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| [Printable Version](https://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/disp_textbook_print.cfm?smtid=3&psid=4045)**Wovoka's Message***Digital History ID 4045*Author:   James MooneyDate:1891**Annotation:** James Mooney, an ethnologist with the Bureau of American Ethnology, was sent to investigate the Ghost Dance movement in 1891. He obtained a copy of Wovoka's message from a Cheyenne named Black Short Nose, who had been part of a joint Cheyenne-Arapaho delegation that visited Wovoka in Nevada in August 1891. Wovoka (also known as Jack Wilson) delivered his message orally, and it was transcribed by a member of the group who had attended Carlisle Indian School. Mooney renders the "Carlisle English" of this transcription in a more grammatical form.Wovoka (which means “wood cutter” in the Paiute language) created the Ghost Dance. Wovoka, also known as Jack Wilson, was an Indian religious leader who had a prophetic vision during the solar eclipse in 1889. His teachings encouraged his people to perform a round dance--holding hands in a circle and moving slowly to the left while singing Native American songs about restoring balance and order to their lives. The Indians also believed that the dance would reunite them with friends and relatives who had died. The fervor of the Ghost Dance movement caught on among other tribes, instilling great fear in white settlers who observed the movement. Not understanding, the white people thought that this exuberance was in preparation for future hostilities towards the whites. In response, more than 3,000 men from the 7th Cavalry were called in to protect the white settlers. This build-up of soldiers and the death of Sitting Bull led to the massacre at Wounded Knee and to the end of the Ghost Dance movement.**Document:** Wovoka's Message: The Promise of the Ghost DanceThe Messiah LetterWhen you get home you must make a dance to continue five days. Dance four successive nights, and the last night keep us the dance until the morning of the fifth day, when all must bathe in the river and then disperse to their homes. You must all do in the same way.I, Jack Wilson, love you all, and my heart is full of gladness for the gifts you have brought me. When you get home I shall give you a good cloud [rain?] which will make you feel good. I give you a good spirit and give you all good paint. I want you to come again in three months, some from each tribe there [the Indian Territory].There will be a good deal of snow this year and some rain. In the fall there will be such a rain as I have never given you before.Grandfather [a universal title of reverence among Indians and here meaning the messiah] says, when your friends die you must not cry. You must not hurt anybody or do harm to anyone. You must not fight. Do right always. It will give you satisfaction in life. This young man has a good father and mother. [Possibly this refers to Casper Edson, the young Arapaho who wrote down this message of Wovoka for the delegation].Do not tell the white people about this. Jesus is now upon the earth. He appears like a cloud. The dead are still alive again. I do not know when they will be here; maybe this fall or in the spring. When the time comes there will be no more sickness and everyone will be young again.Do not refuse to work for the whites and do not make any trouble with them until you leave them. When the earth shakes [at the coming of the new world] do not be afraid. It will not hurt you.I want you to dance every six weeks. Make a feast at the dance and have food that everybody may eat. Then bathe in the water. That is all. You will receive good words again from me some time. Do not tell lies.<http://www.pbs.org/weta/thewest/resources/archives/eight/gdmessg.htm>Additional information: James Mooney, *The Ghost-dance Religion and the Sioux Outbreak of 1890,* 14th Annual Report of the Bureau of American Ethnology, Part 2 (1896).]Copyright 2021 Digital History |

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