

Neolin and Tenskwatawa: A Comparison of Two Nativist Prophets

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Neolin (the “Delaware Prophet”) and Tenskwatawa (the “Shawnee Prophet”) both claimed to carry a message from the Creator that, if heeded, would allow American Indians to return to the golden age in which they lived before European contact. Though the messages were similar, each used different methods to pursue his primary goal—life free from European influence. Both Neolin and Tenskwatawa were associated with powerful chiefs—Pontiac and Tecumseh, respectively—who orchestrated pan-Indian movements in support of the prophets’ goals. Historically, European military leaders, regardless of their personal beliefs, have used religious figureheads as justification for radical actions—the unification of the sacred and the mundane lends itself to winning support from the populace. Perhaps it is because of this knowledge that many white historians studying American Indian affairs—especially pre-1970 historians, who wrote almost exclusively from the perspective of white society—have assumed that Indian military leaders had a similar relationship with religious leaders. Many take for granted that Pontiac and Tecumseh merely used Neolin and Tenskwatawa to gain support for their own causes. By using these two prophets as case studies, this paper seeks to demonstrate the essential interconnectedness of religion and politics in such nativist movements. Neither the prophets nor the chiefs were the sole leaders of the two

movements; rather, each added his power to a movement in order to achieve a common goal—freedom from the oppression of white society.

The cultural upheaval among Native Americans that accompanied European contact and expansion created an ideal environment for prophets. Prophets appeared in Native American societies long before Europeans; however, as the traditional lifestyle deteriorated under the pressure of European expansion, numerous prophets appeared promising a return of the golden age if only Native Americans would reject European culture. Some prophets went so far as to suggest driving Europeans out of America. Such nativist ideas drew many like-minded people from surrounding tribes. At times a prophet's message blended with a militaristic movement that challenged the authority of the white government in the area.

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Neolin and Tenskwatawa were two such prophets. Neolin, a man of the Delaware (or Lenape) tribe, claimed to have received a vision from the creator in 1760. His ideas fueled a nativism movement later dubbed "Pontiac's Conspiracy". Pontiac, a chief of the Ottawa, did not create the movement (which came into being thanks to the initiative of other tribes who followed Pontiac's example) but, along with Neolin, became a leader and figurehead. Tenskwatawa, a Shawnee, claimed to have received his vision in 1805. His message became the ideology for a pan-Indian nativism movement led by himself and his brother, Tecumseh. Each military leader worked in cooperation with his respective religious leader, neither one completely dominating the movement. None of these men single-handedly created a movement; rather, they drew upon ideas and sentiments that already existed in Native American culture.

¹ For more information on cultural conditions that led to the rise of prophets, see Bernard Barber, "Acculturation and Messianic Movements," *American Sociological Review* 6 (1941): 663-669.

The largest barrier to an examination of Neolin and Tenskwatawa is the nature of the sources available. Secondary sources—monographs and journal articles written by historians—vary widely in their attitudes regarding American Indians depending on when they were written. The opinions of the author color the interpretation of primary sources, creating significantly different histories from the same material. As to the primary sources themselves, accounts of the prophets or of Pontiac and Tecumseh were nearly all recorded by white men, mainly missionaries, traders, or members of the military. The authors of the accounts, therefore, saw events and people through a cultural filter. White men regarded American Indians as savages, and evaluated them using white cultural standards—thus praising those who were best adapted to white society and criticizing those who clung to tradition. Missionaries saw American Indians as heathens. Accounts of American Indian religion were given through an understanding of Christianity, with a dichotomized concept of good and evil, emphasized ideas that reflected Christian ideas such as God, and were critical of anything that did not conform to Christian ideals. Specific examples of this as well as the attitudes of historians toward American Indians will be addressed as they arise.

An understanding of Neolin's objection to European culture necessitates a discussion of European influence on American Indian society over time. The Delaware first came into contact with Europeans—Dutch fur traders—in the early 17th century. The trade that resulted between the two cultures gradually created a dependency—the ability of the Delaware to provide for themselves decreased as skills that were no longer necessary failed to pass to the next generation, and they relied increasingly on trade with

Europeans for sustenance. The introduction of alcohol and new diseases created social instability (Neolin, recognizing this, would later oppose the consumption of alcohol).²

Further social instability resulted as interaction between the two cultures increased. In the latter part of the 17th century, the burgeoning fur trade—pursued by Europeans and Native Americans alike, and aided by the use of firearms—created such a scarcity of game that the Delaware began to move north and west, away from their original land in eastern Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and southeastern New York.³

France's desire to control more land contributed to this dislocation. The Walking Purchase of 1737, dictated by James Logan, stated that the Delaware would sell Logan an amount of land, the western border of which would be measured as the distance a man could walk in a day and a half. Logan hired trained men who traveled about fifty-five miles in this time, whereas an average man could only have walked twenty or thirty. All told, Logan ended up with 1200 square miles of land. To prevent further such incidents, the Iroquois, who held some control over the Delaware, banished the tribe.⁴ The migrating bands found places to settle in the Pennsylvania area, but did so in broken social patterns.⁵ Thus, the scattering that resulted from the forced migration demoralized the Delaware and destroyed much of their culture, leaving them extremely receptive to new ideas, including those of both prophets and Christian missionaries.

The mid-eighteenth century was tumultuous for many Native American tribes living in or near Canada, including the Delaware and the Ottawa. Between 1755 and

² Charles E. Hunter, "The Delaware Nativist Revival of the Mid-Eighteenth Century." *Ethnohistory* 18 (1971), 39-40.

³ *Ibid.*, 40.

⁴ Russell Bourne, *Gods of War, Gods of Peace: How the Meeting of Native and Colonial Religions Shaped Early America* (New York and San Diego: Harcourt, Inc.), 198-200.

⁵ Alfred A. Cave, "The Delaware Prophet Neolin: A Reappraisal," *Ethnohistory* 46 (1999), 268.

1760 two great powers, France and Britain, contested for control in what is known in North America as the French and Indian War and in Europe as the Seven Years' War. Thanks to an elaborate alliance system, most of Europe joined the struggle—Austria, Russia, Poland, Sweden, and Saxony aided France, while Prussia and Hanover aided Britain.⁶ Some American Indian tribes chose sides, while others simply found themselves caught in the midst of numerous opposing forces. The Ottawa and the Delaware fought on the side of the French; however, they felt that the French did not sufficiently support their war effort and eventually peacefully accepted British rule before Britain's victory became evident when France surrendered Quebec in September 1759.⁷

Howard Peckham addresses this change of allegiance in his 1947 monograph *Pontiac and the Indian Uprising* (which was the first to thoroughly study Pontiac since that of Francis Parkman, who wrote the earliest complete history of Pontiac's movement in *The Conspiracy of Pontiac*, first published in 1851). Peckham contended that the American Indians changed their support from the French to the British as the war turned in favor of the latter, because "It was ever an Indian characteristic to favor the side that was successful."⁸ It is possible that this was a reason behind the change; however, Peckham frequently assigns such stereotypical traits to Native Americans without any documentary evidence whatsoever, so his position is questionable. Nevertheless, Peckham thoroughly researched all sources available as of 1947, both historical and anthropological, for his scholarly study on the life and times of Pontiac (sources such as journals and letters belonging to British officers present during Pontiac's war). Although he treated Neolin with scorn, his account of the military aspects of the war—troop

⁶ Howard H. Peckham, *Pontiac and the Indian Uprising* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1994), 40.

⁷ Cave, "The Delaware Prophet Neolin," 270.

⁸ Peckham, 52

movements, attacks on forts, etc.—is straightforward, relying on facts collected from primary sources rather than on Peckham’s opinion. Having access to papers that Parkman did not (such as the recently released papers of General Thomas Gage, Lord Jeffrey Amherst, Robert Rogers, and manuscripts from the Clements and Burton collections) gave Peckham a distinct advantage over his predecessor. Once one takes his racial bias into consideration, therefore, his narrative is useful as a single source that provides countless important details regarding the events of the war.

Neolin railed against social problems under British control; however, in order to understand these problems, one must understand society during the alliance with France. While the French dominated Canada, their relationship with the Native population was based on diplomacy and economics. Gift exchanges had long been a traditional means of maintaining reciprocal relationships among Native American tribes.⁹ The French governor of Canada, known by the title “Onontio,” played the role of “father” to the Native “children,” providing for them by giving gifts of supplies: guns, ammunition, tools, cloth, etc. According to Richard White (whose 1991 monograph *The Middle Ground* approached the conflict between the Great Lakes tribes and European culture by examining it as a blend of two societies, both of which experienced change thanks to the other), “none of the French governors who led the alliance [between the French and the American Indians] was regarded as a conquerer [sic]. Instead, western Indians regarded Onontio and the Frenchmen who followed him as their allies, protectors, suppliers, and as the mediators of their disputes.”¹⁰ Thus, whereas a European monarch would collect taxes from his subjects, Onontio, as a father, was expected to give his “children” gifts and

⁹ Richard White, *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650-1815* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 15.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 36.

supplies. For the most part, French governors understood this expectation. Governor de Beauharnois attempted to explain this to the French court in 1730: “all the nations of Canada regard the governor as their father, which in consequence, following their ideas, he ought at all times to give them what they need to feed themselves, clothe themselves, and to hunt.”¹¹ The relationship between the French and the Great Lakes tribes, therefore, was reciprocal—the father had to “support” his children, and so long as he did, the children consented to “obey” their father. The nations of Canada benefited from this relationship not only materially but politically as well. Disputes between tribes were once most readily settled by appealing to the ties of kinship. These ties, however, were only effective over a certain distance—some tribes were too distantly related for even metaphorical kinship to be of any use. By becoming Onontio’s children, however, the American Indian nations became more unified: Onontio had the symbolic authority, meaning the necessary kinship ties, to settle intertribal disputes.¹²

By providing supplies to his children, Onontio not only maintained the diplomatic relationship between the two cultures, but also created a dependency—a fact that Neolin would later try to remedy by calling for a cessation of trade with Europeans. The Ottawas and Hurons living near Fort Detroit relied on the French officers of the fort to supply things that they could not produce but no longer felt that they could or should live without. For example, in 1761 Sir William Johnston, a British Indian agent (His Majesty’s Superintendent in the Northern Department) sent a list of goods desired by the Indian Americans near Detroit to General Jeffery Amherst (commander-in-chief of His Majesty’s Forces in North America). This list included goods such as French blankets,

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 180.

¹² *Ibid.*, 40.

cotton clothing, needles and threads, knives, scissors, cookware, ammunition, traps, and rum.¹³ The Ottawas and Hurons, like many other tribes with access to European trade, saw such merchandise as a necessity at this time, even though their societies had existed for centuries without it. While the French still ruled in Canada, Nicolas Perrot, a French trader, said to the Ottawa, “You have forgotten that your ancestors in former days used earthen pots, stone hatchets, and knives, and bows; and you will be obliged to use them again, if Onontio abandons you. What will become of you, if he becomes angry?”¹⁴ Ironically, Perrot later reversed his opinion, realizing that what he had interpreted as dependence was largely a behavior designed to garner the largest possible amount of goods from the French. He wrote in his memoir (sometime between 1680 and 1718, not published until 1864) that, as the Hurons near Detroit, along with numerous other groups, preferred to bring their furs to sell to the British, who could offer better goods in trade, the Natives seemed to have the “arrogant notion that the French cannot get along without them and that we could not maintain ourselves in the colony without the assistance that they give us.”¹⁵ Thus, although American Indian communities relied on Europeans to provide things they could not make, and although they could not subsist without guns and ammunition in particular, they did not see themselves as completely powerless—they needed their father, but he needed them, as well.

