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# The wounds of the Dakota War

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The Wounds of the Dakota War

Sara Louisa Flint

A thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty of

JAMES MADISON UNIVERSITY

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## Abstract

Abraham Lincoln's American Indian policy is often overshadowed by the study of the American Civil War and this study focuses on Lincoln's policy towards the American Indian, specifically his involvement in the Dakota War with deciding the fate of the condemned Dakota men. The uprising's causes are discussed in length as are the specific events of the rebellion. The study also looks at how the uprising is remembered by white and Dakota population. In addition to secondary books and articles, a large amount of newspapers, personal memoirs, and letters are used in the research. Photographs, artwork, and monuments are also used. The Dakota War could have been avoided if the government had maintained better relations with the Dakota but the Civil War further exasperated an already fractured system. Several hundred settlers died at the hands of warring Indians and thirty-eight Dakota men were hung for their participation in the uprising however for over a century hatred continue to exist between the groups. It is only within the last few decades that the Dakota people and Minnesota have come together in order to remember the Dakota War without prejudice.

## Introduction

Lincoln did not anticipate the challenges that awaited him when he entered office in 1861. Not only would he grieve the death of his son, but he faced the moral dilemmas of slavery, the problems of westward expansion, and the demanding question of how to keep his beloved country united through a bloody civil war. Lincoln matured during his four years in office to become the man so many respect and admire. How Lincoln handled these crises molded him into more than an intellectual or a talented politician, he evolved into a humanitarian who understood the value of human life. An incident on the American frontier in late summer 1862, caused Lincoln to divert his attention and the Union's military resources to Minnesota to put down an Indian rebellion that had claimed hundreds of settlers' lives. Lincoln's decision regarding the rebellion helped define the future relationship between the American Indian and the United States' government.

The rebellion highlighted the inherent problems with America's Indian reservation system. Beginning in the colonial period during the sixteenth century, America had struggled over how to deal with the continent's indigenous population. Colonists originally viewed the American Indian as a potential ally and relied heavily upon the Indians to survive in the wilds of North America. The success of early colonial settlements often depended on native cooperation. Colonists forged military alliances with Indians to win wars with European countries for New World lands. A highly profitable fur trade with various Indian nations also brought much wealth to Old World coffers.

Settlers soon indentified radical cultural differences between themselves and the American Indian. Darker skinned than their European counterparts, Indians appeared



physically different. Their lifestyle and culture did not even remotely resemble the colonists' Western ideology. European empires often defined Indians as savage barbarians or heathens that needed to be converted to Christianity and the 'proper' Western lifestyle. Missionaries desperately tried converting the natives, yet many American Indians tenaciously clung to their traditional beliefs.

The American Indian stood in the way of progress for nineteenth century Americans. Their nomadic lifestyle served as the main obstacle in expanding the American frontier. An empire's success depended upon the ability to conquer not only the land but the people themselves, the very essence of any civilization. Land needed to be civilized, settlers argued and it could not be done without controlling the people. Theoretically all savages could be enlightened but the American Indian defied this logic.<sup>1</sup> In short manifest destiny could not be fulfilled until American brought Indians to heel.

Through wars, land sales, and treaties, the American government removed and ultimately segregated Indian nations to specific land tracts. Even so, the government remained at a loss over what to do with their Indian brethren. Should they be incorporated into mainstream white society? If so, how? Should they be kept isolated, removed from white settlements until they gradually become extinct, or should efforts at acculturation continue? Governmental officials, politicians, missionaries and scientists from the sixteenth to the nineteenth century, argued over what was the best course. Something needed to be done with the vanishing race, but what? American leaders believed that the nation could not continue with its westward expansion until all Indian inhabitants were displaced off their lands. The very future of American civilization appeared dependent

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<sup>1</sup> Roy Harvey Pearce, *The Savages of America: A Study of the Indian and the Idea of Civilization* (Baltimore: John Hopkins Press, 1965), 3, 6, 41.

upon this action. The American Indian was a thorn in America's side and the country desperately wanted the problem solved but did not know how.

Henry Knox, the Secretary of War under President George Washington, first declared that American Indians should be viewed as distinct political entities. He wrote, "The independent nations and tribes of indians ought to be considered as foreign nations, not as the subjects of any particular State."<sup>2</sup> Knox, in charge of Indian affairs, presented his report on Northwestern Indians in June 1789. He concluded Indians should not be destroyed for their lands because it would go against the principals of justice which America was founded upon. Indians owned the land because they inhabited it first, he reasoned because of this America could not simply take it from them. It must be yielded by "free consent" or as spoils of war as fair punishment. Knox proposed that the government gain Indian lands though a series of treaties which satisfied Indian demands, if at all possible. He viewed Indians as "ignorant" in his report, but insisted their opinions be both heard and considered. Knox assumed that as white settlements encroached upon Indian lands, the subsequent loss of game and decreased land value to Indian life, would force Indians to sell even more of their property. This would lead to the natural demise of the American Indian and the growth of America's power.<sup>3</sup> Prior to Knox's report, Congress appropriated specific funding for Indian land sales. The British began this practice and Congress perceived it to be the best option in expanding America's frontier.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Henry Knox to George Washington, 7 July 1789, *Gilder Lehrman Collection* <[http://www.pbs.org/georgewashington/collection/pres\\_1789jul7.html](http://www.pbs.org/georgewashington/collection/pres_1789jul7.html)> (accessed 4 March 2011).

<sup>3</sup> Henry Knox, Report on the Northwestern Indians, 15 June 1789, *American State Papers: Indian Affairs*, I: 13-14 <[http://pages.uoregon.edu/mjdennis/courses/hist469\\_Knox.htm](http://pages.uoregon.edu/mjdennis/courses/hist469_Knox.htm)> (accessed 4 March 2011); Knox to Washington, 7 July 1789.

<sup>4</sup> *American State Papers*, I: 9, <[http://gbl.indiana.edu/ethnohistory/archives/dockett\\_317/317\\_36a.html](http://gbl.indiana.edu/ethnohistory/archives/dockett_317/317_36a.html)> (accessed 4 March 2011).

Indian Affairs underwent a dramatic change during the presidency of Andrew Jackson. The Indian Removal Act of 1830 granted the president the right to remove Eastern Indian nations to Western land tracts set aside by the government. These designated lands would always belong, in theory, to the assigned Indian nations. The government would not only protect American Indians on these lands, but the government would also provide annuities and supplies for them. Of course the Indians would have to agree through a treaty first before being removed from their tribal lands.<sup>5</sup> The Removal Act mainly affected the Five “Civilized” Tribes in the American Southeast.

The Seminole, Creek, Choctaw, Chickasaw and Cherokee Nations, all resisted assimilation into American society. They participated in American society but kept as much of their tribal lands and traditional beliefs as possible while respecting American laws. Members of the Five “Civilized” Tribes were often successful planters. Some lived as westerners but remained proud of their Indian heritage. Eventually representatives of all five of the “Civilized” Tribes signed the Removal Act, and in the following years were removed to Oklahoma on government lands. The most famous removal was the Trail of Tears in 1838 when the government forced the Cherokee Nation west. Thousands died in the horrific march due to the lack of supplies, and gruesome conditions. The Seminoles in Florida resisted removal for several decades with a series of three wars, the Seminole Wars, against the United States army. Some Indians did move west, but ultimately the state of Florida accepted the presence of the Seminole Nation and legally acknowledged them.

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<sup>5</sup> Indian Removal Act, 1830, <[http://www.civics-online.org/library/formatted/texts/indian\\_act.html](http://www.civics-online.org/library/formatted/texts/indian_act.html)> (accessed 4 March 2011).

The reservation system was created in 1851 with the Indian Appropriation Act. By then it was clear the American Indian would not quietly disappear into the pages of history books. They would not willingly cede land ownership to the American government. Indians stood in the way of westward expansion. America could not move forward until they assimilated the Indians into American society and progress claimed the lands. Many believed that only as citizens did American Indians have a place in the future of the United States. Either the Indian must become a citizen and a productive member of society, or he needed to be physically exterminated. One needed to kill the Indian to save the man. As explained by Harvey Roy Pearce, the death of the American Indian is the “price of progress of civilization over savagism.”<sup>6</sup>

The Appropriation Act concentrated American Indians in specific areas known as reservations. Indians were not allowed to freely leave the enclosed encampments. The hope was that reservations would not only protect Indians from white settlers but would allow Indians to be slowly assimilated into U.S. society by the work of missionaries and government appointed agents. Indians, they believed, could learn how to farm while adopting a Christian lifestyle and thus they were no longer essentially Indian. Indians resisted the proposed reservation system. They had no religious or cultural connection to the land given to them. The lands were often poor and unfit for farming. Settlers frequently encroached upon the choice pieces of the lands, pushing out the Indian inhabitants. Disease, starvation and death further plagued reservations.

The Indian agent would be the crucial tie between the Indians on the reservation and the government. Cultural go-betweens served as early versions of Indian agents in the

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<sup>6</sup> Pearce, *The Savages of America*, 49, 53; Bernard W. Sheehan, *Seeds of Extinction: Jeffersonian Philanthropy and the American Indian* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1973), 4, 8, 101.

colonial period, acting as mediators and interpreters. As American Indian policy evolved, cultural go-betweens were replaced by what Knox referred to as “missionaries of excellent moral character.” In a letter to George Washington in July 1789, Knox described the ideal Indian agent and their duties. These “missionaries” would live among a specific nation. They would be knowledgeable of animal husbandry and farming. Knox believed commanding officers should be given first consideration for the position. He saw the agents as “the instruments to work on the Indians.” They would not be interested in profiting off the Indians, rather they would be a paternalistic friend, helping the Indians acclimate to contemporary American culture. Knox believed that the “missionaries” would “attach them to the Interests of the United States.” Gift giving and meeting Indian requests would greatly help this process. Under no circumstances should Indians give presents to agents in return. Knox believed the process would be less expensive than forcibly removing or destroying the Indians as he hoped it would benefit all involved parties. Knox stressed that at all times the Indians should be treated with respect “in the most friendly and just manner.”<sup>7</sup>

The reality of Indian agent system was the exact opposite of what Knox foresaw. The Bureau of Indian Affairs was created in 1824 under the control of the War Department and the responsibility was later given to the Department of the Interior in 1849. As explained by Donald Chaput, corruption always existed in Indian Affairs but it increased greatly under the control of the Department of the Interior. The “Indian ring” as Chaput called it, benefited everyone but the Indian. A politician appointed the agent, usually a friend or political ally. The agent would then choose a trader to serve the

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<sup>7</sup> Knox, Letter to George Washington.

Indians on the reservation. Far from the government's eye, the agent and trader would charge outlandish prices for goods, accepting credit on future annuity payments given to the Indians by the government, and often pocketed the difference.<sup>8</sup>

Agents were mostly civilians with no qualifications for the job. They did not speak the native language, or care about assimilating the Indians. These patronage appointees cared only about profiting from their new position. The agent and his family lived on the reservation in a government supplied home. Agents acted as both a supervisor to the reservation and as a patriarchal figure to the Indians, at least theoretically. They kept track of all the Indians on the reservation, settled disputes when needed, ordered supplies, kept records of monies spent, and the Indians' progress towards Westernization. Their primary duty was handing out yearly supplies and annuity payments. This position was not work intensive nor did it require any level of skill. It was a boon to receive the appointment with many agents retiring after four years, pockets lined with emblemized funds.<sup>9</sup>

Bishop Henry Benjamin Whipple, Minnesota's first Episcopalian Bishop, complained to President Abraham Lincoln that the Indian agents were "generally selected without any reference to their fitness for the place." Whipple said that even the most honest men who had good intentions upon receiving their position, sooner or later fell prey to the system's inherent corruption. Lincoln agreed with Whipple that something needed to be done with the problematic Indian agents but with the Civil War occupying

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<sup>8</sup> Donald Chaput, "Generals, Indian Agents, Politicians: The Doolittle Survey of 1865," *Western Historical Quarterly* 3, no. 3 (July 1979): 269-270.

<sup>9</sup> Flora Warren Seymour, *Indian Agents of the Old Frontier* (New York: Octagon Books, 1975), 1, 4-5, 40.

most government efforts, little could be done. Decent Indian agents did exist but those men were grossly outnumbered by the dishonesty of others.<sup>10</sup>

Meanwhile the Indians lived in a constant state of debt and impoverished living conditions. Many Indians turned to alcohol.<sup>11</sup> Malnutrition and hunger also proved a problem for many Indian families. Domestic violence was also a problem, not only from male family members but from traders as well. Indians depended upon traders and the yearly government supplies to survive, since they could no longer live off the land or hunt buffalo herds. Seemingly the reservation system benefited everyone but the Indian. The reservations were created as the country went along, with little thought given to details or the system's future. The reservation system served as an instant, if unsuccessful fix to a much larger problem. Despite two-hundred and fifty years of engagement, America still did not know what to do with the Indians. The Civil War made the situation much worse. Funds and supplies were lessened or delayed. Soldiers were called away to fight in the eastern campaigns, leaving the West vulnerable to possible Indian rebellions.

Lincoln entered his presidency with little knowledge of American Indians. His personal experience was limited to family history and his own participation in the Black Hawk War in 1832. Lincoln's namesake, his grandfather Abraham Lincoln, died during an Indian raid on the Kentucky frontier in 1786. The Lincoln family had recently settled in Kentucky when Indians came upon Abraham and his three sons, Josiah, Mordecai, and Thomas (Lincoln's father), in the corn fields. Abraham died instantly. Josiah ran for help while Mordecai took shelter in a nearby cabin. Thomas, only six years old, stayed with

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<sup>10</sup> Seymour, *Indian Agents*, 2-3.

<sup>11</sup> Martha T. Riggs, "Letter to Cincinnati Christian Herald," in *Mary and I, Forty Years with the Sioux* by Stephen Riggs (Williamstown: Corner House Massachusetts, 1880), 178.

his dead father. He would have been killed as well if not for Mordecai's quick aim at an Indian who crept up behind the grieving boy. Thomas later swore he heard the bullet enter the Indian. He repeated this story numerous times to his son. Lincoln admitted "the legend more strongly than all others imprinted upon my mind and memory."<sup>12</sup>

Lincoln did not personally interact with an Indian until he served as a soldier in the Black Hawk War. He volunteered for service with the Illinois militia in 1832 and was chosen to be captain of the local company despite having no prior military experience. One day, an Indian wandered into his company's camp, hungry and poorly clothed. He carried a letter of recommendation to General Lewis Cass, suggesting his services as a guide. The soldiers wanted to hang the Indian as a spy simply because of his ethnicity but Lincoln protested. He saw no reason to kill the harmless, innocent Indian. A few of the soldiers accused Lincoln of cowardice. He replied "If any man thinks I am a coward, let him test it!" No one challenged him and the Indian remained unharmed.<sup>13</sup> Clearly Lincoln felt no racial hatred towards Indians despite knowing his grandfather died from an unprovoked Indian attack.

Lincoln saw no direct combat with Indian units but he thoroughly enjoyed his time spent in the militia. He helped bury the dead after Stillman's defeat in May 1832 when a Black Hawk party ambushed the unsuspecting soldiers. The attacking Indians grossly outnumbered the soldiers at Sycamore Creek in Illinois. Lincoln revealed in a 1859 letter to J.W. Fell that his time as captain "gave me more pleasure than any I have

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<sup>12</sup> David Donald Herbert, *Lincoln* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995), 21; Carl Sandburg, *Abraham Lincoln: The Prairie Years and the War Years* (New York: Harcourt Inc, 1982), 3; John G. Nicolay and John Hay, *Abraham Lincoln: A History* (New York: The Century Co, 1890), 21.

<sup>13</sup> Jackson, "Abraham Lincoln in the Black Hawk War," 122.



had since.”<sup>14</sup> He witnessed firsthand the brutality that Indians were capable of but that did not prevent Lincoln from showing them kindness.

He spent his early years on the American frontier where he shared a cabin with his parents and siblings. Thomas Lincoln, his father, relied on young Abraham’s help with the farm. When his father could spare him, Lincoln attended a local school at his mother’s insistence. The Lincoln family possessed little wealth or prestige on the frontier. These humble beginnings shaped Lincoln to be more than “a man of the West” as his 1860 presidential campaign advertised.<sup>15</sup> More than anything Lincoln wanted what was best for his country. Unfortunately the American Civil War demanded all of his attention and the country’s resources during his time in office.



Herman Viola, “Lincoln and the Indian,” (Paper presented at the annual meeting for the Lincoln Fellowship of Wisconsin, Madison 1976), 10.

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<sup>14</sup> Abraham Lincoln, “Speech in the House of Representatives,” 27 July 1848, <<http://www.wisconsinhistory.org/diary/002725.asp>>, (accessed 10 October 2010); Alfred Augustus Jackson, “Abraham Lincoln in the Black Hawk War,” 1898, <<http://content.wisconsinhistory.org/cdm4/document.php?CISOROOT=/whc&CISOPTR=6741&CISOSH OW=6282>>, (accessed 10 October 2010), 125.

<sup>15</sup> Richard W. Etulain, “Abraham Lincoln and the Trans-Mississippi American West: An Introductory Overview,” in *Lincoln Looks West: From the Mississippi to the Pacific*, ed. Richard W. Etulain (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2010), 2.

Lincoln's presidency did not give him many more opportunities to interact with America's Indians. Yearly Indian delegates arrived in Washington D.C for meetings however Lincoln met with only a few. William Dole, Commissioner of Indian Affairs, and Lincoln's secretaries, John Hay and John Nicolay, formally received the delegates. Lincoln's subordinates were in charge of impressing upon the visiting Indians the power of the United States. Not only did the delegates tour the city but they received gifts such as new clothing and peace medals. Few records were kept of Lincoln's private meetings with Indian leaders but his secretary John Hay wrote occasional notes. Hay recorded an 1861 account of Lincoln's meeting with the Potawatomi Indians. It revealed that Lincoln knew little of American Indian culture. He greeted them with what Indian words he knew and spoke with them in broken English. Lincoln assumed all Indians shared the same language and did not understand the English language.<sup>16</sup> He may have recognized them as humans but he did not understand them as people. Lincoln lacked the necessary knowledge and experience to do so.

The photograph below shows a Dakota delegation from 1858 in Washington D.C., which includes Mankato, an Indian leader, who later participated in the uprising and died in one of the last battles. Mankato is sitting in the first row on the left. Three of the Dakota men proudly display large fans they were no doubt given on the trip as part of the gifting tradition. Several of the white men in the photograph have their hands placed on the shoulders of the Indians, promoting the sense of brotherhood and peace between the two groups. It is difficult to believe that only a few years after this photograph was taken, war erupted between the Dakota and Minnesotan settlers.

