

# Chapter Five

## THE MASSACRE AT WOUNDED KNEE



There was no hope on earth, and God seemed to have forgotten us. Some said they saw the Son of God; others did not see Him.... The people did not know; they did not care. They snatched at the hope. They screamed like crazy men to Him for mercy. They caught at the promise they heard He had made. The white men were frightened and called for soldiers. We had begged for life, and the white men thought we wanted theirs.

—Red Cloud, Lakota, 1890

**I**n 1890 a new religious movement called the Ghost Dance swept through the Indian tribes of the western United States. It promised followers that everything on earth would be restored to the way it was before the white men came, with abundant land and game, if the people performed a ritual dance. The Ghost Dance originated with a Paiute prophet named Wovoka who lived on the Walker Lake Reservation in Nevada. Also known as Jack Wilson, Wovoka had lived with a white family during his youth and learned the principles of Christianity (see Wovoka biography, p. 152).

On New Year's Day 1889, a total eclipse of the sun occurred in the western United States. As this unusual and startling event unfolded, Wovoka suddenly became terribly ill with a high fever. Delirious, he returned to his home and fell unconscious. During this period, Wovoka said that he experienced a powerful dream or vision. "When the sun died, I went up to heaven and saw God and all the people who had died a long time ago," he related. "God told me to come back and tell my people they must be good and love one another, and not fight, or steal, or lie. He gave me this dance to give to my people."<sup>1</sup>



The Paiute prophet Wovoka, also known as Jack Wilson, introduced the Ghost Dance movement to the long-suffering tribes of the Great Plains.

According to Wovoka's vision, which he interpreted as a spiritual prophecy, God wanted the Indians to live peacefully together and perform a ritual dance. If they did so, God would reward them in the spring of 1891 by restoring everything in the world to the way it was before the white man arrived. Wovoka said that God planned to cover the land with 30 feet of rich soil. All the white people would be buried underneath, and only the Indians would survive. The fresh earth would be planted with trees and grasses, and vast herds of buffalo and horses would thrive there once again. All of the Indians' ancestors would then come back to life, and the people would be free to ride, hunt, practice their traditional religion, and follow their ancient customs. As word of Wovoka's vision spread, it generated a great deal of excitement among the Plains Indians,

who had lost so much since the arrival of white people (see "A Lakota Indian Recalls the Ghost Dance," p. 187).

In the fall of 1889 Lakota leaders in South Dakota sent a delegation to Nevada to see Wovoka and learn more about the new religion. When the delegates returned in early 1890, they were filled with excitement. "My brothers, I bring you the promise of a day in which there will be no white man to lay his hand on the bridle of the Indian's horse, when the red men of the prairie will rule the world and not be turned from the hunting-grounds by any man,"<sup>2</sup> the Miniconjou delegate Kicking Bear announced to Sitting Bull's followers. Some Lakota were skeptical about the Ghost Dance and chose not to adopt it. But many others embraced the new religion enthusiastically. Already hungry and desperate, they decided that the glimmer of hope it provided was worth defying the reservation's ban on traditional dancing.

Near the Oglala agency at Pine Ridge, tribal members gathered in large camps during the summer of 1890 to perform the Ghost Dance. A typical ceremony started around noon and lasted well into the night. Participants wore white shirts made of cotton or buckskin with feathers on the sleeves and bright symbols painted on the front. The dancers joined hands in a circle and shuffled to the right, and then to the left, while chanting the Ghost Dance song:

The whole world is coming,  
A nation is coming, a nation is coming,  
The eagle has brought the message to the tribe,  
The father says so, the father says so.  
Over the whole earth they are coming,  
The buffalo are coming, the buffalo are coming,  
The crow has brought the message to the tribe,  
The father says so, the father says so.<sup>3</sup>

As the dance went on into the evening, the participants gradually increased the speed of their dancing and the volume of their singing. The pace eventually became frenzied, until participants finally grew dizzy and fell down in exhaustion. Some people lost consciousness and experienced visions of the spirit world and their dead ancestors. When they woke up, they discussed the visions and incorporated them into the group's future dances.

