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A Misunderstanding Between Cultures: the causes of the Dakota Conflict of 1862

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Contents

In August and September 1862, Minnesota was the home of one of the bloodiest wars between Dakota Indians and Anglo-Americans. Before the Dakota Conflict of 1862 ended, it affected 23 counties and left hundreds homeless or dead. The war had a profound effect on the region. Not only did hundreds of settlers die during the conflict, but some survivors left the region never to return.

In many historical accounts of the Dakota Conflict written by settlers, the authors described the Dakota Indians with negative adjectives. Most of the settlers saw the Dakota Indians as inferior beings who were not worthy of respect. The settlers failed to take responsibility for causing the Dakota Conflict. When historians began to write about the Dakota Conflict of 1862, they too placed the blame strictly on the Indians without regard for the part the settlers played in causing the war. In this paper, is it not my intent to blame one group or the other for starting the uprising. Instead, I hope to provide a balanced understanding of the Dakota Conflict. There were extensive differences between Dakota and settler culture. Neither group made an effort to understand the other, and as a result, a cultural misunderstanding developed. In addition, the growing influence of the settlers caused the Dakota Indians to divide into traditional Indians and farmer Indians. The cultural differences between the settlers, the traditional Indians and the farmer Indians and the resulting misunderstanding of these cultural differences was a primary element in the Dakota Conflict of 1862.

Historiography

Throughout the study of the Dakota Conflict, scholars attributed long term and immediate causes to the Dakota Conflict of 1862. The first book written on the subject was published in 1864. Written by Harriet E. Bishop McConkey,[1] the book asserted the Dakota Indians were savage people and waited for the opportune moment to strike the settlers. The next work that

1. Harriet E. Bishop McConkey, *Dakota War Whoop*, ed. Dale L. Morgan (Illinois: The Lakeside Press, 1965).

examined the Dakota Conflict was published approximately 90 later. Louis H. Roddis wrote about the wars with the Dakota Indians from 1857 to 1898, and devoted a large portion of his book to the numerous battles of the Dakota Conflict of 1862. He argued the loss of land had a negative impact on the lives of the Dakota Indians. Two prominent Minnesota historians, William Watts Folwell[2] and Theodore C. Blegen[3] published histories of Minnesota 1924 and 1962, respectively; and they agreed that the United States Indian policies were poor and the government took advantage of the Dakota Indians. Kenneth Carley[4] asserted the Dakota Indians were angry with the white men for taking their traditional hunting and gathering land. These historians argued that the gradual loss of land was the main long-term cause of the Dakota Conflict. Blegen and Carley argued that the crop failure in 1861 and the harsh winter in 1861-1862 caused starvation among a large portion of the Dakota Indians. The severe lack of food on the reservation was the primary immediate cause of the Dakota Conflict.

Until the late 1970s, the scholarship surrounding the Dakota Conflict of 1862 was one sided. Scholars mainly examined the Dakota Conflict from the perspectives of the Anglo-Americans. While there was a willingness to acknowledge that the Anglo-American presence in the Minnesota River valley contributed to some of the problems faced by the Dakota Indians, scholars failed to place any blame on the white population. Many scholars, especially Harriet E. Bishop McConkey, argued the Dakota Indians were naturally savage. The scholarship lacked an understanding of the Dakota Conflict from the perspective of the Dakota Indians.

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2. William Watts Folwell, *A History of Minnesota*, vol. 2 (Saint Paul: Minnesota Historical Society, 1961).
3. Theodore C. Blegen, *Minnesota: A History of the State* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1961).
4. Kenneth Carley, *The Sioux Uprising of 1862* (Minneapolis: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1976).

In recent years, historians began understanding the Dakota Conflict from the Dakota Indian viewpoint. In his book *Little Crow: Spokesman for the Sioux*,[5] Gary Clayton Anderson explained the settlement of the Minnesota River valley affected the Dakota Indians in a negative way because it caused many divisions among the Indians. Anderson contended the Dakota Indians had to accommodate the demands of the white men while trying to defend their traditional religion and culture. Bruce M. White furthered an understanding of Dakota culture in his article, "Indian Visits: Stereotypes of Minnesota's Native People" when he argued that many stories of Dakota Indians in the early 1860s are based on the settlers' negative stereotypes of the Dakota rather than on actual events.[6] Although more work needs to be done to reverse the negative image of the Dakota Indians during the Dakota Conflict of 1862, scholars are gaining a more balanced understanding of the war. I will be adding to the recent scholarship that examines the Dakota Conflict of 1862 from the perspective of the Dakota Indians. In an effort to provide a balanced understanding of the causes of the Dakota Conflict, this paper will attempt to offer an understanding of the war from the Native American viewpoint. The paper will examine the causes of the Dakota Conflict as articulated by Dakota Indians and settlers who participated and lived through the event. I will assert that there were numerous short-term and long-term causes of the Conflict and a balanced understanding of them is necessary for understanding the war. I will also explore the perceptions the settlers had of the Dakota Indians. The paper will argue that the misperceptions held by Anglo-Americans about the Dakota have negatively influenced the way the Indians are perceived in history by Americans.