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<sup>16</sup> Herman Viola, "Lincoln and the Indian" (Paper presented at the annual meeting for the Lincoln Fellowship of Wisconsin, Madison 1976), 3-5.



<http://collections.mnhs.org/visualresources/image.cfm?imageid=44409&Page=1>

The Civil War further ensured Lincoln's limited involvement with Indian affairs. Once more he delegated what duties he could so he could focus on the war in the South. Lincoln cared about the American Indian only in the larger context of the Civil War. He relied heavily upon the Office of Indian Affairs and the Secretary of the Interior. Lincoln perceived the flawed reservation system to be the only solution to the problem. Lincoln hoped the system would hold during the duration of the war so needed supplies could go to the armies, and settlers could continue to populate the western territories. The existing Indian system was one of corruption and inefficiency with Indian agents receiving low salaries or little respect. Rarely were Indian agents qualified or inclined to produce positive results.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Etulian, *Abraham Lincoln and the Trans-Mississippi*, 2-3, 26; Nichols, *Lincoln and the Indians*, 164; David A. Nichols, *Lincoln and the Indians: Civil War Policy and Politics* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1978), 73, 133, 161; Edmund Jefferson Danziger Jr., *Indians and Bureaucrats*:

One Indian rebellion caught the attention of Lincoln. In the fall of 1862, the lower Dakota Nation declared war on Minnesotan settlers. Panic quickly spread throughout Minnesota into Iowa and Nebraska. People feared an all out war as they learned of the atrocities committed by the attacking Dakota on the American frontier. Lincoln could not afford any significant diversion of military attention and needed war material. He sent disgraced General John Pope to end the armed conflict quickly. The subsequent military trials sentenced three hundred Dakota men to death for their participation or association in the uprising. Lincoln's philanthropic nature could not allow such a mass execution. After a close examination of the trial records Lincoln found thirty eight men deserving of the death penalty. The rest he pardoned all together or directed to serve shortened prison sentences.

During the Civil War Indians saw their own chance to change the system and they took it. Not only did the rebellion highlight the culmination of factors which fissured the Indian reservation system, but it changed how the government handled Indian affairs. Prior to this the American Indian was not a dominant or pressing factor in Lincoln's consciousness. The president wanted the rebellion resolved as soon as possible for the uprising took away valuable time and resources from the Civil War. No longer could the government ignore the faulty system. Reforms to the Office of Indian Affairs occurred decades later because of the attention created by the rebellion. The Dakota War forced Lincoln to become personally involved in the lives of three hundred and eight Dakota men and within the Indian system itself.

## Chapter One



<http://collections.mnhs.org/VisualResources/image.cfm?imageid=23924&Page=3&Keywords=Dakota%20Conflict%20of%201862>

Taken on August 21, 1862, the photograph featured above is the only picture taken during the Dakota War. The men, women, and children in the photograph fled their homes surrounding the Dakota reservation in fear that they too would meet a gruesome death as so many of their fellow Minnesotans had at the hands of Indians. Adrain J. Ebell, one of the refugees, took the photograph. Families fled in haste, taking only what could be carried. The group's somber expression portrays the nightmare they lived for several weeks in August until General Henry Hastings Sibley and General John Pope gained control of the frontier.

It is impossible to know how many settlers died in the uprising as the Dakota warriors killed indiscriminately. Defenseless women and children were not spared and many were taken captive. Even those with Indian blood feared for their lives as the dark complexioned man in the photograph demonstrates. The trial records of the Dakota men who faced charges for the uprising, repeatedly claimed they participated only because Dakota warriors threatened to kill them if they refused. Terror raged on the Minnesota

frontier for forty days. Newspaper articles from the time claimed an unbelievable number perished on the frontier but admitted that many of the assumed dead probably fled for their lives without sending word.<sup>18</sup> Conservative estimates were that several hundred died but some historians believe the number could be in the thousands. They argue that so many died in insulated cabins or remote woods where the remains could not be recovered, so there was no record or surviving memory.

Survivors no doubt exaggerated details of the atrocities committed for romantic excitement. The more lurid accounts tell of the Dakota torturing and mutilating the bodies, beyond a simple scalping. Reportedly, one woman's baby was snatched from her womb, and nailed to a tree. Women claimed repeated rapes and people swore the Indians burned some settlers alive. The *New York Times* described roads lined with bodies, and blood trails, and make-shift infirmaries filled with survivors suffering from horrific knife wounds.<sup>19</sup> Rumors like that fueled the ensuing terror. Settlers only knew that the Dakota spared very few. Ransacked homesteads and towns smoldered as settlers fled for their lives.

The settlers maintained hope for victory, as demonstrated by the small group of men raising a hatchet in the photograph. Governor Alexander Ramsey sent General Sibley to put down the rebellion, and Lincoln later dispatched General Pope after the

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<sup>18</sup> "The Indian Troubles; Movements of John Ross Another Town in Minnesota Destroyed, &c" *New York Times*, 29 August 1862.

<sup>19</sup> C.M. Oehler, *The Great Sioux Uprising* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1959), 57; "THE INDIAN ATROCITIES.; Murder of Whites at the Lower Sioux Agency In Minnesota--Attack upon a Party of Soldiers from Fort Ridgely--Several Killedand Wounded--Dreadful Scenes of Murder," *New York Times*, 23 August 1862; "The Indian Massacres; Terrible Scenes of Death and Misery in Minnesota. Five Hundred Whites Supposed to be Murdered. The Sioux Bands United Against the Whites. Fort Ridegely In Danger," *New York Times*, 24 August 1862; "The Trouble With The Indians: Terrible Barbarities Practiced by the Savages Proclamation of the Governor," *New York Times*, 27 August 1862.

incident gained national attention. Divisions among the Dakota enabled the Union army to finally defeat the Indians, but not before many settlers lost their lives and the future of the Dakota Nation was irrevocably changed. The Dakota's anger began with America's flawed reservation system but was deeply rooted in the preceding decade of the tribe's history.

By 1851 the lands of the Dakota had greatly diminished with the settlers' arrival. Game had become scarce and providing for themselves was almost impossible. They could no longer survive on bison and small game alone. The Dakota were eager to sell their lands to the government in exchange for promised care and the United States government was too happy to oblige. In July 1851 the Upper Dakota tribes of Minnesota met with Governor Ramsey and signed the Traverse des Sioux treaty.<sup>20</sup> The featured painting by Frank Barnell Mayer in the early 1880s demonstrated how eager the Dakota were for the treaty. He depicted the men, women, and children gathered to witness the signing, peaceful and supportive of the decision.

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<sup>20</sup> The Lower Dakota tribes signed a similar treaty, the Mendota, later that year. Porter Wilson Shortridge, *The Transition of a Typical Frontier* (Menasha: George Banta Publishing Company, 1922), 110; Roy W. Meyer, *History of the Santee Sioux: United States Indian Policy on Trial* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1967), 48.





[http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/en/8/84/Treaty\\_of\\_Traverse\\_des\\_Sioux\\_painting.jpg](http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/en/8/84/Treaty_of_Traverse_des_Sioux_painting.jpg)

Philander Prescott, Indian agent to the Dakota at the time of the treaty, claimed the exact opposite. It took over twenty days to convince the Dakota to sign. They thought the treaty took too much of their land and believed that they were not adequately represented at the negotiations. Pressured and wooed with feasts and gifts, the Dakota finally agreed. They received “fine coats” according to Prescott, horses, saddles, blankets, knives, tobacco, ribbons, and paint for their cooperation. Games were also played, physical competitions with medals given to the winners. Ironically the cost of the treaty negotiation was later deducted from the Indians’ treaty profit.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>21</sup> Philander Prescott, *The Recollections of Philander Prescott: Frontiersman of the Old Northwest, 1819 – 1862* ed. Donald Dean Parker (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1966), 184-185, 187-189; Meyer, *History of the Santee Sioux*, 79.





<http://www.thehistorium.com/?p=154>

The Indian leaders ceded their land claims from Lake Travers, to the Big Sioux River, and to the Red River of Northern Minnesota in exchange for a small reservation along the Minnesota River. The highlighted border in the accompanying map shows the amount of land the Dakota sold. The Dakota received \$1,665,000 for their lands but the government held \$1,360,000 in trust, payable over the next fifty years with a 5 percent interest rate. A portion of the money would be placed towards educating the Dakota and helping them become ‘civilized’. The government set aside \$275,000 of the profits for relocating the Dakota to the new reservation.<sup>22</sup>

The Dakota would still have been left with a large profit from the treaty but much of the monies went towards debts traders claimed the Indians owed them. The traders claimed some \$250,000 worth of promissory notes. Originally the amount was much

<sup>22</sup> Shortridge, *The Transition of a Typical Frontier*, 113.

higher at over \$400,000 but the traders agreed to a lower debt. They padded the amounts owed to them to an outrageous amount. It was impossible to disprove their sums. Much of the pressure the Dakota felt to sign the treaty came from the traders as they only got paid if the treaty occurred. It is debatable if the Dakota leaders knew what they were signing as the traders pushed what is now known as the “traders’ papers” in front of the Indians after they had signed the main treaty. The leaders claimed they thought the papers were copies of the treaty; they did not realize what they were signing. The traders’ money was deducted from the relocation sum the Dakota received, which greatly affected their future. It is not farfetched to assume that without the treaty, the Dakota might not have felt desperate enough to wage war against the settlers in the summer of 1862.<sup>23</sup> Not only had they lost much of their traditional lands, but they felt cheated out of the money owed to them by the government.

Not all the Dakota agreed with the Traverse des Sioux treaty or with the move to the reservation. Inkpaduta, a Dakota leader who refused to participate in the treaty, separated from the main Dakota Nation as a result. In early March 1857, Inkpaduta went to the reservation seeking provisions as hunting was scarce from the previous hard winter. Charles E. Flandrau, the Indian agent to the Dakota at the time, refused and sent Inkpaduta away. Hungry and upset, Inkpaduta and his warriors attacked a series of isolated homesteads on March 7<sup>th</sup>, 1857 near Spirit Lake in Iowa. Over thirty settlers

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<sup>23</sup> Shortridge, *The Transition of a Typical Frontier*, 111, 114-115; Meridel Le Sueur, *North Star Country* (New York: Dell, Sloan & Pearce, 1945), 84; Meyer, *History of the Santee Sioux*, 80; Prescott, *Recollections*, 184- 185.

were killed in what is now known as the Spirit Lake Massacre. The renegade Dakota took one captive Abbie Gardner.<sup>24</sup>

A young girl at the time, Abbie remembered Inkpaduta and his men arriving at her family's cabin near breakfast time, asking for food. Her family eagerly fed the hungry Indians but refused to give them ammunition. The Indians later returned, demanding more supplies, this time flour, which was a rarity on the frontier. When Abbie's father refused the Indians shot him. They destroyed the Gardner homestead, ransacking it for supplies and burning the cabin. The Indians killed all of the Gardner family, even the children but spared Abbie as a captive. Abbie remembered her young siblings being taken from her arms and beaten "to death with sticks of stove wood." The Indians attacked the surrounding homesteads before attacking several more settlers in Springfield Minnesota. Flandrau caught up with Inkpaduta in late June and freed young Abbie, but the raiding Dakota did not receive any punishment other than a suspension of their government annuities until September. Inkpaduta's attack years earlier, is frighteningly similar to the events of the Dakota War, hunger and helplessness led to a violent uprising. Retrospectively the Dakota War might have been negated if the government had punished Inkpaduta and his men more harshly in 1857 or acknowledged the Dakota's growing desperation. Fear spread on the Minnesota frontier of future Indian attacks but no one predicted the bloodbath of the Dakota war a few short years later in 1862.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Russell W. Fridley, "Charles E. Flandrau: Attorney at War," *Minnesota History* 38, no. 4 (September 1962), 123; Charles E. Flandrau, "The Ink-pa-du-ta Massacre of 1857," in *Minnesota Historical Collections*, vol. 3, 386-407 (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society, 1880), 387-388; Thomas Teakle, *The Spirit Lake Massacre*, (Iowa City: State Historical Society of Iowa, 1918), 101-105; Abbie Gardner, *History of the Spirit Lake Massacre and Captivity of Miss Abbie Gardner* (Des Moines: Iowa Print Company, 1885), 69.

<sup>25</sup> Gardner, *History of the Spirit Lake Massacre*, 64-69; Fridley, "Charles E. Flandrau," 123-125.

The situation had not changed much for the Dakota by 1862. If anything, it had gotten worse with the onset of the Civil War. Over six thousand Dakota depended on the government for provisions and even then, it barely offset the lack of game. The Dakota tried agriculture but suffered from droughts and floods that greatly hindered any progress towards being self sufficient. When Philander Prescott retired from his position in 1856, he and fellow Indian agent, Richard G. Murphy, predicted the Dakota would never be ‘civilized’ “unless a different system is pursued.”<sup>26</sup>

The photograph featured below is of a Dakota man, Chaska, and his family. Chaska, one of the Indians who reportedly helped whites during the uprising, lived as a ‘civilized’ Indian, a “cut hair.” He and his family dressed in white clothing and kept white hair styles, as shown in the photograph. Although not indicated in the photograph, the family no doubt adopted the Christian faith as well. The family most likely inhabited the simple brick home in the back of the scene, and did their cooking in the open fire pit in front of the house. The corn field to the right suggests the family also had mild success with agriculture. Chaska’s family was not wealthy by any means; however, they obviously did their best to adopt a white life style.

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<sup>26</sup> Meyer, *History of the Santee Sioux*, 49, 63-64; Prescott, *Recollections*, 233.



Duane Schultz, *Over the Earth I Come: The Great Sioux Uprising of 1862* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992), 149.

Yearly annuities were late once again in 1862, mostly because of the war, and the Indians still had not received payment for selling their land in the Traverse des Sioux treaty. The education fund remained mostly untouched. Traders agreed amongst themselves to refuse the Indians credit for any more supplies, as they only received payment if and when the annuities were paid, and they doubted if the money would come. One trader, Andrew J. Myrick demonstrated the contempt of many whites with his statement, "if they are hungry, let them eat grass." Starvation was a real fear for the Dakota Nation. Over four thousand Indians went to their assigned agent, Thomas Galbraith, in mid July for provisions only to be told no, even though the storehouse had supplies. He promised the payments would come soon and then he would disperse the goods as he did not want to deal with the hassle more than once. Galbraith was grossly inexperienced for the position. Known for heavy drinking and an "arrogant, stubborn"

attitude, he refused to admit any errors in his actions and insisted he knew how best to handle the Indians.<sup>27</sup>

For several weeks Galbraith handed out the minimum amount of supplies to the waiting Indians who stayed hoping for the annuity to arrive. On August 4, 1862 a few Dakota men became tired of waiting and broke into the warehouse for needed supplies. Stephen Riggs, missionary to the Dakota, said they broke into the warehouse with axes, carrying out bacon and flour. Lieutenant Timothy J. Sheehan managed to bring the Indians under control with the threat of a howitzer although tempers still flared high. The Indians agreed to pay for the damaged door out of their annuity payment when it arrived, and Galbraith gave them more supplies under the condition that the Indians leave immediately, which they were only too happy to do. Galbraith promised to summon them when the payments arrived.<sup>28</sup> The Indians received no punishment for breaking into the warehouse.

This was a tenuous peace at best. The Dakota wanted their promised monies and provisions, but Galbraith could not tell the Indians when they would arrive or if they even would. Traders continued to refuse to give them credit which only worsened the situation. Indians had a very fragile trust with the government, particularly the Dakota who felt trapped and out of options. Rumors spread quickly that the monies would never come. The storehouse incident demonstrated just how desperate the Dakota felt. No longer were

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<sup>27</sup> Richard N. Ellis, *General Pope and U.S. Indian Policy* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1970), 3; Willoughby M. Babcock, "Minnesota's Indian War," *Minnesota's Indian War* 38, no.3 (September 1962), 94. Prescott, *Recollections*, 235; Meyer, *History of the Santee Sioux*, 109-110; Duane Schultz, *Over the Earth I Come: The Great Sioux Uprising* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992), 6, 11; Evan Jones, *The Minnesota: Forgotten River* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1962), 183.

<sup>28</sup> Ellis, *General Pope*, 4; Stephen R. Riggs, *Mary and I: Forty Years with the Sioux* (Williamstown: Corner House Publishers, 1880), 151-152; Babcock, "Minnesota's Indian War," 94- 95; Meyer, *History of the Santee Sioux*, 112.

they content to wait for others to decide their fate. The Dakota's distress and impatience rose with August's heat.

A series of events occurred on Sunday August 17<sup>th</sup> that forever changed the relationship between Minnesotans and the Dakota. Four young Indian men near Acton, Minnesota found a nest of eggs near a farmer's fence while they scavenged for food. Little Crow, Chief of the Dakota, later identified the men as Brown Wing, Breaking Up, Killing Ghost, and Runs-Against-Something-When-Crawling, all part of the Rice Creek band which the Dakota often viewed as troublemakers. The men hesitated in eating the eggs, even though they were hungry because the eggs belonged to a white man. Each dared the other to eat an egg although no one was brave enough to do so. One man broke the eggs and proclaimed he was not a coward. "I am not afraid of the white man," he said and vowed to kill the farmer to prove it. The other men agreed that they would "be brave too" and went to the homestead. The four men killed Mr. and Mrs. Jones, their adoptive fifteen year old daughter Clara, and two men who had the misfortune of visiting the Jones that day, Mr. Webster and Mr. Baker. Their wives were left unharmed and quickly fled to the nearest homestead to raise the alarm. The Indians also spared Clara's eighteen month old brother. The first five victims were later buried in a single grave that is now marked by a monument.<sup>29</sup>

The Dakota men had not planned to kill anyone that day. An act of passion caused things to spiral out of hand; no larger plot existed. The "Soldiers' Lodge", a secret

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<sup>29</sup> Le Sueur, *North Star Country*, 105; Kenneth Carley, *The Dakota War of 1862* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1976), 7-8, 10.

