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# Tecumseh and Tenskwatawa: Myth, Historiography and Popular Memory

Rachel Buff

They liked to romanticize the earlier days when they believed the Indians lived in a simple way and wore more colorful clothing than the complicated Indians who lived alongside them in the modern world. They believed the Indians used to have power. In the older, better times, that is, before the people had lost their land and their sacred places on earth to the very people who wished the Indians were as they had been in the past.

Linda Hogan<sup>1</sup>

The story of Tecumseh and his brother Tenskwatawa, known as the Great Shawnee Prophet, is told in both popular and official mythologies of the United States' national formation. Among a handful of Indians whose stories are recalled in official accounts of American development and westward expansion, Tecumseh is celebrated as one of the great patriot chiefs. These accounts treat him as a unique orator and brave warrior, an exemplary Indian whose failed defense of his people's land

1. Linda Hogan, *Mean Spirit* (New York, 1990), pp. 79-80.

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west of the Ohio River constitutes a noble footnote in the forward march of American destiny. In historical treatments more critical of emergent American nationalism which attempt to restore a narrative of Indian history and resistance, Tecumseh's perceptive call for unity among Indian nations during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries is recalled as is, less often, the role of the pan-Indian religion spread by Tenskwatawa as a fulfillment of this vision of Indian solidarity. To this day many Shawnee homes in Oklahoma contain portraits of Tecumseh, maintaining and expressing a popular memory of this story.<sup>2</sup>

These memories of Tecumseh and Tenskwatawa depend upon divergent ideas of patriotism and national formation. For the dominant story of an emerging American national identity, Tecumseh provides an image of native strength and determination that contributes to a romantic conception of the "Early National Period."<sup>3</sup> While Tenskwatawa, the Great Shawnee Prophet, tends to be marginalized or ignored in most mainstream accounts--I will examine this phenomenon below--the image of Tecumseh as an heroic warrior affirms the noble authenticity of Native American peoples and conjures up pictures of hand-to-hand combat. In this imagining of the past, the heroic effort to create a pan-Indian federation mirrors the struggle of the new Euroamerican republic to consolidate itself. This vision writes the failed Indian struggle into the romantic past of the American frontier landscape, usurping images of Indian nobility as part of the United States' national heritage and identity.

Alternatively, we can see this "Early National Period" as a time when ascendant official nationalism displaced popular social and political formations. Tecumseh and Tenskwatawa represent, in this context, the patriotism of a national-popular<sup>4</sup> character, and embody the emancipatory and diverse imaginings of a cultural politics struggling for local sovereignty. Tecumseh's understanding of colonial politics and his call for Indian self-determination and racial unity drew upon the cultural

2. James Howard, *Shawnee! The Ceremonialism of a Native Indian Tribe and Its Cultural Background* (Athens, OH, 1981), p. 197.

3. The most recent example of this type of treatment of Tecumseh and the pan-Indian federation is Allan Eckert, *A Sorrow in Our Heart: The Life of Tecumseh* (New York, 1992). See also Glenn Tucker, *Tecumseh: Vision of Glory* (New York, 1956); William Van Hoose, *Tecumseh: An Indian Moses* (Canton, OH, 1984) and David C. Cooke, *Tecumseh, Destiny's Warrior* (New York, 1959).

4. The term is Gramsci's, used to denote "an organic relationship between Italian intellectuals and the broad national masses." See David Forgacs, ed., *An Antonio Gramsci Reader* (New York, 1988), p. 363. See also George Lipsitz, *A Life in the Struggle: Ivory Perry and the Culture of Opposition* (Philadelphia, 1988).

strategies of diverse Indian nations during the first hundred fifty years of Indian resistance to Euroamerican colonization.<sup>5</sup> At the same time they pointed the way toward later ideologies of Indian self-determination and nationalism. Tenskwatawa's preachings for a return to traditions that would ensure the restoration of Indian land and peace are--like the Ghost Dance--part of an anticolonial movement spanning the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and combining religious and political forms of resistance. Tecumseh and Tenskwatawa posited an Indian claim of self-determination based on a coalition of tribes and cultures against Western, Enlightenment-based notions of state formation and individual rights.<sup>6</sup> They are, in this sense, sources for counter-memory and for writing history in a fashion that undermines the mythic treatment of American national identity during the "Early National Period."<sup>7</sup>

The core of my argument about Tecumseh and Tenskwatawa and their attempt to organize a pan-Indian resistance relies upon the conception of a national-popular history drawing its resources and strengths from sites of memory.<sup>8</sup> Tecumseh and Tenskwatawa attempted to articulate a unified, intellectual response to Euroamerican colonization. This response, and its popular appeal to diverse Indian nations from the Great Lakes to the Gulf of Mexico, involved complex negotiations with existing indigenous ideas about racial formation and identity, land tenure, and the ongoing syncretism of native and Christian religions. In addition, the resulting coalition drew upon pre-existing memories of connections among Indians of different tribes, dissenting whites, and the network that brought escaped African slaves into contact with sympathetic Indians. Tecumseh and Tenskwatawa

5. See Gregory Dowd, *A Spirited Resistance: The North American Indian Struggle for Unity, 1745-1815* (Baltimore, 1992), and Richard White, *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Regions, 1650-1815* (New York, 1991) for excellent revisionist accounts of Indian social, cultural and political history in this period; for racial formation theory, see Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States* (New York, 1989).

6. Roxanne Dunbar Ortiz, *Indians of the Americas* (London, 1984).

7. For an excellent elucidation of the cultural struggles over national consolidation in this period, see Alexander Saxton, *The Rise and Fall of the White Republic: Class Politics and Culture in Nineteenth-Century America* (London, 1991).

8. My observations on sites of memory follow from Pierre Nora, . For work on the imagining and construction of nationalism and alternative nationalism, see Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflection on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London, 1983), and Homi Bhaba, "DissemiNation," in Bhaba, ed., *Nation and Narration* (London, 1990).

have become sources for present-day counter-memory because they represented a popular uprising against an expansionist American nationalism.