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5. Gary Clayton Anderson, *Little Crow: Spokesman for the Sioux* (Minnesota: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1986).
6. Bruce M. White, "Indian Visits: Stereotypes of Minnesota's Native People," Minnesota History 53, no. 3 (1992): 99-111.

Historical Information

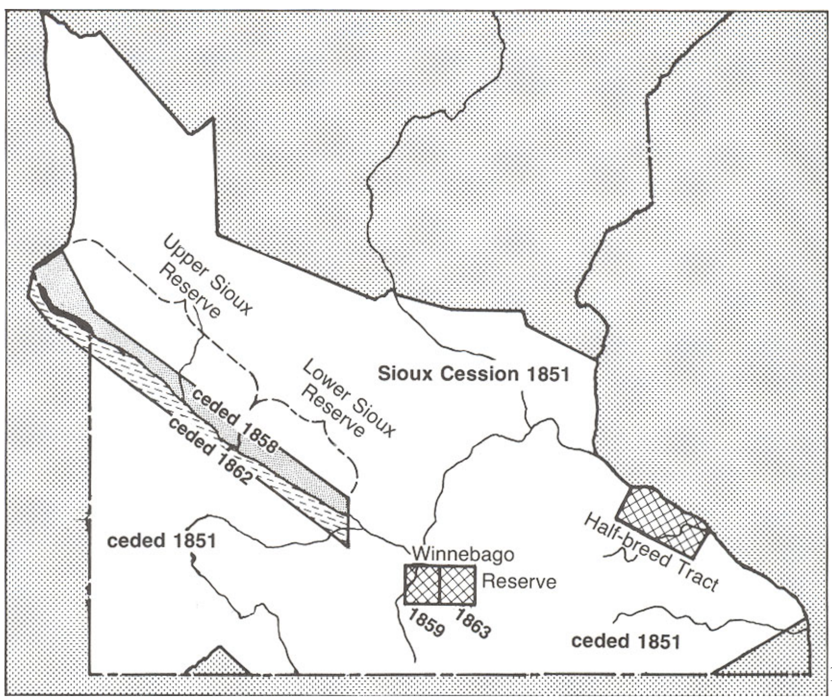
Before one can fully understand the Dakota Conflict, it is essential that one be familiar with the background of the Dakota Indians. There are two important elements to the historical information. The first part is the terms used to describe the Dakota Indians. Since scholars used numerous terms to describe the same group of people, it is important to understand their meanings. The second element of the historical information is the treaties. The treaties the Dakota Indians signed with the United States government profoundly affected the lives of the Indians, and they played a vital role in causing the war. Although the Dakota Indians signed the treaties before 1862, they are an important part of the story.

A confusion of terms often accompanies the Dakota Conflict. Historically, scholars have used the terms "Dakota," "Sioux," and "Santee" interchangeably. Using these three terms without a distinction between their meanings, however, is incorrect. The name "Sioux" is a shortened version of the word Naduwessioux. French traders used the plural form of the Chippewa word Naduwessi, which means "snakes" or "enemies," to describe the Dakotas during the expeditions from 1654 to 1659.[7] The word "Sioux" describes many tribes that speak a common language.[8] The term "Dakota" describes Indians who speak the dialect of the Siouan linguistic family, and is taken from the Santee and Teton words meaning "friend" or "an alliance of friends."[9] The word "Dakota" is used describe the eastern branch of the "Sioux" Indians.[10] The term "Santee" also describes the eastern division of the "Dakota" Indians.

