

*We will survive. We have always survived. We're Lakota. We will survive this as well.*  
--Alex White Plume

## **The Lakota**

In the early 1800's, the Lakota inhabited the area that is now North and South Dakota, extending to the Big Horn Mountains in current-day Wyoming and to the Platte River in current-day Nebraska.

The Oglalas are one of the bands of the Lakota. They now reside on the 2,778,000 acres of the Pine Ridge Reservation in southwest South Dakota.

A number of statistical studies rate Pine Ridge as either the first, second, or third "most impoverished community" in the United States. The typical problems of poverty plague the Oglala people.

The White Plumes are Oglalas and live in and around the town of Manderson, SD on the Pine Ridge Reservation.

## **Treaty of Fort Laramie**

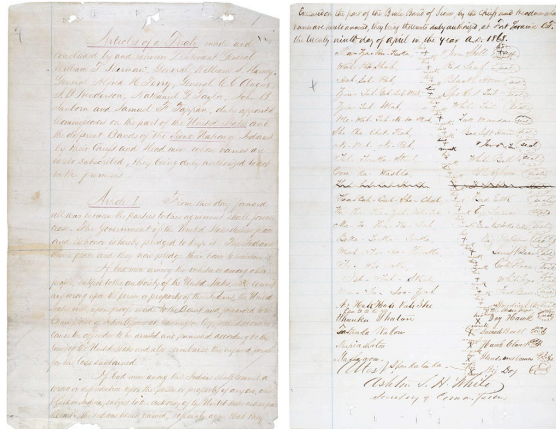


Chief Red Cloud

In 1868, the United States government signed the Treaty of Fort Laramie with Chief Red Cloud, which granted the Lakotas exclusive occupation of a huge tract of land in and around the Black Hills, the most sacred of places to the Lakota. The terms agreed to by both parties was "for the absolute and undisturbed use and occupancy of the Sioux" and prevented wasichus (white people) from settling on or even entering the territory outlined by the treaty.

The U.S. government violated the Fort Laramie Treaty in 1874, when it organized a gold-seeking expedition to the Black Hills. When the expedition found what it was looking for, the Lakota religion was subsequently outlawed in an attempt to get them to

leave the sacred area so that prospectors could mine for gold there. When that tactic failed, General George Armstrong Custer's army attacked the Lakota and Cheyenne in 1876 at the Battle of the Little Bighorn, as it is known by Americans, and the Greasy Grass, as it is known by the Lakota. Led by Chief Crazy Horse, the tribes fought back and prevailed, capturing the American flag and killing Custer in the process. This action outraged the United States government who then sank more money into the military to "deal with the Indian problem." Although Chief Crazy Horse eventually surrendered to the U.S. military, he was ultimately killed. In 1889, Congress voted to annex the Black Hills.



Ft. Laramie Treaty

in 1980 the Supreme Court recognized the 8 Lakota Nations' rights to the part of the Black Hills specified in the 1868 treaty. But instead of ordering the government to return the land, the Claims Commission awarded a financial sum equal to the land's value in 1877 plus interest. This sum now totals almost \$600 million (although the value of the natural resources which have been extracted from the Black Hills is estimated at \$4 billion). The Lakota have refused to accept the money on the grounds that one cannot buy and sell sacred land.

### The Massacre at Wounded Knee



Chief Big Foot

In order to restore faith in the traditional way of life, the Lakota began to perform the Ghost Dance in the 1890's. The Lakota believed that performing the Ghost Dance could

return the buffalo to the land and eliminate the wasichus from their home. U.S. military leaders stationed in Lakota territory feared that the Ghost Dance would stir up an Indian uprising, and began assembling a large army. It was in this environment of increased U.S. military presence in the area that the Massacre at Wounded Knee occurred.

The catalyst for the event was the murder of Chief Sitting Bull, who was killed by tribal police who were trying to arrest him on December 15, 1890. After the murder, 350 Lakota fled the area but were pursued through freezing cold conditions, rounded up, and held at Wounded Knee Creek where they were to be disarmed.



Chief Sitting Bull

A fight ensued, leaving about 300 Lakota dead, many of whom were unarmed women and children. The U.S. Cavalry dragged the frozen bodies through the snow and buried them in a mass grave.

### **The Big Foot Memorial Ride**

The Big Foot Ride began in 1986, to commemorate the 180-mile journey Chief Big Foot and his followers took to their death at Wounded Knee. Curtis Kills Ree had a vision quest that directed Alex White Plume and Birgil Kills Straight to retrace the journey in an effort to reintroduce Lakota traditions and history to the community. Each December, the riders travel for two weeks by horseback over the 120 miles of windswept South Dakota terrain to remember the suffering of their ancestors.

### **AIM**

AIM, the American Indian Movement, was founded in 1968 in Minnesota by a group of Native men, including Dennis Banks, Clyde Bellecourt and George Miller.

The mission of AIM is to preserve Native cultures and land, to restore the civil rights of Native people and to bolster their sense of pride.

The Lakota invited AIM to Pine Ridge after an incident wherein whites tortured two elderly Indian men with impunity.

On February 28, 1973, AIM led a takeover of the Catholic Church and Trading Post at the site of the Wounded Knee Massacre on Pine Ridge. Many times during the occupation, gunfire was exchanged between the AIM-led occupants of Wounded Knee and the Federal agents who had assembled to put down the occupation. The standoff ended when AIM surrendered after 71 days.

## **Reign of Terror**

A Reign of Terror on Pine Ridge spanning the mid-1970's saw over 200 AIM members and sympathizers assaulted or murdered. The "Guardians of the Oglala Nation" or GOON Squad, were behind the murders. Behind the GOON Squad was the FBI.

Tribal President Dick Wilson formed the GOON Squad in 1972 to intimidate those in the community who opposed him: mostly traditional Lakota determined to preserve old ways. Several thousands of dollars in funds allotted to the Reservation were diverted to Wilson's GOON Squad.

The FBI supplied the GOONs with all the accoutrements of war: weapons, information, and communications equipment. The GOONs had free reign in the area since investigations of the terrorism and the murders they carried out were virtually non-existent.

Debra White Plume, Alex's wife, was one of the victims of the GOON Squad during the Reign of Terror. Her family home was fired upon, and members of her family were hit, including her infant son and her mother, who was shot in the back.

## **"The Incident at Oglala"**

On June 26, 1975, after two FBI agents followed a vehicle into the Jumping Bull property on Pine Ridge, a shootout ensued between the agents and a group of Natives, including several AIM members who were camped nearby. Both agents and one Native were killed.

Three men were cited for the murder of the agents, and two of them were acquitted. The third suspect, Leonard Peltier, an AIM member, was convicted despite the fact that the bullets used to kill the agents did not match Peltier's weapon. Peltier remains in prison even though the 8th Circuit Court of Appeals acknowledged in 1986 that there had been fabrication of evidence, withholding of evidence, coercion of witnesses, as well as improper conduct by the FBI. He is currently in Leavenworth State Prison in Kansas facing two consecutive lifetime terms.

*I have no apologies, only sorrow. I can't apologize for what I haven't done. But I can grieve, and I do. Every day, every hour, I grieve for those who died at the Oglala firefight in 1975 and for their families.--Leonard Peltier*

from Prison Writing: My Life is My Sun Dance, by Leonard Peltier, United States  
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