My attempts to piece together the historical evidence of this popular movement have not put Tecumseh and Tenskwatawa—or the thousands of Shawnee, Potawatamie, Miami, Wyandot, Sauk and Fox, Winnebago, Mingo, Delaware, Creek, Osage, Kickapoo, Iroquois, Iowa, Dakota, Choctaw, Seminole, Chicasaw, Cherokee, Ottawa and Ojibwa who flocked to the Prophetstowns set up at Greenville and Tippecanoe, or fought in the battles of Tippecanoe, Thames or Brownstown, or dreamed dreams of liberation—back together again. As Gayatri Spivak and Ranajit Guha have noted historians cannot recover past subaltern consciousness. The available sources reflect the perspective of colonialists whose writings inevitably sought to obliterate the existence and memory of oppositional consciousness; the latter can never be fully recreated in the narratives that emerge from even such rich sources as the Draper Manuscripts, the font from which most writings about Tecumseh and Tenskwatawa derive their source. At the same time, Spivak and Guha argue, “Insurgency...was a motivated and conscious undertaking on the part of the rural masses.”<sup>9</sup> The historian confronts by an apparently insoluble dilemma: to analyze past struggles and avoid replicating the assumptions of colonial writing, we must understand consciousness; nevertheless, clear insight into subaltern consciousness eludes historical investigation.<sup>10</sup>

Along with these and similar issues raised by the Subaltern Studies Group, contemporary critics have raised questions about the location of American Indians in relation to traditional western historiography. Susan Hegemon notes that critics of this historiography tend to fall into two groups. One affirms the uniqueness of Indian experience and its incompatibility with western modes of explanation, including those of Euroamerican historiography. A second tends to minimize cultural differences between Euroamericans and American Indians, maintaining that even such nontraditional texts as “prehistoric myths” may be considered as historical information, “organized by interpretive

9. Ranajit Guha, “The Prose of Counter-Insurgency,” in *Selected Subaltern Studies*, Ranajit Guha and Gayatri Spivak, eds., (Oxford, 1988), p. 46.

10. See Ramon Gutierrez, *When Jesus Came, the Corn Mothers Went Away* (Stanford, 1990), for an excellent effort to recapture the context of subaltern experience around the time of the Pueblo Revolt of 1680. Gutierrez combines social history and anthropology to understand the changes in Pueblo life under Spanish colonization between 1500 and 1846.

schemas."<sup>11</sup> Hegemon describes historiography as caught between cultural essentialism and humanism. The former affirms radical, incommunicable differences among peoples, minimizing the possibility for cross-cultural understanding; humanism discounts these differences, all too often assuming the existence of common experiences and motivations.<sup>12</sup>

Telling the story of Tecumseh, Tenskwatawa and the political/cultural movement associated with them, then, involves issues concerning subaltern consciousness and historiographical perspective. Archival sources rely upon accounts written by Euroamerican military and government officials; upon ethnographic interviews, often conducted by Indian agents and military men, more rarely by early anthropologists like James Mooney; and upon the letters and journals of traders or captives--e.g., Stephen Ruddell, John Kinzie and Andrew Clark--associated with the pan-Indian federation.<sup>13</sup> Even though Indians and Euroamericans who heard Tecumseh speak agreed that he was an eloquent and capable orator, we have only Euroamerican transcriptions of his speeches and those of his compatriots.<sup>14</sup> Histories of battles, conferences and plans depend upon military sources, such as the letters and writings of Ohio Territories Governor William Henry Harrison, an enemy of Tecumseh.

Secondary sources such as nineteenth-century biographies draw heavily on these military accounts, and contemporary histories of Tecumseh, in turn, follow the lead of works like Benjamin Drake's *Life of Tecumseh and of his Brother the Prophet* (1841), which relies primarily on Harrison's letters and interviews with white frontier inhabitants. Given Drake's involvement with the political career of Harrison, who in 1840 successfully ran for president on the Whig slogan, "Tippecanoe and

11. Susan Hegemon, "History, Ethnography, Myth: Some Notes on the 'Indian-Centered' Narrative," *Social Text* 23 (1989): 144-160.

12. For a parallel discussion of this problem in anthropology, see Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes its Object* (New York, 1983), and James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art* (Cambridge, MA, 1988).

13. Lyman C. Draper, Manuscript Collection, State Historical Society, Madison, WI: MSS, 8YY3-4.

14. Although he spoke English, Tecumseh only addressed white audiences in Shawnee. The speeches of others, like Roundhead, a Wyandot ally of Tecumseh, and interviews conducted much later with surviving Shawnee, Cherokee and Creek Indians by and cited in the correspondence of Lyman C. Draper were translated into English.

Tyler Too," his perspective was clearly aligned with nineteenth-century narratives of emergent American nationalism.<sup>15</sup>

Authors of tertiary accounts who intend to set the score straight by gleaning oppositional memory from diverse sources are still driven back to colonialist writings. For Guha, even Marxists attempting to intervene historiographically tend to replicate the failure of colonialist writing to recognize a subaltern consciousness, reducing peasant insurgents to the social and economic forces of a positivist social science. We can understand the history told by demographics and official politics more easily than we can account for the variability of historical memory and the damage that such memories incur with time and the loss of land and culture. In 1882 A.W. Chamberlain, a Cherokee living in Indian Territory, responded to Lyman Draper's queries about Tecumseh's activities with an instructive observation: "The removal from our eastern home to this [place] caused [an] early death of most of our old people-- and the great changes and excitements of the past have greatly obscured or almost obliterated traditional history of earlier events."<sup>16</sup> The available primary, secondary and tertiary sources frame Indian history and culture through the lens of what Timothy Mitchell has called "the imperial gaze," the sweeping view of an ascendent colonialism.<sup>17</sup>

Resolution of this paradox is not to be found in some authentic, untainted voice existing beyond the ravages of colonial or neocolonial history. Nor can we reduce the differences between Indians and Euroamericans or ignore the deeply ingrained biases that accompany colonialist historiography, what Guha terms "the prose of counter-insurgency." To negotiate postcolonial historiography, Spivak calls for what he terms *strategic essentialism* and *affirmative deconstruction*. The former involves the historian's recognition of fundamental cultural identities. At strategic moments and in dialogue with imposed hierarchies, subaltern groups construct categories of difference, like race or gender, to generate historical and political coherence. The act of constructing such categories draws upon ontological and historiographical principles that do not translate into the logic of Enlightenment thinking, but instead appeal to a transcendent sense of cultural difference. This allows for the mobilization of a national-popular

15. It is interesting to note that the publication date of Drake's famous biography of Tecumseh coincides with Harrison's presidential campaign. See Benjamin Drake, *Life of Tecumseh and of his brother the Prophet, with a Historical Sketch of the Shawanoe Indians* (Cincinnati, 1841).