7. Michael Clodfelter, *The Dakota War: The United States Army Versus the Sioux, 1862-1865* (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, Inc., 1998), 18.
8. Doane Robinson, *A History of the Dakota or Sioux Indians* (Minneapolis: Ross & Haines, Inc., 1904), 15.
9. Clodfelter, *The Dakota War*, 17.
10. Robinson, *A History of the Dakota or Sioux Indians*, 15.

The four bands that made up the Dakota or Santee Indians are the Mdewakanton, Wahpekute, Wahpeton and Sisseton.[11] The Mdewakanton and Wahpekute bands are sometimes called the Lower Sioux because of their location on the reservation. The Mdewakanton and Wahpekute bands lived south of the junction where the Yellow Medicine River drains into the Minnesota River. The Wahpeton and Sisseton bands, on the other hand, are often called the Upper Sioux because they lived above the Yellow Medicine River.[12] For the sake of clarification in this paper, I will use the term "Dakota" to describe the Indians involved in the Dakota Conflict of 1862. When necessary, I will differentiate between the four bands.

When one studies the Dakota Conflict of 1862, it is important to be familiar with the treaties the Dakota Indians signed with the United States government. The Treaty of 1851 and the Treaty of 1858 are of utmost importance when studying the Dakota Conflict of 1862. By the



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11. Clodfelter, *The Dakota War*, 18.
12. See Clodfelter, *The Dakota War*, 38 and Jerry Keenan, *The Great Sioux Uprising: Rebellion on the Plains August-September 1862* (Cambridge: Da Capo Press, 2003), 19.
13. Carley, *The Sioux Uprising of 1862*, 4.

early 1850s, the territory[14] of Minnesota felt the pressures of a population boom and needed to open up land for settlement.[15] In 1851, the United States government signed two treaties with the Dakota Indians in Minnesota. On 23 July 1851, the Sisseton and Wahpeton bands singed a treaty with the United States government. This treaty, commonly called the Treaty of Traverse des Sioux, stated "The said See-see-toan [sic] and Wah-pay-toan [sic] bands of the Dakota or Sioux Indians, agree to cede, and do hereby cede, sell, and relinquish to the United States, all their lands in the State of Iowa; and, also all their lands in the Territory of Minnesota, lying east of the following line. . ."[16] Two months later on 5 August 1851, the Mdewakanton band and the Wahpekute band signed a treaty at Mendota with the United States government. Article 2 of the treaty forced the Dakota Indians to give up all land claims in Minnesota territory and Iowa.[17] In Article 3 of both treaties, the United States government agreed to "hereby set apart for the future occupancy and home of the Dakota Indians, parties to this treaty, to be held by them as Indian lands are held, a tract of country of the average width of ten miles on either side of the Minnesota River, and bounded on the west by the Tchaytam-bay and Yellow Medicine Rivers."[18] Many Dakota Indians had to pack their few belongings and move with their tribe to the newly created reservation.

The land allotted to the Dakota Indians in 1851, however, was cut in half in 1858 when the chiefs of the tribes of the Mdewakanton and the Wahpekute bands signed another treaty. The treaty, signed on 19 June 1858, forced the Dakota Indians to cede all lands on the north bank of

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14. President Buchanan did not sign the bill creating the state of Minnesota until 11 May 1858. See Blegen, *Minnesota*, 229.
15. Blegen, *Minnesota*, 165.
16. Thomas Hughes, *The Treaty of Traverse des Sioux* (Saint Peter: Herald Publishing Company, 1929), 175.
17. Mendota Mdewakanton Dakota Community, *Treaty with the Sioux Mdewakanton and Wahpakoota Bands, 1851*, 2005, http://www.mendotadakota.org/treaties/T1851.htm.
18. Ibid.

the Minnesota River.[19] Although the treaty gave the Dakota bands "full force and effect over and within the limits of the same [the reservation lands]," the treaty also stipulated that "The United States shall have the right to establish . . . military posts, agencies, schools, mills, shops, roads, and agricultural or mechanical improvements, as may be deemed necessary."[20] The reservation land was supposed to belong to the Dakota Indians, but the government took advantage of the Indians when it included Article 5 in the treaty. In return for relinquishing a claim to the land, the United States paid the Dakota Indians thirty cents per acre[21] for land that was worth at least five dollars per acre. It was, however, two years before the United States Senate appropriated the funds for the sale. When the funds arrived, the Dakota Indians saw very little, if any, of the money owed to them. Before the Indian Agent paid the Dakota Indians, the traders collected the debt owed to them by the Indians.[22] The Indians received the remaining money. The land and most of the money would never again "belong" to the Dakota Indians.

