

Massacre at Wounded Knee - I

Lead: The last major armed conflict between whites and Native Americans ended on December 29, 1890 along Wounded Knee creek.

Intro.: *A Moment in Time* with Dan Roberts.

Content: In the cold early morning hours of December 29, 1890 elements of 7th and 9th United States Cavalry surrounded approximately 350 Miniconjous Sioux led by Big Foot camped at Wounded Knee twenty miles from the Pine Ridge Indian

reservation in southwestern South Dakota. Within a brief time over 150 Sioux had been killed with another 44 wounded about half were women and children. More would later die of exposure. Army casualties were not small. Over 60 troopers were wounded or killed. In retrospect, such a high sacrifice of life on both sides made little sense. It resulted from broken promises, emotional despair, faulty expectations, professional ineptitude, and bureaucratic infighting.

By the late 1880s the Sioux confederation had largely been beaten into submission. The great buffalo herds upon which they had

depended for food, clothing, shelter, furniture and articles for trade had disappeared. The Sioux had been confined to ever increasingly smaller reservations and encouraged to engage in agriculture on land ill-suited for such a purpose. Rebellions had been crushed, promises had been broken, and treaties had been violated. The Sioux were starving, disillusioned and without hope. They were ripe for a savior and found one in Nevada, a Paiute named Wovoka.

In 1889 Wovoka had a fever-induced vision in which he said the Great Spirit prescribed for him a way Indians might make the hated whites disappear and once again achieve

prosperity. Wovoka preached that they should stop fighting, lead a good life and dance the Ghost Dance. Next time: the bloody end of the Ghost Dance War.

At the University of Richmond, this is Dan Roberts.

Resources

Brown, Dee. *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee: An Indian History of the American West*. New York, NY: 1970.

Ostler, Jeffrey. "Conquest and the State: Why the U.S. Employed Massive Military Force to Suppress the Lakota Ghost Dance," *Pacific Historical Review* 65 (May, 1996): 217-249.

Taylor, Walt. "Wounded Knee (1890) - Unquenchable Spirit (1990)," *Canadian Dimension* (Jan-Feb 1991): 13-16.

Utley, Robert M. *The Last Days of the Sioux Nation*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1963.

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