There are several versions of how the events of August 17<sup>th</sup> occurred. Riggs claimed the Indian men attacked the families when they would not give them alcohol. Carley believed the men did find the eggs and challenged the white men to a target shooting match to prove their bravery. Without warning or provocation the Indians turned on the settlers, killing them instantly. The egg version included in the text is found to be the most probable and is what the Dakota claim to be true.

council of Dakota leaders, which met in June 1862, never mentioned going to war. They only decided to prevent traders from being present when the annuities were doled out. The four men quickly returned to their Rice Creek village, fearful of the repercussions for killing the whites without provocation. Their own band was eager to declare war on the whites, but knew such a thing would not be possible without the support of all the Dakota bands. Red Middle Voice, leader of the Rice Creek Village, consulted Shakopee, leader of a larger band located up the river. Both villages wanted war. They called a chief's council late Sunday night at the home of Little Crow, the unofficial chief of the Dakota Nation. Red Middle Voice said that "Little Crow is the greatest among chiefs... Where he leads all others will follow." Little Crow was indeed the most respected chief among the Dakota. His verdict would ultimately decide if the Dakota would war against the whites.<sup>30</sup>

Between the hours of midnight and dawn, the Dakotas debated what to do. Band leaders crowded into Little Crow's home, while the young men anxiously waited outside, eager to go to war. The majority wanted the fight. Traveling Hail, another Dakota leader, warned that such a war would be folly as the Dakota possessed little ammunition. He asserted they would be greatly outnumbered by the whites who had a tremendous supply of guns and cannons. No one heeded his warnings as the young men outside howled for war. Little Crow was against going to war, but he decided he must support the wishes of

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<sup>30</sup> Carley, *Dakota War*, 10-11; Oehler, *The Great Sioux Uprising*, 31; Evan Jones, *The Minnesota*, 189; Kenneth Carley, "As Red Men Viewed it: Three Indian Accounts of the Uprising," *Minnesota History* 38, no. 3 (Spring 1962): 133.



his people. It was as Red Middle Voice said, the men wanted war and would have it, even if it meant going against the chief's decision.<sup>31</sup>

Little Crow wanted what was best for his people. During the council meeting he called them "children and fools" for suggesting a war against whites, such a thing would be "madness." Leaders needed to be the sage parent and not yield to popular demands if it was not best for the tribe. Red Middle Voice accused Little Crow of being a coward for not wanting to kill the whites. This angered him greatly. Little Crow delivered an eloquent oratory in rebuttal that would later be recorded in which he pledged to support the war.<sup>32</sup>

Little Crow claimed the men did not know what they were asking but that he did. Little Crow had fought the whites and the Ojibwas before. He had the scalps to prove that he was not a coward. His people were like dogs in heat Little Crow said and that they were drunk on "the white man's devil water." The Dakota were not powerful as before. The whites were like locusts, no matter how many died, more would come with guns. Little Crow said they could count on their fingers all day and still would not be able to keep count of how many whites would arrive for war. If the Dakota went to war, the whites would turn on them, and "devour you and your women and little children." Little Crow predicted his people would die like "rabbits when the hungry wolves hunt them in the Hard Moon" if they warred against the whites. His people were in blood lust and did

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<sup>31</sup> Oehler, *The Great Sioux Uprising*, 30, 33-34.

<sup>32</sup> Oehler, *The Great Sioux Uprising*, 34.

not understand reason. Still, Little Crow agreed to declare war against the Minnesotans; he said, "Little Crow is not a coward: he will die with you."<sup>33</sup>

The fateful decision had been made. It is unknown who issued the order for American Indians did not keep written records, and reporters recorded their oral histories years after the fact, but the Dakota vowed to kill all whites and any Indian or "cut hair" who would not join the cause. Before the council dispersed, Little Crow ordered an attack on the Lower Agency that morning, Monday August 18. Big Eagle, a chief present at the council who opposed the war for the same reasons as Little Crow, recalled that the men formed raiding parties to attack the unsuspecting settlers that night: "Parties formed and dashed away in the darkness to kill the settlers. The women began to run bullets and the men to clean their guns."<sup>34</sup>

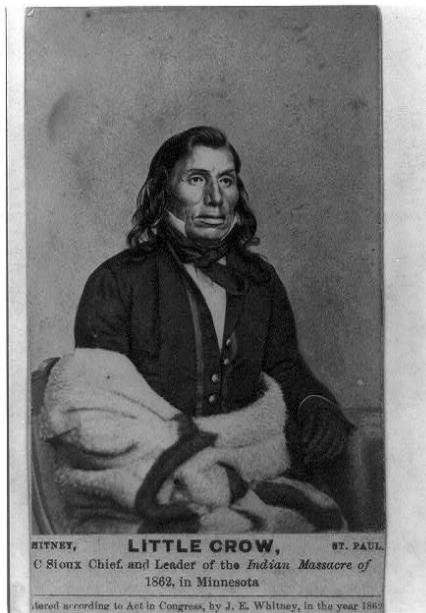
Historians have since wondered why Little Crow changed his mind. Surely a leader would not make a rash decision based upon peer pressure. Some believe he wanted to regain popularity among his people. Earlier that spring the Dakota elected Traveling Hail, a farmer Indian, as their main speaker. This selection humbled the proud Dakota leader. When the council came to him that night in August, Little Crow told them to go to their elected speaker as it was not his place to decide for the tribe. He might have agreed to the war in order to win over his people and to prove his fidelity to the Dakota. He did not want to lose any more status within his nation.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Little Crow, "Taoyateduta Is Not a Coward," *Minnesota History* 38, no. 3 (September 1962): 115.

<sup>34</sup> Oehler, *The Great Sioux Uprising*, 34-35; Carley, *Dakota War*, 12; Big Eagle, "Through Dakota Eyes: Narrative Accounts of the Minnesota Indian War of 1862," ed. Gary Clayton Anderson and Alan R. Woolworth (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1988), 35-36.

<sup>35</sup> Carely, *Dakota War*, 11; Oehler, *The Great Sioux Uprising*, 29, 31; Schultz, *Over the Earth I Come*, 37-38; Babcock, "Minnesota's Indian Wars," 96.



<http://collections.mnhs.org/visualresources/image.cfm?imageid=185082&Page=1>

Little Crow had always favored assimilation as demonstrated in the above photograph of the chief dressed as a white person. Born in ca. 1810, he attended a missionary school as an adult where he learned not only how to read and write in English but in the Dakota language as well. Little Crow frequently served as the spokesperson for newspaper interviews, reservation business, and as a Washington D.C. delegate. He adopted the western style of dress, frequently wearing trousers and linen shirts; however, for Dakota ceremonies he wore traditional dress. Little Crow lived in a two story brick home built for him by Galbraith but he kept his four wives and continued to practice the traditional ways of his people. Eventually he converted to the Episcopal faith; he cut his hair to shoulder length, and began to more fully live as a white man would. Little Crow did his best to combine elements of both the Dakota and the western life style to represent the easiest way for his people to assimilate into American society. When they elected Traveling Hail as their speaker, he felt deceived and rejected. His path straddling both cultures had also been rejected. Little Crow realized his people wanted to be completely

assimilated and not in the manner he advocated.<sup>36</sup> All this quickly changed in August when the Dakota advocated war before Little Crow. They believed they could no longer trust the American government and wanted to return to their traditional ways, with the help of the old leader. The photograph below is of Little Crow in his traditional Dakota dress.



<http://www.thirdminnesota.com/LittleCrow.html>

The Dakota had nothing to lose and much to gain if the war went in their favor. Considerable hatred existed on both sides and the Dakota way of life appeared to be rapidly disappearing with the onslaught of white settlers. Many wondered if it would be better to die in the way of their ancestors, in battle with their enemies, or quietly disappear into the white world? Regardless of what the council or Little Crow decided, the Dakota would receive retribution for that morning's attack on the homesteads. Whites

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<sup>36</sup> Schultz, *Over the Earth I Come*, 33-35, 38.

would not overlook the death of innocent women. Red Middle Voice suggested in the now famous council meeting, that the Dakota had no choice other than war because the government would demand blood retribution for the attack.<sup>37</sup>

The timing for such a war was perfect. As Red Middle Voice stated in the council, most of the soldiers in Minnesota had gone east with the onset of the Civil War. To satisfy Minnesota's quota from Congress' draft in July 1862, all able body men needed to enlist. Indian agencies struggled to fill the abandoned positions and to continue protecting the reservations with military personnel. There was a visible lack of U.S. manpower. At the time of the attack, Galbraith had left the reservation with his band of volunteer militia, the Renville Rangers, to train at Fort Snelling, leaving the Dakota further unsupervised. Indians knew of the Civil War from newspapers and hearing gossip from the white settlers and traders. Big Eagle claimed the Indians believed "the North would be whipped" in the war against the South as the Union had recently suffered a trouncing defeat at the Second Battle of Bull Run. Some Indians feared they would become slaves if the Confederacy won.<sup>38</sup> If the Dakota were to successfully rise against the whites, the time would be now, when the Union was at its weakest.

After all, Inkpaduta had already challenged the power of the Union with few consequences, they themselves had broken down a warehouse door without punishment, and the southern states had, seemingly, successfully withdrawn from the Union. Why could not the Dakota kill all white settlers and reclaim their lands? Several Dakota

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<sup>37</sup> Schultz, *Over the Earth I Come*, 44; Oehler, *The Great Sioux Uprising*, 33; Meyer, *History of the Santee Sioux*, 115; Babcock, "Minnesota's Indian War," 96.

<sup>38</sup> Oehler, *The Great Sioux Uprising*, 32; Gerald T. Henig and Gerald S. Henig, "A Neglected Cause of the Sioux Uprising," *Minnesota History* 45, no. 3 (Fall 1976), 108-109; Sueur, *North Star Country*, 104; Jones, *The Minnesota*, 191.

leaders hoped the British would honor their earlier promise to Little Crow from the War of 1812, to help the Indians defeat the American settlers if needed. Little Crow thought it would be a folly as much had changed in the following five decades but still, the hope was there. Britain had long lost interest in claiming the western territories by that point and wanted nothing to do with American politics. They also did not want to deal with their own Indian uprising if the Dakota decided to attack within Canadian borders as well.<sup>39</sup> When the Dakota declared war on the whites, they did so without Britain's aide and without the support of the Lower Dakota or any other Indian nation.

There may have been truth in missionary Stephen Rigg's statement that without the Civil War "there would have been no Dakota uprising and no Minnesota massacres." The "massacres" began with an attack on the Lower Agency early Monday morning that promised more bloody violence for all the remaining settlers on the Minnesota frontier. Philander Prescott and trader Andrew J. Myrick, who told the Indians to eat grass, were among the first to die. Myrick died trying to escape. The Indians had stuffed grass into his mouth. His brother found his body two weeks later, full of bullet holes, arrows, and an embedded scythe. Gold coins lay nearby. Two other storeclerks who died, James W. Lynd and G.W. Divoll, were also found with gold stuffed in their mouths.<sup>40</sup>

It is remarkable that only thirteen people died in the original attack on the Lower Agency considering the settlers received very little warning ahead of time. The attack began around six in the morning and by noon the town was destroyed. Traders and store

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<sup>39</sup> Henig and Henig, "A Neglected Cause," 109; Oehler, *The Great Sioux Uprising*, 33; Alvin C. Gluek Jr., "The Sioux Uprising: A Problem in International Relations," *Minnesota History* 34, no. 8 (Winter 1955), 317, 319.

<sup>40</sup> Stephen Riggs, *Tah-koo wah-kañ or The Gospel Among the Dakota* (Boston: Congressional Sabbath-School and Publishing Society, 1869), 331; Carley, *The Dakota War*, 14; Oehler, *The Great Sioux Uprising*, 38-39.

personnel were the main target, however, the agency's physician, Dr. Philander Humphrey, and his family also died. His son witnessed his father's throat being cut and his head being severed. Seven more people died trying to escape and ten were captured. The Indians became distracted with looting and burning the settlement which allowed many inhabitants to slip away. Nearly fifty settlers were able to escape to safety by crossing the Minnesota River at the Redwood Ferry. An unknown ferryman risked his own life to get many to safety before the Dakota murdered him. Raiding parties discovered the ferryman and grossly dismembered his body as punishment for helping settlers escape. Riggs said that the death of the ferryman made escape extremely difficult for the remaining settlers who were then forced to flee on foot or in cumbersome wagons.<sup>41</sup>

*The New York Times* reported that the Monday evening of the attack "the light from burning buildings and grain sacks was seen in all directions."<sup>42</sup> The refugees fled thirteen miles to Fort Ridgely. Captain Marsh believed the incident to be nothing more than an isolated occurrence and set out with forty-six men to settle the dispute. The men unknowingly walked into an ambush at the ferry despite the warnings of refugees they met in route. Twenty-four U.S. soldiers were killed, including their mixed blood interpreter, Peter Quinn. Marsh drowned in the river as he tried to escape. Reportedly only one Indian died in the ambush. Clearly this was not a simple misunderstanding as Captain Marsh had thought. Sergeant John Bishop led the survivors back to Fort Ridgely,

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<sup>41</sup> Carley, *The Dakota War*, 14; Jones, *The Minnesota*, 193, 195; Oehler, *The Great Sioux Uprising*, 38, 40, 42; Riggs, *Mary and I*, 153.

<sup>42</sup> "The Indian Atrocities; Murder of Whites at the Lower Sioux Agency In Minnesota--Attack upon a Party of Soldiers from Fort Ridgely--Several Killed and Wounded--Dreadful Scenes of Murder." *New York Times*, 23 August 1862.

arriving after nightfall. Word quickly traveled to Galbraith and to Fort Ripley of the events. Union soldiers and volunteer militia units grouped together to offer what protection they could against the warring Dakota.<sup>43</sup>

The success at the Redwood Ferry and at the Lower Agency gave further confidence to the Dakota. Perhaps they could successfully beat the whites and reclaim their lands. Filled with blood lust, many of the warriors dispersed to raid homesteads, eager to loot and to unleash more violence on unsuspecting families. The Dakota warriors would not attempt another group attack until August 19 when they attacked a nearby town, New Ulm. This allowed the Union army and settlers time to organize against the Dakota. Little Crow warned his men that they needed to act quickly but they were too drunk with their temporary victories to heed his advice.<sup>44</sup>

Mrs. DeCamp, a woman who survived the first attack on the agency, claimed to have asked some of the warriors why they killed innocents. They said that it was “fun to kill white men” and that “One Indian can kill ten white men without trying.” The Dakota men called the whites cowards since they had left their women unprotected when they left to fight in the East. In the words of one author, Meridel Le Sueur, “the Indians had gone berserk... They had gone mad with hunger and vengeance.” Little Crow may have warned his people not to kill women or children, to target only the traders and those guilty of cheating them, but the Dakota quickly forgot to distinguish their victims and killed all whites they encountered on the Minnesota frontier.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Carley, *The Dakota War*, 15-16; Babcock, “Minnesota’s Indian War, 96; Riggs, *Mary and I*, 153.

<sup>44</sup> Carley, *The Dakota War*, 16; Babcock, “Minnesota’s Indian War, 96.

<sup>45</sup> Oehler, *The Great Sioux Uprising*, 42-43; Le Sueur, *North Star Country*, 106-107.



For the Dakota it was simply another war against their enemies, similar to the wars they previously fought against their long time foes the Chippewa and Ojibwas. It did not matter if they killed men or children as they wanted revenge and to eradicate all whites from their lands, and those who did not die would flee for their lives in fear of the atrocities. Either way their goal would be accomplished. Riggs, who lamented the loss of progress he had made with the Dakota, was entirely correct in his recollection that “the Indians had spread terror and death all along the frontier. And still their deadly work was going on.”<sup>46</sup>

Not all the Dakota supported the uprising or the mass murders of so many innocent victims, but unfortunately there was little that could be done. All Indians would receive blame for the carnage regardless if they participated or not, as the later war trials demonstrated. Even the Dakota leaders could not control their men. For the first week the Dakota were on the offensive, but they soon went on the defensive as the Union forces against them grew. Little Crow and other leaders wanted to take Fort Ridgely immediately after attacking the agency, but the younger warriors wanted to loot the nearby town of New Ulm. The Dakota attacked New Ulm twice, first on August 19 and then again on August 23. The original attack was ineffective because it lacked planning and the second might have succeeded, but the town had prepared for the assault. Most of the town burned and thirty-four of its inhabitants died with sixty wounded, but they successfully prevented the Dakota from continuing their attack further.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Jones, *The Minnesota*, 198-199; Riggs, *Mary and I*, 162.

<sup>47</sup> Meyer, *History of the Santee Sioux*, 118-119.

The Dakota finally attacked Fort Ridgely on August 20, days after Little Crow advised them to do so. Originally the fort was relatively unprotected and they might have taken it easily, but by the time they did attack, reinforcements had arrived and the Dakota could not breach the fort. The Dakota fled from artillery fire and tried again on August 22 with more men but were again forced to retreat. Little Crow led the warriors in one final attempt to take Fort Ridgely; however, they could not endure the cannon fire and ultimately gave up after six hours of intense fighting.<sup>48</sup> They did not try to take the fort again.

If the Dakota had won at New Ulm and Fort Ridgely their dreams of taking Minnesota might have come to fruition. However, these attacks expended much of their man power and cost them valuable momentum. Without these victories the Dakota never would have been able to take Fort Snelling as they had planned. As it was, the Dakota gained only a fleeting victory.<sup>49</sup> Ironically, the Dakota's long awaited annuity payments arrived the day after they attacked the Lower Agency. The settlers lived in constant fear of an Indian attack for many weeks. Refugees like those featured in the first photograph flocked to nearby forts and settlements in hopes that there would be safety in numbers. Settlers left with few belongings and many never saw their homes intact again. They placed their trust in their Governor Alexander Ramsey and General Henry Sibley to stop the uprising; however, it would take the involvement of General John Pope under the orders of President Abraham Lincoln to definitively end the uprising.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Meyer, *History of the Santee Sioux*, 119-120.

<sup>49</sup> Meyer, *History of the Santee Sioux*, 120.

<sup>50</sup> Le Sueur, *North Star Country*, 109.

## Chapter Two

General John Pope declared the war with the Dakota over on October 9 1862. In a two-paragraph missive to General-in-Chief Henry Halleck, Pope proclaimed that “The Sioux war may be considered at an end” and stated 1200 Indians, men, women and children, had already turned themselves in. A military tribunal would try the involved Dakota men and some suspected Winnebago warriors. Pope assured Halleck that all of the Dakota’s land and crops had been destroyed.<sup>51</sup> The eight-week horror many Minnesotan settlers experienced was finally over, but the consequences of the uprising had not yet been fathomed. Popular opinion in Minnesota demanded swift, harsh punishment for all of the Dakota. Both Minnesota’s government and white citizens wanted to exterminate all the Indians, even those innocent of wrong doings, in the name of justice. Terror and anger reigned still, and it became clear, the relationship between whites and American Indians would require blood retribution and time, in order to heal.