In the treaties of 1851 and 1858, the Dakota Indians lost a majority of their native lands to the United States government. The loss of land had a profound effect on the lives of the Indians, which will be discussed later in the paper. Losing their native land was only the beginning of a downward cycle for Dakota Indians.

Causes of the Dakota Conflict of 1862

Scholars cannot point to one thing and say it was the cause of the Dakota Conflict. Some of the causes of the war were immediate while other causes were long-term. Some of the causes were articulated while other causes were implicit. The settlers and the Dakota Indians expressed

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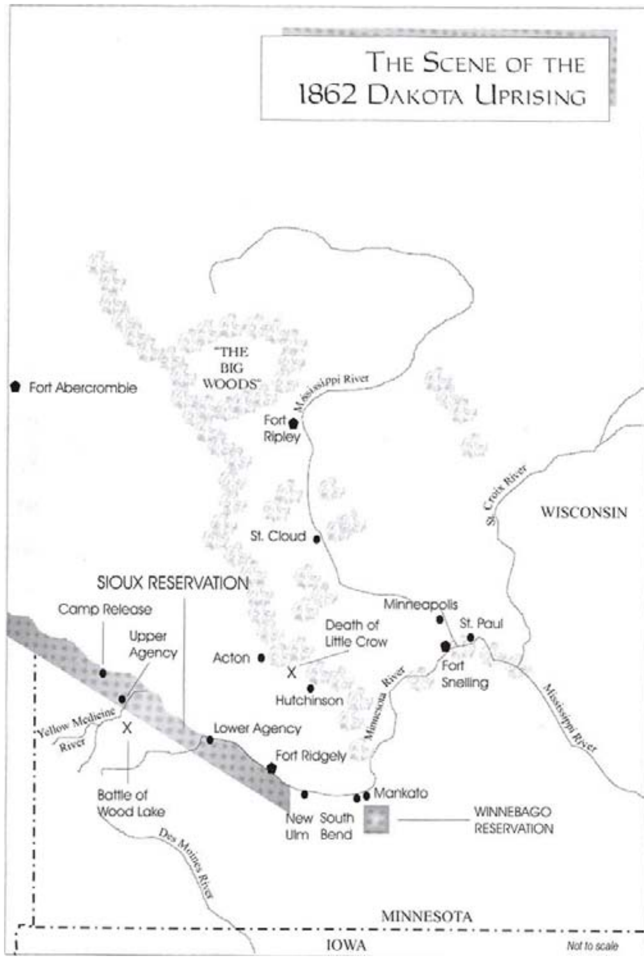
19. Folwell, *A History of Minnesota*, 218.
20. Charles J. Kappler, ed., *Indian Affairs: Laws and Treaties: Treaty with the Sioux, 1858*, 1904, http://digital.library.okstate.edu/Kappler/vol2/treaties/sio0781.htm.
21. Congress appropriated the money on 2 March 1861. The Lower Sioux were to receive $96,000 for 320,000 acres of land while the Upper Sioux were to receive $170,880 for 569,600 acres. See Folwell, *A History of Minnesota*, 218 and Blegen, *Minnesota*, 264.
22. Folwell, *A History of Minnesota*, 218.

many of the same causes, but they offered a different explanation for them. The explanation that accompanied the causes depended on the cultural lens of the author. Whether the causes were from settlers or Indians, immediate or gradual, articulated or implicit — a combination of them started the Dakota Conflict.



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In their narratives, the settlers and the Dakota Indians articulated similar causes of the Dakota Conflict. One of the causes of the Dakota Conflict that the two groups agreed upon was the late annuity payment. Although the settlers did not live on the reservation, they knew the government failed to deliver the payment at the scheduled time. The Dakota Indians also acknowledged the late payment was a factor in starting the war. There was, however, a

23. Keenan, *The Great Sioux Uprising*, 6.

difference between the narratives of the settlers and those of the Indians. The settlers acknowledged the late payment, but they failed to note how much it affected the Dakota. Narratives from Dakota Indians, on the other hand, provided deeper insight on the subject.

