

THE MASSACRE AT WOUNDED KNEE CREEK

THE SPEAKER



Dr. Lani Van Eck is a cultural anthropologist who cofounded Wounded Knee: The Museum in Wall, SD. She has conducted research with the Lakota people on Pine Ridge Reservation since the museum opened in 2003. Oral histories, recorded testimony, and fieldwork on the reservation itself have all contributed to her unique perspective on the Wounded Knee massacre.

Working with the only surviving great-grandson of the legendary Lakota leader, Sitting Bull, Dr. Van Eck helped to create a biography called Sitting Bull: His Life and Legacy (Gibbs Smith Publisher, 2009). This work is based on the oral history passed down through generations of Sitting Bull's descendants.

Noted for her storytelling, Dr. Van Eck weaves the events surrounding the massacre at Wounded Knee into a dramatic depiction of the people and events surrounding the last major military action against Native peoples in the United States.



THE PRELUDE

By 1890, the United States was a dynamic, expanding nation. An explosion of inventions changed the existence of virtually every American. Population was booming as new states joined the Union and thriving settlements sprang up across the country.

The displaced and sequestered Native peoples, confined to reservation lands, found that their golden age had passed. For them, the present time was marked by hardship and prejudice, by laws and regulations designed to destroy their cultures and force them to follow the White Man's Road. A way of life was dying rapidly.

In desperation, many people turned to a new religious movement which promised the return of the old ways, a renewal of the earth, and a revitalization of the Native cultures. This movement spread like wildfire through 30 tribes in 14 states. To the dominant culture of the United States, this religion, dubbed the "Ghost Dance", threatened the future they were building. The stage was set for an ultimate confrontation.

THE PRESENTATION

"The Massacre at Wounded Knee Creek" is a two-hour multimedia event describing that confrontation. It includes

- The untold story: An examination of the cultural, political, and economic factors leading up to this incident, including new information uncovered by the speaker
- Comprehensive overview of the last major military action of the U.S. against the Native peoples of this country
- Presentation based on meticulous research of historical records, personal papers, and oral histories of the descendents of survivors of the massacre which formed the basis for exhibits displayed at Wounded Knee: The Museum
- Balanced perspective that considers both sides of the story
- Vivid description of the event itself
- Analysis of the continuing importance of Wounded Knee for present-day Native peoples
- Presentation that promotes intercultural dialogue by providing a common knowledge base for both cultures, filling knowledge gaps for non-Natives
- Over 50 rare archival photographs and hand-drawn maps from the 19th century
- Music

Some little-known facts about Wounded Knee:

- The 7th Cavalry had four Hotchkiss guns, cannons firing one-foot-long shells at a total rate of 50 per minute
- Thirty Medals of Honor were awarded – 18 for Wounded Knee and 12 for actions around that incident
- Black Jack Pershing, Buffalo Bill Cody, Black Elk, and Sitting Bull were among prominent historical figures directly involved in events around the massacre



FOR MORE INFORMATION, PLEASE CONTACT

Dr. Lani Van Eck

Phone: (734) 424-2099 (between 9:00 a.m. and 3:00 p.m.)

Email: lani.vaneck@yahoo.com

THE AFTERMATH

Native tribes long separated by geographic isolation, language, and cultural differences have found common ground and a new audience through world-wide communication networks. In just the last ten years the Wounded Knee Massacre has become a symbol for all native peoples of the injustices they have all endured. Tribes embrace the Wounded Knee massacre as if it were their own people's tragedy. The Wounded Knee massacre is rapidly becoming social glue that binds indigenous peoples.

- Wounded Knee: The Museum has become a focal point. It is the sole physical location at which the information about Wounded Knee has been gathered into one place. Because of this, it is a destination for those around the world who seek to understand this historical event.
- Visitors to the museum include representatives from many different Native peoples of North America. Even traditional enemies of the Lakota, like Chippewa and Crow, come to pay their respects to those fallen at Wounded Knee.
- One of the roles of anthropologists is to identify, analyze, and report social movements. My continuing association with the museum has allowed me to observe the global nature of responses to Wounded Knee. White Americans who do not know the facts about the incident display shock and guilt. Natives and others who do know the story burn with anger and grief at the injustice and a feeling of solidarity with the victims.
- This presentation is designed to educate non-Natives about Wounded Knee and to highlight the ongoing importance of this event for Native cultures. The intent is to create a common knowledge base that promotes dialogue.

Questions:

1. Why do people from all the different Native American tribes know all the characters involved in the Wounded Knee massacre?
2. Why do they all know what happened in minute detail? Their understanding of the entire event includes every component: geography, chronology, participants, actions, and outcomes.
3. Why are they so angry about it? Why are they all so deeply sad about it?
4. Why do other cultures respond so strongly to this? The museum attracts visitors from every settled continent on the planet (Asians, Europeans, Africans, Australians, South Americans). We have worked with numerous documentary film crews from North America, Europe, and Asia, including Japanese television and multiple BBC crews.
5. Why do they all know the story blow-by-blow?
6. Why are white Americans so ill-informed about this part of their history? Why are they even unaware that the rest of the world knows all about it?
7. Does the rest of the world still expect some resolution through dialogue aimed at redressing this injustice?