

Guided Notes (Teacher)

There are dark days in history. Usually they dawn without a hint of being anything but ordinary...yet end with everybody knowing the day's events won't be forgotten.

A dark day in South Dakota history happened December 29, **1890**. It was winter, but the day dawned sunny, warm, and still along Wounded Knee Creek in southwestern South Dakota.

Colonel James Forsyth of the **Seventh Cavalry** knew Big Foot's journey off the reservation would scare some South Dakotans, even though the group certainly was no war party. Big Foot had about **350** people with him, including many women and children. About a hundred were men who could be considered warriors. Many of those men had guns...and Forsyth told Big Foot his people had to turn over all weapons and then go directly to Pine Ridge, 17 miles away. So the morning of December 29, Big Foot's people handed over guns, knives, axes, and even **crow bars**.

Among the first to die was Big Foot. Eighty-four Minneconjou men, **44** women, and **18** children died that day. More were wounded, and some of them died from those wounds later. Thirty-one of the 470 Cavalry soldiers were killed.

In today's world, when things go terribly wrong, **politicians** and the **media** are often blamed, fairly or unfairly. The same was true in 1890. Senator Richard Pettigrew believed in Dakota for Dakotans—meaning he thought U. S. government jobs in the state should be filled by South Dakotans. After South Dakota became a state in 1889, Pettigrew worked to replace many government employees, including Indian agents on reservations. At Pine Ridge Pettigrew got a political supporter, Daniel Royer, appointed agent.

And in 1890, people who didn't understand the American Indian culture were witnessing something they found quite fearsome: a ceremony called the **Ghost Dance**.

On South Dakota reservations men, women, and children danced with such intensity that they sometimes collapsed in exhaustion. That intensity scared the inexperienced Indian **agents**, and they tried to stop the ceremony.

Wounded Knee marked the end of major **violence** between the United States Army and American Indians. It also opened eyes throughout the United States and around the world. In 1890, most thought the Indian Wars to be long over. Many believed American Indians were eager to drop their traditional way of life, or were content living on remote reservations.

Wounded Knee opened eyes again, 83 years later. It was no coincidence that American Indian Movement leaders chose Wounded Knee in **1973** for an 11-week take-over. They told people worldwide that conditions still weren't good for many American Indians.

Wounded Knee, even the name sounds painful. Maybe that's as it should be—an aching reminder that fear and misunderstanding between people anywhere can lead to tragedy, and that we must learn from our dark days.