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UNCANNY INDIANS

SPIRITUALIST BELIEF AND PRACTICE

At the center of the loosely defined Spiritualist Movement was the belief that the spirits of the dead could communicate with the living. Seen by many Spiritualists and Spiritualist scholars as beginning with the Fox Sister rappings in New York in 1848, Spiritualism emerged as a widely popular and progressive religious movement, predominantly in the Northeast, but which spread “steadily and rapidly ... in the West, and in the Old World as much as the New.”¹ Spiritualism as a movement continues to be loosely defined due to its nature; as an outgrowth of Reform Protestantism, Spiritualism was vehemently antiauthoritarian, which made organization of members and the declaration of a common creed nearly impossible.² It is likewise difficult to specifically define the demographic composition of such a fluctuating constituency. Several scholars have noted the difficulty of pinpointing a Spiritualist constituency as a result of their own aversion to institutionalization. Brown’s research centered around the lack of organization among Spiritualists, the problems that led to disunity and noninstitutionalism, and the difficulty scholars have faced in attempting to impose order and a general definition on Spiritualism that did not exist in its own time.³ He asserted that attempting demographic coverage would be unproductive and unreliable.⁴ The difficulty of defining a body of Spiritualists, and the seemingly small return on such efforts, does not merit my attempting it here.⁵

Spiritualists did make some attempts to quantify their movement in both geographical and numerical terms. In her monograph *Modern American*

Spiritualism, the eminent medium Emma Hardinge Britten categorized the growth of the movement as follows:

No year in the first epoch of modern Spiritualism [as opposed to the spiritualism of antiquity] has been more fruitful with events of interest than 1850. It was in that year that manifestations of the most violent and astounding character appeared in the family of Dr. Eliakim Phelps, D.D., of Stratford, Connecticut. It was then also that rappings, automatic writing, and other intelligent modes of communing with spirits became familiar in Boston through the mediumship of Mrs. Margaret Cooper, daughter of the eminent lecturer and writer, LeRoy Sunderland.⁶

Only two short years after the spiritual instigation of the Rochester rappings, Britten claimed, Spiritualists in New England began to develop a variety of skills and methods for communicating with the dead. Individual mediums became known by the specific methods they employed, including such things as conducting light or dark séances, automatic writing, trance manifestations, spirit portraiture or photography, or an especial focus on musical séances. Britten went on to explain the geographic reach of the movement, stating that “the soaring spirit of a liberal and progressive community has given so warm and hospitable a reception to the angel visitors of the spheres, that Cincinnati may well be called a royal stronghold of Spiritualism.”⁷ She noted that “as early as 1852, a paper entitled *Light from the Spirit World* was published in St. Louis, Missouri, and that the first circles conducted there were done so by a Mr. Hedges, who had received guidance on this front during a visit to New York.”⁸

The publication of Spiritualist journals was a central activity within the movement, connecting adherents across the country by disseminating their opinions on issues of faith and philosophy. Readers were kept abreast of the stance of Spiritualism toward worldly events and developments, and also read contributors’ experiences of spiritual activity and manifestations, as both proof of a progressive afterlife and a source of illumination. The most prominent, prolific, and popularly read of these publications was the *Banner of Light*, a weekly journal published in Boston from 1857 to 1905. This periodical served as the central source of Spiritualist information and thought, republishing correspondence from local papers across the country, and likewise being cited in those smaller journals to more local bodies of readership. Throughout

the *Banner of Light's* pages, correspondence regarding Spiritualist activity came from major cities across the country, including Cincinnati, St. Louis, and San Francisco.

When Emma Hardinge Britten published her history of modern Spiritualism, the movement was still vigorous and ongoing. The proofs of the truth of Spiritualism, she said, “are indeed, still transpiring, and occur constantly in the experience of *eleven millions* of persons in America, whose numbers include authors, editors, doctors, lawyers, clergymen, professors of colleges, magistrates on the bench, statesmen, traders, operatives, and mechanics.”⁹ In Dr. James M. Peebles’s work *Seers of the Ages: Embracing Spiritualism Past and Present*, he referred to the prestigious opinion of the famous Spiritualist Judge Edmonds, described as “a jurist of unimpeachable integrity and keen discernment, [who] estimate[d] the number of Spiritualists in this country at ‘eleven millions.’”¹⁰ Historian Robert Cox’s work supported a membership in the millions, and Ann Braude wrote of a possible membership range between “a few hundred thousand to eleven million” out of a national population of twenty-five million in 1890.¹¹

