Summer 2012

Review of *Eyewitness at Wounded Knee* by Richard E. Jensen, R. Eli Paul, and John E. Carter

Dawn G. Marsh
Purdue University

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/greatplainsquarterly

Part of the American Studies Commons, Cultural History Commons, and the United States History Commons

http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/greatplainsquarterly/2789

Wounded Knee, Pine Ridge, the Ghost Dance are all phrases that invoke, perhaps more than any others, the senseless, prolonged acts of atrocity against Native Americans. The story of the events, peoples, and places unfolds on a bleak wintry landscape of the Northern Plains at the end of the nineteenth century. Scholars tell and retell this story, pondering the causes and failed communications, often seeking explanations or rationalizations for the assault on Sioux men, women, and children that took place in South Dakota leaving
more than 250 dead. Storytellers, poets, and screenwriters employ the frozen, barren landscapes of the Northern Plains and the terrible history of our government’s failed relationship with Native Americans through the lens of the Wounded Knee massacre.

At the core of this re-released edition of the 1991 publication is a collection of photographs that record in damning detail the Wounded Knee campsite in the immediate aftermath of the massacre. Richard Jensen, R. Eli Paul, and John E. Carter, three staff members of the Nebraska State Historical Society in 1991, offer readers an extraordinary collection of photographs, accompanied by a highly readable text, that does not necessarily offer new insights or conclusions regarding the event, but indisputably provides images that prior to 1991 were not known to most scholars. The digitally enhanced photographs in this current publication offer historians and the interested general reader new details and information about the photographers and the photographs previously unknown. The photographers—Clarence Grant Moreledge, George Trager, J. C. H. Grabill, W. R. Cross, and Solomon D. Butcher—document a diverse array of people and events.

The detailed captions provided by the modern authors, however, reveal a story of intentional misinformation, misidentifications, and distorted reenactments staged for the photographers in the days after the December massacre. As a result, this is not only a valuable record and account of Wounded Knee, but also a penetrating look at the role photographers played in how the public came to know and understand the tragic events.

DAWN G. MARSH
Department of History
Purdue University

© 2012 Center for Great Plains Studies, University of Nebraska–Lincoln