¹³ Peckham, 71.

¹⁴ Claude Charles Le Roy, Bacqueville de la Potherie, *History of the Savage Peoples Who are Allies of New France*, in *The Indian Tribes of the Upper Mississippi Valley and Region of the Great Lakes as Described by Nicolas Perrot, French Commandant in the Northwest; Bacqueville de la Potherie, French Royal Commissionner to Canada; Morrell Marston, American Army Officer; and Thomas Forsyth, United States agent at Fort Armstrong*, trans. and ed. Emma Helen Blair, vol. 2 (Cleveland: The Arthur H. Clark Company, 1912), 77.

¹⁵ Nicolas Perrot, *Memoir on the Manners, Customs, and Religion of the Savages of North America* (Paris, 1864), in *The Indian Tribes of the Upper Mississippi Valley and Region of the Great Lakes as Described by Nicolas Perrot, French Commandant in the Northwest; Bacqueville de la Potherie, French Royal Commissionner to Canada; Morrell Marston, American Army Officer; and Thomas Forsyth, United States agent at Fort Armstrong*, trans. and ed. Emma Helen Blair, vol. 1 (Cleveland: The Arthur H. Clark Company, 1912), 96.

The alliance between the French and the Great Lakes tribes depended on good trade relations and balanced precariously upon a fine line of mutual understanding drawn between the two sides. Anything that upset this balance threatened the alliance. An initial problem in the alliance's trade system was that the two races had different ideas of what commerce was and what place it held in society. To the American Indians, trade was not merely an economic transaction. It was part of a more complex social relationship. While the French traders were in part controlled by the European market, or at least forced to comply with its ups and downs, the majority of the American Indians did not believe that the larger economic forces operating across such distance applied to them, and therefore did not tolerate market fluctuations as they applied to their goods. Therefore, while French traders, if left to themselves, would be out for any profit they could obtain, French officials realized that cheating their children would not be good for the alliance. They intervened, when the occasion called for it, making sure the natives received acceptable prices for their goods. At times the Crown acted as a buffer if the European market was in a slump.¹⁶

The American Indian trade system did not revolve around profit. It was not a business in the way that Europeans saw it. It was a system of exchange—framed in the context of a gift exchange, in fact—in which both parties must be satisfied, their needs met. One did not seek profit, and the European economic concept of supply and demand did not apply. Quite the opposite; the greater the need of the buyer, the greater the obligation of the seller to provide him with the goods he needed—thus, rather than raising the price, the seller had to either lower it or simply give the goods as a gift, expecting that the buyer would make him a gift in return when he was able—thus leaving

¹⁶ White, 95.

the door open for future trade. Those involved in trade shared with each other; they did not truly buy and sell. It was an exchange of gifts that bound two parties to each other, obliging them to each other and ensuring further trade in the future. Seemingly in contradiction to this, exchanges were often intentionally made unevenly. If one party received a better deal than the other, the second party held an obligation to the first in future trades—and this ensured that there would, in fact, be an exchange in the future.¹⁷ Once exchanges between two parties had been terminated, the relationship between the two parties was also ended—even on such a large scale as the relationship between the French and American Indians.¹⁸ Thus, French abuse of the trading system brought lowered native opinion regarding the French and put strain on the alliance.

In American Indian society, the importance of gift-giving in maintaining relationships stemmed from several factors. First, the act of exchanging gifts established a social connection. Thus, people who exchanged gifts were no longer strangers (in a society where strangers were dangerous), but were bound by mutual obligation and a symbolic kinship.¹⁹ This opened the door to further social interaction. Thus, not only Onontio but also French traders found themselves obligated to exchange gifts in order to maintain a relationship.

The fur trade established relationships between French and Native Americans, but these relationships, based on trade, were susceptible to fluctuations in the market and were therefore unstable. Onontio's children understood, to a degree, that French merchants were individually responsible for their merchandise; however, they expected their father to ensure that they received a fair trade (a "*bon marché*") from their brothers,

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 98-99.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 107

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 114.

the French traders—that prices remained relatively constant and that the value of their furs did not change according to the market. In the beginning of the eighteenth century, however, the French fur market suffered from oversupply, dropping the price of beaver pelts. Natives became discontent when they could not get what they considered a good deal, or even the same price as the previous year, for their furs. As natives became less and less confident in Onontio’s position as “father”, the alliance weakened, and the natives began to threaten to turn to the English, who offered better deals in trade and therefore could make better fathers.²⁰ The instability of the alliance, coupled with a disenchanted view of Europeans altogether, made Native American societies more receptive to separatist, neo-traditional religious movements like that led by Neolin.

Despite their disappointment with Onontio, most Canadian tribes did not turn to the British until the end of the French and Indian war, as mentioned previously. When the British finally wrested control of Canada from the French in 1760, the role of Native Americans changed—the British did not make better fathers; in fact, they did not accept the role of father at all. The British were more concerned with keeping the French from regaining control than with keeping Native Americans happy.²¹ Rather than maintaining a father/children relationship, therefore, the British commander, Lord Amherst, viewed Native Americans as a conquered people, subjects of the new empire.²² He allowed the prices of goods sold to American Indians to rise—unable to maintain low prices after the costly Seven Years’ War—whereas the French government had swallowed heavy losses

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 116-117.

²¹ Francis Parkman, *The Oregon Trail, The Conspiracy of Pontiac* (New York: The Library of America, 1853), 475.

²² White, 256.

in attempting to keep them low—Pontiac complained that prices were higher than what the British had promised.²³

Pontiac was not the first to attempt action against the British. In July of 1761, the Seneca sent war belts to the Delaware, Shawnee, Ottawa, Huron, Chippewa, and Potawatomie. They hoped to stage synchronized attacks on the British forts at Detroit, Pittsburgh, Presqu'Isle, Venango, and Niagara. The Seneca's grievances against the British stemmed from fear that the British would overrun their territory and from Britain's failure to reward them for their military service in the war against the French. A large part of the problem was a failure to "cover the dead"—deaths in Seneca society (along with most northeastern tribes) needed to be paid for, or covered, with gifts or slaves.²⁴ Amherst refused to give the Seneca gifts or ammunition, and even went so far as to reward his officers with their land. The Seneca's attempt at a pan-Indian movement, however, ultimately failed, as many tribes—including Pontiac's Ottawa at Detroit—were not yet ready to unite against the British.²⁵ The Seneca would later take the initiative to attack British forts in Pennsylvania after Pontiac attacked Fort Detroit.

Grievances against the British continued to grow as the year wore on, and by 1762—shortly before Neolin had his first vision—the American Indians near Detroit were thoroughly disenchanted with British policy. Many of the problems with British-Indian relations were rooted in material issues. Amherst felt that giving gifts was a form of bribery—understandable if taken in a solely European context, but undiplomatic since Native American society saw it differently. When Sir William Johnson sent him a list of supplies desired by the American Indians, Amherst replied that once trade was more

²³ Peckham, 87.

²⁴ White, 75-76.

²⁵ Peckham, 74-75.

firmly established they would be able to purchase such items for themselves, sparing the Crown the expense. He continued, “Services must be rewarded; it has ever been a maxim with me. But as to purchasing the good behavior either of Indians or any others, [that] is what I do not understand. When men of whatsoever race behave ill, they must be punished but not bribed.”²⁶ Thus, what Amherst saw as a business relationship, Native Americans saw as an alliance such as they had with the French. Denied by the men they believed should be providing for them, the American Indian communities living in the vicinity of the now-British forts found themselves without their customary supplies. Faced with a game scarcity, these communities could not sufficiently feed or clothe themselves, and many people suffered and died.²⁷ This troubled atmosphere led to the appearance of prophets, such as Neolin, who offered solutions.

It should be noted (so as not to stereotype all British officers as insensitive to American Indian culture) that not all of the officers involved agreed with General Amherst. Captain Donald Campbell (the commander of Fort Detroit until 1762, when he was replaced by Major Gladwin) wrote to Henry Bouquet, who commanded Fort Pitt, “I am certain if the Indians knew General Amherst’s sentiments about keeping them short of powder it would be impossible to keep them in temper...I hope the general will change his present way of thinking with regard to Indian affairs. As I am of the opinion if they were supplied with ammunition it would prevent their doing mischief.”²⁸ He repeated nearly the same sentiment in another letter to Bouquet dated July 3, 1762. Amherst believed limiting the American Indians’ supply of ammunition would be safest from a military standpoint; however, as Campbell knew, for these communities, ammunition

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 72.

²⁷ Parkman, 476.

²⁸ Peckham, 88.

supported both their trade and their lives, as hunting with traditional weapons was no longer sufficient. An intelligence agent reported to George Croghan (Britain's deputy Indian agent) in December 1762 that the western tribes believed the British were "preparing them for annihilation."²⁹ Neolin himself reinforced this sentiment; one witness (John Heckewelder, who will shortly be discussed in more detail) reported him saying: "above all, you must abstain from drinking their deadly *beson*, which they have forced upon us, for the sake of increasing their gains and diminishing our numbers."³⁰ Thus, from the perspective of the American Indians, the British were deliberately weakening their communities.

Grievances against the British made many tribes near Detroit inclined to war, but another factor was the introduction of Neolin's message. Neolin had his vision in the early 1760s, after the French and Indian war was essentially (but not officially) over and while General Amherst controlled British policy in Canada. Reportedly, as he sat by the fire worrying about the evils he saw among his people, a messenger came to him and instructed him to journey to visit the Master of Life.³¹ The most detailed written description of his journey comes to us through Pontiac's 1763 account (which is recorded in a journal thought to belong to Robert Navarre, an *habitant*, or French resident, of Fort Detroit). Thus, according to Pontiac (in turn according to Navarre), on his way to heaven, Neolin first encountered "a great fire coming out of the earth."³² Trying a different path, he came across a glass mountain, where the road ended. Presently he saw

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 97.

³⁰ Rev. John Heckewelder, *History, Manners, and Customs of the Indian Nations Who Once Inhabited Pennsylvania and the Neighbouring States* (Philadelphia: 1819; reprint, Philadelphia: Publication Fund of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, 1876), xxiii.

³¹ Cave, "The Delaware Prophet Neolin," 271.

³² [Robert Navarre], *Journal of Pontiac's Conspiracy 1763*, ed. M. Agnes Burton (Clarence Monroe Burton, 1912), in *The Siege of Detroit in 1763*, ed. Milo Milton Quaife (Chicago: R.R. Donnelley and Sons Company, 1958), 11.

“a woman of this mountain, of radiant beauty, whose garments dimmed the whiteness of the snow.”³³ She instructed him to bathe in the river, and then guided him to the top of the mountain, which Neolin had to climb with only his left hand and foot. Finally he arrived at a walled village, where “a handsome man, clothed all in white”³⁴ took him to the Master of Life. The Master of Life told Neolin to pass on his message to his people. He claimed responsibility for the scarcity of game, as it was his way of punishing the evils of his children. He was especially emphatic about the evil of allowing Europeans on the land he had created for Native Americans, and for relying on the foreigners for those things that they should rely on him for. He instructed Neolin,

Do not drink more than once, or at most twice in a day; have only one wife and do not run after the wives of others nor after the girls; do not fight among yourselves; do not ‘make medicine,’ but pray, because in ‘making medicine’ one talks with the evil spirit; drive off your lands those dogs clothed in red who will do you nothing but harm. And when ye shall have need of anything address yourselves to me; and as to your brothers [the Europeans], I shall give to you as to them; do not sell to your brothers what I have put on earth for food. In short, become good and ye shall receive your needs.³⁵

Thus, the Master of Life addressed societal evils such as drunkenness and adultery as well as political issues such as trade and the invasion of Native American lands by the British. Upon returning from his journey, Neolin relayed the Master of Life’s message to his people and promised that if they followed his instructions, they would gain the power to drive the invaders from their lands.³⁶

The concept of such a vision is familiar to traditional Native American culture, but much of the imagery betrays the influence of Christianity. For example, according to the trader James Kenney, the creator was seated on “a Glorious Seat...like the King of

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 13.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 16.

