NARRATOR:

There are dark days in history. Usually they dawn without a hint of being anything but ordinary…

yet end with everybody knowing the day’s events won’t be forgotten.

Sadness and anger, in fact, can remain even after those who actually lived the dark day are gone. Historians can help…

by examining what led to the tragedy, and why those events hold so much meaning afterwards.

A dark day in South Dakota history happened December 29, 1890.
Sunrise.

NARRATOR:
It was winter, but the day dawned sunny, warm, and still along Wounded Knee Creek in southwestern South Dakota.

Historic photo of Big Foot’s people, dissolving to

The people of Big Foot, a Minneconjou chief, came into contact with the U. S. Army’s Seventh Cavalry the day before.

MAP South Dakota showing route from Cheyenne River to Wounded Knee

Big Foot and his people were far from their home to the north, the Cheyenne River Reservation.

Town and ranch structures of the 1890s

All that fall and early winter, settlers across western South Dakota feared American Indians were planning to leave their reservations and attack ranches and towns. Newspapers ran stories reporting danger.

Newspaper Headlines

MARIE FOX BELLY ON CAMERA
(Talking about her people’s feelings about the incident and what led up to it.)

MUSIC UP AND UNDER
Sissy Goodhouse “Tawahe” Cut 3 “If it Feels Good”

Photo Col. James Forsyth.
Super name and dates
1834-1906

Colonel James Forsyth of the Seventh Cavalry knew Big Foot’s journey off the reservation would scare some South Dakotans, even though the group certainly was no war party.

PHOTO Montage
Curtis Photo Collection

Big Foot had about 350 people with him, including many women and children. About a hundred were men who could be considered warriors. Many of those men had guns...
Montage continues

PHOTO Montage continues
Grabill Photos
Curtis Photos

Montage Continues

WS Big Foot’s Camp SDSHS
PHOTO Men in blankets

PHOTO Man wrapped in blanket with rifle

Continues

PHOTO Man wrapped in blanket with rifle

But Forsyth believed more guns remained hidden under blankets the people wrapped themselves in against the winter chill. Forsyth told Big Foot everyone would have to line up and show they had no hidden weapons.

One Minneconjou man pulled a rifle from under his blanket…

and said no one had a right to take it without making fair payment. Tension grew…

MUSIC OUT

SFX UP AND UNDER

and a shot rang out, and then another, and more until all that could be heard was a roar of gunfire.

MUSIC UP AND UNDER

Andrew Vasquez “V3: An American Indian” Cut 4
“We Shall Follow Our Brothers”

Among the first to die was Big Foot. Eighty-four Minneconjou men, 44 women, and 18 children died that day. More were wounded, and some of them died from those wounds later.

MUSIC OUT
PHOTO MONTAGE Continues
Wounded Knee aftermath SDSHS

MARIE FOX BELLY On Camera

PHOTO: Seventh Cavalry Group Shot

Telegraph lines, period newspapers.

PHOTO: George Armstrong Custer

Art representing the Battle at the Little Big Horn, 1876.

Historic photo, Wounded knee, 1890

Photos of Aftermath of Wounded Knee, showing grave pits and bodies

MUSIC UP AND UNDER
Joseph Fire Crow “Fire Crow: Northern Cheyenne Flute”
Cut 15 “The Mist”

MARIE FOX BELLY ON CAMERA
(Talking about her people’s feelings about the incident.)

NARRATOR:

PHOTO: Seventh Cavalry Group Shot

Thirty-one of the 470 Cavalry soldiers were killed.

News spread fast. First Wounded Knee was reported as a great Army victory.

MUSIC UP AND UNDER
US Military Band “Gary Owen March”

Some people pointed out it was the Seventh Cavalry that Lieutenant Colonel George Custer led to a terrible defeat against American Indian warriors, 14 years earlier…

Art representing the Battle at the Little Big Horn, 1876.

at Little Big Horn, Montana. Maybe, these people said, justice was done—the Seventh Cavalry got even for Little Big Horn…

MUSIC UP AND UNDER
AMC 017 Cut 1 “Ancient Struggles”

NARRATOR:

at Wounded Knee. But that thinking changed as details about December 29, 1890 became known. How could a disaster where so many women and children died be called a victory?

It didn’t appear anyone was looking for a fight that morning. But there was little trust between Big Foot’s people and Forsyth’s soldiers, and
panic probably gripped both sides.

In today’s world, when things go terribly wrong, politicians and the media are often blamed, fairly or unfairly. The same was true in 1890.

Senator Richard Pettigrew believed in Dakota for Dakotans—meaning he thought U. S. government jobs in the state should be filled by South Dakotans. After South Dakota became a state in 1889, Pettigrew worked to replace many government employees, including Indian agents on reservations. At Pine Ridge Pettigrew got a political supporter, Daniel Royer, appointed agent.