Missionary Stephen Riggs’ 1869 summary of the uprising explained that the rebellion had “destroyed much of the civilization” which the missionaries and settlers struggled had to create. From the initial conflict, it took three weeks before the Union Army arrived and began to fight back and during that time, the Dakota ruled the Minnesotan plains. Originally no one, not even the settlers, believed such violence from the ‘civilized’ Indians was even possible, but the burnt buildings and the mutilated corpses demonstrated the potential violence from the Dakota which could not be

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<sup>51</sup> *War of the Rebellion: Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, Series 1, vol. 13 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1972), 722.

denied.<sup>52</sup> It took far longer for the Minnesotan government to convince the east coast leaders of the uprising's gravity.

Initially the uprising received little attention in the East. Accounts of the Dakota conflict first appeared in the *New York Times* on August 22. The article was only four sentences long and did not mention the gruesome horrors or the lasting terror for those remaining on the frontier. The newspapers reported several persons were killed at the Lower Agency and near Acton, but no further details were given. The paper noted that settlers had fled down the Minnesota River and U.S. military units had been dispatched to the area. The entire event was labeled a "disturbance" and gave the general public little cause to worry.<sup>53</sup> In the past, Indian uprisings had occurred often but had been quickly quelled by military force. Most easterners believed it would be the same with this rebellion.

Governor Ramsey and Commissioner of Indian Affairs William P. Dole wrote Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton, on August 25 requesting an extra month to meet their draft quota because the uprising had so "distracted" the state and required all available manpower to help in the crisis. Despite the large numbers of residents fleeing the violence, Stanton denied Ramsey's request. Two days later Ramsey pleaded his case to President Abraham Lincoln, claiming that: "No one not here can conceive the panic in the State." Lincoln willingly granted the extension, urging Ramsey to "attend to the Indians." Ever the pragmatist, Lincoln understood that "if the draft cannot proceed of

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<sup>52</sup> Stephen Riggs, *Tah-koo wah-kañ or The Gospel Among the Dakota* (Boston: Congressional Sabbath-School and Publishing Society, 1869), 289,299, 304-305.

<sup>53</sup> "Trouble with the Indians in Minnesota.; Attack On The Whites Men, Women and Children Massacred, etc," *New York Times*, 22 August 1862.

course it will not proceed. Necessity knows no law.”<sup>54</sup> Lincoln wanted to win the Civil War in the East yes, but he knew he that could not risk the safety of his people to do so.

Lincoln’s private secretary, John G. Jay and Commissioner Dole, reported to Lincoln that the horrific violence in Minnesota on August 27 had caused “wild panic” in the state. The men called the uprising “a most terrible and exciting Indian war.” This description did little to demonstrate the seriousness of the situation. In mid-September, Major General John M. Schofield complained to Halleck that General Pope had been “detaining” Iowa regiments which were needed to combat the Confederates. Halleck then ordered Pope not to detain any regiments as: “It is not believed that you [Pope] will require a very large infantry force against the Indians, as their numbers cannot be very great.”<sup>55</sup>

Both General Henry Hastings Sibley and General Pope agreed that most did not understand the gravity of the situation. Each leader reported their lack of supplies, from ammunition and properly trained men, to basic needs such as bread and coats. All available supplies were needed for the campaigns in the South. The materials Pope and Sibley did receive would cause shortages in other military branches according to Secretary of War, Edwin Stanton. Many of Pope’s demands were denied because they were not thought to be necessary as the War Department had not yet declared his efforts an Indian campaign.<sup>56</sup>

Frustrated Pope wrote a detailed explanation to Halleck on September 23, of the situation on the Minnesota frontier. He described a situation quite hopeless without more

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<sup>54</sup> *War of the Rebellion*, 13: 596-597, 599.

<sup>55</sup> *War of the Rebellion*, 13: 599, 650.

<sup>56</sup> *War of the Rebellion*, 13: 652, 658-659, 663.

military supplies. According to Pope all the settled territories in Minnesota and Nebraska to the Mississippi River had been abandoned. Over five hundred settlers had already been “murdered” and three hundred women and children taken captive. Innocent people were forced to witness “everything that horrible ingenuity could devise,” said Pope. In all likelihood the Chippewa and Winnebago Nations would soon join the rebellion unless Pope was given more men and supplies to stop the warring Dakota. Pope was entirely correct in his statement to Halleck that he had: “no idea of the wide, universal, and uncontrollable panic everywhere in this country.”<sup>57</sup>

So far removed from possible Indian threat, it is easily understood why those on the East Coast scoffed at the uprising’s magnitude. Only those familiar with the frontier could grasp the potential violence and devastation an Indian attack could produce. No doubt this is one of the reasons why originally Governor Ramsey put General Sibley in charge of putting down the uprising on August 19. Sibley not only spoke the Dakota language, but he had traded with them for many years. Prior to the uprising he had hunted with Little Crow several times. He had the respect of both the settlers and the Dakota and had become the first Territorial Governor of Minnesota. An educated man, from a prominent eastern family, Sibley left the civilized world for the frontier when he was eighteen where he eventually became a trader and an advocate for Indian rights. Sibley wanted the American Indian to be fully ‘civilized’ and accepted by American society. To his mind, this meant giving them equal rights and treating them fairly because otherwise, the government was only preparing the American Indian for failure.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> *War of the Rebellion*, 13: 663-664.

<sup>58</sup> Duane Schultz, *Over the Earth I Come: The Great Sioux Uprising* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1992), 88-90;

Any sympathy Sibley may have held for his Indian friends quickly disappeared upon receiving orders from Governor Ramsey to put down the rebellion. In an August 24<sup>th</sup> letter to Ramsey, Sibley admitted his “heart [was] steeled” against the Dakota and he would do everything in his power to destroy them. The Indians ceased being Sibley’s friend when he saw the mutilated bodies of innocent families. Sibley was confident the Union army could beat the Indians, but he knew it would be a “bloody and desperate battle” as he later explained to General Pope in a September letter.<sup>59</sup> Neither Sibley nor Pope anticipated the denial and lack of support from the government which hampered the efficiency of their campaign against the Dakota Nation.

Sibley carefully pursued the attacking Indians, but the lack of experienced men and cavalry made it difficult.<sup>60</sup> It would not be until September when Pope forcefully demanded more trained troops from the War Department that Sibley did not have to rely solely on local militia men. Lincoln sent Pope to Minnesota immediately after his horrible defeat at Second Bull Run. The Union army dealt with the Indian problems in the frontier when they could no longer ignore it; thus, a failed general with no organized units was dispatched to deal with the situation. Lincoln’s attention and all available war materials were needed to defeat the Confederacy as Robert E. Lee’s Army of Northern Virginia marched into Maryland.<sup>61</sup> Under such a direct threat to the Union heartland,

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Evan Jones, *The Minnesota: Forgotten River* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1962), 204.

<sup>59</sup> Schultz, *Over the Earth I Come*, 176-177; *War of the Rebellion*, 13: 651-652.

<sup>60</sup> Babcock, “Minnesota’s Indian War,” 97.

<sup>61</sup> The Second Battle of Bull Run occurred between August 28<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup>, a little over a week within the onset of the Dakota conflict. General Pope, no doubt embarrassed and upset at his reassignment, had little time to prepare before being thrust in the midst of an Indian war. August 30<sup>th</sup> also marked the beginning of the Antietam Campaign in Maryland which lasted until September 18<sup>th</sup>. President Lincoln was fully engrossed with the problems of the Civil War and had little spare time for the problems in Minnesota. The day before the Battle of Wood Lake Lincoln issued his Preliminary Emancipation Proclamation,

large military resources could not be authorized for sparred skirmishes with the Indians. No doubt if the government had taken the attacks of Fort Ridgely more seriously and provided Sibley with needed troops, the incident would not have required Pope's battle expertise and may have ended long before October.

The final battle against the Dakota ended Tuesday morning, September 23 when Sibley faced Little Crow and his warriors in one last attempt to turn the war in the Indians' favor. Sibley had camped near Wood Lake, not knowing the Dakota were close by. Monday evening Little Crow and several Indian leaders discussed the best plan to attack the unsuspecting Union army. Little Crow favored a quick night surprise attack but once more, his people did not heed his advice and wanted to attack in daylight to better demonstrate their bravery and battle prowess. They did not want to be viewed as cowardly. The few Indians who wanted peace or to limit potential losses with the army were drowned out. It was finally agreed upon that the Dakota would attack Sibley early in the morning.<sup>62</sup>

Fate rapidly intervened with Little Crow's battle plans. A group of Sibley's men left the main camp in search for nearby abandoned Indian fields rumored to be in the vicinity. They slipped away during breakfast without permission and accidentally entered the area where a group of Dakota were waiting to later massacre the army. The Indians did not wish to be caught and chose to attack first. The gunfire quickly drew the attention of both the army and the Indians. The incident started around 7 am and was finished less

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threatening to free all slaves if the Confederacy did not rejoin the Union before the 1<sup>st</sup> of January. The Emancipation Proclamation did go into effect as Lincoln promised in the new year.

<sup>62</sup> Jones, *The Minnesota*, 217-218; Oehler, *The Great Sioux Uprising*, 193-195; Schultz, *Over the Earth I Come*, 230; Board of Commissioners, *Minnesota in the Civil and Indian Wars: 1861-1865* (St. Paul: Pioneer Press Company, 1891), 744.



than two hours later. Thirty-four of Sibley's men were wounded, with seven dead and the Dakota suffered heavier losses, with fifty wounded and fifteen dead. They also lost one of their leaders, Mankato. The Indians were unprepared for battle when they encountered the Union troops and as such were grossly outnumbered by Sibley's men. In the drawing below by A.P.A Connolly titled *Minnesota Massacre* from 1896, it is clear the Dakota could never have won the battle. They lacked the necessary manpower and the supplies. If Connolly's depiction can be believed, the Indians were surrounded by the army.<sup>63</sup>



<http://collections.mnhs.org/visualresources/image.cfm?imageid=1921&Page=1>

The Dakota quickly fled up the river to their camps. Sibley declined to give chase as he feared the Indians would kill the white prisoners. Back in camp, the Indians tried to convince Little Crow to orchestrate another attack on the Union army but he refused. He recognized, even if his men did not, that the end had arrived. Several leaders, including his good friend Wabasha, claimed that perhaps the soldiers would give the Indians clemency if the white prisoners were returned safely but Little Crow did not believe it. He knew the whites would not allow the rebellion to go unpunished. Little Crow and

<sup>63</sup> Oehler, *The Great Sioux Uprising*, 194-195; Jones, *The Minnesota*, 217; Schultz, *Over the Earth I Come*, 233.

approximately one hundred of his followers left their ancestral Minnesota home for Canada, hoping to escape in British lands. Most of those guilty of committing atrocities in the uprising fled, but many stayed behind hoping the army would take pity on them.<sup>64</sup>

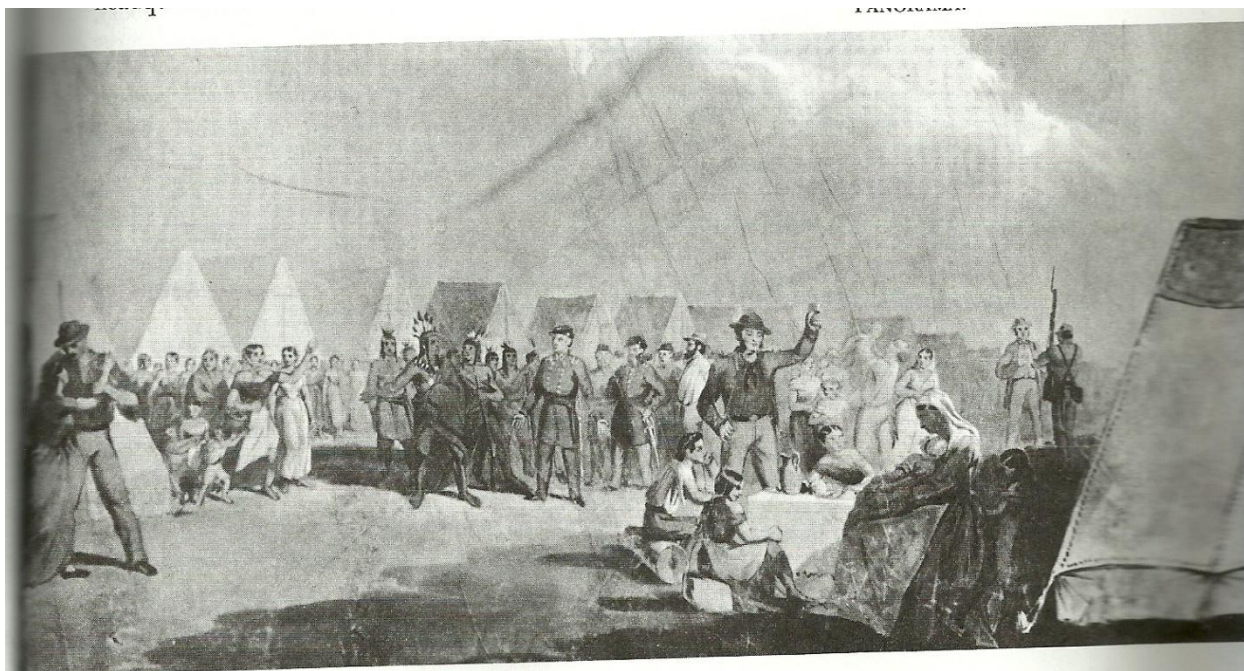
Three days later after the Battle of Wood Lake, on September 26, Sibley entered the Dakota camp as a victor. He freed over two hundred prisoners, both white and of mixed descent, who were overjoyed that their traumatic experience was at an end. Sibley also took captive two hundred and sixty Dakota Indians.<sup>65</sup> The scene featured below is of the liberation of the prisoners. A part of an eleven scene painted panorama completed in 1898 by New Alum artists, Anton Gag, Christian Heller, and Alexander Schewendinger, the release seems almost biblical in appearance. The soldiers stand proudly in the center of the painting, while the newly freed settlers look physically at ease; one group appears to be dining in the right hand corner. The woman cradling her child at the table is reminiscent of Mary and baby Jesus. The couple to the left is embracing as the women and children rush towards the soldiers in the center of the painting.

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<sup>64</sup> Oehler, *The Great Sioux Uprising, 196-197*; Jones, *The Minnesota*, 217-218; Schultz, *Over the Earth I Come*, 235-237; Gluek, "The Sioux Uprising: A Problem in International Relations," 317-318.

The British did not welcome the Dakota as they feared an Indian attack of their own. Troops constantly supervised their settlements and eventually the Dakota returned to the Minnesota frontier. Little Crow was shot in the back by settlers a year later while picking berries. The Dakota caused tense relations between Britain and the United States.

<sup>65</sup> Jones, *The Minnesota*, 218.



Kenneth, Carley, *The Dakota War of 1862: Minnesota's Other Civil War* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1976), 67.

Sibley aptly named the encampment, Camp Release. In the following days the Dakota released another three hundred and fifty captives. Within a week, over 800 Dakota, men, women and children surrendered. Sibley promised to treat those who willingly surrendered as prisoners of war, otherwise the Indians would be treated as hostiles and killed. Faced with the uncertain future of starvation while wintering on the Great Plains, many chose to take their chances with the United States government. The Dakota who did not surrender, and chose not to flee with Little Crow, went west and joined other Native American tribes who would later resist further white settlements.<sup>66</sup>

Sibley repeatedly stated he only wished to punish the guilty Indians. In letters to four Indian Chiefs, Ma-Za-Ka-Tame, Toopee, Wa Ke-Nen-Nan-Te, and Ta-Tanka-Nazin, Sibley promised fair treatment for the Indians innocent of any wrong doings. If they surrendered peacefully and produced the white captives, the wounded Indians would be

<sup>66</sup> Jones, *The Minnesota*, 218, 222; Oehler, *The Great Sioux Uprising*, 199; Schultz, *Over the Earth I Come*, 237, 245.

medically treated, and the dead buried with respect. Sibley continued to stress that he would make every attempt to separate the innocent from the guilty and not to condemn all. It seems that the Dakota could count upon their long time ally Wapetonhonska, the Long Trader, to be fair in his deliverance of justice. He did not tolerate unnecessary violence or cruelty; he condemned any scalping of dead Indians by soldiers and disciplined those who ignored his ruling.<sup>67</sup> Like Lincoln, Sibley wanted retribution but not at the cost of innocent lives or the use of brutality.

Once the rebellion had been stopped, all attention became fixated on what punishment needed to be meted out to the errant Indians. Since September, Pope had been very clear what needed to be done to the Dakota. The entire incident “[called] for punishment beyond human power to inflict” Pope confided to Sibley in a letter. He planned to fully exterminate all Indians who did not turn themselves in, and would not allow for any truce or treaties. Pope told Sibley that the Indians should “be treated as maniacs or wild beasts” and that a scorched earth policy should be enacted toward the Dakota. Pope wanted the Indians herded to the plains and destroyed. Sibley agreed with Pope, and created a military tribunal to try the captured Indians. He questioned his legal power to do so, but wanted to make an example to prevent any further outbreaks.<sup>68</sup>

Sibley tricked the surrendered Dakota into cooperating with the military trials. Indian Agent Galbraith asked all the Indian families to report to the warehouse to sign in and receive the long awaited annuities. He even promised a bonus. Pleasantly surprised, the Dakota eagerly obeyed. They never suspected a thing, not even when asked to give up

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<sup>67</sup> *War of the Rebellion*, 13: 664, 666-667; 664; Carley, “As Red Men Viewed It,” 137, 143.

<sup>68</sup> *War of the Rebellion* 13:685-687.

their weapons. The men were separated from their families at the warehouse, and after entering the building, were shackled and led away. There were not enough shackles for all the Indian prisoners, and they were chained by the ankles, two by two. As Sibley stated in a letter to Pope, all Indians would be treated as guilty until the military trials found them innocent.<sup>69</sup> This is a direction contradiction to what Sibley had told various Indian leaders earlier about promised clemency for the innocent, but his statements regarding the treatment of the Indians to Pope do correlate with his promises to make all the Dakota pay for the uprising.