³⁶ Cave, “The Delaware Prophet Neolin,” 273.

the White People.”³⁷ Before the seventeenth century, Native American concepts of the creator did not include omnipotence or omnipresence. Rather, the Creator and the Supreme Being were usually two separate entities. The Supreme Being could pass instructions to men, but was generally not approachable. One did not pray to him, and he was not jealous of other powers, as Neolin’s Master of Life seems to be. Also thanks to European contact was the new racial identity—an “us-versus-them” attitude that grouped Native Americans in one unified category and Europeans in another. Religion reinforced this belief—according to the 1757 journal of Louis Antoine de Bougainville, a French officer at Fort George, “they [the Ottawa] say that the Master of Life who created them was brown and beardless, while he who made Frenchmen was white and bearded.”³⁸ White asserts that this dualism became more widespread as the relationship between Britain and the Great Lakes tribes declined. Both the decline of the alliance and the new sense of racial identity contributed to the success of Neolin’s religion.³⁹ This attitude also aided the creation of pan-Indian movements such as those spearheaded by Pontiac and the Shawnee brothers.⁴⁰

Scholars do not agree on the extent to which Neolin blended traditional Native American ideas with new Christian ideas. Most scholars (Charles Hunter and Anthony Wallace, for example) interpreting Neolin’s message through a Christian filter,

³⁷ Gregory Evans Dowd, *War Under Heaven: Pontiac, the Indian Nations, and the British Empire* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), 101.

³⁸ Edward P. Hamilton, ed., *Adventure in the Wilderness: The American Journals of Louis Antoine de Bougainville 1756-1760* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1964), 133.

³⁹ White, 283-284.

⁴⁰ For more information on American Indian belief systems see Richard White; Gregory Evans Dowd, *A Spirited Resistance: The North American Struggle for Unity, 1745-1815* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992).

emphasize the similarities between Neolin's vision and Biblical tales.⁴¹ More recently, historians such as White and Cave, following a new (post-1970s) philosophy that focuses on events from a Native American perspective rather than from the perspective of white policy, have begun to emphasize the blend of two cultures that Neolin created.⁴² On one hand, European culture influenced his ideas; but on the other, he rejected European customs and goods.

John Heckewelder, a Moravian Missionary, wrote a monograph in 1819 titled *History, Manners, and Customs of the Indian Nations who Once Inhabited Pennsylvania and the Neighbouring States*. He did so, he claimed, "for the information of those who are desirous of knowing the true history of those people, who, for centuries, have been in full possession of the country we now inhabit."⁴³ Heckewelder had direct information since he lived among several American Indian tribes while pursuing his missionary activities. Having once had the opportunity to hear one of Neolin's speeches, Heckewelder reports him as saying:

...put off entirely from yourselves the customs which you have adopted since the white people came among us; you are to return to that former happy state, in which we lived in peace and plenty, before these strangers came to disturb us...Then will the great Spirit give success to our arms; then he will give us strength to conquer our enemies, to drive them from hence.⁴⁴

Thus, Neolin asked his followers to cast off European culture, even though his message betrayed some Christian influence.

Charles Hunter found it incongruous, that Neolin should reject a culture that he borrowed from. In his 1971 article "The Delaware Nativist Revival of the Mid-

⁴¹ Hunter, 43-46; Anthony F.C. Wallace, *The Death and Rebirth of the Seneca* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1970), 117.

⁴² White, 279; Cave, "The Delaware Prophet Neolin."

⁴³ Heckewelder, xxiii.

⁴⁴ Heckewelder, 293.

Eighteenth Century,” Hunter stated, “by the mid-eighteenth century, the Delawares had internalized white culture to the extent that they could no longer distinguish it from their own. The Delaware’s path was irrevocably tied to that of the white man, as was perhaps the most aptly demonstrated in the character of his very attempt to separate the paths.”⁴⁵ He argued that Neolin employed a so-called Indian Bible, borrowed Christian concepts of Heaven and Hell, and “generated an almost Mosaic pattern of ethics.”⁴⁶

In his 1970 monograph *The Death and Rebirth of the Seneca*, Anthony F.C. Wallace, a psychological anthropologist and historian, also compared Neolin’s vision to that of Moses.⁴⁷ Certainly the pillars of flame that Neolin encountered, as well as the commandment-like orders the Master of Life gave to Neolin, echo Christian mythology. Additionally, as previously mentioned, Neolin’s styling of the Creator as a Supreme Being, who does not want his children speaking to other spiritual powers and punishes them for their wickedness, has more in common with the Christian God than with other Native American concepts of either the Creator or the Master of Life. Wallace also called to attention Neolin’s abandonment of certain cultural traditions such as medicine songs and polygamy, and their replacement with “quasi-European concepts” such as sin and monotheism. Wallace did not focus solely on the influence European culture had on Neolin, but rather argued that Neolin’s movement combined Native and European elements.⁴⁸

Neolin’s story contains many elements familiar to the religion of Eastern tribes. He made a journey to heaven, and returned with new instructions from the Master of

⁴⁵ Hunter, 47.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ Wallace, 117.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 120.

Life. Many men before him had undertaken similar quests, embarking on dangerous journeys and bringing back new rituals from places not of this world.⁴⁹ Thus, the mechanism for change was built into Native American tradition—as Dowd (1992) wrote, “they experimented with ‘new’ ritual in ‘traditional’ ways.”⁵⁰ Such journeys required a spirit guide. The man who appeared at Neolin’s fire, the woman at the glass mountain, and the man at the entrance to Heaven all fit the mold for such a guide.⁵¹ The instructions Neolin received could be interpreted not as Mosaic commandments, but rather as a bestowal of power. Power was the ultimate goal of a sky journey—in Neolin’s case, the power to expel the Europeans and to create a better way of life for his people.⁵²

As for the Master of Life, Neolin’s account, though similar to Christianity, also echoes the beliefs that the Delaware and nearby tribes held before European contact. According to Heckewelder, writing in 1819, the Delaware believed in two powerful spirits, one good and one evil. The powerful good spirit does not address earthly matters directly; rather, he “must have his attendants to execute his supreme behests”.⁵³ These lesser spirits act as go-betweens, keeping the Great Spirit informed of the state of affairs on earth and, should the need arise, taking action on his behalf. These are the spirits to whom most Delaware addressed themselves in supplication.⁵⁴ Contrary to this, George Loskiel, a Moravian missionary, claimed that the Delaware had no concept of the Devil—the evil spirit—before the arrival of Europeans.⁵⁵ It is possible, that both men

⁴⁹ Gregory Evans Dowd, *A Spirited Resistance*, 3.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁵¹ Cave, *The Delaware Prophet Neolin*, 274.

⁵² Dowd, *A Spirited Resistance*, 3.

⁵³ Heckewelder, 212.

⁵⁴ Cave, *The Delaware Prophet Neolin*, 276.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 279.

were right in a way. Louis Antoine de Bougainville wrote in 1757 that “the belief in two spirits, one good, the other bad, then one inhabiting the heavens, the other the bowels of the earth, now established among them [the Ottawa], goes back only to the time they commenced trade with Europeans.”⁵⁶ It would seem, therefore, that the evil spirit that Neolin referred to was the product of the influence of Christianity, and that Heckewelder collected his information after the Christian idea had already taken root.

Although Neolin’s message was certainly influenced by Christianity—at least in part—Native American society had also been influenced by Christianity. Thus, Neolin’s message ultimately met his society’s need for a religion that would address current social, economic, and political problems. This is why it was so influential. American Indians knew what was wrong with their world—misfortune brought upon them by the anger of Master of Life proved that something was wrong—and Neolin told them what they needed to do to remedy these wrongs. As Richard White suggests, “Neolin might denounce white practices, but what he really preached was Indian guilt.”⁵⁷ This guilt stemmed from incorporating white culture into their own—something that, according to Neolin, was not appropriate to their way of life. By accepting their guilt, White argues, American Indians took control of their lives—thus, Neolin promised power to those who reformed their “sinful” ways.⁵⁸

Thus, Neolin’s message eventually reached Pontiac, who accepted it and made it the ideology behind his movement. Neolin’s message provided a religious reason to attack the British, but it also addressed the political and economic issues (game scarcity, the fur trade, and invasion of American Indian land) that were already inclining many

⁵⁶ Hamilton, ed., 133.

⁵⁷ White, 283.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

tribes toward war. Additionally, the rumor of the pending return of the French to power gave hope that the movement could be successful. Documentation of this rumor originates primarily from British officers, who were eager to blame their old enemies for instigating the Indian uprising.⁵⁹ Whether the French spread the rumor in hopes of stirring up trouble for the British or whether the rumor was merely wishful thinking, Pontiac hoped—or at least assured his warriors—that once the British were weakened their French “father” would return. Navarre reported Pontiac as saying to his gathered Ottawas and Hurons in his war council of May 5, 1763, “Have I not shown you the wampum belts which I received from our Great Father, the Frenchman? He tells us to strike them.”⁶⁰ Thus, bolstered by political, moral, and social righteousness, Pontiac instigated an attack on the British.

In his account of Neolin’s vision to his gathered warriors, Pontiac referred to “those dogs clothed in red” (the British) as the ones who must be driven out of America. Scholars disagree on whether this distinction between the British and the French was Pontiac’s amendment or Neolin’s true intent—an important distinction in the debate over whether or not Pontiac truly embraced Neolin’s ideas. Those inclined to believe that the intelligent, rational military commander simply used Neolin’s religion as impetus for his own purposes argue that he changed the message (which, they claim, originally spoke against all Europeans) so that he could continue to rely on French support against the British. This mindset can be found mainly among historians from the nineteenth century to the mid-1970s—that is, those writing in a time when American Indian society, and

⁵⁹ Gregory Evans Dowd, “The French King Wakes up in Detroit: ‘Pontiac’s War’ in Rumor and History,” *Ethnohistory* 37 (1990), 254.

⁶⁰ Peckham, 120.

especially religion, did not command much respect, either in the scholarly community or in white society in general.

Howard Peckham, for example, argued that Pontiac used Neolin's message to further his own ends. He introduced Neolin as "a psychopathic Delaware,"⁶¹ and later stated, "It should be noted that the Delaware Prophet was not a war chief who desired to lead a military expedition to drive out the English and restore French domination."⁶² Thus, he de-emphasized Neolin's role, focusing almost exclusively on the military aspect of the movement. Of Pontiac, he wrote, "Whether or not he followed the interpretation to the conclusion of simple, resourceful living, he shrewdly recognized the power of the Prophet's argument. Here was an appeal that could unite the Indians in a common war effort!"⁶³

Charles Hunter, analyzing the Pontiac's account of Neolin's vision, argued that "The phrase, 'dogs clothed in red,' would seem to be of Pontiac's invention, in order to restrict his indictment to the English, and demonstrates a reinterpretation of the nativist movement to suit more political needs."⁶⁴ Though it is true that Pontiac solicited the aid of the French against the British, more recent scholars offer differing opinions on Pontiac's adherence to Neolin's beliefs.

Richard White's 1991 monograph *The Middle Ground* marks a turning point in scholarship because his approach to the conflict between Native American (specifically the Great Lakes area) and European culture was to examine it as a blend of two societies, both of which experienced change thanks to the other. Unlike Hunter, he pointed out

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 98.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 100-101.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 101.

