

Christopher Myers

The Hands of Strange Children



ALICE AUMA / ALICE LAKWENA
(born in Uganda, 1956-2007)

Alice Auma was an Acholi spirit-medium who, as the head of the Holy Spirit Movement (HSM), led a millennial rebellion against the Ugandan government forces of President Yoweri Museveni from August 1986 until November 1987. The primary spirit she allegedly channeled was that of a dead Italian army officer called "Lakwena," meaning messenger, which the Acholi believed to be a manifestation of the Christian Holy Spirit. The combined persona of Auma channeling the spirit Lakwena is often referred to as "Alice Lakwena." Auma's HSM was ultimately defeated in November 1987 by Museveni's forces when she and 118 followers crossed the Kenyan border and were arrested as illegal immigrants.

When Auma died of AIDS in the massive refugee camp in Dadaab in the North of Kenya, she claimed that the spirits that had once helped her lead an army had abandoned her.



TE UA HAUMENE
(born Waiaua, South Taranaki c. 1820-1866)

Te Ua Haumene was a New Zealand Māori religious leader during the 1860s who founded the Pai Mārire movement and church, which he considered to be Christianity untainted by the teachings of missionaries.

Captured by Waikato Māori in 1826 and taken as an enslaved child to Kawhia, Te Ua was taught to read and write by the Christian missionaries that resided there. He also studied the New Testament. Soon after John Whiteley, a Wesleyan missionary, established a mission station in Kāwhia, Te Ua was baptised as Horopāpera, a transliteration of the name Zerubbabel (a reference to the leader of the Jews on their return to Jerusalem after the Babylonian captivity).

In 1840, Te Ua returned to his birth region of Taranaki, joining the Wesleyan mission at Waimate. By the 1850s he was a supporter of the Kingitanga (Māori King Movement) and also engaged in the anti-land-selling movement, protesting the acquisition by settlers of Māori land in Taranaki. He fought against the government in the First Taranaki War, serving as a chaplain to the Māori warriors.

In 1863, Te Ua began setting up the Pai Mārire church. A key aspect was *pai mārire* (goodness and peace) and much of his teachings were derived from the parables of Jesus. He called his church Hauhau, in homage to *hau* (wind). As conflict between the church and government ensued, Hauhau became a term used to describe any anti-government Māori. Te Ua recognised that the conflict with the government could not continue and after years of several years of conflict Te Ua surrendered in February 1866. After the failure of his resistance, he was left no choice but to encourage other Maori to accept the colonial invaders.



NONGQAWUSE
(born Gxarha, Centane, which is now modern day Eastern Cape, South Africa, c. 1841 - 1898)

In the 1850s, a young Xhosa girl named Nongqawuse prophesized that if the Xhosa were to sacrifice their cattle en masse, the ancestors would restore to her people their wealth, revive their dead, and sweep the European settlers in the African continent into the sea.

After the failure of Nongqawuse's prophecy, her followers blamed those who had not obeyed her instructions, turning against her. Chief Sarili visited the Gxarha River mouth, and spoke with Nongqawuse and her uncle. Upon his return, he announced that the New World would begin in eight days. On the eighth day a blood-red sun would rise and there would be a massive thunderstorm culminating with the rise of the dead. During the next eight days the cattle-killing rose to a climax. These prophecies also failed to come true, resulting in the death of many people by starvation.

Mlanjeni, a prophet who preceded Nongqawuse, employed some of the same rhetoric and ideas that she would later bring to the fore. During the eighth and most brutal Xhosa war (1850-1853), which became known as "Mlanjeni's War," the prophet Mlanjeni arose among the homeless Xhosa, and predicted that the Xhosa would be unaffected by the colonists' bullets. This prophecy foreshadowed similar failures that Nongqawuse would face and Mlanjeni's war ended in the complete subjugation of the Ciskei Xhosa.



NAT TURNER
(born in Southampton County, Virginia, 1800-1831)

Nat Turner was an enslaved African-American preacher who organized and led the four-day rebellion of enslaved and free Black people in Southampton County, Virginia, in 1831. Turner was deeply religious and frequently had visions which he interpreted as messages from God. As a young man, Turner often conducted services, preaching the Bible to his fellow enslaved people, who dubbed him “The Prophet.” By 1828, Turner believed that he “was ordained for some great purpose in the hands of the Almighty.”