Royer had no experience in this line of work. The people of Pine Ridge didn’t trust him. Royer couldn’t talk effectively with tribal leaders when he heard rumors of trouble in late 1890. Instead, he called for Army troops.

That’s where the media jumped in. South Dakota newspaper writers, and those from papers across the United States, figured the Army’s movement meant a likely Indian war. They traveled to the reservations, especially Pine Ridge, and promised their readers exciting coverage.

Hrcb 7 Cut 4 “Hombre”
NARRATOR:

Unfortunately, exciting writing about American Indians—in books of the time called dime novels—probably shaped the thinking of many young Army soldiers. In these books, Indians almost always were portrayed as cruel and fearsome.

MUSIC OUT

MUSIC UP AND UNDER

Sissy Goodhouse  “The Third Circle” Cut 11
“The Seventh Generation”

NARRATOR:

And in 1890, people who didn’t understand the American Indian culture were witnessing something they found quite fearsome: a ceremony called the Ghost Dance.

The Ghost Dance started here, at Pyramid Lake in Nevada. A holy man named Wovoka said a re-born world would come with the new grass of 1891—a peaceful world with lots of bison to hunt. The new world became reality, Wovoka taught, if Indian people everywhere sang and danced the Ghost Dance.

MARIE FOX BELLY On Camera
Talking about the Ghost Dance.

MUSIC UP AND UNDER
Bald Eagle Family “Honoring Song” SOVTR

Traditional Dance mixed with Ghost Dance photos
PHOTO Indian Agent

PHOTO Montage Reservation life and dancers

VIDEO Ghost Shirt (SDCHM)

NARRATOR:

On South Dakota reservations men, women, and children danced with such intensity that they sometimes collapsed in exhaustion. That intensity scared the inexperienced Indian agents, and they tried to stop the ceremony.

That didn’t surprise Ghost Dancers in South Dakota. Believers most places spoke of the ceremony as peaceful, but in South Dakota, preparing for war was part of the dance. Some men wore Ghost Shirts—soft fabric with painted designs. Ghost Dancers said these shirts would stop enemy bullets.

It’s likely some men at Wounded Knee wore Ghost Shirts, and believed they couldn’t be hurt.

Why did Big Foot’s people leave the Cheyenne River Reservation? Big Foot knew government officials tried to stop the Ghost Dance on the Standing Rock Reservation…

MUSIC UP AND UNDER

Andrew Vasquez V3: An American Indian Cut 5 “Grandfather’s Way”

just to the north. They tried to arrest Chief Sitting Bull there…

and in the struggle, Sitting Bull was killed.

If that could happen on the neighboring reservation, Big Foot probably thought escaping the Cheyenne River Reservation was wise. His people could go into hiding…
Badlands.  
perhaps in the Badlands, where other Ghost Dancers were said to be gathering.

Wounded Knee site today.  
Distrust.

MONTAGE Photos
Indian and whites depicting fear, political appointments, dime novels, ghost shirt etc. over background.  
PHOTO Big Foot dead in snow.  
Indians and soldiers

NARRATOR:
Fear.  Bad political appointments.  Poor newspaper writing.  Scary dime novels.  Ghost shirts.  Like chemicals that should never be mixed, these came together and exploded here.

SFX UP AND OUT Gun shot  
MUSIC UP AND UNDER  
Joseph Fire Crow “Legend of the Warrior” cut 11 “My Elders Speak”

NARRATOR
Wounded Knee marked the end of major violence between the United States Army and American Indians.  It also opened eyes throughout the United States and around the world.

PHOTO City scene 1890  
Another City scene  
Indian blacksmiths  
Indian school group shot  
Ghost Dance photo  
Survivors of Wounded Knee

In 1890, most thought the Indian Wars to be long over.  Many believed American Indians were eager to drop their traditional way of life, or were content living on remote reservations.

Wounded Knee, and the desperation behind the Ghost Dance, revealed life was terribly hard for lots of American Indians.

MUSIC OUT  
SOVTR UP AND UNDER
Wounded Knee occupation, 1973. (KELO news footage of occupation)

Wounded Knee opened eyes again, 83 years later. It was no coincidence that American Indian Movement leaders chose Wounded Knee in 1973 for an 11-week take-over.

**MUSIC UP AND UNDER**

Joseph Fire Crow “Legend of the Warrior” Cut 3 “Sweet Medicine”

**NARRATOR:**

They told people worldwide that conditions still weren’t good for many American Indians.

**MUSIC OUT**

Wounded Knee. Even the name sounds painful. Maybe that’s as it should be—an aching reminder that fear and misunderstanding between people anywhere can lead to tragedy, and that we must learn from our dark days.

**MUSIC UP AND UNDER**

DWCD 251 CUT 1 “Easy Come, Easy Go”

CLOSE and Credits

Fade to Black

**MUSIC OUT**