The settlers said the late annuity payments angered the Dakota Indians because they were unable to purchase supplies. The annuity payment was scheduled to arrive in June 1862.[24] June and July, however, passed without the payment because of government delays. The delayed payment happened because Congress was slow when appropriating the money and the U.S. Treasury Department held up the transaction for a month while it debated whether to pay the Dakota Indians in gold or paper money.[25]

Although the settlers probably did not know the reason for the delayed payment, they acknowledged the delay created tension on the reservation. According to Charles Flandrau, the former United States Indian agent for the Dakota in Minnesota, "Every thing went along harmoniously at the [Upper and Lower] agencies except an occasional misunderstanding which usually arose from delays in the arrival of the government funds, which gave rise to discontents and grumbling among the Indians."[26] Christopher Spelbrink, a resident of New Ulm during the Dakota Conflict, wrote the delayed payment caused the Dakota Indians to suffer because they had to wait longer for the much-needed money.[27] Even though the narratives noted the late annuity payments, the authors expressed very little, if any, sympathy for the Dakota Indians. The narratives said the Dakota Indians needed the money, but the authors did not suggest giving food

24. Blegen, *Minnesota*, 266.
25. Carley, *The Sioux Uprising of 1862*, 5.
26. Charles E. Flandrau, *Charles E. Flandrau and the Defense of New Ulm*, ed. Russell W. Fridley, Leota M. Kellett and June D. Holmquist (New Ulm: Brown County Historical Society, 1962), 15, 33.
27. Christopher Spelbrink, *Memories of the Battle of New Ulm: Personal Accounts of the Sioux Uprising: L. A. Fritsche's History of Brown County, Minnesota (1916)*, ed. Don Heinrich Tolzmann (Bowie: Heritage Books, Inc., 2001), 69.

to the Indians without the annuity payment; instead, settlers implied the Dakota Indians simply had to wait for the payment and do their best to alleviate the starvation.

Many settlers did not know was the late annuity payments caused many Dakota warriors to talk about an uprising. Big Eagle,[28] a member of the Mdewakanton band, was approximately 35 years old at the time of the Dakota Conflict, and he acknowledged the delayed payment caused trouble on the reservation.[29] The Dakota gathered at the agencies to collect their

Big Eagle[30]

annuity payments, but they did not arrive on schedule. After weeks went by without the scheduled payment, Big Eagle said someone told the Indians the payment would never arrive because gold was scare due to the Civil War. Big Eagle said the rumor caused some Dakota to

28. Big Eagle succeeded his father in 1857 as a chief of a band of Mdewakanton Indians who lived near the Lower Agency. During the Dakota Conflict, Big Eagle fought at the second battles of Fort Ridgely and New Ulm, the battle of Birch Coulee and the battle of Wood Lake. See Gary Clayton Anderson and Alan R. Woolworth, ed., *Through Dakota Eyes,* 21.

29. Anderson and Woolworth, ed., *Through Dakota Eyes: Narrative Accounts of the Minnesota Indian War of 1862* (Saint Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1988), 21.

30. Anderson and Woolworth, ed., *Through Dakota Eyes*, 22.

talk of war, but "most of us [the Dakota Indians] thought the trouble would pass."[31] At the meeting where the Dakota discussed the possibility of war, the Indians who wanted peace prevailed because they could see the harvest in the fall would be bountiful and the Indians who wanted peace convinced others not to fight. According to Big Eagle, a good harvest meant the Dakota Indians would be able to live through the winter "without having to depend on the game of the country or without going far out to the west on the plains for buffalo."[32] With a good harvest in sight, the Dakota Indians temporarily calmed their anger over the delayed payment.

Unless the settlers lived very close to the Upper or Lower Agency, the settlers would not have known how angered the Dakota Indians were about the delayed payment. As Big Eagle noted in his interview, some of the Dakota began to talk about war in June. None of the narratives by the settlers discussed hearing rumors of war. In fact, many of the settlers expressed feelings of shock and disbelief when they heard the Dakota Indians started an uprising. Benedict Juni, an eleven-year-old settler who lived near the present city of Morton at the start of the war, summed up the feeling of many settlers when he wrote, "The news of the outbreak came to all like a thunderbolt from a clear sky."[33] The settlers in the Minnesota River valley knew the Dakota Indians were unhappy about the delayed payment, but the Anglo-Americans did not expect the wrath of the Dakota Indians to be as quick and brutal as it was.

