

The Ghost Dance 1890: *Should You Dance?*

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DIRECTION: Analyze the following documents. Use the documents and your knowledge of American history, to answer the questions that follow each document. Your answers will help you write a short essay related to the documents.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT:

Massacre At Wounded Knee, 1890

The hope of the Ghost Dance

On the morning of December 29, 1890, the Sioux chief Big Foot and some 350 of his followers camped on the banks of Wounded Knee creek. Surrounding their camp was a force of U.S. troops charged with the responsibility of arresting Big Foot and disarming his warriors. The scene was tense. Trouble had been brewing for months.

The once proud Sioux found their free-roaming life destroyed, the buffalo gone, themselves confined to reservations dependent on Indian Agents for their existence. In a desperate attempt to return to the days of their glory, many sought salvation in a new mysticism preached by a Paiute shaman called Wovoka. Emissaries from the Sioux in South Dakota traveled to Nevada to hear his words. Wovoka called himself the Messiah and prophesied that the dead would soon join the living in a world in which the Indians could live in the old way surrounded by plentiful game. A tidal wave of new soil would cover the earth, bury the whites, and restore the prairie. To hasten the event, the Indians were to dance the Ghost Dance. Many dancers wore brightly colored shirts emblazoned with images of eagles and buffaloes. These "Ghost Shirts" they believed would protect them from the bluecoats' bullets. During the fall of 1890, the Ghost Dance spread through the Sioux villages of the Dakota reservations, revitalizing the Indians and bringing fear to the whites. A desperate Indian Agent at Pine Ridge wired his superiors in Washington, "Indians are dancing in the snow and are wild and crazy...We need protection and we need it now. The leaders should be arrested and confined at some military post until the matter is quieted, and this should be done now." The order went out to arrest Chief Sitting Bull at the Standing Rock Reservation. Sitting Bull was killed in the attempt on December 15. Chief Big Foot was next on the list.

When he heard of Sitting Bull's death, Big Foot led his people south to seek protection at the Pine Ridge Reservation. The army intercepted the band on December 28 and brought them to the edge of the Wounded Knee to camp. The next morning the chief, racked with pneumonia and dying, sat among his warriors and powwowed with the army officers. Suddenly the sound of a shot pierced the early morning gloom. Within seconds the charged atmosphere erupted as Indian braves scurried to retrieve their discarded rifles and troopers fired volley after volley into the Sioux camp. From the heights above, the army's Hotchkiss guns raked the Indian teepees with grapeshot. Clouds of gun smoke filled the air as men, women and children scrambled for their lives. Many ran for a ravine next to the camp only to be cut down in a withering cross fire.

When the smoke cleared and the shooting stopped, approximately 300 Sioux were dead, Big Foot among them. Twenty-five soldiers lost their lives. As the remaining troopers began the grim task of removing the dead, a blizzard swept in from the North. A few days later they returned to complete the job. Scattered fighting continued, but the massacre at Wounded Knee effectively squelched the Ghost Dance movement and ended the Indian Wars. *If you were at Wounded Knee Creek would you have risked your life to participate in the Ghost Dance?*

<http://www.eyewitnesstohistory.com/pfknee.htm>

Document #3

[Second Annual Message to Congress](#), December 6, 1830

Jackson announces Indian Removal nearing consumation; the Choctaw and Chickasaw peoples agree to relocation; this development will induce other tribes to follow; states his good-will toward aboriginal people;

"Toward the aborigines of the country no one can indulge a more friendly feeling than myself, or would go further in attempting to reclaim them from their wandering habits and make them a happy, prosperous people." -- *Andrew Jackson*

<http://www.synaptic.bc.ca/ejournal/jackson.htm>

6. What type of feelings did Andrew Jackson have for the aborigines?
7. What type of habits did he suggest the Indians had?
8. What did he hope would happen as a result of relocation of the Choctaw Indians?

Document #4

The whole world is coming,
A nation is coming, a nation is coming,
The eagle has brought the message to the tribe.
The Father says so, the Father says so.
Over the whole earth they are coming,
The buffalo are coming, the buffalo are coming,
The crow has brought the message to the tribe,
The Father says so, the Father says so.

The Ghost Dance religion promised an apocalypse in the coming years during which time the earth would be destroyed, only to be recreated with the Indians as the inheritors of the new earth. According to the prophecy, the recent times of suffering for Indians had been brought about by their sins, but now they had withstood enough under the whites. With the earth destroyed, white people would be obliterated, buried under the new soil of the spring that would cover the land and restore the prairie. The buffalo and antelope would return, and deceased ancestors would rise to once again roam the earth, now free of violence, starvation, and disease.

<http://www.bgsu.edu/departments/acs/1890s/woundedknee/WKghost.html>

9. How did the Indians think the ghost dance would help them stay on their land?
10. What would happen to the White man according to the dance?
11. What does it mean in the song; "Over the whole earth they are coming"?

12. What were the Indians hoping to be free of?

Document #5



Picture #1



Picture #2



Picture #3



Picture

#4 <http://www.woundedknee.net/images/3/album.php>

13. According to the pictures, what time of the year did the soldiers surround the Sioux Indians?

14. According to Pictures #2, what conditions were the Indians forced to live in?

15. How were the Indians dressed in picture #3?

16. What type of weapons did the Indians have?

17. How were the Indians transported for burial?

Document 6

With only their bare hands to fight back, the Indians tried to defend themselves, but the incident deteriorated further into bloody chaos, and the 350 unarmed Indians were outmatched and outnumbered by the nearly 500 U.S. soldiers.

The majority of the massacre fatalities occurred during the initial ten to twenty minutes of the incident, but the firing lasted for several hours as the army chased after those who tried to escape into the nearby ravine. According to recollections by some of the Indian survivors, the soldiers cried out "Remember the Little Bighorn" as they sportingly hunted down those who fled -- evidence to them that the massacre was in revenge of Custer's demise at Little Bighorn in 1876.

(Recorded by Santee Sioux, Sid Byrd, from oral histories of several survivors.)

Many of the injured died of exposure in the freezing weather, and several days after the incident the dead were strewn as far as approximately two to five miles away from the original site. By mid-afternoon on

December 29, 1890 the indiscriminate slaughter ceased. Nearly three-hundred men (including Chief Big Foot), women, and children -- old and young -- were dead on the frosty banks of Wounded Knee Creek. Twenty-nine soldiers also died in the melee, but it is believed that most of the military casualties were a result of "friendly" crossfire that occurred during the fighting frenzy. Twenty-three soldiers from the Seventh Cavalry were later awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor for the slaughter of defenseless Indians at Wounded Knee.

<http://www.bgsu.edu/departments/acs/1890s/woundedknee/WKmscr.html>

18. How many Indians died in the massacre and how did most of them die?

19. How long did the massacre last?

20. How did the 29 soldiers die in the massacre?

21. Why did the Seventh Cavalry get awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor?

Now you are ready to write your essay, using your own knowledge and the answers you have found in the documents.

QUESTION:

Explain the reasons why the Ghost Dance at Wounded Knee was such a threat to the expansion of the west during 1890. Should the Sioux Native Americans have continued with the legend of the Ghost Dance or should they have gone peacefully onto the reservation area given to them?

Rubric Checklist

Does your essay:

- **Address all aspects of the question by analyzing, and interpreting at least four documents.**
- **Include information provided by the document.**
- **Incorporate relevant background information that addresses your theme**
- **Support your arguments with facts.**
- **Include a clear and logical format**
- **Have a summation of the theme.**