The relationship between Spiritualism and Christianity is largely ambiguous. Many treatises on the philosophy of Spiritualism were in fact discussions of Christian theology and the intersection between Christian and Spiritualist thought. Some Spiritualist writers described the supernatural events of the Bible as the spiritualism of antiquity, in continuity with contemporary phenomena termed “modern” spiritualism. Spirits were often compared to Biblical angels, lending their communications significant weight.¹² The perceived superiority of spirits in matters of morality elevated spirits and their messages, Indian or otherwise, to a higher position than that afforded to the living, allowing them to serve as models of gender differentiation and racial equality. Many who identified themselves as Spiritualists did not cease to identify as Christians; Universalists, for example, constituted a large part of the Spiritualist Movement because the latter’s general ideals coincided with the former’s goal of a society in universal harmony.¹³ Methodists, Presbyterians and other Protestant sects also filled the ranks of Spiritualism. The morality espoused by Spiritualists in regard to treatment of Indians was itself largely Christian in nature. The difference, Spiritualists argued, was that the tenets of Christianity would be more truthfully followed by those communing with the dead, with a watchful eye on the use of Christian supremacy as a faulty rationalization for Indian disenfranchisement. Ann Taves spoke of Spiritualism as a liberal outgrowth of Protestant opposition to formalism

and institutionalization.¹⁴ Their distaste for official churches is pertinent to the notion of the afterlife as Romantic and natural, propounded by the spirit maidens at the center of chapter 4, and it also figures in chapter 5's discussion of their discourse on President Grant's Peace Policy. Others saw demonic forces at work in Spiritualism, rejecting it as a form of Satanic delusion and a false religion. While this project makes claims about Spiritualist ideas and attitudes in a broad sense as expressed in their literature, it is equally important to remember that Spiritualist voices were not always united, and reflected the various opinions of Americans on issues such as race and gender on a national scale. The relationship between Spiritualists' beliefs and their Christian background was likewise individualistic. That fact will be important in considering how Spiritualists related to their largely Christian nation. Spiritualists would frequently call upon Christian sentiments and obligations, for example, in advocating reform in Indian policy, a point developed further in chapter 5.

One of the few practices common among Spiritualists was the definition of spiritual communications in scientific terms of the day—"in terms of magnetism, electricity, and nervous fluid."¹⁵ "Spiritualists," the editor of the periodical *The Present Age* said, "profess to have a scientific religion, and we should therefore, expect among them to find an ardent devotion to science, and a high degree of scientific culture."¹⁶ Throughout Spiritualism's popularity, the debate about how to define the movement—as a new religion, as a new religious sect, or as a new science, was ongoing, and never entirely resolved. Dr. Napoleon Wolfe, for example, declared that "Spiritualism is not a religion in a partisan sense. It is greater than this: *it is a science*. With no church but the universe, with no creed but truth, with no formulated prayer to sustain it, it constructs itself a power to rescue mankind from the sin of ignorance, from the crime of false worship."¹⁷ On the one hand, this passage references the need for quantifiable data and proof able to withstand contemporary scientific scrutiny in the accreditation of recorded phenomena; it also demonstrates the acceptance of Spiritualist interpretations of the meaning and consequences of that spiritual truth. Scientific accountability, in other words, was essential to establishing the legitimacy of Spiritualism, as a religion or otherwise. It demonstrated that Spiritualism defied conventional definitions of religion. It lacked a dogma or organizational structure—in both belief and practice. To a large extent, this is also why the approach of different Christian sects to Spiritualism would become problematic. On the whole, the view of Spiritualism espoused by Wolfe put two major points into perspective:

the obstacles to quantifying a Spiritualist constituency, and the crucial role of contemporary science.

Spiritualism had much in common with its abundant metaphysical contemporaries. In a broad sense, occultism is generally understood to be of a hidden or private nature. But according to religious scholar Mitch Horowitz, American religions with occultist leanings were distinctively open to the public. The practices of American occultists, he argues, emphasized an “ethic of social progress and individual betterment. These religious radicals, living outside the folds of traditional churches and mostly overlooked in the pages of history, transformed a young nation into a launching pad for the revolutions in therapeutic alternative spirituality that swept the earth in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.”¹⁸ Spiritualists’ deviation from the furtiveness normally associated with occultism came more from their scientific perspective. As Moore points out, *séance* attendees were encouraged to repeat their experiences to anyone who would listen. The retelling of the events of a *séance* acted as a sort of scientific reporting of results, whereby the medium was bound (sometimes literally) to specific conditions which would satisfy her audience of the authenticity of the spirit communication. Yet these retellings were done in a simple manner, requiring neither specialized knowledge nor preparation on the part of the circle.¹⁹ Although many Spiritualists disavowed themselves of religious labels, opting instead to see Spiritualism as a modern science, they still operated within a religious context—they legitimized ancient spiritualisms as much as they panned them. If anything, the battle in print to define Spiritualism by either term only demonstrates this as both an internal and external conflict.

Spiritualism is grounded firmly in metaphysical thought. Catherine Albanese writes that metaphorical movements defined the material world and the spiritual world as mirror images of each other.²⁰ Spiritualist practitioners borrowed language about altered states of consciousness and the higher faculties of the brain, including clairvoyance, largely from mesmerism and phrenology, both imported from Europe in the 1830s.²¹ Self-improvement and social reform were tenets of phrenology, Freemasonry, and radical Quakerism before the famous rappings heard at the Fox household in 1848.²² Spiritualism was nonconventional and pluralistic by nature. Most importantly, Spiritualism, like other American metaphysics, shined light on occultism, commodifying “what had once been but dimly understood, deeply feared, and described in contradiction to scriptural morality,” and made it available for the masses.²³ Though many *séances* were conducted

in the dark, they were far from invisible. Mediums repeatedly extended invitations to the public to experience their mediumship and judge for themselves.²⁴ It turned discourse that was the traditional purview of theologians into a scientific debate.

