

## **WOUNDED KNEE, 1890: HISTORICAL EVIDENCE ON TRIAL IN THE CLASSROOM**

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On December 29, 1890, the Seventh Cavalry of the United States Army killed approximately 300 Sioux Indians near Wounded Knee Creek in South Dakota. The Army had come to disarm and detain the Sioux in order to suppress the unrest associated with an emerging religious movement known as the Ghost Dance. While the soldiers were disarming the Sioux and separating the men from the women and children, a shot was fired. In the chaos that followed, soldiers gunned down and stabbed Sioux men, women, and children. Some who did not die instantly crawled away only to freeze to death in the coming blizzard. The day's bloodshed not only represented a tragic defeat for the Sioux, but also the definitive conquest of the American West by the U.S. Army. While Indian resistance would reemerge (and native population would increase dramatically) in the next century, the incident at Wounded Knee marked a turning point in American history.

Studying the incident at Wounded Knee in a high school or college history class offers an excellent opportunity for students to understand not only important historical content but also essential historical skills. The documentary evidence related to Wounded Knee provides diverse and conflicting perspectives and compels students to analyze and interpret evidence just as professional historians do. Instead of receiving a straightforward textbook description of the incident at Wounded Knee, students confront the historical record to construct their own interpretation of historical cause and effect. To make the use of primary sources an explicit and self-conscious part of the curriculum, I have designed and implemented a mock trial in which students participate as attorneys, witnesses, and members of the jury in a collective effort to interpret history. Students make use of primary source materials in order to conduct a "trial" of the U.S. Army for the murder of 300 Sioux Indians. Each time this mock trial has been performed in my classes, students' interpretation of evidence and the jury's verdict have varied, and students have learned that our national history is more than a compendium of facts—that it is also a story we tell about ourselves that remains subject to revision and reinterpretation. It is in constructing such stories that we discover ourselves in both the past and present.

### **Background**

The incident at Wounded Knee—whether described as "battle" or "massacre"—was the tragic consequence of cultural, economic, and military conflict between the U.S. Army and the Sioux Indians dating back to the 1860s. The story of this conflict is not only historically rich in its own right, but also provides a dramatic lens through which to study U.S.–Indian relations in the nineteenth century.

In the late 1860s, the Sioux leader Red Cloud successfully led the resistance to white encroachment in the territory of the Powder River. The Treaty of Fort Laramie in 1868 formalized the peace settlement between Red Cloud and the U.S. Army and assured the Sioux rights to extensive territory on the "Great Sioux Reservation." Red Cloud's victory was brief, and the terms of the treaty would be consistently and violently contested over the next several decades.

The language of the Treaty of 1868 was clear: "No white person or persons shall be permitted to settle upon or occupy any portion of the territory, or without the consent of the Indians to pass through the same." Yet General George Armstrong Custer and his Seventh Cavalry defied the treaty in 1875 by passing through the Black Hills in search of gold. The allure of gold led the U.S. government to reconsider its commitment to the Treaty of 1868, and Indian agents were dispatched to the Black Hills to convince the Sioux to sell their land. The continuing conflicts over Sioux territory led to the famous Battle of Little Bighorn, where Crazy Horse and myriad bands of Sioux annihilated Custer and his soldiers in 1876. Angered by defeat, the U.S. Army viewed Little Bighorn as evidence that the Sioux themselves had violated the Treaty of 1868, despite the fact that the U.S. Cavalry had attacked first. Over the next decade, the U.S. government stepped up its efforts to secure Sioux lands and confine Indians to separate reservations. Crazy Horse was killed in September 1877, and Red Cloud and several other Sioux leaders surrendered to reservation life out of fear of starvation.

The American conquest of Sioux territory continued into the 1880s along similar lines of both acquiescence and active resistance. When the U.S. government sought to convince the Sioux to sell nine million acres of Sioux land for white settlement, Sitting Bull, the Hunkpapa Sioux leader, led the opposition. The U.S. government, however, was determined to shroud its land-grab with an aura of legitimacy. U.S. Indian agents sought to obtain the signatures of three-fourths of adult Sioux males in order to abrogate the Treaty of 1868. They succeeded in doing so in 1889, but only by excluding Sitting Bull and his followers from the final council discussions. In the year before the fateful incident at Wounded Knee Creek, the Sioux were faced with the disappearance of their land and their way of life.