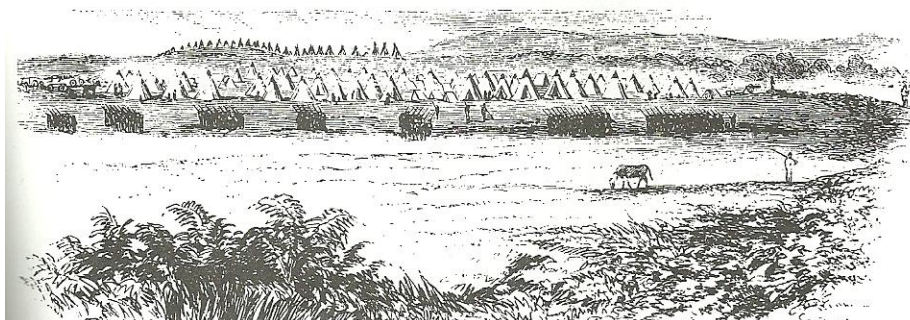
Kenneth, Carley, *The Dakota War of 1862: Minnesota's Other Civil War* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1976), 69.

The Indians in the photograph above, taken by a soldier known as “Whitney” in 1862, were Dakota prisoners awaiting their trial. The soldiers stand proudly behind them, confident that the Indians will not flee and posed no further threat. While the Indians who

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<sup>69</sup> Schultz, *Over the Earth I Come*, 246; Oehler, *The Great Sioux Uprising*, 202; *OR*,13: 707-708, 738-740.

so recently stood up to them, sat submissively on the ground, huddled in blankets for warmth, their eyes appear downcast in front of the camera with no sign of hope. Conditions were poor inside Camp Release for the Dakota. Over two thousand Indians were being housed and approximately 1600 soldiers. Supplies were severely limited. All unnecessary cattle were killed for food and to conserve the forage grains. Indian women foraged for corn and potatoes in the nearby abandoned fields. Those were the only rations the Indians received besides bread twice a week, if it was available. Considering the hatred for all Indians in the aftermath of the summer, it is unlikely any extra supplies went to the Dakota. Bread was a scarcity in Camp Release because although the Union army could supply some flour, cooking it was very difficult.<sup>70</sup> The Indians who thought the government would grant leniency were sadly mistaken. If anything the conditions for the Dakota proved far worse than when they originally rebelled.



Kenneth, Carley, *The Dakota War of 1862: Minnesota's Other Civil War* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1976), 64.

The above image of Camp Release by Isaac Heard, member of General Sibley's staff and recorder at the trials, did not illuminate the flawed "justice" going on within by the military tribunal which decided the fate of many Dakota men. The drawing depicted

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<sup>70</sup> Oehler, *The Great Sioux Uprising*, 202.



only the soldiers' tents and did not hint at the poor conditions suffered by the Dakota. Sibley created the tribunal, assigning five men from local militias and adding more as needed once it became clear individual Indians could be held responsible for specific acts committed against settlers. Colonel William Crooks, Lieutenant Colonel William R. Marshall, Captain Hiram Grant, Captain Hiram Bailey, and Lieutenant Rollin Olin were all hand picked by Sibley to oversee the trials and decide the verdicts. The Minnesota Board of Commissioners (MBC) later applauded the tribunal for their work and steadfastly claimed that they treated all the Indians humanely and with respect.<sup>71</sup>

Isaac Heard professed to the MBC the unevenhandedness in the trials and swore it had not been "organized to convict." The trials were fair according to him and many others. Between September 30 and November 5, 1862, four hundred and twenty-five Dakota men were tried. Three hundred and twenty-one men were found guilty of the charges brought against them, and three hundred and three were sentenced to death by hanging. Those deemed less guilty would receive jail sentences up to ten years. Missionary Riggs estimated that thirty to forty cases were completed in a day. He disagreed with Heard's statements of fairness because Riggs believed the trials were too hurried for any facts to be heard. Riggs surmised the justification for the speedy trials was that the defendants were Indians and the tribunal felt they did not deserve the same legal treatment as white citizens.<sup>72</sup> As demonstrated by their verdict, the tribunal believed that any participation in the uprising equaled punishment by death.

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<sup>71</sup> Board of Commissioners, *Minnesota in the Civil and Indian Wars*, 746-747.

<sup>72</sup> Board of Commissioners. *Minnesota in the Civil and Indian Wars*, 747; Riggs, *Tah-koo wah-kañ or The Gospel Among the Dakota*, 333-334.



<http://collections.mnhs.org/VisualResources/image.cfm?imageid=140256&Page=6&Keywords=Dakota%20Conflict%20of%201862>

The image above is of a woodcut from 1862 depicting a young white boy accusing several Dakota men during the trials. The boy is very well dressed compared to the defendants, his arm in a sling representing the bodily harm done to many of the settlers. The noticeable gap in the middle of the room between the Dakota and the white people tell of the strong divide between the two groups. Soldiers stand behind him protectively while the Indians look on with disdain and possible confusion. It is entirely possible the Indians did not fully comprehend the trials or what was happening to them. There is no way to know if the Dakota understood their lives were at stake or if they even understood the Western conceptions of justice.<sup>73</sup>

Legal scholar, Carol L. Chomsky examined in detail the many legal problems with the Dakota War trials she found in her study of the proceedings. The western concept of warfare differed greatly from traditional American Indian groups. Indians

<sup>73</sup> Schultz, *Over the Earth I Come*, 250; Chomsky, "The United States-Dakota War Trials," 52.



routinely attacked the women and children of their enemies and took captives, while Europeans fought only the enemy's army in open warfare, avoiding harming innocents when possible. The military tribunal did not consider these cultural differences. They also did not take into account that part of the Dakota culture consisted of bragging about their battle exploits, it was expected. It is likely the Indians assumed that is why the trials questioned their activities in the uprising and exaggerated their own involvement to increase their standing within the tribe. The Dakota considered touching their enemy to be the bravest act in battle, not killing them, and it is also unclear if the Indians made this distinction while testifying.<sup>74</sup>

Regardless of any cultural misunderstandings between the Union army and the Dakota, the tribunal still ignored the Indians' legal rights. They were given no legal representation or counseling by a lawyer. Since the Army created a military tribunal to decide the Dakota's fate, the government silently declared that the Indians were not American civilians but a sovereign nation fighting a war against the United States. As such the Dakota should have been tried as soldiers under the Laws of War, and not held accountable by civilian laws of murder, rape, or robbery as the Dakota were. In addition, the tribunal failed to recognize that since the Dakota decided as a group, to war against the settlers, individuals who broke away from their tribe to commit crimes without the group's sanction, should have been treated as "belligerents" and the Dakota nation could not be held responsible or forced to pay reparations for those individual acts.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Chomsky, "The United States-Dakota War Trials," 48-49, 88.

<sup>75</sup> Chomsky, "The United States-Dakota War Trials," 53, 71-73, 80-84.

Missionary Stephen Riggs interviewed the settlers, taking their statements regarding their experiences during the Indian uprising and during their captivity. Riggs was charged with talking to the women who suffered personal violations. With the exception of the Indians who were identified by their accusers, most of the Dakota faced general charges of robbery, murder, and other outrages. Crimes against women worsened the animosity towards the Indians and many of the accusations were false.<sup>76</sup> Each defendant was allowed to speak to his innocence before the tribunal called witnesses. A majority of the witnesses were those of mixed heritage who claimed the Dakota forced them to participate in the uprising and white women who claimed personal injury at the hands of the raiding Indians. Irrefutable evidence was not needed to convict the men, they could be found guilty simply for being seen at a place of attack. Their own testimonies of participating in battle, or simply firing a weapon even if the shot hit nothing, were enough to convince the tribunal that all the Indians were guilty. Missionary Riggs concluded that the Dakota were “condemned on general principals.”<sup>77</sup> Approximately only 10 percent of those found guilty by the tribunal were actually guilty of the crimes charged against them.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> There is little direct evidence to prove or disprove the allegations of rape in the trial records. Rape could not be physically proved, and only the woman’s testimony served as evidence of the attack. Undoubtedly the large number of alleged rapes did not occur; the women most likely wanted to get revenge on the Indians who invaded their homes and destroyed their lives. Rape is not a part of traditional raiding practices of the Dakota.

<sup>77</sup> Riggs, *Mary and I*, 179,180-181, 185; Chomsky, Carol, “The United States-Dakota War Trials: A Study in Military Injustice,” in *Stanford Law Review* 43, no. 1 (November 1990), 24, 28, 51; Oehler, *The Great Sioux Uprising*, 206; Schultz, *Over the Earth I Come*, 249-251; “Records of Selected Cases Decided by the Military Commission Sitting in Minnesota,” available online at <http://law2.umkc.edu/faculty/projects/ftrials/dakota/cases.html> (accessed 2 March 2011).

<sup>78</sup> This figure is derived from the fact that Lincoln only convicted thirty-nine men out of the originally condemned three-hundred and three to death by hanging.

All the Indians were guilty, even those who did not participate in the uprising because they would have if they could. As summarized by Riggs, “To them [the military tribunal] an Indian is an Indian”. Despite claims of judicial fairness, it is obvious that those harmed by the Dakota, and the avenging soldiers, could not separate the guilty from the innocent in the trials. The MBC report stated that no one on the tribunal intended to sentence so many to death. However the witness’ testimonies caused such a violent reaction in the public and with the tribunal that many wanted to kill all the Indians, regardless of their involvement. It was only because the military feared negative publicity from other countries that they limited themselves to sentencing three hundred and three men to death. The MBC feared the Confederacy would accuse the Union of unjustly murdering prisoners of war. The MBC’s report stated “We [Minnesota] were engaged in a great civil war, and the eyes of the world [the rest of the country and Europe] were upon us.” The tribunal did not want to be accused of being: “incapable of making the proper discriminations” when it came to delivering justice.<sup>79</sup>

There was a large outcry against the decision by many missionaries and from those in the East. Sentencing over three hundred men to die in a seemingly hasty military trial tugged at the heart strings and conscience of many humanitarians. The MBC disagreed with those who found fault with the trial results. In their report they called the protestors “well-intentioned but ill-informed people” who “besieged President Lincoln to put a stop to the proposed executions.”<sup>80</sup> Missionary Riggs, one of many who wrote to Lincoln on the Dakota’s behalf, wanted only to find a middle ground in punishing the

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<sup>79</sup> Riggs, *Tah-koo wah-kañ or The Gospel Among the Dakota*, 335-336; Board of Commissioners, *Minnesota in the Civil and Indian Wars*, 748.

<sup>80</sup> Board of Commissioners, *Minnesota in the Civil and Indian Wars*, 747.

Indians. The Dakota understood that many white people had died because of the uprising and because of that they would be punished, but the question remained how many Indians needed to be punished and how.<sup>81</sup>



<http://collections.mnhs.org/VisualResources/image.cfm?imageid=140254&Page=5&Keywords=Dakota%20Conflict%20of%201862>

The Indians in the drawing above from artist W.H. Childs ca. 1863 await Lincoln's verdict in a wooden prison. The dark coloring of the drawing mimics the hopelessness for the Indians. They sit huddled together, heads down dejectedly, in the almost lightless prison, attended by only a few guards. The artist's rendition depicts countless Indians but the army clearly does not perceive them to be a threat with only two guards watching them. The days of the proud Dakota obviously had come to an end, they were now powerless and completely reliant upon the Union army and the United States government for survival.

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<sup>81</sup>Riggs, *Tah-koo wah-kañ or The Gospel Among the Dakota*, 337.

Both Sibley and Pope, along with most of Minnesotan citizens, wanted to carry out the executions as soon as possible. It was unclear if they possessed the legal authority to do so. Sibley had been concerned over the legality of the trials, and the executions, since early October. In a letter to Pope dated October 15, Sibley requested that it be confirmed he “[had] the legal authority to order a general court martial.”<sup>82</sup> He would not move forward with the hanging without presidential sanction. The War Department never responded to their request seeking permission. Pope grew restless and on November 7 1862, he telegraphed President Lincoln asking for authorization. He included all the names of the condemned in his request, and the telegraph cost over four-hundred dollars to send. A sum many considered to be exorbitant during the war.<sup>83</sup>

Lincoln responded to Pope’s request three days later on November 10 to delay the executions until he examined the trial records himself. He asked Pope to send him, by mail, the names of all the condemned men, their trial records, and any statements they may have made in regards to their innocence or guilt. Lincoln wanted to be sure that “the more guilty and influential” Dakota were distinguishable from their counterparts. Governor Ramsey telegraphed Lincoln on November 10<sup>th</sup> as well, urging the president to execute the condemned men without delay or further investigation. Ramsey feared that if the Dakota were not hanged, Minnesotans would participate in vigilante revenge and kill the Indians themselves. Lincoln declined to answer Ramsey’s plea and forwarded the wire to the Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton. Pope sent a similar telegraph to the President on November 11 also voicing fear of “indiscriminate murder” of all the Indians

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<sup>82</sup> *War of the Rebellion*, 13: 740-741.

<sup>83</sup> Schultz, *Over the Earth I Come*, 252; *OR*, 13:756-757.

if the convicted men were not executed immediately. He claimed all the Indians were guilty of killing and raping, but to varying degrees. An incident such as the rebellion deserved a mass hanging because it was so offensive. The Indians involved were not “wild Indians” but those in the process of being ‘civilized’ which made it even more heinous according to Pope. Lincoln would not be swayed. He announced on November 18, that he would decide for himself the outcome but only after he made his annual address to Congress on December 1.<sup>84</sup>

The president sought legal counsel from Judge Advocate General Joseph Holt in early December. Could he designate his forthcoming decision regarding the hangings to someone else, or was it necessary that he personally examine the cases? Holt responded that Lincoln must do it personally, he could not delegate as only the president could grant pardons. It might be possible to challenge the procedure but no president had thus far. Holt went on to suggest that if Lincoln desired more legal advice that he contact the Attorney General Edward Bates. There is no evidence if Lincoln solicited help regarding his decision. In fact, there are no documents suggesting his personal feelings or thoughts about the trials.<sup>85</sup>

The trial records Pope mailed to Lincoln were grossly incomplete but in less than a month the president announced his decision. On December 6, Lincoln forwarded to General Sibley a list of thirty-nine Dakota men, carefully spelled with the correct corresponding case number, to be executed on December 19. He specified that the prisoners must be protected until that time from “any unlawful violence.” When Lincoln

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<sup>84</sup> *War of the Rebellion*, 13: 787-788; Abraham Lincoln, *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, ed. Roy P. Basley (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1953), 5:493.

<sup>85</sup> Lincoln, *Collected Works*, 5: 537-538.

addressed the Senate on December 11<sup>th</sup> at their request about his decision, he claimed that he acted with enough clemency to provide justice but not unfairly or maliciously. Lincoln based his decisions upon the sorts of acts committed, and distinguished between massacres and battles. The Indians who violated women or participated in massacres against innocents, would be held accountable for their crimes.<sup>86</sup>

Historian Chomsky concluded in her study that Lincoln did the best he could considering the lack of evidence and improperly conducted trials. The Dakota were only guilty of fighting a war, even if Lincoln did not recognize the Indian nation's sovereign status. The Dakota Nation declared war upon the United States and the men should have been treated as prisoners of war, not as criminals. Chomsky concluded that Lincoln made the most humane decision he could to avoid the mass hanging which Pope, Sibley and so many others vehemently advocated. Instead of killing over three hundred men, or decimating an entire American Indian Nation, Lincoln selected thirty-nine men who appeared to be the most guilty from the trial records to hang for their actions in the Dakota uprising.<sup>87</sup>

General Sibley had considered moving the imprisoned Indians to Fort Snelling for their safety since October. While waiting to hear Lincoln's decision, Sibley moved the prisoners and the Dakota families to the fort where it would be easier to care for the Indians. He did not anticipate the violent reaction from the citizens of New Ulm on November 11 when the Indians passed through the town. With mob like rage, men, women and children rushed the Indians with whatever weapons they had, including

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<sup>86</sup> Oehler, *The Great Sioux Uprising*, 209; Lincoln, *Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, 5:542-543, 550-551.

<sup>87</sup> Chomsky, "The United States-Dakota War Trials," 86, 88-90.

stones and clubs. Before the soldiers could react, many of the Indians, the women, children, and the elderly were pulled away from the procession and beaten. One witness claimed that a white woman grabbed a nursing baby from its Indian mother and hurled it to the ground. Missionary Riggs summarized that: “the people came out and made an insane attack upon the prisoners.”<sup>88</sup> The drawing below from an unknown artist in November 1862, demonstrates the rage the citizens held towards the Indians, particularly the women who seemingly lead the attack according to the artist’s rendition. The Indians in the center of the etching remain helpless as the soldiers stand unwilling to stop the mob.



<http://collections.mnhs.org/VisualResources/image.cfm?imageid=60107&Page=4&Keywords=Dakota%20Conflict%20of%201862>

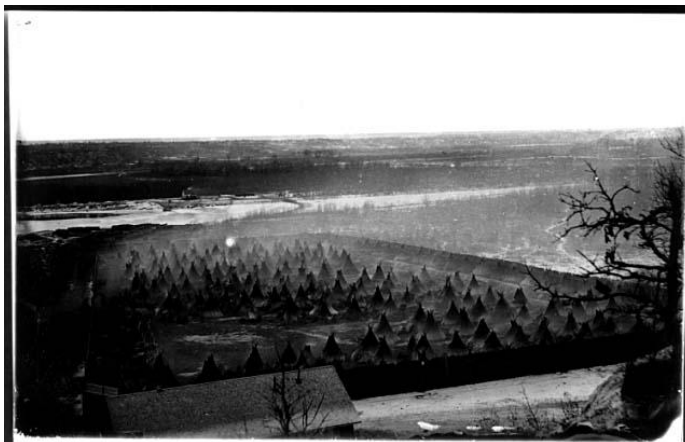
The Dakota reached Fort Snelling on November 11. The photograph below is of the fenced in teepees at the fort. Positioned near the Minnesota River the gloomy image depicts the Indian situation well. The Dakota were placed on the miry land tract that offered no protection from the weather or river. They received few rations from the

<sup>88</sup> *OR*,13: 740-741; Schultz, *Over the Earth I Come*, 253; Oehler, *The Great Sioux Uprising*, 211-212; Riggs, *Mary and I*, 182.



government and disease ran rampant in the camp. Many did not survive the winter.<sup>89</sup>

Even the Indians who had done nothing wrong, other than being of Dakota heritage, were being punished for the actions of their tribesmen.