The scientific rhetoric of Spiritualism extended to technological innovation—the mode of ghostly communion was commonly referred to as the “spiritual telegraph line.”²⁵ As part of their efforts at legitimacy, Spiritualists defined the phenomena they witnessed and interpreted them through the lens of accepted contemporary sciences. In attempting to define members of the Spiritualist movement, Robert Moore emphasized the relationship between Spiritualist language and contemporary values of empiricism, optimism, evolutionary progress, and reform.²⁶

Both nineteenth-century practitioners and contemporary scholars have pointed to the many parallels between Spiritualism and Shakerism. Emma Hardinge Britten described Shakerism as “heralding modern Spiritualism.”²⁷ The most pertinent similarity between the two for the purposes of this book, moreso than the “prominence of women in the facilitation of religious experience” described by Albanese, are the “hordes of Indians” manifested during Shaker ceremonies.²⁸ Yet Spiritualist manifestations of Indians differed greatly from those of the Shakers, which Albanese called largely “boisterous antics.”²⁹

The preeminent literature on performance studies, including *Playing Indian, Love and Theft*, and *Bodies in Dissent* has a limited usefulness here. So much of the analysis of racial performances rely on the consciousness of the performers and the active negotiation of cultural tropes in the search for “authenticity.” In *Bodies in Dissent*, Daphne Brooks describes spirit possession as the “comingling of male Indian bodies with female white ones as a loss of social and cultural categories.”³⁰ She writes about Spiritualism in the context of nineteenth-century showmanship, where the séance is aimed at demonstrating “spectacles of transfiguration” and “the convertibility of the body.”³¹ This proves problematic because of the Spiritualist claims of agencies outside of the self, and the emphasis of spirit over matter. Working within Brooks’s framework would require this book to assume that all nineteenth-century Spiritualists were conscious performers—in other words, that they were all frauds. That is not a claim I am willing to make here—namely, because it would be irrelevant. They were not transparent in their mimicry or an alleged desire to deceive others. If instead we look at these performances as either genuine or unconscious/internalized, only what practitioners believed is relevant, and the mechanics of the construction of racial tropes emerges

from an indeterminate agency. Only the results are palpable—that the racial character of these specters was *recognized* as such. The recognition in this case is rather a passive act. It rests upon the satisfaction of the audience, not the action of the medium. Both the medium and the manifestation must rely on established cultural objects, and would have to adhere to them for legitimacy and authenticity. Mediums could not, in essence, break new ground in stereotype construction without first playing upon accepted ones. That is what Indian manifestations within séances exhibit—stereotypes of Indians are framed and interpreted in very specific ways that reflect the complex interplay between race and gender, “Indianness” as related to modernity, and the conflicted sentiment toward Indian peoples and policy.

Albanese places emphasis on Spiritualist reform efforts for women’s rights, as argued by Braude, and abolition. Indian rights as an impetus is acknowledged, but minimally. I argue that it was at least as important as these. Given their connection to Quakers, the forerunners of Indian missions, it was ingrained in Spiritualist culture from its inception. The link between Indian appearances and Spiritual political posturing is clearly demonstrable.³² The main tenets of Spiritualism drew deeply on the society from which it emerged. Due to the previous popularity of scientific-occult movements, as Butler observed, the American middle-class elite easily digested the claim of the Fox sisters.³³ They were also primed to accept Indian ghosts. By 1848, rhetoric of the “vanishing Indian” was also firmly established, and these two driving forces of American culture readily coalesced.

Among the most important strains of Spiritualist thought were the parallels Spiritualists drew between concepts of civilization and racial difference and their understanding of spiritual hierarchies. Drawing on Swedenborgian thought, they generally understood the spirit world to consist of several spheres, each with its own unique character.³⁴ In the *Religio-Philosophical Journal*, Prentice Mulford described these spheres as “partly located in belts or bands encircling our earth, somewhat as the rings about Saturn and Jupiter.”³⁵ They believed movement occurred between these spheres, but under very specific conditions on the part of the spirit. When traveling between spheres (Earth included), “spirits pass into these new forms in accordance with the same law which in turn decomposes and etherealizes the grain of sand. It is the grand chemistry of Nature.”³⁶ The spheres themselves, and the processes by which spirits move through them, is thus defined as a chemical process. According to Dr. William Ramsey, “there are many circles, probably seven.”³⁷ Seven was the most common number used when defining the spheres, with Earth

as the first sphere, and spheres two through seven representing different stages of spiritual progress.