### White Agents and Settlers Panic

As it was originally taught by Wovoka, the Ghost Dance was a peaceful religious movement that focused on restoring hope and bringing happiness to the Indians. Although it foresaw a future without white people, it was not overtly hostile. In fact, it told followers to refrain from fighting and rely instead on supernatural means to achieve that goal. But each tribe that adopted the Ghost Dance changed Wovoka's original teaching in some way. The Lakota adopted a more militant version of the religious movement than some other groups. For instance, Lakota followers believed that the white "ghost shirts" they wore while dancing had the power to protect them from harm, including bullets. This conviction inspired some Lakota dancers to stand up to federal agents and Indian police officers.

White agents on the reservations watched with interest as the Ghost Dance took hold. Some experienced agents reacted calmly to the religious movement. They interpreted the Ghost Dance as an outlet that Indians were using to cope



This work by the famous Western painter Frederic Remington shows Oglala Lakota Indians engaged in the Ghost Dance ceremony at the Pine Ridge Reservation.

with the many blows that they had suffered over the previous few decades (see “A BIA Assessment of the Causes of Lakota Discontent,” p. 189). They found the dancing relatively harmless, and they figured that it would die out on its own when the events Wovoka predicted failed to occur. But other agents viewed Wovoka’s apocalyptic vision as a threat to their authority. They felt that practicing a mystical religion and performing traditional dances were incompatible with government efforts to civilize the Lakota and help them assimilate into white society. Many agents used reservation police officers to arrest followers and suppress the Ghost Dance. A few agents grew so alarmed by the Indians’ strange behavior that they requested military troops to protect them.

Daniel F. Royer took charge of the Pine Ridge Agency in October 1890. A pharmacist and leading citizen from the town of Alpena, Royer received the appointment because of his political connections to newly elected South

Dakota Senator Richard Pettigrew. Royer had no experience dealing with Indians, no knowledge of conditions on the reservation, and no understanding of the Ghost Dance movement. A journalist of the time described him as “destitute of any of those qualities by which he could justly lay claim to the position—experience, force of character, courage, and sound judgment.”<sup>4</sup> In fact, he appeared so nervous around the Lakota when he assumed his post at Pine Ridge that he earned the nickname Young Man Afraid of Indians.

Shortly after Royer arrived at Pine Ridge, the Bureau of Indian Affairs took some action to address the Ghost Dance phenomenon. It asked all of its agents to compile lists of Indian “troublemakers” who might need to be removed from their reservations in order to maintain order and security. Royer sent a list of sixty-four names, while the agents at the other five Lakota reservations sent a combined total of fifteen. Royer also sent a stream of panicky telegrams to Washington, D.C., demanding military intervention. “Indians are dancing in the snow and are wild and crazy,” he wrote in November 1890. “I have fully informed you that the employees and the government property at this agency have no protection and are at the mercy of the Ghost Dancers. . . . We need protection and we need it now. The leaders should be arrested and confined at some military post until the matter is quieted, and this should be done at once.”<sup>5</sup>

*“Indians are dancing in the snow and are wild and crazy,” Indian Agent Daniel F. Royer wrote in November 1890. “We need protection and we need it now.”*

Rumors of strange dances, mystical visions, and potentially hostile Indians soon attracted widespread attention. Reporters flocked to South Dakota to see what all the fuss was about. Many newspapers published sensational stories about the Indians’ behavior that served to increase fears. “Settlers on the farms and ranches south of Mandan are fleeing their homes, believing that an Indian uprising is at hand,” the *Chicago Tribune* reported on November 16, 1890. “They urgently demand protection and many a farmhouse in North Dakota will soon be deserted unless the settlers receive some assurance that they will not be left to the mercy of the murderous redskins, who are now whetting their knives in anticipation of the moment when they begin their bloody work.”<sup>6</sup>

A few writers protested against such irresponsible journalism. One local reporter who actually visited the Pine Ridge Agency found the Oglala going about their business in a peaceful and orderly fashion. Nevertheless, concerns

about the Ghost Dance escalated into full-fledged terror among white settlers on the plains. “The panic among the frontier settlers of both Dakotas, Nebraska, and Iowa was something ludicrous,” noted ethnologist James Mooney. “The inhabitants worked themselves into such a high panic that ranches and even whole villages were temporarily abandoned and the people flocked into the railroad cities with vivid stories of murder, scalping, and desolation that had no foundation whatever in fact.”<sup>7</sup>

