massacre. She said, “My grandfather was shot in the back; it went through his lung in the first volley of gunfire. He was again shot in the right calf and in the hip. He was coughing blood. He had lost a lot of blood. He could hear someone singing a death song. Whenever someone moved, the soldiers shot them.”<sup>37</sup>

The Seventh Cavalry returned to the Pine Ridge Agency with their dead and wounded soldiers. Most of them had been shot “by their own comrades, who had encircled the Indians.” Very few of the natives had guns, wrote Charles Alexander Eastman in *From the Deep Woods to Civilization*. “A majority of the thirty or more Indians wounded were women and children, including babies in their arms.” There were not enough tents so the mission chapel, “in which the Christmas tree still stood,” was offered as a “temporary hospital”: “We tore out the pews and covered the floor with hay and quilts. There we laid the poor creatures side by side in rows, and the night was devoted to caring for them as best we could. Many were frightfully torn by pieces of shells, and the suffering was terrible.” Eastman, a medical doctor, was placed in charge. The army surgeons were ready to assist, but the “tortured Indians would scarcely allow a man in uniform to touch them.”<sup>38</sup>

Eastman, Santee Dakota, was born in 1858 near Redwood Falls, Minnesota. Many Lightnings, his father, was imprisoned for his active resistance in the Dakota Uprising of 1862. Seth Eastman, his maternal grandfather, was a graduate of West Point. Later he was the commander of Fort Snelling in Minnesota.

Charles attended the Santee Normal Training School, Beloit College, Knox College, Dartmouth, and graduated from the Boston Medical College, one of the first native medical doctors. Susan LaFlesche Picotte and Carlos Montezuma were two other native medical doctors at the time. Eastman had been in practice for about a month when he treated the survivors of the Wounded Knee Massacre. His Dakota nicknames were Hakadah, The Pitiful Last, and Ohiyesa, The Winner.

Wounded Knee was buried in snow. Eastman, who searched for survivors after the storm, wrote,

Fully three miles from the scene of the massacre we found the body of a woman completely covered with a blanket of snow, and from this point on we found them scattered along as they had been relentlessly hunted down and slaughtered while fleeing for their lives. Some of our people discovered relatives or friends among the dead, and there was much wailing and mourning. When we reached the spot where the Indian camp had stood, among the fragments of burned tents and other belongings we saw the frozen bodies lying close together or piled upon one another. I counted eighty bodies of men who had been in the council and who were almost as helpless as the women and babes when the firing began, for nearly all their guns had been taken from them. A reckless and desperate young Indian had fired the first shot when the search for weapons was well under way. Immediately the troops opened fire from all sides, killing not only unarmed men, women, and children but their own comrades who stood opposite them, for the camp was entirely surrounded.

It took all of my nerve to keep my composure in the

face of this spectacle and of the excitement and grief of my Indian companions, nearly every one of whom was crying aloud or singing his death song. The white men became very nervous, but I set them to examining and uncovering every body to see if any were living. Although they had been lying untended in the snow and cold for two days and nights, a number had survived. Among them I found a baby of about a year old warmly wrapped and entirely unhurt. I brought her in, and she was afterward adopted and educated by an army officer. One man who was severely wounded begged me to fill his pipe. When we brought him into the chapel, he was welcomed by his wife and daughters with cries of joy, but he died a day or two later.<sup>39</sup>

Luther Standing Bear, or Plenty Kill, was in the first class of native students to attend the Carlisle Indian School, a former military barracks, in 1879. He survived the extreme experience with distinction and was hired to teach in the government school on the Rosebud Reservation. Later, he moved to the Pine Ridge Agency.

Standing Bear noted in *My People the Sioux* that the soldiers were sent to escort and protect Big Foot and the Ghost Dancers. “The following morning the news arrived of the terrible slaughter of Big Foot’s whole band. Men, women, and children—even babies were killed in their mothers’ arms!” he wrote many years later. “When I heard this, it made my blood boil. I was ready myself to go and fight then. There I was, doing my best to teach my people to follow in the white man’s road—even trying to get them to believe in their religion—and this was my reward for it all! The very people I was following—and getting my people to follow—had no respect for motherhood, old age, or babyhood. Where was

all their civilized training?”<sup>40</sup> Days later he visited the site of the massacre. The bodies had been buried. “The place of death was forsaken and forbidding. I stood there in silence for several minutes, in reverence for the dead, and then turned and rode toward the agency.”<sup>41</sup>

Indian Agents were determined to turn natives into “citizen farmers” observed L. G. Moses in *The Indian Man: A Biography of James Mooney*. The “Ghost Dance religion would not be permitted to challenge the tidiness of the process.” Natives watched the military parades in silence. Grievously, “faith in the prophet was no longer enough to inspire armed resistance to the combined forces of civilization.”<sup>42</sup>

### Fictional Shoulders

Sophia Alice Callahan had almost completed her novel *Wynema* at the time of the war crimes at Wounded Knee Creek. She included a descriptive, omniscient scene about the “day of the skirmish,” one of the first fictional comments of the massacre.

Wounded Knee is introduced at the very end of the novel by two characters in a passive, romantic conversation about a singular newspaper editorial: “The great Indian war is over—nothing was done except what was intended to be done.” “[Defenseless] Indians were murdered; the Indian agents and contractors reaped a rich harvest; that’s all.”

