



## **The Heartbeat of Wounded Knee: Native America from 1890 to the Present**

*David Treuer*

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# The Heartbeat of Wounded Knee: Native America from 1890 to the Present

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**The Heartbeat of Wounded Knee: Native America from 1890 to the Present** David Treuer  
A sweeping history--and counter-narrative--of Native American life from the Wounded Knee massacre to the present.

Dee Brown's 1970 *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee* was the first truly popular book of Indian history ever published. But it promulgated the impression that American Indian history essentially ended with the 1890 massacre at Wounded Knee--that not only did one hundred fifty Sioux die at the hands of the U. S. Cavalry but Native civilization did as well.

Growing up Ojibwe on a reservation in Minnesota, training as an anthropologist, and researching Native life past and present for his nonfiction and novels, David Treuer uncovered a different narrative. Instead of disappearing, and despite--or perhaps because of--intense struggles to preserve their language, their culture, their very families, the story of American Indians since the end of the nineteenth century to the present is one of unprecedented growth and rebirth.

In *The Heartbeat of Wounded Knee*, Treuer melds history with reportage and memoir. Beginning with the tribes' devastating loss of land and the forced assimilation of their children at government-run boarding schools, he shows how the period of greatest adversity also helped to incubate a unifying Native identity. He traces how conscription in the US military and the pull of urban life brought Indians into the mainstream and modern times, even as it steered the emerging shape of their self-rule and spawned a new generation of resistance. In addition, Treuer explores how advances in technology allowed burgeoning Indian populations across the continent to come together as never before, fostering a political force. Photographs, maps, and other visuals, from period advertisements to little-known historical photos, amplify the sense of accessing a fascinating and untold story. *The Heartbeat of Wounded Knee* is an essential, intimate history--and counter-narrative--of a resilient people in a transformative era.

## The Heartbeat of Wounded Knee: Native America from 1890 to the Present Details

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# **From Reader Review The Heartbeat of Wounded Knee: Native America from 1890 to the Present for online ebook**

## **Bookworm says**

Had read 'Rez Life' and 'Prudence' by the same author and was very excited to read this book. I did not care for 'Prudence' but was totally absorbed by 'Rez'. I was curious to see what this was about, especially when I realized it was about Native people in the US after 1890 instead of just Wounded Knee.

Treuer takes us through a history of Native America and the history not told in most US history classes (unless you take specific ones, I think). Covering everything from how Natives navigate the modern day in social media to covering topics you might have heard of such as blood quantum to Native military service and more. A lot of it was fascinating and definitely filled in lots of gaps in my knowledge.

I won't lie, though, it was tough reading by any standard. Whereas I had thought this would be closer to 'Rez Life' (a non-fiction book where he talks about his reservation and people), this was more of an overview and sometimes the sheer amount of information was overwhelming. Nothing wrong with this and it was quite readable, but it is a lot. Some of the topics are also difficult: from sexual abuse in residential schools (plus historically) to descriptions of hardship such as cycle of drug and alcohol abuse, suicide, emotional abuse, genocide, etc. It's not overly graphic but Treuer doesn't shy away from the topics either.

It was a good read overall. I wish the author had included maps within the text because it was sometimes difficult to visualize exactly where we are and it's helpful as a reference. Definitely a personal preference, though. I wouldn't be surprised to see this as an assigned reading for classes but it can be read on its own. Do recommend that if you pick it up you allow yourself time to occasionally set it aside or read here and there since there's a lot of info to absorb. I'd say it's more of a 3.5 but I'll round it up.

Borrowed from the library but it would probably be a good reference for purchase, too.

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## **Peter M. says**

"The Heartbeat of Wounded Knee" is a path-breaking work on the Native American experience. It is actually much more than the title suggests because the first 100 pages explore Indian life before 1890. It is also far more than just a dry history book. Treuer takes us foraging for pine cones and hunting for clams while interviewing colorful family members and acquaintances.

Countless books have recounted the tragedies experienced by Native Americans at the hands of Europeans and Americans, but few have told the story like "Heartbeat." For starters, Treuer holds Native Americans responsible for their own share of tragedy inflicted on themselves, whether through inter-tribal wars or self-destructive behavior. Yet even in the darkest times, Treuer reminds us of Native Americans' resiliency: "We're still here!"

After 1890 (Wounded Knee), many of the hardships experienced by Native Americans were based on the good intentions of Christians and the American government. I grew up near Sherman Indian High School (Riverside, CA) without knowing anything about Native American boarding schools. Education and job training were worthy goals, but they came at the cost of strained/broken family ties and cultural genocide.

Even the best run schools would punish children who spoke in their native languages. I was shocked that the first Native American would not be admitted to U.C. Berkeley until 1968 (p. 300).

One of the key insights I learned from "Heartbeat" is that the turning point for Native Americans came when they embraced the most powerful weapon of all: The rule of law. They slowly learned to read the fine print of the treaties and documents they were asked/forced to sign and began to demand their rights. The first American presidents to get Native American policy right were Lyndon Johnson and (surprisingly) Richard Nixon.