In 1889, the cultural movement known as the Ghost Dance began to take shape across the American West, from Nevada and Utah to the Dakotas and the Great Plains. A Paiute Indian named Wovoka described apocalyptic visions and taught that Indians could prepare for paradise by adopting certain religious ceremonies. Successful performance of the Ghost Dance would ensure the return of the buffalo herds, the reunification of all Indians, past and present, and the disappearance of whites from Indian life. By the fall of 1890, the message of the Ghost Dance had reached Sitting Bull and the Sioux. The messianic ritual offered cultural support for their continued resistance to the U.S. Army and white expansion.

As the Ghost Dance spread, white settlers and politicians interpreted the ceremony as hostile and requested military protection. In November 1890, agents of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs banned the Ghost Dance and ordered the disparate

bands of Sioux to assemble at local Indian agencies. Indians who mistrusted the government's motives retreated into the Badlands; among them was Sitting Bull. As part of their strategy to suppress the Ghost Dance and its promise of liberation, Major General Nelson A. Miles and Indian Agent James McLaughlin ordered Sitting Bull's arrest. On December 15, Indian police attempted to arrest him, and in the fight that followed the Sioux leader was slain. His remaining followers traveled to join Big Foot's Minneconjous band of Sioux, who were headed to the Pine Ridge Reservation. Big Foot and his 370 followers were stopped short of Pine Ridge, on the banks of Wounded Knee Creek, on December 28, 1890. The next morning witnessed their massacre.

### Teaching Activities and Outcomes

As a way of concluding a unit on the nineteenth-century American West, I have used the following strategies and materials to create a mock trial on the incident at Wounded Knee. The activities allow students to examine the culture of the Ghost Dance, the status of U.S.-Indian relations leading up to the incident, and the events themselves on December 29, 1890. The structure of the activity requires that students make use of primary source materials in order to interpret historical phenomena. The multiple roles required in the trial make room for various student skill levels and public speaking abilities. While offering a variety of ways for students to participate in and learn from the activity, the mock trial format also ensures that all students grapple with and respond to historical evidence.

I have implemented this mock trial in regular U.S. history courses with high school sophomores, juniors, and seniors. Successful implementation of the trial normally requires between three and four class periods of an hour each (not including out-of-class student preparation time). With changes in preparation time, outside readings, and written requirements, the activity could be easily modified for different age groups and skill levels, including AP U.S. history and college-level courses.

- Assign students specific roles. Depending on class size, two to three students may serve as prosecuting attorneys, and two to three as defense attorneys. Up to nine students are needed as specific witnesses. Student witnesses represent actual historical figures or, in one case, a composite of several people. Mrs. Z.A. Parker observed the Ghost Dance on the Pine Ridge Reservation in June of 1890; American Horse and Turning Hawk were Indian witnesses to the incident on December 29; Major General Nelson A. Miles and General Thomas H. Ruger served in the U.S. Army at this time; Philip Wells was a mixed-blood Sioux who served as an interpreter for the Army; Alice War Bonnet was a thirteen-year-old witness; James Mooney worked for the U.S. Bureau of Ethnology and published reports and testimony related to the incident (his role in the trial is basically that of an expert witness); and an "Indian Agent" may serve as a composite character representing agents Perain A. Palmer, James McLaughlin, and Daniel Royer of the Bureau of Indian Affairs. The remaining students in the class serve as members of the jury. The teacher may elect to act as judge or appoint a student to do so.

- Distribute primary documents to attorneys and witnesses (witnesses may be given access to all primary sources or only the particular document(s) pertaining to their own "character"). Provide members of the jury with general background reading and documentation so that they understand the context of the incident and the basic events without being predisposed to sympathize with either side.