Spiritualists thought that the sphere in which a particular spirit resided was directly connected to their individual state of enlightenment. Passing through one sphere to the next, therefore, required a change in the character of the spirit itself. Just as the firm belief in the inevitability of national and individual progress was a central value in American life, progress and spiritual evolution were key components of the afterlife in the mind of the American Spiritualist. The spirit-driven motivation to evolve and proceed through the spheres served as the primary purpose for spirit interactions with humans. This hierarchical aspect of the spiritual appearance was an integral one to the recognition of racial and spiritual difference. Concerning the quantifiable parameters of the spiritual world, “the Spirit-Land has no particular locality or limit. It is boundless and diffused throughout all space. It is divided into many worlds, or spheres, each corresponding with the degree of development of its inhabitants . . . it is just as tangible and appears just as real to us [spirits] as earth does to you.”³⁸ The spirit world was described as spatially abstract, yet with a structure firmly based in a sensory reality. In describing the spirit world to the members of séance circles, apparitions consistently emphasized the exacting materialistic nature of the spirit world as a mirror image of Earth, vastly improved:

[T]he spirit, or Summer-Land, is real and substantial—more substantial to spirits than this earth to mortals . . . The spiritual is real . . . so the entranced and clairvoyant of this age behold delightful fields, landscapes, gardens, flowers, fruits, rivers, lakes, fountains, vast assemblages of spirits, musical bands, lyceum gatherings, sportive children, scholars of design, art galleries, magnificent mansions, and architectural abodes of beauty, where loving hearts beat and throb as one.³⁹

The reference to the spirit world as the “Summer-Land” was a common one; the description of the world in this seasonal tone was intended to connote the lush verdure, pleasant atmosphere, and Edenic harmony to be found there. The idyllic natural landscape was populated with the best society had to offer, as the reference above to museums and art galleries suggested, but there was a consistent emphasis on the natural character of the Summer Land in multiple descriptions of it. Any departure from that was made relevant by the Romantic tone of the depiction. The spirit of Josephine Bonaparte,

for example, explained the parallel between heaven and earth thus: “We have in the Spirit-land all you have in life: birds, fruits, flowers, paintings, books, and whatever else that can charm the taste or improve the understanding. Here all is beautiful, all is harmony and peace.”⁴⁰ Art and literature continued to be regarded as means of enlightenment and development in the spirit world, alongside a more naturalized setting. As Bonaparte’s spirit suggested, the central characteristics of the spirit land were beauty, harmony, and happiness. But there were levels of happiness, and levels of spiritual evolution, that were marked by a journey through all the spheres as a sign of a spirit’s ultimate progress. Dr. Peebles claimed that “all spirits were once mortals. All angels were once spirits . . . Those in the celestial heavens are termed angels, because they have *advanced* beyond the taints and selfish loves of their mortal existence.”⁴¹ According to the Illinois State Spiritualist Association, all spirits fell under one of three major categories:

FIRST, those who are so bound to earth conditions that they will try to come into contact, and to communicate with it through any avenue they find available; SECOND, those who are naturally attracted to us [mortals] by the ties of relationship and the laws of love. THIRD, those advanced and developed spirits who return from the higher spheres of life in the Spirit World, filled with Holy Love for Humanity, for the purpose of guiding and leading mankind into higher knowledge and Further Light.⁴²

Thus, the character of each spirit, and their reasons for appearing in séances, demarcated a specific status for each spirit, integrally connected to their level of progression and the sphere (or state of progress) in which they were purported to reside.

This basic understanding of spiritual difference takes on an added significance when Indian spirits, defined generally as belonging to a separate racial category, are analyzed and categorized according to the accepted hierarchical structure of the universe. Their communication with the living was understood on a basic level as one of the essential pieces of their upward transcendence of the spheres. Carroll argued in his work that acknowledging spirits and their position in the celestial hierarchy was an important element of Spiritualists’ search for order.⁴³ It is unfortunate that his work lacks an in-depth discussion of who spirits purported to be or what they allegedly said, making the important task of determining spirits as authority figures impossible. I attempt

to remedy that omission herein. Although not universally accepted, Spiritualists sometimes interpreted the frequency of Indian apparitions as deriving from lower spheres, thus demarcating a lower spiritual status for Indians. They were perceived as more bound to earth, connected still to its inhabitants, and *needing* to help living souls if they hoped to achieve higher planes of existence. This work was the recognized fate of most Indians, because of their wars and perceptions of living Indians as savage. Other Spiritualists argued that Indian spirits, with their lofty aims for humankind, hailed from the highest spheres. This debate will be returned to in chapter 5.

The division of spheres not only dictated the nature of relations between spirits and mortals, but also defined interactions between spirits residing in different spheres, delineating further the distinct divisions and hierarchies among recognized forms of spiritual existence. In *The Revelator*, Abraham Pierce described how “in each circle [spirits] had teachers from higher spheres, who come to instruct them and to assist them to progress. As they progress in knowledge of the great truths, they change in their conditions, and pass onward to a higher circle.”⁴⁴ The ultimate goal of all spirits, then, was to help less enlightened or “lower” spirits attain further illumination and ultimately pass to heaven, described more as a state of mind, rather than a distinct place, outside of the seven spheres. The way this perfected harmony and progress was achieved was through close interaction and education between the spheres. This method of progress was mirrored by Spiritualists who, in their interactions with nonbelievers and intercessions for the rights of Indians, upheld the value of education—both in explaining what they thought to be the universal truths of Spiritualism, and in their support of initiatives to educate Native Americans (and other unfortunates) about intellectual and morally upright living.

