

“STRANGER IN A STRANGE LAND:”  
CULTURAL HYBRIDITY AND MIMICRY IN GEORGE COPWAY’S ENGAGEMENT  
WITH CHRISTIANITY, FREEMASONRY, AND LITERACY

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## **Abstract**

While historians have tended to dismiss George Copway's writings as examples of acculturation, in the field of literary criticism his writings have received a much more focused approach using post-colonial and indigenous studies theories. In addition, recent developments in religious studies and the history of Indigenous involvement in fraternalism have contributed to a more sophisticated analysis of his engagement with Canadian Methodism and American Freemasonry. Though his adoption of Euromerican culture defined his religious and intellectual development, other important motivations and goals informed those choices. While Copway's education in English literacy and Christianity ultimately drew him away from the Indigenous cultural and social context of his childhood, it would be a mistake to ignore the agency that he exercised in advancing Indigenous issues throughout this process. When the approach of Indigenous literary and religious studies scholars is used to inform a historical analysis, Copway's life is revealed to be a culturally hybrid, yet coherent, attempt to make space for indigeneity in the public religious and intellectual discourse of nineteenth-century America.

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Dedicated to The Researcher

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# Chapter 1

## Introduction

In summer 1839, following his graduation from the Ebenezer missionary school at the age of 21, Kahgegagahbowh, better known as George Copway, toured the northeastern United States, excited to finally see the modern cities he had heard of through the stories of traders and missionaries. But by October he was feeling homesick and disappointed on the streets of Boston, a city he found to be “much overrated.”<sup>1</sup> Unsure of what to do, he wandered into the offices of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM). This organization was famous for its missionaries stationed in India and Africa, and so Copway’s curiosity was piqued when he noticed a door labelled “Missionary Room.” The space was filled with exhibits of artifacts sent home by the ABCFM’s operatives throughout the world, and he looked with interest at each of the display cases. One stood out, however, and as he leaned down to examine its contents he realized with amusement that it contained tools, clothing, and weapons that had been commonplace throughout his life. The Anishinaabe<sup>2</sup> items exhibited included beadwork,

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<sup>1</sup> George Copway, *Life, Letters, and Speeches*, edited by A. Lavonne Brown Ruoff and Donald B. Smith, 1850, reprint (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1997), 128.

<sup>2</sup> Anishinaabe is an autonym used to refer to the linguistic and cultural Indigenous group of which Copway was a member. The word is most often translated: ‘first people,’ ‘true people,’ or ‘human beings’ and includes, among others, the Mississauga and Algonquin groups. Ojibwe is an exonym used to refer to the Anishinaabeg who live around the Lake Superior and east into the central prairie region. Chippewa is an exonym more common in the United States that is roughly equivalent to Ojibwe. Copway’s village of Rice Lake was part of an Indigenous group that the French called the Mississauga, the transliteration of an Algonquian word meaning “river with several outlets.” The Mississauga were made up of Anishinaabeg living in the Georgian Bay and north shore of Lake Ontario region (where the Greater Toronto Area is located today). Although there are cultural, religious, social, and political differences between Anishinaabe groups they are connected by similar cultural practices and traditionally speak dialects of the Anishinaabemowin (Ojibwe) language. Due to this similarity, and the confusing nature of colonial exonyms, Copway usually referred to himself as an “Ojibway.” Where this spelling is used, the term is not meant to signify the actual group of people who identify as Ojibwe, but rather Copway’s political and cultural understanding of the term; Donald Smith, *Mississauga Portraits: Ojibwe Voices from Nineteenth-century Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013), xxxiv; Bernd Peyer, *The Tutor’d Mind: Indian Missionary-Writers in Antebellum America* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1997), 224 & 230; Michael Angel, *Preserving the Sacred: Historical Perspectives on the Ojibwa Midewiwin* (Winnipeg: University

moccasins, and, most prominently, a collection of war clubs. Remembering the moment six years later while writing his autobiography, Copway sarcastically reflected that if the Secretary of the ABCFM had seen these tools as he had, “stained with blood and notched according to the number of individuals they had slain,” perhaps he would not have kept them on proud display in a public gallery.<sup>3</sup>

This experience is one of the few Copway relates from his trip to Boston, and it conveys a sense of the bewildering contradictions that often arose from his life in Euromerican society.<sup>4</sup> His visit to the ABCFM gallery is prefaced in his autobiography with a melancholy poem eulogizing the Indigenous people on whose graves this urban centre stood and mourning for a lost Indigenous past.<sup>5</sup> The experience of seeing every-day objects from his home on display as artifacts of a foreign and vanishing people affected Copway in a way that he would never forget. The remainder of his 1839 tour of the United States impressed upon him the technological strength of settler society and their large and growing population. Filled with dread for the future of all Indigenous North Americans, he believed that this technological and demographic power was intimately linked to newcomer religion, philosophy, and education. However, the American public’s perception of indigeneity that the museum display revealed also presented an exciting opportunity to the ambitious and resourceful Anishinaabe. In an effort to obtain a position of influence in American Society, Copway appropriated Euromerican Christianity, Freemasonry, and English literacy, transforming them as he pursued both selfish and pro-Indigenous goals. Throughout his career, he consistently drew attention to the hypocrisy of a Euromerican society that purported to ascribe to Christian ideas of justice while carrying on a violent and unjust colonial project. Styling himself as an emancipator and representative of all Indigenous people, Copway’s political, ethnographic, and literary work culminated in a petition for the

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of Manitoba Press, 2002), 6; Harold Hickerson, *The Chippewa and their Neighbours: A Study in Ethnohistory* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1970).

<sup>3</sup> Copway, *Life, Letters, and Speeches*, 123.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 122.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 123.



establishment of an independent and separate Indigenous state that combined religious and cultural change with the continuity of Indigenous political agency.<sup>6</sup>

The colonial focus on trade and military alliances with Indigenous communities turned to outright annexation and conquest of Indigenous lands once the United States became a successful nation state.<sup>7</sup> This resulted in the intermixing of Indigenous and settler religions, spirituality, and culture. But rather than becoming a linear process of transition from one state to another, this cultural borderland became a confused and complicated space marked by conflict, oppression, acceptance, and appropriation. Born into this multi-directional process of cultural change, Copway sought to give himself power and agency by adopting and participating in Christianity, Freemasonry, and English literacy. Through these aspects of Euromerican culture, he became a member of the American intelligentsia, establishing a platform from which he could assert his own ideas of social justice and Indigenous identity. He believed that by adopting Euromerican culture and participating in American stereotypes of indigeneity, he could obtain political equality for Indigenous North Americans, saving them from imminent destruction. In an 1851 political treatise titled *The Organization of a New Indian Territory, East of the Missouri River*, Copway argued that Indigenous adoption of Euromerican Christianity and literacy was “the only means which [could] be used to save the Indians from extinction.”<sup>8</sup> The agency that he exercised in arguing for Indigenous historicity, equality, and even superiority over Euromerican society complicates the standard academic portrayal of him as a subservient victim of assimilation and points to the value that can be derived from exploring the continuity of Indigenous identity despite the corrosive and transformative forces of cultural colonialism.

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<sup>6</sup> Donald B. Smith, “Kahgegagahbowh: Canada’s First Literary Celebrity in the United States,” in *Life, Letters, and Speeches*, edited by A. Lavonne Brown Ruoff and Donald B. Smith, 1850, reprint, (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1997), 39.

<sup>7</sup> Joel W. Martin, *Native Americans, Christianity, and the Reshaping of the American Religious Landscape* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 3.

<sup>8</sup> Copway, *Organization of a New Indian Territory, East of the Missouri River* (New York: S.W. Benedict, 1850), 4.

## 1.1 Copway's Life

Copway was born near Rice Lake in 1818 as non-Indigenous settlers were beginning to encroach on Anishinaabe territory and as Christian missionaries were attempting to suppress and transform Anishinaabe culture.<sup>9</sup> This colonial pressure, accompanied by a destructive alcohol trade, created a culturally-dynamic situation wherein many communities turned to Methodist and Moravian Christianity, as it was presented to them by both Anishinaabe and non-indigenous missionaries. Canadian Methodism, with its opposition to the alcohol trade and government acquisition of Native lands, spread rapidly around the Great Lakes region. Along with their evangelical work, the missionaries also established schools to teach English literacy in an effort to establish a literate cadre of Methodist Anishinaabe clergy. After a traditional childhood largely identical to that of the previous generation, Copway left home to study at a Methodist mission school along with fifty other children. There he received an education “far superior to that of the average pioneer in Upper Canada” and became a member of a cohort of Anishinaabe Christians who were the first of their communities to master English literacy and travel throughout the United States and Europe.<sup>10</sup>

From 1834-1846 Copway pursued the life of Methodist missionary, marrying Elizabeth Howell, the daughter of an English farmer, and spreading his Methodist faith at missions around Lake Superior. His dissatisfaction with this employment led him into increasingly political activity that involved networking amongst Indigenous preachers, chiefs, and other leaders. After spending mission funds on an inter-band conference without authorization, he left his position and returned home to become the Rice Lake band clerk. However, his financial mismanagement continued, and after losing this position and being briefly jailed for embezzlement he took his family and left for the United States to pursue a new life as a writer and lecturer.

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<sup>9</sup> Bernd Peyer, *The Tutor'd Mind: Indian Missionary-Writers in Antebellum America* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1997), 230-1.

<sup>10</sup> Peter S. Schmalz, *The Ojibwa of Southern Ontario* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991), 152.

Over the next five years, Copway made himself famous as Canada's first international literary celebrity.<sup>11</sup> Following his expulsion from the Canadian Methodist Conference, he travelled through the northeastern United States lecturing on Indigenous Christianity and gathering donations for the proposed (but never fulfilled) establishment of a new manual labor school. During this time, he began compiling his life story and in 1846 published *The Life, History, and Travels of Kah-ge-ga-gah-bowh (George Copway)* to great acclaim. This conversion narrative launched him into literary and political circles and allowed him to form relationships with intellectuals like Francis Parkman, Washington Irving, James Fennimore Cooper, and Henry Wadsworth Longfellow.<sup>12</sup> From 1848 to 1853, as Copway began to drift away from his Methodist roots, he joined the Freemasons. Finding that their Enlightenment philosophy and the narrative of their origins presented new opportunities for expressing his Indigenous identity, he began to draw attention to correlations between their practices and those of Anishinaabe religion.

Several editions of his autobiography were followed by a group of new works that both helped and hindered his reputation as a reliable author. The most well-received of these new books was a historical and cultural overview of the Anishinaabe that expanded on the ethnographic portions of his autobiography. *The Traditional History and Characteristic Sketches of the Ojibway Nation* (1850) delved into language, geography, folklore, and even botany and zoology as a sweeping compendium of what he presented as traditional Anishinaabe knowledge. Although the narrative is situated within a Christian worldview, Anishinaabe history and culture take centre stage in this proto-ethnohistorical work, indicating an increasingly pro-Indigenous shift in Copway's thought. This was due to his understanding of the power and influence of printed text, the interest of the public in Indigenous topics, and his growing desire to promote indigeneity through the medium of text. Throughout this period, Copway deliberately took advantage of 'Romantic Indian' cultural trends and associated expectations, portraying himself as a 'civilized Indian' and appearing in regalia for his numerous public lecture tours.

However, fame and fortune did not prevent Copway from expressing criticism of his capitalist employment. He described the New York public as fickle and obsessed with money: "it

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<sup>11</sup> Smith, "Kahgegagahbowh," 23.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 38, 43-44.

takes full one year of close effort to interest the people, and there is but one way in which this can be done – to let the shadow of a mighty dollar, appear on the walls of their public halls.”<sup>13</sup> Regardless of his thoughts on American popular culture, Copway continued to publish more editions of his autobiography from 1847 to 1850 as well as two new works that led critics to question his consistency as a writer: *The Ojibway Conquest* (1850) and *Running Sketches of Men and Places in England, France, Belgium, and Scotland* (1851). The former was an epic Romantic poem memorializing a pre-contact war between the Anishinaabe and Iroquois nations. Although published under Copway’s name, an Indian agent named Julius Taylor Clark later claimed that he was the real author and had allowed Copway to take credit in order to increase sales.<sup>14</sup> *Running Sketches*, written after a tour of Europe to speak at an international peace conference, padded Copway’s travel narrative with extensive quotations from publicly available travelogues and guidebooks.<sup>15</sup> Although this was a common method of composition at the time, it did not garner positive press reviews, and further discredited Copway’s reputation as a serious intellectual.

Throughout 1847-1852, Copway actively criticized the Euromerican treatment of Indigenous peoples and engaged in political activism. Due both to the political climate and a sincere desire to help the larger Indigenous community, Copway found that his personal ambitions often dovetailed with social justice aims, and as a result he used his celebrity to gain the attention of a number of political and religious leaders in his calls for legislative reforms. At the height of his political influence, Copway penned a letter to President Zachary Taylor, appeared before Congress, and represented the Indigenous people of North America at the 1850 Frankfurt World Peace Congress.<sup>16</sup> His own engagement with Euromerican culture influenced his political vision of an independent American state set aside for the sole use of Indigenous North Americans. In an act of hubris, he declared that the name for this community should be a

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<sup>13</sup> George Copway, Letter to a Boston Newspaper, 1849, in *Life, Letters, and Speeches*, 190.

<sup>14</sup> Smith, “Kahgegahbowh...,” in *Life, Letters, and Speeches*, 39.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.

<sup>16</sup> Donald B. Smith, *Mississauga Portraits: Ojibwe Voices from Nineteenth-century Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013), 154 and 190-5.

shortened form of his own Anishinaabemowin name, Kahgega, and that it should be governed by educated Christian Indigenous leaders like himself. The fact that this idea reached the audiences it did is remarkable, and its final formulation is telling of the tension between his personal ambitions and his desire for justice for all Indigenous North Americans.

Copway's political vision never made it past Congress, however, and so he returned to writing in the summer of 1851 to carve out an Indigenous space in the press. The result was a weekly literary journal, *Copway's American Indian*, that continued the themes of his earlier work by combining accounts of the spread of Christianity and literacy among Indigenous communities with Indigenous-language articles and romanticized traditional Indigenous history. Copway invested heavily into this magazine, both in terms of money and labour as he composed numerous articles as a nameless editor. He managed to publish twelve-weeks' worth of issues before the journal folded on September 27, 1851.<sup>17</sup>

In the late 1850s and early 1860s, Copway became increasingly desperate, turning to anti-immigration American political groups and giving theatrical public readings of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's *The Song of Hiawatha*. As his career lost its air of intellectualism, Copway began to produce new editions of *The Traditional History* with edits that distanced him from Indigenous 'superstitions.' These later editions, particularly the retitled 1858 *Indian Life and Indian History by an Indian Author* deceptively portrayed the book as a broad treatise on all Indigenous history, promoting the image of a universal pan-Indigenous identity, despite its largely unchanged contents.<sup>18</sup> In the later years of Copway's life, the American press treated him as a humorous figure beset with scandals and failed schemes, frequently introducing their reports with a line from a poem by Alexander Pope: "Lo, the poor Indian!"<sup>19</sup> Copway continued to slip into obscurity, eventually abandoning his family, working as a traditional "Indian Doctor," and recruiting Indigenous men to fight in the American Civil War. He died in 1869 at the age of fifty-one while a guest at the house of a pastor in Ypsilanti Michigan.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 201.

<sup>18</sup> Ruoff, "Literacy and Methodist Contexts," 9.

<sup>19</sup> "Lo, the Poor Indian!" *Lowell Daily Citizen and News*, January 1, 1857, Lowell, Massachusetts, America's Historical Newspapers.

<sup>20</sup> Smith, *Mississauga Portraits*, 208.

## 1.2 Overview of Thesis

Nineteenth-century North America was a turbulent cultural space for an Indigenous person, one which historian Keith Carlson describes as “the cauldron of colonialism.”<sup>21</sup> To portray cultural and religious transformation as a linear process of progression or decline obscures the complexity of George Copway’s experiences, and Carlson’s metaphor captures the haphazard, confusing, and multidirectional vectors of change that both Euromerican and Indigenous individuals and communities experienced. At various instances in Copway’s life historical circumstances forced or enabled him to choose, adopt, or combine cultural practices, languages, rituals, and beliefs to make sense of his world and to pursue his goals. Settler colonialism brought a confusion of cultures, languages, and religions to the continent and when these began to interact with Indigenous cultures through trade, religious evangelism, and other interactions it produced a transcultural space where practices, ideas, and cultural tools began to overlap and be adopted and changed by both Indigenous and Euromerican individuals and communities. However, the inequality of power in the colonial context meant that an individual like Copway had to adopt parts of Euromerican culture to achieve his goals and to navigate settler society. Though he was the last of his family to affiliate with Christianity, and although he initially refused to leave home and become a missionary, he eventually embraced Euromerican culture, seeing Christianity, Freemasonry, and English literacy as a means of political and spiritual salvation for Indigenous society.

In explaining Euromerican society’s difficulty in making sense of Indigenous writer William Apess, Robert Warrior points out that there were “two particular sorts of American Indian marginalization in the American northeast in the 1830s.” The first was that with the expansion of eastern urban centres, only Indigenous communities beyond the frontier were worthy of much popular consideration. “The second sort of marginalization was that the last thing people in the northeast probably imagined when they pictured Indians was an articulate

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<sup>21</sup> Keith Thor Carlson, *The Power of Place, The Problem of Time: Aboriginal Itendity and Historical Consciousness in the Cauldron of Colonialism* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010), title.

Methodist minister writing books.”<sup>22</sup> A decade later, when Copway began writing and lecturing, not much had changed and his presence as a literate, Christian Indigenous person presented an interesting challenge for Euromericans to square with their worldview.

Though it might be tempting to try and interpret Copway’s earlier life through the lens of his troubled later years, it is important to remember that from 1847 to the mid-1850s he exerted a powerful influence over the image of indigeneity in American popular culture. In addition, his political voice was convincing enough that he could stand before state legislatures and the U.S. Congress to assert his ideas of Indigenous justice, often to resounding applause. By focusing on the years 1847-1851 and the works that he produced during this time, it becomes apparent that Copway embarked on an ambitious attempt to redefine indigeneity through the adoption of Christianity, Freemasonry, and English literacy, not simply to have it conform to Euromerican society, but to change it both culturally and politically. He wanted to make space for the survival of Indigenous society, and for him that meant facilitating change in Indigenous culture. Rather than settling into a career as a Methodist minister under the supervision of often oppressive supervisors, Copway pursued fame and power on an equal footing with his Euromerican peers, becoming the first Indigenous Canadian to publish his own writings.<sup>23</sup> The English literacy that he had obtained through his Methodist education enabled him to curate his understanding of Anishinaabe culture and to argue for its importance in public discourse.

Because Copway appropriated Euromerican culture and religion, some scholars have concluded that he lost or completely abandoned his Indigenous identity.<sup>24</sup> For this reason Copway has often been studied through psychological and post-colonial theoretical approaches that portray him as a victim of colonization who was left broken and without a coherent identity. Literary critic Cheryl Walker took this approach in concluding that Copway’s autobiography was part of a subjugated discourse that failed in its attempts to mimic a dominant Euromerican

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<sup>22</sup> Robert Warrior, *The People and the Word: Reading Native Nonfiction* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), 7.

<sup>23</sup> Schmalz, *The Ojibwa of Southern Ontario*, 152.

<sup>24</sup> Cheryl Walker, *Indian Nation: Native American Literature and Nineteenth-Century Nationalisms* (Durham: NC Duke University Press), 84 and ff., also Smith, *Mississauga Portraits*, 190 and ff.

literature.<sup>25</sup> Walker argued that “the text’s confusing array of premises and styles” reflected “Copway’s own lack of psychological and cultural coherence.”<sup>26</sup> Although German historian Bernd Peyer’s historical analysis of Copway is an important entry in the historiography, he too slips into psychological interpretation, speculating that Copway may have developed a “windigo psychosis” which caused him to lash out irrationally at his family and supporters.<sup>27</sup> This approach, which is based on psychological interpretations of the Anishinaabe *wiindigoo*, a being associated with cannibalism and the winter season, not only verges on racial caricature, but also oversimplifies Copway’s use of conflicting voices and genres. To quote literary critic Cathy Rex: “these readings conflate the events of Copway’s life with the material in his texts, add a dash of speculation about his mental processes, and finally provide an unsupportable reading of Copway’s psychological state rather than his literary endeavors.”<sup>28</sup> This thesis takes an alternative approach that assesses Copway’s experience of cultural hybridity with the theoretical tools of literary criticism and post-colonial theory tempered by the archival and anthropological methods of ethnohistory. Though Copway’s story has been explored a handful of times from a historical perspective, the implications of his story for Indigenous cultural history have not been explored in depth. However, in the discipline of literary criticism there have been several close examinations of specific works which have resulted in a much more theoretically sophisticated understanding. By using this literary approach as an example alongside recent innovations in Masonic history and religious studies, this thesis re-examines Copway from a historical standpoint in order to develop a more nuanced approach to historical studies of cultural change and continuity under nineteenth-century settler colonialism.

Copway’s search for fame and political power required that he dwell at the meeting-place between two cultural and religious systems. While he abandoned many of the ideas and practices of his Anishinaabe childhood, the settler culture that he appropriated granted him an international

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<sup>25</sup> Walker, *Indian Nation*, 85.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 85.

<sup>27</sup> Peyer, *The Tutor’d Mind*, 263.

<sup>28</sup> Cathy Rex, “Survivance and Fluidity: George Copway's The Life, History, and Travels of Kah-ge-gah-bowh,” *Studies in American Indian Literatures* 18, no. 2 (Summer 2006), 2.



platform from which to subversively broadcast his pro-Indigenous ideas. My approach to this seeming paradox is influenced by historian Keith Carlson's study of the shifting expressions of Stó:lō collective identity over time. Throughout Copway's life and writing, I identify a recurring thread of cultural continuity amidst the powerful forces of colonial change. He may not have always been an accurate transmitter of Anishinaabe history, but his works serve as rich historical sources on the transformation and continuity of Indigenous identity in the nineteenth-century intellectual world. In his attempts to situate his community historically and to make space for them in the future, Copway repurposed his Christianity, Freemasonry, and literacy in unexpected ways.

### 1.3 Historiography

For broad background information on the history of the Southern Anishinaabe and their traditional cultural practices, this thesis draws from the ethnohistorical studies that grew out of early anthropological work. Harold Hickerson's *The Southwestern Chippewa: an Ethnohistorical Study* (1962) and *The Chippewa and Their Neighbours: A Study in Ethnohistory* (1970) began the move to combine anthropological and historical methods into a new ethnohistorical approach, pushing beyond the limited use of colonial textual records. Anthropologist Elizabeth Graham also implemented an ethnohistorical approach in her 1975 study of missions amongst the Mississauga, including the Rice Lake community, in *Medicine Man to Missionary: Missionaries as Agents of Change among the Indians of Southern Ontario, 1784-167* (1975). One of the most important sources for this thesis' grounding in Anishinaabe history is Peter S. Schmalz' *The Ojibwa of Southern Ontario* (1991), a broad overview of their history from the earliest records to the nineteen-eighties.<sup>29</sup>

The foundation of Copway studies was laid by historian Donald Smith, beginning in the mid-nineteen-seventies. By locating a large amount of the archival records concerning Copway, especially publications and correspondence related to his missionary work, Smith was able to make sense of an otherwise confusing narrative. This research was synthesized and published in two chapter-length biographies. The first appeared in a reprinted copy of Copway's *Life, Letters,*

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<sup>29</sup> The extensively annotated endnotes in Peyer's *The Tutor'd Mind* were an essential resource for the development of this thesis' secondary research; Peyer, *The Tutor'd Mind*, 367-8.

*and Speeches* (1997) edited by Smith and LaVonne Brown Ruoff, who also contributed an essay examining the larger context of Indigenous Methodism. Smith's second biography published in 2013 in *Mississauga Portraits* made use of the advances in information technology to expand and refine the archival research. These essays provided a very important foundation for the more focused religious and literary studies that were to follow. In a 1984 essay on Copway's involvement with the nativist Order of the Star-Spangled Banner or Know-Nothings, historian Dale Knobel began to unpack Copway's deployment of Indigenous identity as a strategy to promote Indigenous political interests within American nativist movements. Knobel's study pushed the field away from biographical history by using Copway's writings and life as historical sources themselves that provided a window into Indigenous engagement with Euromerican culture and politics.