On November 17 the U.S. government finally responded to the growing tension surrounding the Ghost Dance movement by sending military troops to South Dakota. The authorities decided that a display of overwhelming force was necessary to prevent an all-out Indian uprising and reassure white communities. They dedicated one-third of the U.S. Army—the largest muster of military force since the Civil War (1861-65)—to occupying reservations where the Ghost Dance religion had taken hold. Although the arrival of troops convinced some frightened Lakota to stop dancing and report to the nearest agency, many others decided to stay as far away from the soldiers as possible. Thousands of Lakota fled to the Badlands, a rugged, rocky region north of Pine Ridge, to hide out until the Ghost Dance prophecy came true.

### **The Death of Sitting Bull**

Sitting Bull had arrived at the Hunkpapa agency at Standing Rock in 1883, after returning from Canada and spending two years in a military prison. In the fall of 1890 he remained one of the most influential Lakota leaders. He and about 250 followers lived in cabins along the Grand River and maintained a degree of independence. Although Sitting Bull kept livestock and did some farming, he also refused to give up many of his people’s traditions and customs. His defiant attitude kept him at odds with Major James McLaughlin, the longtime agent in charge of Standing Rock.

When Kicking Bear first brought the Ghost Dance to Standing Rock, Sitting Bull harbored some doubts about Wovoka’s prophecy. He set his personal feelings aside, though, and allowed his followers to learn the Ghost Dance. When McLaughlin ordered the dancing to stop, Sitting Bull grew determined to protect his people’s right to practice the new religion. The situation soon escalated into a tense standoff between the two strong-willed men.

On October 16, 1890, McLaughlin sent tribal police officers to escort Kicking Bear off of the Standing Rock reservation. Even after Kicking Bear left,



however, the Ghost Dance continued to be practiced among the Hunkpapa. McLaughlin eventually decided that the only way to stop the Ghost Dance was to arrest Sitting Bull and send him back to prison. “Sitting Bull is high priest and leading apostle of this latest Indian absurdity,” the agent wrote in a letter to the commissioner of Indian Affairs. “In a word he is the chief mischief-maker at this agency, and if he were not here, this craze, so general among the Sioux, would never have gotten a foothold.”<sup>8</sup>

General Nelson Miles, the man in charge of the U.S. military forces sent to keep order on the Lakota reservations, came up with a plan to convince Sitting Bull to surrender peacefully. Miles suggested sending in William F. “Buffalo Bill” Cody—a legendary cowboy who had become close friends with Sitting Bull when they toured the country together in 1885 as part of Cody’s famous Wild West Show—as a negotiator. Miles arranged for Cody to travel to Standing Rock for a meeting with the Hunkpapa leader. But McLaughlin viewed the scheme as a dangerous publicity stunt that might cause unrest on the reservation. He arranged to keep Cody and Sitting Bull apart and went ahead with his own plans to arrest the chief.

Early on the morning of December 15, McLaughlin sent a 43-member tribal police force under the command of Captain Henry Bull Head to Sitting Bull’s cabin on the Grand River. The officers arrived while Sitting Bull was still asleep. When the influential chief first woke up, he agreed to surrender and accompany the police to the Standing Rock agency. By the time Sitting Bull was dressed and ready to go, however, his followers had been alerted to the situation. When the police brought Sitting Bull out of his cabin, they were surrounded by an angry crowd. People shouted insults, brandished weapons, and encouraged Sitting Bull to resist arrest. In the midst of the confusion, shots rang



The 1890 death of Sitting Bull, seen here in an 1885 portrait, further deepened white-Indian tensions across the Dakota territory.

out. The resulting clash took the lives of Sitting Bull and eight of his followers, including his teenage son Crowfoot, as well as six reservation police officers.

People across the country mourned the shocking death of Sitting Bull, who was widely known as the last of the great Indian chiefs to refuse to abandon his traditional ways. “The proud spirit of the original owners of these vast prairies inherited through centuries of fierce and bloody wars for their possession, lingered last in the bosom of Sitting Bull,”<sup>9</sup> South Dakota newspaper owner L. Frank Baum wrote in the *Aberdeen Saturday Pioneer*.

