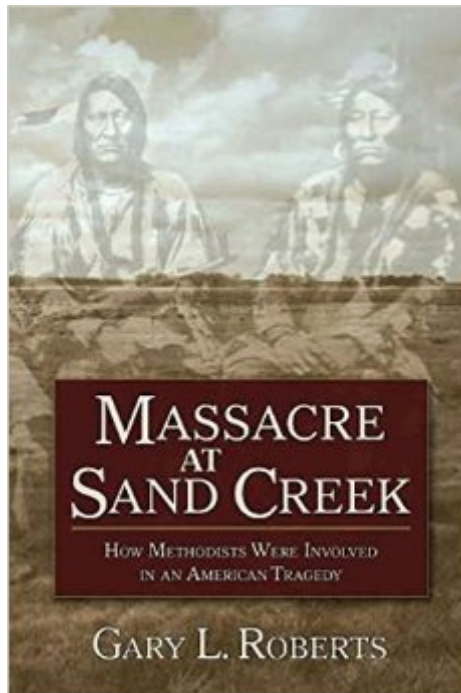


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# Massacre At Sand Creek: How Methodists Were Involved In An American Tragedy



## Synopsis

Sand Creek. At dawn on the morning of November 29, 1864, Colonel John Milton Chivington gave the command that led to slaughter of 230 peaceful Cheyennes and Arapahos-primarily women, children, and elderly-camped under the protection of the U. S. government along Sand Creek in Colorado Territory and flying both an American flag and a white flag. The Sand Creek massacre seized national attention in the winter of 1864-1865 and generated a controversy that still excites heated debate more than 150 years later. At Sand Creek demoniac forces seemed unloosed so completely that humanity itself was the casualty. That was the charge that drew public attention to the Colorado frontier in 1865. That was the claim that spawned heated debate in Congress, two congressional hearings, and a military commission. Westerners vociferously and passionately denied the accusations. Reformers seized the charges as evidence of the failure of American Indian policy. Sand Creek launched a war that was not truly over for fifteen years. In the first year alone, it cost the United States government \$50,000,000. Methodists have a special stake in this story. The governor whose policies led the Cheyennes and Arapahos to Sand Creek was a prominent Methodist layman. Colonel Chivington was a Methodist minister. Perhaps those were merely coincidences, but the question also remains of how the Methodist Episcopal Church itself responded to the massacre. Was it also somehow culpable in what happened? It is time for this story to be told. Coming to grips with what happened at Sand Creek involves hard questions and unsatisfactory answers not only about what happened but also about what led to it and why. It stirs ancient questions about the best and worst in every person, questions older than history, questions as relevant as today's headlines, questions we all must answer from within.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

This is not exclusively an analysis of the Sand Creek massacre in Colorado Territory in the early 19th century, although it is covered in the second part of this book. The early chapters deal with the compare and contrast between our indigenous tribes and Protestantism and how the two groups saw the world, land ownership and community. The indigenous had a circular way of thinking about life; the whites had a linear one which they felt was superior. The whites gave the indigenous two options: "resist and die or assimilate and disappear" (34). The second chapter is a history of the Methodist Church in this country, and history of Colorado territory before the massacre. Then Governor John Evans, who also had an interest in building the railroad through the territory, and Colonel John Chivington, commander of the attacking cavalry, were members of the Methodist Church, but does that mean the church is guilty of committing the heinous act of slaughtering unarmed women, children and elderly? Western pioneers were moving into the tribal areas to settle, mine and hunt. Tribes were moved further westward. Both sides committed mistakes, and Gary Roberts makes it clear that Chivington was an officer of questionable character; his focus was protecting the miners and getting his share of the profits. He was expecting to be celebrated a hero, but word got back to Washington that he was anything but heroic. Where the church comes in is when the church defends both Evans and Chivington, since Chivington was also a Methodist minister. The delays in the trial and then the readings all put some blame on the church only because of their attempt to cover up the incident. The country was still fighting a civil war that took up most of the resources, and churches were more concerned with the rights of the freed slaves than they were for the rights of indigenous people. Connecting this massacre to the Methodist Church is Robert's way of admitting that what happened was wrong and to move on. The significance of the Sand Creek massacre, however, is that all future dealing between white and red people were in the shadow of this event. Trust was broken on both sides. Roberts does a good job of summarizing the event and making it coherent to rest of our pioneer and Indian Bureau relations. It's well worth reading.

This is an extremely well researched book. Commissioned by the United Methodist denomination to uncover the role of certain Methodist leaders in the infamous Sand Creek Massacre, it is a compilation of information provided by representatives from both the Arapaho and Cheyenne tribes,

as well as national historical site curators and historians. Every important fact and photograph is carefully annotated and documented. The first few chapters were a little difficult to muddle through, as it was mostly an apologetic for the volume and an explanation of why and how it was written. It is something of an extended Acknowledgements section of the book, if you will. Once you get past that, it's a bit more interesting. Reading the historical background of the concepts of the Doctrine of Discovery, introduced by the Catholic Church by the end of the 15th century and the subsequent idea of Manifest Destiny that drove early settlers in the United States made me more than a little ashamed of my Western European heritage. The author asserted that these superior attitudes of whites toward Native Americans was a strictly Anglo-Saxon trait; however, I believe that Europeans in general had this mindset. It caused them to regard indigenous people of the Americas and other continents as either lower lifeforms or obstacles in the way of their goal to acquire more land and resources. It was particularly interesting, as well, to learn of the difference between what the author referred to as a typically Western "linear" concept of history and civilization, versus the Native American view of history as a "circular" phenomenon. It sounds like so much of the conflict between whites and red men was due to this antithetical view of human events, as well as the perception of "otherness" between the two different cultures. Unfortunately, Methodists and other Christians were tainted by the view that Indians were wild or savage. They seemed more concerned about assimilating them into Anglo culture to avoid conflict rather than really transforming their lives through the Spirit of God. Native peoples were rightly reluctant to adopt a religion that its own adherents were loathe to live up to. Why would they want to know a God that they were told loved them, when His representatives really didn't care about them as people? And when Methodism became increasingly political and material, it was even less attractive. The background information about John Chivington, the US Army Colonel who attacked the men, women and children at Sand Creek, and John Evans, the governor of the state of Colorado at the time, is very revealing. Both were ambitious men, more concerned about making a name for themselves and advancing their agendas than in promoting the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Though Methodist ministers, both were devoted Freemasons--an association discouraged by the church because of its anti-Christian doctrine. The author did not mention this, but I know from personal research that Freemasons--including the Sons of Liberty who instigated the Boston Tea Party, and the Texans who defended the Alamo--are quite frequently prone to take up arms in a conflict rather than choose the path of peace. Because it is so scholarly, this book can be a bit dry at times. However, anyone interested in history would find it interesting. I think it is especially suitable as a text book for a Native American studies course at a university. It would also be an excellent resource, both as a

primary source document and for its bibliography for anyone doing research on the subject. It is not a quick read, nor an easy one, but it is worth the investment of time to read this informative book.

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