“I think the editor is rather bitter,” said Genevieve.

“Yes dear,” answered Robin, “but if you had seen the Indians slain on the battle-field as we did, and could have heard the groans of the wounded you would not think so.”

Robin placed his hands over his eyes and said, “I shall never forget that battle-field all strewn with dead and dying

men and women and children, and the three little babies resting sweetly and unconsciously in their dead mothers' bosoms."<sup>43</sup>

Callahan created Wildfire, a noble warrior of omniscience, who maintained that he would never surrender his arms, and "my followers shall not. They are ours to use for our pleasure, or defense if need be."

Carl Peterson, a missionary, counsels Wildfire to surrender on a reservation, assume a "submissive attitude" and the government "will protect you; you will not be starved again, for those criminal agents have been discharged and better ones employed."<sup>44</sup>

"May the Great Father hear me say, let this arm wither, let these eyes grow dim, let this savage heart still its beating, when I stand and make peace with a Government whose only policy is to exterminate my race," said Wildfire.

This is "not a policy to live by," said Peterson.

"Then let it be a policy to die by," declared Wildfire. "If we cannot be free, let us die. What is life to a caged bird, threatened with death on all sides?"<sup>45</sup>

Big Foot and the Ghost Dance are not directly named in the novel. The omission creates an absence of actual natives, and the fictional natives, revised in sentimental conversations, are a double absence, not a presence in the novel or history.

Callahan died at age twenty-six in 1894. *Wynema* is one of the first novels written by a native, and the first published by a native woman. Apparently the novel was not widely read in the first edition. A. LaVonne Brown Ruoff pointed out in the historical introduction to *Wynema* that the only notice of the original publication was in *Our Brother in Red*:

Callahan “is an intelligent Christian lady and we look forward with pleasure to a time when our other duties will permit us to read the book.”<sup>46</sup>

“Callahan combines the themes of domestic romance and protest novel” and “uses multiple voices and perspectives, Indian and non-Indian, female and male, to educate her readers,” observed Ruoff. Of the last section of the novel Ruoff observed, “Sioux hostilities, the murder of Sitting Bull, and the massacre at Wounded Knee, is such an abrupt departure from the earlier romance plot that it was probably added to an almost completed novel.”<sup>47</sup>

### Pagan Sentiments

Gertrude Bonnin was eight years old when she left the Yankton Reservation for the first time to attend White’s Indiana Manual Labor Institute in Wabash, Indiana. The institute was sponsored by the Society of Friends.

“The first turning away from the easy, natural flow of my life occurred in an early spring,” she wrote in *Atlantic Monthly*. “At this age I knew but one language, and that was my mother’s native tongue.” Gertrude spied the missionaries that morning and heard the promises of “red, red apples.” Her mother resisted but then agreed that her daughter would “need an education when she is grown, for then there will be fewer real Dakotas, and many more palefaces. This tearing her away, so young, from her mother is necessary, if I would have her an educated woman.”<sup>48</sup>

Bonnin was indeed an educated woman. She assumed a native literary name, Zitkala Sa, and wrote traditional and autobiographical stories for several magazines at the time. She taught at the Carlisle Indian School, played the

violin with the band, and performed as a soloist at the Paris Exposition in 1900. Suddenly, she returned to the Yankton Reservation, ended her engagement to Carlos Montezuma, the medical doctor, and married Raymond Bonnin, a native who worked for the Indian Service. Later she transcribed native melodies and collaborated on the production of *The Sun Dance Opera* that was performed in Salt Lake City, Utah, in 1913. She became a native activist and was elected secretary of the Society of American Indians, and, with her husband, founded the National Congress of American Indians in 1926.

“Controversial to the end, Gertrude Bonnin remained an enigma,” observed Dexter Fisher in “Zitkala Sa: The Evolution of a Writer.” She was “a curious blend of civilized romanticism and aggressive individualism. Her own image of herself eventually evolved into an admixture of myth and fact, so that by the time of her death in 1938, she believed, and it was erroneously stated in three obituaries, that she was the granddaughter of Sitting Bull, though the Yankton tribal rolls indicated that her own mother was older than Sitting Bull.”<sup>49</sup>

Ruth Heflin wrote in “I Remain Alive”: *The Sioux Literary Renaissance* that Gertrude Bonnin, like Charles Alexander Eastman, “at first wrote both autobiographical essays and short stories, later merging her literary talents with political rhetoric.” She wrote blatant political “essays and appeals, seeking equity and suffrage for Indians.”<sup>50</sup>

Zitkala Sa published “Why I Am a Pagan” in the *Atlantic Monthly*. She returned to the reservation and in this essay responded to the criticism of missionaries. “I prefer to their dogma my excursions into the natural gardens

where the voice of the Great Spirit is heard in the twittering of birds, the rippling of mighty waters, and the sweet breathing of flowers. If this is Paganism, then at present, I am a Pagan.”<sup>51</sup>

Ely Samuel Parker, Chief Joseph, Theodore Beaulieu, Wovoka, Charles Alexander Eastman, Luther Standing Bear, Sophia Alice Callahan, and Gertrude Bonnin, and many other natives, were neither pagans nor evangelists of dominance; they were by visions, words, and actions, the new warriors of survivance between the Civil War and the First World War. Their narratives of survivance have inspired many generations of natives.

Copyright © 2009. University of Nebraska Press. All rights reserved.