SPIRITUALISTS AND THE INDIAN QUESTION

The connections Spiritualists drew between empirical science and spiritual appearances, between the evolution of civilization and progression through the spheres, and between the natural laws that ordered the material and spiritual realms, were all understood and discussed in the most literal of tones, and had a real impact on American life. As Andrew Jackson Davis put it in 1863, Spiritualism was a movement that meant to turn the prayer “thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth, *as it is in heaven*” into

a reality.⁴⁵ In the nineteenth century, America's reality was saturated with Indians. An overwhelming concern for many was what to do with Indians in the face of America's growth; this debate was commonly referred to as the "Indian Question" or the "Indian Problem."

There were several attempts to answer this question. Since Europeans' earliest encounters with American Indians, converting them to Christianity was a primary goal of colonization. Beaver points out that "the missionary purpose of colonization was made explicit in the first Virginia charter in 1606."⁴⁶ The sentiment to convert rather than kill the Indians was reinforced in 1610 by the pastor William Crashaw, but Beaver dates the tension between these two objectives as early as 1620.⁴⁷

When Britain's colonies separated, Indian nations retained their sovereign identities. The Constitution granted Congress the power to negotiate treaties. Indian policy was put in the hands of the War Department.⁴⁸ Shortly after Thomas Jefferson authored the foundation of the U.S. government, he expressed his hope for racial blending. In *Notes on the State of Virginia*, published in 1784, Jefferson favored civilization as a means of absorbing Indian cultures to help create an authentically "American" culture. Advocates of Indian "civilization" programs sought the complete political and social absorption of Indians into American life.⁴⁹ A large component in the push for cultural assimilation of Indians was religious education. In the early decades of the nineteenth century, scores of Quakers, Baptists, Methodists, and other missionaries flocked into Indian-inhabited areas to instill Christian principles in the hearts of Indians.⁵⁰ Such missions were still hard at work in 1830, when President Andrew Jackson made removal the federal policy, claiming that the massive relocation of entire populations benefited both natives and Americans. By midcentury, the understanding of Indian nations as sovereign entities largely faded from U.S. federal policy. Through a series of treaty negotiations, many tribes became financially dependent on federal aid, having lost access to key resources, land and food chief among them. By 1849, the administration of Indian policy had been transferred to the newly created Department of the Interior.⁵¹ Indian policy had transformed into a domestic issue, rather than an international one. As Simard has written, "For most Indian communities, treaty negotiations blessed and legitimized their dispossession [and] starting in the late eighteenth century created in rudimentary form the shape of a liberal welfare state in Canada and the U.S."⁵² By the 1850s, a third solution to the Indian Problem was implemented. The U.S. government instituted the reservation system, setting aside large tracts of land, allegedly

protected by treaty, meant to keep Indians safe from white encroachment and separate from American society. It echoed Jefferson's concept of an Indian Reserve, which he suggested as a productive use of the Louisiana Purchase of 1803. But rather than safeguard boundaries that Jefferson envisioned as gradually fading, the reservations served to keep Indians effectively separated from the rest of American society, making assimilation in its most well-meaning form a nigh impossible feat. The concept of white supremacy had been a part of the American intellectual landscape since 1735, when Carl von Linnaeus organized human classification on skin color. He described Indians, or *Homo Americanus*, as "reddish, choleric, obstinate, contented, and regulated by customs."⁵³ American Indians were thus deftly labeled as unchangeable, while white men were conveniently described as being governed by law. In Johann Blumenbach's 1781 treatise *On the Natural Variety of Mankind*, Indians were classified as one of the five races of man. They were racially separate for the American naturalist Samuel George Morton in the 1830s and '40s. Darwin, too, did not dispute the categorization of Indians as racially distinct. By the publication of Darwin's *Origin of Species* in 1859, a majority of Americans were convinced that the racial superiority they asserted over Native Americans was proven as scientific fact. Many tribes resisted the reservation system and its mismanagement, as well as the assumption on the part of many whites that the only effective solution to the "Indian Problem" was extermination.