⁶⁴ Hunter, 46.

that, due to the difficulty involved in translating the word “white”, this interpretation of the British as the enemy, rather than the French, may have been Neolin’s intention all along.⁶⁵ Thus, it is possible that Pontiac did not twist Neolin’s message to serve his own purposes; rather, specifically targeting the British as the enemy was Neolin’s intent all along.

Gregory E. Dowd argued that Pontiac did not simply use Neolin’s message to gather followers, but truly ascribed to it. He published an article in 1992 called “Thinking and Believing: Nativism and Unity in the Ages of Pontiac and Tecumseh”. His primary argument was that Pontiac and Tecumseh, two military leaders who were backed by (or who backed up) religious leaders, could both think and believe. That is to say, they were rational men with political aims who nevertheless wholly subscribed to the religious teachings of Neolin and Tenskwatawa, respectively. This challenged the thinking of most early historians, who separated the military and religious aspects of the movement, as if they were two things that could not coexist. He speculated on the distinction historians made between the sacred and the secular: “Perhaps this distinction results from the paradoxical product of Christian hostility toward native belief and of secular hostility toward belief in general.”⁶⁶ Thus, as society became more accepting of Native American religion, scholars gave more credibility to prophets such as Neolin and Tenskwatawa, and became more accepting of the fact that “rational” men such as Pontiac and Tecumseh could truly adhere to the religions presented by the prophets. In reference to Pontiac’s distinction between British and French, Dowd argued that Neolin himself drew the distinction. As evidence, he refers to Navarre’s journal, which reports that a

⁶⁵ White, 284.

⁶⁶ Gregory Evans Dowd, “Thinking and Believing: Nativism and Unity in the Ages of Pontiac and Tecumseh,” *American Indian Quarterly* 16 (1992), 310.

group of Chippewas, Delawares, and Shawnees who, during Pontiac's siege of Detroit, reminded Pontiac, "the Master of Life by one of our brother Delawares...forbade us to attack our brothers the French."⁶⁷ This, then, is another source that reports Neolin's message as favorable to the French.

Thus, Pontiac, embracing Neolin's message, finally solidified a plan to carry out one of the Master of Life's injunctions: to make war upon the British. At his war council of May 5, 1763, after reminding his gathered Ottawa and Huron warriors (his immediate neighbors) of British abuses and assuring them of aid from the French and from other tribes, Pontiac gave his account of Neolin's journey, using the commands of the Master of Life to unite all the members of the tribes at the council.⁶⁸ He planned to begin his assault on Fort Detroit on May 7. Thanks to an unknown informant, however, Major Gladwin—the officer in charge of the fort—learned of the plan the night before it was to be carried out. Pontiac had counted on having all 300 of his warriors armed with concealed weapons within the fort before beginning the assault, but suddenly faced with Detroit's increased defenses and only allowed to bring his 10 chiefs inside, Pontiac did not give the signal to attack.⁶⁹ Bereft of the advantage of surprise and unable to carry out his original plan to attack the fort from the inside, on May 9 Pontiac and his warriors laid siege to Detroit.⁷⁰

Francis Parkman's flair for the dramatic and his desire for a hero to fill his readers with excitement and sympathy made him believe that Pontiac planned the subsequent attacks on other British forts. He wrote, "The peril of the times was unfolded in its full

⁶⁷ Dowd, "The French King Wakes Up in Detroit," 260.

⁶⁸ White, 287.

⁶⁹ Peckham, 130-132.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 135.

extent before him [Pontiac], and he resolved to unite the tribes in one grand effort to avert it.”⁷¹ The evidence, however, does not support this; while he did invite other tribes—the Chippewas and the Ottawas of the Michilimackinac and the Thames River—to join his assault, Pontiac did not plan the sweeping movement that would overthrow nearly all the British forts in the Great Lakes region. He did, however, make the first move—an example, as it was, for others to follow—and became popularly known as the de facto leader of the movement. He also sent some of his warriors to Fort Sandusky and Fort St. Joseph.⁷² Fort Sandusky fell on May 16 to a surprise attack by Detroit Ottawas and Hurons joined by local Hurons. The warriors suffered no casualties, and news of their success strengthened “Pontiac’s war”.⁷³ Fort St. Joseph (located in Niles, Michigan) fell on May 25—the warriors used the same attack plan as the one used at Sandusky, the one Pontiac had hoped to use at Detroit. Additionally, on May 27 Fort Wayne, Indiana fell to a group of warriors who Pontiac had sent to seek aid from the French.⁷⁴ They were subsequently joined by Weas, Kickapoos, Mascoutens and conquered Fort Ouiatenon—the southwestern limit of Britain’s authority—without bloodshed on June 1.⁷⁵

After receiving news of Pontiac’s siege, other nations soon began to take the initiative to capture British forts, planning attacks independently. The Delaware and Mingo besieged Fort Pitt on May 29. An unknown group of American Indians fired upon Fort Ligonier, in Pennsylvania, on June 2. After being chased off, they move further east

⁷¹ Parkman, 485.

⁷² Peckham, 145.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 154.

⁷⁴ French aid was not forthcoming, as Britain had made peace with France on February 20, officially ending the Seven Years’ War. News of this had yet to reach Pontiac, and in fact Major Gladwin did not learn of it until June 2. Peckham, 159-160.

⁷⁵ Peckham, 161.

to attack Fort Bedford.⁷⁶ A group of Chippewas and Sauks, later joined by northern Ottawas, took Fort Michilimackinac by surprise on June 2.⁷⁷ At about this time, the Shawnee and Seneca joined the Delaware at Fort Pitt. Some Senecas moved to attack Fort Venango, in Franklin, Pennsylvania. They took the fort on June 16, killing all within.⁷⁸ The same group took Fort Le Boeuf, in Waterford, Pennsylvania, on June 18. They then moved to Fort Presqu'Isle, in Erie, Pennsylvania, which, with the help of the 200 Hurons, Ottawas, and Chippewas who had been sent from Detroit, they conquered on June 19.⁷⁹

Back in the west, the British officers at Fort Edward Augustus, hearing of the fall of Fort Michilimackinac and having no hope of holding out against the attack they knew would come, abandoned their posts on June 21. They left the fort in the hands of local Sauks, Foxes, Menominees, and Winnebagoes, who had not committed themselves to Pontiac's war but rather chose to maintain their neutrality. Thus, by July of 1763, of the British forts in the Western Great Lakes area, only Fort Detroit remained in British hands.⁸⁰ Fort Pitt, however, remained locked in stalemate, and Pontiac saw no progress at Detroit. The hoped-for French aid never came, and the siege at Detroit ended ambiguously in early fall. Pontiac and the other chiefs negotiated for peace.⁸¹

“Pontiac's war,” so named because he made the first move and not because he orchestrated it in its entirety, caused King George III to issue the Proclamation of 1763

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 166-167.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 163-164.

⁷⁸ We know the precise date of the attack because, before killing the commander, Lieutenant Francis Gordon, the Seneca dictated to him their reasons for going to war with the British—first, the scarcity of powder, and second, that the British kept so many forts the Seneca feared they intended to take over all their territory. Peckham, 167-168.

⁷⁹ Peckham, 168.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 165-166.

⁸¹ White, 288-289.

on October 7, which set the crest of the Appalachians as the boundary of Western settlement. News of this never reached Pontiac; additionally, settlers did not observe the proclamation and the British army was not able to effectively enforce it.⁸²

Thus, Pontiac's war came to an inconclusive end. British armies invaded Ohio in 1764, attempting to bring all the rebellious tribes to heel—with little success. Thomas Gage, the commander in chief of British forces in North America, wrote of the 1764 campaign to Campbell on June 5, 1765: "We neither attacked them, or made Peace with them. Pondiac [sic] was thought to have lost His influence,...And when it was found that he was still powerful, No means were taken to make Friends with Him."⁸³ According to an unknown French source, Pontiac, after being told of France's surrender to Britain four years earlier in 1760, replied,

Tell your general [Amherst] to withdraw all of his peole promptly from our lands. We do not intend to allow any of them to set foot there. The cession by Onontio of which you haughtily speak to us arouses two very different responses in our hearts: laughter at the mad pretension of your master, and tears at the misfortunes of our father.⁸⁴

Pontiac, in addition to other Great Lakes chiefs, refused to believe that Onontio was completely defeated, and treated news of his surrender with contempt.

Thus, Amherst did not see a decisive victory; nor did the Native Americans. The British were not driven out of Canada, and the French would not return to power; however, as Richard White argues, the war was not a complete failure for Pontiac, Neolin, and those who joined their cause. The American Indians did not become conquered subjects—although they were ready for peace, they were still quite capable of

⁸² Peckham, 179.

⁸³ Dowd, *War Under Heaven*, 213.

⁸⁴ Peyser, Joseph L., trans. and ed. *Letters from New France: The Upper Country 1686-1783* (University of Illinois Press: 1939), quoted in Collin G. Calloway, *One Vast Winter Count: The Native American West before Lewis and Clark* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2003), 353.

war, while the British waged war only to the detriment of settlement, the fur trade, and the royal treasury. Rather than one side conquering the other, then, the two powers worked for accommodation, which was several years in coming.⁸⁵ Each tribe made a treaty or conducted a peace ceremony with the British individually between 1764 and 1766. Pontiac formally ended his war with the British in July 1766. Historian Colin Calloway (2003) describes the ceremony: Pontiac took Sir William [William Johnson, British Indian agent] by the hand, [and] the western delegates and the Six Nations exchanged war belts.”⁸⁶ With the conclusion of the war, the Great Lakes tribes finally acknowledged the British as their fathers.

Thus Pontiac, rather than destroying British power, forced them to become more like the “fathers” that the French had been, willing to adapt their policies to more closely fit to Native American standards.⁸⁷ Pontiac remained a key figure; although he was not, in reality, the leader of the “conspiracy,” he was later identified as the leader of the movement by the British, the French *habitants*, and by many American Indians. He led, not a tribe, or a group of tribes, but rather a group of American Indians with a common cause—he had transcended tribal boundaries.⁸⁸

In the end, the peace treaty agreed upon in 1765 brought about a return of the former status quo.⁸⁹ Pontiac and Neolin, therefore, failed in their attempt to overthrow the British, but succeeded in joining together a group of tribes in a common cause and in establishing a new sense of racial identity and unity. Once accomplished, other

⁸⁵ White, 289-291.

⁸⁶ Collin G. Calloway, *One Vast Winter Count: The Native American West before Lewis and Clark* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2003), 354.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 270, 293, 304.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 295-296.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 305.

movements—including that of Tenskwatawa and Tecumseh—could more readily do the same.

Fighting resumed only ten years later, in 1775, with the beginning of the American Revolution. The Revolution affected numerous tribes, not only because it established a new power in North America, but also because the war itself affected an entire generation of people—disputes over Native American land continued well after the Revolution ended, until the Treaty of Greenville in 1795 (which was itself only a temporary solution, as will be discussed later). Thus, for twenty years, Native Americans living in what would become America experienced nothing but war. American Indians, many confused as to which side they should join and many wishing to stay out of British affairs, found it difficult to maintain neutrality during the American Revolution. The British, the Americans, and even the Spanish pressed tribes to join their side. The Shawnee tried to remain neutral, but their placement in Ohio country, on the American frontier, made this impossible. American settlers pushed westward, compelling the Shawnee to join the British. They raided American settlements, and the American army burned Shawnee villages and fields.⁹⁰

The end of the Revolution in 1783 did not mean the end of violence between the Shawnee and Americans. Like many American Indian tribes, the American Revolution forced the Shawnee out of their villages. Communities broke apart and reassembled in the far northwest corner of their territory, often incorporating members of other communities or even other tribes into their social structure.⁹¹ This dislocation, similar to

⁹⁰ Calloway, 367-369.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 371.

that experienced by the Delaware in Neolin's time, created the atmosphere of deprivation that lent itself to the rise of prophets and laid the ground for future intertribal unity.