16. Draper MSS 4YY28.

17. Timothy Mitchell, *Colonizing Egypt* (New York, 1988), pp. 3-17.



impulse; through affirming and experiencing a transcendent collectivity, diverse contingents of alternatively-imagined communities may form coalitions powerful enough to challenge hegemony.

In this sense Tenskwatawa's call for the restoration of Indian truths in religion and a return of Indian lands in the Northwest Territories invoked an indigenous identity that could not be shared by whites. Tenskwatawa explained this to Harrison in 1808:

That we ought to consider ourselves as one man; but we ought to live agreeable to our several customs, the red people after their mode, and the white people after theirs....Those Indians were once different people; they are now but one; they are all determined to practise what I have communicated to them, that has come immediately from the Great Spirit through me.<sup>18</sup>

Since the idea of "red" and "white" people as distinct entities contradicts much traditional Shawnee thinking,<sup>19</sup> Tenskwatawa was invoking historical exigency rather than some authentic, pre-existing cultural practice. He articulated a pan-Indian vision forming among the diverse bands and nations of the Ohio Valley as a result of colonization. Dowd explains such Indian revivalism: "it was not a 'revival' of a religious spirit that had lain, somehow, dormant. In its most important aspect, it was an 'awakening' to the idea that, despite all the boundaries defined by politics, language, kinship, and geography, Indians did indeed share much in the way of their pasts and their present. It was an awakening to the notion that Indians shared a conflict with Anglo-America, and that they, as Indians, could and must take hold of their destiny by regaining sacred power."<sup>20</sup> The call for a return to fundamental Indian ways or truths, in this context, was both constructed and conditional; Tenskwatawa certainly understood this, as did his native audiences who heard the message for pan-Indian solidarity.

The historian must recognize such strategic moves for what they were as well as deploy essentialism to understand the elusive manifestations of subaltern consciousness in recorded history. Jan

18. Quoted in Carl Klinck, ed., *Tecumseh: Fact and Fiction in Early Records* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ, 1961), p. 51.

19. Some versions of Shawnee origin myths, in fact, have the Shawnees coming across the Atlantic to America, thus separating the origins of the Shawnee nation from those of surrounding Indian people. Draper MSS, 23S178; also Howard, p. 170.

20. Dowd, p. 27



Nederveen Pieterse's acknowledgement of the spiritual basis for political Indian resistance in the Ghost Dance, Tecumseh's Indian federation, and Pontiac's rebellion provides a good example of the historiographical use of strategic essentialism.<sup>21</sup> Pieterse negotiates the terrain between cultural essentialism and humanism, granting the epistemological difference between American Indian values and contemporary western conceptions of a deep divide separating the spiritual from the material; at the same time he affirms the importance of talking about this and other differences in terms of Indian history and consciousness.

Spivak's notion of affirmative deconstruction manages the problems of counterinsurgent prose by reading texts for semiotic rupture, contradiction and false closure. This provides the opportunity to see the struggles among historical actors represented in the discursive failings and repeated themes found in colonialist prose. While the actual voice and consciousness of the subaltern will never be represented in primary colonialist sources, nor in the histories that necessarily depend upon them, an insurgent challenge like the pan-Indian federation will register in semiotic displacements within these texts. The task is not to recover the subaltern, whole, from the constructs of official history; it is to engage in "reading as an active transaction between past and future."<sup>22</sup> Such transactions grant the importance of present imaginings of the past in the ongoing construction of sites of memory and the recreation of popular history.

Because my project concerns alternative imaginings about Tecumseh and Tenskwatawa, it is important to locate the semiotic disjunctions in counterinsurgent sources that tell us their story. This story already functions as a counternarrative in various popular memories: among the Shawnee who keep Tecumseh's picture in Oklahoma, in narratives of the American Indian Movement (AIM),<sup>23</sup> and in the myriad histories that employ such sites of memory to create meaning.

21. Jan Nederveen Pieterse, "Amerindian Resistance: the Gathering of the Fires," *Race and Class* 26 (1986): 26-38. See also Joel W. Martin, *Sacred Revolt: the Muskogees' Struggle for a New World* (Boston, 1991), for an excellent account of the relationship between prophesy and politics among the Creek Indians.

22. Gayatri Spivak, "Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography," in *Selected Subaltern Studies*, Ranajit Guha and Gayatri Spivak, eds., p. 3.

23. Vine Deloria, Jr.'s *God is Red* (New York, 1973), pp. 3-22 contains an excellent account of the social and intellectual foundations of the American Indian Movement, pp. 3-22.

**Bad Birds and Bad News: Rumors of War**

The primary texts of counterinsurgent prose--the letters, communiques and speeches of officers and governors--came from direct contact with native peoples. How these writings portray Indians and native leaders like Tecumseh and Tenskwatawa reveals much about the ideological stakes in the battle for control in the Northwest Territories. In addition, it is possible to crack this "public transcript"<sup>24</sup> open, glimpsing some of the discursive power wielded by the Indians during this period.