- Instruct attorneys to review all evidence, prepare opening and closing statements, and write at least five questions for each witness. These questions should begin very specifically and then become more open-ended to ensure that members of the jury understand exactly who each witness is and also what story each has to tell. Attorneys should be instructed to assume that the jury has no prior knowledge about the case.

- Instruct each witness that he or she must memorize the evidence contained within the relevant primary source material. The student should perform on the witness stand as if he or she were actually the historical figure being represented. When witnesses are not testifying, they should take notes on what other witnesses say so that they, too, can come to their own conclusions about the incident at Wounded Knee.

- Advise members of the jury that during the trial they will need to take notes on the evidence described by each witness. Tell them that in between each witness, they will have the opportunity to ask the judge clarifying questions about what they have heard. After closing arguments have been presented, the jury will deliberate in front of their peers. In order to force close scrutiny of the evidence, the jury must decide unanimously whether or not the death of all 300 Sioux was justified, considering the cultural and military context of the incident. Tell members of the jury that in order to convict the U.S. Army of unjustifiable homicide (murder), the evidence must demonstrate beyond a reasonable doubt that the Army had no justifiable cause to behave the way it did. If all jurors are not convinced beyond a reasonable doubt, they must render a verdict of innocent. This strict standard not only matches up with the legal doctrine of "innocent until proven guilty," but it also forces the jurors' deliberations to go beyond the understandable sympathy they feel for the Sioux. Allow the jury to debate for an adequate period of time so that as many interpretations as possible are elicited. Finally, have the jury vote by roll call.

Five different classes of mine have conducted this mock trial, and in three out of the five cases the jury has returned a verdict of innocent. On each of these occasions, one or two members of the jury have argued that, given the context of the Sioux's relations with the army, the cavalry was understandably prone to take more extreme measures. This interpretation has angered the majority of the students in the room, especially the prosecuting attorneys. Yet the argument has served to provoke vital discussions and interpretations about Wounded Knee, and the resulting picture of the events of 1890 has turned out to be much more complicated than the students—or their teacher—would have imagined. As one group of student defense attorneys wrote in their opening arguments, "While the U.S. government may have, in fact, treated the Indians unfairly, that is not the issue here today. We are here today simply based on

the fact that the U.S. military was responding to hostile behavior coming from the Indians, which was based on the Ghost Dances and earlier bitterness from the Battle of Little Bighorn." As objectionable as this statement might seem to some, it reflects the students' ability to appreciate historical perspective and context based on their interpretations of primary source materials. History teachers can ask for little more.

- When the jury has reached a decision, lead a class discussion based on questions similar to the following: Why did members of the jury rule the way they did? What was the most important evidence for them? What was the least important? Why do the student attorneys think they "won" or "lost" the case? In what ways might they have been more persuasive? What frustrated them about the jury's interpretation of the evidence? What did witnesses think the importance of their testimony was? Did their testimony vindicate the actions of the U.S. Army or not? Was it contradicted or complemented by the testimony of other witnesses?

- When the trial is over, remind students that they will be turning in their trial materials. Attorneys turn in their opening and closing statements (one page each) and their prepared questions. Witnesses turn in their notes from the trial as well as a one-page explanation of what conclusion they think *their* evidence points to in the trial. Jurors turn in their notes from the trial and a one-page explanation of what evidence led them to their verdict and why. Through these assignments, all students, regardless of their role in the trial, confront and interpret primary documents in order to construct a historical narrative.

The quality of student work produced as part of the mock trial has consistently been of high quality. All students have been able to construct interesting historical arguments based on evidence they have read, heard, and acted out. Perhaps it is this mix of learning styles that has also contributed to the students' enjoyment of the experience. The mock trial has generated enthusiasm among students that standard class discussions do not, and the fact that the outcome of the trial depends on student argumentation has created a higher level of student commitment to the curriculum.