Another articulated cause of the Dakota Conflict was related to the Indian Agents and traders. Anglo-Americans realized some of the U.S. Indian Agents and the traders were greedy and abused their power to increase personal wealth. The memoir of Christopher Spelbrink revealed his knowledge of Dakota families purchasing supplies on credit. Spelbrink was reluctant to accuse the traders of taking money from the Indians, but he wrote, "he [the trader]

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31. Big Eagle, "The Great Sioux Uprising." In *Native American Perspectives* (Illinois: Nextext, 2001), 92.
32. Ibid., 26.
33. Benedict Juni, *Held in Captivity* (Minnesota: J & L Printing, Inc., 1996), 1.

certainly is not in business for his health."[34] Other contemporaries recognized the harmful actions of the Indian Agents and traders on the reservation. In his account of the Dakota Uprising, Jacob Nix[35] wrote:

> No one can deny that the greed of one of the government officials [Agent Galbraith?] of that time had a great deal of responsibility for the terrible outbreak of the Sioux Indians in the Upper Mississippi Valley. In fact, that same person who possessed of only one thought, to squeeze a maximum of dollars out of the Indians, bears sole blame for that horrible fate of many brave settlers.[36]

Jacob Nix realized there was an unequal relationship between the government officials on the reservation and the Dakota Indians. On the reservation, the traders set the prices for good without government regulation. The high prices made trading on the reservation a very profitable business.[37]

One element the settlers acknowledged was unequal was the fur trade between the Indians and the traders on the reservation. Spelbrink accused the traders of taking advantage of the Dakota when trading furs. He noted the Dakota Indians were unaware of the value of many of the furs they traded. The traders knew the Indians sold the furs at a price that was less than one-half of their value but the traders did nothing to correct the problem. In his discussion on the causes of the Dakota Conflict, Spelbrink was reluctant to place much blame on the white men. Spelbrink implied it was the Indians' fault for not being able to read or write.[38]

Statements from Dakota Indians supported the Anglo-American belief that the Indian Agent and traders did not have a good relationship with the Dakota. In his account of the Dakota

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34. Spelbrink, *Memories of the Battle of New Ulm*, ed. Don Heinrich Tolzmann, 67.
35. On 18 August, the Sheriff in New Ulm appointed Jacob Nix as the Commandant of New Ulm. He held this position until the defendants of the town elected Charles Flandrau as Commander-in-Chief on 20 August. See Jacob Nix, *The Sioux Uprising in Minnesota, 1862: Jacob Nix's Eyewitness History*, ed. Don Heinrich Tolzmann, (Indianapolis: Indiana University Printing Services, 1994), 89, 109.
36. Nix, *The Sioux Uprising in Minnesota, 1862*, ed. Don Heinrich Tolzmann, 78.
37. Marion P. Satterlee, *Outbreak and Massacre by the Dakota Indians in Minnesota in 1862*, ed. Don Heinrich Tolzmann (Bowie: Heritage Books, Inc., 2001), 3.
38. Spelbrink, *Memories of the Battle of New Ulm,* ed. Don Heinrich Tolzmann, 67.

Conflict, Big Eagle noted that the Dakota Indians were unhappy with the traders, and they had to purchase goods from the traders on credit "and when the government payments came the traders were on hand with their books, and showed that the Indians owed so much and so much, and as the Indians kept no books they could not deny their accounts, but had to pay them, and sometimes the traders got all their money."[39] Wabasha, another leader of an Mdewakanton tribe, compared the traders to "rats." Like rats, according to Wabasha, the traders would do anything to steal from the Dakota.[40] The Dakota Indians had little respect for the men who took advantage of them, and the Indians lost more respect for the white men living on the reservation after 1861.

One aspect of the relationship between the government officials and the Dakota Indians the settlers failed to acknowledge was the change of Indian Agents in 1861. Joseph R. Brown succeeded Charles E. Flandrau as the Indian Agent in October 1857 and Brown served until 1861. Brown married a Dakota woman and lived among the Dakota for many years before

Major Joseph R. Brown[41]

39. Big Eagle, "The Great Sioux Uprising." In *Native American Perspectives*, 87.
40. Anderson and Woolworth, ed., *Through Dakota Eyes*, 29.
41. Carley, *The Sioux Uprising of 1862*, 41.

becoming the Indian Agent; therefore, he was familiar with Dakota customs and their way of life.[42] Brown's successor as the Indian Agent, Thomas Galbraith, knew little about Dakota culture. Thomas Galbraith became the Indian Agent because the Republican Party won a majority in the 1860 election.[43] Big Eagle knew Agent Galbraith received his position as a political favor, and later said that many of the Dakota men on the reservation were unhappy with the change.[44] Agent Galbraith did not have much respect for the Dakota Indians and was unfamiliar with the problems they faced.[45] The new Indian Agent, according to historian Paul Beck, was "arrogant, opinionated and slow to take advice" and was a poor choice for the position.[46]