<http://collections.mnhs.org/VisualResources/image.cfm?imageid=23899&Page=2&Keywords=Dakota%20Conflict%20of%201862>

Once Lincoln announced his decision, the condemned prisoners were moved to the town of Mankato for the hanging. They were heavily guarded, manacled, and protected from the populace than the last Indian procession. At Mankato, Missionary Riggs was allowed the closest contact with the Dakota, frequently acting as an intermediary to their families. He and other missionaries reported several conversions and baptisms while the Indians waited for their death on December 19. All but two were baptized before the execution. The hanging date was postponed on December 16 when Lincoln wired to General Sibley that the original date did not allow for enough preparation time and the execution would take place December 26<sup>th</sup>. Lincoln urged Sibley to act with “great discretion” as he feared public reaction would intervene with the

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<sup>89</sup> Schultz, *Over the Earth I Come*, 253-254.

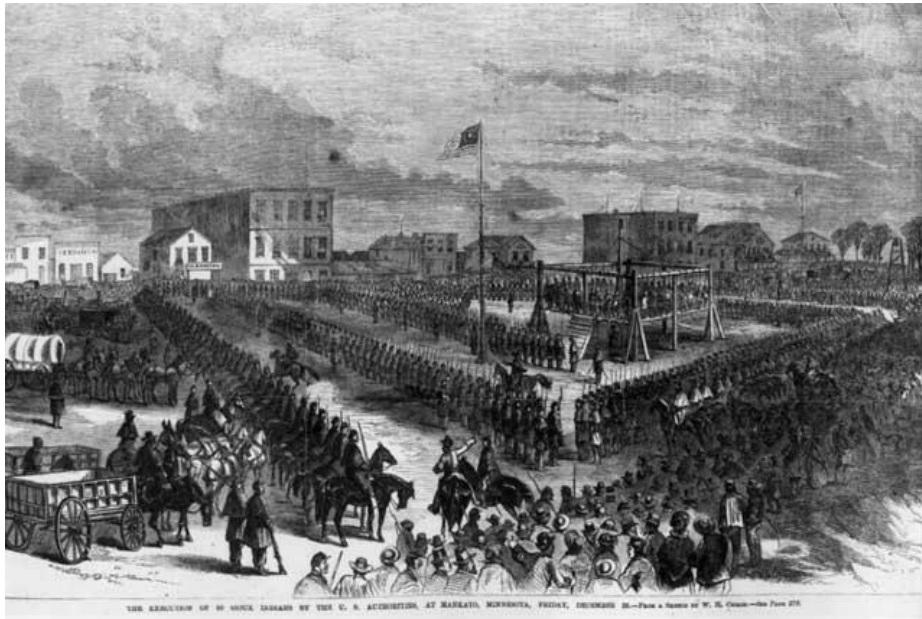
scheduled hangings.<sup>90</sup> He did not want any more mob violence towards the Dakota, as much as possible Lincoln wanted the Indians treated humanely.

On December 22, those sentenced to hang were separated from the Indians who would serve their sentences in jail. They spent the last few days of their lives visiting missionaries like Riggs and seeing their families when the army allowed. The Dakota recognized, according to Riggs, that some needed to be punished for the tribe's actions, even if they were innocent, blood for blood retribution was required. Many still proclaimed their innocence. As the execution day approached the Dakota chanted their death songs according to the surviving accounts. On December 26, after breakfast, the guards lined the men up according to names and corresponding identification numbers. There is some evidence of possible name confusion or numbers not matching correctly, but the Army has always denied any wrongdoing. The Dakota men walked to the scaffold resolutely, without tears or pleading. Within minutes the large crowd that had gathered to witness the hanging, dispersed after watching the largest mass execution in America's history take place. Lincoln received a one sentence telegram from Sibley stating that he had the "honor to inform" the president of the hanging which occurred "quietly" around 10 am with no problems.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> Riggs, *Mary and I*, 182, 185, 189; Lincoln, *Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, 6: 6-7; Meyer, *History of the Santee Sioux*, 129.

<sup>91</sup> Schultz, *Over the Earth I Come*, 259-264; Oehler, *The Great Sioux Uprising*, 217-223; Lincoln, *Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, 6: 7.



<http://collections.mnhs.org/VisualResources/image.cfm?imageid=65352&Page=4&Keywords=Dakota%20Conflict%20of%201862>

The above drawing from W.H. Childs, dated from the day of the execution, shows the scaffolding with the Dakota awaiting their fate, and the massive group of people congregated to witness the hanging. The execution alone did not pacify the angry Minnesotans. Government officials suggested various plans ranging from exiling them to some isolated land tract within the United States to whipping them to death while letting the rest starve so only a few would survive. Indian Agent Galbraith suggested the latter, more malicious punishment. On February 16, 1863 Congress annulled all treaties with the Dakota, voided any rights, and redirected the annuity money as reparations to the settlers. A month later on March 3 with the Indian Removal Act or the Sioux Act as it is also known, Congress announced that all of Dakota's land in Minnesota, over a million acres, would be publicly sold. The Dakota would be removed to Crow Creek Missouri, a desolate land tract compared to the rich agricultural land they had been forced to leave behind. Historian Chomsky concluded in her study it was only because the government

treated the Dakota as criminals in the trials that they were able to confiscate their tribal lands for public sale.<sup>92</sup>

Prior to Lincoln's decision and even before the military tribunal finished the hearings, General Pope had made plans to hunt down the renegade Dakota who fled after the Battle of Wood Lake. Those who sought refuge in Canada were chased back into United States' territory, while the Union army started a full-ledge Indian campaign against the Dakota and all western American Indian nations that would span decades.<sup>93</sup> Not everyone agreed with the punishment for the Dakota. Some like Galbraith, Pope, and Ramsey thought Lincoln had gone too easily on the Indians, and that more needed to be executed. Citizens in the western states agreed, Indian attacks needed to be met with violent force to prevent future outbreaks. Others, primarily those from the east coast and missionaries, placed the blame entirely on the government who neglected to fix the flawed reservation system. The government needed to take responsibility for their role in the Dakota War. Although no one mentioned it, what everyone needed, even the Dakota Nation, was healing, something only time and the shaping of memory could allow.

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<sup>92</sup> Schultz, *Over the Earth I Come*, 279-280, 282; Le Sueur, *North Star Country*, 111; Chomsky, "The United States-Dakota War Trials," 93.

<sup>93</sup> Meyer, *History of the Santee Sioux*, 133.

### Chapter Three

The media's reaction to the Dakota War was immediate. Newspapers commented extensively on Lincoln's decision while artists supplied their own version of the events; the uprising became the focal point in several panoramas, and in many paintings and drawings as well. These artistic interpretations naturally differed as did the various editorial commentaries, but the one constant variable was that all these sources came from the white perspective. The white public took control over how the event was being remembered while the Dakota faded quietly into the background as they were removed from their tribal homelands and struggled to survive in a hostile environment. By default superiority, the white population controlled how the Dakota War would be remembered and they chose to focus upon their own innocence in the face of the Indians' unprovoked, 'savage' actions. This can be seen in the newspapers, artwork from the time period, and the monuments which the citizens of Minnesota erected to memorialize various events from the uprising.

Newspapers throughout America, both in the Confederacy and within the Union, including the western territories, followed the uprising from late August until January after the thirty-nine men Dakota men had met their death at the gallows. Opinions varied from region to region, and the demographic base of the newspaper's audience effected how the paper interpreted the event, but most newspapers discussed the Dakota War and the ultimate hanging, if only briefly. Some continued to insist the uprising was a part of a much larger move by the Confederacy to distract the Union army from its eastern campaigns, but many used the opportunity to expound upon the problems with the existing Indian system and how best to deal with the American Indian in general.

Newspapers did describe the horrors of the initial uprising and many offered commentary on what should be done with the imprisoned Dakota, but none openly condoned Lincoln's final verdict on the matter.

From early September, the *New York Times* called for forced removal of the Dakota from Minnesota. This step appeared necessary on the frontier since they could not be controlled and thus could not protect the settlers. The Spirit Lake Massacre of 1857 was cited by the newspaper as a previous example of the Dakota barbarity and unpredictability. Either the Dakota needed to be removed farther west, away from civilization, or they needed to be exterminated. Little was directly said about what fate should await the accused warriors but it was clear the writers of the *New York Times* favored strict punishment. The skeptical tone in the articles demonstrated the belief that all the Indians were guilty and deserving death of the military tribunal had decreed. In a December 8<sup>th</sup> article titled, "Diplomatic Correspondence," the author stated: "Everyone of these monsters deserves death." Not doing so would dishonor the settlers who suffered in the uprising claimed the *New York Times*.<sup>94</sup>

The same article also stated that the country should not try influencing the president's decision. Abraham Lincoln would do what he perceived to be best, and the decision should be left "to his own careful and conscientious judgment." Increasingly that became the stance of the *New York Times*, that it was best to leave the matter to Lincoln's discretion and obey his wishes. The mass extermination favored by many no longer seemed to be the most just. On December 3 the newspaper printed excerpts of

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<sup>94</sup> "The Indian War in the NW," *New York Times*, 3 September 1862; "The Indian War: Terrible Battle...", *New York Times*, 14 September 1862; "The Indian War: Trial and Conviction," *New York Times*, 23 November 1862; "Diplomatic Correspondence," *New York Times*, 8 December 1862.

Commissioner William Dole's "Report of Indian Affairs" along with their opinions on his conclusions. Some punishment was needed; however, killing over three hundred men would be more revenge than retribution said the paper: "These are savages, far beneath us in either moral or intellectual culture" and the Indians cannot be judged using "our standards of morals." The newspaper agreed with Commissioner Dole that only the uprising leaders should face punishment by death, while the participants should receive a lesser degree of punishment.<sup>95</sup>

The actual execution received only four sentences in the *New York Times*. The newspaper did not favor clemency in the beginning but by the time of the hanging, they agreed with Lincoln's decision. Other newspapers New England voiced arguments similar to the *New York Times*. The *New Hampshire Patriot and Gazette* specifically stated that the "few agents and contractors" who "provoked the Indians" should be executed alongside the thirty-nine men Lincoln found guilty. The newspaper praised Lincoln's decision and his refusal to give into peer pressure to exterminate all of the Dakota. The hanging was referred to as a "whole sale slaughter" by the *Patriot and Gazette*, but no other opinion was given on the matter.<sup>96</sup>

Farther north in Maine and Vermont, newspapers also echoed support for Lincoln's decision. The *Portland Daily Advertiser* urged the Minnesotans who threatened to kill the imprisoned Dakota themselves, to respect and obey the president; civil authorities would have the final say regardless of what the public may want. As

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<sup>95</sup>"Diplomatic Correspondence," *New York Times*, 8 December 1862; "Indian Affairs: Report of Commissioner Dole," *New York Times*, 3 December 1862; "Our Indian Relations," *New York Times*, 3 December 1862.

<sup>96</sup>"Execution of Indians in Minnesota," *New York Times*, 29 December 1862; "The Indian Executions," *New York Times*, 12 December 1862; "Minnesota Indians," *New Hampshire Patriot and Gazette*, 17 December 1862, 2; "Untitled," *New Hampshire Patriot and Gazette*, 19 November 1862, 3.

suggested by an article titled, “Peace with the Minnesota Indians,” the newspaper wanted peace with the Dakota, not more violence. The *Vermont Phoenix* hoped only that President Lincoln would be “equally just” when he punished Jefferson Davis, President of the Confederacy.<sup>97</sup> The newspaper’s editor obviously supported Lincoln’s decision if he thought the punishment would be suitable for the Confederate leader.

Newspapers from the East Coast were more willing than their western counterparts to admit or see the problems with the reservation system and the role the government played in the initial uprising. In late August *The Sun* of Baltimore and the *Philadelphia Enquirer* both cited the government for being at fault for the rebellion; however the Philadelphia newspaper did not share the same amount of sympathy for the Indians as *The Sun*. The *Enquirer* did not perceive the Indians to be anything other than ‘savages’ in need of harsh punishment. While the Baltimore paper considered the Dakota to be “outlaws,” and hoped for extermination or total removal from Minnesota’s borders like the *Enquirer* did, the editor still retained a surprising amount of empathetic objectivity towards the American Indian.<sup>98</sup>

In an article printed in early October, long before President Lincoln became involved, *The Sun*, explained to its audience the causes of the Indian attacks and named the United States government as the culprit. Since the beginning, the Indians had been “swindled” by the government and its “unprincipled” agents, said the paper, even as the settlers encroached upon the designated Indian lands. The revolt occurred because the

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<sup>97</sup> “By Telegraph to Evening Papers,” *Portland Daily Advertiser*, 10 December 1862, 2; “Peace with the Minnesota Indians,” *Portland Daily Advertiser*, 21 November 1862, 1; “General Summary of News,” *Vermont Phoenix*, 18 December 1862, 2.

<sup>98</sup> “Indian Hostilities in Minnesota,” *The Sun*, 22 August 1862, 2; “Indian Outrages in Minnesota,” *Philadelphia Enquirer*, 22 August 1862, 1; “The Indian War. Meeting of the Legislature of Minnesota Message,” *The Sun*, 19 September 1862, 1.



Dakota did not receive their promised payments and their frustrations with the government overflowed: “It’s believed that the country was now reaping the result of their wrongs to the Indians.” *The Sun* realized that the deeds committed by the Dakota were too “great” to be ignored, and recognized “little mercy” would be given.

Unsurprised, the editor accorded the hanging only one sentence in the newspaper, simply stating: “they were hung yesterday.” The newspaper did not mention the uprising or the hanging again nor did they comment on Lincoln’s clemency decisions. Clearly they favored punishment but they realized the system was to blame, not the desperate Dakota.<sup>99</sup>

The *New York Daily Tribune* shared the same sentiment as *The Sun*. The *Tribune* more specifically stated the problems with the Indian system and clearly spoke on behalf of the Dakota. Surprisingly unbiased for the time period, the paper outlined the history of unfair treaties made with the Indians, and expounded upon the dishonorable acts of corrupt Indian agents. The article simply titled “The Indian War in Minnesota,” described the abuses experienced by Indian women at the hands of white men, the evils of whisky when given to Indians, and the traders who took advantage of them. The *Tribune* called for a massive change with the current system: “They have been grievously wronged and outraged, and have a thousand grievances or causes of complaint against us.” The newspaper was unclear about the hanging but it agreed that Lincoln did the only thing he could do legally and morally by executing just those proven guilty of specific crimes.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> “Cause of the Indian Attack in Minnesota,” *The Sun*, 2 October 1862, 2; “Horrors of Indian Warfare,” *The Sun*, 6 November 1862, 1; “Executions of Indians,” *The Sun*, 27 December 1862, 4.

<sup>100</sup> “The Indian War in Minnesota,” *The New York Daily Tribune*, 5 September 1862, 2; “From Washington, The Admission of West Virginia,” *The New York Daily Tribune*, 11 December 1862, 4.

Missionaries only saw the problems with the system and the government's role, but they believed the Indians should be awarded clemency for their actions since the uprising was not entirely their fault. The authors of the *Philadelphia Enquirer* considered such beliefs to be "misplaced philanthropy." There was a movement in the City of Brotherly Love from the Society of Friends, the Quakers, to petition Lincoln for a presidential pardon on behalf of the condemned Dakota. The *Enquirer* admitted the Quakers meant well; however, the atrocities committed on so many innocents prevented any possible mercy. The Indians, according to the newspaper, "have not been sufficiently chastised for their late wanton massacres."<sup>101</sup>

The *New York Times* published a letter from a man identified only as Father Beeson on November 29, who echoed the same sentiment that no capital punishment should be given to the Dakota men. Father Beeson pointed out that since American Indians were not seen as citizens they should not be treated as such, meaning they should not be held accountable to American laws. He even went as far as to suggest that perhaps white men dressed as Indians led the attacks and the Dakota had nothing to do with the uprising.<sup>102</sup> Beeson most likely proposed that idea to demonstrate the Indians' innocence and their need for mercy. He demanded more protection for the American Indians, along with proper land ordinances, and clearly defined legal rights. Although the *New York Times* did not comment on Father Beeson's letter, they did respond to the writings of Bishop Henry Benjamin Whipple, who strongly advocated prison sentences for the Dakota. They did agree with Bishop Whipple that the nation might be at fault, and the

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<sup>101</sup> "Misplaced Philanthropy," *Philadelphia Enquirer*, 21 November 1862, 4; "Movement on Behalf of Minnesota Indians," *Philadelphia Enquirer*, 21 November 1862, 8; "The Indian War in Minnesota," *Philadelphia Enquirer*, 7 November 1862, 4.

<sup>102</sup> There is absolutely no evidence suggesting white men disguised as Indians started the uprising and it is unknown where Beeson deduced this idea.

system needed to be changed because it was clearly not working, but blood retribution was still needed to compensate for the suffering of so many innocents.<sup>103</sup>

Bishop Whipple in a report to President Lincoln pointedly said that God would hold the nation accountable for the uprising's atrocities. Some of the Dakota's strongest supporters came from Minnesota, even the missionaries who witnessed firsthand the horrors of the Dakota War, pleaded for mercy in their sentencing. Missionary Stephen Riggs openly condemned the government, saying that America had failed in their Christian duty. His daughter, Martha said in a letter written to the *Cincinnati Christian Herald*, that executing the Dakota would curse America for generations. The country had corrupted the Indians with alcohol and immoral traders, treated them with disrespect, and denied them a livelihood.<sup>104</sup> Hanging the Dakota for a crime perpetrated by the government, defied logic and Christian morality for many missionaries.

The majority of the country disagreed with the missionary's viewpoint. The *New York Times* printed an article from St. Paul Minnesota, in response to the pleadings of missionaries and said the Indians could not appreciate any mercy given to them because they lacked the humanity to understand it. Forgiveness would be wasted, and it would fail to prevent future Indian outbreaks.<sup>105</sup> Only capital punishment would suffice in protecting

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<sup>103</sup> Father Beeson, "An Appeal for the Indians," *New York Times*, 29 November 1862; "The Case of Sioux," *New York Times*, 14 December 1862.

<sup>104</sup> Bishop Henry Benjamin Whipple, "Report to President Lincoln," in *North Star Country* by Meridel Le Sueur (New York: Duell, Sloan & Pearce, 1945), 109-110; Riggs, *Tah-koo wah-kañ or The Gospel Among the Dakota*, 328; Riggs, "Letter to Cincinnati Christian Herald," 178.