### Selected Resources

The primary sources available for this lesson come from a variety of print and online sources. The PBS documentary series *The West* has a companion website called "New Perspectives on the West" at <<http://www.pbs.org/weta/thewest>>. Most of the witnesses' testimony can be found there. The testimony of interpreter Philip Wells is available online at "Eyewitness: History Through the Eyes of Those Who Lived It," at <<http://www.ibiscom.com>>. The Jackdaw publication entitled *Wounded Knee Massacre and Ghost Dance Religion* contains the testimony of Alice War Bonnet and the Indian agents, as well as excellent reproductions of original documents. The Jackdaw also contains photographs, drawings, maps of Sioux territory, and additional primary sources that could provide the basis for more student witnesses in the mock trial. Jackdaws are available at P.O. Box 503, Amawalk, NY 10501, or 800-789-0022. The original source for much of the same primary evidence, as well as additional

documentation, is James Mooney, *The Ghost-Dance Religion and the Sioux Outbreak of 1890*, *14<sup>th</sup> Annual Report of the Bureau of American Ethnology, 1892–1893*, Part 2 (Washington DC: Government Printing Office, 1896); this collection also was published by the University of Nebraska Press in 1991. Original photographs can be found through the Library of Congress's *American Memory: Historical Collections for the National Digital Library*, online at <<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/amhome.html>>. Keyword searches for "Wounded Knee" and "Ghost Dance" will lead to appropriate photographs. Sufficient primary sources exist such that the mock trial could be expanded to accommodate varying class sizes, skill levels, time requirements, and teacher and student interest level.

Useful secondary readings come from a variety of sources, some more widely available than others. Dee Brown's *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee: An Indian History of the American West* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1970) is essential. James S. Wilson, *The Earth Shall Weep: A History of Native America* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1996), provides an interesting overview as well. Helpful and detailed background information can also be found in several reference volumes. Sharon Malinowski, Anna Sheets, Linda Schmittroth, eds., *UXL Encyclopedia of Native American Tribes* (Detroit: Gale Group, 1999), 867–888, provides a concise and very accessible summary of the Lakota Sioux from the 1700s to 1890, followed by a contemporary profile. Frederick E. Hoxie, ed., *Encyclopedia of North American Indians: Native American History, Culture, and Life from Paleo-Indians to the Present* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1996), 694–697, contains a brief entry describing the incident, told largely from the point of view of the Sioux. Howard R. Lamar, ed., *The Reader's Encyclopedia of the American West* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1977), 1289–1290 and 730–731, offers a biographical sketch of Nelson Miles and a review of the Battle of Wounded Knee. Lamar's volume, along with several other sources, cites a lower death toll from the 1890 incident, putting the number at 146 confirmed Indian fatalities. While sources disagree on the final number, the difference seems to depend on whether one is counting deaths that occurred during the actual battle, or also deaths (many of them due to exposure) that took place up to several days after the incident. Finally, Clyde A. Milner II, Carol A. O'Connor, Martha A. Sandweiss, eds., *The Oxford History of the American West* (New York: Oxford, 1994), 182, offers another concise review of the Battle of Wounded Knee.

Several videos might serve as companion pieces to teaching about Native American history and the subject of the trial. PBS's *The West* is a nine-volume series that can be checked out from some public libraries; the series can be purchased at <[www.shop.pbs.org](http://www.shop.pbs.org)>. The *Frontline* episode "The Spirit of Crazy Horse" provides an excellent and provocative overview of Sioux history, including a wonderful comparison of the incidents at Wounded Knee in 1890 and 1973. For further information, see <<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/programs/categories/info/908.html>>.

In addition to the websites previously mentioned, various online sources are relevant and useful. "Wounded Knee" is an MSNBC website that provides both a

historical overview and links to primary source excerpts. The site contains a multimedia slideshow, audio clips, maps, and photographs. With sections on "Ghost Dance," "Massacre of 1890," "Siege of 1890," and "Related Links," the site is an excellent place for student research, preparation, and further investigation into Native American history. See <<http://msnbc.com/onair/msnbc/TimeandAgain/archive/wknee/1890.asp>>. "Cankpe Opi" contains links to and excerpts from primary sources, as well as discussion of more contemporary debates about Wounded Knee. See <<http://www.dickshovel.com/Wkmassacre.html>>. The organization Native Americans@Buffalo Trails maintains a website with a descriptive chronology of events leading up to the 1890 incident at <<http://www.native-americans.org/newsletters/chronology-of-wounded-knee.htm>>. Numerous other online resources exist; the websites described here, however, provide sufficient primary source documents and photographs with which to prepare and conduct the mock trial on the Battle of Wounded Knee.

