

University of Nebraska - Lincoln

DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln

---

Great Plains Quarterly

Great Plains Studies, Center for

---

1993

## Review of Wounded Knee Lest We Forget and Wounded Knee 1973: A Personal Account.

John R. Wunder

University of Nebraska-Lincoln, [jwunder1@unl.edu](mailto:jwunder1@unl.edu)

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/greatplainsquarterly>



Part of the [Other International and Area Studies Commons](#)

---

Wunder, John R., "Review of Wounded Knee Lest We Forget and Wounded Knee 1973: A Personal Account." (1993). *Great Plains Quarterly*. 794.

<https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/greatplainsquarterly/794>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Great Plains Studies, Center for at DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln. It has been accepted for inclusion in Great Plains Quarterly by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln.

*Wounded Knee Lest We Forget.* By Alvin M. Josephy, Jr., Trudy Thomas, and Jeanne Eder. Foreword by Peter Hassrick. Introduction by George P. Horse Capture. Cody, Wyoming: Buffalo Bill Historical Center, 1990. Foreword, illustrations, bibliographies, notes. iv + 60 pp. \$18.95.

*Wounded Knee 1973: A Personal Account.* By Stanley David Lyman. Edited by Floyd A. O'Neil, June K. Lyman, and Susan McKay. Foreword by Alvin M. Josephy, Jr. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1991. Introduction, photos, epilogue, additional reading, index. xxxix + 180 pp. \$30.00.

The meandering Wounded Knee Creek wanders timelessly through south central South Dakota on the Pine Ridge Reservation. Yet time seemed to stop at least twice on its banks, once at the massacre of several hundred Sioux in Big Foot's band by the Seventh Cavalry in late December 1890 and nearly a century later during the forcible takeover of the settlement of Wounded Knee by the American Indian Movement in late February 1973. Today these events are known as Wounded Knee I and Wounded Knee II.

The beautiful exhibit catalog *Wounded Knee Lest We Forget*, prepared by the Buffalo Bill Historical Center, contains five substantive sections and many lavish illustrations. The foreword and introduction explain the purposes of the booklet: to commemorate Wounded Knee I, to explain the "massacre" aspect of Wounded Knee, to identify Ghost Dance materials, and to provide a vehicle for the expression of the Sioux peoples. The excellent booklet solidly achieves its goals.

In the opening portion of Alvin Josephy's "Wounded Knee: A History," he strangely treats Wounded Knee I as a battle and assesses it in rote human terms, counting 250 Sioux and 25 cavalry dead, 50 other Indians, 37 soldiers, and two civilians, including "a halfbreed interpreter," wounded (p. 10). And he asks the question, "What had Big Foot and his people

done that brought them to such a sudden and violent end?" (p. 11). Josephy is much more eloquent after these first few pages of his essay where he recapitulates the old Wounded Knee I history with its focus on the U.S. army. He later successfully attempts to understand why the deaths occurred, and he contributes greatly to any possible understanding. Josephy concludes that "it is certain that the white ignorance about the Indians, together with a 400-year heritage of avarice, racism, and conflict, were at the root of Wounded Knee" (p. 27).

"Crisis and Creativity: The Ghost Dance Art Style," by Trudy Thomas, describes and illustrates Ghost Dance artifacts and analyzes Ghost Dance art. Less helpful are the statements that Plains Indians were all nomadic mounted warriors and that the traditional culture of Plains peoples was "brought to a close" after 1870. More intriguing are Thomas's suggestions that Ghost Dance art is related to Sun Dance art, her excellent discussion of Ghost Dance art designs, and her conclusion that Ghost Dance art primarily portrayed a healing rather than a hostile message.

Jeanne Eder's outstanding article, "Massacre at Wounded Knee, 1890: Descendants of Indian Survivors Speak," contains important original material collected through an extensive oral history project. Sioux elders and relatives of those murdered speak, some for the first time, about the atrocities committed at Wounded Knee I, and Eder has organized her essay to take full advantage of these new and special sources. *Wounded Knee Lest We Forget* presents useful discussions of history and art and should be obtained for all academic libraries as well as considered for use in Native American history classes.

Less successful is *Wounded Knee 1973*, an original account based upon the journal entries of a mid-level BIA bureaucrat recorded during the Wounded Knee, South Dakota, occupation of 1973. Stanley Lyman was superintendent at the Pine Ridge Reservation when AIM took over the village of Wounded Knee to symbolize and dramatize Native American grievances. The new Self Determination policies of the Nixon Administration had heightened expecta-

tations for Indians before actual practical benefits could be achieved, and several explosions occurred, of which Wounded Knee II was the largest.

There were great human costs to Wounded Knee II. Lyman documents his own sufferings and those of some of the Oglala people at Pine Ridge. He states clearly that he favored the mixed-blood tribal government of Dick Wilson and the BIA infrastructure. He vigorously opposed AIM, AIM sympathizers, the press, and the Department of Justice. The tragic Lyman does not seem to have the slightest idea about why the occupation was happening. He thinks his role with the BIA is that of a reformer, supporting tribal government, but he is constantly manipulating that government. He is under great pressure, but then he takes time off for dinner at a country club and thinks he deserves this more often. Eventually Lyman is reduced to worrying about food at roadblocks, and he resents the fact that the Justice Department and AIM have deprived him of his power and position. His wife includes some of her thoughts, and his son Martin bitterly postulates that Wounded Knee II was caused by outside agitators sympathetic to the likes of Martin Luther King, Jr. The document's remarkable candor is its strength.

The diary is preceded by an introduction by Floyd O'Neil and a foreword by Alvin Josephy. Josephy recognizes the most important aspect of this book, that Lyman undergoes subtle changes during the course of the narrative, and he correctly assesses the impact of Wounded Knee II.

O'Neil, however, cannot move beyond the confidences of a friend to look at Wounded Knee II objectively. The introduction, with its pro-Wilson and anti-Self Determination viewpoint is in many ways an extreme extension of the diary. It is also historically inaccurate. For example, although O'Neil thinks the Kennedy Administration ended termination, not only did it not end termination, but it continued it with the Northern Ponca in 1962. Termination was officially stopped by the Nixon administration, the same administration that was trying to resolve Wounded Knee II. Moreover, O'Neil—

and actually Lyman—does not clearly understand the Indian New Deal basis for tribal governments and the problems their creation made for Pine Ridge and other reservations.

O'Neil offers glorification and politicization rather than edification. For example, he describes Superintendent Lyman as "a practical man in implementing programs, yet . . . always an idealist." Lyman's idealism to O'Neil was "reinforced by his wife [O'Neil's co-editor]; both represented that deep loyalty to community and country that is far less present in recent times" (p. xxi). O'Neil's brief epilogue explains that Lyman left Pine Ridge to protect Indian water rights with the BIA in Phoenix. Lyman still believes Wounded Knee II prevented industry and private enterprise from providing the Pine Ridge Oglalas with needed jobs. This is the stuff of which myths and the "Big Lie" are made.

It is not at all clear why this book was published. The diary is important and should be available in a manuscript collection. The foreword is a brief statement of some use. The introduction is not scholastically sound.

*Wounded Knee Lest We Forget* and *Wounded Knee 1973* in different ways underscore two tragedies of the American past that flow from misunderstanding, fear, and conquest.

JOHN R. WUNDER  
Department of History  
University of Nebraska—Lincoln