The letters of Harrison express concern over the integrity and volubility of Indian leaders and the volubility of the Indians in general. Harrison's correspondence with William Eustis, Secretary of War under Jefferson and Madison (1807-1813), characterized Indians as constitutionally unable to negotiate in good faith:

The mind of a savage is so constructed that he cannot be at rest, he cannot be happy unless it is acted upon by some strong stimulus that which is produced by war is the only one that is sufficiently powerful to fill up the intervals of the chase if he hunts in the winter he must go to war in the summer, and you may rest assured Sir, that the establishment of tranquility between the neighboring tribes will always be a sure indication of war against us. (August 28, 1810)<sup>25</sup>

Besides believing the Indians as a military and political threat, this passage constructs a racialized discourse of distrust. Indians are perceived as essentially unstable, warlike subjects; Harrison indicates that no bargain of equals can be made with them.

Other correspondence among American officials in the Northwest Territories expresses concern for military and discursive control. Before the outbreak of war in 1812, officer B.F. Stickney wrote to General Hull, "The time appears when it is necessary, if possible, to cut off the communication between the Indians within the territory of the United States and Canada."<sup>26</sup> Since Tecumseh and his followers were allied with the British at this point, Stickney's comment can in part be read as

24. James Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance* (New Haven, 1990).

25. Harrison's letters taken from Logan Esary, ed., *Messages and Letters of William Henry Harrison*, 2 vols. (Indianapolis, 1922), vol. II, p. 471.

26. B.F. Stickney to General Hull, May 24, 1812, in Esary, vol. I, p. 53.

military strategy. It is significant, however, that these passages express fear of any communication among the Indians without the intervention of colonial authority.

Harrison's correspondence with Tecumseh and the Prophet expresses in muted tone these same anxieties about Indian trustworthiness and the need for discursive stability. In his letters Harrison attempted to establish American credibility and to stabilize meaning by alluding to the power of the "seventeen fires" (the United States) and the "chief of the seventeen fires," and the "great Father" (Jefferson, and later Madison). Harrison portrayed himself, however, not as a deputy with access to the military power of the seventeen fires, but as an intermediary guaranteeing the free flow of information between the Indians and the United States. Further, Harrison placed himself at the apex of a discursive triangle:

Your Father the president will be much pleased when he hears your determination to consider his protection and to shut your ears against the bad talks of the people on the other side of the great lakes and I shall take care to express to him my belief in your sincerity. But I must candidly inform you that it is his positive determination in any case of the Tribes who became his children at the Treaty of Greenville should lift up the Tomahawk against him then he will never again make peace as long as there is one of the Tribe on this side of the Lake.<sup>27</sup>

Attempting to consolidate their colonial power, officials like Harrison tried to establish clear communications guided by Euroamerican notions of law, order and clarity. The above letter emphasizes the importance of semiotic order; Harrison talks about the reception of reports and rumors ("It is true that I have heard a very bad report of you...I myself have given credit to this report") and about how his word, as law, clears out confusion and is worthy of Indian trust (he gives Tenskwatawa "solemn assurance" and talks about the latter's "seduction" by the untrustworthy British). These passages emphasize the danger of not accepting the rule of American law and order, and they reaffirm the idea that Indians are warlike by nature and in need of control.<sup>28</sup>

27. To the Prophet, July 6, 1808 in Esary, vol. II, p. 294.

28. While colonial authorities were clearly establishing an imperial notion of the nature of Indian peoples, their imperial gaze failed to see the well-regulated systems of war and peace long established among the Ohio Valley tribes.

But why Harrison's anxiety about clarity in communications and about Indians talking to each other? First, there was the fear of "seduction" by the British, borne out by Tecumseh's alliance with General Isaac Brock during the War of 1812. Harrison asked Tecumseh in 1807: "Have you not always had your ears open to receive bad advice from the white people beyond the lakes?"<sup>29</sup> Second, Harrison, as the representative of an ascendant colonial power, needed to enforce American rule on the newly acquired Louisiana territory. Third, and most important in writing subaltern history, what were the Americans, led by Harrison, trying to control?

By establishing himself at the apex of the discursive triangle that placed Tecumseh and Tenskwatawa on one side and the United States on the other, Harrison tried to order the associations involved in colonial communications. Certainty is privileged over rumor, assurance and contract over seduction and affinity. The letters from Tecumseh and Tenskwatawa to Harrison, however, make clear that the Indians did not accept Harrison's discursive hegemony, and they destabilized his semiotic order at every opportunity.<sup>30</sup>

Spivak argues that the importance of rumor in a colonial context lies in its ability to undermine official discourse. Rumors spread through unofficial networks of communication, legitimizing truths not accompanied by official sanction. Rumor, in other words, threatened to usurp the power that Harrison attempted to claim by occupying the apex of the triangle of colonial communications.

For example, in 1806, hoping to throw into question the religious power of Tenskwatawa, Harrison charged a council of Delawares to doubt the power of the Prophet:

Demand of him some proofs at least, of his being the messenger of the Deity. If God has really employed him, he has doubtlessly authorized him to perform miracles, that he may be known and received as a prophet. If he is really a prophet, ask of him to cause the sun to stand still--the moon to alter its course--the rivers to cease to flow--or the dead to rise from their graves.<sup>31</sup>

29. Esary, vol. II, p. 250.

30. For a good discussion of the struggle over the "public transcript," see Scott, pp. 45-69.

31. Esary, vol. II, p. 239.

Before long word spread that Tenskwatawa had correctly predicted a recent solar eclipse. News of this powerful augury moved throughout the Northwest territories, increasing support for Tecumseh and Tenskwatawa, and adding greatly to the numbers of those at Greenville.<sup>32</sup>

In corresponding with Harrison, the brothers also made reference to the question of rumors, turning it to their advantage. Describing unfounded rumors as “bad birds” that impeded communication between themselves and the American representative, Tenskwatawa brushed aside Harrison’s uncertainties about trusting him and his brother:

I am very sorry that you listen to the advice of bad birds....Father, I wish you would not listen any more to the voice of bad birds: and you may rest assured it is the least of our idea to make disturbance, and we will rather try to stop any such proceedings that encourage them.<sup>33</sup>

Similarly, in a long address to Harrison in 1810 Tecumseh insisted that he had not been clearly understood: “I hope you will confess that you ought not to have listened to those bad birds who bring you bad news.” The allusion to “bad birds” suggests that Harrison is the one subject to questionable influences. The brothers continually insisted to Harrison that they conveyed truth and occupied the apex of the colonial triangle; at the same time, their constant reference to rumor mocks the stability of discursive truth between military enemies.

