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Review of Eyewitness at Wounded Knee.

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Eyewitness at Wounded Knee. By Richard E. Jensen, R. Eli Paul, and John E. Carter. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1991. Foreword, maps, photographs, notes, references, list of photograph repositories, index. xii + 210 pp. \$40.00.

What happened at Wounded Knee Creek on 29 December 1890, was not a battle but a

massacre by soldiers of the families comprising Big Foot's band of Minneconjou Lakotas. Surrounded, desperately outnumbered and outgunned, provoked into a hopeless firefight, they ran and were slaughtered to the tiniest infant by mounted soldiers who hunted them for "several hours" (p. 19) and some three miles. About three hundred Lakotas were killed. Because Bigfoot's men had engaged the soldiers, the atrocity has been masked as a battle. Indeed, twenty-eight soldiers received medals of honor for participating in the massacre and associated activities.

The photographs documenting that episode are collected here for the first time by three authors employed by the Nebraska State Historical Society. Their introductory essays examine the roles of three distinct groups: Jensen writes about the Lakotas, Paul about the U.S. Army, and Carter about the photographers and journalists who covered the story. In a foreword, the former director of the Society, who "grew up near the battlefield" (p. xi), casts the atrocity within the tired conception of "clash of cultures, of failed government Indian policy, and of the end of the frontier" (ibid.). The authors uphold that conception in their account of this phase of the genocidal American invasion of Lakota lands, never questioning the prerogatives of the invading population's government. Nevertheless, by making the photographs available along with much relevant information, they have produced a valuable book.

Jensen's account is in keeping with the New history of U.S.-Indian relations in that it incorporates ethnohistorical material. He cites a number of interviews with survivors of the massacre but ignores the living testimony preserved among descendants of the survivors and recounted, for example, in the film *Wiping the Tears of Seven Generations* (Gary Rhine and Fidel Moreno, Kifaru Productions). Thus he falls short of the promised "fresh look at the Indian side of Wounded Knee" (p. xi).

Paul refutes the conception of the "events of 1890-91" as "the last Indian war, and

Wounded Knee as the war's last battle" (p. 25). He describes instead a police action by troops "intent on upholding the law, restoring order, and protecting property" (ibid.). According to that conception, the Ghost Dancers were dissidents. Paul does not develop the conception further to consider whether the prolonged slaughter of noncombatants was a police riot or formal genocide.

Carter depicts the U.S. military buildup at Pine Ridge as "a modern news story, with war correspondents from major newspapers and wire services on the scene . . ." (p. 39). This splendid little media event was a commercial opportunity for photographers, five of whom made most of the photographs. No photographer witnessed the massacre.

Twenty-six photographs illustrate the text and notes, and 113 comprise the body of the book. Images include scenes of the Pine Ridge agency town; Lakotas, soldiers, and U.S. agents; historic sites; and scenes of the aftermath of the violence, including the famous photos of the frozen dead. Legends (captions) by Jensen and Paul, like the essays, reflect the authors' preferred sources.

The striking design of this coffee table book reflects the black tone of an episode of brutal repression. For better or worse, an unconventional page design discourages any reading of the text. Eerie and beautiful, the visual effect celebrates photography within a hideous context. The photographs and the ongoing discussion of the atrocity are part of our collective historical legacy. That legacy and the designer's vision warrant the purchase and study of this book.

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