

Grua, David W. *Surviving Wounded Knee: The Lakotas and the Politics of Identity*. Oxford: University of Oxford Press, 2016. Pp.176. Hardback: £22.99.

In the late 1880s, the Ghost Dance revitalization movement swept through the Lakota reservations of South and North Dakota stirring unease among Indian agents, army officers, and settlers who feared its millenarian thrust. By the fall of 1890 their unease had escalated to alarm, prompting President Benjamin Harrison to order troops to the reservations to maintain control. On December 15th Indian police acting on orders from the agent at Standing Rock intervened to suppress the dance there by arresting Sitting Bull, its presumed leader. In the process, they killed him and several other Lakotas, which set in motion a chain of events that would lead to catastrophe just two weeks later. Fearing a similar fate, many of the Standing Rock Ghost dancers fled south to seek refuge with Big Foot's band on the Cheyenne River Reservation. From there, Big Foot, a well-regarded peace-maker, led the combined group further south toward the Pine Ridge Agency, where he had been asked to mediate in a dispute and believed his people would be safe. Soldiers intercepted them on December 28th and redirected them to Wounded Knee, where the next morning they surrounded and disarmed the Lakotas. When a gun unexpectedly went off, the reconstituted Seventh Cavalry of Little Bighorn fame reacted by opening fire and killing more than 200 Lakotas, a high proportion of whom were women, children, and elders.

In 1973, Lakota activists and their American Indian Movement (AIM) allies occupied the same site, at heart of which now lies an obelisk erected by Lakota survivors to memorialise the massacre and mark the mass grave of their loved ones killed there. During the ensuing 71-day stand-off with heavily-armed federal agents, the activists drew attention not only to corruption in tribal governance at Pine Ridge, which was their original objective, but also to the myriad treaty violations and other wrongs and injustices endured by Native Americans since Europeans first arrived in their lands. In doing so, they harnessed and expanded on the site's already painfully emotive symbolic referents to add moral force to their protest.

Surviving Wounded Knee: The Lakotas and the Politics of Identity is not about either of these benchmark events *per se* but about memory politics in the interim years. As author David W. Grua explains, Army officers and Lakota survivors both took deliberate steps to memorialise Wounded Knee and shape how it would be remembered, each aiming to legitimise and firmly secure their own version of events on the memorial landscape, and for very different reasons. The army sought to protect and enhance its honour by deflecting blame for what in reality was an unnecessary, brutal and tragically botched operation. The Lakota survivors sought to overturn the official perception of them as "hostile" during those fateful days in 1890 in order to win compensation for their losses that was earmarked exclusively for "friendlies". Rather than an act of

greed, their quest for reparations was in keeping with Lakota tradition.

As described in some detail in this volume, the army story ranked supreme as the "official" account for a very long time, despite decades of diligent countermemory work by the Lakota survivors. But during the Vietnam War era an important shift occurred in American sensibilities that enabled the Lakota narrative to displace the army's story, in large part because it resonated with the anti-colonial sentiments and awareness of racial injustice being awakened in a war-weary public. That it could do so is attributable to the sustained efforts of Dewey Beard, his brothers and other Lakota survivors, who not only kept the story alive in Lakota oral tradition but encouraged non-Indian interlocutors to write it down. Although they never succeeded in winning compensation, the survivors did shape the narrative and ensure that the Lakota memories would eventually prevail.

Surviving Wounded Knee is logically organised to explore how Wounded Knee was "remembered, contested, and reimagined during the five decades after 1890" (3). Grua begins with a concise overview of the memory politics of Wounded Knee and a brief but effective discussion of relevant issues in memory studies more generally. He concludes with a summary of survivor engagement with memory politics, using Dewey Beard, the story's last living protagonist, as an exemplar. For the most part, he avoids using his authorial voice to detail the history of Wounded Knee and, instead, allows the story to emerge out of the contest between official memories and Lakota countermemories of what happened. In the three chapters of Part I, he examines army efforts to control the Wounded Knee story and honour the soldiers. Then, in the four chapters of Part II, he looks at Lakota efforts to win compensation for the loss of their loved ones and property, an effort that evolved over time as white allies intervened in support of their cause and the Lakotas negotiated strategic differences amongst themselves.

There are three strands to Grua's approach that warrant mention in that they not only enhance the volume's value as a contribution to memory studies, American history, and Native American studies but also its utility as a pedagogical tool. These are his focus on memory as the concept has been developed by Maurice Halbwachs¹, his detailed attention to Lakota agency and the structures that constrain it, and his positioning of the struggle for control of the memorial landscape within the race war discourse that shaped Indian-white relations from early 17th century through the 19th century and beyond. Of these, his reliance on the race war trope is the least satisfying but possibly most enlightening.

Following Halbwachs, Grua views memory as a social construction that selectively preserves the past to address present concerns. He writes that "[m]emories are constructed within social frameworks, meaning that people filter and organize their

memories according to the values and concerns espoused by whatever group or groups to which they belong." (3) On the very next page he introduces the notion of a race war discourse, by which he means the tendency to view the history of Indian-white relations as a continent-wide struggle between savagery and civilization. Thereafter he uses "race war" as shorthand for processes that may have benefited from further elaboration. This leaves one with a feeling that it, too, is serving as a filter organizing remembrance of Wounded Knee, except this time one imposed by the author himself. With its detailed discussion of this important moment in the American past and straightforward style, this book is ideal for use in undergraduate and graduate courses in a range of social science disciplines, where issues such as the one just mentioned could be constructively explored. In short, there is a lot of good material here for a skilled lecturer to work with.

DEBRA BUCHHOLTZ
Independent Scholar

¹ See Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, ed. and trans. Lewis A. Coser (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992); and Maurice Halbwachs, *The Collective Memory*, trans. Francis J. Ditter Jr and Vida Yazdi Ditter (New York: Harper Colophon Books, 1980).