A speech by Tecumseh in 1810 is noteworthy for its inversion of dominant meanings and its destabilization of colonial narratives. Part of the federation’s achievement was to accept American racial categories and then use them against their source. Responding to the racialized discourse of U.S. expansion, this strategic use of essentialism functioned on two important levels. First, as Dowd points out, accepting the categories of “red” and “white” allowed Indians to “awaken” and unite; at the same time they could draw upon traditional practices as well as the cultural and epistemological adaptations made as a response to

32. Rumors of similar successes in predicting earthquakes and meteor showers enlarged the reputation of the pan-Indian federation. In 1883 some seventy-two years later, Tustenuckochee, an elderly Seminole turned Creek, remembered Tecumseh’s prediction of the New Madrid earthquake and credited him with inspiring the Creek Red Stick resistance; Coleman Cole of the Choctaw Nation told a similar story in 1884. See Drake, pp. 90-91.

33. Esary, vol. II, p. 251. August, 1807.

colonialism. Second, public reinterpretations of race in speeches to mixed audiences of Indians and Euroamericans allowed Indians to have a voice in the realignment of power taking place after the Treaty of Paris. Inverting Harrison's analysis of the warlike nature of Indians, Tecumseh used the racial categories of red and white to insist upon native self-determination,

You try to force the red people to do some injury. It is you that is pushing them on to do mischief. You endeavour to make distinctions, you wish to prevent the Indians to do as we wish them to unite and let them consider their land as the common property of the whole you take tribes aside and advise them not to come into this measure and until our design is accomplished we do not wish to accept of your invitation to go and visit the President.

The reason I tell you this is--you want by your distinctions of Indian tribes in allotting to each a particular track of land to make them to war with each other. You never see an Indian come and endeavour to make the white people do so. You are continually driving the red people when at last you will drive them into the great lake where they can't either stand or work.<sup>34</sup>

Tecumseh's speech also retold the story of Shawnee relations with the British, French and Americans, and thereby made a strategic claim to discursive control of the public transcript. By emphasizing verbs of communication and narration--the French "asked us for a small piece of country to live on," Indians "are treated as children," Harrison "should redeem broken promises"--Tecumseh subverted the colonialist attempt to establish a hegemony of association. To undermine further Harrison's ability to dominate communication, Tecumseh contrasted the efforts of the U.S. to deal only with village chiefs to the pan-Indian federation's attempt to level distinctions among Indians. Finally, the speech rhetorically subverted the ideology of national expansion, claiming that whites themselves did not understand the religious icon that had justified their original claim to Indian lands.<sup>35</sup> And for collective

34. Esary, vol. II, p. 465. August 20, 1807.

35. This concerns the original Doctrine of Discovery as well as eighteenth and nineteenth-century American civil religion that developed around the idea of Manifest Destiny. See David Noble, *The End of American History* (Minneapolis, MN, 1985), and Vine Deloria, Jr., *Behind the Trail of Broken Treaties: An Indian Declaration of Independence* (Austin, TX, 1985).

behaviour, Tecumseh argued that Euroamericans, rather than Indians, were untrustworthy savages: "How can we have confidence in the white people when Jesus Christ came upon the earth you kill'd and nail'd him on a cross, you thought he was dead but you were mistaken."<sup>36</sup>

This reading of the Harrison, Tecumseh and Tenskwatawa correspondence allows the historian to see some of the discursive negotiations between Euroamericans and Indians during the early period of American expansion. Again, this reading does not put Tecumseh, Tenskwatawa and their followers back together whole. It does not recover the voice and consciousness of the subaltern. An affirmative deconstruction of the primary sources, however, indicates the forcefield within which Euroamericans and Indians operated. Indians tried to maintain self-determination at the same time Euroamericans sought to expand their rule onto traditionally held tribal lands.

These struggles were fought and expressed in the context of a colonial hermeneutics; both Indians and whites sought to control the terms, as well and the outcome, of this encounter. Further, discursive negotiations over rumor, truth and corrosive influences persisted long after the military struggle for control of the Ohio Valley had ended.<sup>37</sup> And the negotiations continue. The historiographical terrain expresses an ongoing struggle; control of the public transcript remains part of the operation of power.

### **"A Big Baby! A Big Baby!"**

My analysis necessarily relies heavily on the speeches and writings of Tecumseh and Tenskwatawa, to the exclusion of hundreds of Indians from diverse nations who joined them and made the pan-Indian accomplishments of the period possible. Other than testimonies from Indian agents and Euroamerican witnesses, few written sources tell us the story of this massive, popular resistance; it enters American history

36. Esary, vol. II, p. 467.

37. In 1819 Harrison was building a political career by further reinventing the history of these frontier struggles. He argued, in a debate in Congress over the Seminole Bill, that the Treaty of Greenville "was still expected to keep alive the spirit of hostility against the United States; and the establishment at Tippecanoe, and the plan of the celebrated confederacy, which was to have been headed by Tecumseh and the Prophet, had their origin in British councils." Draper MSS 1YY.



as a heroic footnote underscoring the military genius of Tecumseh.<sup>38</sup> Moreover, Tenskwatawa and his role as the Great Shawnee Prophet of a nativist religion are either discounted or ignored.

