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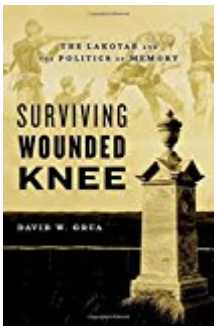
David W. Grua. *Surviving Wounded Knee: The Lakotas and the Politics of Memory.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016. 288 pp. $34.95, cloth, ISBN 978-0-19-024903-8.



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Controlling the Narrative: The Memory of Wounded Knee

The idea of changing or controlling an official narrative is a central theme in David W. Grua's *Surviving Wounded Knee: The Lakotas and the Politics of Memory*. It is an important contribution that pushes our understanding of how and why Wounded Knee was remembered during and after the turn of the nineteenth century, and how and why the dominant memory was asserted and then challenged immediately after the violence ended in 1890.

On November 13, 1890, fourteen years after the combined tribes overwhelmed and defeated Lieutenant Colonel George Armstrong Custer and his Seventh Cavalry at the Battle of Greasy Grass/ Little Bighorn in June 1876, President Benjamin Harrison ordered as many as seven thousand soldiers to South and North Dakota to, in the words of Grua, "maintain control of the Lakota reservations, avert an uprising, and protect settlers" (p. 23). It was an Indian scare. Paranoia stoked the media, as did "Indian Office agents, many of whom were political appointees with little experience with Indians" (p. 21).

The paranoia was induced by a lack of understanding. The Ghost Dance, a movement that originated in Nevada in the late 1880s from Paiute prophet Wovoka, had spread. By 1890, there were four to five thousand Ghost Dancers, 35 percent of whom were Lakota. Grua notes that white observers "speculated that the Lakotas had twisted Wovoka's peaceful religion into a militaristic cult intent on destroying whites, citing as evidence the adoption of ceremonial Ghost Shirts, which were believed to make their wearers invulnerable to bullets" (p. 21). A battle for resources also stoked the paranoia. Throughout the 1880s, settlers, industrialists, and state and territorial officials pressured the federal government to let whites onto tribal lands. Tension resulted from the arrival of the Industrial Revolution, which came into conflict with traditional Lakota lands and ways.

A month after President Harrison ordered troops to South Dakota in November 1890, the Standing Rock Agency Indian police shot and killed Sitting Bull, a Hunkpapa-Lakota spiritual leader for the Oceti Sakowin. Fourteen days after the killing, Colonel James W. Forsyth and more than five hundred of the Seventh Cavalry pursued Chief Big Foot and his Lakota band through South Dakota. Major General Nelson Miles, according to Grua, "ordered that the Minneconjou [Lakota] chief [Big Foot] should be located, arrested, and disarmed, authorizing troops to 'destroy him' if he resisted." For the rest of his life, states Grua, Miles regretted his order to "destroy" Big Foot (p. 25). This order haunted the US general into retirement.

Under the orders of General Miles, on December 29, 1890, Colonel Forsyth led the Seventh Cavalry to Big Foot's encampment at Wounded Knee Creek. In his first chapters, Grua explains how federal US soldiers separated Native warriors from the noncombatants and rummaged through the Natives' belongings. Forsyth wanted to make sure the Natives were completely disarmed. During this encounter, a struggle broke out. One of the Lakota fired a gun into the air, and Forsyth and the Seventh Cavalry responded with impunity. When the shooting ceased, hundreds of Lakota children, women, and men had been killed, some miles away from the original encampment. Twenty-five cavalrymen also died.

Forsyth drafted and submitted his official report on December 31, 1890. He was particularly silent about the killing of noncombatants, women, and children. In chapter 5, Grua expands on this omission, bringing Lakota survivor accounts into the narrative. Mary Mousseau, for example, provided a female perspective. In the initial call for the Lakota to disarm, Mousseau obliged this request and "brought some guns to the place where the officers stood." The federal soldiers continued to search for weapons. Mousseau said that "a soldier lifted me up and felt all over me in the search." Grua notes that Mousseau "experienced a form of sexual assault." He describes what happened thereafter. Mousseau's "husband was killed in the soldiers' initial volley, and Mousseau's little girl was shot soon thereafter. As she fled with the other women, a soldier's bullet broke her arm above the elbow. Her baby boy, who was strapped to her back, was killed by another bullet. Mousseau and her wounded mother remained near the field until mid-January 1891, surviving only on water. When Indian scouts found them, Mousseau was 'very weak and thin' and her clothes were 'caked with dried blood'" (p. 126).