Historian Bernd Peyer expanded on Smith, Ruoff, and Knobel's work in *The Tutor'd Mind: Indian Missionary-Writers in Antebellum America* (1997), where he framed Copway as a transitional figure bridging the eras of 'Salvationism' and 'Modernity' in Indigenous literature. One of Peyer's most significant contributions was his use of the theory of transculturation to describe Copway's inter-cultural experience. This theoretical approach, originally formulated by Cuban anthropologist Fernando Ortiz, allowed for a more nuanced and flexible understanding of culture than was allowed by simpler ideas of acculturation and assimilation.<sup>30</sup> Where previous historical scholarship treated Copway as someone who mixed or switched cultures, Peyer viewed Copway as a more transformative figure who created something new from the interaction of the Euromerican and Anishinaabe worldviews. As a scholar based in Germany, Peyer also contributed key information regarding Copway's trip to the Frankfurt Peace Congress, particularly his warm reception in the German press. In the essay "A Nineteenth-Century Ojibwa Conquers Germany" (2002), Peyer closely followed Copway's journey through Germany, most significantly showing Copway's use of Freemasonry to meet with Prussian Prince Friedrich Wilhelm Ludwig as a Masonic brother. Besides Smith, Ruoff, Peyer, and Knobel there is surprisingly little work on Copway from a historical perspective, other than brief mentions in broad works on the Anishinaabe in general. Though this thesis draws from an interdisciplinary

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<sup>30</sup> Bernd C. Peyer, *The Tutor'd Mind: Indian Missionary-Writers in Antebellum America* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1997), 4.

range of sources, as a history it is situated in the intellectual stream formed by these core works and is indebted to them for an understanding of the larger historical context in which Copway lived.

#### 1.4 Methodology

In the opening of his essay “Thick Description: Towards an Interpretive Theory of Culture” anthropologist Clifford Geertz examined the role of theory in the discipline of anthropology. Building on the work of philosopher Susanne Langer, Geertz mused that revolutionary ideas that at first appear to “resolve all fundamental problems” initially swell to influence the efforts of most scholars in a field before receding to more controlled uses as their strengths and limitations become better-understood.<sup>31</sup> Although he identifies this as a common phenomenon across disciplines, he notes that it applies especially well to the notion of ‘culture’ and describes his collection of essays as various attempts to cut the idea down into “a narrowed, specialized, and... theoretically more powerful concept of culture.”<sup>32</sup> This approach to theory can be seen in the following three chapters that each deal with a focused aspect of Copway’s cultural hybridity. Religious studies, postcolonial studies, literary criticism, and ethnohistory have all influenced my approach, and I have highlighted those metaphors and conceptual frameworks that have influenced my analysis.

In addition to the theoretical approach of transculturation used by Peyer, this thesis also draws upon post-colonial theorist Homi K. Bhabha’s theory of ‘cultural hybridity’ as expressed in *The Location of Culture*. Hybridity highlights the way colonial and colonized cultures necessarily transform one another when they come into contact. Like transculturation, cultural hybridity also allows a more dynamic understanding of inter-cultural interaction than the binaries implicit in ideas of cultural authenticity, assimilation, and acculturation. While still considering the change and loss that occurs in these colonial encounters, Bhabha argues that they can also have creative and transformative effects: “these ‘in-between’ spaces provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood—singular or communal—that initiate new signs of identity, and

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<sup>31</sup> Clifford Geertz, “Thick Description: Toward and Interpretive Theory of Culture,” in *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 1973), 3.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself.”<sup>33</sup> Together with transculturation, this theoretical approach allows for a better understanding of Copway’s engagement with Euromerican culture and his creation and deployment of indigenized Christian, Masonic, and intellectual identities in the promotion of Indigenous interests.

Figures like Copway, in attempting to assert their own equality through appropriation of the colonizer’s culture, were often viewed by settler society as Homi Bhabha’s cultural “mimic men,” individuals who inadvertently supported the colonial project by seeming to prove the superiority of Euromerican culture through their adoption of it.<sup>34</sup> It is important to remember, however, that mimic men in Bhabha’s use of the term were part of a colonial strategy of control (despite whatever freedom the mimic men may have exercised in terms of Indigenous agency). This aspect of Bhabha’s theory makes sense of Copway’s repeated frustrations in his appropriation of Christianity, Freemasonry, and literacy for they allowed him to become “almost the same but not quite... almost the same but not white.”<sup>35</sup> Though the strategy of cultural mimicry could bring a sense of justification to colonial authorities, the cultural hybridity that resulted from such “discriminatory practices” posed an existential threat to the theological and philosophical supports for colonialism: “The display of hybridity—its peculiar ‘replication’—terrorizes authority with the *ruse* of recognition, its mimicry, its mockery.”<sup>36</sup> Copway’s adoption of new cultural identities gave him tools and resources that he could use to insert himself into the discourse on Indigenous identity and history through print, politics, and performance, and at various points in his career he would twist these tools to critique and challenge settler society.

It was during the successful five-year period in New York that Copway left his cultural mark as an Anishinaabe intellectual, and this moment of success will be examined to reveal his use of Euromerican ideas of race and indigeneity to further his own ambitions. Although some aspects of all three chapters deal with events beyond this five-year scope, this thesis is grounded

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<sup>33</sup> Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 1-2.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 87.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 89.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 114-115.

in the body of literature that he produced during this time. To focus a qualitative analysis of Copway's writings and archival footprint, this thesis moves through three thematic aspects of his engagement with Euromerican culture: his conversion to Methodist Christianity, affiliation with American Freemasonry, and embrace of English literacy and literary trends.

One of the most significant contributions of this thesis to historical scholarship is the examination of previously unexplored archival sources. In the early twenty-first century, databases like *America's Historical Newspapers*, *American Religion: Denominational Newspapers*, and Proquest's *American Periodicals* digitized and made available hundreds of articles, advertisements, and news items pertaining to George Copway.<sup>37</sup> A search for the term 'copway' yields up over a thousand items in *America's Historical Newspapers* alone. Other than Smith's most recent biography in *Mississauga Portraits*, most Copway scholarship was unable to fully assess the large footprint that he left in North American and European publications. This large body of sources reveals new dimensions of Copway's public engagement with Euromerican culture to curate his own understanding of Anishinaabe identity. The dates and geographical locations recorded in Copway's advertisements and press announcements of his appearance in various cities also aided in establishing a timeline that clarified his previously confusing engagement with American Freemasonry. By examining unexplored Masonic archival collections in New York City and Washington D.C. alongside Copway's appearances in newspaper databases, this thesis stitches together a chapter of Copway's cultural hybridity that had previously been unknown.

## 1.5 Conclusion

In reviewing one of Copway's lectures, a member of the press noted that "a keen observer must he have been of our institutions, our social structure, and our prevailing character, whether for good or evil."<sup>38</sup> This odd report reveals the unease that a transcultural figure like Copway could produce in colonial society. While his adoption of Christianity, Freemasonry, and English literacy seemed to prove the superiority of the settler world, his use of these ideas and

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<sup>37</sup> "History of Readex from Microprint to Digital," *Readex*, accessed July 2, 2017, <http://www.readex.com/history-readex>.

<sup>38</sup> Copway, *Life, Letters, and Speeches*, 211.

techniques produced a rather different effect. Due to his unique context and ambitious personality, Copway was able to broadcast his ideas and take an active role in influencing non-Indigenous society's understanding of Indigenous North Americans. In the end, Copway's freedom and ambitions collided with the social and racial barriers of nineteenth-century America, leaving him alone and bereft of resources. But his writings remain, and they constitute the carefully-curated thoughts and reactions of a nineteenth-century Anishinaabe towards the Euromerican world, thereby serving as a window into the processes and experience of transculturation under colonialism. Because of its cultural hybridity, Copway's life provides fresh avenues for challenging the categories of assimilation and authenticity. Indeed, his self-fashioning over time brings into question the categories themselves and invites a new approach to the study of Indigenous cultural change and continuity under colonialism.

## Chapter 2

# “Jesus Christ, Keshamonedoo’s Son:” Copway’s Indigenized Christianity

“Their worshippers must have been astounded and mortified when they returned, and discovered that their gods had vanished.”

Copway commenting on his wife and sister-in-law  
throwing Indigenous “idols” into a river.<sup>1</sup>

In the hot summer of 1845, George Copway threw an enormous party in the village of Saugeen, Ontario, where he was serving as a minister under the auspices of the Canadian Methodist Conference. Ojibwe pastors, chiefs, and elders travelled from bands scattered around the Great Lakes to discuss their prospects for the future. Settler farmers had been encroaching on their lands and, despite mounting conflicts, the Canadian government proved unwilling or unable to intervene effectively. These tribal leaders had come to the conclusion that to assert their rights they would need to unite politically. At the centre of the camp meeting, from an improvised stage, community leaders loudly praised Jesus, the son of Gitche Manitou, asking him to send aid where the government would not. Copway stood at the back of the crowded clearing, sweating in his dark suit and watching the proceedings with a pleased smile. Although hosting the event, and a gifted orator, he kept to the margins as a quiet observer. Meanwhile, about two-hundred kilometers southwest in Credit River, Copway’s cleric supervisors were seething at what they as non-Indigenous men regarded as a brazen misuse of church funds. Although this event involved prayers, hymn singing, and preaching in the form of a Methodist camp meeting, it was neither sanctioned by church authorities nor in pursuit of their goals. Copway and the band leaders working with him had taken the methods, forms, and philosophies of Methodism and employed them to promote their own Anishinaabe interests. The Saugeen conference was the first time that Copway used the religion, literacy, and cultural knowledge that he gained from Euromerican missionaries to pursue his own ends and it contained the germ from which would develop many of his later projects.

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<sup>1</sup> George Copway, *Life, Letters, and Speeches*, 132.

From his childhood as the son of a prominent shaman up until his death in the home of a Methodist reverend, religious philosophy and practice were essential components of Copway's worldview.<sup>2</sup> Religion provided a larger cosmological and philosophical background for him to support his arguments and assertions and helped him to make sense of his place in history. Copway's Methodist (and later more general-Protestant) Christianity gave him a shared moral and intellectual framework with his Euromerican audiences and provided him with ready-made social networks. This provided him with audiences and allowed him to appeal to their Christian moral sensibilities in arguing for Indigenous rights. Like all other aspects of Copway's cultural makeup, his religion was a product of the interaction of Methodist Christianity and his traditional Ojibwe upbringing.

## 2.2 Historiography

The historiography of North American Indigenous Christianity begins with writers like William Appess, Samson Occom, Peter Jones, and George Copway who chronicled their own experiences in religious autobiographies. These individuals were not only some of the first Indigenous writers in English, but also some of the first North American Indigenous Protestant Christians. Their works, as well as the autobiographies of contemporary Euromerican missionaries, generally portray Christian mission and native conversion as positive forces. These early Indigenous authors fit into a genre that Bernd Peyer refers to as 'salvationist literature,' accounts of the author's movement from an unsaved 'state of nature' through the emotional experience of a religious conversion, and then a successful life lived in service to Jesus Christ and to the new faith, usually as a clergyman amongst their own people.<sup>3</sup> Religious studies scholar George Tinker's *Missionary Conquest* (1993) presented a strong challenge to heroic portrayals of Euromerican missionaries by demonstrating that their activities could not be separated from the larger project of settler colonialism.

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<sup>2</sup> I follow historian Michael Angel in using the term 'worldview' to mean a way of looking at and interpreting reality, and 'cosmology' in an older religious and spiritual sense rather than a scientific one.

<sup>3</sup> Peyer, *Tutor'd Mind*, 277.



Religious scholar Michael McNally argued for a new shift in theoretical approach in “The Practice of Native American Christianity” (2000) in order to account the complexities of Indigenous Christianity. His exploration of the experiences of the Ojibwe *Anami’aawin* Christians who identified themselves as both Indigenous and Christian revealed the limitations of ideas of religious syncretism. Rather than focusing on religious conversion as a simple extension of cultural assimilation McNally proposed shifting towards a more dynamic view of religious change that could include the lived experiences of Indigenous Christians.<sup>4</sup> This idea was pushed even further in *Native Americans, Christianity, and the Reshaping of the American Religious Landscape* (2010) where religious historian Joel Martin argued for a move towards lived religion in the style of religious studies scholar Robert Orsi, signalling a move away from approaching religions as homogenous systems with clear boundaries.

This thesis follows the example and approach of two important historical studies that apply this new theoretical approach in their examination of Indigenous Christianity: Susan Neylan’s *The Heavens are Changing: Nineteenth-Century Protestant Missions and Tsimshian Christianity* (2003) and Linford Fisher’s *The Indian Great Awakening: Religion and the Shaping of Native Cultures in Early America* (2012). Fisher re-examines the scholarship on Indigenous participation in the first and second Great Awakenings by exploring the agency of English-literate Indigenous Christians as active transformers not only of their original culture, but also of the religious narratives and practice of their newly-adopted Christianity. An example of this is his analysis of independent Mohegan religious movements that openly criticised and separated from the Congregationalist revivals, establishing Christian theology and modes of worship that were uniquely Indigenous and which they viewed as natural extensions of their traditional worldview.<sup>5</sup> Previous scholarship had long viewed the Indigenous Great Awakening as a straightforward narrative of cultural abandonment and assimilation into an overpowering

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<sup>4</sup> Michael D. McNally, “The Practice of Native American Christianity,” *Church History*, 69, no. 4 (2000), 850.

<sup>5</sup> Linford D. Fisher, *The Indian Great Awakening: Religion and the Shaping of Native Cultures in Early America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 131.

Euromerican culture, but Fisher's close historical analysis reveals cultural continuity that transformed Christianity into something uniquely Indigenous.<sup>6</sup>

### 2.3 Copway's Early Religious Experiences

In 1835, the prominent American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM) Minnesota missionary Edmund Ely asserted that full salvation would only be possible for the Ojibwe if they could adopt an agricultural lifestyle that would allow them to participate in the markets of British North America and the United States.<sup>7</sup> Though Euro-Canadian Methodists, or "black coats" as the Indigenous people called them, had been operating in Indigenous Upper Canada since the 1790s, they only began to make rapid progress in the early 1820s beginning in Credit River.<sup>8</sup> This community lay over one-hundred kilometers to the southwest of Rice Lake near the north shore of Lake Ontario, and its growing Methodist community hoped to expand their community throughout the surrounding Anishinaabe communities.

Perhaps the Methodist's most significant accomplishment was the conversion of Kahkewaquonaby, or Peter Jones, a Credit River Mississauga who became educated through the assistance of his wealthy Welsh-born father.<sup>9</sup> Jones and his half-sister had a powerful spiritual experience at a Methodist camp meeting in the spring of 1823 and as historian Neil Semple puts it: "ushered in a new era in Methodist relations with native people."<sup>10</sup> The 1821 Methodist Genesee Conference had developed a new strategy for Methodist missions. Rather than attempting to produce scattered converts who could easily forget their new religion, Canadian Methodist leadership realized that they needed focused, in-depth missional work that could begin

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<sup>6</sup> Linford D. Fisher, "It Provd But Temporary, & Short Lived," *Ethnohistory*, 59, no. 3 (2012): 466-7.

<sup>7</sup> Kugel, Rebecca, and Ojibwa. "Of Missionaries and Their Cattle: Ojibwa Perceptions of a Missionary as Evil Shaman." *Ethnohistory* 41, no. 2 (1994): 229.

<sup>8</sup> Peyer, Tutor'd Mind, 232; Elizabeth Graham, *Medicine Man to Missionary*, 51.

<sup>9</sup> Neil Semple, *The Lord's Dominion*, 154.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid*, 155.

to transform Mississaugan society itself.<sup>11</sup> In light of this new approach, they began laying the groundwork for manual labour schools, and weekly education at the local level in order to raise up a generation of Anishinaabe Methodists trained in English literacy and culture.

George Copway saw his first Methodist missionaries in the early summer of 1827. According to his autobiography, his father, John, had purchased a cask of liquor and was hosting a lake-side celebration when a group of Ojibwe strangers interrupted the festivities. After identifying themselves as members of the nearby Credit River community, they began to share a story that Copway's father found strange: *Gitche Manitou* the "Great Spirit" had begun to interact directly with human beings. "*Jesus Christ, Ke-sha-mon-e-doo O-gwe-son* (the Benevolent Spirit's son), came down to the world, and died to save the people; all the Indians at the Credit River... are now on their road to the place where the Saviour has gone. Jesus has left a book containing his commands and sayings to all the world..."<sup>12</sup> In his account, Copway explains that this message had a powerful effect on his parents: "He [the Ojibwe evangelist] described the way that the Son of God was crucified. I observed some of them crying; my mother heaved deep sighs."<sup>13</sup> One of the missionaries prayed for the members of the Rice Lake community: "O Great Spirit! Here are some of my own relatives; open their eyes and save them!"<sup>14</sup> In response to this message, Copway's father paddled into the lake with the cask of whiskey and poured it out. After returning to shore, he addressed his family and friends, referring to the Ojibwe missionaries as "our brothers" and informing them he would travel to the nearby community of Coburg for a camp meeting along with whoever was willing to join him.<sup>15</sup>

When the party from Rice Lake arrived at Coburg their excitement quickly turned into fear at the "great number of whites" who caused them to "feel rather timid and suspicious." Anticipating that the Euromerican missionaries were planning some kind of deception, John Copway instructed George to hide in the forest while the adults approached the campsite

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Copway, *Life, Letters, and Speeches*, 96.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, 97.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

cautiously.<sup>16</sup> Copway states that his father did this to protect him from physical harm as they anticipated an attack from the Euromerican missionaries. After weighing the situation and finding the missionaries to be genuine, John Copway found himself drawn to the music and prayers of the Methodist tent meeting and, after engaging in the prayers and worship, he adopted Christianity in an emotional and dramatic conversion experience.<sup>17</sup>

George Copway's parents did not force their new spirituality on their children and as a result George refused to join them in their Christian religious practice for three years. His attitude changed dramatically in the winter of 1829-30. Copway's mother grew sick December, 1829, and during her illness she expressed a wish that all her children could one day join her after death.<sup>18</sup> Filled with grief, Copway began to actively search for meaning in his parents' Methodism. In the summer of 1830 George accompanied his father to a tent meeting about twenty-seven kilometers from Rice Lake in the town of Colborne. Enroute, John encouraged his son to consider becoming a Christian, which made George feel distressed: "I now began to feel as if I should die; *I felt very sick in my heart* [italics in original]." When they arrived at the campsite a thunderstorm had begun, adding to his consternation. The sermon, delivered by a Euromerican and translated into Anishinaabemowin by an Indigenous preacher, made a strong impression on the young man and he found himself lying in the mud and trying unsuccessfully to pray. Taking shelter in the roots of a tree, Copway underwent a vision of a bright light that moved towards him through the forest before descending on his head like the tongues of fire at Pentecost. In an allusion to the ritual of baptism, Copway writes that he awoke with his head in a puddle of rainwater and a heart on fire for his new religion shouting out, "*Glory to Jesus* [italics in original]" in English.<sup>19</sup> These months of his mother's sickness and his subsequent conversion had a profound effect on the twelve-year-old boy. Writing in the early 1840s, Copway stated that

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 98.

<sup>18</sup> Peyer, *The Tutor'd Mind*, 235.

<sup>19</sup> Copway, *Life, Letters, and Speeches*, 101-2.

he always preceded his lectures on Ojibwe culture by singing the Ojibwe hymn that his mother sang before she died: “Jesus ish pe ming kah e zhod... Jesus, my all, to heaven is gone.”<sup>20</sup>

Around 1828, George Copway had began to learn reading and writing along with fifty other students at a Methodist mission school in Rice Lake, set up by James Evans, the missionary who went on to develop the Cree syllabic alphabet.<sup>21</sup> In his autobiography, Copway attributes his passion for learning to his desire to be able to read the English Bible and to teach others to do the same.<sup>22</sup> This religious drive made him a strong student, and when the American Methodists asked for four Rice Lake Ojibwe to aid them in their Lake Superior mission work, the leadership picked four men, the youngest of which was sixteen-year-old George Copway. After a period of resistance, including an impromptu hunting trip, Copway agreed to join and the four left Rice Lake on July 16, 1834, beginning a three-year mission amongst the Ojibwe and Sioux of the Lake Superior region.<sup>23</sup> Peter Jones, who had become a spiritual guide in Copway’s life, remarked that the young Copway possessed a “deep piety” and wished him well on his journey.<sup>24</sup>

During this period, Copway and his companions worked in communities at Keenenaw on the southeastern shore of Lake Superior, La Pointe in what would become Wisconsin, and Ottawa Lake where he helped establish a brand-new mission. He also aided Reverend Sherman Hall in translating the books of Luke and Acts into Anishinaabemowin.<sup>25</sup> The Methodist leadership was so impressed with his abilities that they send him to Ebenezer Manual Labor School at Fort Snelling where he advanced his education even further.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 99.

<sup>21</sup> Peyer, *The Tutor’d Mind*, 232.

<sup>22</sup> Copway, *Life, Letters, and Speeches*, 102.

<sup>23</sup> Smith, *Mississauga Portraits*, 171.

<sup>24</sup> Peter Jones, Anecdote Book, anecdote no. 15, quoted in Donald B. Smith, *Sacred Feathers*, 196.

<sup>25</sup> Smith, *Mississauga Portraits*, 172 and 174-5.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 176.

Following graduation at the age of 21, he embarked on a Grand Tour of sorts throughout the eastern United States. The size and complexity of New York and Boston made a great impression on the young man, who had never travelled beyond Southern Ontario or gazed on “the works of the white man.”<sup>27</sup> During this trip, he also began to realize the diversity and divisions within Christianity as he encountered Roman Catholics, Quakers, Anglicans, and other denominations. While showing genuine amazement at the technology and immense numbers of Americans, Copway began to be deeply troubled by the implications these things held for his own people. He later recorded these feelings in a poem: “Once more I see my fathers’ land / Upon the beach, where oceans roar; / Where whiten’d bones bestrew the sand, / of some brave warrior of yore. // O! tell me, ye ‘pale faces,’ tell, / Where have my proud ancestors gone?”<sup>28</sup> It was during this trip that he visited the Missionary Rooms of the ABCFM in Boston and saw the tools, clothing, and art of his home on display as curious artifacts in a glass case. This anecdote immediately follows the above poem in his autobiography almost as a coda on the theme of the fate that seemed to be approaching his people.<sup>29</sup>

After returning to Rice Lake, Copway married Elizabeth Howell, the educated daughter of Yorkshire farmers on June 1, 1840. Most of her family refused to attend the wedding but it was officiated by Copway’s supportive mentor Peter Jones.<sup>30</sup> The couple spent the next six years heavily involved in Methodist missionary work, teaching and preaching to the Ojibwe and Souix at Fond du Lac in Minnesota. They were only posted there for a short time, however, and in 1842 the Copways returned to Canada. George continued to rise in the ranks and was sent on a fundraising tour throughout Upper Canada with Methodist William Ryerson. Following this trip, he was made minister of the Saugeen mission on Lake Huron, and seemed well on his way to a successful career a Methodist minister. Although Copway was on track to follow in the footsteps of older leaders like Jones, Copway was becoming increasingly frustrated with the meagre

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<sup>27</sup> Copway *Life, Letters, and Speeches*, 122.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 123.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> Peyer, *Tutor’d Mind*, 238.

salaries that missionaries received. Elizabeth had given birth to their first child, and the mission society regularly refused his request for increased funding.<sup>31</sup>

Some of Copway's Euromerican colleagues viewed him as arrogant and headstrong, but Peyer argues that this can be attributed to their discomfort at working alongside an Indigenous person that neither fit within their racial stereotype nor balked at sharing his own opinions.<sup>32</sup> In his recollections of this time, Copway expresses his annoyance with the mocking and pernicious comments that his non-Indigenous peers often made about his marriage to an Englishwoman. The racial ideas of the day created ample room for conflict. They often cropped up blatantly and aggressively like at a public meeting in Toronto where Reverend Thomas Hulbert, a British Canadian Methodist missionary, stated: "The Indians, unchristianized were destitute of fellow-feeling, were superstitious, immoral, imbecile in mind, and degraded in social habits." The missionary went even further, claiming that "the Indians are cannibals" and that Indigenous peoples were a corrupting influence on Euromerican society. These are not even direct quotes, but were re-worded for summarization in the Methodist journal *The Christian Guardian*.<sup>33</sup> Though George Copway was present at the meeting, he neither stood up to Hulbert in person, nor responded via publication in *The Guardian*, as Peter Jones did, quickly and aggressively.<sup>34</sup> Despite their acceptance of Methodism, education in English literacy, and establishment of Euromerican nuclear families, these Indigenous Methodists were still regarded as racially and spiritually inferior and were expected to do as they were told. Copway may not have acted at the meeting in 1843, but he was about to in a dramatic fashion.

Copway attracted the full wrath of Canadian Methodist leadership in the summer of 1844, when he threw a massive event in Saugeen without denominational authorization. It was to be a Methodist-style tent-meeting revival followed by a general Council of Methodist Ojibwa chiefs and leaders where they would discuss their grievances with the government as well as plans to restructure their remaining lands. The meeting featured Indigenous preachers and hosted chiefs from all the surrounding bands. Ideas of Indigenous sovereignty, including the writing up of their

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<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 241.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 239.