### Procedures and Roles for the Wounded Knee Mock Trial

#### Procedure

#### Student Role

Opening Statement for the Prosecution

Two or three students play the prosecuting attorneys, dividing up the duties among themselves.

Opening Statement for the Defense

Two to three students play the defense attorneys, dividing up the duties among themselves.

Witnesses

Mrs. Z.A. Parker  
 Alice War Bonnett  
 Indian Agent  
 James Mooney  
 Turning Hawk  
 American Horse  
 General Nelson Miles  
 General Thomas Ruger  
 Philip Wells

One student plays each witness.

(Witnesses may be called in the order in which they are listed. Since the testimony of each witness could support either the prosecution or the defense, no witness "represents" one side or the other. The prosecution questions each witness first, followed by the defense.)

Closing Statement for the Prosecution

Closing Statement for the Defense

Jury Deliberations

The jury may consist of as many students as necessary.

**Document One****Wovoka's Message: The Messiah Letter**

This version of Wovoka's message of the Ghost Dance was obtained by James Mooney on a trip to the West in 1891. Wovoka, a Paiute Indian from Nevada, refers to himself here by the name of Jack Wilson. Quoted in James Mooney, *The Ghost-Dance Religion and the Sioux Outbreak of 1890*, 14<sup>th</sup> Annual Report of the Bureau of American Ethnology, 1892-1893, Part 2 (Washington DC: Government Printing Office, 1896), also published by the University of Nebraska Press (1991).

When you get home you must make a dance to continue five days. Dance four successive nights, and the last night keep up the dance until the morning of the fifth day, when all must bathe in the river and then disperse to their homes. You must all do the same way.

I, Jack Wilson, love you all, and my heart is full of gladness for the gifts you have brought me. When you get home I shall give you a good cloud [rain?] which will make you feel good. I give you a good spirit and give you all good paint. I want you to come again in three months, some from each tribe there [the Indian Territory].

There will be a good deal of snow this year and some rain. In the fall there will be such a rain as I have never given you before.

Grandfather [a universal title of reverence among Indians and here meaning the messiah] says, when your friends die you must not cry. You must not hurt anybody or do harm to anyone. You must not fight. Do right always. It will give you satisfaction in life. This young man has a good father and mother. [Possibly this refers to Casper Edson, the young Arapaho who wrote down this message of Wovoka for the delegation.]

Do not tell the white people about this. Jesus is now upon the earth. He appears like a cloud. The dead are still again. I do not know when they will be here; maybe this fall or in the spring. When the time comes there will be no more sickness and everyone will be young again.

Do not refuse to work for the whites and do not make any trouble with them until you leave them. When the earth shakes [at the coming of the new world] do not be afraid. It will not hurt you.

I want you to dance every six weeks. Make a feast at the dance and have food that everybody may eat. Then bathe in the water. That is all. You will receive good words again from me some time. Do not tell lies.



## Document Two

### The Ghost Dance

Mrs. Z.A. Parker witnessed a Ghost Dance performed at White Clay Creek at Pine Ridge Reservation on June 20, 1890. Quoted in James Mooney, *The Ghost-Dance Religion and the Sioux Outbreak of 1890*, 14<sup>th</sup> Annual Report of the Bureau of American Ethnology, 1892-1893, Part 2 (Washington DC: Government Printing Office, 1896), also published by the University of Nebraska Press (1991).

