

## Dee Brown's *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee* and Peter Cozzens' *The Earth is Weeping*

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Like most who read Dee Brown's *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee* I came away sad and angry. The Indian Wars of 1865 – 1890 are a dark stain on American history and Brown tells their many stories with elegance and intensity. But I also came away wanting more. Brown is often criticized for his lack of balance, even though he explicitly eschews balance in favor of telling the story from the Indian's perspective. I appreciate Brown's approach and am glad he wrote his book in exactly the way he did. As a white American boy regularly watching Cowboys and Indians on TV when *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee* was published in 1970, I needed and deserved the emotional slap in the face that the book provides. Still, there are many gaps and a few inaccuracies in Brown's account, and of course there are other perspectives worth understanding. So I sought out another book to round out my new knowledge of this chapter in American history.

I settled on Peter Cozzens' *The Earth is Weeping*, published in 2016. Cozzens envisions his book as a pendulum swing back towards balance, both a reaction to and corrective for *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee*. While not nearly as compelling as Brown's telling of the story, *The Earth is Weeping* is immensely researched and well written (and has maps, which I greatly appreciated). Had I not read *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee* first I'm sure I would have felt almost the same emotional reaction from Cozzens' fine book, which pulls no punches in describing the crimes and moral failings of the many actors in this sad tale. What one gets from Cozzens' account is both more detail and a broader scope, especially about the Army's actions and the biographical background of its leaders. Thanks to historical documents unavailable to Brown, Cozzens provides a more complete history, told as a history. I especially enjoyed learning more about George Custer and reading a much more detailed description of his "last stand".

In the end, *The Earth is Weeping* in no way changes the major message of *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee*. Genocide may not have been the intention of America's policies and actions towards the Indians, but that was the result. The westward expansion of the United States was inevitable, but the wholesale slaughter of the West's native population was not. The toxic mix of racism and greed that led to so many crimes against the Indians was supported by religious bigotry, political corruption, and the grotesque hubris known as Manifest Destiny. Both sides saw the other side as "others" rather than fellow humans, so that collective guilt, vengeance, and arbitrary punishment became commonplace and accepted with little remorse.

The story of the Indian Wars is important not just in understanding the still festering wounds of the American West and its Native American population, but as a cautionary tale of what we as Americans are capable of. I'm sorry to see that the underlying moral flaws that lead to the many crimes of the Indian Wars are still with us today.