In 1831 he began communicating his plans of rebellion to a small circle of fellow enslaved people from his neighborhood. It is believed that one of the ways Turner summoned his conspirators was through the use of particular songs. During the course of three days, over 70 rebels traveled from house to house, freeing enslaved people and killing many of the white people they encountered. Those suspected of participating in the rebellion were beheaded by the militia and had their heads placed on poles at crossroads as a form of intimidation. Turner was tried on November 5, 1831, for “conspiring to rebel and making insurrection.” When asked if he regretted what he had done, he responded, “Was Christ not crucified?” Turner was convicted and sentenced to death by lynching. Afterwards, his corpse was desecrated, as recounted by John W. Cromwell in a 1920 article in the *Journal of Negro History*. “Turner was skinned to supply such souvenirs as purses, his flesh made into grease, and his bones divided as trophies to be handed down as heirlooms.”



WOVOKA aka JACK WILSON or QUITZE OW
(born Smith Valley, Nevada c. 1856 - September 20, 1932)

In the late 1880s, Wovoka, also known as Jack Wilson or Quoitze Ow, was the Paiute religious leader who founded a second episode of the Ghost Dance movement. Inspired by a prophetic vision, he taught tribe members that through righteous living and the performance of the ritual Ghost Dance, they would resurrect the dead Paiute Indians, restore Indigenous prosperity, and remove white settlers from North America. The dance was eventually banned for fear of violence, effectively contributing to the United States’ systematic erasure of Native culture.

The Ghost Dance movement is known for being practiced by the victims of the Wounded Knee Massacre. Before the Ghost Dance reached Native Americans on South Dakota Plains reservations, interest in the movement came from U.S. Indian Office, U.S. War Department, and multiple Native American tribal delegations. As the movement spread across the American West, various interpretations of Wovoka’s original message were adopted, notably by the Lakota Sioux living on the Pine Ridge reservation. The Lakota interpretation was considered more militant, placing additional emphasis on the foretold elimination of white men. Although the Lakota interpretation promoted hostility toward U.S. federal agents, it did not explicitly advocate for violent action. Historical evidence suggests that the unconventional practice of Christianity on the part of the Lakota tribe was largely responsible for the tensions between whites and Native Americans leading up to the Battle at Wounded Knee. U.S. authorities challenged the theological views of the Ghost Dance movement, and arguably sought conflict with the Lakota tribe as a means of condemning these practices.



HONG XIUQUAN
(born Hua County, Guangdong, Qing China, 1814-1864)

Hong Xiuquan was a Hakka Chinese prophet who experienced visions of fighting the heavens. He eventually came to lead the Taiping Rebellion in an attempt to overthrow the Qing Dynasty. In 1843, in a state of desparation after failing the imperial examinations for the fourth time, Hong took time to carefully examine the Christian pamphlets he owned. Hong believed that they held the key to interpreting his visions and took them literally; his celestial father was God the Father, the brother that he had seen was Jesus Christ, and he had been directed to rid the world of demon worship.

In 1847, Hong began his adaptation of the Bible in what came to be known as, *The Taiping Bible*. By 1850 he had between 10,000 and 30,000 followers. Authorities, alarmed at the growing size of the sect, ordered them to disperse. A full-scale attack was launched by government forces in the first month of 1851, in what came to be known as the Jintian Uprising, named after the town of Jintian (present-day Guiping, Guangxi) where the sect was based. Hong’s followers emerged victorious and beheaded the Manchu commander of the government army. This conflict began the Taiping Rebellion and Hong declared the founding of the “Heavenly Kingdom of Transcendent Peace” on January 11, 1851.

Hong Xiuquan abdicated in favor of his 15-year-old son, leading to the demise of the Kingdom. The son was inexperienced and ineffectual, so the Kingdom was quickly destroyed when Nanjing fell in July 1864 to the imperial armies.

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SARAH FORBES BONETTA

(born in Yorubaland, which is now modern day Yewa South, Ogun State, Nigeria, 1843-1880)

Sarah Forbes Bonetta was an African woman from Yorubaland who was a ward and goddaughter of Queen Victoria. She was believed to have been a titled member of the Egbado clan of the Yoruba people in West Africa. Forbes Bonetta was orphaned during a war with the nearby Kingdom of Dahomey as a child. In 1850, Captain Frederick Forbes of the Royal Navy, was bequeathed a little girl by King Ghezo of Dahomey. The gift of the “perfect genius” of an “amiable” child was intended for Queen Victoria, as a tribute between royals. Raised as the Queen’s goddaughter, her life serves as apt illustration of the conceptual knots of Victorian England. This was an era characterized by a mindset that could simultaneously trample the world in colonial endeavor and see itself as civilizing souls like Sarah Forbes Bonetta. Once grown, she was married to Captain James Pinson Labulo Davies, a wealthy Lagos philanthropist, and returned to the African continent, where she worked as a teacher.

Forbes Bonetta died of tuberculosis on the isle of Madeira at the age of 36. She had been sent there to convalesce, as the air there was considered conducive to healing respiratory diseases. Her caretakers and guardians believed that the travel back and forth between the climates of Africa and Europe was to blame for her illness.