American invasion of Shawnee lands continued. Former revolutionaries, having seen the plentiful fields of the Shawnee, became settlers eager to gain the fertile land of the Ohio Valley. The United States government, under the Confederation, claimed all land to the Mississippi by right of conquest, thus, as the British had in Neolin's time, treating American Indians as subjects.⁹² Tenskwatawa and Tecumseh grew up, therefore, in an atmosphere of demoralization and violence.

As shown in the case of Pontiac and Neolin, a military leader—whether white or Indian—is often associated with a particular religious leader. Less frequently, however, are secular and ecclesiastical leaders personally connected. Whereas Pontiac and Neolin had no relationship prior to Neolin's ascension to the role of prophet—and afterward had an informal relationship at best—Tenskwatawa and Tecumseh were brothers. In fact, they belonged to a set of triplets. They were, therefore, intimately connected. This meant that sacred and mundane aspects of their movement were more closely linked than in Pontiac's conspiracy. Furthermore, whereas Neolin did not take a military role in Pontiac's war, Tenskwatawa and Tecumseh jointly led their people. Pontiac spoke for Neolin to his warriors, but Tenskwatawa could speak for himself. In the case of the Shawnee brothers, it is difficult to ascertain whether one man was exploiting the other and, if so, who was controlling whom. Some historians maintain that Tecumseh used Tenskwatawa's religion to further his own aims, but it is likely that the two worked together towards a common cause, the pan-Indian movement that aspired to keep the United States of America from spreading further westward.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 372.

Tecumseh, born in territory that is now Ohio sometime between 1768 and 1771, rose to prominence among the Shawnee as a great warrior.⁹³ The Shawnee were divided into families, each led by a chief. Benjamin Drake, one of Tecumseh's earliest and most prominent biographers (writing in 1841), describes this organization:

Of these twelve [original families], the names of but four tribes are preserved, the rest having become extinct, or incorporated with them. They are, 1st. the Mequachake,—2d. The Chillicothe,—3d. the Kiskapocoke,—4th. The Piqua....In each of the four tribes, except the Mequachake, the chiefs owe their authority to merit, but in the last named, the office is hereditary....Mequachake, signifies a perfect man. To this tribe the priesthood is confided.⁹⁴

Tecumseh and his siblings belonged to what modern historians name the Kispoko tribe (Kiskapocoke in the quotation from Drake).⁹⁵ Based on his merit, therefore, Tecumseh became a chief beginning in 1795.⁹⁶

Early historians initially stereotyped Tecumseh as the epitome of the “noble savage” because of his diplomacy and compassion. Romantic historians in the nineteenth century, such as Benjamin Drake and Reed Beard, idealized him for this, especially in comparison to Tenskwatawa, who received much criticism because of his religious fervor. Additionally, the Shawnee Prophet was born slightly twisted, making him much less handsome and athletic than Tecumseh. To add to this, he lost his right eye in a hunting accident early in life, adding to his physical deformity and giving romantics the opportunity to speculate that his outer appearance was a sign of his troubled mind and spirit. This simply demonstrates the willingness of white society at the time to laud those

⁹³ Benjamin Drake, *Life of Tecumseh and of his Brother the Prophet, with a Historical Sketch of the Shawanoe Indians* (Cincinnati: H.S. and J. Applegate and co., 1841), 67.

⁹⁴ Drake, 17. Richard White lists five Shawnee families extant in the 18th century: Chillicothe, Hathawekela, Kispoko, Mequachake, and Piqua. White, 191.

⁹⁵ John Sugden, *Tecumseh: a Life* (New York: Henry Holt and co., 1998), 13.

⁹⁶ Drake, 83.

who showed signs of conforming to white standards, while denouncing those who were openly different.

Tecumseh's conflict with the United States centered on the Greenville Treaty, signed in 1795. A description of the Greenville Treaty, however, begs an explanation of the conflict that it resolved. Throughout the 1780s and 1790s, large number of American pioneers advanced into the Ohio country—20,000 between 1785 and 1790. Either in response to a perceived threat, or as a natural result of the increased population density of the area, the native inhabitants killed large numbers of these settlers—between 1,500 and 2,000 in the 1780s. The settlers pressed the United States government to retaliate. Nevertheless, the government withheld military assistance until 1790, when federal interests required an army. In 1787, Congress had passed the Northwest Ordinance, which claimed federal ownership of a vast amount of territory between the Great Lakes and the Ohio River, up to the Mississippi. Such a claim required the presence of U.S. troops to back it up.⁹⁷ Thus, the United States sent troops as much to protect its land from settlers as to protect settlers from Native Americans.

Unfortunately, poor diplomacy by the army commanders aggravated local Indians.⁹⁸ The situation reached its breaking point when Henry Knox, the Secretary of War, informed the British of the American army's plan to raise a militia and attack the Miami and the Shawnee (in order to allay possible British concerns about the amassing force). British officer Maj. Patrick Murray, the recipient of this message, informed the Miami and Shawnee. Little Turtle and Blue Jacket, the Miami and Shawnee war chiefs, then gathered their tribes and allies (including warriors from the Ottawa, the Fox, and the

⁹⁷ Bil Gilbert, *God Gave Us This Country: Tekamthi and the First American Civil War* (New York: Atheneum, 1989), 132-133.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 134-135.

Sauk) and ambushed the American force in the autumn of 1790.⁹⁹ For five years the Indian alliance and the United States engaged in a series of raids and skirmishes. For the most part, the alliance held the upper hand, until a pivotal battle in 1794, the Battle of Fallen Timbers. The previous year, in the winter of 1793, Lord Dorchester, the governor of Canada, gave a speech to a gathering of Iroquois and other Native Americans from the St. Lawrence area. He reminded them of grievances against the United States, and hinted that Britain might be favorable to going to war with the Americans: “I shall not be surprized [sic] if we are at war with them in the course of the present year.”¹⁰⁰ He spoke out of anger and did not represent British policy; nevertheless, the Indians believed that Britain would support their effort (the British Indian agents had already been supplying the alliance with goods).

Benjamin Drake said of the battle in 1794, “this memorable action ... gave victory to the American army, and humbled the north-western Indians”.¹⁰¹ Indeed, the American army decisively held the upper hand for the first time. Historian Robert McAfee (1816) described the result of the battle as “a complete discomfiture of the Indians”.¹⁰² Although their descriptions of the battle are technically accurate, it must be noted that these two early-19th century American historians felt a definite “us-versus-them” attitude regarding the events they wrote about. Thus, their exuberant descriptions of the American victory were likely slightly exaggerated for both dramatic effect and national pride.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 137-138.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 173.

¹⁰¹ Drake, 82.

¹⁰² Robert Breckinridge McAfee, *History of the Late War in the Western Country* (Lexington, 1816), in *Tecumseh: Fact and Fiction in Early Records; a Book of Primary Source Materials*, ed. Carl Frederick Klinck (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1961), 27.

The *coup de grace* for the native alliance, however, came not from the American troops but from the British. When Blue Jacket's warriors retreated from the battle, they arrived at the nearby British Fort Miamis expecting shelter—the fort had provided them with provisions right up until the battle began—and found, instead, a barred gate guarded by armed men under instructions not to let them in.¹⁰³ The British refused them shelter, not wanting to start a battle with the pursuing Americans. Their fears were justified; when the American army arrived, Captain William Campbell, the commandant, sent a message to Anthony Wayne, who commanded the Americans, asking why the army was camped outside the gates of Fort Miamis. Wayne replied that they were searching the area for Native Americans. He added ominously that, had he found any, Campbell's post and guns "would not have much impeded the progress of the Victorious Army under my command."¹⁰⁴ Blue Jacket and his warriors eventually reached the Lake Erie. There, British Indian agents Alexander McKee and Matthew Elliott cared for the tattered army, supplying food and clothing. Devoid of the desire to continue fighting under the circumstances, representatives of the Indian nations traveled to Greenville in January 1795, to discuss peace.¹⁰⁵

The Americans hoped, through the Treaty of Greenville, to obtain as much of the Ohio valley area as possible without unduly aggravating the native inhabitants by taking too much. The treaty established a boundary between territory belonging to the white Americans and the natives, although the United States reserved the right to establish and maintain military bases within the native territory. The treaty essentially declared that, aside from some particular tracts of land, the United States owned the country up to the

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁴ Gilbert, 182.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 183-184.

Ohio River, but not beyond: “The United States relinquish their claims to all other Indian lands northward of the river Ohio, eastward of the Mississippi, and westward and southward of the Great Lakes and the waters uniting them.”¹⁰⁶ The Americans also promised the Indians a yearly stipend of goods worth \$9,500. Blue Jacket, who received \$300 per year through a private arrangement, agreed to the terms of the treaty. Little Turtle argued that the Americans claimed important hunting grounds and travel routes, but the other chiefs saw no problem—in August of 1795 the representatives of twelve Indian nations—the Wyandot, Delaware, Shawnees, Ottawa, Chippewa, Potawatomi, Miami, Eel-river, Weas, Kispoko, Piankashaw, and Kaskaskia signed the treaty with the United States.¹⁰⁷

Tecumseh, who had participated in the raids and skirmishes of the war as a commander but not a tactician, opted to not attend the conference at Greenville.¹⁰⁸ His motives for doing so are not known, but one might suppose that he did so as a form of protest—the Greenville conference was, essentially, a setting for American Indians to formally surrender to the Americans. Not doing so, therefore, raised Tecumseh’s status in the opinions of other Native American chiefs.¹⁰⁹

In the years following the treaty, Tecumseh and his people stayed more or less on the move, forced to do so by a game scarcity largely caused by increasing American settlement, the fur trade, and war. They stayed for most of 1795 at Deer Creek, migrated to the upper Miami Valley in 1796, and in 1797 moved on to the White Water River in

¹⁰⁶ “A Treaty of Peace between the United States of America and the Tribes of Indians, called the Wyandots, Delawares, Shawanoes, Ottawas, Chipewas, Putawatimes, Miamis, Eel-river, Weea’s, Kickapoos, Piankashaws, and Kaskaskias,” 3 August 1795, in *Indian Affairs, Laws and Treaties*, ed. Charles J. Kappler, LL. M., vol. II (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1904; reprint, New York: Ams Press, 1971), 39.

¹⁰⁷ Gilbert, 188-189.

¹⁰⁸ Drake, 83.

¹⁰⁹ Gilbert, 191.

eastern Indiana, where they stayed until 1800. At this time they joined a group of Delaware on the White River, where they lived for five years.¹¹⁰

Thomas Jefferson was president at this time (1801-1809). In his own words, he wanted the United States to co-exist peacefully with American Indians. In a confidential letter (1803) to William H. Harrison Governor of the Indiana Territory, he wrote: “Our system is to live in perpetual peace with the Indians, to cultivate an affectionate attachment from them...by giving them effectual protection against wrongs from our own people.”¹¹¹ He wrote of encouraging American Indians to rely on agriculture for sustenance because of the game scarcity—and how this would encourage them to relinquish the vast tracts of land they used to hunt in exchange for small plots. He also declared that he intended “at our trading houses to sell so low as merely to repay us cost and charges.”¹¹² This, he said, would discourage private traders, “and we shall thus get clear of this pest.”¹¹³ Thus, in a way, Jefferson intended to be “father” to Native Americans living in the United States; on the other hand, he expected more out of the relationship than Onontio had. He wanted American Indians to either assimilate or “remove beyond the Mississippi.”¹¹⁴

In 1805 Tenskwatawa, who was at that time a drunkard and a shaman of little repute named Laulewasikaw, passed out at his campfire and, when he awoke, claimed to have visited the Great Spirit, from whom he received instructions to pass on to his

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 191-192.