<sup>33</sup> *The Christian Guardian*, quoted in Donald B. Smith, *Sacred Feathers*, 186.

<sup>34</sup> Smith, *Mississauga Portraits*, 180.

own code of laws, dominated the discussion and were drawn up by Copway into a five-point plan.<sup>35</sup> This meeting proved to be a highlight of Copway's career and he reflects on it glowingly in his autobiography: "Never was I more delighted than with the appearance of this body. As I sat and looked at them. I contrasted their former (degraded) with their present (elevated) condition. The Gospel, I thought, had done all this."<sup>36</sup> Despite his conflicts with church officials, and his unauthorized use of their funds, Copway saw himself as doing the Lord's work, and interpreted this show of Indigenous political agency as his people catching up with their Euromerican neighbours.

While Copway may have viewed the conference as the outworking of Christianity, his supervisors were angered by his depletion of the Saugeen mission fund and disregard for their authority. They had also been discredited in the eyes of the government, as the governor-general had expressed his disapproval at this council that had been called without his knowledge.<sup>37</sup> In part due to this situation, the Copways moved back to Rice Lake where George took an administrative position as the band's council clerk. There he attracted more negative attention by mismanaging the band's government funds. Accusations of embezzlement emerged and he was removed from his position and briefly placed in jail. On release, he found that he had been expelled from the Canadian Methodist Conference and publically humiliated in the eyes of his band members.<sup>38</sup>

But George Copway was resilient. Only a month after his public downfall, he moved his small family to the northeastern United States and began a series of public lectures, telling audiences that he was a Methodist missionary raising funds for manual labour schools in Canada, a project that he was neither authorized to undertake nor ever fulfilled. During these months, he composed his autobiography with the help of Elizabeth, and in 1847, *The Life, History, and Travels of Kahgegahbowh (George Copway)* was published.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Copway, *Life, Letters, and Speeches*, 146-7.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 148.

<sup>37</sup> Smith, *Mississauga Portraits*, 182.

<sup>38</sup> Peyer, *The Tutor'd Mind*, 241-2.

<sup>39</sup> Smith, *Mississauga Portraits*, 166.



During the subsequent years of success as a literary celebrity, Copway moved away from identifying himself as ‘Reverend’ George Copway. This paralleled a shift in the content of his books, which moved from more traditional Christian conversions stories to ethnographic topics. Although his early letters from the mid-1840s close with “yours in Christ, George Copway,” by 1849-50 Copway was closing with “George Copway, Ojibway Nation” or “Kahgegagahbowh, Chief Ojibway Nation.”<sup>40</sup> His business cards were even printed: “Kah ge ga gah bowh, Chief Ojibway Nation. G. Copway” with his full English first name only appearing as an initial after his Anishinaabe name and title. In addition, there is no mention of his role as a clergyman.<sup>41</sup> Despite this public move away from his religious identity, Copway still described himself as a reverend as late as 1852, as that is his listed occupation on the return for his Masonic lodge.<sup>42</sup>

## **2.4 Theoretical Approach: Cultural Bricolage and Lived Religion**

From the straightforward narrative of Copway’s engagement with Christianity, it could appear as though he simply rejected his Anishinaabe roots and embraced a new life in the Euroamerican world, a life defined by a new Methodist worldview. Although elements of this interpretation are true, it is an oversimplification that hides much of the interplay between the Anishinaabe and Euroamerican cultures. In his writing Copway takes ideas and beliefs that he identifies as Anishinaabe and pre-Contact, but then he carries many of these over into his Christianity, self-consciously in some cases. Though in his later life he deployed his Christian identity inconsistently, there are strong indications of sincere involvement. Even after he was rejected by his Christian community and was deeply involved in Indigenous sovereignty and

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<sup>40</sup> George Copway to Rev. Bro. Green, Dec. 4, 1846, American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions Archives, 1810-1961 (ABC 1-91), Houghton Library, Harvard University; George Copway to H.W. Longfellow, April 1849, Letters to Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (MS Am 1340.2-1340.7), Houghton Library, Harvard University; George Copway to Warman Esq. [?], Historical Society, dated Nov 13<sup>th</sup> 1848, Item 3, George Copway letters, 1848-1863, Manuscript Collection, New-York Historical Society.

<sup>41</sup> Business Card undated, Item 1, George Copway letters, 1848-1863, Manuscript Collection, New-York Historical Society.

<sup>42</sup> “Return for Atwood Lodge No. 208 December 1851-June 1852” in personal Correspondence with the Chancellor Robert R. Livingston Masonic Library.

cultural preservation, he still maintained that the teaching of Christianity would be central to any reconciliation between Euromerican and Indigenous society. In some ways, Copway's separation from his Methodist roots allowed him to employ his Christianity in new ways. It gave him a moral framework that he knew Euromericans could understand, and that he could then use to judge their behavior towards Indigenous people. Although Copway underwent a radical cultural and religious transformation, a simplistic conception of religious assimilation cannot account for these phenomena.

In "The Practice of Native American Christianity" Michael McNally argued that in order to do justice to the complexity of religious conversion under colonialism religious historians' focus needed to "shift from system to bricolage, from belief to practice."<sup>43</sup> This implementation of the process of practical bricolage wherein a worker makes use of the limited tools and materials that they have on hand is a reference to anthropologist Claude Levi Strauss' notion of cultural bricolage.<sup>44</sup> This understanding of cultural development not only makes sense of unexpected transformations but anticipates them: "Like 'bricolage' on the technical plane, mythical reflection can reach brilliant unforeseen results on the intellectual plane."<sup>45</sup> Once historians begin to move away from the idea of homogenous religious systems with clear boundaries that individuals either join or leave, they can begin to appreciate the diverse ways that converts like Copway and his community indigenized their Methodist faith to create a new hybrid worldview that was both practical and spiritually beneficial for them.

In *Lived Religion*, religious studies scholar Meredith McGuire applies Claude Levi-Strauss' concept to the formation of religious identities. Her interviews and explorations of everyday religious practice revealed that in most, if not all, cases the adherent combines techniques, methods, and ideas from a variety of sources. Religion was not necessarily a primarily cognitive activity, but one focused on practice.<sup>46</sup> These were often variations of their own religiosity, but could even be drawn from completely different cultural contexts. In the case

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<sup>43</sup> McNally, "The Practice of Native American Christianity," 850.

<sup>44</sup> Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1962), 11.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>46</sup> Meredith McGuire, *Lived Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008) 12-13.

of a religious convert, this means that they would not necessarily reject their old religion wholesale, but could in fact be modifying it, adding to it, or transforming it as they adopt ideas and methods from a new body of religious knowledge and practice: “At the level of the individual, religion is not fixed, unitary, or even coherent. We should expect that all persons’ religious practices and the stories with which they make sense of their lives are always changing, adapting, and growing.” Instead of a cognitive system with clear boundaries defined by a centralized authority, real religion is made up of the ordinary, day-to-day practices and experiences of religious adherents. This dynamic approach to religious studies is what McGuire calls the study of lived religion. This theory postulates that, rather than adopting a specific, singular religious identity, the convert or adherent develops a complex religious identity made up of rituals, beliefs, and traditions derived from a range of experiences throughout their spiritual life.<sup>47</sup>

Like Levi-Strauss’ cultural bricoleur, Copway used the religious ideas and practices he encountered to create something new and workable that fulfilled spiritual needs in his life. Although the results happened to propel him to fame, the process was not as neat and intentional as it sounds. For Copway, and other trans-cultural individuals, the experience of cultural bricolage is a pragmatic one that is guided by circumstance as much as by choice. It is this unsystematic nature of religious change that makes the ‘lived religion’ approach necessary. Theological paradoxes, and apparently opposed religious practices frequently appear in an individual or a community’s religious life and cannot be accounted for by traditional systematic approaches to religion.

## **2.5 Syncretism and Hybridity: Anishinaabe Spirituality and Christianity**

In their zeal to extend the network of their religions, Christian missionaries were often blinded to the nuances of their interactions with Indigenous communities. Misunderstanding on both sides of the cultural exchange often resulted in unusual and unexpected cultural transformation as Indigenous people took an idea, object, or practice and implemented it in new ways. Historian Rebecca Kugel highlights this in her focused examination of an 1839 incident where a cow belonging to Fond du Lac missionary Edmund Ely injured a young Ojibwe man.

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 195-6.

While the missionaries saw the incident as an unconnected and relatively unimportant series of events, the Fond du Lac Ojibwe viewed the whole situation as confirmation of Ely's status as a powerful, anti-social, and malevolent shaman.<sup>48</sup> Seemingly unobtrusive acts like the missionaries' display of cow pictures on the walls of their house communicated a seemingly clear message to the rest of the community. The strange new animal's treatment by the Euromericans led it to be seen as a mysterious creature that embodied the missionary's spiritual power. Ironically, Ely remained completely ignorant of the Ojibwe understandings and interpretations of his actions and behavior, to the detriment and eventual failure of the Fond du Lac mission. The transferal of a piece of a culture often resulted in unanticipated consequences. Kugel argues that while Indigenous people actively worked to obtain and examine new aspects of spiritual, technological, and material culture, their "perceptions... were not static, [and] they changed to reflect additional knowledge or altered circumstances."<sup>49</sup> This description fits Michael Angel's conception of the Anishinaabe worldview.

Angel's exploration of the Anishinaabe Midewiwin reveals that their *aadizookaanag* or sacred oral narratives were intended to communicate implicit truths rather than historical fact: "since theirs was a world view that prized stability over change, any appearance of change was interpreted as a repetition of old themes."<sup>50</sup> Rebecca Kugel echoes this by stating that Anishinaabe society "stressed harmony in interpersonal relationships."<sup>51</sup> The Rice Lake community's use of English literacy, and Euromerican religion makes sense when viewed with this Anishinaabe perspective in mind. The cultural changes that Copway underwent may have been extreme, but they were also in a sense the practical extension of the Ojibwe adaptability he had grown up with. The extent to which Copway and his peers changed matched the intense nature of their historical context under invasive cultural colonialism.

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<sup>48</sup> Kugel, Rebecca, and Ojibwa. "Of Missionaries and Their Cattle: Ojibwa Perceptions of a Missionary as Evil Shaman." *Ethnohistory* 41, no. 2 (1994): 233.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 240.

<sup>50</sup> Michael Angel, *Preserving the Sacred: Historical Perspectives on the Ojibwa Midewiwin* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2002), 3-4.

<sup>51</sup> Kugel, "Of Missionaries and their Cattle," 229.

Angel goes on to explain that the Anishinaabe would historically borrow variations on their traditional stories from other friendly, and even enemy tribes.<sup>52</sup> This cultural reciprocity reflected Ojibwe economic practices which involved the willing and generous exchange of food, equipment, and goods, a process that was viewed as essential to a healthy community.<sup>53</sup> From the Ojibwe perspective, the British and French could be considered another among a series of outsider communities who brought different knowledge and material culture. Angel argues: “That they should adopt and adapt some Euro-American concepts... into their world view is neither surprising, nor indicative that they were on the road to assimilation.”<sup>54</sup> The irony, Angel notes, is that while many Anishinaabeg adopted parts of Christianity or held it as coexistent with their own worldview, those who adopted an exclusive form of the new religion were abandoning one of the most essential tenets of their traditional worldview: adaptability.<sup>55</sup> This Anishinaabe philosophy, together with the already murky space of cultural exchange may have been the force behind many of the ideas in Copway’s writing that could be seen as religiously syncretic.

From his earliest writings Copway drew correlations between Christianity and the Anishinaabe worldview, especially in his referring to the Christian God as ‘The Great Spirit,’ his translation of Gitche Manitou. There is no obvious differentiation between the Great Spirit of the pre-conversion portion of his autobiography, and the Great Spirit of Christianity. Copway describes his father, an Ojibwa shaman, as praying to the ‘Great Spirit’ who responds by saving the family from starvation. In a later story, the young Copway receives revelations from the Great Spirit through personal dreams. Copway, writing almost two decades later as an English-educated Methodist minister, tells these stories not as interactions with some pagan deity, or with malevolent spirits, but as the direct working of the same god who he worshipped consistently throughout his life. This is made even clearer in the first edition of *Copway’s American Indian*

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<sup>52</sup> Angel, *Preserving the Sacred*, 19.

<sup>53</sup> Kugel, “Of Missionaries and their Cattle,” 229.

<sup>54</sup> Angel, *Preserving the Sacred*, 19.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

where he explains that Indigenous people had knowledge of the Christian God, who he equates with the Great Spirit, through nature in a form of general revelation.<sup>56</sup>

This consistency despite an apparent change in religious affiliation is partly due to the fact that the gospel that Copway's parents chose to make their own had already been indigenized. Copway reports that the Indigenous Methodists who introduced the Rice Lake band to Christianity told them of, "*Jesus Christ, Ka-sha-mon-e-doo O-gwe-son.*"<sup>57</sup> "Jesus Christ, Gitche Manitou's son." Rather than presenting a whole new alien cosmology, these Indigenous Christians simply informed their hearers that Gitche Manitou had sent a son into the world to save his people from sickness and death, a narrative not entirely unfamiliar in traditional Anishinaabe stories.

This idea had originated with shortcut-taking Euromerican Methodist missionaries who borrowed Anishinaabe words and concepts to make their preaching comprehensible. Reverend Alvin Torry, an influential Methodist missionary who partnered with Peter Jones and his sister shortly after their conversion in 1822, stated that he would proclaim: "Jesus Christ, the Son of the Great Spirit, and who lives with the Great Spirit above, will save you. He can cast the bad spirit out of your hearts..."<sup>58</sup> Statements like this attempted to convey very complex Methodist theological concepts in a culturally simplified way. This was the result of paternalistic assumptions about Indigenous worldviews as well an attempt to quickly overcome language barriers. The cosmological structure of a "Great Spirit" and a "bad spirit" bears a strong resemblance to already-existing Anishinaabe cosmology, and would also lend itself to a blurring of the boundaries between the two religions.

As can be seen in the teaching of Reverend Torry, this equating of spiritual beings applied equally to negative entities like demons, Satan, and the *maji-manidoog* or bad spirits. During baptismal ceremonies to confirm conversion, Euromerican Methodist missionaries delivered lectures carefully explaining that the converts need no longer fear gravesites or islands inhabited by malevolent *manidoog* and the Algonquian evil spirit because Christ the son of the

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<sup>56</sup> Copay, "Meeting at Tripler Hall, June 1," *Copway's American Indian*, vol. 1, no. 1, page 2.

<sup>57</sup> Copway, *Life, Letters, and Speeches*, 96.

<sup>58</sup> Alvin Torry, *Autobiography of Rev. Alvin Torry, First Missionary to the Six Nations and the Northwestern Tribes of British North America*, (Auburn: William J. Moses, 1862), 80.

Great Spirit would give them power over them.<sup>59</sup> Teachings like these not only implicitly confirmed the veracity of Ojibwe cosmology, but also indicated equivalency between their spiritual personalities.

Though he frequently dismissed Ojibwe religious ideas as pagan superstition, Peter Jones used similar semantic shortcuts in his preaching at Rice Lake: “I told them of the goodness of Kezhamunedoo (God) in sending His only begotten Son to save us from Mahjemunedoo, (the bad spirit) and that whosoever would believe on him should be made happy, and when they died be taken up to Ishpeming (Heaven).”<sup>60</sup> This inter-cultural equivalency can also be seen in Copway’s writing where he clearly identifies the opponent of his mission work on the south shore of Lake Superior not as Satan or ‘the Devil,’ but as “*Mah-je Mon-e-doo* (Bad Spirit)”.<sup>61</sup> Copway relates another story from the same mission concerning a group of shamans who, on running into conflict with the missionaries, challenged them to a contest to see who could “excel” in “worshipping the Great Spirit” indicating that these spiritual leaders did not view the missionaries as worshipping a different god, but rather the same entity in a different way.<sup>62</sup> By streamlining their own project of cultural transformation, Methodist missionaries were greatly increasing the likelihood for unintended cultural and religious hybridity.

This process moved in both directions as Anishinaabe individuals used Christian metaphor and history to assert Indigenous authority. In his 1885 *History of the Ojibway People* William Warren recounts this repurposing of Christian ideas. In explaining the various kinship symbols and their meanings, an Ojibwe Chief informs Warren that he “is the present living recognized head of the great A-waus-e family. He says that this clan claim the Me-she-num-aig-way (immense fish) which, according to their description, is equivalent or analogical, to the Leviathan mentioned in the Bible.”<sup>63</sup> According to Warren, this chief had appropriated a Judeo-

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<sup>59</sup> Graham, *Medicine Man to Missionary*, 55.

<sup>60</sup> Peter Jones, *Life and Journals of Kah-ke-wa-quo-na-by: Rev. Peter Jones* (Toronto: Anson Green, Wesleyan Printing Establishment, 1860), 83.

<sup>61</sup> Copway, *Life, Letters, and Speeches*, 108.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>63</sup> William Warren, *History of the Ojibway People*, 1885, (St. Paul, Minnesota: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1984), 45-6.

Christian concept to amplify and support traditional Anishinaabe political and social structures. Warren himself did not see these worldviews as mutually exclusive, and, writing in the 1840s, argued that there was more similarity than difference between his conception of traditional Anishinaabe morality and Euromerican Christianity.<sup>64</sup>

Another religious concept that bridges the pre- and post-conversion stages of Copway's life is that of spiritual revelation through dreams. Throughout his writings, Copway highly values dreams as a source of spiritual insight. This sharply contrasts with his mentor Peter Jones who criticized a group of Haudenosaunee Christians who had been using visions as part of their Christian worship: "I cautioned them against trusting to dreams or visions for fear of being led into error and superstition; and reminded them that God had revealed his will clearly in the Bible, from whence we must derive all our religious knowledge and rule for our conduct."<sup>65</sup> In contrast to this, Copway relates the importance of Anishinaabe dreams in the straight-forward wording of the academic: "The Ojibways place much dependence upon dreams. They are to them the omens of good or bad fortune. –Fastings of considerable length are endured in order to win the good will of the god [sic]." Peyer argues that Jones' attitude arose from his own struggles to engage in Indigenous spirituality as a child. Unlike Copway, he never experienced a vision through fasting and isolation.<sup>66</sup>

According to Angel, dreams were used by the Anishinaabeg to communicate with the *manidoog*, or spirits.<sup>67</sup> In this way they could be means of obtaining new knowledge or teachings through messages received in visions. These 'blessings' from the manidoog were often given to empower an individual to survive and be successful in life.<sup>68</sup> Copway's pre-Christian, childhood vision follows Angel's description almost exactly. Growing up, he would sleep away from his home in an effort to communicate with the manidoog, and when he was twelve years old he received a profound vision that left a strong impression on him. While sleeping under a large

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 67.

<sup>65</sup> Peter Jones, *Life and Journals*, 136.

<sup>66</sup> Peyer, *The Tutor'd Mind*, 233.

<sup>67</sup> Angel, *Preserving the Sacred*, 4.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 27.



pine tree, Copway saw a man approaching from the east who taught him a song. In the vision, wind and waves struck at the pine, but it remained unmoved. When the boy returned home he related this dream to his father who explained its meaning: “the aged tree, I hope, may indicate long life; the wind may indicate that you will travel much; the water which you saw, and the winds, will carry your canoe safely through the waves.”<sup>69</sup> Although Copway does not explicitly give his opinion on the truth of this vision, the following narrative of his travels throughout the United States and Canada presents an understated fulfillment of it.

Copway seems torn in portraying this episode in his autobiography. He precedes the story by speaking about Anishinaabe dreams and omens in general, and though he does not mock them or deny their reality, there is a tone of condescension. But once the vision is explained, Copway seems to backtrack: “I relied much on my dream, for then I knew no better. But, however, little reliance can be placed in dreams, yet may not the Great Spirit take this method, sometimes, to bring about some good results? [sic]” This question is turned into a strong affirmation when the dream of moving light plays a major role in his conversion to Christianity, and then the reality and value of dreams is confirmed even more strongly when he relates a third dream, one that he experiences in 1840, ten years after his conversion.

This vision of a sick cousin ascending to heaven is explicitly Christian and filled with the clichés of missionary literature in his descriptions of “clouds of angels” and a golden river. The dream is presented as a premonition, and Copway states that a few days later he learned that his cousin had died at exactly the moment he had his dream. Once again, despite the overt Christianity, Copway is defensive: “My readers will, I trust, excuse me for having inflicted upon them this dream. It is even now so vivid in my recollection, and being somewhat curious and peculiar, that I have ventured to give it. It is but a dream, and I wish to go for what it is worth, and no more.” These words ring somewhat hollow in the wake of such rapturous language and out-of-place references to the time of day and his location as proof of the prediction’s veracity, let alone his inclusion of three different personal visions. These weak disclaimers display a self-consciousness in Copway, showing that he anticipated a critical reaction to his visions even when they were expressions of the reality of a Christian cosmology. If his career in mission work, Christian education, and interactions with members of multiple denominations had led him anticipate resistance to these stories, then it is likely that the source for his value of dreams and

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<sup>69</sup> Copway, *Life, Letters, and Speeches*, 87-88.

visions was his childhood Anishinaabe worldview. Though he had adopted Methodist Christianity, Copway still retained a respect for, and belief in Anishinaabe means of spiritual revelation which had been rejected by his spiritual mentor, Peter Jones.

## **2.6 The Attraction of Methodism: Methodist Theology and Indigenous Social Action**

Despite competing with Moravian and Church of England missionaries, the Methodists achieved an unprecedented level of success amongst the Upper Canada Anishinaabeg.<sup>70</sup> Many of the values that brought success to the expansion of Methodism were rooted in its theological emphasis on principles of spiritual equality which, in turn, challenged nineteenth-century notions of race. Neil Semple argues that these progressive ideas originated from the teaching of the denomination's founder John Wesley. Wesley's theology of salvation was formed in response to the perceived rigidity of Calvinism. He pushed against the notion of a pre-ordained elect that had been selected by God for salvation, viewing this idea as exclusive, deterministic and "logically and scripturally absurd."<sup>71</sup> Rather, for Wesley, all humans were equal in their fallen state, prior to salvation, and equal in their responsibility to use their God-given will and conscience to approach God as individuals seeking salvation. Salvation itself was a gift offered universally to humankind regardless of their actions or status.<sup>72</sup> Copway's account of his conversion reflects this Wesleyan soteriology when he describes himself as being "saved by grace, by grace alone" and not by any individual qualities.<sup>73</sup> This theological egalitarianism was an important influence in Methodism's progressive approach to race. Wesley himself fought against American slavery and kept up correspondence with his friend William Wilberforce. In one of these letters, Wesley called the slave trade: "the vilest that ever saw the sun," and declared it "villainy" that an African man's oath was not considered legally equal to a European's.<sup>74</sup> These progressive ideas of race

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<sup>70</sup> Elizabeth Graham, *Medicine Man to Missionary*, 11-14.

<sup>71</sup> Semple, *The Lord's Dominion*, 15.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Copway, *Life, Letters, and Speeches*, 102.

<sup>74</sup> Wesley, "Letter to William Wilberforce - 1791," [www.umcmission.org](http://www.umcmission.org).

influenced the policy of Methodist missionaries in Upper Canada, leading them to create a space that encouraged the indigenization of Christianity in new and unexpected ways.

Peyer argues that one of the most attractive aspects of Methodist missions was their organization's willingness to educate and train Indigenous clergy, an approach that was implemented early on. Ironically, the dawn of the spread of Methodism began with Alvin Torry's failed attempts to establish a mission amongst the Haudenosaunee Six Nations community at Grand River in 1822. Although he adopted a soft approach that showed respect to their history and political structure he found himself unable to develop an Indigenous audience and began holding camp meetings for Euromericans instead.<sup>75</sup> It was at one of these meetings that Peter Jones and his sister Polly adopted Methodism. Through them, their Anishinaabeg relatives began to accept the new religion so that when Torry finally travelled to their community at Grand River, he found a nascent church already growing. Jones encouraged his mother, who lived at Credit River, to join and from there Methodism spread throughout the Anishinaabe community, including Rice Lake in 1826-7.<sup>76</sup> As the new faith spread, missionaries like James Evans established weekly day schools in each community where they taught religious lessons as well as reading and writing in English.

The conversion of the educated Joneses was a sign of things to come and with the implementation of their plans for education the Methodist raised up a small, but influential cohort of English-literate Anishinaabe Methodists. At its height, this group numbered at least ten individuals, including Copway, Nahnebahwequay (Catherine Sutton), Maungwudaus (George Henry), Pahtahsega (Peter Jacobs), and Shahwudais (John Sunday).<sup>77</sup> As will be expanded on in Chapter 3, this policy of education had unintended consequences. Though the Methodist leadership planned for this group to dedicate their lives to ministry, many followed paths similar to Copway's, becoming entertainers, educators, and political activists in urban centres throughout Canada, the United States, and Europe.<sup>78</sup> Catherine Sutton and Peter Jones even met

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<sup>75</sup> Graham, *Medicine Man to Missionary*, 14.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 16; Smith, *Sacred Feathers*, 84.