I think they wore the ghost shirt or ghost dress for the first time that day. I noticed that these were all new and were worn by about seventy men and forty women. The wife of a man called Return-from-scout had seen in a vision that her friends all wore a similar robe, and on reviving from her trance she called the women together and they made a great number of the sacred garments. They were of white cotton cloth. The women's dress was cut like their ordinary dress, a loose robe with wide, flowing sleeves, painted blue in the neck, in the shape of a three-cornered handkerchief, with moon, stars, birds, etc., interspersed with real feathers, painted on the waists, letting them fall to within 3 inches of the ground, the fringe at the bottom. In the hair, near the crown, a feather was tied. I noticed an absence of any manner of head ornaments, and, as I knew their vanity and fondness for them, wondered why it was. Upon making inquiries I found they discarded everything they could which was made by white men.

The ghost shirt for the men was made of the same material—shirts and leggings painted in red. Some of the leggings were painted in stripes running up and down, others running around. The shirt was painted blue around the neck, and the whole garment was fantastically sprinkled with figures of birds, bows and arrows, sun, moon, and stars, and everything they saw in nature. Down the outside of the sleeve were rows of feathers tied by the quill ends and left to fly in the breeze, and also a row around the neck and up and down the outside of the leggings. I noticed that a number had stuffed birds, squirrel heads, etc., tied in their long hair. The faces of all were painted red with a black half-moon on the forehead or on one cheek.

As the crowd gathered about the tree the high priest, or master of ceremonies, began his address, giving them directions as to the chant and other matters. After he had spoken for about fifteen minutes they arose and formed a circle. As nearly as I could count, there were between three and four hundred persons. One stood directly behind another, each with his hands on his neighbor's shoulders. After walking about a few times, chanting, "Father, I come," they stopped marching, but remained in the circle, and set up the most fearful, heart-piercing wails I ever heard—crying, moaning, groaning, and shrieking out their grief, and naming over their departed friends and relatives, at the same time taking up handfuls of dust at their feet, washing their hands in it, and throwing it over their heads.

Finally, they raised their eyes to heaven, their hands clasped high above their heads, and stood straight and perfectly still, invoking the power of the Great Spirit to allow them to see and talk with their people who had died. This ceremony lasted about fifteen minutes, when they all sat down where they were and listened to another address, which I did not understand, but which I afterwards learned were words of encouragement and assurance of the coming messiah.

*Document Three***Lakota Accounts of the Massacre at Wounded Knee**

Excerpted from the *Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs*, 1891, volume 1, pages 179–181 (verbatim stenographic report of council held by delegations of Sioux with Commissioner of Indian Affairs, at Washington, February 11, 1891), as quoted in James Mooney, *The Ghost-Dance Religion and the Sioux Outbreak of 1890*, 14<sup>th</sup> Annual Report of the Bureau of American Ethnology, 1892–1893, Part 2 (Washington DC: Government Printing Office, 1896), also published by the University of Nebraska Press (1991).

**Turning Hawk:** When we heard that these people were coming toward our agency we also heard this. These people were coming toward Pine Ridge Agency, and when they were almost on the agency they were met by the soldiers and surrounded and finally taken to the Wounded Knee Creek, and there at a given time their guns were demanded. When they had delivered them up, the men were separated from their families, from the tipis, and taken to a certain spot. When the guns were thus taken and the men thus separated, there was a crazy man, a young man of very bad influence and in fact a nobody, among that bunch of Indians fired his gun, and of course the firing of a gun must have been the breaking of a military rule of some sort, because immediately the soldiers returned fire and indiscriminate killing followed.

**American Horse:** This man shot an officer in the army; the first shot killed this officer. I was a voluntary scout at that encounter and I saw exactly what was done, and that was what I noticed; that the first shot killed an officer. As soon as this shot was fired the Indians immediately began drawing their knives, and they were exhorted from all sides to desist, but this was not obeyed. Consequently the firing began immediately on the part of the soldiers.

**Turning Hawk:** All the men who were in a bunch were killed right there, and those who escaped that first fire got into the ravine, and as they went along up the ravine for a long distance they were pursued on both sides by the soldiers and shot down, as the dead bodies showed afterwards. The women were standing off at a different place from where the men were stationed, and when the firing began, those of the men who escaped the first onslaught went in one direction up the ravine, and then the women, who were bunched together at another place, went entirely in a different direction through an open field, and the women fared the same fate as the men who went up the deep ravine.