¹¹¹ Thomas Jefferson to Governor William H. Harrison, 27 February 1803, in *Tecumseh: Fact and Fiction in Early Records; a Book of Primary Source Materials*, ed. Carl Frederick Klinck (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1961), 57.

¹¹² *Ibid.*

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*

people.¹¹⁵ Upon his return he took the name Tenskwatawa, which means “The Open Door.”¹¹⁶ From his new position of spiritual power, the Prophet preached against societal evils such as drunkenness, witchcraft, and spousal abuse. The story of his journey changed slightly with each retelling, although this could be attributed to the fact that a different witness recorded his story each time. For the most part, accounts of his vision come to us through historians writing well after the fact.

According to Drake (1841), when Tenskwatawa first spoke to an assemblage of various tribes, “He told them that since he had become a prophet, he went up into the clouds; that the first place he came to was the dwelling of the Devil, and that all who had died drunkards were there, with flames issuing out of their mouths”.¹¹⁷ The instructions Tenskwatawa received from the Great Spirit centered on separation from the influence of white men. Reed Beard, a historian writing in 1889, described Tenskwatawa’s call for social reform:

In the religion taught by The Prophet were found many virtues, gained for the most part by contact with white travelers, and adulterated with Indian superstition. He insisted upon temperance, preaching total abstinence from intoxicants. He taught reverence for old age and sympathy for the weak and infirm. He condemned the intermarriage of different races and believed that the Indians should adhere to their own customs of living, especially in dress.¹¹⁸

Beard, of course, saw virtues in the similarities between Tenskwatawa’s message and his own Christian beliefs. His bias as a white American living in the 19th century—a religiously charged period—inclined him toward approval of values that reflected

¹¹⁵ White, 503.

¹¹⁶ Drake, 86-87.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 87.

¹¹⁸ Reed Beard, *The Battle of Tippecanoe; Historical Sketches of the Famous Field Upon Which General William Henry Harrison Won Renown That Aided Him in Reaching the Presidency; Lives of the Prophet and Tecumseh, with Many Interesting Incidents of their Rise and Overthrow. The Campaign of 1888 and Election of General Benjamin Harrison* (Chicago: Donuhue and Henneberry, printers, 1889), 13-14.

Christian beliefs. He also approved of a separation of the races, which is why he includes condemnation of intermarriage in his list of virtues.

Tenskwatawa's own words come to us through a speech he made in 1808 to Major-General William H. Harrison. Harrison had been afraid that Tenskwatawa was a tool of the British, but the prophet assured him: "I had no other intention but to introduce among the Indians those good principles of religion which the white people profess."¹¹⁹ He went on to report the essential part of his vision: "The Great Spirit told me to tell the Indians, that he had made them and made the world—that he had placed them on it to do good, and not evil...That we ought to consider ourselves as one man...that they should not drink whiskey...and that they must always follow the directions of the Great Spirit."¹²⁰ He spoke of his accomplishments at that time: "The religion which I have established for the last three years, has been attended to by the different tribes of Indians in this part of the world. Those Indians were once different people; they are now but one; they are all determined to practise [sic] what I have communicated to them."¹²¹ Thus, three years after his vision, Tenskwatawa had gathered members of various tribes and forged them into a homogenous group, convincing them to abandon whiskey and to rely more on agriculture than on hunting, reducing the effects of the game scarcity.

In his speech to Harrison, Tenskwatawa also professed good intentions toward the United States. He claimed that he forbid his followers from taking up the tomahawk, and according to Moses Dawson, a historian writing in 1824, "He frequently, in presence of the Governor, harangued his followers, and his constant theme was the evils arising from

¹¹⁹ Moses Dawson, *Historical Narrative of the Civil and Military Services of Major-General William H. Harrison* (Cincinnati, 1824), in *Tecumseh: Fact and Fiction in Early Records; a Book of Primary Source Materials*, ed. Carl Frederick Klinck (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1961), 50.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 51.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*

war, and from the immoderate use of ardent spirits”.¹²² He said to Harrison: “I now inform you that it is our intention to live in peace with our father [Thomas Jefferson] and his people for ever.”¹²³ As this turned out not to be true, a number of possible explanations present themselves. First, it is possible that he did intend to live in peace with the Americans but eventually accepted the inevitability of war. Second, he who translated or transcribed the speech may have made an error. It would seem that he made other errors—the title of the speech refers to Tenskwatawa as “Lolawawchicka, or The Loud Voice.” The prophet, however, used the name Tenskwatawa by this time; furthermore, most other translations of “Lauliwasika” give the name the meaning “the rattle.”¹²⁴ Another possibility is that Tenskwatawa went to Harrison with the intention of calming his fears, essentially saying what needed to be said in order to placate him, as the Shawnee brothers were not yet ready for war. According to Dawson, Tenskwatawa announced his intention to visit Harrison by sending a messenger who gave “a very pacific and conciliatory speech. The bearer of the message complained bitterly of the misrepresentation which had been circulated relative to the prophet’s views and dispositions towards the citizens of the United States.”¹²⁵ Thus, Tenskwatawa’s speech, though in his own words (or as close as we can get through the filter of translation and transcription), is partially suspect because it was designed to persuade the governor not to go to war against his people. Like Neolin, Tenskwatawa’s message reflected the blend of white culture with tradition that characterized Native American society at the time. His vision of drunkards burning in the afterlife, for example, reflects the Christian idea of

¹²² *Ibid.*, 50.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 51.

¹²⁴ Bourne, 324; Alfred A. Cave, “The Failure of the Shawnee Prophet’s Witch-hunt,” *Ethnohistory*. 42 (1995), 451.

¹²⁵ Dawson, 49.

hell. Richard White attests that Tenskwatawa was influenced by other prophets as well as by American religious upheavals. He cites the appearance of Shakers in 1802—Americans who fell over as though dead, then upon regaining consciousness, repented of their sins and started new lives of goodness. It is possible that this influenced Tenskwatawa; however, there is no evidence of his contact with Shakers until after he settled at Greenville.¹²⁶

Another interesting correlation between this revised American Indian religion and Christianity is the concurrence of Neolin and Tecumseh's movements with the First and Second Great Awakenings—a series of Christian religious movements. The First Great Awakening, roughly occurring in the 1730s and 1740s, preceded Neolin's movement, while the Second Great Awakening, occurring approximately in the 1820s and 1830s, followed Tenskwatawa's movement. The Great Awakenings affected not only whites but slaves and Native Americans as well—American Indian participation in Christian meetings increased dramatically.¹²⁷ It is possible, therefore, that the Christian movements influenced, and later were influenced by, the movements of Native American prophets. It is also possible that they occurred in such similar time frames because both cultures experienced similar societal environments—environments that created an atmosphere ideal for religious revival. For example, Anthony Wallace wrote of the early eighteenth century,

the difficulties of the early settlers in the Seneca country were not merely the first-year sufferings of pioneers in a new land. To the inevitable hardships and disappointments of frontier life had been added the misery of irredeemable poverty. It is not surprising, therefore, that across this dark and barren country a wave a religious enthusiasm began to swell.¹²⁸

¹²⁶ White, 504.

¹²⁷ Bourne, 182.

¹²⁸ Wallace, 215.

Thus, both white settlers and American Indians in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries lived in a time of depravation, which led to religious revivals.

Despite some influence by white culture, Tenskwatawa, like Neolin, rejected it. Aside from desiring a separation from American influence, he also gave Americans a new identity. He associated them with the sea and therefore the Great Serpent, who represented evil powers. The Americans' connections with the Great Serpent essentially made them devils. White wrote, "Just as Indian haters envisioned Algonquians [Great Lakes tribes] as devil worshippers and 'red devils,' so Americans had become children of the Great Serpent."¹²⁹ Thus, the new racial identity that began in Neolin's time had fully become reciprocal Indian hating by Tenskwatawa's time.

Tenskwatawa also instigated a campaign against witchcraft. Traditionally, historians credited this campaign with a rapidly formed, enthusiastic following. John Heckewelder, the Moravian missionary, wrote in 1876 that the Shawnee prophet's "bold assertions met with implicit belief, and he obtained by that means such an unlimited command over a credulous multitude, that at last, he had only to speak the word, or even to nod, and the pile was quickly prepared by willing executioners."¹³⁰ Although Heckewelder witnessed some prophets in person, he did not seem to be well acquainted with Tenskwatawa—in fact, he mistakenly believed that Tecumseh and the Shawnee Prophet were the same person. His information, therefore, must have been secondhand at best. Additionally, according to Drake, Tenskwatawa singled out individuals, especially chiefs, who were hostile to him or to his design (at times, traditional-minded chiefs resisted unity, and acculturated individuals favored accommodation with the United

¹²⁹ White, 507.

¹³⁰ Heckewelder, 297.

States. The subsequent loss of reputation, if not life, discredited the individuals and made their negative opinions regarding the Prophet much less valid.¹³¹ According to Alfred A. Cave, however, recent historians have questioned the supposed enthusiasm for the witch-hunt, due to a lack of solid evidence concerning how many people the Prophet and his followers actually executed as witches.¹³²

The concept of what is called witchcraft is different in Native American society than in European society. Witches were malicious people who abused power that could be used benevolently. This power was usually associated with a talisman, the medicine bag or bundle. Thus, having supernatural powers was not evil; only malevolent use of this power to cause misfortune made an individual a witch. The fear of witchcraft was common in Native American culture before the appearance of Europeans. Whether or not witches were commonly executed is a questionable matter.

The climate of deprivation and demoralization that led to the profusion of prophets in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries also led to a heightened fear of witchcraft. After Europeans arrived in North America, bringing with them new diseases and war, Native American societies blamed these calamities on witchcraft used against them by the Europeans. This reflects the tendency to blame witchcraft on outsiders—societies commonly held that witches used their power on other tribes, not against their own clan.¹³³

Tenskwatawa did not strictly conform to the traditional definition of witchcraft. Traditionally, spiritual power could be used for either good or evil, but the Prophet wanted to destroy all medicine bundles, claiming that they held pieces of the Great

¹³¹ Drake, 88.

¹³² Cave, "The Failure of the Shawnee Prophet's Witch-hunt," 446.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 446-447, 452.

Serpent, an evil being, and blamed them for causing social strife, disorder, and sickness. Additionally, he did not adhere to the practice of accusing only outsiders—he accused members, and even chiefs, of the villages he visited.¹³⁴

Tenskwatawa's witch-hunt seems to have had a mixed reception. He did not force his hunt on terrified and unwilling communities; in fact, at times he visited communities that had already resolved to purge themselves of witches but needed Tenskwatawa's aid to point out the guilty parties.¹³⁵ The Delaware and Wyandot villages in which he picked out victims to burn had asked the Prophet to come to them and identify the witches amongst them.¹³⁶ Interestingly, many of those accused turned out to be people with connections to white culture—Christians, for example, or chiefs who had ceded land to the United States.¹³⁷ At Woapikamunk, the village the Delaware invited him to in 1806,¹³⁸ Tenskwatawa singled out five people (from a group of suspects chosen by the Delaware) as witches. The first was woman raised by Moravian missionaries, the second a chief who advocated accommodation with the United States, the third a Mahican interpreter for the Moravians, the fourth a Christian convert, nephew of the accused chief, and the fifth, who was not executed, the widow of the accused chief.¹³⁹

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 459.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 454.