<sup>77</sup> Peyer, *Tutor'd Mind*, 232.

<sup>78</sup> Smith, *Sacred Feathers*, 229.

with Queen Victoria and George Henry with President Zachary Taylor on behalf of their Indigenous social and political interests.<sup>79</sup> Copway stands out as one of the more extreme examples because “while Peter Jones and his disciples opted for a somewhat more secure mediating position as missionaries... Copway essayed instead to penetrate the White Man’s cultural sanctuary.”<sup>80</sup> Once the Canadian Methodists had severed their ties with the rogue missionary, he used the education and training that they had given him to reach a much wider audience than he would have had he remained in their employ.

Besides its encouragement of equipping Indigenous leaders with literacy and experience, Methodism also encouraged a practically-focused Christianity that made it an attractive and socially-relevant religion. Rather than focusing on asceticism, or an abstract cognitive acceptance of Christianity, Methodism emphasized the social outworking of religion. The outward improvement of community and society were essential expressions of genuine individual faith.<sup>81</sup> This philosophy had encouraged Methodists’ active engagement in the pursuit of social justice throughout their history. In his history of Canadian Methodism, Neil Semple explains that in order to be a Methodist, one was required to live in the real world and work to heal its ills: “the role of the church was not merely to expand its own horizons, but more importantly, to create a moral social order and to promote God’s kingdom on earth.”<sup>82</sup> Social justice was not just a suggestion for Methodists, it was a necessary outward sign of an inward transformation. Semple states that this not only included traditional acts of public charity but also political action to create a “just and humane nation.”<sup>83</sup> With a Christianity so focused on social action and equality, it is in now way surprising that Copway championed Indigenous causes.

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<sup>79</sup> Donald Smith overviews the lives of eight of these individuals and their families in *Mississauga Portraits: Ojibwe Voices from Nineteenth-Century Canada*.

<sup>80</sup> Peyer, *The Tutor’d Mind*, 262.

<sup>81</sup> Semple, *The Lord’s Dominion*, 66.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

One of the major social issues that Copway and Jones saw plaguing their communities was alcoholism and many Indigenous leaders were drawn to Methodism because of its strong promotion of temperance and its opposition to often malicious and dishonest traders who Copway referred to as “*land-sharks* [italics in original].”<sup>84</sup> In the 1820s, as Methodism was just beginning to spread amongst the Upper Canada Anishinaabeg, it was shifting away from acceptance of moderate alcohol consumption to strict abstinence.<sup>85</sup> This movement played a major role in Copway’s life as the destruction caused by the liquor trade featured prominently in his plans for social and political reorganization of the Indigenous community. The last of ten points in his argument for the establishment of Kahgega was focused solely on ending the liquor trade.<sup>86</sup> He argued that political sovereignty and separation from Euromerican society was necessary to achieve this goal. Outlining this plan in the *American Whig Review*, he quoted what he claimed to be common Indigenous proverb: “if you see a white man, you will see a jug of rum.”<sup>87</sup> In addition to this social argument, temperance organizations also provided him with an audience and network to support his speaking tours throughout the United States and England, giving him a platform from which to present his political ideas.

## 2.7 Anishinaabe Methodism as Resistance

“I cannot suppose for a moment that the Supreme Disposer has decreed that the doom of the red man is to fall and gradually disappear, like the mighty wilderness, before the axe of the European settler,” wrote Peter Jones in 1861.<sup>88</sup> In the nineteenth-century, colonialism was seen as an existential threat to all Indigenous people, and Indigenous writers like Jones and Copway knew that westward expansion meant future violence and disease. Many believed that this could

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 155.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 68.

<sup>86</sup> Copway, *The Traditional History and Characteristic Sketches of the Ojibway Nation*, 264.

<sup>87</sup> Copway, “The American Indians.” *American Whig Review*, 9, no. 18 (1849), 635.

<sup>88</sup> Peter Jones, *History of the Ojibway Indians: With Especial Reference to Their Conversion to Christianity* (London: A.W. Bennet, 1861), 29.

lead to the complete extinction of Indigenous North Americans. In the face of such a dark future, Christianity could become even more attractive: “Christian rhetoric, with its language of spiritual enlightenment and its predication of better times ahead as a heavenly reward for true belief and good conduct, offered a way of making sense of a changing world.”<sup>89</sup> For Jones, Christianity provided the means to preserve his community and his identity as an Anishinaabe in the face of radical social and cultural upheaval.<sup>90</sup>

In an 1850 lecture in Liverpool, England, Copway captured the emotions of this idea in verse: “I will go to my tent and lie down in despair; / I will paint me with black, and will sever my hair; // For my kindred are gone to the mounds of the dead; / They died not by hunger, nor wasting decay, / The steel of the white man hath swept them away.”<sup>91</sup> Copway was deeply affected by his knowledge of the numbers of immigrants arriving in North America each year, and he looked on their technology and organization with fear for his home and family. In the summation of his political thought, *The Organization of a New Indian Territory, East of the Missouri River*, he claimed that his Kahgega plan for an independent Indigenous state was “the only means which can be used to save the Indians from extinction.”<sup>92</sup> Copway’s Kahgega scheme was as equally focused on the spiritual future of Indigenous people as it was on their physical survival and political agency.<sup>93</sup> Like Jones, Copway saw the Christianization of Indigenous North America as the only solution to their dire situation, and his arguments for Indigenous sovereignty were based on a Christian moral framework that he used to reveal the hypocrisy of American and Canadian native policy.

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<sup>89</sup> Kate Flint, *The Transatlantic Indian, 1776-1930* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009), 225.

<sup>90</sup> Smith, *Sacred Feathers*, 86.

<sup>91</sup> “The Rev. George Copway, the Indian Chief,” *Liverpool Mercury*, August 16, 1850, quoted in Copway, *The Traditional History and Characteristic Sketches of the Ojibway Nation*, 1850, Reprint (Toronto: Prospero, 2001) 297.

<sup>92</sup> Copway, *Organization of a New Indian Territory, East of the Missouri River* (New York: S.W. Benedict, 1850), 4.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*

The roots of Copway's plan for Indigenous political and social agency began to take shape during his education in the late 1830s. He was present at the treaty signing at Fort Snelling in what is now Minnesota in July, 1837, as a student, and another signing at La Pointe in 1842 as a missionary.<sup>94</sup> At the former he witnessed the secession of what was to become eastern Minnesota and central Wisconsin, and the latter treaty hinted at American land annexation at an unspecified future date.<sup>95</sup> Similar surrenders and unfair land purchases had been taking place in southern Ontario since the early 1800s, and Methodist missionaries had played a key role in supporting Indigenous leaders against land speculators and Indian agents.<sup>96</sup>

The influence of the Methodist theology of social action dovetailed with his own observations of the injustices done to Indigenous communities, and in his later political writing religion and politics would blur into an almost proto-liberation theology that emphasized political transformation in the support and protection of Indigenous communities as an outworking of Christian faith. One of the earliest examples of this is the Saugeen conference where he attempted to organize the Indigenous community into an effective force for resistance to colonial policy. This meeting of Ojibwa leaders was in many ways nineteenth-century Anishinaabe Methodism coming into its own, and it proved to be a powerful mingling of religion and politics. In his autobiography, Copway devotes an entire chapter to the Saugeen Conference of Methodist Ojibwa. Land claims, petitions to the Governor General, the need for schools, and the idea of amalgamating all the local bands into one large tract of land dominated the conversation.<sup>97</sup> The ideas floated at this conference made up the first iteration of what would become Kahgega. With these discussions taking place in the context of a Methodist tent-meeting complete with hymn singing and prayers it is unclear where Indigenous politics ended and religious activity began for the Ojibwa Methodists. Despite Copway's excitement for this gathering, it was clear to the denominational authorities that he was using denominational resources and tools incorrectly. The Christianity of these Indigenous leaders had begun to be deployed in unprecedented ways that confused and angered the Methodist leadership and drew

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<sup>94</sup> Smith, *Mississauga Portraits*, 176; Peyer, *The Tutor'd Mind*, 240

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 176 & 179.

<sup>96</sup> Schmalz, *The Ojibwa of Southern Ontario*, 130.

<sup>97</sup> Copway, *Life, Letters, and Speeches*, 145-152.

the ire of the Governor General, and so they pushed Copway out of his position, eventually severing ties with him completely as punishment for his “bad conduct.”<sup>98</sup>

The ultimate expression of Copway’s Indigenous Christian political vision was of course Kahgega, a proposed pan-Aboriginal state administered by a literate and Christian Indigenous elite. In this state, Indigenous Americans would be self-governed, live as political equals to the Euromericans, and be free from land-hungry settlers and liquor traders: “The government and its agents style us ‘My children.’ The Indians are of age—and believe they can think and act for themselves.”<sup>99</sup> Although it would be separate from the rest of the United States, Copway envisioned it as a means of Christianizing all of native North America and thereby becoming equal in the eyes of Americans. In *Copway’s American Indian* he explicitly states that he believes the hostility and paternalism shown towards the Indigenous person is because “he has not shown himself equal in the progress of civilization,” and that this lack of progress is due to the crippling violence and land-acquisition of Euromerican colonialism.<sup>100</sup> Christianity for Copway, as it was for Jones, was not simply a new religion to be adopted for its spiritual and social benefits, but it was also the vehicle for social, political, and spiritual survival in the face of colonial devastation.<sup>101</sup> Their religion was central to any reconciliation or progress in Indigenous-Euromerican relations. In the closing pages of his autobiography, following an account of the illegal land seizures and broken promises of Canadian Indian policy, Copway states: “I once thought, that there were some things that I could never forgive; but the religion of Jesus, and the law of love, have taught me differently. I *do* forgive them; and may God forgive them and me too [emphasis in original].” It is interesting that while Copway forgives the Euromericans, he leaves open the possibility that God will judge them for what they have done to Indigenous people unless they seek his forgiveness. In 1850, when it became obvious that

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<sup>98</sup> Letter from J. Lewis[?] on behalf of Allen Steele to Mr. Green, American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions Archives, 1810-1961 (ABC 1-91), Houghton Library, Harvard University.

<sup>99</sup> Copway, *Traditional History*, 201.

<sup>100</sup> Copway, “Meeting at Tripler Hall, June 1,” *Copway’s American Indian*, vol. 1, no. 1, page 2.

<sup>101</sup> Smith, *Sacred Feathers*, 86.



Kahgega would fail, Copway returned to his literary activities, but continued to base his critique of American society on Christianity.

Besides seeming to provide an avenue for the salvation and protection of Indigenous people, Copway's Christianity also provided him with a moral and theological framework that he could use to judge and critique settler society. This was a strategy that he frequently employed. While arguing for religious education in Kahgega, Copway questioned the ability of the teachers that had been provided for Indigenous students: "Their training in moral culture had not been attended to, because some of those men who had been their instructors knew Christianity by theory only, not by a practical knowledge of the pleasing and persuasive influence of the Bible."<sup>102</sup> By casting judgement on the abilities of his former teachers, Copway asserted that an Indigenous person could command more authority in Christianity than even a professional Euromerican missionary. In this instance, he used his Methodist education to directly challenge the church authorities that had pushed him out in 1846.

Another example of his asserting Indigenous authority on true Christian belief and practice occurs in *Running Sketches* where he openly criticized the common Euromerican practice of using the Bible to justify the conquest of North America:

I read in a different light from this the character of the God whom you love and serve. His benevolence is written in the page of nature around me; and every blade of grass, and the sweet sounds that vibrate on my ear, and salute my heart with feelings of warm emotion, tell me that the God who made the earth is a God of love. The God that we adore, my brethren, is not the author of the downfall and ruin of the North American Indians.<sup>103</sup>

Here, Copway uses Christianity to implicitly challenge the roots of colonialism itself, a God of love would not have "crushed and made few the noble sons of America."<sup>104</sup> By pushing aside Euromerican theological justifications for colonialism, Copway implies that their conception of

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<sup>102</sup> Copway, *Organization of a New Indian Territory*, 7.

<sup>103</sup> Copway, *Running Sketches*, 312.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*

God is completely opposed to his actual nature. This idea would have severe spiritual and theological consequences if it were commonly believed to be true.

Although Copway claimed to have forgiven the wrongs done by colonial society, to forgive was not necessarily to forget. In his autobiography, five lines after forgiving the wrongs done to his community, Copway describes the colonizers' behaviour using a Biblical metaphor for Satan the "roaring lion... seeking whom he may devour:" "The white men have been like the greedy lion, pouncing upon and devouring its prey. They have driven us from our nation, our homes, and possessions."<sup>105</sup> Here Copway twists a common Christian image to reveal the moral hypocrisy of settler colonialism. While his audience may have found the presence of this Indigenous Christian convert to be a reassurance of the rightness of the colonial project, they would have reacted quite differently had they understood his unorthodox use of Christian discourse.

One of the most scathing examples of this subversive use of Christianity is in the very first edition of *Copway's American Indian*. While arguing for the establishment of a pro-Indigenous society in New York, he employs Christian cosmology and theology to deliver a prophetic judgement on Euromerican society:

The heavens that have long been overcast with the vengeance of the Great Spirit upon the white man, are now beginning to break forth; and when a Society is formed in the City of New-York, it shall be one of the means to send its prayers to the God of the Universe, to avert the thunderbolt that Jehovah, in the hands of Gabriel, has now set in motion in the skies—that some day must come and rake up the bones of our ancestors, in the face of the prosperity of the white man, tells you that God shall become the accuser of the wrongs of my poor brethren [sic].<sup>106</sup>

These examples of resistance show that although Copway adopted the religion of colonial society, he did not see his conversion as conformity. His Methodism provided him with a source of hope for the future of Indigenous North America, and a powerful means to critique the very foundation of settler colonialism.

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<sup>105</sup> 1 Peter 5:8, *The Holy Bible*, Authorized King James Version (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 1999); Copway, *Life, Letters, and Speeches*, 161.

<sup>106</sup> Copway, "Meeting at Tripler Hall, June 1," *Copway's American Indian*, vol. I, no. 1, 2.

## 2.8 Conclusion: Copway's Move Away from Methodism

After being abandoned by his old denomination, Copway became increasingly ecumenical throughout the 1850s, moving away from his Methodist roots and rebuking Christian missionaries for the competition and division between denominations. How far Copway had moved by 1851 can be seen in a review of a lecture he delivered in Liverpool during his European trip: "He was formerly a Methodist preacher, but, in advocating his plan, he had not placed himself under the direction of any religious society... and he was desirous that the cause which he advocated should not rest on the narrow ground of religious sectarianism, but on the broad basis of humanity and justice."<sup>107</sup> This was of course partly a strategy to avoid being placed under a new religious authority, so that he could remain free to spend donated funds as he saw fit. But it was also an expression of theological flexibility that had been growing ever since he met other Christians on his tour of the United States as a young man. In the appendices to *The Traditional History and Characteristic Sketches of the Ojibway Nation* Copway explains that "Forms of worship, varied as they are, have been urged on him, and in being perplexed, his mind is thus prejudiced to Christianity."<sup>108</sup> He argued that this fragmentation both confused Indigenous communities with arcane theological disputes and discredited the whole evangelical project by showing a lack of cohesion on the part of the missionaries themselves.

There are instances in Copway's *Traditional History* where he verges on a sort of religious universalism: "the noble deeds of man are those... which are performed for the good of others; and that virtue will be alike rewarded in the future, whether it be found and cherished in pagan lands or in Christian temples."<sup>109</sup> Copway abhorred barriers within Christianity and blatantly ignored them throughout his career, seeing them as both ridiculous and harmful. This indifference to religious boundaries fit well with (and indeed might have been a product of) Copway's Anishinaabe worldview which historian Michael Angel describes as valuing flexibility and adaptability in understanding and adopting the concepts and practices of other

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<sup>107</sup> "The Indians of the Western Continent of America," *Liverpool Mercury*, July 30, 1850, 2.

<sup>108</sup> Copway, *The Traditional History*, 262.

<sup>109</sup> *History*, 164.

communities.<sup>110</sup> Indeed, toward the end of his life Copway began to advertise himself as an “Indian Medicine Man” or as the “Indian Doctor Ka-ge-ga-gah-bowh” a traditional healer who apparently had great success working “without the use of minerals” in the “Indian Mode.”<sup>111</sup> Left without allies or an audience, Copway deployed the identity of a sanitized, and marketable Indigenous shaman who could be invited into the parlor to treat ordinary ailments for payment. Despite this distancing from Methodism, Christianity seems to have remained an important part of Copway’s worldview and he certainly maintained some of his religious relationships, because he died while living at the house of an old friend, a reverend from Ypsilanti, Michigan.<sup>112</sup>

As the lived Christianity of George Copway and his contemporaries is explored a dynamic identity rather than a rigid one, it becomes apparent that terms such as conversion, acculturation, and assimilation hide a wide range of complex ideas and practices. Copway moved between two different cultural societies by seeing his participation in a Christian society as transcending other worldly divisions. His refusal or inability to completely conform to the norms of either Indigenous or settler societies led to the transformation of both into something unique. Indigenous Christianity retained elements of the Anishinaabe worldview that would perhaps have disturbed the missionaries, had they been aware. Though the Euroamerican Methodists saw the success of their evangelism and teaching as the advancement of their form of Christianity, what Anishinaabe Christians did with their adopted religion and education often proved to be something else entirely. As the most extreme example of this, and as the most prolific writer, Copway presents a unique example to historically examine the workings of Indigenous Christianity under colonialism.

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<sup>110</sup> Michael Angel, *Preserving the Sacred*, 19.

<sup>111</sup> “Indian Medicine Man,” *Jackson Citizen Patriot*, April 7, 1868, page 5; “Ka-ge-ga-gah-bowh,” *Jackson Citizen Patriot*, April 1, 1868; “Notice,” *Jackson Citizen Patriot*, April 20, 1868; “Indian Doctor,” *Geneva (N.Y.) Gazette*, August 31, 1860, pictured in Smith, *Mississauga Portraits*, 206.

<sup>112</sup> Smith, *Mississauga Portraits*, 208.

## Chapter 3

# The White Man's Lodge: George Copway's Participation in American Freemasonry

“In a retired wigwam the two Masons sat, unable to speak the language of each other, but each expert in that universal language which clearly conveys the sentiments of Brotherly Love, Relief, and Truth... and there they remained together without intrusion until the sun went down. But what was said, and what was promised, and what was done, is it not recorded on the pages of Masons' hearts!”

Robert Morris, “The Masonic Breastpin: A Tale of Indian Times,” 1855.<sup>1</sup>

On Friday, August 23, 1850, George Copway took the main stage at the Fourth International Peace Congress in Frankfurt, Germany. Wearing what he presented as traditional Anishinaabe regalia and theatrically unwrapping a staff that he described as an “Indian banner of peace” he lectured at length on the inherent rights of nations to be free from outside interference. Copway concluded his presentation by gifting a pipe of peace to the President of the Congress. Although he received stirring applause from the hundreds of international delegates, English-language newspapers reported that he spoke in a rambling manner for over forty minutes, twice the amount allotted to the conference's presenters.<sup>2</sup>

From a box seat above the applauding crowd, one person watched Copway with special interest. Prussian Prince Friedrich Wilhelm Ludwig, the future Kaiser Wilhelm I, had either heard or deduced that Copway was a Freemason like himself. He was likely fascinated by the idea that someone so socially, politically, and racially different from himself could be his

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Morris, *The Lights and Shadows of Freemasonry: Consisting of Masonic Tales, Songs, and Sketches Never Before Published* (New York: JNO. W. Leonard & Co., 1855), 34.

<sup>2</sup> “The Peace Congress,” *Times* (London), August 28, 1850, 5, cols. 2, 3, quoted in Bernd C. Peyer, *The Tutor'd Mind*, 88; George Copway, *Running Sketches*, 1851, 223-224.

Masonic brother and thus his equal within the fraternal order.<sup>3</sup> The prince was so intrigued that he approached Copway after the Congress and arranged for a subsequent meeting where they could meet “Masonically” or “on the square” and exchange handshakes, or grips, as well as other signs of fraternal fellowship as trusted brothers of the Freemason’s Order without regard for differences of race, social status, or political philosophy.<sup>4</sup> The implications of such a meeting, however, were complicated and compromised some of Copway’s social capital with the conference’s organizers. Contrary to the goals of the Peace Congress, the militaristic Prince Friedrich was visiting Frankfurt to inspect the Prussian occupation force serving under his command, and he had recently played a key role in violently suppressing the Berlin rebels during the Revolutions of 1848.<sup>5</sup> Whether this history was known to Copway is unclear, but that meeting on the Prussian parade ground made for an interesting interaction not only between two cultures, but two diametrically opposed political ideals.<sup>6</sup>

Although little is known of the Masonic meeting between the Prussian noble and the Ojibwe intellectual, the German historian Bernd Peyer speculated that it would have been natural for Copway to share his vision of an independent Indigenous-governed state which had dominated both his public appearances in Europe and his political writings earlier that year.<sup>7</sup> Copway and the future Kaiser, however, shared certain proclivities for self-promotion. Just as Freidrich’s Prussian forces were creating a new unified German state so too Copway sought to establish an Indigenous state. And just as the Prince aspired to rule a united Germany, Copway envisioned himself at the helm of his proposed state of Kahgega.

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<sup>3</sup> Bernd C. Peyer, “A Nineteenth-Century Ojibwa Conquers Germany,” in *Germans and Indians: Fantasies, Encounters, Projections*, Colin G. Calloway, Gerd Gemünden, and Susanne Zantop editors (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2002), 154.

<sup>4</sup> George Copway, *Running Sketches of Men and Places, in England, France, Germany, Belgium, and Scotland* (New York: J.C. Riker, 1851; University of Michigan facsimile reprint), 254; Keith Carlson, e-mail correspondence with author, December 9, 2016.

<sup>5</sup> Peyer, “A Nineteenth-Century Ojibwa Conquers Germany,” 154.

<sup>6</sup> Copway, *Running Sketches*, 254.

<sup>7</sup> Peyer, “A Nineteenth-Century Ojibwa Conquers Germany,” 154.

As a fifty-three-year-old member of the Prussian nobility, Prince Friedrich ascribed to a traditional conception of European imperialism and nobility. Regardless of the content of their discussion, Copway's very presence captured the prince's attention and imagination: here was an Anishinaabe Canadian, fluent in English, lecturing the European intellectual class, and in possession of the secret grips and signs that identified him as a Masonic brother and an equal. Copway's adoption of American Freemasonry, had equipped him with cultural tools and language that caused the future first German Emperor to want to meet with him one-on-one as an equal – at least in theory.

### 3.1 Historical Context of Indigenous Freemasonry

Despite being a widespread phenomenon, Indigenous engagement in Freemasonry has been largely overlooked in the field of North America Indigenous history. A handful of Masonic scholars like William R. Denslow, Robert C. Wright, and the researchers at the Oklahoma Lodge of Research and the Grand Lodge of Oklahoma have explored this topic, but historical scholarship outside of Freemasonry is largely limited to the work of two historians: Joy Porter and David Hackett. Porter's *Native American Freemasonry*, published in 2011, is the most exhaustive treatment of the subject to date.<sup>8</sup> Both Porter and Hackett argue that the Enlightenment philosophical ideals of Freemasonry made it a refuge for Indigenous intellectuals, and while they take into account the limitations of these ideals, this chapter goes even further in examining the role of the colonial strategy of cultural mimicry in the experience of George Copway. While some of his Masonic brothers certainly viewed him as a confirmation of the benefits of cultural assimilation, George Copway used the mythical history and philosophy of Freemasonry to assert Indigenous spirituality and ritual. In this way, Copway falls within a broader stream of Masonic and Indigenous history that includes some of its most prominent personalities and political organizations.