Treuer devotes the final 200 pages to how Native Americans have taken advantage of sovereignty and self-determination to lift themselves up and rediscover their cultures. Indeed, Treuer himself represents the first generation to grow up under this system. I now understand "Indian casinos" in a whole new light.

"Heartbeat" concludes by presenting a compelling case for adopting an inclusive definition of what it means to be Native American in the 21st century. This definition also strikes at the heart of America's identity.

My only complaint is that I wish the book had been longer. The Economist's review suggests that the pre-1890 section of "Heartbeat" is boring, but I found it fascinating. The sections on the tribes in each region of the U.S. could easily become stand-alone chapters. For example, the Cherokee merit more attention. I knew about the Trail of Tears, but I did not know that they use their own alphabet until I visited their ancestral lands in North Carolina. It would also be great if there were maps showing the distribution of tribes in 1700 and today.

In the meantime, I can only hope Treuer's insights will be incorporated into all future American school textbooks.

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### **Alison Labbate says**

Good NYT book review

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### **Barbara Van loenen says**

It was easier to read than a history textbook, many stories that kept it moving along. However it is not a speed read. It included powerful historical examples of Native leaders; eloquent and thoughtful speakers; not just the victimized tribe stories

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### **Sara says**

The actual only true non-immigrant Americans, Native Americans have been treated abysmally. Many of us know this history and it is appalling. After a quick review of this history, the author takes us past that into the current showing us how Native Americans are finally thriving often by having learned to take the unjust laws passed and use them to their own advantage. They have learned from the greed of Americans and Europeans not to trust that anyone has their best interests at heart and as John Adams wrote to Thomas Jefferson "Power always thinks it has a great Soul, and vast Views, beyond the comprehension of the Weak." This is how Americans and Europeans stole all they could and tried to exterminate Native Americans but in the stories

told in the book, tribes are actually thriving in many areas. Fascinating book.

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### **Angie says**

Treuer characterizes this book as 3 journeys in his introduction: a journey into history, a journey across America, and a journey into himself and his identity. He describes all three of these journeys with great skill, although the historical journey does get a little dry here and there, and his inward journey makes the narrative a little more Minnesota-oriented than it would be coming from someone else (that's a plus for me). After his introduction, which by the end made me want to stand up and cheer, he covers Native American history from prehistoric times to 1890 (Wounded Knee) in a little over 80 pages. The story methodically moves from region to region, giving us a sense of the diversity of Native American history and identity. This history is a review, and is just as soul-crushing as I expected it to be, but it was well-written and engaging. And within it, Treuer uses that phrase of his that characterizes this book for me: "And yet." Despite the raging forest fire of white Americans through Native lives and culture, many tribes survived, held on. Then Treuer describes the fledgling new life springing up here and there through the next century, and by the end of the book he's describing a verdant landscape, full of hope. I need this book. So many need this book.

Treuer set out to prove that American Indians are not a relic of a failed history. There is a living culture of Indigenous people in our country that thrives and improves every day. At the end of the book, he describes the Standing Rock protests and what they meant, how different they were from the protests of the 1970s. He describes the small revolutions taking place on reservations and in cities across North America. This is a masterpiece of history from a proud Indian. I hope there are many more like it to come; as he states late in the book, identity politics is the beginning of privilege, and Native Americans are just getting to that level of privilege in the last decade or two.

I can't recommend this enough. I'm very thankful to the publisher, who gave me a copy to review through Edelweiss.

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### **Tina Miller says**

There is simply too much to cover in a review, but, if you ever wanted a perspective on and of American Indians, you need this book. I finished it feeling proud to live in a place shared with these extraordinary peoples and sure they remain integral to the places and societies that evolved from, with, and around them.

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### **Gaby Chapman says**

The book that needed to be written. The history that seemed to subside after 1890, continued, and now, here it is.

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### **Tom Gorski says**

As with his earlier book about his reservation experience, David Treuer writes a very readable yet

comprehensive study of the Native American life in all parts of the country from 1890 (Wounded Knee massacre) to the present. Noted though are the first 90 pages which provide a background for all parts of North American from about 10,000 BCE to 1890. He combines both anthropology and first person narratives in creating this unique study of the indomitable spirit held by these people.

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### **Emily Goenner says**

How can I not know the things written here? As Anglo-Americans, we've been taught such lies and shaded stories. This book gives a different side, another heart-breaking view of all the evil done by Europeans when they arrived in America. I was fascinated to learn so much and horrified that I didn't know it.

While I would like to hand this book to everyone and say, "read this," it isn't an easy read. More like a history book than a personal narrative (of which I would have liked more), its long and detailed and takes some work to make it through. I could see Treuer's training in this book (anthropology PhD).

In the end, though, the readers who put in the time and effort will be rewarded with a more fuller understanding of history, the present, and the future. Treuer waxes hopeful and forward looking, which is a great counterpoint to the horrors of history.

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