In the wake of the Civil War, interest in westward expansion and development exploded. Beaver describes the deleterious effects of "repeated removals of the tribes, their difficulty in adjusting to reservation life, nonfulfillment of treaty obligations by the government, the corruption of the Indian service, the Westward rush of settlers with their insatiable appetite for land, and the building of railroads into Indian country."⁵⁴ However, a large degree of public sentiment remained in favor not only of ceasing to kill Indians, but in support of integrating them as much as possible into American life. In 1869, Grant's Peace Policy was instituted in response to corruption on reservations. The goal of Grant's program was to ferret out government corruption in the administration of Indian affairs and to subsidize the work of the missions. The intention was twofold: to remove the circumstances that provoked disgruntled tribes to warfare, and to make the imposition of American religion and culture more palatable. Agents and commissioners were handpicked for their personal dedication, placing, as Beaver wrote, "the improvement of the Indians under religious sponsorship and inject[ing] a spiritual dynamic into

the process of civilizing the Indians.”⁵⁵ Quakers and other favored denominations worked diligently to effect the Indians’ voluntary acceptance of the value of individual labor, land ownership, and responsibility. The wholehearted adoption of such concepts was deemed necessary to the overall success of assimilation.⁵⁶ In the 1870s, a growing number of Americans saw Indians as wards of the government, requiring protection and education in the ways of the white man. Advocates of policy reform fought to keep Indian affairs under the auspices of the Department of the Interior, seeing the proposed return to the War Department as a threat to their relatively humane efforts. By 1880, efforts to “civilize” Indians through instruction were largely supported and government-funded. In 1887, the Dawes Severalty Allotment Act made the reservation system obsolete by dealing with natives as individuals rather than tribal entities. This step was intended to encourage self-reliance and industry among American Indians, necessary characteristics of American citizens.

In the last decades of the nineteenth century, the war between these possible solutions to the Indian problem—extermination, assimilation, reservation—still raged. The abundance of Spiritualist writing about this debate indicates their deep concern over how the “Indian Question” would ultimately be answered. They frequently discussed the moral dimensions of America’s treatment of Indians, expressing their disgust at the nation’s failure to live up to its creed of political equality for all with a foundation in Christian love. When applying their understanding of the cosmos to Indian-related matters, Spiritualists fell largely on the side of interracial peace. They argued that the strides of the “civilized” tribes such as the Cherokee, along with the celestial progress exhibited by their “spirit friends,” proved beyond a doubt that Indians were capable of improving themselves. For their part, failure to provide Indians with the support they required was seen as potentially catastrophic for America’s reputation and spiritual future.

This project tracks the progression of the Spiritualist movement and the centrality of Indian manifestations to the movement in relation to significant changes in Indian policy. Parallels are drawn between the movement’s peak in the 1860s through the 1880s, and the Indian-related events to which Spiritualist journals dedicated their pages. The Sand Creek Massacre of 1864, negotiations and hostilities of the 1870s, the rise and fall of Grant’s Peace Policy, the progress of the Carlisle Institute, and the institutionalization of the Dawes Act in 1887 will all be discussed in the context of Spiritualist attempts to fashion their world after the heavenly models presented at séance tables. By the 1890s, such changes to the legal status of Indians were established

as federal policy lasting into the twentieth century. Satisfied, the fervor of Spiritualists and other Indian advocates for bettering native circumstances declined as a result. At around the same time, “the Spiritualist connection with social reform was, in effect, dead.”⁵⁷ Other metaphysical religions that were grounded in Spiritualist influences became more prominent features of the American landscape. Parapsychology became slowly more methodical and respected, and Christian Science, Theosophy, and New Thought gained steam. The temporal focus of this book is centered around the formative years of Spiritualism, from the Rochester rappings in 1848 to the filing of the patent for the Ouija board in 1890, after which Spiritualism became astronomically more commodified.⁵⁸ The reappropriation of racialized, imagined religions holds a central place in alternative beliefs to this day; its roots lie in the historical context of Indian relations as it saturated the American consciousness in Spiritualism’s foundational years. This deepens the current understanding of the Spiritualist movement’s involvement in national debates, expanding on its role in helping to define gender and adding to that Spiritualist positions on racial difference, the nation’s character, and how its future would be defined.

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Nineteenth-century séances, especially those where Indian specters were present, operated as hauntings in a literal sense. Understanding Spiritualist practices as hauntings is a core precept of this work. The ghostliness of Indian figures has been analyzed as it appears in literature, yet this is only a part of Spiritualism’s larger context. The psychical and paranormal research of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries are outgrowths of Spiritualism’s empirical nature, with evidence and experience as authenticating factors. Spiritualist historians have yet to marry this aspect of the movement to its other social and religious elements. The hauntedness at the core of Spiritualism should not be kept separate any longer from the cultural persistence of hauntedness that finite and narrow interpretations of the movement have left largely unexplored. Fictive hauntings still contribute, however, to the interpretation of spectral Indians in this work. As Larry Danielson so aptly pointed out, “even when the narrative purports to describe actual paranormal experience, the art of the storyteller is at work [and it] involve[s] a complex interaction between personal experience, traditional lore about the supernatural, and canons of narrative aesthetics.”⁵⁹ In her book on the ghostly lore of the Hudson