This focus on Tecumseh to the exclusion, and often derision, of his brother is common to almost all secondary and tertiary sources on the two men and the period. While Tecumseh is valorized as exceptionally brave, strong, competent and intelligent, Tenskwatawa (known as Lalewethika before his conversion experience) is described as lazy, stupid and worthless, a burden on the nobility of his older brother. Drake is only the first biographer to employ hyperbole in describing Tecumseh's youth: "He loved hunting because it was a manly exercise, fit for a *brave*. [his emphasis]"<sup>39</sup> According to Drake, Tecumseh liked to play tricks on white frontiersmen and then laugh at them, in one case calling his victim "a big baby." These tricks, along with Tecumseh's other qualities, apparently impressed frontiersmen; contemporary descriptions of him are flattering. William Stanley Hatch, who fought with Hull in 1812, wrote of Tecumseh:

The personal appearance of this remarkable man was uncommonly fine. His height was about five feet nine inches, judging him by my own height when standing close to him.... His face oval rather than angular, his nose handsome and straight; his mouth beautifully formed, like that of Napoleon I... his eyes clear, transparent hazel, with a mild, pleasant expression when in repose, or in conversation; but when excited in his orations, or by the enthusiasm of conflict, or when in anger, they appeared like balls of fire; his teeth beautifully white, and his complexion more of a light brown or tan than red; his whole tribe as well as their kindred, the Ottowasy had light complexions; his arms and hands were finely formed; his limbs straight; he always stood very erect, and walked with a brisk, elastic, vigorous step... in his appearance and noble bearing one of the finest looking men I have ever seen.<sup>40</sup>

This passage expresses admiration for the nobility and beauty of a worthy adversary. Taken from his cultural and historical context,

38. A good bibliographic treatment of popular literature involving Tecumseh can be found in Klinck, pp. 228-234.

39. Drake, p. 83.

40. Cited by Klinck, pp. 162-163.

Tecumseh became a trope for imperial nostalgia as well as the commanding reflection of invented colonial power.<sup>41</sup> Heroes like Tecumseh and Pontiac have often served in American political discourse to explain the “Indian tragedy”: a once-proud people decline to a condition that demands removal, termination or assimilation, depending on the period. In 1829, when Congress was planning the removal of the southern tribes from their lands east of the Mississippi, Colonel McKinney argued that the failed nobility of Tecumseh had sealed the fate of his people: “His life paid the forfeit of his gallant enterprise; and with it vanished all hope of all allies to him of ever again becoming lords of their domain.”<sup>42</sup>

Lalawethika, on the other hand, receives no such ideologically charged commendation. Stories abound in primary, secondary and tertiary sources of his ineptitude. According to historiographical mythology, he not only lost his eye by accidentally shooting an arrow backwards when drunk, but was economically dependent upon his brother and wife. Relying upon primary and secondary sources, Amanda Porterfield provides the dominant view of the Great Shawnee Prophet:

Tecumseh’s brother Lalawetheka was something of a big baby. During the 1790s, while Tecumseh was establishing his reputation as an intrepid war chief, Lalawetheka was an alcoholic, and, despite his brother’s lessons, a poor hunter who could not provide for his family. Lalawetheka had none of the self-mastery that lay at the heart of Tecumseh’s skill as a political and military leader....The plight of being an outcast, which lay at the root of Tenskwatawa’s failures, is characteristic of colonized peoples. Tenskwatawa’s claim to supernatural power was a means of compensating for being outcast, disgraced, and colonized.<sup>43</sup>

Like Harrison, Drake and most Euroamerican historians have assumed that Tenskwatawa’s religious visions and leadership were a veil for personal inadequacies. This skepticism about the prophet springs from the accounts of Stephen Ruddell, who grew up with

41. See Renato Rosaldo, *Culture and Truth* (Boston, 1990) for an excellent discussion of narratives of imperialist nostalgia.

42. Draper MSS 1YY90.

43. Amanda Porterfield, “Tecumseh, Tenskwatawa and the Complex Relationship between Religious and Political Power,” in Rowland Sherill, ed., *Religion and the Life of the Nation* (Champagne-Urbana, IL, 1990), p. 223.

Tecumseh and Lalawethika as their white "brother," and whose accounts influenced Drake. Ruddell told his son that he had often attempted to convince Tecumseh of the folly of the Prophet's preachings, and that Tenskwatawa's appearance when praying was "truly hideous."<sup>44</sup> Ruddell's fear that Tecumseh, who defended the religion as appropriate for Indians but not for whites, was "the tool of the Prophet" is consonant with Harrison's concern over the brothers' trustworthiness.

Drawing from Ruddell's account and other primary reports, most histories of Tecumseh contain psychological theorizing about Tenskwatawa as a sluggard or fanatic. Drake's theory epitomizes the hyperbole employed to castigate the religious leader: "Among other doctrines of his [the Prophet's] new code, he insisted on a community of property--a very comfortable regulation for those, who like himself, were too indolent to labor for the acquisition of it."<sup>45</sup> Drake's criticism ignores the history of Indian landholding practices, using Tenskwatawa to draw an invidious comparison between the capitalism of the United States and the communalistic vision of the pan-Indian federation.

If, as Pieterse argues, Tecumseh and Tenskwatawa represent two important components of the spiritual/material dialectic of Amerindian history, why does Tenskwatawa not merit serious treatment in secondary and tertiary accounts? It is clear that he was seen by some Shawnees and other Indians as an important figure even after his defeat at Tippecanoe.<sup>46</sup> What is ideologically at stake in reducing the stature of this religious leader?

The historiographical treatment of the two brothers is not only hyperbolic and unequal, it neatly places Tecumseh and Tenskwatawa in a binary opposition. In the descriptions quoted above, Tecumseh's "hazel eyes," "mouth...like that of Napoleon I," and "light complexion" recall noble European leaders rather than the contemporary view of Indians; at the same time, his masculinity is emphasized as indicated in an almost erotic description of Tecumseh by the British officer, John Richardson:

Habited in a close leather dress, his atheletic proportions were admirably delineated, while a large plume of white ostrich

44. J.M. Ruddell to Lyman Draper, Draper MSS, 8YY43.

45. Drake, p. 87.

46. See interviews with Shawnees in Kansas, Draper MSS 1S169-178; also Dowd, pp. 191-201.

feathers, by which he was generally distinguished, overshadowing his brow, and contrasting with the darkness of his complexion and the brilliancy of his black and piercing eye, gave a singularly wild and terrific expression to his features. It was evident that he could be terrible.<sup>47</sup>

In this passage Tecumseh is fetishized. His image takes on the Euroamerican projection of primitive sexuality that accompanies racialized discourse; at the same time he transcends his racial identity and appears almost European.