McLaughlin had hoped that taking Sitting Bull into custody would help put an end to the Ghost Dance and prevent a violent uprising on the reservation. Instead, the death of Sitting Bull and the arrival of federal troops in South Dakota created a panic among the Lakota. Afraid for their lives, thousands of tribal members fled the reservations. Many of Sitting Bull’s followers headed for Pine Ridge, where they sought the protection of the Oglala chief Red Cloud. Many others headed for the Stronghold, a large plateau in the Badlands that could be easily defended in case of attack. Within a week, about 3,000 Lakota gathered there.

### **The Wounded Knee Massacre**

Among the groups of Lakota on the move at this time was a band of Miniconjou led by Chief Sitanka, also known as Big Foot (see Big Foot biography, p. 121). After hearing about the death of Sitting Bull, Big Foot decided to make the 150-mile journey from the Cheyenne River agency to Pine Ridge. Although some of his followers still performed the Ghost Dance, Big Foot no longer believed that it was the answer for his people. He wanted to assist Red Cloud in his efforts to resolve the dispute between the Lakota and the government without further bloodshed.

Big Foot’s band consisted of about 350 people, including 230 women and children. As they made their way toward Pine Ridge, they suffered from shortages of food and inadequate clothing for the winter weather. Big Foot became so ill with pneumonia that he was forced to ride in the back of a wagon. Nevertheless, government authorities viewed him as a threat. The Miniconjou chief’s name appeared on the list of potential troublemakers maintained by the Bureau of Indian Affairs. General Miles worried that Big Foot’s band might join the hostile Lakota at the Stronghold, or might start an uprising when they reached Pine Ridge. He decided that they could not be allowed to reach their



destination. Miles dispatched U.S. Army troops with orders to disarm the Miniconjou and transport them by train to a military prison in Omaha, Nebraska.

On December 28 about 500 troops of the Seventh Cavalry—the same unit that had been crushed in the Battle of Little Bighorn—caught up with Big Foot’s band at Wounded Knee Creek, about 20 miles away from the Pine Ridge agency. Big Foot tied a white flag to his wagon and told the army’s advance scouts that he intended to surrender. The Miniconjou set up camp near the creek, and the cavalry took up positions nearby.

The next morning, December 29, Colonel James W. Forsyth took charge of disarming and arresting the Indians. He ordered all of the Miniconjou to assemble in an open area near the creek. He stationed his troops in a circle surrounding the area and placed two powerful Hotchkiss guns on the hillside above to discourage any resistance during the council. Then Forsyth asked Big Foot to hand over all of his weapons. Reluctant to leave his people completely defenseless, the chief told his warriors to give up a few older guns. Since he had already offered to surrender peacefully, Big Foot hoped that a token gesture of disarmament would satisfy Forsyth’s demand.

The colonel had little experience dealing with Indians, however, and did not trust Big Foot. When the chief only offered a few guns, Forsyth ordered his men to search the Miniconjou individually as well as their camp. The soldiers found additional guns hidden under blankets, in wagons, behind the flaps of tipis, and beneath people’s clothing. Forsyth confiscated those weapons as well as the Miniconjou’s knives, bows, and arrows. As the search progressed, the Indians felt humiliated and grew increasingly restless.

At one point a medicine man named Yellow Bird began performing the Ghost Dance in protest. He encouraged the Miniconjou to stand up to the soldiers, reminding them that their Ghost Shirts would protect them from harm. “Do not be afraid,” he declared. “I have assurance that the soldier bul-



Colonel James W. Forsyth was the commanding U.S. Army officer at the massacre at Wounded Knee.



An undated photograph of Chief Big Foot of the Miniconjou band of Lakota.

lets cannot penetrate us; the prairie is large and the bullets will not go toward you; they will not penetrate us.”<sup>10</sup> Yellow Bird’s actions put Forsyth and his soldiers on edge. Since they could not understand the medicine man’s words, they worried that he was calling for the band’s warriors to attack.

The tense situation exploded into violence a few moments later, when a deaf Indian named Black Coyote responded defiantly to the soldiers’ efforts to disarm him by holding his rifle over his head. During a scuffle over the gun, it went off. The troops immediately opened fire on the assembled Indians. Big Foot was among the first to be killed. Some Miniconjou warriors tried to fight back, but most had already surrendered their guns and were soon cut down by the soldiers surrounding the area.