Beginning with the initiation of Mohawk Revolutionary War leader Joseph Brant at an English lodge in 1776, a large number of Indigenous figures found Masonic affiliation to be an

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<sup>8</sup> William R. Denslow, *Freemasonry and the American Indian*, 1956

important social and spiritual resource.<sup>9</sup> By the time the first independent lodges were being established in America, English Freemasonry was still less than fifteen years old.<sup>10</sup> Indigenous Masonic membership grew throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth-centuries with an independent Indigenous Grand Lodge being established in the Indian Territory in 1874 to oversee eight local Indigenous lodges that had sprung up.<sup>11</sup> The membership of these lodges often represented the elite members of Indigenous communities as the brothers were always male and usually Christians who had received an education in English literacy. Mohawk Civil War leader and Commissioner of Indian Affairs Ely S. Grant was also an ardent Freemason and saw the Fraternity as a sanctuary within American society, a repository for the knowledge and customs of a people on the verge of extinction, and a venue for his lectures on the equality of Indigenous Americans.<sup>12</sup>

Due to the Masonic ideals of the innate brotherhood of all men regardless of creed, class, or race, Masonic lodges were often more receptive to the exploration of Indigenous culture than American society in general. In addition, this philosophy of Masonry often created a socially-acceptable space for Indigenous brothers to express themselves and to socialize and converse beyond the gaze of the un-initiated. Although the reality of lodge culture often fell very short of this optimistic vision, its intentions engendered a welcoming spirit of intellectual curiosity towards aboriginal history, philosophy, language, and religion. Copway's involvement in Freemasonry seems to have been somewhat pragmatic, at least initially, as membership could be a valuable entry on the resume of a rising intellectual celebrity. This practicality does not present the whole picture, however, as later in life the costs of engagement began to eclipse any social benefit. When situated within the larger historical context, Copway's experience reveals the

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<sup>9</sup> David G. Hackett, *That Religion in Which All Men Agree: Freemasonry in American Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014), 175.

<sup>10</sup> Alexander Piatigorsky, *Freemasonry: The Study of a Phenomenon* (London: The Harvill Press, 1999), 163.

<sup>11</sup> Hackett, *That Religion in Which all Men Agree*, 177; Joy Porter, *Native American Freemasonry: Associationalism and performance in America* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2011), 14.

<sup>12</sup> Porter, *Native American Freemasonry*, 164-5; Hackett, *That Religion in Which all Men Agree*, 186.



complex interplay of notions of race, the universalism of Masonic philosophy, Copway's pragmatic self-interest, and a competing desire for sincere involvement. The interaction of these forces shows that eighteenth-century Indigenous Freemasons inhabited a complex transcultural space that could be simultaneously beneficial and harmful.

### 3.2 Copway's Engagement in American Freemasonry

Freemasonry first appears in Copway's story during a discussion of the Anishinaabe Midewiwin<sup>13</sup> 'secret medicine society' in his 1846 autobiography. Although it is not known exactly where he first learned of the Euromerican fraternity, he had likely become familiar with it through his interaction with Protestant colleagues during his studies, mission work, and his 1839 travels throughout the urban centres of North America. Counter to historian Michael Angel's description of Copway as "anxious to paint the [Midewiwin] ceremonies in the blackest possible terms," Copway compares the secret society favorably to Freemasonry in an attempt to form a connection between a respected modern social and spiritual institution and an Indigenous one.<sup>14</sup> This early, albeit brief, comparison was a sign of things to come as Copway and his fellow Masons would use the origin myth and philosophy of Freemasonry to establish a unifying connection between Indigenous culture and Freemasonry that could provide both with a sense of rootedness in an ancient, primordial spiritual truth that transcended racial, religious, and cultural divisions.

Two years later, on June 20, 1848, Copway moved from outside observer to active participant when he was initiated in Washington, D.C., at Federal Lodge No. 1 in the presence of twenty-five Masonic brethren.<sup>15</sup> He would likely have been invited by an acquaintance also

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<sup>13</sup> The Midewiwin society was a religious organization that involved elaborate rituals, a hierarchical system of knowledge (which Copway compared to the three degrees of Masonry), and a strict system of secrecy and loyalty. Alongside its spiritual role, the Midewiwin provided a means for the preservation and transmission of Anishinaabe knowledge.

<sup>14</sup> Copway, *Life, Letters, and Speeches*, 82.

<sup>15</sup> Lodge Minutes recorded by R. J. Powell, Secretary, June 20, 1848, *Federal Lodge No. 1 Minute Books: January 5, 1847, to January 30, 1855*, George Washington Masonic Memorial Library, Alexandria, Virginia.

serving as his sponsor, who would introduce him to the lodge and vouch for his character. Although the identity of this individual is not known, it was not uncommon for D.C. lodges to extend membership to visiting Indigenous leaders and luminaries during this time. Earlier in the year, a Cherokee Chief named William P. Ross had been initiated, passed, and raised, at Federal No. 1, moving through all three degrees during month-long treaty negotiations in Washington.<sup>16</sup> The advancement to each degree involved the memorization of ritualized recitation pieces and could often take a substantial amount of preparation. The day after his initiation, Copway left the lodge to continue his lecture tour, never to reappear in person but still retaining his First Degree membership as an Entered Apprentice.<sup>17</sup>

Two years later, on April 9, 1850, Federal No. 1's minute books reported that a "Bro. Henry of the Chippewa Nation made a statement relative to the progress of Masonry in his country."<sup>18</sup> George Copway and his friend Maungwudaus, George Henry, were in Washington on April 1, 1850, to promote the idea of the Indian territory of Kahgega and to meet President Zachary Taylor, respectively.<sup>19</sup> It is almost certain that the Chippewa lecturer at Federal Lodge was Copway's companion, and it is interesting that Copway did not participate in delivering a lecture at his own lodge, let alone attend Maungwudaus'. The surrounding entries in the minute books, which carefully record the names of all members in attendance, indicate that neither Henry nor Copway attended any other meetings during this period. In early 1850, Copway was heavily involved in promoting his Kahgegah scheme and may simply have been too occupied with political manoeuvring and lecturing to attend such the meeting at his home lodge.

Copway's last appearance in the minutes of Federal Lodge No. 1 was on March 4, 1851, when the brethren read a letter from "Bro. Copeway" belatedly requesting that they furnish him

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<sup>16</sup> Federal Lodge No. 1, *Federal Lodge No. 1, F.A.A.M. District of Columbia* (Washington, D.C., 1943), 50.

<sup>17</sup> Federal Lodge No. 1, *Lodge Minutes, Federal Lodge No. 1 Minute Books: January 5, 1847, to January 30, 1855*, George Washington Masonic Memorial Library, Alexandria, Virginia.

<sup>18</sup> Federal Lodge No. 1, *Lodge Minutes, April 9, 1850, Federal Lodge No. 1 Minute Books: January 5, 1847, to January 30, 1855*, George Washington Masonic Memorial Library, Alexandria, Virginia.

<sup>19</sup> Smith, *Mississauga Portraits*, 164.

with his Entered Apprentice certificate.<sup>20</sup> They agreed to fulfill this request, sending the certificate nearly three years after his initiation. The following month Copway began the involved process of applying for an Indian agent position with the Department of the Interior, so it is likely that he saw this certificate as an asset in achieving that goal. 1851 was a busy year for Copway. In addition to applying unsuccessfully for this government position, he had published *Running Sketches* in April and later that summer began publishing his ill-fated literary journal, *Copway's American Indian*.<sup>21</sup> But, despite these projects Copway found the time and effort to engage with a new Masonic community in New York City.

On December 15, 1851, over three years after his initiation in Washington D.C., Copway was initiated a second time into a lodge in New York City in an unusually rapid fashion.<sup>22</sup> Over a crowded two days, he was initiated to the first degree, passed to the second degree, and raised to the third degree becoming a master mason at Atwood Lodge No. 208.<sup>23</sup> There is no record of why this process happened so rapidly, but some of the members may have wanted him as an ally in a growing conflict within the lodge. A year after his initiation, tensions erupted into a full-fledged schism and in the fall of 1852, he joined the dissenting faction in the creation of a brand-new lodge: Metropolitan No. 273. Copway benefitted by becoming not only a charter member, but also the Chaplain, one of eleven officers.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Lodge Minutes recorded by R. J. Powell, Secretary, March 4, 1851, *Federal Lodge No. 1 Minute Books: January 5, 1847, to January 30, 1855*, George Washington Masonic Memorial Library, Alexandria, Virginia.

<sup>21</sup> Smith, *Mississauga Portraits*, 197.

<sup>22</sup> Compare with the month-long process that William P. Ross underwent: Federal Lodge No. 1, *Federal Lodge No. 1, F.A.A.M. District of Columbia* (Washington, D.C., 1943), 50.

<sup>23</sup> Personal Correspondence with the Chancellor Robert R. Livingston Masonic Library, "Return for Atwood Lodge No. 208 December 1851-June 1852."

<sup>24</sup> Grand Lodge of the New York, Historical Sketches of Lodges No. 148-No.326 Vol. 2: Taken from New York Grand Lodge Proceedings 1908-1913, Chancellor Robert R. Livingston Masonic Library, 184-5.

In this position, he attended the first meeting of Metropolitan No. 273 on October 2, 1852.<sup>25</sup> Amid the singing of hymns, and reciting of prayers the Grand Chaplain of the Grand Lodge of New York presented Copway with his officer's jewel, a metal necklace depicting an open Bible, a symbol of his spiritual leadership in the lodge. As Chaplain, Copway was responsible for overseeing the spiritual needs of this new fraternal community.<sup>26</sup> This important role was a natural extension of his occupation as listed in the Return for Atwood 208: "Reverend."<sup>27</sup> Three months later, however, financial troubles finally caught up with him. The failure of *Copway's American Indian* in September 1851 left him unable to pay his bills and as a result he was suspended from Metropolitan 273 and then dropped from Federal Lodge, No. 1. The stated reason for both expulsions was non-payment of dues.<sup>28</sup> In the end his lack of wealth formed the ultimate barrier to his participation, bringing his five-year membership in Freemasonry to an abrupt close. This was not the end of his involvement in American fraternalism, however, for as Copway found himself cut off by Freemasonry, he would eventually turn to their enemies, the anti-Masonic Know-Nothings.

The reasons for Copway's largely inactive first three years as an Entered Apprentice raise questions about possible conflicts between the ideals of eighteenth-century Freemasonry and Copway's personal agenda. To be initiated at Federal Lodge No. 1 in 1848, Copway paid a fee of six dollars which is equivalent to nearly one-hundred and eighty modern dollars when adjusted for inflation.<sup>29</sup> Although there is no record of the fees he paid to move through the three degrees

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<sup>25</sup> Historical Sketches of Lodges No. 148-No.326 Vol. 2: Taken from New York Grand Lodge Proceedings 1908-1913, Chancellor Robert R. Livingston Masonic Library, 1913[?], 184-5.

<sup>26</sup> Thomas Smith Webb, *The Freemason's Monitor* (1818), 89-90, 104.

<sup>27</sup> Personal Correspondence with the Chancellor Robert R. Livingston Masonic Library, "Return for Atwood Lodge No. 208 December 1851-June 1852."

<sup>28</sup> Personal Correspondence with Chancellor Robert R. Livingston Masonic Library, "Ledgers from the Grand Lodge of New York F.&A.M."; Federal No. 1 Cardfile: George Copway, Grand Lodge of District of Columbia; Smith, *Mississauga Portraits*, 201.

<sup>29</sup> Lodge Minutes recorded by R. J. Powell, Secretary, June 20, 1848, *Federal Lodge No. 1 Minute Books: January 5, 1847, to January 30, 1855*, George Washington Masonic Memorial Library, Alexandria, Virginia; inflation calculated using online inflation calculator at <http://www.in2013dollars.com/>, accessed January 7, 2017.

in New York, it was likely a substantial amount compounded by his annual dues. Adding to the financial strain of Freemasonry, by 1837 Masonic leadership had begun to discourage the use of the fraternity as source of financial insurance and funds for external charities.<sup>30</sup> The combination of cost and the removal of the fraternity as a potential source of financial aid, could have made Copway less interested in maintaining an active membership during his years lecturing for money. Another aspect of eighteenth-century American Freemasonry that may have stood in opposition to Copway's goals was its strict policy forbidding political discussion. Masonic culture valued cosmopolitan attitudes that promoted unity in the Lodge and as a result discussion of politics and religious difference was strictly forbidden.<sup>31</sup> As Copway was devoted to his Kahgega project of political reform from early 1849 to 1850, he (or perhaps his brothers within the lodge) may have seen these policies as a hindrance to his very vocal political activity.

Considering these drawbacks, it is interesting that Copway's most Masonically active period began just three months after his journal folded in 1851 while he was struggling financially. From his 1848 initiation in Washington, Copway would already have been aware of the cost of Masonic membership, and yet he still desired to become involved in a New York lodge. This disregard for the cost of membership, combined with his repeated involvement throughout these years displayed a strong desire for participation in the Masonic community late in his career. Despite the drawbacks, Copway's reasons for wanting to remain active in the lodge were incentives common to most Indigenous Freemasons. Within the lodge, the philosophy and worldview that undergirded the fraternity served to create what Porter terms a "Masonic middle ground" where Indigenous and non-Indigenous brothers could attempt a form of cultural negotiation within a protected venue.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Porter, *Native American Freemasonry*, 236.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 70 & 63.

<sup>32</sup> Porter, *Native American Freemasonry*, 212.

### 3.3 The Masonic Lodge and the Midewiwin Lodge: Mimicry and Hybridity in Copway's Freemasonry

Copway would have seen themes of brotherhood and equality running throughout the installation ceremony for Metropolitan 273. As the Grand Senior Warden handed the jewel of office to the newly-appointed Senior Warden he would have instructed that “the Level demonstrates that we are descended from the same stock, partake of the same nature, and share the same hope” and “as an instrument in your hands, you will use [it] to preserve that equality which ought to subsist among Masons, which nature assigns, and which love requires.”<sup>33</sup> Echoing the spiritual equality in Copway's Methodist theology, the Grand Senior Warden would go on to speak of “death the grand leveler of human greatness” which made all men equal regardless of class, wealth, or social status.<sup>34</sup> Equality between Masonic brothers was one of Masonry's most important values, and in theory it could extend to members of all races.<sup>35</sup>

Because their worldview was grounded in an idealized Enlightenment philosophy, Freemasons were often more receptive to other cultures and religions than the rest of antebellum American society.<sup>36</sup> The ideal of equality was built directly into Masonic rituals themselves and would have been on constant display throughout Copway's progression through the degrees. For example, the charges to an aspiring entered apprentice in an 1853 American Freemason's manual state that:

By the exercise of brotherly love, we are taught to regard the whole human species as one family; the high and low, the rich and poor; who, as created by one Almighty Parent, and inhabitants of the same planet, are to aid, support, and protect each other. On this principle, masonry unites men of every country, sect, and opinion, and conciliates true friendship among those who might otherwise have remained at a perpetual distance.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Thomas Smith Webb, *The Freemason's Monitor or Illustrations of Masonry: In Two Parts* (Salem: Cushing and Appleton, 1818), 89; Z.A. Davis, *The Freemason's Monitor: Containing a Delineation of the Fundamental Principles of Freemasonry*, (Philadelphia: Clark and Hesser, 1853), 154.

<sup>34</sup> Webb, *The Freemason's Monitor*, 1818.

<sup>35</sup> Alexander Piatigorsky, *Freemasonry*, 164.

<sup>36</sup> Hackett, *That Religion in Which all Men Agree*, 177.

<sup>37</sup> Davis, *The Freemason's Monitor*, 85.

Although reality often fell short of this optimistic vision, the promotion of these values engendered a welcoming spirit towards Indigenous initiates and offered them what Porter calls “a social resource... a place... where they might garner support for their respective causes.”<sup>38</sup> This middle ground can be seen in Copway’s meeting ‘on the square’ with the Prussian Prince Friedrich. This was a trans-cultural encounter wherein he could share his controversial political vision with a brother bound by fraternal trust. If Copway had not been a Freemason, it is unlikely that the prince would have pursued an audience at all, as his stated goal was to meet with Copway “Masonically.”<sup>39</sup>

As Copway moved away from his Methodist roots towards a more ecumenical and universal view of religion, it seemed logical for him to gravitate towards Freemasonry, an organization with a mythical origin story that transcended traditional social, cultural, and religious boundaries while still providing a structured and intellectually-engaging spiritual practice. Nineteenth-century American Freemasonry traced its history into the distant pre-Christian past.<sup>40</sup> According to “The Shorter Catechism of Masonry,” published in an 1855 anthology, the origin of speculative Masonry in its current form could be traced back to King Solomon. This “true Masonry” consisted of “revealed religion... as the mind of God had divulged it” with one of its aims being “to unite the Jews and heathen, by the principles of Brotherly love, Relief, and Truth.”<sup>41</sup> Solomon’s friend and architect Hiram Abiff, the central figure in the allegorical third-degree ritual and possessor of the ultimate secrets of Masonry was neither Jewish nor Christian, but the foreign King of Tyre (modern Lebanon).<sup>42</sup> At its root, the

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<sup>38</sup> Porter, *Native American Freemasons*, 212.

<sup>39</sup> Copway, *Running Sketches*, 254.

<sup>40</sup> Z.A. Davis, *The Freemason’s Monitor*, 1853, 113.

<sup>41</sup> Robert Morris, *The Lights and Shadows of Freemasonry: Consisting of Masonic Tales, Songs, and Sketches Never Before Published* (New York: JNO. W. Leonard & Co., 1855), 255-257.

<sup>42</sup> Porter, *Native American Freemasonry*, 58.

origin narrative of Freemasonry emphasized brotherly union across religious, political, and social divides through the search for a hidden, divine, and transcultural truth.

These transcendent and universal aspects of Masonic philosophy created a potent intellectual framework that, coupled with an organizational structure bound by loyalty and secret signs of membership, lent itself to appropriation. As Masonry became popularized in Scotland and England in the early-eighteenth century its ideas and methods were quickly adopted by a diverse and often conflicting array of religious, social, and political factions.<sup>43</sup> As a fully-formed international fraternal organization, nineteenth-century Freemasonry was a powerful social resource that provided communication networks and structures for collective action that could potentially be harnessed to challenge the intellectual status quo.<sup>44</sup> In her study of fraternal communities, sociologist Mary Ann Clawson described them as sites of cultural construction where the dominant group's interpretation of reality normally takes precedence. However, marginal groups could challenge or modify this cultural construct to assert their own interests and beliefs.<sup>45</sup> Indigenous Freemasons took advantage of this aspect of Masonry by appropriating the origin myth of a transcultural spiritual truth to promote the historicity and spiritual value of indigenous knowledge.

Although Copway was unique in tying the origins of Masonry to the Anishinaabe Midewiwin, his overall argument was in keeping with Masonic ideas of the day. For example, in 1850 Benjamin T. Kavanaugh, the first Grand Master of Wisconsin, declared that Indigenous Americans possessed knowledge of Freemasonry transmitted from their Asian ancestors who had migrated east to North America following the fall of the Tower of Babel.<sup>46</sup> Copway recognized the power of these ideas and took full advantage of them. An example of this was his relationship with the prominent archaeologist Ephraim G. Squier who contributed a letter and two lengthy

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<sup>43</sup> David Stevenson, *The Origins of Freemasonry: Scotland's Century 1590-1710* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 7.

<sup>44</sup> Mary Ann Clawson, *Constructing Brotherhood: Class, Gender, and Fraternalism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989), 11.

<sup>45</sup> Mary Ann Clawson, *Constructing Brotherhood: Class, Gender, and Fraternalism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989), 12.

<sup>46</sup> Hackett, *That Religion in Which all Men Agree*, 189.



essays to *Copway's American Indian*. In his letter to the editor, Squier summed up his theory with a quote from his recent book: "We shall be prepared to find in America the traces of a primitive religion, essentially the same with that which underwent so many modifications in the Old World, illustrated by analogous symbols, and attended by similar rites."<sup>47</sup> These "traces," Squier argued, pointed towards a unifying, transcendent spiritual truth which he termed "the First Principle."<sup>48</sup> In these grand theories of human history, Copway recognized a potential means of asserting the importance of Anishinaabe religion, and he did so, expanding on his early ethnological musings on the Masonic character of the Midewiwin in public lectures.

This Masonic philosophy made Freemasonry an attractive intellectual community for Copway to engage with. Alongside Protestant Christianity and English literacy, Freemasonry formed an important part of the dominant cultural package in antebellum America, and assimilation into this hegemonic culture seemed to promise equality in Euromerican society.<sup>49</sup> However, that promise was proven to be false when invisible boundaries prevented Copway's attaining the acceptance or success of his non-Indigenous peers. As in religious circles, many of Copway's Masonic brothers viewed him as Homi Bhabha's mimic man, a 'civilized' Indigenous person whose mimicry of Euromerican culture appeared to support its superiority.

The exercise of this colonial strategy is exemplified by a letter published in the February 1851 edition of *The Freemason's Monthly Magazine*.<sup>50</sup> Masons frequently attended Copway's lectures, and this letter recounted one brother's experience at an engagement in Boston.<sup>51</sup> The letter-writer listened intently to Copway's description of the Midewiwin as a "Fraternity" with an

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<sup>47</sup> Ephraim George Squier, *The Serpent Symbol, and the Worship of the Reciprocal Principles of Nature in America* (New York: George P. Putnam, 1851), 21, quoted in *Copway's American Indian*, vol. I, no. V, Saturday, August 9, 1851, 2.

<sup>48</sup> Squier, *The Serpent Symbol*, ix, 19.

<sup>49</sup> Hackett, *That Religion in Which all Men Agree*, 176.

<sup>50</sup> Charles W. Moore, ed., *The Freemasons' Monthly Magazine*, Volume 10 (Boston: Tuttle & Dennett, 1851), 143-4.

<sup>51</sup> Charles T. McClenachan, *History of the Most Ancient and Honorable Fraternity of Free and Accepted Masons in New York From the Earliest Date* (New York: Grand Lodge of New York, 1888), 228.

“injunction of secrecy [sic].”<sup>52</sup> These speculations were likely a much more elaborate version of those posed in his autobiography: “there were four grades in the [Grand Medicine Lodge] institution; and, as I have thought, somewhat similar to the Masonic institution.”<sup>53</sup> This lecture led the listener to speculate that the Midewiwin could in fact be an independent, ancient form of Freemasonry.<sup>54</sup> After meeting one-on-one with Copway, the attendee penned his letter to the magazine, excitedly sharing his thoughts on their conversation.<sup>55</sup>

In the letter, the author expressed great admiration for the charismatic Copway’s intelligence, and reported that he left their meeting convinced that Freemasonry had indeed existed among the Indigenous population of North America prior to European contact. But rather than allowing the person of Copway or his ideas of Masonic history to challenge his colonial notions, the writer used this episode to unconsciously reassert his own cultural and biological superiority to the local Indigenous people that he was familiar with. Intriguingly, he did this by contrasting them with Copway, whom he conceptualized, not as an equal, but as a mimic man: an example of the success of cultural assimilation, and the representative of a vanishing Romantic Indigenous past:

If the light of Masonry ever illumed the brain among the remnants of our Northern and Eastern tribes, it must have been extinct long ago. For in intelligence, appearance, and character they are almost infinitely inferior to that nation from which sprang the Indian orator whose gentlemanly bearing, cultivated mind and Christian conduct, gather friends around his path wherever he goes... he is a noble specimen of the Red man of the forest, whose ancestors once held all the lakes, mountains and rivers of this continent, with an imperial sway.<sup>56</sup>

The writer’s interpretation of their discussion ran completely counter to Copway’s intended goals of using Euromerican Romanticism and Freemasonry to reassert the importance of Anishinaabe culture. Historian David Hackett argued that Freemasons like the letter writer were drawn to

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<sup>52</sup> Moore, *The Freemason’s Monthly Magazine*, 143.

<sup>53</sup> Copway, *Life, Letters, and Speeches*, 82.

<sup>54</sup> Moore, ed., *The Freemasons’ Monthly Magazine*, 143.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 144.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

Indigenous culture in part due to their “quest for a primal American identity,” an identity that could only exist in an imagined Romanticized Indigenous past.<sup>57</sup> The letter writer certainly left his meeting with Copway with a mind swirling with images of a legendary Indigenous past. Despite Copway’s aims and physical presence, and the reality of native life in Massachusetts, the letter writer concluded that this Indigenous Freemasonry, and these noble “children of the forest” had vanished, except in the dark forests of Euromerican imagination, perhaps even leaving the mantle of native American identity behind for the newcomers to adopt for themselves.

The nuance that the Bostonian Mason missed was Copway’s attempting to imply that through the possession of an older, more authentic, Freemasonry, untouched by the corrupting influence of modernity, the Anishinaabe were in fact equal with their Euromerican brothers. By reinterpreting Masonic history in this way, Copway was not only asserting the value of the Midewiwin and Anishinaabe history, but also attempting to give Indigenous peoples authority as possessors of an essential component of an original, mythic American identity. The different conclusions drawn by each party in this interaction reveal the complexity of Copway’s appropriation of Freemasonry, for even as he actively strove to resist colonialism, he fell into the role of a cultural mimic, unintentionally and inadvertently affirming the colonial project. Referring to the case of Ely S. Parker, Hackett suggested that mid-nineteenth century Freemasons were driven less by their philosophy of universal brotherhood than by their search for connection with an ancient, pre-historical identity when they sought to welcome Indigenous men into their fraternity.