On February 12, 1891, Secretary of War Redfield Proctor "conceded that a large number of women and children were among the dead" (p. 30), but he laid the blame at the feet of the Lakota warriors. He claimed that the deaths were a result of the Lakota warriors firing blindly at the soldiers, missing them, and instead hitting the fleeing women and children. Proctor also indicated that Lakota warriors fled into the ranks of the Lakota women and children, further endangering the noncombatants, and that federal soldiers could not distinguish between men and women due to the standard length of hair for both.

The pushback to this narrative came from Major General Miles. Miles described Wounded Knee as "the most abominable military blunder and a horrible massacre of women and children" (p. 31). This is of particular interest, at least in the larger context of how military generals during this period either penned statements of regret such as this or were quoted as having regretted their actions. On April 12, 1920, in retirement, Miles convened with Cato Sells, commissioner of Indian affairs. Miles advocated for the federal government to, in his word, "atone" for the federal massacre of Lakota and compensate Lakota survivors (p. 128). What the readers get from this is a window into the moral compass of Miles: he engaged in a decades-long process of private and public self-reflection, indicating that he felt regret and remorse for the brutal outcome of Wounded Knee.

Before the outbreak of the US Dakota Wars from 1862 to 1865, the Lakota and Oceti Sakowin (what are known in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries as the Great Sioux Nation) held sway over large swaths of traditional land on the northern plains. As America continued its nation-state-making process, the federal government implemented policy that increasingly pushed Natives, including the Lakota, Dakota, and Nakota, onto increasingly smaller parcels of land. As they dislocated Natives, Euro-Americans and immigrant pioneers claimed homesteads and brought lands into industrial agricultural production. Through this agrarian production, the nation-state created more calories and protein for its citizenry and for export. Anglo-America wanted to be big on the world stage. This competitive mindset was fueled by and added to Social Darwinian thinking—also known as racism—of the time. These broad, sweeping themes are reflected in the local realities, such as the massacre at Wounded Knee.

Within Chapter 2, Grua notes that the "men who ultimately held the power to define Wounded Knee in the government's official records essentially ignored ... early Lakota interpretations" (p. 49). It was from 1900 through the 1910s, though, that survivors of Wounded Knee partnered with Progressives and Anglo-Americans to navigate the legal process of getting their stories formally recognized. The process of remembering Wounded Knee from 1900 to 1920 paralleled the tension that also played out in how and why the US Dakota Wars were remembered in that period. While retired Major General Miles worked to help Lakota survivors at Wounded Knee, Episcopalian Reverend Dr. Aaron McGaffey Beede worked to help Lakota survivors reclaim their narratives from Whitestone Hill and the US Dakota Wars.

Grua's monograph is monumentally important. It engages readers with the public landscapes in the twenty-first century that are central to understanding the long arc of the US Dakota Wars: this started with the Battle of Ash Hollow on September 2-3, 1855, on the Platte River in central Nebraska; was ignited separately with the Spirit Lake Massacre in northwestern Iowa in 1857; came to a full roar with the US Dakota Wars in Minnesota and Dakota Territory from 1862 to 1865; and continued well up to the Battle of Greasy Grass/Little Bighorn in June 1876. With Grua's study, we know that Colonel Forsyth did not bring this long running war to an end at Wounded Knee in 1890. Because of Grua, we see how Miles and others continued to struggle with the dominant narrative well into the first decades of the twentieth century.

Grua's study, and others like it, takes on new meaning when read within the public sites where the events played out, in South Dakota, North Dakota, Montana, Wyoming, Minnesota, Nebraska, Iowa, and Saskatchewan. At each of these sites (whether a military fort, native encampment, skirmish line, battlefield, massacre site, or museum), one can still view, study, and read the chronology of material culture: the memorials, signage, prayer ties, official and unofficial narratives, tobacco offerings, and the landscape itself. Current residents of that landscape also move the narrative in unexpected ways and directions. That important sense of history is recaptured through this dialogue with the past. When we engage with the past, we rescue and breathe new life into it. In this vein, Grua not only looks at a troubling topic in American and world history but also pushes the scholarship in new and needed directions. His monograph is a welcome addition to the canon of American and North American history.

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