Valley, Judith Richardson wrote of hauntings as the consistent subject of popular interest that demands further scrutiny “because of what they reveal about how senses of the past and of place are apprehended and created.”⁶⁰ The paranormal experience of being haunted is at the heart of Spiritualism, even as it occurred in expected, controlled conditions rather than in musty attics or on abandoned roads. The aim of this project is to study Spiritualism print records for evidence of the processes of experience and reporting, and how living Indians and their realities were incorporated into the narrative of Indian apparitions. Spectral Indians brought American guilt over their proclaimed vanishing to the fore. They presented the Indian question as unanswered and needing continual attention, rather than emphasizing the ameliorating effect of ghosting/vanishing Indians—when looking at haunting contexts, this uneasiness and disruption is more readily apparent. Only when we stop being haunted can we begin to discuss whether the Indian question has been sufficiently settled. That the end of Indian imagery as ghostly or Romantic appears to be nowhere in sight is a testament to the cultural staying power of this phenomenon and the ongoing ambiguities of claiming these racial spiritual identities. Avery Gordon spoke of haunting as a manner of knowledge production, one in which “abusive systems of power make themselves known and their impact felt in everyday life, especially when they are supposedly over and done with.”⁶¹ In this way, Spiritualism served as a forum for the expression of political opposition and the reformatory impulse. Mediums turned haunting into an exacting mode of knowledge by seeking information from ghosts—about their families, the structure of the universe, and the fate of their nation.

The ghosts of Indian chiefs recognized there by Spiritualists were “apparitions out of the past”⁶²—representatives of a race that many Anglo-Americans perceived as disappearing from the earth. It is important to remember that the term *ghost* is not synonymous with *dead*; a “ghost” is someone who has returned from the dead. That difference is significant in studying Indian spectral manifestations, yet has been overlooked by those who have studied cultural imagery of Indians as “ghostly” or as “vanishing.” Those two terms have frequently been used interchangeably. To do so simplifies such imagery and is incorrect. Depictions of Indians as “vanishing” portray them in the act of disappearing. Describing them as “ghostly,” by strict definition, implies the opposite. Spectral representations of Indians undermine the idea of Indians as gone, rather than justifying or celebrating it. It is the reappearance of Indian spirits, and the reentry of the “Indian” into the American

consciousness, that lay at the heart of Spiritualist manifestations of them. As Richardson observed, apparitions can act as subversive voices, “serving to affix blame and guilt where courts and official records had failed.”⁶³ Such specters are frightening because they reveal moral iniquities and chastise the unjust.⁶⁴ A haunting, she argued, allows the haunted party to renegotiate the past and help shape the present moment. “In many cases,” she writes, “the contest is one between different versions of memory and myth which vie over the same place, each with a compelling claim, and each supporting a different view of who or what belongs there.”⁶⁵ Spiritualist believers saw spirit Indian personalities as evidence to question the logic of the inevitable doom supposedly facing all Indians, and to advocate contemporary programs that promoted education over continual and financially draining warfare. Analyzing such phenomena and their psychological effects on American politics in this way has been overlooked by McGarry, Trachtenberg, and the like, and as such is the primary goal of this book.

According to Terry Castle in her discussion of ghosts and their definition as “uncanny” figures, “the idea that spirits of the dead might come back to haunt murderers, locate stolen objects, enforce the terms of legacies, expose adulterers, and so on, functioned as a kind of implicit social control.”⁶⁶ As Bridget Bennett explained, a haunting is a disruption of the present by the past—it is not subject to the linear progression of time or logic or institutional power.⁶⁷ Spirit chiefs largely fulfilled these commonly understood roles of ghosts as described in literature and folklore. By the nineteenth century, the ideology of progress—on a national, industrial, economic, scientific, and moral scale—was a prevailing intellectual force in America. The majority of Americans viewed natives and native ways of life as counterintuitive to progress. As John Coward pointed out in *The Newspaper Indian*, the majority of Americans were convinced of their nation’s destiny for greatness because they believed their Christian and civilized character was superior to those of other nations and races.⁶⁸ By adhering to the messages of Indian specters, American Spiritualists sought to combat what they recognized as a political and moral injustice. According to Jared Farmer, “The rhetoric of the Vanishing American—as old as the United States itself—reached its zenith in the fin-de-siècle era when the aggregate native population reached its nadir.”⁶⁹ The peak of rhetoric regarding Indians as vanished coincided with the peak of Spiritualism and the height of Indian appearances within the movement in particular. Approximately 90 percent of the Indian manifestations recorded in the *Banner of Light* occurred in the years between

1860 and 1890, with roughly 50 percent of those appearing in the 1870s. Communications from spirit chiefs pointed to U.S. generals as murderers of Indian women and children, criticized American society for its deceitfulness and theft of Indian lands, and attempted to enact, through their audiences, a federal Indian policy that would honor its promises. In 1831, Chief Justice John Marshall declared that “Indians were not ‘foreign nations’ but ‘domestic dependent nations’: they are in a state of pupillage. Their relation to the United States resembles that of a ward to his guardian.”⁷⁰ As such, Spiritualists argued, the welfare of Indian peoples was the responsibility of all American citizens, especially those who had been enlightened by spirit communication. The role toward Indians as their protectors was a traditionally masculine one; Spiritualists, along with their ghostly controls, sought to undermine America’s masculinity and honor by emphasizing its failure to protect Indian peoples from white predation.