### 3.4 Anti-Masonry

Following the failure of his literary journal in 1851 and expulsion from Freemasonry two years later, Copway spent the next decade of his life attempting to regain his lost influence by aligning himself with disparate, often contradictory currents in American politics and popular culture. Historian Dale Knobel argued that this was not random or accidental, but “a calculated stratagem conceived after several years of observing American political developments.”<sup>58</sup> One of

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<sup>57</sup> Hackett, *That Religion in Which All Men Agree*, 177.

<sup>58</sup> Dale T. Knobel, “Know-Nothings and Indians: Strange Bedfellows?” 183.

these movements, American nativism, included strong elements of anti-Masonry. The Anti-Masonic movement of the 1820s had grown increasingly political by the 1850s, culminating in the Order of the Star-Spangled Banner or “Know-Nothings,” based out of New York.<sup>59</sup> At its height, this political organization had a membership of hundreds of thousands with George Copway among them as a speaker at the rallies of their political wing, the American Party, which avidly campaigned for presidential candidate Millard Fillmore in the fall of 1856.<sup>60</sup>

Masonic historian Alexander Piatigorsky states that after the American Revolution Freemasonry came to be regarded as vaguely foreign by the majority of American society due to its secularism, ecumenicalism, and historical ties to England and France.<sup>61</sup> Anti-Masonic groups also viewed the fraternity as elitist and counter to their conception of American equality, despite the key role of Freemasons in the Revolution and subsequent founding of the United States.<sup>62</sup> In the minds of the uninitiated, Freemasonry also shared a convoluted affinity with ‘pagan’ and ‘popish’ religious practice due to its elaborate ritual, performance, and symbolism. These aspects of the fraternity seemingly clashed with American theological systems that were historically wary of the ritual and mystery that lay at the heart of Masonic practice.<sup>63</sup> The result of this unorganized and vague antagonism was the lumping together of Freemasonry, Roman Catholicism, British Anglicanism, and Indigenous spirituality as forces antagonistic towards American values.<sup>64</sup>

Paradoxically, however, the new nativist fraternities also found indigeneity to be a potent symbol of a true American identity. Since the American Revolution with its use of ‘Indian

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<sup>59</sup> Joy Porter, *Native American Freemasonry*, 91.

<sup>60</sup> Chip Berlet, “Anti-Masonic Conspiracy Theories: A Narrative Form of Demonization and Scapegoating,” in *Freemasonry in Context: History, Ritual, Controversy*, edited by Arturo De Hoyos and S. Brent Morris (Oxford: Lexington Books, 2004), 286; Knobel, “Know-Nothings and Indians: Strange Bedfellows?” 186.

<sup>61</sup> Piatigorsky, *Freemasonry*, 163-164.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 164.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

costume' in the Boston Tea Party the romanticized Indian had become a "leading patriotic symbol" and a means for "chauvinists to distinguish the New World from the Old and the native from the foreign."<sup>65</sup> This could be seen in their hierarchical degree structure and secret signs and distress signals which mimicked the Masonry that they distrusted. In their glorification of a romanticized indigeneity, the Know-Nothings used secret codes of identification that they claimed were authentically Indigenous.<sup>66</sup> The Order of United Americans, another political fraternity that welcomed Copway as a member in early 1852, granted its leaders the title Sachem, an Anglicized version of an Algonquin term for a political leader.<sup>67</sup> This appropriation of relics of a vague, pan-Indigenous culture opened a door for Copway to become one of the Know-Nothings most valued public speakers, as he presented a sanitized flesh-and-blood version of this American identity that could lend authority to their political claims.

This did not sit well with some members of the party, and on September 3, 1856, a letter to the editor appeared in the *New York Daily Times* titled "Anti-Copway" attacking the "Indian Chief" for pretending to be an American while in reality being a "British subject." The author declared Copway's appearances at their rallies to be a "humbug" and "hazardous" to their cause.<sup>68</sup> Copway's reply in the September 8 issue of the same paper brushed off such accusations with a very brief and selective version of his autobiography which emphasized his years in the United States as a missionary. Unperturbed by the attack, Copway spent the majority of this letter detailing his plans for "colonizing and concentrating the Indian tribes in one spot, where our American friends might encourage them to the arts of agriculture."<sup>69</sup> What is interesting

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<sup>65</sup> Knobel, "Know-Nothings and Indians: Strange Bedfellows?" 175 & 176.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 175.

<sup>67</sup> Smith, *Mississauga Portraits*, 202; Nagel & Weingaertner, M Lafever, and Karl Gildemeister, [*Order of United Americans / M. Lafever, del. ; drawn on Stone by Karl Gildemeister*], ca. 1850, [New York: Printed by Nagel & Weingaertner N.Y] Photograph, Retrieved from the Library of Congress, <https://www.loc.gov/item/2004665376/>, (Accessed July 03, 2017.)

<sup>68</sup> "Anti-Copway," *New York Daily Times (1851-1857)*; Sep 3, 1856; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: *The New York Times*, 2.

<sup>69</sup> "Letter from George Copway," *New York Daily Times (1851-1857)*; Sep 8, 1856; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: *The New York Times*, 3.

about Copway's reply is that rather than emphasizing his status as a loyal Know Nothing, he identified himself as a free agent who had chosen the Know-Nothings or American Party and their presidential candidate Millard Fillmore after a series of political disappointments with first the Democrats and then the Whigs, eventually deciding that "the interest of the Indians identically belongs to the American Party." Copway described himself as "a consistent advocate to the American cause" and a "Fillmore man before the American Party nominated Mr. Fillmore" thereby asserting that his authenticity as a true native American predated and was independent of the American Party itself.<sup>70</sup> In this way, Copway used the nativist's idolization of a sanitized Indigenous identity to assert his own authority and to publicize his own ideas for Indigenous sovereignty.

### 3.5 Copway in Masonic Memory

In his 1888 history of Freemasonry in New York, Charles McClenachan recounts Copway's oratorical skills, intelligence, and status as a Freemason in glowing terms: "His lectures on the religion, oratory, and poetry of the Indians of this country were most eloquent. His views were broad, thoughtful, and delivered only after thorough consideration."<sup>71</sup> This positive recollection contrasts sharply with Copway's portrayal in newspaper obituaries printed to mark his death. For example, in a crowded section titled "Miscellaneous Deaths" the *Boston Traveler* mentioned his passing by simply stating that the "Indian chief" had died from "fire water." This racialized language appears in most of his obituaries, continuing the portrayal of him as a comical tabloid figure that had become the norm towards the end of his life.<sup>72</sup> The Freemasons of New York, especially those who had known him personally, would have been aware of Copway's public humiliation and his widespread negative portrayal in the newspapers.

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> McClenachan, *History of the Most Ancient and Honorable Fraternity of Free and Accepted Masons in New York*, 228.

<sup>72</sup> For additional examples see: *Cape Anne Light*, Page 1, October 16, 1869; *Newport Mercury*, Page 2, July 17, 1869; *Lowell Daily Citizen*, Page 2, December 7, 1869; *Boston Traveler*, Page 1, December 31, 1869.

His involvement in anti-Masonic organizations was also highly publicized, so it is intriguing that two decades after his death he remained an intelligent and charismatic “member of the Masonic Brotherhood” in their personal recollections of him.<sup>73</sup>

Today, in the basement of the massive House of the Temple, the headquarters of the Scottish Rite branch of Freemasonry in Washington, D.C., there is a tiny museum filled with portraits and artifacts of the heroes of American Freemasonry. And in one corner, hanging amongst pictures of George Washington and Buzz Aldrin, there is a small portrait of George Copway. The museum’s stated purpose is to celebrate “the Masonic principles of personal, social and intellectual freedom” a goal that echoes the aspirations of both Copway and his Masonic brothers.<sup>74</sup> But while such freedom is now deemed something to celebrate, for Copway it took the form of an inherently futile and frustrating struggle to achieve equality through the adoption of the colonizer’s culture.

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<sup>73</sup> McClenachan, *History of the Most Ancient and Honorable Fraternity of Free and Accepted Masons in New York*, 228.

<sup>74</sup> The Scottish Right of Freemasonry Supreme Council, 33° Southern Jurisdiction, U.S.A., “Americanism Museum,” [scottishrite.org](https://scottishrite.org), <https://scottishrite.org/headquarters/virtual-tour/americanism-museum/> accessed January 21, 2017.

## Chapter 4

### “Thank Heaven I am an Indian:” Copway’s Use of English Literacy to Assert His Own Conception of Indigenous Identity

“*Memory*, like an angel, will still hover over the sacred spot,  
where first you taught me the letters of the alphabet.”

Copway, *Life, Letters, and Speeches*<sup>1</sup>

On March 7, 1848, Copway stood up before the members of the New-York Historical Society to present an essay on “The Wars in Canada West by the Ojebways & Iroquois.”<sup>2</sup> It appears that Copway did not actually prepare a written essay, but spoke extemporaneously and from memory. Copway performed his knowledge rather than read it. The Society received his presentation with acclaim, and less than two months later he wrote a letter thanking them for granting him a diploma declaring him a “Corresponding Member.” He closed the letter by promising to “hereafter... take much pains in collecting the historical facts of the Country which we [the Ojibway] still inhabit and now and then lay them before the Society.”<sup>3</sup> After several letters inquiring why he had not left a written manuscript of his talk for them to place in their archives, he complied and mailed a written draft.<sup>4</sup>

This essay and its accompanying performance reveal how Copway used his English literacy to take control of the portrayal of indigeneity in American discourse.<sup>5</sup> It opens with an

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<sup>1</sup> Copway, *Life, Letters, and Speeches*, 95.

<sup>2</sup> Smith, *Mississauga Portraits*, 194.

<sup>3</sup> Letter from George Copway to J.W. Beckman, May 13, 1848, George Copway Letters 1848-1863, Manuscripts Collection, New York Historical Society.

<sup>4</sup> Letter from George Copway to Warman[?] of the New York Historical Society, George Copway Letters 1848-1863, Manuscripts Collection, New York Historical Society.

<sup>5</sup> George Copway, “The Wars in Canada West by the Ojibways & Iroquois, 1648,” March 7, 1848, New-York Historical Society manuscripts of lectures and addresses, Box 1, Folder 17, George Copway, Manuscripts Collection, New York Historical Society.



epigraph, apparently taken from Hugh Murray's 1839 account of the war between the Wyandot (Huron) and Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) in the late seventeenth-century, but this quotation is one of the only similarities between Murray and Copway's accounts.<sup>6</sup> As the title indicates, Copway's essay retold the story of the war from the Anishinaabe perspective, one that he claimed to have received orally from older members of the Rice Lake community. In his telling, the defeat of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy was not due to their fear of French military expeditions, as Murray claimed, but rather due to a large-scale invasion of Haudenosaunee territory by Anishinaabe war parties that drove them south into what is now the Finger Lakes region. Having read Murray's history, Copway certainly knew that his essay diverged from long-accepted British and American textual accounts of this conflict.

In retelling this history, Copway portrayed his own nation as a benevolent, brave, and proud people with military prowess, political heroes, and access to an oral history that European textual records were completely ignorant of. In Murray's work, the French are said to have mounted a series of ineffective military expeditions into "desolate regions," almost never encountering the Haudenosaunee and finding their villages mysteriously burnt and abandoned.<sup>7</sup> In 1694, as the French and English begin to engage in direct conflict, the Confederacy suddenly initiated peace negotiations. Though Murray viewed the French effort as "an act of heroic folly, by which nothing was effected, except the destruction of some grain and wooden cabins," he still attributed the capitulation of the Confederacy to their awe and fear of 'advanced' European military power.<sup>8</sup> In contrast, the French hardly appeared in Copway's account, and colonial powers found themselves relegated to the fringes of an Indigenous military struggle. Copway's

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<sup>6</sup> Copway's hand-written essay states that the quote is from "Wilson's Hist." but extensive searching by the author has not been able to locate a relevant history written by a "Wilson." Although at least two works contain the quote, Murray's is the oldest and its date of publication makes it the likeliest source. As the essay appears in a rough-draft form with multiple strikethroughs and rewrites, it is likely that Copway simply confused two different authors.

<sup>7</sup> Hugh Murray, *An Historical and Descriptive Account of British America; Comprehending Canada Upper and Lower, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Newfoundland, Prince Edward Island, The Bermudas, and the Fur Countries ...*, Vol I (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, Tweeddale Court, 1839), 159.

<sup>8</sup> Murray, *An Historical and Descriptive Account of British America*, 143.

version of events placed responsibility for the survival of New France on the strength of the Anishinaabe and their Wyandot allies without any support from European powers: “the whole of the western tribes of Indians had combined against them, and they were utterly subdued by overpowering numbers.”<sup>9</sup> In this essay Copway combined a Romantic literary style with the academic tone of mid-nineteenth century ethnography in order to assert the political coherence and historicity of the Anishinaabe before a Euroamerican audience.<sup>10</sup>

Copway’s use of English literacy is the most lasting legacy of his adoption of Euroamerican culture, and his books, letters, and articles were all vehicles for conveying his conception of Indigenous identity, and the political and social future of Indigenous communities. Through the way he dressed, spoke, and acted in public, and the literary styles that he used, Copway crafted and curated his own personal representation of indigeneity. By influencing and using American perceptions of Indigenous people in this way, he found that he could deploy popular racial and cultural stereotypes to advance his personal ambitions, as well his own notions of Indigenous political sovereignty. Throughout this process Copway employed the American ‘Noble Savage’ archetype which portrayed Indigenous people as the remnant of an ancient and quickly vanishing idealized people. This stereotype simultaneously glorified an idea of Indigenous people as noble and romantic while ignoring the complex and sometimes negative realities of life in Indigenous communities and the caustic effects of colonialism. It is important not to overstate the intentionality behind his use of these discourses and images, as Copway often borrowed and built upon trends already present in the literature of his day without giving them much analytical thought, hence his confusion when they inevitably fell from popularity.

Literary scholar Tim Fulford described Copway’s words as his “currency,” his means of providing for his family, as well obtaining fame and recognition.<sup>11</sup> Though much of his use of English literacy and trends in American popular culture was intended for personal financial and

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<sup>9</sup> Copway, “The Wars in Canada West by the Ojibways & Iroquois, 1648,” 26.

<sup>10</sup> For a more in-depth examination of the historical accuracy of Copway’s account see Leroy V. Eid, “The Ojibwa-Iroquois War: The War the Five Nations Did Not Win,” *Ethnohistory*, vol. 26, no. 4 (Autumn, 1979), pp. 297-324.

<sup>11</sup> Tim Fulford, *Romantic Indians: Native Americans, British Literature, and Transatlantic Culture, 1756-1830* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 283.

social gain, there was a very idealistic purpose that dovetailed with these more self-serving motivations. In his “Prospectus” that was mailed throughout the United States and published in the first issue of his literary journal, Copway laid out his hopes and plans for the new weekly. These were ambitious, to say the least, as Copway planned to send copies to all missionaries working amongst Indigenous communities and all bands that had schools, free of charge.<sup>12</sup> In this document, Copway listed ten points describing the content of his journal, the largest of these is point five, “Languages.” At nearly double the size of the next largest point, Copway went into detail on the use of a weekly journal to preserve Indigenous languages by compiling and publishing all the research and information available in print on Indigenous languages. He argued that the paper would prove to be an invaluable resource to missionaries, ethnographers, travellers, “and even Indians themselves, who can read and write English, as well as their own tongues.” Through this compiling of research, Copway hoped “by publishing to preserve it.”<sup>13</sup> It is telling of Copway’s ‘doomed indigeneity’ worldview that he saw the audience of this preserved knowledge as being primarily Euromerican and educated. In this way, Copway participated in the early anthropological discourse of ethnographers like Schoolcraft who showed interest in Indigenous culture as *curiosa* or artefacts of intellectual interest, though ultimately fated to vanish as a living and breathing culture.

However, this project of preservation carried a different weight for Copway, as he himself was a member of this ‘doomed’ society. Despite years of life among the urban elites of the United States, he knew what reality looked like for Indigenous people and like many of his educated Anishinaabe peers while he adopted the “modes of writing favored by the U.S. middle classes... to gain a hearing from them,” he “exceeded, conflicted with, criticized, and rejected the conventions for representing Indians.”<sup>14</sup> Though he participated in a larger discourse of writing about Indigenous people, he used this literary mode to do the opposite of his Euromerican peers who constructed an atemporal indigeneity stripped of geographical specificity. Copway, by way of contrast, sought to describe real Indigenous experiences within

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<sup>12</sup> Copway, “Prospectus,” in *Copway’s American Indian*, vol. 1, no. 1, 1.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> Konkle, *Writing Indian Nations: Native Intellectuals and the Politics of Historiography, 1827-1863* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 162.

the context of the unfolding history of colonialism, broken treaties, and governmental hypocrisy.<sup>15</sup>

#### 4.1 Historiography

Compared with the limited body of historical scholarship on Copway, there is a wealth of studies that analyze his writings from a literary perspective. Though giving insight into the literary genres with which Copway engaged, these studies have usually only focused on one or two of his works, thus missing the opportunity to historicize his writings collectively. This chapter uses the theoretical analyses of these literary studies to examine Copway's writings as historical sources on the development of Anishinaabe and pan-Indigenous identity in a mid-nineteenth century context.

In her 1997 study of nineteenth-century Indigenous literature's relation to the development of American nationalism, Cheryl Walker took a particularly negative view of Copway's adoption of Euromerican culture, referring to it as his "surrender." In this light, Copway's books are examples of subjugated discourse, declining in quality over time and forming a record of his cultural self-destruction.<sup>16</sup> Walker drew from Homi Bhabha in emphasizing the power of the colonial strategy of cultural mimicry, arguing that Copway's life was defined by its acculturation, and that his books were a series of thwarted attempts to prove his 'civilization.'<sup>17</sup> Although this interpretation did not satisfactorily account for the increasingly Indigenous-centric content of his following works, Walker pointed out Copway's active awareness of the presence of the reader and its influence on his writing.<sup>18</sup> Ultimately Walker interpreted Copway's use of English literacy as a self-interested and half-hearted attempt to garner fame and wealth: "Throughout his life, George Copway sought power, and he was not

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 161.

<sup>16</sup> Cheryl Walker, *Indian Nation: Native American Literature and Nineteenth-century Nationalisms* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997), 84.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 85.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 88.

above misrepresenting himself (and others) in order to obtain it.”<sup>19</sup> Although this analysis explains some of the more immediate motivations in Copway’s writing, it does not account for his critiquing and insulting of Euromerican society, which had the opposite effect. Walker’s work has been particularly prone to critique as an example of the reliance on simplistic understandings of acculturation and assimilation.

In *Writing Indian Nations* (2004), Maureen Konkle questioned metaphors like a cultural ‘middle ground’ or authors being ‘caught between two worlds.’ Finding that these images ignore the agency of figures like Copway, Konkle focussed on the ways that nineteenth-century Indigenous writers used their literacy to assert political visions that differed from and critiqued that of the settler colonial states. Cathy Rex (2006) followed Konkle in seeking to move beyond the conflicts in Copway’s identity. To accomplish this she applied Gerald Vizenor’s notion of ‘post-Indian warriors of survivance,’ a theoretical approach that unpacks the complexity hidden by the dichotomy of assimilation versus authenticity. This approach treats Copway’s writings as “venues through which he forges a new possibility for Indianness, a self-determined identity” and evades the trap of speculating on Copway’s psychological state to explain his confusing behaviour.<sup>20</sup> As a writer of survivance, Copway attempted to redefine what it meant to be ‘Indian’ by subverting the literary genres popular in nineteenth-century America.

In an examination of Indigenous involvement in Romantic literature, Tim Fulford (2006) asserted that the emotive power of poetry, rather than scientific fact, was Copway's primary means of claiming authority.<sup>21</sup> This analysis gave much-needed attention to Copway’s use of English poetry, his emotive use of dramatic live performances, and the Romantic literary clichés that frame his written stories. However, Fulford ignored Copway’s much more prominent use of historical narrative and political critique to convince his readers of the injustices done to Indigenous Americans. Fulford also viewed Copway’s frequent borrowing of secondary quotations as a sign of the “alienness” of his English words to himself.<sup>22</sup> Although he may have

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<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 91

<sup>20</sup> Rex, “Survivance and Fluidity,” 2-3.

<sup>21</sup> Tim Fulford, *Romantic Indians*, 288.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 289.

struggled to express himself in English and often relied on Elizabeth to assist him in this respect, it seems more likely that the extensive quotations in his later works were attempts to add bulk to his books in the false hope that size would appeal to potential publishers.

The apparent progressive bent of this scholarship towards a rehabilitation of George Copway is not entirely accurate. Scholars like Walker and Fulford were correct in acknowledging the ultimately destructive effects of Copway's use of English literacy, as the recognition and success that he desired was impossible for an Indigenous person in nineteenth-century America. However, his acculturation must be viewed alongside his attempts to preserve and protect the history, language, and culture of his people and when simplistic understandings of assimilation are abandoned, the paradoxical nature of his life begins to make sense. The scandal and drama of Copway's life often clouded his message, and under close scrutiny inconsistencies begin to appear throughout his writings. In both text and performance Copway sought to communicate Indigenous historicity, cultural value, and political interests to Euroamerican audiences. Although his use of Romantic style often placed these historical themes in literary shadows, they can be seen throughout his work.

#### **4.2 The Development of a Nineteenth-Century Anishinaabe Writer**

It is important to remember that despite being eclipsed by later writers, Copway's life and work were ground-breaking. His autobiography was the first book published by a Canadian Indigenous person and *The History of the Ojibway Nation* was the first published account of Anishinaabe history, pre-dating Peter Jones' by a decade and William Warren's by over thirty years.<sup>23</sup> In addition, his autobiography was only the second Indigenous autobiography to be published, appearing eighteen years after William Apess' *Son of the Forest*.<sup>24</sup> As part of the first generation to leave Rice Lake, Copway represented the forefront of the Indigenous expatriate community in urban America. As he navigated this world, he initially followed a course laid out for him by his parents and spiritual leaders but as he began to master the tools of English literacy

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<sup>23</sup> Donald B. Smith, "George Copway", *Dictionary of Canadian Biography Online*, url: [http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio.php?id\\_nbr=4517](http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio.php?id_nbr=4517), accessed April 19, 2017.

<sup>24</sup> A. LaVonne Brown Ruoff, "The Literary and Methodist Contexts of George Copway's *Life, Letters, and Speeches*," in *Life, Letters, and Speeches* by George Copway, 1997, 4.

he quickly began to use them in ways that diverged and sometimes conflicted with his authorities' agendas.

Copway first began to engage with English literacy shortly after his father's conversion to Christianity in the summer of 1827. According to his autobiography, his father had received extracts from the New Testament that had been translated into Ojibwe. These casual lessons in how to read Anishinaabemowin scripture transliterated with English characters served as George's initiation into the world of text. In addition to his learning at home, he also began to intermittently attend local classes with his father at a day school the Methodists had constructed in 1828.<sup>25</sup> This time of seasonal education came to a close when Copway left to work in the American Great Lakes region as a missionary.

In the fall of 1837, after three years of missions, Copway and two other Rice Lake Ojibwe received a stipend to be enrolled at the Ebenezer Manual Labor School at Fort Snelling near Jacksonville, Illinois.<sup>26</sup> Founded by a Methodist minister, this school employed a progressive program that gave a racially-integrated class of Indigenous and Euromerican students an elementary, classical, and religious education over two years.<sup>27</sup> Copway proved to be a gifted writer, publishing two literary items in the Methodist *Western Christian Advocate*.<sup>28</sup> While a student, Copway also penned a letter to the Methodist head office critiquing a cost-cutting decision and convincing them to send additional textbooks for the new students.<sup>29</sup>

Another important event in his development as a writer was his marriage in the spring of 1840 to Elizabeth, an avid reader and a poet. Though the degree of Elizabeth's involvement is unclear, Fulford concludes that the use of Romantic style in Copway's books were the result of a literary collaboration.<sup>30</sup> She would prove to be an invaluable editor and perhaps co-author as well as a source of secondary quotations from the English literary canon.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Copway, *Life, Letters, and Speeches*, 102.

<sup>26</sup> Smith, *Mississauga Portraits*, 176.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 176-7.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 177.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 177.

<sup>30</sup> Fulford, *Romantic Indians*, 285.

Copway's early acts of resistance to religious authority grew following his arrest and subsequent transplanting of his family to the United States. Following his expulsion from the Canadian Methodist Conference, Copway attempted to obtain a position with the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM) while simultaneously working with Elizabeth to prepare his autobiography for publication. During his 1839 trip through the United States as a graduate, Copway had met with members of the ABCFM and had visited their headquarters in Boston. In need of funds to support his family in their new precarious state, Copway initiated a correspondence with Secretary David Green that brought him into direct conflict with Methodist leadership.

