Media Literacy Mini-Lesson #10

WHOSE VOICES ARE MISSING?

Sources like newspaper articles or photographs that came out at the time of an event are incredibly useful tools as we study the past. But one key question to ask is **whose voices are missing?**

Figuring out whose voices are missing from a news story may be addressed in the following ways:

Who is quoted in the article or featured in the picture? Who is omitted, deliberately or not?

Why would a journalist or news editor choose to include certain individuals in a story and choose to leave other individuals out?

Keep in mind...
the different perspectives that journalists or their editors (the people who revise journalists' work and decide if it will be published) may bring to a news story and whether or not the story is biased in a particular direction. This will help you think critically about the question of whose voices are included and whose voices are not included.

For example:

You've just come across a newspaper article on the issue of Native American mascots in sports. Take a look at the individuals featured or quoted in the story. Are they team managers or owners? Fans? Native American leaders or activists? What do the particular voices highlighted in the story tell you about the potential goals of that story?

Examine the photograph on the following page and answer the following questions. Share your responses with a peer in-person or online.

The photograph below is a primary source about the historically important Massacre of Wounded Knee. The image is labeled as a "battle" and now recognized as a "massacre" of at least 200 and perhaps as many as 300 Sioux men, women, and children in December of 1890. Newspapers reported erroneously that many soldiers and only a few Lakota warriors were killed at Wounded Knee.

Burial of the dead at the Battle of Wounded Knee, S.D. Trager and Kuhn, photographer. Not before 29 December 1890. Library of Congress

Describe what is happening in the image. What did you notice or wonder about?

What elements are included in the photograph? What elements are left out?

What would you need to know about the people in the image that might not be observable?