As soon as the shooting began, the Miniconjou women and children ran for their lives. Many took cover in a dry ravine, where they desperately tried to dig protective holes in the frozen earth. But they were targeted by the Hotchkiss rapid-fire cannons perched on the hillside, which rained down two-pound explosive shells at a rate of fifty per minute. Many other Miniconjou kept on running, but the cavalry set off in pursuit and shot everyone they caught, including women and children. “We tried to run,” recalled Louise Weasel Bear, “but they shot us like we were buffalo.”<sup>11</sup> In fact, the soldiers chased down fleeing survivors for the next couple of hours (see “Black Elk Recounts the Massacre at Wounded Knee,” p. 192). Some bodies were later found up to three miles away from the site of the original fight. “There can be no question that the pursuit was simply a massacre,” wrote ethnologist James Mooney, “where fleeing women, with infants in their arms, were shot down after resistance had ceased and when almost every warrior was stretched dead or dying on the ground.”<sup>12</sup>

### Counting the Dead

When the shooting finally ended, Forsyth ordered his soldiers to load the wounded into wagons and take them to the Pine Ridge agency. A blizzard blew into the area in the late afternoon, which made it difficult for the cavalry

## Lost Bird Survives the Wounded Knee Massacre

When a group of Lakota returned to the site of the Wounded Knee Massacre following a three-day blizzard, they were shocked to hear a baby crying. They found a healthy infant girl who had been sheltered from the elements by her mother's dead body. She wore a tiny cap decorated with beads in the shape of an American flag. One woman named the baby Zintkala Nuni, meaning "Lost Bird." The remarkable story of her survival appeared in newspapers across the country.

Lost Bird was soon adopted by Brigadier General Leonard Colby, whose army regiment had been called to South Dakota following Wounded Knee, and his wife Clara, a leading activist in the women's suffrage movement. Clara Colby frequently published cheerful updates about her young daughter in suffragist newspapers. Although her adoptive parents gave her a privileged upbringing, Lost Bird struggled to adapt to white society and was often the victim of racism. She developed emotional and behavioral problems that resulted in her being expelled from several schools. Clara Colby eventually realized that the child should have been allowed to remain on the reservation. "She has been sinned against in being taken from her proper surroundings," she wrote of Lost Bird.

At sixteen Lost Bird ran away from home and found work in a Wild West Show. Longing to connect with her Indian roots, she often visited reservations. With no understanding of the Lakota language, culture, or manners, however, she found it impossible to fit in. Over the next decade, Lost Bird married several times and gave birth to a son, whom she gave up to be raised by an Indian woman. She lived mostly in California, where she appeared as an extra in silent movie Westerns and performed in saloons and dance halls. Lost Bird eventually contracted a venereal disease that affected her eyesight. On February 14, 1920, her short, unhappy life ended after 29 years as a result of heart problems related to the venereal disease. In 1991 the Lakota Nation recovered Lost Bird's remains and brought them back to Pine Ridge. Following a traditional ceremony intended to release her spirit, they laid her to rest near the mass grave at Wounded Knee.

**Sources:** Flood, Renee Sansom. *Lost Bird of Wounded Knee: Spirit of the Lakota*. New York: Scribner, 1995.  
Smith, Gene. "Lost Bird." *American Heritage*, April 1996. Available online at [http://www.americanheritage.com/articles/magazine/ah/1996/2/1996\\_2\\_38.shtml](http://www.americanheritage.com/articles/magazine/ah/1996/2/1996_2_38.shtml).

to locate and transport survivors. Fifty-one wounded Lakota eventually were deposited at Pine Ridge, where the church was transformed into a makeshift hospital. “We laid the poor creatures side by side in rows, and the night was devoted to caring for them as best we could,” recalled Charles Eastman, a doctor on the reservation. “Many were frightfully torn by pieces of shells, and the suffering was terrible.”<sup>13</sup> Seven people later died of their injuries.

The Lakota at Pine Ridge, already on edge from hearing the sound of cannon fire in the distance, grew terrified when the wounded began to arrive. Hundreds of people hurriedly packed up their belongings and left the agency. Scattered raids and fighting took place throughout the reservation and surrounding areas. On December 30 a group of Lakota warriors ambushed members of the Seventh Cavalry along White Clay Creek, about seventeen miles north of Pine Ridge. General Miles quickly sent an additional 3,500 troops to South Dakota to restore order.