In his first letter to Green on December 4, 1846, Copway did not soften his words, but explained that he was "quite disgusted with the divisions of the Methodist Church in Canada."<sup>32</sup> This open critique of the denomination that had thrown him out drew the attention of the New York Methodist authorities, who knew something of the events that had taken place in Upper Canada. Two months later, the New York Methodists sent their own letter to the ABCFM, warning Reverend Green of Copway's history and asking to be brought up to date on his activities and whereabouts.<sup>33</sup> Appearing to have heard about their allegations and seeking to assert his legitimacy, Copway responded in a second letter informing Green that he was on the verge of obtaining \$4,500 from the Society of Friends for the construction of a manual labour school and expanding on his critique: "I am tired of the divisions and dissensions in the Methodist Church. I have established 3 missions for the Methodists, they have been abandoned." As a final proof of his credibility and personal worth, Copway included a copy of his freshly-published autobiography, informing Green that it was one of a thousand that were selling rapidly. Perhaps by this second letter Copway's confidence in his new book had removed any fear of repercussions, enabling him to openly critique his old overseers.

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<sup>31</sup> Peyer, *The Tutor'd Mind*, 238-9.

<sup>32</sup> "To Rev. Bro. Green, Dec. 4 1846," American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions Archives, 1810-1961 (ABC 1-91), Houghton Library, Harvard University.

<sup>33</sup> "Letter to Rev. Mr. Green, Feb. 10, 1847," American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions Archives, 1810-1961 (ABC 1-91), Houghton Library, Harvard University.



If Green perused the book that accompanied Copway's letter he would have found additional arguments defending Copway's actions. In the passage dealing with the Saugeen Council, Copway conveniently avoided mentioning the repercussions of the tent meeting. Rather, he includes letters and a petition from the gathered chiefs that declare their desire to appoint him as their representative in gathering funds for the construction of a new school. Copway's explanation for these documents is a sarcastic response to unnamed critics: "I give these, for the benefit and instruction of those, who have been so kind as to insinuate, or assert, that I was not an *authorized agent* to forward the interests of my poor people. Those who have been the loudest and most active in this slander, have done the least, in rendering the Indians any essential service. Let them go on, with their gossippings, while I go on my way rejoicing in doing all I can for my poor people, independently of the Canada Conference [sic, emphasis in original]."<sup>34</sup> It is likely that these individuals are the same Methodist colleagues and supervisors that he critiqued in his correspondence with Reverend Green.

Having been trained in the written word by his Methodist supervisors, Copway used it to out maneuver them. While they attempted to put a stop to his attempts to rehabilitate his career, he bypassed the channels of authority and communication that normally restricted the power of an Indigenous person to successfully thwart their efforts. Copway used his literacy to take control of the narrative, editing his life's story to exclude his personal humiliation, and to emphasize the important role of Indigenous missionaries in the development of their own, very politically focused, Indigenous Christianity. In this way, Copway achieved a level of social status and influence that would have been impossible had he remained a missionary, leaving a permanent and best-selling record of his critique of the Canadian Methodists.

As Copway's celebrity and social network grew, he began to move away from the Christian literary style of his first book and engaged with the modes that had proved successful in American popular culture. Adopting literary styles common in writing about Indigenous people, Copway drew from the ethnographic work of Henry Schoolcraft, Lewis H. Morgan, Lewis Cass, and Thomas L. McKenny, as well as increasingly Romantic and idealized depictions of indigeneity in popular culture.<sup>35</sup> Although these forms ultimately proved destructive, Copway

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<sup>34</sup> Copway, *Life Letters, and Speeches*, 149.

<sup>35</sup> Konkle, *Writing Indian Nations*, 160.

bent them to his goals of preserving and transmitting his community's oral traditions, asserting the historical reality and cultural validity of Indigenous peoples, and asserting his own idea for Indigenous political independence.

### 4.3 "A Better Idea of Each Other:" Reconciliation Through Education

In the summer of 1851, in a letter to Longfellow, Copway explained the purpose of his literary journal: "It is designed to become a channel of information for the American people and to the Indian Race of all such things as will tend to give them a better idea of each other."<sup>36</sup> In *The Traditional History*, Copway describes an English education and Christianity as the two wings of an eagle that will enable the Indigenous people of North America to rise to a position of equality with settler society.<sup>37</sup> Copway argued that through English literacy, Indigenous people would have access to "the accumulated experience of the past" and "might learn the elements which would produce the greatest amount of good to our nation." Though he notes another effect of this would be the loss of their "own ideas of civilization, as well as the old usages in our nation" he sees the access to this new "universal language in all lands" as being of essential benefit to their survival as a nation.<sup>38</sup> Having risen to social heights in American society through his own adoption of English literacy, Copway desired to give, and even force, this knowledge on all Indigenous peoples in his new state. But his ideas of the importance of education moved in both directions. As his literary journal's "Prospectus" made clear, Copway saw his own work as educating non-Indigenous America. This was not simply a passive transmission of information, but rather the first transformative steps towards building bridges between nations that were separated by ignorance, language, and a history of violent conquest.

Copway's belief in the socially transformative power of education can be seen in a letter published in the Boston newspaper *The Flag* and added to the 1858 edition of his autobiography.

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<sup>36</sup> George Copway to Henry W. Longfellow, June 12, 1851, Letters to Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (MS Am 1340.2-1340.7), Houghton Library, Harvard University.

<sup>37</sup> Copway, *The Traditional History*, 260.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 260-1.

Seeing no hope for change at the governmental level, Copway recommended a more grass-roots approach: “use those means which are in the hands of the people; diffuse sound education, let the ministry of north and south *preach and practise a pure Christianity*; then will the slaves be set free [emphasis in original].”<sup>39</sup> Education, particularly Christian, was the driving factor in Copway’s conception of social change. This idea played a major role in the formation of his political vision, as he saw education in English literacy as the means of Indigenous peoples’ survival: “When we have a press of our own, we shall, perhaps, be able to plead our own cause. Give us but the *Bible*, and the influence of a *Press*, and we ask no more.”<sup>40</sup> Copway believed that through education Euroamerican society could be roused from its ignorance and made aware of the injustices being perpetrated towards Indigenous America. All his books, letters to newspapers, articles, and literary journal were venues for him to convey the arguments that would bring this about. Whether ignorant, naïve, or simply optimistic Copway seems to have sincerely believed that if his people could master English literacy, they would be able to engage in public discourse, reason with the settler state, and eventually be accepted as political and social equals. For Copway, English literacy was not simply a tool, but an essential component in his plan for the political and social agency of his people.

#### 4.4 Copway’s Deployment of Romantic “Idealized Indian” Stereotypes

By the time Copway had emerged as a literary talent, American popular culture had begun to embrace an idealized, Romantic view of Indigenous people. Writers like Washington Irving not only argued for the value of Indigenous culture, but also that it exhibited qualities that were superior to modern society in many ways.<sup>41</sup> This new romanticizing of the public image of Indigenous people created a receptive market for Copway’s writing and he avidly embraced the sentimental rhetoric both in his public performances and in his accounts of Indigenous history and culture. He openly praised the work of writers like Schoolcraft, James Fenimore Cooper, and Longfellow in his introduction to *The Ojibway Conquest*: “I am very glad to think that justice has

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<sup>39</sup> Copway, *Life, Letters, and Speeches*, 197.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 152.

<sup>41</sup> Smith, “Kahgegagahbowh,” 37.

been done to them by many writers, in their tales, and the peculiar romance which belong to them. [sic]"<sup>42</sup> Copway's mastery of Romantic style contrasted with his one-time mentor, Peter Jones who detested performing in 'traditional Ojibway' garb to raise money for mission schools.<sup>43</sup> It is unclear whether this was due to his dislike for the traditional clothing itself or because he saw through the crass deception of portraying himself as a romanticized 'traditional' Anishinaabe. Either way, he likely would have preferred to present himself as the genteel, educated minister, dressed in white shirt and black suit, as he is portrayed in most of his portraits.

Tim Fulford describes Copway's adoption of Romantic language as "a bid for power" that gave him "a privileged intimacy with a natural world with which whites [had] lost touch."<sup>44</sup> This aspect of the idealized Romantic Indian resonated with an America that was still attempting to establish its own national identity. In their writing and editing, Copway and Elizabeth sought to conform to rather than change or modify fashionable literary style.<sup>45</sup> This proficiency with the theatrical language and clichés of the genre were in large part what made Copway's books such a success.<sup>46</sup> On his European tour Copway made little effort to blend in as he revelled in his role as a representative of all Indigenous North Americans, and often adopted Romantic clichés as part of his public persona.<sup>47</sup> The reasons for this were twofold: on the one hand, Copway could present himself in a romanticized way that would attract and entertain audiences while on the other it also allowed him to show pride in his identity as an Indigenous person. Konkle argues that because he saw the representation of Indigenous people in Euromerican culture as a central component of Indigenous political struggles, his performances played a role in his attempting to control that representation.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Copway, *The Ojibway Conquest*, viii-ix.

<sup>43</sup> Konkle, *Writing Indian Nations*, 188.

<sup>44</sup> Tim Fulford, *Romantic Indians*, 286.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 286.

<sup>46</sup> Peyer, *The Tutor'd Mind*, 271.

<sup>47</sup> Kate Flint, *The Transatlantic Indian*, 219.

<sup>48</sup> Konkle, *Writing Indian Nations*, 5.

Fulford argues that Copway's employment of quotes from Romantic English literature was a subversive act. Where he quotes poets Henry Kirke White and Lord Byron in *History of the Ojibway Nation*, Copway is attempting to soften his implicit claim that the Indigenous people of North America are the rightful claimants to its lands.<sup>49</sup> In a similar fashion Copway used the image of the idealized Romantic Indian to cast judgement on the colonial actions of settler society: "Is it for the deeds of a Pocahontas, a Massasoit, and a host of others, that we have been plundered and oppressed, and expelled from the hallowed graves of our ancestors?"<sup>50</sup> By using the names of well-known romanticized Indigenous characters, Copway intended to induce a sense of guilt in his Euromerican audience. Ironically, this reinforced their imaginary understanding of Indigenous Americans and pushed them further from an appreciation of real contemporary indigeneity.

Although granting Copway a shorthand with which to communicate and market his ideas, Romanticism was also a corrosive discourse that translated Ojibwe identity into a "generalized" and "infantilized" form.<sup>51</sup> Fulford argues that Copway misunderstood this aspect of the movement, and that by relying on it to buoy his work, he tied it to a declining movement, condemning it to being seen as passé. Copway was a product of his time, however, and like Levi-Strauss' bricoleur, he had to make do with the literary techniques and styles at hand. He and Elizabeth were steeped in Romantic literature and poetry and Elizabeth even published at least one poem in the *New York Observer and Chronicle*.<sup>52</sup> In the sense of an infantilized Indigenous history, Copway was a forerunner of future Indigenous portrayals in Euromerican popular culture:

As Romanticism became a debased popular currency and as Indians became Reservation curiosities, pulp fiction and Hollywood movies traded time and again on the cliché which Copway had struggled to turn to his and Indians' advantage – the brave, hardy, but

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<sup>49</sup> Tim Fulford, *Romantic Indians*, 282.

<sup>50</sup> Copway, *Life, Letters, and Speeches*, 162.

<sup>51</sup> Tim Fulford, *Romantic Indians*, 289.

<sup>52</sup> Elizabeth Howell Copway, "Not in the Morning," *New York Observer and Chronicle*, October 13, 1856, 34, 44, pg. 348, *American Periodicals* (Database).

primitive children of nature, too simple for civilization but admirable as embodiments of a oneness with nature that urban whites felt themselves to have lost.<sup>53</sup>

By using participating in this Romantic discourse, Copway was attempting to promote his culture with the very materials that attacked and corroded it. This grew as he fell from fame and in later life he began to perform theatrical public readings of *The Song of Hiawatha* that re-affirmed these romanticized racial stereotypes. It appears Copway was either unaware of the destructiveness of this imagery or that he viewed this Romantic style as the most convenient and marketable means of communication. Konkle argues that these clichés and stereotypes were the only materials available for him to work with, and in his search for rapid success, he employed clichés and stereotypes to his financial and social advantage. The irony of course was that the very discourse that he engaged in denied his own life experience as well as the ability of an Indigenous person to produce literature at all.<sup>54</sup>

Despite Copway's use of sentimental clichés, these framings often fade away as he begins to recount experiences that are drawn from his own life. For while his tales may have struck his readers as fantastical and entertaining, for him they remained true stories about real memories. Konkle cleverly demonstrates this by examining one story in particular: Copway's account of a girl's vision quest in his *Traditional History*. The story begins in a very stylized, sentimental form but once the main character begins to actually have dreams, much of the Romantic language drops away and Copway begins to play the role of interpreter, in a manner echoing his father's interpretation of his own childhood vision recounted in his autobiography. Copway explains that the girl is searching for the relief of her nation's recent suffering and sickness and she is visited by a series of spiritual beings and animals who share their wisdom with her. The story ends abruptly with Copway inserting himself into the narrative: "Since that time, I have seen that girl but once... In the year 1842, while sailing along Lake Superior... I saw Shah-won-a-qua, and listened with deep interest to her relation of the dreams of her childhood."<sup>55</sup> In the matter of a few pages, the writing moves from a clichéd structure with

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<sup>53</sup> Tim Fulford, *Romantic Indians*, 289-90.

<sup>54</sup> Konkle, *Writing Indian Nations*, 195.

<sup>55</sup> Copway, *The Traditional History*, 164.

sentimental language to being jarringly historicized in a geographically and chronologically specific setting. In this way, and to an extent that earlier scholars have not noticed, Copway used the Romantic literary style that his readers found entertaining to convey ideas that were otherwise “unthinkable, for readers in mid-century America.” In this particular case by showing deference and respect to an older Indigenous woman for her willingness to share traditional knowledge with him.<sup>56</sup> Though Copway relied on a literary style that was innately destructive to Indigenous identity, he did so in an attempt to challenge the epistemology of Euromerican society by asserting the presence and reality of an Anishinaabe knowledge, unknown in settler society.

Another way that he used the image of an idealized, noble Indigenous culture was to contrast it with Euromerican society in order to highlight its hypocrisy and moral failings. In *Traditional History*, Copway extolls Anishinaabe society’s foundation of mutual trust within the community, and praises its lack of prisons and poor houses, and proper respect for the spiritual world. He then goes on to critique Euromerican society’s widespread use of corporal punishment, prisons, liquor, and using God’s name in oaths and curses, European practices that he sardonically labels “savage.”<sup>57</sup> In *Organization of a New Indian Territory*, a published version of his presentation before the U.S. Congress, Copway places the blame for Indigenous communities’ seeming inability to advance in “civilization” on the moral failings of settlers themselves. Konkle points out that these are expansions on the arguments laid out in Copway’s autobiography where he asserts “that the current state of Native peoples in the United States... [were] the result not of the inherent difference and inferiority of Native peoples but the result of willful, deceitful actions of whites.”<sup>58</sup> He does this by dividing settler society into two “classes” of “pale-faces:” a lower class of rough, selfish, and un-Christian settlers who are only interested in acquiring Indigenous land, and the “refined and civilized society” that presumably makes up

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<sup>56</sup> Konkle notes that the date and setting of this last meeting align with another story in Copway’s autobiography where he meets a powerful female shaman who had converted to Christianity. Konkle speculates that the women in both stories might be the same figure. If that is the case, it is possible that Copway’s earlier, Christianized account was sanitized for a more religious Euromerican audience; Konkle, *Writing Indian Nations*, 222.

<sup>57</sup> Tim Fulford, *Romantic Indians*, 287; Copway, *The Traditional History*, 258.

<sup>58</sup> Maureen Konkle, *Writing Indian Nations*, 189.

his audience.<sup>59</sup> This differentiation between Euroamerican culture and Euroamerican people is an important aspect of Copway's thought because although he saw their culture as a resource necessary for his people's survival, he also wanted Indigenous people to acquire them in the context of geographical and social separation.

#### **4.5 “And by Publishing, to Preserve:” Transforming Oral Traditions into Text**

“The history of a nation is always interesting. The more obscure the means of tracing it, the more of interest attaches to it, as it slowly discloses itself to the eye of research.”

Copway, “The American Indians”<sup>60</sup>

On January 27, 1851, Copway went with Longfellow to see Peter Stephenson's sculpture “The Wounded Indian.”<sup>61</sup> This neoclassical statue depicted a Romantic dying ‘Indian warrior’ pierced by an arrow. Like the ancient sculptures of the Greeks and Romans that it echoed, this statue represented a vanishing, mythical part of the history of the United States. It is interesting to contrast how each of the viewers would have taken the work of art. In four years, Longfellow would publish his most successful poem, the epic *Song of Hiawatha* by re-implementing stories that Schoolcraft had gathered and bowdlerized while an Indian Agent in the Great Lakes area. In contrast, by the end of the year Copway's professional career would be in steep decline. As his father and uncles had fought in the War of 1812, Copway had seen real Indigenous warriors and he knew the realities of reservation life and the day-to-day experiences of real flesh-and-blood natives. For Longfellow, however, the statue embodied his conception of indigeneity as a

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<sup>59</sup> Copway, *Organization of a New Indian Territory, East of the Missouri River* (New York: S.W. Benedict, 1850), 4-5.

<sup>60</sup> Copway, “The American Indians.” *American Whig Review*, 9, no. 18 (1849): 631.

<sup>61</sup> Samuel Longfellow, *The Life of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow*, vol. 2 (Boston: Ticknor and Company, 1886), 188, Longfellow calls the statue the “Dying Indian;” “The Wounded Indian,” Chrysler Museum of Art, url: [http://collection.chrysler.org/emuseum/view/objects/asitem/People\\$00406058/0/title-asc?t:state:flow=cd3bfb2c-f632-4ad2-a6e3-01e49e3354d2](http://collection.chrysler.org/emuseum/view/objects/asitem/People$00406058/0/title-asc?t:state:flow=cd3bfb2c-f632-4ad2-a6e3-01e49e3354d2), accessed April 15, 2017.



Romantic subject for his own poetry, and a source of mythology for a developing American national identity.

In the ethnographic material that dominated Copway's *Traditional History*, he struggled between the conflicting roles of 'Romantic, idealized Indian' and 'civilized, assimilated Christian' and he made frequent use of both modes throughout the work. But, rather than simply keep to either of these performances, Copway employs a third, unexpected literary mode by establishing the historicity of Anishinaabe culture and society.<sup>62</sup> Through this approach, Copway upends both literary images of natives, and reveals that his books are the account of a nation with identifiable leaders and boundaries as well as an ancient history that can be traced through time to his own family heritage and life experience in the mid-nineteenth century. "Our nation has never been conquered; and have maintained their ground wherever they have conquered" he proclaims in his autobiography, disregarding Euromerican claims of colonial domination.<sup>63</sup> Throughout this ethnographic work Copway emphasizes the genuine nature of his information by showing its connection to Indigenous oral tradition. Following the account of Shahwonqua's dream mentioned above, Copway explains that he gave her gifts of wild ducks and a yard of red cloth in exchange for her story and the knowledge that it contained.<sup>64</sup> In the essay that he mailed to the New York Historical Society phrases like "tradition, narrates" and "tradition informs us" are repeated, as an indication that his alternative account of the Wyandot-Haudenosaunee conflict is received from traditional oral history obtained from in his home community.

Despite his sentimental portrayal of Indigenous culture, and half-hearted attempts to distance himself from it, Copway's focus on and positive portrayal of traditional culture was unusual in comparison to the work of other Indigenous authors. While about a third of Copway's autobiography dealt with his childhood and Anishinaabe culture, similar works by Peter Jones, William Apress, Peter Jacobs, and John Johnson all either skipped over this part of their life, or portrayed it as pagan superstition. In his *History of the Ojebway Indians*, Jones strongly criticized traditional Indigenous culture, viewing it as superstitious and incompatible with

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<sup>62</sup> Rex, "Survivance and Fluidity," 7.

<sup>63</sup> Copway, *Life, Letters, and Speeches*, 90.

<sup>64</sup> Copway, *The Traditional History and Characteristic Sketches of the Ojibway Nation*, 164.

modern Christianity. Peyer states that Copway's recollections are almost "euphoric" in comparison.<sup>65</sup> Even Johnson, who claimed to have been a member of the Midewiwin with knowledge of its teachings, criticizes it as heathen superstition.<sup>66</sup>

In contrast, Copway sought to disseminate his knowledge of traditional Anishinaabe culture to a wide audience in an effort to educate the Euroamerican public. Disagreeing with the censoring practices of more conservative members of his community, he saw value in converting Anishinaabe oral traditions into a written, English record:

The *traditions* handed down from father to son, were held very sacred; one half of these are not known by the white people, however far their researches may have extended. There is an unwillingness, on the part of the Indians to communicate many of their traditions. The only way to come at these is, to educate the Indians, so that they may be able to write out what they have heard, or may hear and publish it [emphasis original].<sup>67</sup>

In his political writings, Copway often fluctuates between praise for Indigenous society and culture and agreeing with the superiority of settler 'civilization' and his people's need to conform to it. A wide range of beliefs and emotions motivated this project including his Ojibwe nationalism, belief in the unstoppable forces of colonization, and the imminent destruction of Indigenous society and culture. His belief in these forces coupled with his search for power and fame made it imperative for him to quickly gather what knowledge he could and preserve it in published books. Konkle argues that "the power of Copway's writing is that he did *not* abandon the authority of tradition [emphasis original]" but attempted to transplant it into the new medium of English writing.<sup>68</sup> The resulting hybridization of two different modes of communication and cultural preservation forced Copway to fluctuate between literary styles that often mixed in unexpected ways.

In the ethnographic sections of both *Life, Letters, and Speeches* and *Traditional History*, Copway attempted to portray a culturally complex and politically coherent Ojibway nation that

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<sup>65</sup> Peyer, *The Tutor'd Mind*, 233.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 264.

<sup>67</sup> Copway, *Life, Letters, and Speeches*, 89.

<sup>68</sup> Konkle, *Writing Indian Nations*, 223.

merited modern, American statehood. This was in direct opposition to the ethnographic work of Lewis Cass and Thomas L. McKenney, whose writings and anthropological questionnaires formed models for Copway.<sup>69</sup> Unlike these collectors of artifacts and stories, however, Copway complemented his sentimental histories and tales with a realistic account of the broken treaties, governmental hypocrisy, and destructive liquor trade that plagued the Rice Lake community.<sup>70</sup>

Rather than just demonstrate how the Ojibway nation met many of the criteria for Euromerican definitions of civilization, he also subtly asserted that traditional Indigenous culture was in many ways superior to Euromerican culture. One of the main ways he did this was through the exploration of an Indigenous form of literacy in their language, pictographic writing system, and birch bark scrolls. In this discussion, Copway compares Anishinaabemowin to English, asserting its sophistication: “After reading the English language, I have found words in the Indian combining more expressiveness. There are many Indian words which when translated into English lose their force, and do not convey so much meaning in one sentence as the original does in one word.”<sup>71</sup> While this reveals his pride in the Anishinaabe language of his youth, it also shows his acceptance a new hierarchical scale for measuring the civilization of a society, particularly according to its development of textual forms of communication. Despite writing in English, Copway argues that Euromerican society’s literacy is not necessarily superior to the oral traditions of the Anishinaabe. To support this argument, Copway reminds his readers of the importance of oral tradition in the development of the Christian scriptures: “The present dependence of the pale face on letters, for the past is too much of a marvel for the history of those times, entirely forgetting that the whole of the Old and New Testaments has been handed down in the same form in years back, until letters became the representation of such traditions.”<sup>72</sup> He concludes the same chapter by describing the use of beadwork and couriers for

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<sup>69</sup> Peyer, *The Tutor’d Mind*, 269-70.

<sup>70</sup> Konkle, *Writing Indian Nations*, 160.

<sup>71</sup> Copway, *Traditional History*, 124-5.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 138-9.

long-distance communication, a system that he claims makes it impossible to change the meaning of the original message due to the careful construction of the beaded belts.<sup>73</sup>

Konkle argues that through the writing and publishing of Anishinaabe stories and praise of Anishinaabe culture “Copway told his audience that what they called Indian ‘myths and legends’ were both a history of and resistance to colonization; that the Ojibwe language has an aesthetic quality of which speakers were intensely aware; and that dreams were valid knowledge, knowledge that only Indians could explain.”<sup>74</sup> In addition, he sought to prove that Indigenous society was already partially ‘civilized’ in its possession of a form of writing and a complex language, and thus worthy of self-government. He believed that once this was achieved, and they had begun the process of Christianisation and widespread English education, they could stop the decline of their population and land holdings, push Euromericans out of their territory, and approach the settler nation on an equal footing.

