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<http://www.lastoftheindependents.com/wounded.htm>

Tilpasset af IS

The Ghost Dance



A phenomena swept the American west in 1888 – a holy man Wovoka from Nevada began spreading the "gospel" that came to be known as the **Ghost Dance Religion**. He claimed that the earth would soon perish and then come alive again in a pure, aboriginal state, to be inherited by the Indians, including the dead, for an eternal existence free from suffering.

To earn this new reality, however, Indians had to live harmoniously and honestly, cleanse themselves often, and shun the ways of the whites, especially alcohol - the destroyer.

Wovoka also discouraged the practice of mourning, because the dead would soon be resurrected, demanding instead the performance of prayers, meditation, chanting, and especially dancing through which one might briefly die and catch a glimpse of the paradise-to-come, replete with lush green prairie grass, large buffalo herds and Indian ancestors.



Arapaho Ghost Dance

Wounded Knee

Lakota

December 29, 1890

The Wounded Knee Massacre

White officials became alarmed at the religious activism, and in December 1890 banned the **Ghost Dance** on Lakota reservations.

When the rites continued, officials called in troops to Pine Ridge reservations in South Dakota. The military, led by veteran General Nelson Miles, geared itself for another campaign.

The presence of the troops exacerbated the situation. The dancers sent word to Sitting Bull of the Hunkpapas to join them. Before he could set out from the Standing Rock reservation in North Dakota, however, he was arrested by the police. A scuffle ensued in which Sitting Bull and seven of his warriors were slain.

General Miles had also ordered the arrest of Big Foot, who had been known to live along the Cheyenne River in South Dakota. But, Big Foot and his followers had already departed south to Pine Ridge.

Miles sent out the Seventh Cavalry to locate them. They found the tribe dancers on Porcupine Creek, 30 miles east of Pine Ridge. The Indians offered no resistance. Big Foot, was ill with pneumonia, and rode in a wagon.

The soldiers ordered the Indians to set up camp five miles westward, at Wounded Knee Creek. The soldiers put up four Hotchkiss cannons in position around the camp. The soldiers now numbered around 500; the Indians 350, all but 120 of these women and children.

The following morning, December 29, 1890, the soldiers entered the camp demanding the Indian firearms be relinquished.

The silence of the morning was broken by a gunshot and soon other guns echoed in the riverbed. At first, the struggle was fought at close quarters, but when the Indians ran to take cover, the Hotchkiss artillery opened up on them, cutting down men, women, children alike, the sick Big Foot among them.



Chief Big Foot lies dead in the snow. He was among the first to die on December 29, 1890

By the end of this brutal, unnecessary violence, which lasted less than an hour, at least 150 Indians had been killed and 50 wounded.



An Army officer looking at the dead

“Wounded Knee” became a catch phrase for all the wrongs inflicted on Native Americans by the descendants of Europeans.

*“I did not know then how much was ended. 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.
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...
The nation’s hoop is broken and scattered. There is no center any longer, and the sacred tree is dead.”*

Black Elk

In 1973, Indian activist, drawing on the courage of their ancestors, would stage another confrontation there.

On Feb. 27, 1973, a group called the [American Indian Movement \(AIM\)](#) seized control of Wounded Knee. Led by AIM leader Russell Means, the occupation began to protest the reservation’s officially sanctioned government under the leadership of Dickie Wilson. Two people were killed during the 71-day occupation, 12 were wounded, including two marshals, and nearly 1,200 were arrested. Inspired by the civil rights movement of the 1960’s, AIM put the issue of Native American rights into the national spotlight.

 [Russell Means](#) talks about the events of 1973.
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