In contrast, accounts feminize Tenskwatawa, who sinks discursively into the irrational, victimized status described by Harrison in his letters. The discursive contrasts in defining Tecumseh and Tenskwatawa persist throughout colonialist literature. Even accounts that dismiss the role of the Prophet, or are concerned only with the military aspects of the history of the period, mention both brothers together. The opposition is not accidental; it serves an important ideological function in the official histories.

Discussing the encounter between Cortez and the Aztec empire, Debra Root has pointed out that colonial writers, in order to reinforce Western hegemony, encode the European in their descriptions of the other. Western culture remains the reference point of discursive stability and thereby provides the measure for Indian culture. "At the same time," Root points out, "these devices conceal the historical and political relations between Europe and the 'Indian' which underlay the possibilities of the latter's textualization."<sup>48</sup> The binary opposition found in the histories of Tecumseh and Tenskwatawa establishes a European vantage point from which to view Tecumseh as orator, warrior and male--a worthy enemy--and Tenskwatawa as inarticulate, inactive and female. Tecumseh assumes the role of agent while Tenskwatawa becomes a figure of rumors and fanaticism. This opposition doubly subverts the cultural possibilities of understanding the mass, pan-Indian movement led by the two brothers. Tecumseh transcends Indianness, becoming a fetish for European desire and admiration; Tenskwatawa, in contrast, represents the opposite of what is valued by the West and assumes responsibility for the degradation Euroamericans read into the Indian. Tecumseh can be celebrated in official narratives as a patriot only insofar as ample grounds exist to dismiss the collective resistance

47. Cited by Klinck, p. 186.

48. Debra Root, "The Imperial Signifier," *Cultural Critique* 9 (1988): 197-216: 216.

embodied in the federation he and his brother organized. Tenskwatawa provides the shadow that proves Tecumseh an exception to his race, reminding the reader of the truly "cunning,"<sup>49</sup> irrational nature of the Indian mind and, by extension, racial collectivity.

### Nation, Religion, Resistance

In official Euroamerican narratives, then, Tenskwatawa represents the period's pan-Indian consciousness. Unlike Tecumseh, who rises "above the moral degradation in which [Indian civilization] is shrouded,"<sup>50</sup> Tenskwatawa remains with the people, a creature of rumors and degradation. The contrast between the two brothers disrupts the symbolic relationship between religious and political life in Amerindian resistance during the nineteenth century.

Partha Chatterjee has noted a similar ideological distinction in colonialist historiography concerning the nationalism of the Indian Subcontinent. The essential identity of the people was considered to lie in the realm of the spiritual and the feminine.<sup>51</sup> The putatively more pragmatic and rational, and thereby male, character of the West, on the other hand, could help India materially and politically. This gendering of cultural terrain is also evident in the sources recounting the story of Tecumseh and Tenskwatawa.<sup>52</sup> While these sources most commonly express concern that Tenskwatawa was a front for British subversion and a fanatic, some worry that he was overly influenced by his wife. Despite contemporary evidence to the contrary, Judge John Law, in his *History of Vincennes*, went so far as to invent the designation of Queen for the Prophet's wife. Law explained Tenskwatawa's fanaticism as the result of his wife's grip on the minds and hearts of Indian people: "The wife of the Prophet, under the royal designation 'Queen,' enjoyed an influence and power behind the throne greater than the throne itself....she possessed an influence over the female portion of the tribe

49. Drake, p. 86.

50. *Ibid.*, p. 60.

51. Partha Chatterjee, "Colonialism, Nationalism, and Colonized Woman: The Contest in India," *American Ethnologist* (1990): 622-633.

52. For an excellent discussion of the gendering of colonial discourse, see Ann Stoler, "Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Gender, Race, and Morality in Colonial Asia," in Micheala diLeonardo, ed., *Gender at the Crossroads of Knowledge: Feminist Anthropology in the PostModern Era* (Berkeley, 1991).

not less potent than her husband's--an influence felt, and often disastrously felt, in the councils of the nation."<sup>53</sup>

For American Indian nations during the nineteenth century politics and religion retained their traditional association. In the face of an expansive U.S. colonization that reached across the continent, pan-Indian religions like that of the Great Shawnee Prophet and the Ghost Dance became important for intertribal communication and unity. These syncretic religions combined the vision of leaders like Tenskwatawa or Wovoka with the local cosmologies of different tribes and a century of native experience with the messianic teachings of Christianity. Calling for a return to "traditional" Indian ways, believers in these religions foresaw a time when the land would be free of colonial domination. According to a Sioux ghost dancer: "we saw a land created across the ocean on which all the nations of Indians were coming home."<sup>54</sup>

The political implications of such religious movements for anti-colonial struggles are important. Amilcar Cabral, among other guerilla theorists, insists that military struggles for liberation must be based in national culture.<sup>55</sup> In Spivak's terms, this represents a move toward strategic essentialism; Tenskwatawa and Wovoka invoked a popularly created, syncretic religious identity to unite a people politically for the task of liberation. Ideologically, the creation of these definitions of Indian identity was a response to Euroamerican racial hierarchy. Tecumseh's and Tenskwatawa's vision of a pan-Indian federation constituted an intervention in racial formation, with race defined from the bottom up rather than from the top down. Indians at Greenville sought to unite spiritually and culturally, and thereby maintain their economic and political self-determination. Roundhead, a Wyandot ally of Tecumseh and Tenskwatawa, explained the peaceful purposes of the settlement at Prophetstown in 1804:

We people at Greenville is thinking of no evil we employ ourselves in trying to make peace with our maker. I am very glad that we have got through the hard winter and this Spring there has come a grate number of people to see us, and I can ashure you that they have no ill desire for they have never mentioned anything like mischief. The people come to see us was very

53. Draper MSS 3YY110-114.

54. Cited by James R. Mooney, *The Ghost Dance Religion* (Chicago, 1965), p. 41.

55. Amilcar Cabral, "National Liberation and Culture," in *Return to the Source: Selected Speeches by Amilcar Cabral* (New York, 1972).

thankful and went away well satisfied. There people was of different nations and from a grate distance when they came to see us they took us by the hand in friendship and agrees with us in senitament and have left with us fine men and a number of women and children and when our nation was going away we told them to return at a certain time and then we should be provided with plenty to eat.<sup>56</sup>

Tenskwatawa's preachings about Indian identity separated the origins of Indians from those of Euroamericans. He preached against alcohol, polygamy and the accumulation of capital.<sup>57</sup> These teachings responded to the very real effects of European conquest. The strategic essentialism of the Great Shawnee Prophet religion drew upon national-popular memory, which is always heterogeneous, to suggest a political and cultural alternative to colonial domination. Tenskwatawa and Tecumseh represented a movement that broadened racial categories beyond the colonial construct of tribes that could be divided and pitted against one another. In 1810 a Kickapoo chief, when allying his band with the Indian federation, said: "My friends, although the Tribe I belong to are yet remote from any white settlement I came here with my band to join you in defending what is left of our common country around us, I may life to see the day when I will have to fight the intruders at my own home....Think you if all our vast inheritances should pass into the hands of the white man he would be satisfied? I say, No, arouse then and fight for your country."<sup>58</sup> The federation allowed for the complex allegiances of Indian life on the frontier of U.S. settlement to become an alternatively-imagined nation.

The writings of A.F.C. Wallace on revitalization have been influential in scholarly interpretations of the Great Shawnee Prophet religion. Wallace saw revitalization as a culture's conscious effort at self-preservation by constructing new "mazeways" to respond to rapid change. Further, all revitalization movements, independent of local differences, supposedly share common structures and processes.<sup>59</sup>

Revitalization theory presents at least two problems. For one, its functionalist character leads to the assumption that culture is stable and

56. Draper MSS 3YY72.

57. David R. Edmunds, *Tecumseh and the Quest for Indian Leadership* (Boston, 1984).

58. Draper MSS 8YY56.

59. Anthony F. Wallace, "Revitalization Movements," *American Anthropologist* 58 (1956): 264-281.



homeostatic, and that a particular culture responds to external change by trying to preserve and extend its own logic, rather than by entering into a developing relationship with the factors bringing change. This bias precludes an understanding of the dynamics of anticolonial struggle. While the Shawnee had a tradition of prophecy, the pan-Indian alliances organized around religion and politics expressed a dialectical relationship with Euroamerican colonial expansion. Traditional Shawnee culture did not perceive land as geopolitically bounded, but both Tenskwatawa and Tecumseh came to advocate boundaries as a strategic response to U.S. expansion. This was not a move towards homeostasis, but a cultural response to new conditions. Richard White points out in his important revisionist account of this period that Indians and Euroamericans together created a semiotic and cultural “middle ground” where they negotiated social and political issues.<sup>60</sup> The strategic essentialism invoked in Indian resistance led to the creation of different ways of life rather than the restoration of old “mazeways.”

Secondly, given its functionalism, revitalization theory tends to elide historical agency and fails to adequately note the role of local actors who shape any given movement. Different tribes used the Great Shawnee Prophet religion and the Ghost Dance for different purposes. Rather than being shaped by some internal structure of revitalization, Indians shaped these movements according to the dictates of history and culture.

The lopsided emphasis on Tecumseh in Euroamerican historiography functions to misconstrue a memory of struggle that drew upon Indian popular culture and represented a military and rhetorical response to colonization spoken in a language the West could understand. This pan-Indian threat loomed so large in the Euroamerican imagination that William Henry Harrison and Richard Johnson successfully campaigned for president and vice-president in 1840 by claiming the frontier victories of Tippecanoe and the death of Tecumseh.

In Indian memory, kept alive in portraits in Shawnee homes and repeated references to Tecumseh in AIM writings, this history has been used differently. Strategic essentialism allows for a powerful coalition of material and spiritual forces. It is impossible to understand the history and significance of the pan-Indian federation without considering both

60. White, ix-xvi. In his important essay on Meti history, Rich Kees argues that this “middle ground” became the central terrain for the formation of Meti identity and culture in the Great Lakes region. See Rich Kees, “A New Nation in Their Hearts: The Historical Evolution of the Meti People,” in *Gone to Croaton: A History of Dropout Culture in America* (New York: forthcoming).

its religious and political aspects and the dialectical relationships between them. Most Shawnee, who had been relocated to Kansas and Oklahoma by 1860, fought on the side of the Union during the Civil War.<sup>61</sup> This followed at least in part from the rearrangement of popular perceptions of race that took place during the pan-Indian movement, when both Tecumseh and Tenskwatawa spoke of the parallels between the white treatment of Indians and the enslavement of Africans.<sup>62</sup> While some southeastern Indians held slaves and fought on the side of the Confederacy, many others remembered the pan-Indian federation and the founding of the Red Sticks, the important Creek opposition to acculturation and removal.

Big Jim, Tecumseh's grandson, in 1890 led a band of Shawnee opposed to U.S. government policies of allotment and acculturation to Mexico, in search of a lost, pan-Indian nation that persisted in Shawnee cultural mythology. This story, along with many others, indicates the importance and fluidity of collective memory. Such stories attest to the persistence of imaginings of alternatively formulated communities, to peoples' ability to use strategic essentialism to pose critiques of mainstream narratives grounded in national consolidation and domination, and to the use of such critiques and imaginings to build powerful historical coalitions.

61. Howard, pp. 22-23.

62. For a treatment of the historical alliances between Indians and blacks, see William Loren Katz, *Black Indians: A Hidden Heritage* (New York, 1986).