#### **4.6 Kahgega: Copway’s Indigenous Political Vision**

In keeping with mid-nineteenth-century American culture, Copway ascribed to a historical consciousness of Indigenous people that was based on their imminent destruction as a distinct community politically, culturally, and even physically.<sup>75</sup> However, unlike his Euromerican contemporaries, Copway did not see this as a deterministic natural phenomenon that could not be stopped: “The pale face says that there is a fate hanging over the Indian bent on his destruction. Preposterous! They give him liquors to destroy himself with, and then charge the great Good Spirit as the author of their misery and mortality.”<sup>76</sup> He expands on this point heatedly in a letter to the *Saturday Evening Post* included at the end of his *Traditional History*:

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 139.

<sup>74</sup> Maureen Konkle, *Writing Indian Nations*, 213.

<sup>75</sup> Ruoff, “The Literary and Methodist Contexts of George Copway’s *Life, Letters, and Speeches*,” 5.

<sup>76</sup> Copway, *The Traditional History*, 93-94.

The ministry of this country, and the sluggards in the cause of humanity, say now: *There is a fate or certain doom on the Indians, therefore we need do nothing for them.* How blasphemous! First you give us rum by the thousand barrels, and, before the presence of God and this enlightened world, point to God, and charge him as the murderer of the unfortunate Indians... save us from such orthodoxy!<sup>77</sup>

In the first of these letters, Copway cites four causes behind the declining Indigenous population, all of which are the responsibility of European colonization and not some inherent racial difference or impersonal spiritual or natural force. The first is “*The Diseases introduced by Europeans* [emphasis original]” including smallpox and measles. Second: the introduction of firearms which have caused inter-tribal conflicts to have a much higher death toll. Third: wars waged between the “whites” in which allied Indigenous warriors were made to fight in the most dangerous engagements, thus experiencing higher casualty rates. His final, and most strongly-worded, reason is the introduction of liquor, a curse that he argues is “greater than all the other evils combined.”<sup>78</sup> In Copway’s understanding, the present decline of Indigenous communities was directly caused by settler colonialism. In the face of unending and increasing immigration he concluded that if political and social action were not taken immediately, the remaining Indigenous peoples would rise in desperation to wage a final deadly war against the colonizers.<sup>79</sup>

While Euromerican society viewed this situation as essentially an Indigenous choice between assimilation and extinction, Copway presented a third option. The political vision of Kahgega seemed to promise a third way that included Indigenous adoption of newcomer religion and English literacy while maintaining the continuity of Indigenous sovereignty.<sup>80</sup> It is possible that Copway had this in mind when he gave the territory a shortened form of his own Anishinaabemowin name: Kahgega, which he translated to mean “firm, or ever; which would mean ‘Ever-to-be Indian Territory.’”<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 262-263.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 270.

<sup>80</sup> Timothy Sweet, “Pastoral Landscape with Indians: George Copway and the Political Unconscious of the American Pastoral,” *Prospects* 18 (1993): 3.

<sup>81</sup> Copway, *Organization of a New Indian Territory*, 18.

As a political solution to the ‘Indian problem’ Kahgega expanded on ideas promoted by earlier Indigenous thinkers like Augustus Bowles and it would live on in other forms like the political theory of Albert Pike, both of whom were also influenced by Masonic philosophy.<sup>82</sup> These plans served as a sort of compromise within the larger discourse on the fate of Indigenous America. As settler colonialism began to spread westward, spurred on by variations of the notion of Manifest Destiny, immigrants came into conflict with Indigenous populations over their increasingly aggressive encroachment on Indigenous land. As early as 1781, Thomas Jefferson, despite his acceptance of an abstract, Enlightenment racial parity, expressed his belief that ‘the wilderness’ and its Indigenous population would inevitably give way to a Euromerican agricultural society in *Notes on the State of Virginia*.<sup>83</sup> Jefferson cushioned the need for removal with the idea that Indigenous populations could improve by assimilating into Euromerican culture.<sup>84</sup> Pretences of compassion were abandoned in 1833, when President Andrew Jackson stood before Congress and declared that the Indigenous population was incapable of improvement and needed to vanish in order to make way for American civilization.<sup>85</sup> Copway waded into this discourse full of ambition, uprooting his family in 1849 to embark on his tour of the western territories in order to find a suitable geographical location for his self-titled state. The need for such a territory was made all the more urgent in early 1850 when President Zachary Taylor authorized the forced removal of Anishinaabe communities from Michigan and Wisconsin to Minnesota, a plan supported by the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions.<sup>86</sup> When President Taylor died the same day that Copway sailed from New York for Europe he jotted down his thoughts to include in his travel narrative, referring to him not as

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<sup>82</sup> Joy Porter, *Native American Freemasons*, 218.

<sup>83</sup> Timothy Sweet, “Pastoral Landscape with Indians,” 4.

<sup>84</sup> Hackett, *That Religion in Which All Men Agree*, 177.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> Peyer, *The Tutor’d Mind*, 246; Knobel, “Know-Nothings and Indians: Strange Bedfellows?” 180.

‘President,’ but “General,” and stating that he hoped “the Great Spirit had forgiven him for killing so many of the red men of my country.”<sup>87</sup>

Copway’s version of the ‘Indian territory’ concept reflected the importance of Indigenous land ownership in his political thought. This can be seen as early as his 1848 autobiography which contains a repetitive list of fifteen different Indigenous, primarily “Chippewa,” communities comprising “A Geographical Sketch of the Ojebwa, or Chippeway, Nation.”<sup>88</sup> In many of these entries, is carefully recorded the acreage of their traditional lands and present territories, the monetary amounts paid in exchange for these lands, and the history of Anishinaabe conquests and settlement in Southern Ontario. This information, which was repeated in an edited form in *The Traditional History*, strengthens Copway’s case argument for the historicity of Indigenous people, the legitimacy of their claim to the land, and their right to political independence.

#### **4.7 The Tension Between Reality and Romanticism in Copway’s Writing**

In August 1849, Copway returned from his travels in the western territories with a new work, an epic poem, that he thought would impress his literary friends in the east. This poem, *The Ojibway Conquest*, Smith has determined was almost certainly ghost-written by Julius Taylor Clark, an Indian Agent, and published under Copway’s name to increase sales.<sup>89</sup> The only parts that are generally attributed to Copway are the preface and an opening poem addressed to Elizabeth. Peyer finds it ironic that Copway is criticized for claiming Clark’s work as his own, when writers like Clark, Longfellow, and Schoolcraft were all ransacking what Indigenous knowledge they could obtain to make into financially successful poems and stories for themselves.<sup>90</sup> The poem presented Indigenous history as a romanticized, fantastical world described in sentimental and dramatic language. Though this work was not the product of Copway’s own pen, he adopted many of the stylistic flourishes in his own works, combining

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<sup>87</sup> Copway, *Running Sketches*, 13.

<sup>88</sup> Copway, *Life, Letters, and Speeches*, 152.

<sup>89</sup> Smith, “Kahgegagahbowh...,” in *Life, Letters, and Speeches*, 39.

<sup>90</sup> Peyer, *The Tutor’d Mind*, 269.

ethnography with the romanticizing of traditional Anishinaabe stories in order to paradoxically assert the historicity of Indigenous society.

Though it is not commented on in the scholarship, there is a third portion of *The Ojibway Conquest* that appears to have been contributed to Copway. The poem is accompanied by surprisingly extensive endnotes which explain the meaning behind many of the elements of Anishinaabe culture used throughout the poem. By the sixth note, however, the writer abruptly changes voice from a distant, speculative, third-person perspective to a confident first-person that sounds suspiciously familiar after Clark's stiff iambic tetrameter. This second narrative voice gives detailed explanations of the use and constructions of skin drums and standards made from eagle feathers, and argues for the reality of the "magic" used by Anishinaabe shamans.<sup>91</sup> The remainder of the endnotes switch erratically between first- and second-person perspective, giving the impression of double authorship. Even in a borrowed work, it seems as though Copway could not resist to clarify and expand on Clark's construction of an imagined indigeneity.

Though he avidly adopted the ahistorical and sentimentalizing literary styles of nineteenth-century Romanticism, and the often-paternalistic methods of early ethnography, the unusual fact that Copway was an Indigenous author twisted these genres in unexpected ways. In her examination of his historical writing, Rex argues that despite the idealized, and ultimately damaging stereotypes that he used, his writing challenged Western constructions of Indigenous identity by inserting a "textualized self" that asserted Indigenous political and social interests.<sup>92</sup> Unlike many other early Indigenous writers, Copway readily used traditional stories, history, and knowledge to sell his books and entertain his audiences. Without the popularity of romanticized indigeneity or his desire for fame, money, and power, Copway would not have been able to publish his works. But, mixed with his self-focused goals were a sincere desire to preserve and share knowledge that he believed would disappear, either through the destruction of Indigenous people, or through their assimilation into a new Indigenous territory. Either way, Copway believed that the loss of Indigenous language and culture were inevitable, and he turned the tools he had acquired at the Methodist mission schools to his own Indigenous-centric purposes. Whether he was fully conscious of it or not, Copway's engagement with English literacy created

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<sup>91</sup> Julius Taylor Clark and George Copway, *The Ojibway Conquest*, 85-86.

<sup>92</sup> Rex, "Survivance and Fluidity," 6.



the possibility for a new expression of Indigenous identity, one that he considered to be the best hope for a people suffering under the pressures of settler colonialism.

## Chapter 5

### Conclusion

“None of my race have, perhaps, seen the different phases of one man’s varied history as I have. The path I have trodden has been here and there rugged, steep, and intricate. Flowers and thorns have clustered in my bosom at the same time, and have left the aching heart to bleed. Sunshine has also succeeded the darkest hours of sorrow and the bereavements of the past.”

George Copway, *Recollections of a Forest Life*<sup>1</sup>

The second issue of *Copway’s American Indian* related the “Algonquin Tradition of the Evil Serpent.” As narrated by Copway, this traditional flood story began with a conflict between the Anishinaabe trickster folk hero Nanabozho and the Great Serpent with the former transforming himself into a withered tree stump to hide himself as the serpents emerge from their underwater home: “They saw the broken, blasted stump into which Manabozho had transformed himself, and suspecting it might be one of his disguises, for they knew his cunning, one of them approached, and wound his tail around it, and sought to drag it down. But Manabozho stood firm.”<sup>2</sup> One wonders if Copway saw his own story reflected in the “Algonquin Tradition of the Evil Serpent.” After all, he interpreted his own name and the name of his proposed Indian territory, Kahgegagahbowh, as ‘standing firm,’ and there was enough similarity between Manabozho’s shape shifting and Copway’s cultural transformation to lead literary critic Tim Fulford to draw a direct comparison: “changing his shape, altering his voice, the trickster cheats and confuses evil spirits and thus acquires power. Accounts of Copway’s speeches suggest that he played this role, shifting his modes of address as he strove constantly to reinvent himself and the Indianness he represented.”<sup>3</sup> It would not be surprising if Copway saw himself in the figure

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<sup>1</sup> George Copway, *Recollections of a Forest Life, or, the Life and Travels of George Copway, or, Kah-ge-ga-kah-bowh, Chief of the Ojibway Nation* (London: Willoughby & Company, 1850), 1-2.

<sup>2</sup> George Copway, “Algonquin Tradition of the Evil Serpent,” *Copway’s American Indian*, vol. 1, no. 2, July 19, 1851.

<sup>3</sup> Fulford, *Romantic Indians*, 283.

of Nanabozho, transforming yet standing firm in order to protect his people and combat malevolent forces.

Copway had a grandiose image of himself and believed that he was a historically significant figure. The title of this thesis, “Stranger in a Strange Land,” is taken from the 1847 introduction to Copway’s autobiography where he paraphrased the biblical Moses by declaring, “I am a stranger in a strange land!”<sup>4</sup> By drawing a parallel between himself and the Old Testament patriarch Copway did more than use a common turn of phrase. In the Exodus narrative, Moses’ childhood in Pharaoh’s palace made him a culturally-hybrid figure inhabiting the overlap between the Egyptian and Israelite worlds, a state which resulted in his exile. Copway may have felt a kinship with the biblical character as he walked the narrow streets of New York. By identifying with Moses in his autobiography, Copway reveals that he viewed himself as an emancipator, both spiritually and physically, as he sought to bring Christianity and political independence to his beleaguered people.

Elements of this heroic self-image can be seen throughout Copway’s writings. In a letter to the *Saturday Evening Post* arguing for centralized leadership in the proposed new territory, Copway exclaimed: “one good man would be like a light-house in a storm, who would warn and guide the rest.”<sup>5</sup> There can be little doubt that Copway had himself in mind for such a position, as he argued for the abolishing of a hereditary chieftainship, “giving the rule and authority to the well educated.”<sup>6</sup> The combined qualifications of education and Christianity drastically narrowed the pool for the selection of Kahgega’s leaders.

Copway also revealed his own conception of his place in history by publishing a flattering letter to the editor in the second edition of *Copway’s American Indian*. The letter, written by the French émigré and author Julie de Marguerittes, compared Copway to the Scottish liberator Robert the Bruce: “he, with valor suited to the rude spirit of the age, led them [the Scottish] to assert their rights, and to remain inscribed amongst the nations of the world; so you, dear Sir, with civilization and religion, weapons more suited to our peaceful times, will rescue

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<sup>4</sup> Copway, *Life, Letters, and Speeches*, 67; Exodus 2:22, *The Holy Bible*, King James Version.

<sup>5</sup> Copway, *The Traditional History*, 271.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 277.

your countrymen from degeneration and oblivion.”<sup>7</sup> Again we can see evidence of Copway having been caught in the perpetual liminal state of cultural mimic man, for Marguerittes praised him specifically for his “civilization and religion,” aspects of his identity that reaffirmed the superiority of colonial society while also qualifying him for leadership in a new Indigenous state. And yet, the vision Copway carried of a North American society where Indigenous people could hold real positions of power and influence in social, cultural, and political spheres was always just beyond reach. To paraphrase Homi Bhabha, Copway was almost acceptable, but not quite; almost western, but not white.

More subtly, Copway also portrayed his role as a representative and leader of North America’s Indigenous population as arising out of traditional Anishinaabe social structure. In *Life, Letters, and Speeches*, Copway identified his grandfather as a member of the “Crane tribe,” a “daring adventurer,” “great hero,” and “*a warrior* [emphasis original].”<sup>8</sup> Unknown to Copway’s Euromerican audiences, his identification as a member of the Crane tribe was actually a very important way of situating himself socially and politically within the Anishinaabe community. Through oral accounts gathered throughout the 1840s, William Warren paid particular attention to the Crane kinship group in his chapter “Totemic Divisions of the Ojibways:” “This clan are noted as possessing naturally a loud, ringing voice, and are the acknowledged orators of the tribe; in former times, when different tribes met in councils, they acted as interpreters of the wishes of the tribe. They claim, with some apparent justice, the chieftainship over the other clans of the Ojibways.”<sup>9</sup> This perception of the Crane kinship group that was widespread among the Anishinaabe interviewed by Warren was no doubt well known to Copway and this knowledge seems to have spurred him on in his career as both an orator and a political leader.

Up until 1852, Christianity, Freemasonry, and English literacy had exceptionally improved Copway’s life in his own eyes. His engagement with these cultural structures had made him famous and given him influence in American society. In many respects he chose to actively pursue engagement with Euromerican culture and he often expressed pride in his

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<sup>7</sup> Julie de Marguerittes, in *Copway’s American Indian*, vol. 1, no. 2, July 19, 1851, 3.

<sup>8</sup> Copway, *Life, Letters, and Speeches*, 71, emphasis Copway’s.

<sup>9</sup> Warren, *History of the Ojibway People*, 46-47.

decision. Acculturation can be a narrowing idea that often denies agency to Indigenous historical actors. Copway often took action to pursue his own goals and when he found an organization or a denomination to become unhelpful or limiting, he consistently went rogue, relying on his own abilities to create new networks and harness other forces in American culture, even if they proved to be contradictory. This apparent success, combined with his own strong personal ambition led him to believe that this same experience would help all Indigenous people.

Copway's political vision for Indigenous America paralleled his own hybridity. Euromerican-style education, Christianity, the temperance movement, and a focus on Indigenous agency were all aspects of Kahgega. Copway embraced cultural hybridity as an answer to the existential threat posed by American and Canadian colonialism. Rather than accepting Euromerican colonial domination, or totally asserting a separate traditional Indigenous culture (as many other Indigenous leaders such as Sitting Bull did), Copway called for a hybridization of the two. In this regard, he was similar to Metis leader Louis Riel. Cultural hybridity was not a distasteful but necessary compromise for Copway, rather, he saw it as a mode of life transcending both traditional Anishinaabe and Euromerican society. Neither was his vision for the future of Native Americans simply political or economic. While Copway still ascribed to the Anishinaabe use of dreams as a source of knowledge, Christian affiliation remained a deeply important spiritual and moral resource for him, and he believed that Christianity should be adopted by Indigenous Americans. This religious change was innately tied to his political project as he believed that it created the need and means for the creation of a new form of Indigenous society: "As we (the Christian part of our nation) have abandoned our former customs and ceremonies, ought we not to make our own laws...?"<sup>10</sup> In his attempts to rationalize both his past experience and vision of an Indigenous future with colonial authorities he sought to show how he and his people deserved western approval and acceptance, like a true mimic man. In this sense Copway often adopted arguments and values that inadvertently supported the colonial project. For example, in his efforts to prove his nation's equality to Euromerican society, Copway even emphasized that the Anishinaabe had their own history of conquest and settlement. In his autobiography, he emphasizes their military prowess over neighboring Indigenous groups like the Sioux and Haudenosaunee stating that "they [the Ojibway] came to this country, and fought

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<sup>10</sup> Copway, *Life, Letters, and Speeches*, 147.

with the original inhabitants; and having overpowered them, became the owners of the soil.” Interestingly, Copway follows this bold claim by stating that he cannot provide evidence for it in this volume, but will at some future date when he has more time to gather evidence.<sup>11</sup> This sort of disclaimer is unusual in Copway’s writing, and its defensive tone implies that he invented this narrative to give the Anishinaabe a history of conquest that could inspire respect in his Euromerican audience. In his writing, Copway saw this history of colonization and land ownership as something positive, despite its obvious conflict both with the Anishinaabe worldview as well as the treatment of Indigenous peoples in the history of European colonization. In the prospectus for *Copway’s American Indian*, Copway even expressed his tacit acceptance of the notion of a social spectrum that ran from “civilization” to “barbarism.”<sup>12</sup>

Despite this paradoxical acceptance of Euromerican culture, Copway simultaneously expressed pride in his indigeneity, declaring in an address before the legislature of Pennsylvania, “Thank Heaven, I am an Indian. Yes; were I to be the last to stand on the peaks of the Rocky Mountains, I would still raise my hand to the world as a part of a noble specimen of humanity, the representative of the Indians who once lived in this country.”<sup>13</sup> This quote shows the connection between this pride and his belief in the destruction approaching his people, as well as his sense that his Indigenous legitimacy and authority transcended the traditional territory of his Anishinaabe ancestors. Copway the literate Christian Freemason saw himself as the member of a pan-Indigenous identity that applied anywhere within North America, from the forests west of the Great Lakes to the peaks of the Rocky Mountains. Although his solution reinforced his appreciation for Euromerican Christianity and education, these structures were intended to assert and ensure the continuity of Indigenous political sovereignty.

The cultural critic Elemire Zolla, one of the earliest twentieth-century scholars to analyze Copway’s writing, goes so far as to declare that in Copway’s *Traditional History* he developed a façade of assimilation in order to “smuggle into the threatening world of the whites a notion terribly inimical to them.” Zolla saw the patchwork nature of Copway’s book as a fundamental

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 89.

<sup>12</sup> Copway, “Prospectus,” *Copway’s American Indian*, vol. 1, no. 1, 1.

<sup>13</sup> Copway, *Life, Letters, and Speeches*, 187.

aspect of its design, and argued that if one could accept that Copway might not be as assimilated as is commonly assumed then “his book, though quite chaotic on the surface, becomes coherent, carefully elaborated to demonstrate without ever openly saying so, the superiority of the natives.”<sup>14</sup> In a similar vein, Maureen Konkle states that “Copway’s writing may be uneven and contradictory at times, but that is its importance. His writing dramatizes the inevitable epistemological struggle in Native writing in the wake of settlement and colonization.”<sup>15</sup> As a writer of Indigenous history, Copway could not use the traditional European narrative of the rise of a nation, and this presented him with the challenge of historicizing Indigenous knowledge and society in a completely new way.<sup>16</sup>

Cathy Rex argues that although Copway moved through various cultural spheres, his Anishinaabe status remained the essential core of his identity, changing and undergirding all others.<sup>17</sup> This echoes Zolla in arguing that the strongest element of Copway’s cultural identity was his indigeneity: “Copway repudiates the Western inventions of a static, universal Native identity by placing emphasis on his fluid identifications among three distinct nationalities: British Canadian, American, and Ojibwe, the final of which Copway uses as his lens through which to view the others suggesting its de facto sovereignty and validity.”<sup>18</sup> Rather than abandoning his Anishinaabe identity in order to adopt a new Euromerican one, Copway was attempting to create a new expression of indigeneity that was locked neither in the timeless Romanticism of a Longfellow poem or Francis Parkman’s static histories. Through the cultural structures of Christianity, Freemasonry, and English literacy Copway sought to transcend colonial impositions by selectively embracing some of their central features to enhance or adapt his Anishinaabe identity. By combining such disparate elements, this new Indigenous identity challenged Euromerican conceptions of indigeneity by presenting them with the living

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<sup>14</sup> Elemire Zolla, *The Writer and the Shaman* (New York: Haricourt, 1973), 238.

<sup>15</sup> Konkle, *Writing Indian Nations*, 222.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.

<sup>17</sup> Cathy Rex, “Survivance and Fluidity,” 3.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

contradiction of an educated, Christian Indigenous person who actively asserted Indigenous rights.<sup>19</sup>

As a Christian, Copway believed that “the Lord looketh on the heart” but he ignored or forgot that “man looketh on the outward appearance.”<sup>20</sup> In his own mind he was an equal member of Euromerican society, and he sincerely believed that the world of the settlers would accept him on an equal footing with other literary figures. In his own mind, he was never merely a mimic man, but he seems to have perceived the broader Indigenous community as liminal and on the cusp of transitioning into a state where they would be accepted as separate from and respected by colonial settler society. Unfortunately, his racial perceptions were not universal, and as his glory faded Copway increasingly expressed a growing sense of alienation, exclaiming at a lecture in Pittsburgh: “your children stare at me in the streets as a stranger, but this is my home; this land is my land.”<sup>21</sup> Copway’s optimistic and ambitious adoption of Euromerican culture carried him only as far as American racial prejudices would allow, and once he reached the limit, he descended rapidly into bitter obscurity.

The colonization of North America brought apocalyptic changes to its Indigenous inhabitants, and many, including Copway, saw their peoples’ physical and cultural extinction as a rapidly approaching event that could only be prevented through the adoption of aspects of Euromerican culture. Settler colonialism aggressively asserted a destructive influence on the cultures, languages, and social structures of Indigenous communities and under its influence hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of people found themselves in a rapidly transforming world. As an Indigenous man educated by Methodists, Copway chose to adopt beliefs and practices that he believed were valuable and significant. He then proceeded to implement these elements in unprecedented ways that in turn surprised, angered, inspired, and convicted his Euromerican colleagues. When his life is viewed as both transcultural and defined by its hybridity, then the paradoxes begin to make historical sense, as they would have to him. The

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>20</sup> 1 Samuel 16:7, *The Holy Bible*, King James Version.

<sup>21</sup> Copway, synopsis of a lecture in Pittsburgh, reproduced in “Pittsburg Correspondence, dated Pittsburgh, Dec. 23, 1852,” (Syracuse, NY) *Weslyan* (13 Jan. 1853), quoted in Donald B. Smith, *Mississauga Portraits*, 202.



most important result of approaching Copway in this way is that it returns our focus to his agency as an individual and a historical actor. Though some scholars have viewed Copway's ideas and assertions as made inauthentic or un-Indigenous by his engagement with Euromerican culture, this does Copway, and other trans-cultural individuals, a disservice and obscures more than it reveals.<sup>22</sup> To understand their stories, we must account for the Indigenous adoption and transformation of newcomer culture as well as its coercive and destructive aspects. The only way in which these disparate pieces become coherent is when the historian takes into account the continuity that exists alongside cultural change in a life marked by its hybridity.

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<sup>22</sup> Cathy Rex, "Survivance and Fluidity: George Copway's *The Life, History, and Travels of Kah-ge-ga-gah-bowh*," *Studies in American Indian Literatures* 18, no. 2: (Summer 2006): 2 & 23. For a particularly critical assessment see Cheryl Walker, "The Terms of George Copway's Surrender," in *Indian Nation: Native American literature and nineteenth-century nationalisms*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1997.

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