The ability of spirit chief manifestations to act as social controls lay in their uncanny nature. As Julian Wolfreys stated in *Victorian Hauntings*, “The spectral is, strictly speaking, neither alive nor dead.”⁷¹ The Indian ghosts were undead, and their race was not entirely vanished, as evidenced to Spiritualists by continuous news coverage of the ongoing interactions between the United States and Indian nations during the mid to late nineteenth century. Sigmund Freud’s definition of the uncanny, or *unheimlich*, is particularly useful. The uncanny is the return of something familiar that has been repressed—an intrusion of the past upon the present.⁷² The specters of Indian chiefs existed in both the past and present. The narrative of Indian disenfranchisement is as old as the colonization of North America itself. Indian nations were continually repressed, first by Europe, then by America, and relegated to public invisibility and alienated by an arbitrary distinction of vanishing as inevitable. Indians had been depicted for centuries as figments of the past. Indian policies further distanced America’s racial reality from its claim to the morally righteous character of a free and equal nation. The concept of the vanished Indian was pervasive and highly romanticized. According to John Coward, their romanticism and the sentiments consequently roused by such figures stemmed from their imminent disappearance, but also celebrated that disappearance.⁷³ From a Spiritualist perspective, the romantic and sympathetic figure became the source of social disruption.

Spiritualist recordings of Indian ghosts should be interpreted as related to but not the same as Indian ghosts appearing in literature. Though there are a great many similarities, the effects of a literal haunting, as opposed to a

literary one, are more profound. The presence of ghosts in séances was recognized by Spiritualists by the same methods described in works of fiction. In traditional ghost stories, ghosts make themselves known to the senses in ways that simultaneously indicated their presence and absence. Take, for example, the archetypal image of the ghost in sheets. Conjure to mind the Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come in Charles Dickens's 1843 tale *A Christmas Carol*, or the figure in the gothic giant M. R. James's "Oh Whistle, and I'll Come to You My Lad" of 1904. The sheet is visible, with its folds and billows suggesting a humanoid form underneath. Yet there is nothing under the sheet, so far as the eye can tell. This kind of seeing/not seeing experience is unsettling, and the source of the fear instilled by such apparitions. It is in this way that both literal and literary ghosts were recognized. Such stories and the Spiritualist publication record under analysis here are being produced so close upon each other that it is not only appropriate but necessary to consider the terms *spirit* and *ghost*, and their connotations, in tandem. Spiritualists' choice of the word *spirits* did not stop them from understanding the ghostly functions of their visions. The ghost of Jacob Marley and the three succeeding spirits (*his* language) of Dickens's traditional novel come to work, in their own words, Ebenezer Scrooge's salvation. Writing of actual paranormal experience, Danielson reports that "over forty percent of the apparitions described in the [collected] accounts are purposeful, most of them involved in helpful missions to the living."⁷⁴ That was precisely the reason that Indian spirits, by their own admission, visited Spiritualist circles. That was how séance participants interpreted their presence, amplified by the established trope of Indians as guides. Spiritualist responses to Indian spirits, or any of the specters that illuminated their sitting rooms, cannot be fully understood without first situating the Spiritualist movement in the context of ghostliness to which it so intimately belongs.

The impact of witnessing such phenomena in person would have a markedly different effect on someone than reading a story in which an apparition appears. Though a literary ghost would still be interpreted as a source of social disruption, that disruption would be contained within the fictional work. The haunting would be resolved by the end of the story, as it is for Scrooge on Christmas morning. That is, the spirit's message would most likely be heeded and thus cease to visit the living—and as fiction, its manifestation occurs at a safe distance from the reader. Being haunted in reality, or believing yourself to be haunted, as Spiritualists did, was quite the different experience. The unsettling, frightening experience would be continual

without action on the part of the one being haunted. The threat that the ghosts represented would be keenly felt, rather than experienced passively and vicariously by identifying with the fictional protagonist of a ghost story. The literal haunting that Spiritualists claimed to witness demanded a response from them, both in mind and word, in a way that reading about Indian ghosts did not. Their disappearance in the context of the real was not mere staging. It provided an impending sense of imperative action to avoid the wrath of spirits who had long been understood as “extremely vengeful.”⁷⁵

The ongoing presence of Indian apparitions in nineteenth-century séances defied the strict categorization of Indians as past. The return of the repressed in ghostly form demanded that Indian apparitions and their living counterparts be considered as ever present. In Freudian terms, “a successful analysis [of the haunting], ostensibly, is a kind of exorcism ... the patient [in this case, American Spiritualists and by extension, American society], who have hitherto turned [their] eyes away in terror from [their] own pathological productions, begins to attend to them and obtains a clearer and more detailed view of them.”⁷⁶ As a result of their encounters with spirit chiefs, Spiritualists became diligent overseers and investigators of Indian policies and enforcing government agencies. Through publications like the *Banner of Light*, they attempted to circulate information about the greed and corruption running rampant in Indian country that tainted the nation’s honor, and, as McGarry stated, directed Spiritualists to political action, a point to be discussed at length in chapter 5.⁷⁷