



The Ghost-Dance Religion and the Sioux Outbreak of 1890

James Mooney

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Responding to the rapid spread of the Ghost Dance among tribes of the western United States in the early 1890s, James Mooney set out to describe and understand the phenomenon. He visited Wovoka, the Ghost Dance prophet, at his home in Nevada and traced the progress of the Ghost Dance from place to place, describing the ritual and recording the distinctive song lyrics of seven separate tribes. His classic work (first published in 1896 and here reprinted in its entirety for the first time) includes succinct cultural and historical introductions to each of those tribal groups and depicts the Ghost Dance among the Sioux, the fears it raised of an Indian outbreak, and the military occupation of the Sioux reservations culminating in the tragedy at Wounded Knee. Seeking to demonstrate that the Ghost Dance was a legitimate religious movement, Mooney prefaced his study with a historical survey of comparable millenarian movements among other American Indian groups.

In addition to his work on the Ghost Dance, James Mooney is best remembered for his extraordinarily detailed studies of the Cherokee Indians of the Southeast and the Kiowa and other tribes of the southern plains, and for his advocacy of American Indian religious freedom.

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