

REVIEWS



American Carnage: Wounded Knee, 1890. By Jerome A. Greene. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2014. 620 pages. \$34.95 cloth; \$34.95 electronic.

Few events in American history resonate with more profound and lasting impact than the tragedy that unfolded 125 years ago along Wounded Knee Creek in South Dakota. On the morning of December 29, 1890, a confrontation between United States soldiers and a band of Lakota Sioux descended into a hellish massacre. When the mayhem ended, twenty-eight soldiers and more than two hundred Indian men, women, and children—more than half of them noncombatants—lay dead or dying. Over the ensuing generations, the tragedy at Wounded Knee became a touchstone of Native American history, symbolically marking the final blow to Indian morale after a very bad century of interaction with the American government. Given the enduring echoes of the disaster that occurred there, it is not surprising that Wounded Knee would later become a galvanizing focal point of the Red Power Indian nationalist movement of the 1960s and 1970s—memorably invoked by Dee Brown in the title of his influential 1970 book—and purposefully chosen by American Indian Movement activists as the site for their renowned standoff with the federal government in the spring of 1973.

Wounded Knee has, of course, spawned an immense historiography, including highly-respected works by eminent historians such as Richard Jensen, Eli Paul, James C. Olson, and Robert M. Utley, among many others. Yet much of that existing scholarship has been limited in scope, offering important but relatively narrow military, social, political, or biographical perspectives on the story. Most recently, for example, in *Wounded Knee: Party Politics and the Road to an American Massacre* (2010), historian Heather Cox Richardson analyzed the events leading up to the disaster with specific attention to the role played by the turbulent national party politics of the Gilded Age. In her interpretation, the fate of the Lakota victims at Wounded Knee was effectively determined in the years and months leading up to the massacre by the political maneuverings and partisan opportunism of party hacks in Washington. While Richardson's treatment, like so many before it, is useful and instructive, the daunting challenge that has remained was for a scholar to provide a comprehensive, objective, and evenhanded account of all aspects of the tragedy, assessing its causes and effects in the light of the totality of the evidence and engaging the latest scholarship on a host of ancillary questions.

Now, with *American Carnage*, Jerome A. Greene has done just that. A prolific writer and former National Park Service historian, Greene combines meticulous historical research with exceptional narrative skill to forge a definitively thorough examination of Wounded Knee in all of its complexity and multilayered dimensions. He begins his account with a contextual assessment of the deteriorating conditions on the Sioux reservations in western South Dakota during the late 1870s and 1880s, as drought, reduced beef rations, disease, increasing land pressure by whites, and steadily

eroding reservation boundaries combined to produce misery and despair among the Lakota. On the latter point, Greene places particularly sharp focus on the deleterious effects on the Sioux of the controversial 1889 land agreements engineered primarily by General George Crook, in which the Lakota surrendered millions of additional acres to the government. The confluence of these and other factors provided the perfect environment for the flourishing of a revivalist message of hope, which emerged in the form of the Ghost Dance movement. Though the Ghost Dance had originated in the largely peaceful teachings of a Paiute mystic known as Wovoka, rumors of supposed militaristic adaptations of his message by some Sioux adherents began to sweep through the white communities and government agencies surrounding the reservations, fueled in part by fear-mongering stories filed by news reporters in the region. Government officials responded to the perceived but largely illusory threat with the largest military mobilization since the Civil War, deploying scores of army and militia units into the area in the late fall of 1890.

Tensions escalated further in mid-December, when Indian police were dispatched from the Cheyenne River Agency to arrest Hunkpapa spiritual leader Sitting Bull, who many government officials believed was supporting the Ghost Dance as a means to incite a violent Indian uprising. The attempted arrest produced a tragedy that presaged the much larger one to come, as Sitting Bull and seven of his followers, along with six Indian police, died in a bloody firefight in the early morning hours of December 15. In turn, Sitting Bull's death produced widespread panic among many other Indian bands throughout the area. A group of some 370 Brule, Hunkpapa, and Minneconjou under the leadership of Big Foot moved south from the turbulent Cheyenne River region toward the perceived safety of the Pine Ridge Agency. On December 28, they were intercepted by a battalion of the Seventh Cavalry and herded into an encampment along Wounded Knee Creek.

