

H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Woody Kipp. *Viet Cong at Wounded Knee: The Trail of a Blackfeet Activist*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004. vii + 157 pp. \$24.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8032-2760-6.

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Published on H-AmIndian (May, 2006)



This is not the book to read if you are looking for some type of confrontation with or presence of the Viet Cong during the occupation of Wounded Knee in 1973. The reference to the Viet Cong rises from a saying commonly used by the South Vietnamese when speaking despairingly to American service personnel in Viet Nam during the U.S. military intervention: "You same same Viet Cong." The Vietnamese speaker was very clearly expressing the opinion that American intervention in Vietnam was no more welcome than that of the Viet Cong. We were all invaders of their homelands.

This is not Woody Kipp's first writing on this subject as he previously published an article titled "The Eagles I Fed Who Did Not Love Me," that contains much of the material found in this book.[1] One could wish that Kipp had taken time to give credit to that journal for publishing his material.

Having said all of the above, this is a very hard book. It appears from the ending that Kipp intends to write a second book that promises to be much more uplifting and motivational. If one were to use this book as motivational it would, in Kipp's own analysis, be an encouragement to fight, drink, do drugs, commit adultery, and/or carry out illicit affairs by the numbers. That, however, is what Kipp wants to talk about. He wants to present to the reading audience the harsh life that results from reservation life, government paternalism, and the effect that colonization has had on Indian people since European contact and up to the mid-1970s.

Viet Cong at Wounded Knee traces Kipp's life from the experience of living off of bull elk meat in mid-December 1945, at the age of two months, during a northern Montana snow storm, to early March 1973 when he removed himself from the Wounded Knee occupation after having

only actively participated for probably about two weeks. It is during these two weeks, however, that Kipp makes the connection between the U.S. government's response, including the use of military force at Wounded Knee, to his experience in Viet Nam. The Vietnamese had seen U.S. troops as interlopers. Similarly, at Wounded Knee Village, the Indians became, and were treated, just as the Vietnamese had been by the Viet Cong—thus, the title of the book.

The book is filled with interesting family history and presents an often unflattering look at Kipp and those around him. Kipp pulls no punches in describing the hard-knuckle life that is often necessary in order to live day-by-day in the reservation and later Indian urban world. The book is sometimes hilarious with the sober and drunken antics of Kipp and his friends, and sometimes will make the reader cry out in frustration at the self-harm that Kipp brings upon himself and those that he loves. Other times the reader will laugh uproariously at the craziness of life on the "rez" and the day-to-day survival skills, honed in a way that only a tough, street-smart Indian can do.

An excellent read. Do not expect to be uplifted, however, for it is a sad story. One will be encouraged and then discouraged, to think back, as I did, to the many times I heard the words that Kipp did: "You same same, Viet Cong."

Note

[1]. Woody Kipp, "The Eagles I Fed Who Did Not Love Me," in *American Indian Activism: Alcatraz to The Longest Walk*, ed. Troy Johnson, Joane Nagel, and Duane Champagne (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997), pp. 207-224.

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Citation: Troy Johnson. Review of Kipp, Woody, *Viet Cong at Wounded Knee: The Trail of a Blackfeet Activist*. H-AmIndian, H-Net Reviews. May, 2006.

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