

Opinion: Wounded Knee – forgotten lesson



Wounded Knee is
stark reminder of
the U.S.
government's
mistreatment of
Indians.

Photo/Kathryn Reed

By Kathryn Reed

PINE RIDGE INDIAN RESERVATION, S.D. – A week ago today I was at the site of the worst massacre in U.S. history. I wasn't in Florida. I was in South Dakota.

I was on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation, home of Wounded Knee. This is where 146 Lakota Sioux were killed on Dec. 29, 1890. Most were women and children. In subsequent days the death toll exceeded 300.

This was not a battle as some revisionist accounts of history would lead one to believe.

John Miller, South Dakota State University (Brookings) history professor emeritus, said in the November-December 2015 issue of *South Dakota* magazine, "Native Americans in this state have assumed a role similar to other ethnic or racial minorities in the nation as a whole. We continue to try to solve these problems, but they're very hard to reconcile."

In the week since 49 people were murdered at a gay nightclub in Orlando there have been articles written about whether this shooting was the worst in U.S. history.

NPR interviewed Grant Duwe, the director of research and evaluation at the Minnesota Department of Corrections. According to NPR, "He says he sees two distinctions between mass murders that occurred before and after the 20th century. Before 1900, most mass murders were perpetrated by the 'haves' against the 'have nots.' After 1900, mass murders began being perpetrated by the 'have nots' against the 'haves.' Another difference is that before the 20th century, few mass murders were perpetrated by a single person."

Now some news outlets have gone to calling Orlando the worst U.S. shooting in "modern day history".

The gunman in Orlando would not have been able to obtain the weapon he did had a bill like what was proposed on Monday been in effect. That bill said anyone in a five-year period who had been investigated for terrorist ties could be denied the ability to immediately purchase a gun. On June 20 the Senate voted down a bill that would have blocked suspected terrorists from being able to purchase a gun.

Guns are just part of the problem. But it is one area in which our elected officials seem so inept at being able to come to consensus.

Yes, he could have gotten a gun any number of ways, but making it difficult to acquire assault rifles is a no brainer. It has nothing to do with infringing on Second Amendment rights. I'm

all for being able to possess guns for protection, hunting, other recreation. But it's time to throw up roadblocks to obtaining them – even for legitimate purposes. There is something wrong if someone is in a rush to purchase a gun – any gun. Substantive background checks – again, should be a no brainer.

We have banned substances that kill humans – think DDT in the United States. Would it be such a stretch to ban a weapon that has no purpose other than mass destruction?

Obviously, the case of Wounded Knee proves that “antique” weaponry can be destructive when the intended target does not have the same artillery or manpower. Still, that is not a reason to say yes to assault rifles. There was so much more to Wounded Knee than manpower and guns.

The “so much more” should not be lost. Like the university professor said, hatred toward those who are “different” is still alive today just as it was 125 years ago at Wounded Knee.

Banning guns is not enough to curtail senseless killings. At some point we need to address the hatred that seems to be getting more rampant in this country. I'm all for people being different. Why can't we embrace our differences (or at least accept them), instead of wanting to eliminate those who are different than us?

And why can't we apologize for our wrongs? Etched in my mind is Wounded Knee with its old chain link fence around the gravesite. A monument is there with only a few of the names of those who died. It was soldiers who dug the mass grave atop the hill. They threw the bodies on top of each other with no idea who was who.

Wounded Knee is a depressing memorial with a message that resonates as a symbol for what is so wrong with how those with power treat those who are oppressed.

The white men who did the killing were the savages.

Maybe it's time we all smoked a peace pipe and learned to accept our differences. How many more people have to die simply because the shooter doesn't agree with someone's sexual preference, gender, religion, color, ethnicity or some arbitrary difference?