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WOUNDED KNEE:
THE FINAL SUBJUGATION OF THE SIOUX

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A MASTER'S REPORT

submitted in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree

MASTER OF ARTS

Department of History

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY
Manhattan, Kansas

1976

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to express my gratitude to Professor Socolofsky, my major professor, who gave me several important research leads and made many suggestions for the betterment of this report. My sincere appreciation is also extended to Professor Mrozek and Professor Kaufman whose constructive comments were most helpful.

Grateful acknowledgement is also extended to Mr. Arne Richards and his staff of the Documents Division, Farrell Library who spent a great deal of their time initiating me into the maze of United States Government documents.

WOUNDED KNEE:
THE FINAL SUBJUGATION OF THE SIOUX

From the time of the arrival of the earliest Europeans on the shores of North America, the Indian exerted a tremendous impact upon the settlement of the American frontier. Eventually he was no longer able to resist the encroachment of the white man. With the culmination of the Battle of Wounded Knee, the armed conflict between the white interlopers and the indigenous red man terminated. Wounded Knee was the end of a conflict that had been sporadically fought for over three centuries.

Called by some the Massacre of Wounded Knee, the Battle of Wounded Knee was the last major conflict between the United States Army and the American Indian. It took place in a remote portion of southwestern South Dakota between two forces who had fought each other intermittently over a period of 25 years, the U. S. Seventh Cavalry and the Sioux Indians. Accounts of the battle and the events surrounding it are conflicting and have often been emotionally presented. Many theories have been advanced to explain the causes and results of the battle. Robert M. Utley in his excellent treatment of the subject, The Last Days of the Sioux Nation, calls the battle a "regrettable tragic accident."¹ Others have attempted to seek a culprit by blaming a nation who thought the only good Indian was a dead Indian; or a government which starved the Indian and

made treaties only to break them to the benefit of a select few; or to the Sioux to whom, in the belief of many, fighting and killing was a way of life; or the U. S. Seventh Cavalry who exacted revenge for its defeat at the Little Big Horn; or to the leaders of the Messiah Craze such as Sitting Bull (Tatanka Yotanka), who readily exploited the unrest to restore their lost prestige; or to the reduction in the size of the reservations and cutting down on the amount of rations issued. There is an element of truth in each of these theories. Many factors influenced the actions of the troopers of the Seventh Cavalry and the members of Chief Big Foot's band of Sioux Indians.

The confrontation has been attributed to lack of leadership on the part of both Indian chiefs and U. S. cavalry officers. Chief Big Foot (Si-Tanka) has been classed as an inept leader with doubtful influence over the more militant members of his band. The U. S. Army officers and non-commissioned officers on the scene have been portrayed as lacking in experience, positive leadership and common sense in allowing their units to come in such close contact with the Indians and in their abortive attempt to disarm the members of Big Foot's band. It was an explosive situation that was to result in a massacre.

Many armed and belligerent Indian braves died on Wounded Knee Creek. Many more innocent women and children were also slain. Although reports vary on the number killed, Major