On January 1, 1891, when the blizzard finally subsided, Eastman accompanied a group of 100 Lakota to Wounded Knee to search for survivors (see “Looking for Survivors at Wounded Knee,” p. 197). The search party found a woman named Blue Whirlwind and her two young sons. Although all three had suffered shrapnel wounds in the massacre, they had survived three days in the snow with no food or water. The search party also found a healthy infant girl who had been shielded from the elements by her mother’s dead body (see “Lost Bird Survives the Wounded Knee Massacre,” p. 73).

Mostly, though, the search party found dead bodies frozen in the snow. On January 3, a group of U.S. Army soldiers dug a large trench—fifty feet long and six feet wide—on the hill where the Hotchkiss guns had been placed during the massacre. The site became known as Cemetery Hill. They buried 146 Lakota bodies in it, including 44 women, 18 children, and Big Foot himself. Most of the bodies were stripped of clothing and jewelry before they were buried, and some of the soldiers posed for pictures with the corpses. “It was a thing to melt the heart of a man, if it was of stone, to see those little children, with their bodies shot to pieces, thrown naked into the pit,”<sup>14</sup> one member of the burial party recalled. The Lakota were not allowed to say prayers for the dead or conduct any traditional burial ceremonies. The gravesite remained unmarked until 1907, when the Lakota Nation built a fence around it and erected a monument.



The frozen body of Big Foot in the aftermath of the Wounded Knee Massacre.

At the time, official government reports claimed that 153 Lakota had been killed at Wounded Knee (146 who were buried at the site and 7 who died at Pine Ridge). The reports also noted the loss of 25 U.S. Army soldiers, most of whom were killed accidentally by bullets or explosive shells fired by their fellow soldiers. Later investigations, however, indicated that the number of Indians killed was much higher, probably between 250 and 300 people. Many of the bodies had already been removed by relatives by the time the soldiers came back to bury them.

### A Massacre Disguised as a Battle

Unlike many other episodes in the decades-long conflict between the Lakota and the U.S. government, the massacre at Wounded Knee received a great deal of attention nationwide. A number of newspaper and magazine reporters were already at Pine Ridge to cover the Ghost Dance controversy, and three newsmen actually witnessed the events at Wounded Knee. The well-known Western artist Frederic Remington was on hand when the wounded began arriving at Pine

Ridge, and he published a series of sketches based on eyewitness accounts. In addition, a photographer from Chadron, Nebraska, accompanied the search party to the site of the massacre on New Year's Day. He took shocking pictures of the mangled, frozen bodies of dead Indians, including one of Big Foot. He also captured images of soldiers posing at the mass grave.

The wealth of detailed stories and images surrounding the events at Wounded Knee greatly troubled the American people. Some people insisted that Big Foot's band was uncooperative and dangerous, so the soldiers had a right to defend themselves. But many others argued that the army overreacted and committed a senseless atrocity. They pointed out that the Miniconjou were tired, hungry, outnumbered, mostly unarmed, and had already agreed to surrender when the fight broke out.

The Bureau of Indian Affairs initially described what happened at Wounded Knee as a battle. As the testimony of survivors and eyewitnesses revealed that dozens of unarmed women and children had been killed as they fled the scene, though, the incident quickly became known as a massacre. Some observers suggested that the Seventh Cavalry may have engaged in indiscriminate killing in revenge for Custer's loss in the Battle of Little Bighorn. "From the fact that so many women and children were killed, and that their bodies were found far from the scene of action, and as though they were shot down while flying, it would look as though blind rage had been at work,"<sup>15</sup> noted one historian.

Miles publicly condemned the Seventh Cavalry's actions at Wounded Knee. He also relieved Forsyth of command and ordered an official inquiry into the incident. The soldiers who fought under Forsyth defended the colonel's decision to disarm the Miniconjou. They also claimed that they found it difficult to distinguish between armed warriors and unarmed women and children in the confusion of battle. In the end, Forsyth was exonerated of wrongdoing and reinstated to his previous rank and command. In addition, seventeen members of the Seventh Cavalry later received the Congressional Medal of Honor for heroism in combat at Wounded Knee.