<sup>105</sup> "To the Letter of the New York Times," *New York Times*, 7 December 1862.

the frontiers and offer justice to the bereaved families. As stated by *Harper's Weekly* in mid-January, the hanging was needed: "to answer for their inhuman barbarities."<sup>106</sup>

The western territories frequently could not perceive any humanity in the Dakota Nation or with American Indians in general. The uprising only proved that Indians could not be trusted and needed to be "crushed" as stated by the *Weekly Dakotian* from Yankton, South Dakota. The Dakota: "have amply deserved the retribution which is in store for them" the newspaper reported, and it was up to the citizens to punish the Indians as the settlers are "God's fierce avengers in the future." An unknown reporter who interviewed the convicted Dakota men during their last few days before the execution could not accept the human attributes he witnessed in the prisoners. The fact that they civilly conversed with him and offered to shake his hand, offended the man for all he could see was the blood of so many innocents. He reported himself "disgusted with such an illustration of fallen humanity."<sup>107</sup> The man's image of an American Indian was one of savagery, and untamed wildness resulting in horrendous barbarity. That the men he saw in chains physically resembled his own self, and acted in a 'civil' manner, perplexed him to the point of extreme discomfort. He could not see pass the atrocities committed and instead, he encouraged the extermination of all the Indians, preferring to perceive the Dakota as nothing more than 'savages.'

Other newspapers in the western portion of the United States shared the same opinion. As early as August 23, the *Cincinnati Daily Enquirer* was promising a "vengeance as they have never yet received" and eagerly awaited "a day of reckoning"

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<sup>106</sup> "Untitled," *Harpers Weekly*, 17 January 1863, 39.

<sup>107</sup> "The Sioux War. What Shall We So With It?" *Weekly Dakotian*, 11 November 1862, 2; "The Minnesota Indian War," *Weekly Dakotian*, 9 December 1862, 2; "A Horrible Spectacle – Hanging of the Thirty Eight Sioux," *Weekly Dakotian*, 27 January 1863, 1.

for the Dakota. While the *Wisconsin Patriot* acknowledged the Dakota had not received their annuity payments, the newspaper still promised extermination and “annihilation,” even if the Indians surrendered. The *Wisconsin Daily Patriot* also promised ammunition to Minnesota to assist in “exterminating the savage Indians.”<sup>108</sup>

One of the more spiteful comments about the Dakota came from the *Wisconsin Chief*, published in Fort Atkinson. They were not subtle about wanting to decimate all of the Indians, even those not directly involved in the uprising. The article appeared on September 3, but even then the paper was eagerly awaiting the demise of the Dakota: “The red savages will be exterminated. Happy for them now if they only owned niggers.” The *Wisconsin Chief* stated the same thoughts as its rival newspapers from Wisconsin, only with more clearly apparent hatred for the Indians.<sup>109</sup>

The *Dakota Republican* printed in Vermillion, South Dakota used similar tones as the newspapers in Wisconsin. Their newspaper publications were sparse and erratic but the tones used in reporting the initial uprisings, and discussing Lincoln’s verdict, supported the execution along with the promised vigilantism proposed by the Minnesota settlers. They believed Lincoln and his “promise”<sup>110</sup> to deal with the rest of the renegade Dakota. Surprisingly the newspaper understood the president’s logic because the only

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<sup>108</sup> “The Minnesota Massacres. The Thousand Savages on the War Path – Missouri Rebels Though to be the Instigators- Butcheries too Horrible to Name – Inhabitants Fleeting in Terror,” *Cincinnati Daily Enquirer*, 23 August 1862, 1; “The Late Indian Massacres,” *Cincinnati Daily Enquirer*, 25 August 1862, 2; “More of the Indian Massacres. Horrid Atrocities,” *Cincinnati Daily Enquirer*, 23 August 1862, 3; “Further Particulars of Indians Massacres in Minnesota,” *Wisconsin Patriot*, 30 August 1862, 5; “St. Paul Pioneer: Indians: Gov. Ramsey: Republican,” *Wisconsin Patriot*, 27 September 1862, 4; “Munitions to Minnesota,” *Wisconsin Daily Patriot*, 25 August 1862.

<sup>109</sup> “Minnesota,” *Wisconsin Chief*, 3 September 1862, 2.

<sup>110</sup> The newspaper did not expound upon what Lincoln’s “promise” was. Lincoln vowed to fix the Indian reservation system, and he promised to punish more Dakota if the need arose. He assured the nation, and Minnesota, that the government would do its best to prevent any more uprisings. Lincoln also directed Union armies in the west to pursue any and all errant Indians.

witnesses in the military tribunal were surviving captives whose testimonies might have been flawed by their personal experiences. The *Dakota Republican* was also the only newspaper from any region to suggest removing the remaining Dakota to the East where they could be surrounded by “friends and sympathizers,” further suggesting that those on the East Coast could not possibly understand or grasp the true nature of American Indians.<sup>111</sup>

The *Liberty Tribune* published in Liberty, Missouri, had relatively little to say about the matter despite the fact that many Unionists were convinced the Confederate sympathizers in the state instigated the uprising, even though no evidence indicated this. Their proximity to Minnesota no doubt allowed the *Tribune* to be more sympathetic to the settlers’ plight; the threat of an Indian uprising was very real to Missourians as well. For those of Liberty, the Dakota War merely added “another and bloodier feature to the drama of this war.”<sup>112</sup>

The Confederacy stood equally diverse as the Union in their opinions. Not all southern newspapers covered the uprising or the subsequent execution, and many editorials did not physically survive the war, but a few of the surviving newspapers did offer their views. Published in Columbus, Georgia, the *Daily Columbus Enquirer*, a Confederate newspaper sympathetic to the Indians, expressed hope that the Union army could put down the rebellion before more died. Compared to some of the other southern newspapers which held no empathy for the northern settlers, the amount of caring on

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<sup>111</sup> “Sioux Agency: Washington: Minnesota,” *Dakota Republican*, 22 November 1862, 3; “Organized Indian Killer,” *Dakota Republican*, 31 January 1863, 1; “Minnesota,” *Dakota Republican*, 10 January 1863, 3; “The Question Settled,” *Dakota Republican*, 10 January 1863, 6; “Washington: Minnesota: Eastern Dakota,” *Dakota Republican*, 10 January 1863, 6.

<sup>112</sup> “Untitled,” *Liberty Tribune*, 29 August 1862, 2.

behalf of this Georgia newspaper is surprising. The *Daily Columbus Enquirer* called for intense fighting to end the uprising, but like some Unionist newspapers, cited the government for being at fault in instigating the Indian's ire. Despite this, the paper warned that unless the Dakota were exterminated, the Indians would continue on their rampage and no town would be safe: "Here is a new and startling danger – let it be promptly met."<sup>113</sup> The *Daily Columbus Enquirer* may have offered an opinion on Lincoln's verdict and the hanging but the corresponding issues are not available. It can only be assumed that the paper would have supported the execution. No doubt the terror they felt in their own homes at the threat of invasions by the Union army fueled their understanding of the Minnesotans' fear.

In Richmond, Virginia the authors of the *Richmond Enquirer* were not sympathetic or compassionate to the terror suffered by those on the Minnesota plains. They mentioned the uprising only briefly in their coverage of Lincoln's annual message in early December. Offended that the Union still believed the Confederacy to be at fault for the rebellion, the authors said it was the "bad faith of the United States" which caused the death of so many innocent settlers. The Union did not keep their promises to the American Indians just as they had previously failed to protect the South's right to slavery. The North was getting exactly what it deserved for not keeping its promises, and received the same treatment they would have wished "inflict[ed] upon the South."<sup>114</sup> The dividing lines between the North and South were clearly drawn in Virginia with no care for the

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<sup>113</sup> "A Campaign Against the Indians," *Daily Columbus Enquirer*, 16 September 1862, 3; "The Indian War," *Daily Columbus Enquirer*, 20 September 1862, 3; "Cause of the Indian Troubles," *Daily Columbus Enquirer*, 23 October 1862.

The issues of the *Daily Columbus Enquirer* from December 24<sup>th</sup> 1862 to late August 1863 are not currently available according to America's Historical Newspapers online archive.

<sup>114</sup> "Mr. Lincoln's Annual Message," *Daily Richmond Enquirer*, 6 December 1862, 2.

fate of their enemies who were once their fellow statesmen. Without a doubt the Confederates who shared the same opinion as put forth in the *Richmond Enquirer* believed the Dakota War to be a righteous act. Not only had the Union mistreated the Indians, but they were at war with the Confederacy.

The *Daily Picayune* published in New Orleans, Louisiana, not only supported Lincoln's decision, they feared the president changing his mind and granting more pardons to the convicted Dakota men. The paper understood that Lincoln wanted evidence before he sentenced anyone to death; he would not convict innocent men simply to pacify the American people. Although the *Daily Picayune* remained fearful of the uprising spreading, their overall tone supported Lincoln's verdict.<sup>115</sup> Many throughout the U.S. shared the newspaper's fear of further uprisings from other Indian Nations.

Even after the Dakota had surrendered and the military trials against them had begun, the Minnesotan settlers remained afraid, aware of their tenuous position on the frontier. It required a statement from General John Pope urging the settlers to return home, to convince many that it was safe to return to their homesteads.<sup>116</sup> As demonstrated by the newspaper articles from across the United States, all had their own opinions on who was truly at fault for the rebellion, and what fate should await the guilty Indians. Lincoln received petitions on behalf of the Indians along with demands from Minnesotan politicians to execute all of the Dakota Nation. Ultimately, he made the only decision he

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<sup>115</sup> "The Indian Massacres in Minnesota," *Daily Picayune*, 11 December 1862, 2; "Indian War Matters," *Daily Picayune*, 10 September 1862, 1; "Indian Atrocities in Minnesota," *Daily Picayune*, 8 November 1862, 2; "Three Hundred Condemned Indians," *Daily Picayune*, 25 November 1862, 2.

<sup>116</sup> *War of the Rebellion: Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, Series 1, vol. 13 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1972), 724.



could which satisfied his philanthropic morals while fulfilling the country's need for revenge.

Those in Minnesota, specifically those who suffered at the hands of the warring Dakota, could not let go of their anger. Lincoln's refusal to mass exterminate all the Indians created a lasting resentment towards the president and the nation. The angry citizens consoled themselves by attending the hanging in December and by claiming the lands opened up for purchase when the government forcibly removed the Indians. Monetary reparation requests were also filed with the United States government, many of which took years to process and fulfill. Lincoln's decision did cost him votes in Minnesota in the 1864 election. He still won the electoral votes, however the margin was much slimmer than in 1860. In the previous presidential election he carried Minnesota by ten thousand votes, but in the 1864 reelection year, he led George McClellan with only seven thousand votes. When Governor Ramsey, then a senator, visited Lincoln at the White House following the 1864 election, he noted to Lincoln that he might have won more votes if he had executed the Dakota. Ramsey made the comment in jest according to historian David Nichols; however, Lincoln refused to joke about the lives of anyone, even Indians. Lincoln reportedly responded to Ramsey that, "I cannot afford to hang men for votes."<sup>117</sup>

*Harper's Weekly* was entirely correct in their statement that recovery would take a long time for those on the Minnesota frontier. The magazine predicted peace would not be had "until they have hunted every Indian into the mountains."<sup>118</sup> The United States

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<sup>117</sup> Nichols, *Lincoln and the Indians*, 177-178.

<sup>118</sup> "Untitled," *Harper's Weekly*, 20 December 1862, 807.

government did indeed spend several decades “hunting” American Indians on the western plains, forcing them with treaties and the threat of extinction to move on reservations, and demanding Indian youth to be schooled in government regulated boarding schools. It would take much more than military and government action against the American Indian to aid in the healing process of the Dakota War.

Numerous writings concerning the uprising appeared soon after. Survivors wrote their memoirs of their captivity, and histories of the event were published, rich with gruesome, horrific drama and sensationalism. Collective memories were already being formulated and shaped, focused on the savagery of the American Indian, and the innocence of the white settlers. As demonstrated by the newspapers, those on the East Coast may have been able to acknowledge the problems with the system, but those in the territories could not move past the violence.

Only a few short years later in 1865, sign painter John Stevens created the first panorama of the Dakota War. Stevens placed the ‘savage’ Indian at the forefront of his artistic work. Originally from Utica, New York, Stevens moved to Rochester Minnesota in the 1850s, and heard many firsthand accounts of the uprising. It is unknown why he reportedly created the panorama a month after the uprising began, but between the years of 1865 and 1878, Stevens painted approximately five versions of the uprising.<sup>119</sup> There may have been an earlier version of Stevens’ panorama in 1865 that he sold to a private buyer, but the first one for public use appeared in 1868. Stevens traveled through Minnesota, Iowa, Wisconsin, and Illinois, stopping at small towns and cities, where he set

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<sup>119</sup> Bertha L. Heilbron, “Documentary Panorama,” *Minnesota History Magazine*, (March 1949): 1-2; John Bell, *American Puppet Modernism: Essays on the Material World in Performance* (New York City: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 17, 20.; Peter E. Palmquist and Thomas R. Kailbourn, *Pioneer Photographs From the Mississippi to the Continental Divide: A Biographical Discovery, 1839 – 1865* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), 59.

up his panorama at schoolhouses and town halls. For as little as fifty cents one could witness Stevens' moving canvas. Entitled "The Panorama of the Indian Massacre of 1862 and the Black Hills," more commonly known now as the Dakota War Panorama, the painted canvas was six feet wide and two-hundred and twenty-two feet long, with thirty-six colored scenes. The showing of the piece was very popular, Stevens narrated while musicians played. Someone operated the hand crank, moving the wooden mechanical frame, letting the dramatic scene unfold in front of the audience. Stevens' work depicted scenes from the massacre, settlers fleeing for their lives, and the hanging. In all phases he highlighted the savagery of the American Indian while exaggerating the innocence of white settlers.<sup>120</sup> Below is a scene from one of Stevens' panoramas, titled "Slaughter Slough," depicting a group of settlers hiding in a grassy field while being surrounded by the approaching Indians. Two of the men are loading their muskets but they will no doubt be useless against the 'savagery' of the warring Dakota.



Kenneth, Carley, *The Dakota War of 1862: Minnesota's Other Civil War* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1976), 24

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<sup>120</sup> Heilbron, "Documentary Panorama," 3-4; Bell, *American Puppet*, 17, 20; Palmquist and Kailbourn, *Pioneer Photographs*, 59.

Stevens and his assistants were not the only ones who painted a panorama depicting the uprising; there are several other panoramas from the late nineteenth century with it as its subject matter as well. Two of Stevens' creations survive today, both in museums.<sup>121</sup> Stevens' work demonstrates that from the outset the settlers took control of how they wished to remember the uprising, and how they rationalized such unprecedented acts of violence. By focusing on the violence and the Indians' savagery towards them, the settlers were better able to handle such a traumatic event. They had done nothing wrong, nothing deserving of a blood bath, but since the Dakota were little more than savage beasts, the settlers did not need further cause for the uprising.

The first monument dedicated to the events of the Dakota War appeared in September 1878, southwest of Litchfield, Minnesota at a local church, in honor of those killed at Acton. Marked with a granite stone, the monument served as a mass grave for the deceased.<sup>122</sup> The state of Minnesota erected a monument in 1891 in New Ulm titled "Guardians of the Frontier" which depicts battle scenes in relief form along the base of the obelisk. Another monument also appeared in 1899 honoring six Dakota men who saved the lives of settlers in the uprising. In 1909 a stone monument was placed at Baker's Farm where the uprising first began with those four young Indian men who found the unfortunate farmer's eggs.<sup>123</sup>

The white population erected these early monuments in the late nineteenth century were for the white population's benefit. Indeed, they did not honor or remember

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<sup>121</sup> Palmquist and Kaibourn, *Pioneer Photographs*, 59.

<sup>122</sup> See Appendix A for photographic images of the discussed monuments in order of appearance. There are no photographs included of the Redwood Ferry markers.

<sup>123</sup> Carley, *The Dakota War of 1862*, 9, 38, 44.

the Dakota. The 1899 monument acknowledging the six Dakota men who helped white settlers, does not portray the Indian men as American Indians but as Indians who did not give into the 'savagery' of their fellow tribesmen and emulated the 'civilized' characteristics of the white population. The only reason the Indians were mentioned at all is because they assisted whites in the uprising. As with the newspaper accounts and Stevens' panorama, the settlers actively chose to remember themselves as innocent victims in the wake of the Dakota's 'savage's rage. The turn of the century however saw the arrival of the Dakota as Dakota in memorialization of the uprising.

There was an 8500 pound granite monument placed in the town of Mankato in 1912 at the site of the hanging, but it has since gone missing. The monument was simply engraved with the phrase: "Here were hanged 38 Sioux Indians," with the date of December 26, 1862. The marker was removed from downtown Mankato in 1971 and reappeared in the 19902 in a a storage yard which was the last time anyone saw it. There are no records as to where it finally rests today or what prompted its removal. No documents indicate why the monument was removed. There is a disturbing lack of evidence regarding the monument. The Dakota found the monument especially offensive and one interviewed Dakota woman, seventy-one year old, Vernell Wabasha, referred to it simply as the "derogatory rock." Wabasha claims to know where the marker is, but refuses to say where because it does not need to be seen.<sup>124</sup>

This missing monument was as a turning point in the memorialization process. For the first time the Dakota were remembered as individual actors, not as Indians with 'civilized' characteristics. The monument represented the arrival of the Dakota in the

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<sup>124</sup> Carley, *The Dakota War of 1862*, 9; Dan Linehan, "Students Search for Missing Marker," *The Free Press*, 14 May 2006.

community's historical memory. It may be considered offensive and it may indeed shed a negative light on the Indian community, but at least the Dakota were now seen with individual agency. The Dakota War is a clearly apart of Minnesota's history and local communities struggle in regards to how the event should be remembered by the public. Throughout the twentieth century Minnesota citizens continued to memorialize the uprising in various ways in addition to stone monuments.

The Minnesota Historical Society (MHS) purchased the only surviving Lower Agency building, a stone warehouse, in 1967 and beginning in the 1970s, the MSH has presented museum exhibits on the Dakota uprising for the public's consumption. Markers have been placed at the Redwood Ferry site where many settlers were able to escape at the beginning of the uprising; one of the markers honors the unknown ferryman who gave his life helping others across the river. West of New Ulm at Milford, the state erected a stone monument honoring the fifty-two settlers who died at the hands of the warring Dakota. There is also a granite obelisk at Wood Lake, where the final battle occurred between Sibley's men and the unprepared Indians. Part of the area has been declared a state park. At Camp Release where many white captives were released, a fifty-one foot tall stone monument stands in remembrance of the event.<sup>125</sup> The monuments no doubt helped with the healing process.

