

# Incident at oglala essay sample

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In the case of Leonard Peltier, his arrest and conviction were the result of the atmosphere of fear, anxiety, tension, and violence prevalent in the cultural and historical contexts associated with the murder of the two FBI agents. The video Incident at Oglala describes this atmosphere, highlighting previous events that had built up the tension between the Native Americans on the reservation and the surrounding community and pointing out that the Native Americans were fearful because of the mistreatment they had received at the hands of Wilson's local government and also because there were hundreds of unsolved murders on the reservation. As one of the speakers on the video indicates, although the federal agents appeared not to be aware of it, for strangers to come driving onto the reservation with guns was an invitation to be shot, given the fear that was felt on the reservation at that time.

This fear originated long before the recent events leading up to the incident, however. Paul Berg, who had served with the FBI during the 1973 siege of Wounded Knee in which the 7th Cavalry had massacred more than 200 mostly unarmed Native American old men, women, and children, simply because government agents incorrectly interpreted the Ghost Dance as an aggressive threat to non-Indians and called in the army. Berg reports that the women had thrown blankets over the children so that they would not see their executioners. This horrific and gratuitous massacre had left a haunting impression on the surviving Native Americans, and Berg recalls that when he assigned his seventh grade students to write an essay on what their lives would be like in 10 years, half of them wrote about their own death.

The fear of the Native Americans was a reasonable fear because of the genocide that had been committed against them by the government, but the government's efforts to kill innocent Native Americans seemed prompted by sheer, unreasoning terror. After the murder of the two FBI agents, the video shows that phony affidavits were drawn up to convict Peltier even though he was not even present when the men were murdered. The case built against him was a pile of lies, perhaps driven by the fear that if he were allowed to remain free, he might somehow expose the real perpetrators behind the unsolved murders on the reservation.

To his credit, Peltier subsequently learned the identity of the real murderer, another Native American, but he refuses to identify him to authorities even though it could win him his freedom from the unjust imprisonment he is still serving. Peltier's refusal is consistent with the Native American concept of a warrior. Native American John Trudell explains that a warrior must never become reactionary, regardless of what is done to his people and urges that "We must do this for the love of our people." In the last analysis, however, a grave injustice was done to Peltier in sentencing him to two life sentences. The evidence against him was flimsy and concocted, all secondhand. In reality, what convicted Peltier and complicated his case was not his actions but the atmosphere of fear that existed between the Native Americans at the reservation and government authorities.

#### Works Cited

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