The events that ensued on the following morning have been described many times, but seldom with more thoroughness and poignant effect than Greene achieves here. As soldiers commenced a search for weapons among Big Foot's followers, a Lakota medicine man initiated some of the Ghost Dance rituals and seemed to urge the Indians to resist. As Greene writes, "what happened next took but seconds, but would mark memory and history forever. A single gunshot pierced the air" (228). Greene's narration of the horrors that followed that initial shot is particularly remarkable for its objectivity, as he deftly weaves together both official government reports and the memories of many of the Lakota participants and witnesses. The cumulative evidence marshalled by the author makes it apparent that, for the first several minutes, Wounded Knee was a "battle," as Indian warriors drew rifles from concealment and delivered a withering barrage into the soldiers arrayed around them, killing or wounding several dozen and quite likely also killing some Indian bystanders. What is equally clear, however, is that in the moments that followed the initial exchange, "Wounded Knee evolved quickly into purposeful yet indiscriminate killing. It became a full-fledged massacre. . . . No single officer exercised control, and the shooting momentarily escalated as all personal constraint and self-possession fell away" (234). As the soldiers' bloodlust intensified, they pursued fleeing Indians and shot them down in the ravines and draws

throughout the area without regard to age or gender. The initial devastation wrought by the soldiers' rampage was dramatically exacerbated by the effects of the 450-caliber Hotchkiss Mountain Guns posted in elevated positions around the Indian camp. As the melee abated and the field of fire began to clear, the artillery pieces "unleashed a barrage of shrieking canister that shredded tipis and improvised shelters, extinguishing whatever life remained in the cap area" (235). Given the later controversy over whether the events of December 29 should appropriately be referred to as a "battle," Greene makes an important point when he notes that some of the soldiers and officers who took part in the carnage, both in their official after-action reports and their personal memoirs and correspondence, characterized it as a "massacre" or "bloodbath" or "war of extermination," as did many of the news reporters who were present.

Greene's treatment of the massacre's aftermath and legacy is equally thorough. Particularly well-told are the stories of the efforts to place a memorial at the site of the mass grave where the majority of the Indian victims were buried, and the long, ultimately futile efforts by Wounded Knee survivors and their descendants to receive reparations for their injuries and suffering. And in what is perhaps the most effective of all his analyses of post-massacre issues, Greene offers a remarkably measured and well-reasoned assessment of one of the most delicate and emotionally charged of all the ongoing controversies surrounded Wounded Knee—the awarding of the Congressional Medal of Honor to almost twenty of the soldiers who took part in the day's events.

American Carnage will almost certainly be the definitive account of Wounded Knee for generations to come. If Greene had accomplished nothing more than the compilation of his exhaustive bibliography and endnotes, drawn from a wealth of previously unavailable or underutilized primary sources and archival collections, his contribution to Native American and western history would have been prodigious. But with this book he has achieved so much more. This is a volume that illustrates the great potential of historical analysis to inform and elevate the national discourse on matters of lasting significance, when scrupulous scholarship combines with engaging narrative style. Greene deserves, and will undoubtedly find, an appreciative audience among specialists and general readers alike.

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Chinookan Peoples of the Lower Columbia. Edited by Robert T. Boyd, Kenneth M. Ames, and Troy A. Johnson. Seattle: University of Washington Press. 2013. 448 pages. \$50.00 cloth.

Chinookan Peoples of the Lower Columbia collects academic scholarship and commentary from Chinook Native Troy Johnson and Grand Ronde tribal members David G. Lewis, Eirik Thorsgard, and Chuck Williams. For those familiar with Lower Chinookan studies, the editors of this volume are recognizable figures, as are several contributors. Robert T. Boyd and Kenneth M. Ames are established anthropologists