**American Horse:** The men were separated, as has already been said, from the women, and they were surrounded by the soldiers. Then came next the village of the Indians and that was entirely surrounded by the soldiers also. When the firing began, of course the people who were standing immediately around the young man who fired the first shot were killed right together, and then they turned their guns, Hotchkill [sic] guns, etc., upon the women who were in the lodges standing there under a flag of truce, and of course as soon as they were fired upon they fled, the men fleeing in one direction and the women running in two different directions. So that there were three general directions in which they took flight.

There was a woman with an infant in her arms who was killed as she almost touched the flag of truce, and the women and children of course were strewn all along the circular village until they were dispatched. Right near the flag of truce a mother was shot down with her infant; the child not knowing that its mother was dead was still nursing, and that especially was a very sad sight. The women as they were fleeing with their babes were killed together, shot right through, and the women who were very heavy with child were also killed. All the Indians fled in these three directions, and after most all of them had been killed a cry was made that all those who were not killed or wounded should come forth and they would be safe. Little boys who were not wounded came out of their places of refuge, and as soon as they came in sight a number of soldiers surrounded them and butchered them there.

**Document Four****Statements of General Nelson A. Miles**

From *Report of the Secretary of War, 1891*, Vol. I, pp. 133, 134, and 149, as quoted in James Mooney, *The Ghost-Dance Religion and the Sioux Outbreak of 1890, 14<sup>th</sup> Annual Report of the Bureau of American Ethnology, 1892-1893*, Part 2 (Washington DC: Government Printing Office, 1896), also published by the University of Nebraska Press (1991).

The unfortunate failure of the crops in the plains country during the years of 1889 and 1890 added to the distress and suffering of the Indians, and it was possible for them to raise but very little from the ground for self-support; in fact, white settlers have been most unfortunate, and their losses have been serious and universal throughout a large section of that country. They have struggled on from year to year; occasionally they would raise good crops, which they were compelled to sell at low prices, while in the season of drought their labor was almost entirely lost. So serious have been their misfortunes that thousands have left that country within the last few years, passing over the mountains to the Pacific slope or returning to the east of the Missouri or the Mississippi.

The Indians, however, could not migrate from one part of the United States to another; neither could they obtain employment as readily as white people, either upon or beyond the Indian reservations. They must remain in comparative idleness and accept the results of the drought—an insufficient supply of food. This created a feeling of discontent even among the loyal and well disposed and added to the feeling of hostility of the element opposed to every process of civilization.

*Telegram*

RAPID CITY, SOUTH DAKOTA, December 19, 1890.

General JOHN M. SCHOFIELD,

Commanding the Army, Washington, District of Columbia:

Replying to your long telegram, one point is of vital importance—the difficult Indian problem can not be solved permanently at this end of the line. It requires the fulfillment by Congress of the treaty obligations which the Indians were entreated and coerced into signing. They signed away a valuable portion of their reservation, and it is now occupied by white people, for which they have received nothing. They understood that ample provision would be made for their support; instead, their supplies have been reduced, and much of the time they have been living on half and two-thirds rations. Their crops, as well as the crops of the white people, for two years have been almost a total failure. The disaffection is widespread, especially among the Sioux, while the Cheyennes have been on the verge of starvation and were forced to commit depredations to sustain life. These facts are beyond question, and the evidence is positive and sustained by thousands of witnesses. Serious difficulty has been gathering for years. Congress has been in session several weeks and could in a single hour confirm the treaties and appropriate the necessary funds for their fulfillment, which their commissioners and the highest officials of the government have guaranteed to these people, and unless the officers of the army can give some positive assurance that the government intends to act in good faith with these people, the loyal element will be diminished and the hostile element increased. If the government will give some positive assurance that it will fulfill its part of the understanding with these 20,000 Sioux Indians, they can safely trust the military authorities to subjugate, control, and govern these turbulent people, and I hope that you will ask the Secretary of War and the Chief Executive to bring this matter directly to Congress.