The massacre at Wounded Knee was the last major episode in four centuries of conflict between American Indians and white settlers. The high costs of defying the reservation system and resisting assimilation into white society were made clear on that bloody morning. All across the West, Indians gave up the Ghost Dance and resigned themselves to the realities of their new way of life. Even Wovoka disavowed the Ghost Dance after hearing about the



## L. Frank Baum Calls for Extermination of the Indians

L Frank Baum is best known as the author of the classic 1900 children's book *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*. A decade before its publication, though, he lived in South Dakota and published a small newspaper called the *Aberdeen Saturday Pioneer*. Like many white people living on the western frontier at that time, Baum held racist attitudes toward American Indians. On January 3, 1891, a few days after the Wounded Knee Massacre, he wrote the following editorial calling for their total extermination:

The peculiar policy of the government in employing so weak and vacillating a person as General [Nelson] Miles to look after the uneasy Indians, has resulted in a terrible loss of blood to our soldiers, and a battle which, at best, is a disgrace to the war department. There has been plenty of time for prompt and decisive measures, the employment of which would have prevented this disaster.

The PIONEER has before declared that our only safety depends upon the total extermination of the Indians. Having wronged them for centuries we had better, in order to protect our civilization, follow it up by one more wrong and wipe these untamed and untamable creatures from the face of the earth. In this lies safety for our settlers and the soldiers who are under incompetent commands. Otherwise, we may expect future years to be as full of trouble with the redskins as those have been in the past.

**Source:** Venables, Robert. "Looking Back at Wounded Knee 1890." *Northeast Indian Quarterly*, Spring 1990. Available online at <http://www.dickshovel.com/TwistedFootnote.html>.

Wounded Knee massacre. "Today, I call upon you to travel a new trail," he told his followers, "the only trail now open—the white man's road."<sup>16</sup>

The Oglala holy man Black Elk, who rode to the scene of the massacre from Pine Ridge, recalled years later how the tragedy had crushed the spirit of his people. "When I look back now from this high hill of my old age, I can still

see the butchered women and children lying heaped and scattered along the crooked gulch as plain as when I saw them with eyes still young,” he wrote. “And I can see that something else died there in the bloody mud, and was buried in the blizzard. A people’s dream died there. It was a beautiful dream.”<sup>17</sup>

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## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Quoted in Mooney, James. *The Ghost Dance Religion and the Sioux Outbreak of 1890*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1991, p. 834.
- <sup>2</sup> Quoted in McLaughlin, James. *My Friend the Indian*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1910, p. 185.
- <sup>3</sup> Quoted in Viola, Herman J. *Trail to Wounded Knee: The Last Stand of the Plains Indians 1860-1890*. New York: National Geographic, 2006, p. 172.
- <sup>4</sup> Welch, Herbert. “The Meaning of the Dakota Outbreak.” *Scribner’s*, April 1891, p. 450.
- <sup>5</sup> Quoted in Olson, James C. *Red Cloud and the Sioux Problem*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1965, p. 326.
- <sup>6</sup> Quoted in Landau, Elaine. *Cornerstones of Freedom: The Wounded Knee Massacre*. New York: Children’s Press, 2004, p. 16.
- <sup>7</sup> Mooney, p. 892.
- <sup>8</sup> Quoted in Commissioner of Indian Affairs. *Annual Report*, 1892, p. 125.
- <sup>9</sup> Quoted in Di Silvestro, Roger L. *In the Shadow of Wounded Knee*. New York: Walker, 2007, p. 84.
- <sup>10</sup> Quoted in Viola, p. 189.
- <sup>11</sup> Quoted in McGregor, James H. *The Wounded Knee Massacre from the Viewpoint of the Survivors*. Baltimore: Wirth Brothers, 1940, p. 106.
- <sup>12</sup> Mooney, p. 869.
- <sup>13</sup> Eastman, Charles A. *From the Deep Woods to Civilization: Chapters in the Autobiography of an Indian*, 1916, p. 110.
- <sup>14</sup> Quoted in Mooney, p. 878.
- <sup>15</sup> Welch, p. 452.
- <sup>16</sup> Quoted in O’Neill, Laurie A. *Wounded Knee and the Death of a Dream*. Brookfield, CT: Millbrook Press, 1993, p. 55.
- <sup>17</sup> Quoted in Landau, p. 39.