The Ghost Dance

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What is the Ghost Dance

- The Ghost Dance was a spiritual movement that arose among Western American Indians. It began among the Paiute in about 1869 with a series of visions of an elder, Wodziwob. These visions foresaw renewal of the Earth and help for the Paiute peoples as promised by their ancestors (Encyclopedia of the Great Plains).

- The dance consisted of dancing in a circular pattern continuously, which induced a state of religious ecstasy (Hall).

Wodziwob
Origin

- The dance began among the Paiute in about 1869 with a series of visions of an elder, Wodziwob. These visions foresaw renewal of the Earth and help for the Paiute peoples as promised by their ancestors.

- On January 1, 1889, a Northern Paiute named Wovoka (born Quoitze Owalso, he also took the name Jack Wilson) had a dream during the eclipse of the sun. His prophesy was similar to that of Wodziwob. He said that he saw the European settlers leaving or disappearing, the buffalo returning, and the land restored to Indian peoples all across the continent. In this vision, ancestors would be brought back to life and all would live in peace. a reality and the participants would enjoy the new Earth (Encyclopedia of the Great Plains).
Sitting Bull’s Death

- Sitting Bull was a leader respected among the Lakota.
- When news of the Ghost Dance was getting out and reached the Lakota the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) agents grew disturbed when they became aware.
- The BIA agent in charge of the Lakota eventually sent the tribal police to arrest Sitting to force him to stop the dance. In the struggle that followed, Sitting Bull was killed along with a number of policemen (Weiser).
The Wounded Knee Massacre

• Following the killing of Sitting Bull, the United States decided to ban the Ghost Dance and sent the Seventh Cavalry to “disarm the Lakota and take control.” During the events that followed, now known as the Wounded Knee Massacre December 29, 1890, 457 U.S. soldiers opened fire upon the Sioux killing more than 200 of them. The Ghost Dance reached its peak just before the Wounded Knee Massacre in 1890 (Weiser).
The Ghost Dance died out among the Lakotas after Wounded Knee, but it survived elsewhere in the Plains. A Dakota Sioux community in Canada, for instance, practiced the Ghost Dance into the 1960s. During the 1970s, Leonard Crow Dog, an Oglala Lakota holy man affiliated with the American Indian Movement, revived the Ghost Dance as part of the Red Power movement. To many, the Ghost Dance represented resistance to U.S. Indian policy and American culture and was a rallying point for preserving traditional Indian culture (Encyclopedia of the Great Plains).
References