¹³⁶ Gilbert, 222.

¹³⁷ Dowd, "Thinking and Believing," 7.

¹³⁸ This community, devastated by disease and therefore teeming with a fear of witchcraft, had already executed two women in 1802. Most of these Delaware suspected Christians to be responsible for the perceived spiritual attacks, since the disease did not appear until the Moravians established a mission in 1799. Unwilling to punish the converted Delaware, however, the village leaders' attention turned to two women—outsiders, one a Nanticoke and one a Mingo—who had allegedly spoke of a desire to harm the Delaware. This follows the traditional practice of suspecting outsiders, rather than members of one's own tribe, as witches. Suspicion against Christians, however, remained, and another outbreak of disease in 1805 motivated them to look for aid in identifying those responsible. Cave, "The Failure of the Shawnee Prophet's Witch-hunt," 455-456.

¹³⁹ Cave, "The Failure of the Shawnee Prophet's Witch-hunt," 456-458.

Despite this support, the witch-hunt faced strong opponents. According to Anthony Shane, a young man among the Delaware—the brother of the last woman accused of witchcraft—put a halt to the executions in his village with a few words of reason: “The devil has come among us, and we are killing each other”.¹⁴⁰ The Moravian missionaries, probably a less romantic and more reliable source, wrote in their diary for April 9-10 1806: “We heard that the savages were about to put to death their last surviving chief...the friends of the chief...threatened to kill anyone who should take part in the murder. This put a check on further slaughter.”¹⁴¹ The chief of the Wyandot stopped Tenskwatawa from executing any of the Wyandot witches he identified. By 1806, the Delaware and Shawnee tribes were divided amongst themselves in support of or opposition to Tenskwatawa’s witch-hunt.¹⁴²

Tecumseh’s position on his brother’s actions remains a matter of debate. Bil Gilbert (1989) contended that Tecumseh could have stopped the hunt at any time he wished, since the Delaware and Wyandot found it so easy to halt.¹⁴³ This argument makes logical sense, but is rather weakly based on the assumption that Tecumseh did indeed have the power to bend his brother to his will. The authority of the Wyandot chief did prevent any executions in his village, even after Tenskwatawa identified the “witches.” In the Delaware village, one bold young man halted the executions by bringing his fellow villagers back to reason. Neither community openly defied Tenskwatawa, as Tecumseh would have had to do in order to force his brother to

¹⁴⁰ Gilbert, 223

¹⁴¹ Cave, “The Failure of the Shawnee Prophet’s Witch-hunt,” 459.

¹⁴² Dowd, “Thinking and Believing,” 7.

¹⁴³ Gilbert, 223.

completely stop the hunt. Therefore, simply assuming Tecumseh had the same ability to halt the witch-hunts as the Wyandot and Delaware had done is a stretch.

Those with an inclination to idealize Tecumseh as a man of nobility and scruples—such as Benjamin Drake—contend that he vehemently opposed the witch-hunt. Drake wrote, “We have met with no evidence that Tecumseh favored the destruction of the Delawares, whose unhappy fate has been detailed. On the contrary, it is stated by a credible authority, [Anthony Shane—the son of a French-Canadian trader and a Shawnee woman—who idolized Tecumseh] that he was opposed to it”.¹⁴⁴ Observing Tecumseh’s position against burning *prisoners*, one could conclude that it is quite likely that Tecumseh also opposed burning *witches*. When he was young, as he watched warriors burn a prisoner of war for the first time, he reportedly felt extreme revulsion at such a practice. According to Drake (1841), “After it was over, he expressed in strong terms, his abhorrence of the act, and it was finally concluded by the party that they would never burn any more prisoners; and to this resolution he himself, and the party also, it is believed, ever afterwards scrupulously adhered”.¹⁴⁵ Drake, of course, had a great respect for Tecumseh as a mighty warrior, military leader, diplomat, and hero, and was probably inclined to believe the best about him. His subsequent glorification of Tecumseh’s nobility, genius, independence, eloquence, and sense of justice only serves to testify in favor of Drake’s bias. Gilbert, calling Drake and Shane apologists, believed that Tecumseh took a practical view of the witch-hunts—they set an example for those who were sympathetic to Americans.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁴ Drake, 91.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 68-69.

¹⁴⁶ Gilbert, 223.

Barring exaggeration on the part of early historians, and the possibility that witches did not rate the same humane treatment as prisoners in Tecumseh's eyes, one could reasonably conclude that Tecumseh would not have supported Tenskwatawa's campaign. Whether or not he actually opposed his brother and tried to put a stop to him is another matter—perhaps he respected the Prophet enough to leave him to his own devices. Nevertheless, this unresolved disagreement between the two brothers implies that Tecumseh did not control Tenskwatawa, else he would have prevented the prophet from conducting witch hunts. Thus, one must conclude that either Tecumseh believed in and supported his brother's actions, or did not have the power to oppose him. Either way, it would seem that Tecumseh did not control Tenskwatawa.

During Tecumseh's travels between 1803 and 1811, he addressed both American and Indian audiences from the Great Lakes to the Gulf coast regarding the atrocities committed upon the red man by the white. As American settlers pushed beyond the boundaries established by the Greenville treaty, conflicts often sprang up between the two races.¹⁴⁷ Tecumseh cried out against individual violence and racial mistreatment. He often pointed out the malicious nature of white men—who, he said, hungered for native hunting grounds. A report (attributed to General Sam Dale, a frontiersman, and dictated at an unspecified date) of Tecumseh's 1811 speech to the Creek provides an example of this. The witness wrote this version because, as he said, "His speech has been reported, but no one has done or can do it justice. I think I can repeat the substance of what he said, and, indeed, his very words."¹⁴⁸ According to this report, Tecumseh said of

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 206.

¹⁴⁸ J.F.H. Claiborne, *Life and Times of General Sam Dale, The Mississippi Partisan* (New York, 1860), in *Tecumseh: Fact and Fiction in Early Records; a Book of Primary Source Materials*, ed. Carl Frederick Klinck (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1961), 94.

the white race, “They seize your land; they corrupt your women; they trample on the ashes of your dead. Back, whence they came, upon a trail of blood, they must be driven...This is the will of the Great Spirit, revealed to my brother, his familiar, the Prophet of the Lakes. He sends me to you.”¹⁴⁹

The Shawnee brothers’ aim was to push white settlers back to the Greenville boundary—in other words, to enforce the treaty where the United States would not. Thus, Tecumseh and Tenskwatawa adopted a more modest goal than that of Pontiac and Neolin. Perhaps knowing that they had no hope of driving the Americans from the continent, they simply desired to halt the spread of westward settlers, to keep the west for Native Americans. In order to accomplish their goal, they endeavored to unite the Indian tribes—to make them a single race instead of a group of separate nations. Whereas Pontiac sent war belts to other nations to ask for their support as he attacked, the Shawnee brothers sought to forge unity before they started an all-out war. As Tecumseh traveled, both with his brother and on his own, he gathered supporters for their cause.

In 1805, about the same time that Lauliwethica became Tenskwatawa, the brothers and their followers settled at Greenville, at the insistence of the Prophet. Tenskwatawa claimed the Great Spirit instructed him to settle there to “receive and instruct all from the different tribes that were willing to be good”.¹⁵⁰ By “good”, the Prophet meant willing to leave their “wicked” (unbelieving) chiefs and follow him instead. This prerogative, of course, shows a degree of control on Tenskwatawa’s part, since his designs overrode those of this brother, who had planned to continue on to

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 96-97.

¹⁵⁰ Dowd, “Thinking and Believing,” 7.

Auglaize, where the two had been invited to settle with their followers.¹⁵¹ From Greenville, the brothers continued their campaign, each winning support for their cause in a different manner. The community that Tecumseh and Tenskwatawa established here—in symbolic defiance of the Treaty of Greenville—was a mixture of Indians from many different tribes.¹⁵² Thus their ideal nation, which transcended tribal identities, was becoming a reality.

While Tenskwatawa focused his efforts on changing Indian society, Tecumseh was more willing to maintain diplomatic relations with America, at least at first, in order to achieve his goals. This willingness to compromise can be related to the willingness of Pontiac (and likely Neolin) to maintain relations with the French—in fact, to seek to bring them back to power. Perhaps all these men knew they could not succeed in a direct confrontation with the established power, and compromised accordingly. Both brothers exchanged communications with William Henry Harrison, the governor of the Indiana territory. Tecumseh, while usually civil to the governor, strongly believed that Harrison had illegitimately purchased the Indiana territory, since he bought it from small tribes who had questionable rights to the land to begin with. An example of this comes to us through the historian Benjamin Drake, who drew information on an 1810 meeting between Harrison and Tecumseh from a family letter written by Captain G.R. Floyd, who was present at the meeting. According to Drake,

Tecumseh opened the meeting by stating, at length, his objections to the treaty of fort Wayne¹⁵³, made by governor Harrison in the previous year; and in the course

¹⁵¹ Since the brothers' community did not reach Auglaize, the settlements there migrated to Greenville to join them. Drake, 86.

¹⁵² Dowd, "Thinking and Believing," 3.

¹⁵³ In 1809 Harrison concluded the treaty of Fort Wayne with chiefs of the Delaware, Miami, Potawatomi, Eel River, Wea, Kispoko, Piankashaw, and Kaskaskia—all of whom were subsidized by the United States. These chiefs agreed to sell over 3 million acres of land along the Wabash—territory barred from American

of his speech, boldly avowed the principle of his party to be, that of resistance to every cession of land, unless made by all the tribes, who, he contended, formed but one nation.¹⁵⁴

This became a reoccurring theme in Tecumseh's speeches—only the Indian nation as a whole, he said, should have the right to bargain away land that belonged to everyone.

Harrison did his best to dissuade Indians from following the Prophet or joining Tecumseh's nation. According to historian Moses Dawson (1824), whose account cites the original document, in 1807 Harrison sent a speech to the Shawnees, delivered by John Conner, an American Indian agent. In it he pleads: "My children, this business must be stopped. You have called in a number of men from the most distant tribes, to listen to a fool, who speaks not the words of the Great Spirit, but those of the devil, and of the British agents".¹⁵⁵ The United States feared that Tenskwatawa worked with the British in an anti-American conspiracy—Jefferson reminisced to Adams in 1812, "We let him [Tenskwatawa] go on...unmolested. But his followers increased until the British thought him worth corrupting, and found him corruptible."¹⁵⁶ It is interesting to note that he goes on to say that after this he left the administration, and was never "informed what were the particular acts on his part, which produced an actual commencement of hostilities on ours."¹⁵⁷ The Shawnee brothers, in fact, did nothing to commence hostilities.

In 1807 Harrison demanded that the brothers and their 400 or so followers remove themselves from his territory and relocate beyond the boundary established by the treaty of Greenville. The United States feared that the Indians had gathered together in

settlement according to the terms of the treaty of Greenville—to the United States. This caused a great deal of anger among members of tribes not present at the signing of the treaty. Gilbert, 250-251.

¹⁵⁴ Drake, 125.

¹⁵⁵ Dawson, 48.