Emotions still rang strong against the Dakota nation decades later. The Dakota were equally scarred by the events of 1862; it was not until the 1970s following the Civil Rights movement that the Dakota implanted their own methods of remembrance. In 1972, the Dakota held their first Mahkato Memorial Wacipi or pow-wow to honor the thirty-

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<sup>125</sup> Carley, *The Dakota War of 1862*, 13-14, 16, 22, 63, 66.

eight men hung at Mankato. Originally held at Sibley Park at Mankato, the Wacipi was attended only by Dakota members at first, with approximately two thousand tribesmen participating. The photograph below is of the first pow-wow. It was intended only to be a onetime event; however, it evolved into an annual commemorative and reconciliatory event. Attendees at the Wacipi claimed thirty-eight eagles could be seen flying over the park which encouraged the Dakota to hold the pow-wow yearly to honor their deceased tribesmen.<sup>126</sup>



<http://www.hmdb.org/Marker.asp?Marker=17506>

The city of Mankato dedicated a tract of land to the Dakota Nation in 1980 that once belonged to the Dakota before they were expelled from Minnesota. The land now known as “Land O Memories Park” or the “Dakota Wokiksuye Makoce Park,” was the

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<sup>126</sup> Sheryl and Bruce Dowlin, “First Mahkato Memorial Wacipi,” 7 December 2008 <<http://www.hmdb.org/Marker.asp?Marker=17506>> (accessed 30 March 2011); Sheryl and Bruce Dowlin, “Healing History’s Wounds: Reconciling Communication Efforts to Build Community Between Minnesota Dakota (Sioux) and Non Dakota Peoples,” *Peace and Change* 27, no. 2 ( July 2002), 12; Sheryl and Bruce Dowlin, “The Dakota Conflict Remembered,” (Paper presented at the annual Northern Great Plains History Conference, Mankato, September 2000) <<http://www.dowlinconsulting.com/images/%2700%20The%20Dakota%20Conflict%20Remembered.pdf>> (accessed 30 March 2011): 5-6.

original meeting place for many traditional Dakota ceremonies and gatherings. It became the permanent home of the annual Wacipi where it gained increased popularity, higher attendance rates, and community support. Hundreds attend each year, both whites and American Indians alike, and support for the event comes primarily from the community and private sponsors. In addition to vendors, there is a dance competition and a drumming circle. Held every year around Labor Day, the Mahkato Memorial Wacipi is celebrating its fortieth anniversary.<sup>127</sup> There is a Birch Coulee pow-wow that which is also held in September, but it does not promote reconciliation, rather it honors only the memory of the executed men. There is much less known about this event compared to the Mahkato Memorial Wacipi.

The turning point between white and American Indian relations began in 1987, the 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the uprising, when Vine Deloria, J.r, American Indian activist, challenged Minnesota to promote and encourage reconciliation during his key note speech at the Minneapolis Treaty Symposium. Later that year, Minnesota Governor Rudy Perpich verbally declared a “Year of Reconciliation” for the state. On December 26 1987 the state unveiled a new monument dedicated to the Dakota, simply titled the “Winter Warrior.” That year Dakota exiles from Canada began to return to Minnesota for the pow-wows, many for the first time in generations. One Dakota tribesman interviewed in 1987, eighty-one year old Eli Taylor, hoped the “Year of Reconciliation” would finally allow for healing: “Our parents were very much terrified, to the extent where they

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<sup>127</sup> Mahkato Wacipi Club History, “Mahkato Wacipi Honoring the 38 Dakota,” 30 August 2010, <http://www.mahkatowacipi.org/History.htm> (accessed 30 March 2011); Dowlin, “Healing History,” 12.



wouldn't talk about it for years and years and years...The Year of Reconciliation will help heal that wound.”<sup>128</sup>

Since then there has been an increased attempt to preserve and honor the memory of the Dakota War by both the Dakota and white society to promote a better sense of unity between the two groups that have been at odds for centuries. In 1989, the Mahkato Memorial Wicipi began to include an educational program for local third graders. One day during September school children gathered at Land O Memories Park to interact with members of the Dakota Nation and learn about the Dakota culture. Those involved with the Wacipi claimed to have taught over twelve thousand school children and interested family members since the late 1980s.<sup>129</sup> The photograph shown below is of the educational program held at the pow-wow.



<http://www.mahkatowacipi.org/Education.htm>

As time progressed the horrific deeds of the Dakota War and their memories have lessened. Oral histories from the Dakota and white settlers have been collected, and

<sup>128</sup> Dowlin, “The Dakota Conflict Remembered,” 3; Dowlin, “Dakota (Sioux) Memorial – 1862,” 7 December 2008, <<http://www.hmdb.org/marker.asp?marker=14195>> (30 March 2011); Dowlin, “Healing History’s, 17-18; S. Crawford, “Indians Still Upset Over Hangings,” *Free Press*, 21 September 1987.

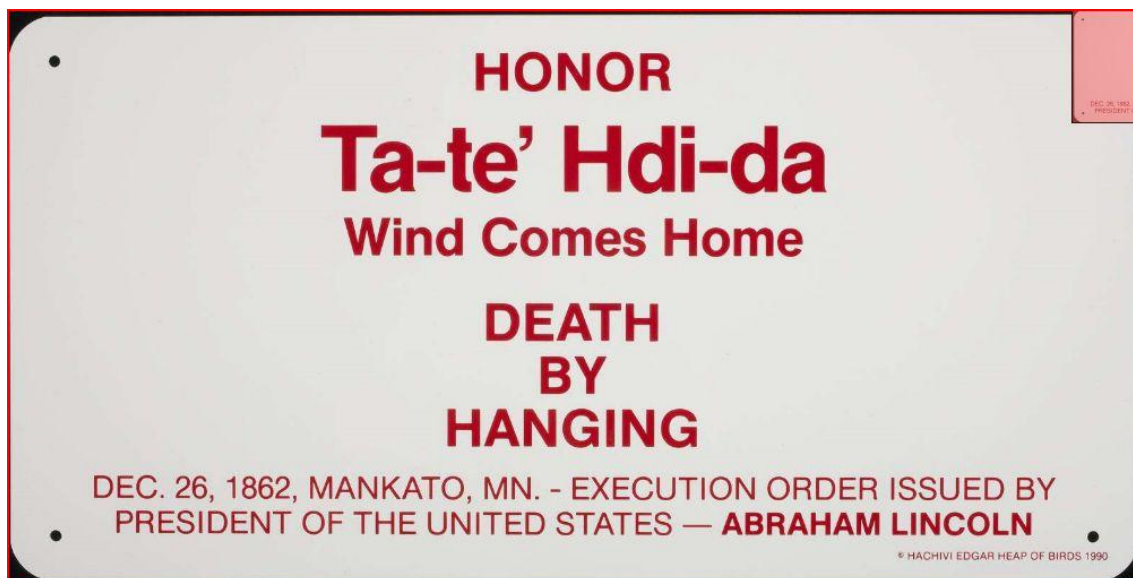
<sup>129</sup> “Mahkato Wacipi Honoring the 38 Dakota,” <<http://www.mahkatowacipi.org/History.htm>> (accessed 30 March 2011).

preserved, but each generation has become progressively more detached from the event which defined their ancestors' lives. Today the emphasis is less on Indian's brutality and is centered on the government's role that catalyzed the Dakota to action. Increasingly, the executed men are seen with honor and respect, not as murderous criminals. Some American Indian groups refer to the execution as a mass murder.

American Indian artist, Edgar Heap Of Birds, did his best in 1990 to encourage the memorialization of the thirty-eight executed Dakota by creating a public modern art project, featured along the Mississippi River in Minneapolis. Heap Of Birds produced forty aluminum signs like the one depicted below which listed the names of each Dakota man executed. The artist included two other men who were later hanged under the orders of President Andrew Johnson. These signs, known as the "Building Minnesota" exhibit, were hung along the river so it could be seen by everyday people. Heap of Birds did not want it to be shown in a museum where the exposure would be limited he said interview. He wanted to invade the consciousness of the locals with his work and remind them of the execution.<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>130</sup> Walker Art Center, "Hachivi Edgar Heap of Birds, TA-TE' HDI-DA (WIND COMES HOME), 1990," 1 March 2009 < <http://www.artsconnected.org/resource/90608/hachivi-edgar-heap-of-birds-ta-te-hdi-da-wind-comes-home-1990>>( accessed 30 March 2011); Edgar Heap Of Birds, "Sculpture: Edgar Heap Of Birds," interview by John LeKay <<http://www.heyokamagazine.com/HEYOKA.3.SCULPT.EDGAR.htm>>(accessed 30 March 2011).



<http://www.artsconnected.org/resource/91786/ta-te-hdi-da-wind-comes-home>

Honoring their executed tribesmen became much easier in 1997 when the Dakota Nation's long search for the remains of one of the men produced results. Originally the men were buried in a mass grave however scientists, reportedly, later claimed the bodies for scientific research. It is also believed that settlers dug up the bodies to use them as souvenirs. In the late 1990s the Mayo clinic admitted to having the skull of one of the men, Cut Nose or Mahpi' ya Ainazin, and a piece of his skin. As according to the Native American Grave Repatriation Act his remains were returned to the Dakota, and in May 1998 they ceremonially buried him. Since then the Dakota have been able to perform more healing ceremonies. The remains of Cut Nose, such as they are, are the only surviving remains of the executed Dakota. It is unknown what happened to the rest of his body or the other men.<sup>131</sup>

The year 2012 marks the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Dakota War. The Brown County Historical Society (BCHS) has already created a committee for the occasion as

<sup>131</sup> Dowlin, "Healing History's," 18; Tim Krohn, "St. Peter Man Returns Warrior to Spotlight," *Free Press*, 11 December 2006.

well as a website. Despite early claims in 2009 of including the Dakota community and perspective in the event, the current website has no mention of the Dakota Nation's involvement. It is unknown if that is simply because the Dakota do not want to participate or if the BCHS did not include them in the decision making process. Currently the Dakota are noticeably absent from the planned events. The website lists a variety of events: walking tours, round table discussions, lectures, film showings, a concert, a luncheon and banquets, and rededication ceremonies for several of the existing monuments. The BCHS is also hoping to have a new book published for the event, and a corresponding book signing event on the anniversary.<sup>132</sup>

The monuments erected in the late nineteenth and mid twentieth centuries were sponsored by the white community for the white people's benefit, but the public memory has gradually changed to include the Dakota's perspective. Metaphorically similar to the Dakota's fight for independence in August 1862, the Dakota Nation has been engaged in an ongoing battle for a voice in the memorialization of the Dakota War. Originally the white citizens controlled the memory and used various forms of media to honor white victims and victories, but with the passage of time as future generations became more removed from the uprising's atrocities, the Dakota slowly infiltrated the white dominated memorialization.

The turning point in this process of equal representation in memory began with the missing monument of 1912 and culminated in 1972 with the first Mahkato Memorial Wacipi. Over one hundred years later, the Dakota were able to demand a voice in the

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<sup>132</sup> Kremena Spengler, "Commemorating 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of War Between Dakota, Settlers Discussed," *The Journal*, 11 February 2009; Brown County Historical Society, "150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the U.S.-Dakota War of 1862: Brown County, Minnesota," <[http://www.browncountydakotawarcommemoration.com/IN\\_THE\\_NEWS.php](http://www.browncountydakotawarcommemoration.com/IN_THE_NEWS.php)> (accessed 30 March 2011).

public memory. Since then, various tribe members have tried to shape the memorialization to incorporate the government's responsibility in the uprising. No longer are whites the only innocent victims, the Dakota are frequently seen in the same light. After the uprising, the Dakota were not physically able to have an active role in the shaping of memory but in the hundred and fifty years since, tribal pride and strength have taken the place of silence. Today the public memory is more truthful and all encompassing than it was in 1865 with Stevens' panorama or even with the early monuments. The Dakota believe that it will take seven generations before healing and peace could occur between Minnesota and the Indian Nation, and with the seventh generation upon us, there is hope that there can finally be equality and harmony in both the representation and in the memory of the Dakota War.

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In retrospect, the Dakota War could have been easily prevented. If those four young men had not found that egg nest, maybe they never would have confronted the farmer. If the prior treaties with the Dakota had been fairer, or if the Indian agents had been concerned with their charges' welfare and not with lining their own pockets, perhaps the Dakota would not have felt unprecedented violence was their only way to gain a better life for themselves. If the traders had charged less inflated prices the Dakota might not have existed in a continual cycle of debt and poverty, living hand to month. If the government had punished Inkpaduta in the Spirit Lake Massacre, maybe the Dakota would have given more thought to the consequences of rising against the whites in such a violent manner. If the American Civil War had not occurred, the yearly annuity payments would not have been late and the Dakota would not have been driven to desperation.

Even with the war on, had Galbraith handed out more provisions, the Indians might have been convinced to wait peacefully until the annuity payments did arrive. If people had reacted differently when the young men broke down the warehouse door, and recognized the dangerous situation brewing, perhaps the initial outbreak could have been contained or even prevented in its entirety.

But none of these “what ifs” happened. So many lives could have been saved if only one action had been different. The situation between the Dakota and the United States rapidly degenerated in a downward spiral which ended in a violent, bloody clash that both sides were powerless to stop. Both Minnesota and the Dakota Nation were caught up in the moment, each unwilling to admit defeat. Although the Dakota believed, at least in the beginning, they could have won a war against the whites, the rest of the world knew it was only a matter of time before the rebellion would be squashed and the Indians punished for their attempt to gain control of their own fate. Thirty-eight Dakota men personally paid for the uprising with their lives and several hundred settlers died. Despite his unrelenting focus on the war in the South, President Lincoln became caught in the middle. He did not want to become involved, but he did not have a choice when the military tribunal could not move past their prejudices and need for revenge. No stranger to the possible violence from American Indians, Lincoln was forced to find a compromise with his natural humanitarianism and need to find good in people, with Minnesota’s loud demands for blood retribution. The president valued human life which is probably what encouraged him to favor clemency as he considered the fate of three-hundred and three condemned Dakota. Lincoln was wholly invested in the Civil War; he wanted desperately to preserve his beloved country and he did not have time to fix the problematic Indian

system. No doubt he resented the intrusion of the Dakota War, but his compassionate nature forced him to make the fairest decision possible. Minnesotans demonstrated a lasting need for revenge on the Dakota people that would take much more than a mass execution to sate.

The uprising itself lasted a little over a month, but the effects of it lasted well into the twenty-first century. An unknown number of settlers died on the Minnesota frontier while the Dakota lost many tribe members in Fort Snelling and during relocation. Settlers eventually returned to their homes and began their lives, however the Indians no longer had their tribal home. The land which they had inhabited for over a century was taken away from them as punishment and the Dakota were banished to the west, to new lands which held no cultural or religious meaning to them whatsoever. Some Dakota did stay in Minnesota, but they faced much hatred from the white population.

The hatred remained between the groups for decades. As can be seen in the media and artwork from the late nineteenth century, the white population focused solely on the ‘savagery’ of the American Indian. The monuments erected in honor of the Dakota War did not acknowledge the Indians until well into the twentieth century; they memorialized instead white victimization. It took many decades before the Dakota felt strong enough to participate in honoring their own ancestors, however now both Minnesota and the Dakota Nation work together to commemorate the anniversary of the uprising. Now the focus is on the government’s role in instigating the event and not on the barbarous acts.

Very little good has come out of the Dakota War. It is not one of the historical events in which the ends justified the means or where a colossal change occurred that bettered the situation. The Dakota lost their tribal lands, settlers lost their lives, and a

large wound opened between the Indian population and the whites which still lingers today, over a century and a half later. The Dakota War did turn attention onto the Indian reservation system which prompted eventual change, but with the Civil War demanding all of the country's attention, the change was a long time in coming. Both the white population and the Dakota Nation were left to pick up the pieces and grapple with painful memories.



Appendix A

1). 1878 Acton Monument



<http://www.rrcnet.org/~historic/Acton.htm>  
[community/attractions/](http://www.rrcnet.org/~historic/Acton.htm)

2). 1891 Guardians of the Frontier



<http://www.newulm.com/visitors->

3). 1899 Monument Honoring the Loyal Dakota



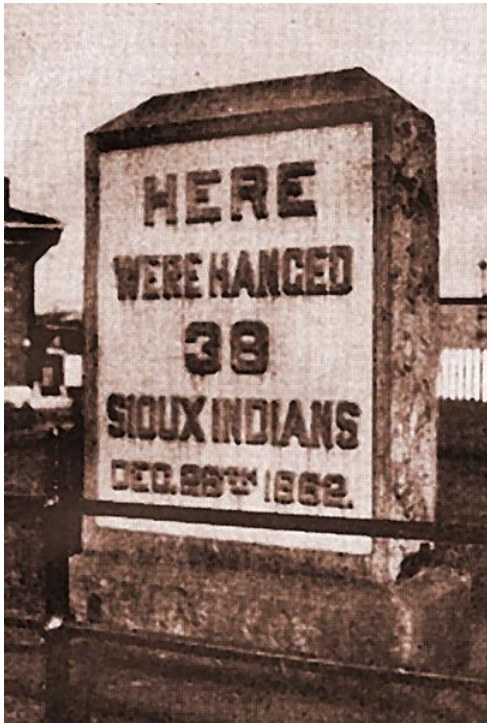
<http://mnprairieroots.wordpress.com/2010/07/page/2/>

4). 1909 Baker's Farm Monument



[http://www.plainsart.org/learnonline/exhibits/show/david-  
bradley/guiltysection/item/41](http://www.plainsart.org/learnonline/exhibits/show/david-bradley/guiltysection/item/41)

5.). Missing Monument from 1912



6). Milford Monument



<http://www.rrcnet.org/~historic/Milford.html>

<http://mankatofreepress.com/local/x519254252/Students-search-for-missing-monument?keyword=secondarystory>

7). Wood Lake Monument



<http://www.globe-hoppers.com/sioux-midian.html>

8). Camp Release Monument



<http://www.flickr.com/photos/83372564@N00/2960185406>

9). Winter Warrior Monument



<http://www.hmdb.org/marker.asp?marker=14195>



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