A Misplaced Massacre: Struggling Over the Memory of Sand Creek

Abstract

Prof. Ari Kelman, Professor of History at University of California-Davis, presented the story of the Sand Creek Massacre, an episode of the American Civil War often overlooked in American history books. Kelman proposes that immediately after the events of November 29th, 1864, in which 150 to 250 members of the Arapaho and Cheyenne tribes – mainly women, children, and elderly – were killed and their bodies mutilated by soldiers of the Colorado US Volunteer Cavalry, the memory of Sand Creek has been contended by different groups.

The 2007 opening of the National Parks Service Memorial Site exemplifies this controversy. Some participants were optimistic that the new memorial would help alleviate relations between Native Americans and the Federal Government, others maintained that the memorial was political and didactic, and some claimed that the site “reeked of political correctness and revisionism.” To others, adopting the events of Sand Creek as a part of the story of the Civil War serves to contest the popular belief that the war was not a significant part of the history of the West Coast of America.