¹⁵⁶ Thomas Jefferson to John Adams, 20 April 1812, in *Tecumseh: Fact and Fiction in Early Records; a Book of Primary Source Materials*, ed. Carl Frederick Klinck (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1961), 53.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

preparation for war. Contrary to his intent, Harrison's diplomacy caused a stir and more natives moved to Greenville in defiance of the governor and in support of Tecumseh, bringing their numbers to 700 or 800 by the end of the summer.¹⁵⁸

In 1808, after Greenville's resources could no longer support the growing community, Tecumseh, Tenskwatawa, and their followers relocated to the banks of the Tippecanoe, on territory granted to them by the Potawatamies and Kickapos.¹⁵⁹ From a settlement popularly known as Prophet's Town, the brothers attracted more followers to their union. Many historians contend that Tecumseh now used his brother to validate his own plans. For example, Reed Beard (1889) wrote, "The Prophet and his superstitious religion were used as tools by Tecumseh. Although The Prophet appeared for some time the greater, his popularity was made to serve the ambitious political purposes of his intellectual and sagacious brother".¹⁶⁰ Beard, of course, credited Tecumseh for being the brains of the operation. He chose not to believe that a superstitious man such as Tenskwatawa could also be as successful a negotiator as his brother, who was more socially acceptable in the context of Beard's white culture.

Some historians credit Tenskwatawa with being the first to speak of a united Indian nation. Beard asserts that not only did Tecumseh devise this enterprise, but he also developed the religious movement that went along with it: "The idea of ruling the Indians by a supposed mediation between them and God, in all probability had its origin in Tecumseh's fertile mind".¹⁶¹ Drake (1841), on the other hand, implies that, if anything, this relationship described by Beard was reversed: "The sacred office which the

¹⁵⁸ Drake, 94.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 105.

¹⁶⁰ Beard, 23.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 24.

Prophet had impiously assumed, enabled him to sway many minds, and in doing so, he was effectively sustained by the personal presence, tact, and sagacity of his brother”.¹⁶²

Rather than being Tecumseh’s puppet the Prophet utilized his brother’s skills in order to supplement his own powerful attributes.

Nevertheless, Tecumseh and Tenskwatawa were both aware of Pontiac’s uprising, and knew that they followed in the footsteps of others. According to Parkman, Tecumseh “adopted him [Pontiac] for his model, proving himself no unworthy imitator.”¹⁶³

According to a letter Harrison sent to the Secretary of War, Tenskwatawa also “boasted that he would follow in the footsteps of the Great Pontiac.”¹⁶⁴ Dowd (1992) argued that Tecumseh and Tenskwatawa’s movement drew on a legacy of ideas dating back to the 1740s—other prophets, other attempts at unity, and other hopes of recapturing the sacred power lost after contact with Europeans.

Like Pontiac and Neolin, the Shawnee brothers did not achieve their goals. A great loss of the Prophet’s power—though not Tecumseh’s, at least not entirely—came with the battle of Tippecanoe. Tecumseh left the settlement—taking warriors with him and leaving Tenskwatawa with a skeletal force—to speak to the southern tribes. Believing that he planned on being absent for only three months, Harrison acted quickly to destroy Prophet’s Town, ostensibly to protect the white settlers from “the murderous depredations of the Indians”.¹⁶⁵ He marched toward the settlement with about 910 soldiers.¹⁶⁶ Before dawn on November 6, 1811, the remaining Indians at Tippecanoe, believing themselves to be invincible under Tenskwatawa’s spiritual protection, attacked

¹⁶² Drake, 106.

¹⁶³ Parkman, 483.

¹⁶⁴ Harrison to Secretary of War, 14 June 1810, quoted in Dowd, “Thinking and Believing,” 310.

¹⁶⁵ Beard, 45.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 53.

the American army, which was encamped within a mile of the town. Tenskwatawa had said to them, “They [the Americans] sleep now, and will never awake. The Great Spirit will give light to us, and darkness to the white men. Their bullets shall not harm us; your weapons shall always be fatal”.¹⁶⁷ Despite the Prophet’s promise, many warriors died during the battle. While the battle itself was not decisive, and it did not decimate the Native American army, Tenskwatawa’s failure to deliver victory to the Indians meant that the Americans won by default, since his followers lost faith in his promises.

The Prophet’s authority all but vanished. Beard wrote, “The battle of Tippecanoe was fought contrary to the orders of Tecumseh, who, when he returned from the South with his confederacy completed, found that all had been ruined by the folly of his brother”.¹⁶⁸ This is an exaggeration—Tecumseh’s confederacy was hardly completed, and fault for the loss at Tippecanoe could not be placed solely on Tenskwatawa’s shoulders. Furthermore, while Tecumseh wished to avoid (or at least postpone) outright conflict with the United States, defending the town against an American attack probably didn’t refute his orders. Nevertheless, only two days after the battle the Americans found Prophet’s Town completely deserted, save one chief with a broken leg. The American army destroyed the town and the supplies that remained in it.¹⁶⁹

Later that year Harrison reported to the war department that the two principal chiefs of the Kickapoos parleyed with him and informed him that “the whole of the tribes who lost warriors in the late action, attribute their misfortune to the Prophet alone; that

¹⁶⁷ Benson J. Lossing, *The Pictorial Field-Book of the War of 1812* (New York, 1869), in *Tecumseh: Fact and Fiction in Early Records*, ed. Carl Frederick Klinck (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1961), 100.

¹⁶⁸ Beard, 67.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 73

they constantly reproach him with their misfortunes, and threaten him with death”.¹⁷⁰

Many historians (Drake and Gilbert, for example), basing their reports on that of Anthony Shane, maintain that even Tecumseh threatened to kill Tenskwatawa for his folly.¹⁷¹

Whatever words passed between the brothers, the Prophet lost his credibility at Tippecanoe, as did Tecumseh to some extent. Not completely abandoned by his followers, Tenskwatawa resided among various tribes and eventually crossed to lands west of the Mississippi, where most of the Kispoko Shawnee had migrated by the time he first had his vision in 1805.¹⁷² There, he lived out the rest of his days as chief of a small Shawnee village.¹⁷³

Thus far, Tecumseh’s efforts to build his confederacy had been promising. It is possible that he could have made similar progress even without the support in his brother. Complete loss of faith in Tenskwatawa, however, combined with a loss of faith in what united tribes could do against the Americans, led many tribes to rethink their commitment to the pan-Indian union and reconsider the benefits of friendly relations with the United States. Tecumseh continued his efforts to build his confederacy. A British officer reported to his General in 1812, “The Prophet and his people do not appear as a vanquished enemy; they re-occupy their former ground”.¹⁷⁴ Indeed they were not vanquished, but any confidence their followers had in their ability to defeat the United States in battle had been shattered. The Prophet’s powers had failed. Tecumseh, while moderately successful at keeping the tribes of his confederacy together, could no longer

¹⁷⁰ Harrison to war department, 4 December 1811, quoted in Benjamin Drake, *Life of Tecumseh and of his Brother the Prophet, with a Historical Sketch of the Shawanoe Indians* (Cincinnati: H.S. and J. Applegate and co., 1841), 155.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 156.

¹⁷² White, 503.

¹⁷³ Bourne, 349.

¹⁷⁴ Colonel Elliott to General Brock, 12 January 1812, in *Tecumseh: Fact and Fiction in Early Records*, ed. Carl Frederick Klinck (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1961), 103.

retain authority as a leader of the consolidated nation. Without the influence of a religious figurehead, what he arranged was merely an alliance between chiefs. Tecumseh eventually allied himself with the British army, and fought against America until he died in battle in the War of 1812.¹⁷⁵ While he continued to distinguish himself as a warrior, he no longer had any hope of forging a united Indian nation.

As for the battle of Tippecanoe, in all likelihood, if Tecumseh and his forces had been present, Harrison would not have attacked—the General simply saw and exploited the weakness that the warriors left in his absence. Nevertheless, had Tecumseh been there, his diplomacy skills—or his military forces, as a last resort—might have saved the day and preserved the confederacy. The battle of Tippecanoe proved that neither brother could succeed without the skills and support of the other. Furthermore, barring insanity, if Tenskwatawa had been a puppet or a fraud, he would not have promised invincibility to his warriors. This promise would make absolutely no logical sense unless he believed it—for surely he knew that even if his warriors emerged victorious, some must die, thus invalidating his power and discrediting him almost as much as losing would have. Far from foolish, Tenskwatawa surely believed his own words as he promised that American guns would not harm his warriors. Had the Prophet been a fraud, he would have made a promise wrapped in obscurity, one less readily disproved—perhaps promising victory but not invincibility. Had he been his brother's puppet, he would never have taken it upon himself to attack the Americans against Tecumseh's wishes.

Tecumseh and Tenskwatawa had a reciprocal relationship. Each benefited from the other's authority in his particular sphere. If either had thoughts of dominating the other he was unsuccessful, as each maintained such a degree of independence that he was

¹⁷⁵ Drake, 324.

sovereign in his own realm. Nevertheless, they relied on each other—Tenskwatawa would have needed his brother's military leadership in order to have a chance at success at the battle of Tippecanoe, and Tecumseh could not remain the head of his confederacy without his brother's religious backing. Only when the brothers were separated did their powers fail.

Early historians tended to focus on military leaders such as Pontiac and Tecumseh rather than on religious figureheads such as Neolin and Tenkswatawa. They did so with purpose—they did not credit prophets as leaders but saw them as psychopaths. Furthermore, white historians who wanted to tell an exciting story often preferred the military leaders because it is in their campaigns one finds the action that appeals to white audiences. It is an exciting story to tell. The stories of the prophets, by contrast, seem relatively more mythic, less relevant, and less comprehensible to non-believers.

Despite this viewpoint, one does not need to ascribe to the truth of the prophet's messages in order to recognize their importance. The relevant fact is that they were believed—many American Indians, including Pontiac and Tecumseh, believed in the validity, the sheer relevancy, of the prophets' visions, and it is because of this that there is “action” to speak of—the prophets were catalysts for the nativist movements that grew up in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

The prophets' messages were not simply moral injunctions. Although both men attempted to rectify evils they saw in society, they also addressed “mundane” issues such as game scarcity, invasion of Native American land, and economic dependence on European and American trade and goods. Thus, the prophets sought to remedy not only society's evils but also its troubles. What White wrote about Tenskwatawa applies to

Neolin as well: “Tenskwatawa constructed a social and theological response to the conditions of the border villages.”¹⁷⁶ Both prophets preached in response to the social conditions they faced. This is no coincidence; the sociologist Bernard Barber, in his 1941 article “Acculturation and Messianic Movements,” asserted that “The general sociocultural situation that precipitates a messianic movement...[is characterized by] the widespread experience of ‘deprivation’—the despair caused by inability to obtain what the culture has defined as the ordinary satisfactions of life.”¹⁷⁷ This meant, first, that Neolin and Tenskwatawa sought to remedy social problems. Second, as both were affected by their environment—a blend of native and white culture—both combined traditional and Christian elements in what they preached.

Thus, the prophets’ messages, tailored to be relevant to the social situation at the time, attempted to change the situation. One way to go about this was to make people recognize their real problems and how to solve them. For example, Tenskwatawa wanted to address the problem of drunkenness. He described the place where drunkards went when they died, and then called for people to abstain entirely from intoxicants, lest they suffer thusly in the afterlife. His proscription against trade with the United States helped enforce this, as well as reducing the influence that American culture had on his people.

Another way of changing the social situation was inducing war leaders such as Pontiac and Tecumseh to put forth a military effort. Thus, the relationship between the religious figureheads, Neolin and Tenskwatawa, and the war leaders, Pontiac and Tecumseh, was symbiotic. Neolin and Tenskwatawa used the war leaders to effect the social changes desired by both parties, while Pontiac and Tecumseh used the nativism of

¹⁷⁶ White, 506.

¹⁷⁷ Barber, 664.

the prophets to create unity, thus allowing them to pursue the goals that all four men strove for.

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