Agent Galbraith, unlike his predecessor, acted without Dakota interest at heart. The Dakota Indians needed an Indian Agent who would look after the best interest of the Indians. Even though it was the job of the Indian Agent to further the interest of the Dakota Indians, Galbraith often acted with personal interests in mind, and even when the Dakota Indians were starving in the summer of 1862, Galbraith was reluctant to issue the food rations without the annuity payment.[47]

In the fall of 1861, the Dakota Indians experienced a crop failure. The Dakota Indians stressed this was a cause of the Dakota Conflict, but the settlers failed to mention it in their narratives. Cutworms destroyed the entire corn crop grown by the Sisseton Indians, while they only damaged a majority of the crops of the Mdewakanton, Wahpekute, and Wahpeton Indians.[48]

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42. See Folwell, *A History of Minnesota*, 219 and Louis H. Roddis, *The Indian Wars of Minnesota* (Cedar Rapids: The Torch Press, 1956), 56.
43 Paul N. Beck, *Soldier, Settler, and Sioux: Fort Ridgely and the Minnesota River Valley, 1853-1867* (Sioux Falls: Pine Hill Press, Inc., 2000), 133.
44. Anderson and Woolworth, ed., *Through Dakota Eyes*, 25.
45. See Roddis, *The Indian Wars of Minnesota*, 56 and Blegen, *Minnesota*, 265.
46. Beck, *Soldier, Settler, and Sioux*, 133-134.
47. Carley, *The Sioux Uprising of 1862*, 5.
48. See Folwell, *A History of Minnesota*, 229 and Carley, *The Sioux Uprising of 1862*, 5.

Following an extremely poor harvest, the winter of 1861-1862 was exceptionally cold and full of bad snowstorms; therefore, the amount of available food on the reservation, lacked for two reasons.[49] First, the crop failure eliminated a large portion of food available. Second, the Dakota could no longer rely on hunting and gathering for survival because they had sold their land.[50] The majority of the Dakota population was starving by the spring of 1862.[51] By June 1862, the Dakota Indians needed the goods and money to alleviate their suffering.[52] In his testimony before the United States commission investigating the cause of the Dakota Conflict, Robert Hakewaste,[53] an important member of Little Crow's band of Mdewakanton Indians, testified that the Dakota had no food on the reservation. As Hakewaste told the government, "We [the Dakota Indians] were in a starving condition and desperate state of mind."[54]

The payments were late and many Dakota were unwilling to stand by and starve to death. On 4 August 1862, Dakota Indians broke into the warehouse at the Upper Agency and took sacks of flour.[55] Little Crow, a Mdewakanton Indian chief, asked for food on behalf of the Dakota people. Little Crow told the Indian Agent:

> We have waited a long time. The money is ours, but we cannot get it. We have no food, but here are these stores, filled with food. We ask that you, the agent, make some arrangement by which we can get food from the stores, or else we may take our own way to keep ourselves from starving. When men are hungry they help themselves.[56]

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49. See Beck, *Soldier, Settler, and Sioux*, 135 and Anderson, *Little Crow*, 116.
50. Beck, *Soldier, Settler, and Sioux*, 135.
51. See Roddis, *The Indian Wars of Minnesota*, 57 and Elroy E. Ubl, *New Ulm Area Defenders of 1862: Dakota Indians and Pioneer Settlers* (New Ulm: Local History, 1992), 6.
52. Larry Lundblad, "The Impact of Minnesota's Dakota Conflict on 1862 on the Swedish Settlers," *The Swedish-American Historical Quarterly* 15, no. 3 (2000): 212.
53. Robert Hakewaste was an important member of Little Crow's band of Mdewakanton Indians. Before the outbreak, he lived on the reservation and was well aware of the poor conditions. See Anderson and Woolworth, ed., *Through Dakota Eyes*, 31.
54. Ibid., 31-32.
55. Carley, *The Sioux Uprising of 1862*, 5.
56. Mark Diedrich, ed., *Dakota Oratory: Great Moments in the Recorded Speech of the Eastern Sioux, 1695-1874* (Rochester: Coyote Books, 1989), 65.

The Dakota Indians were desperate, yet the Indian Agent and the traders gave the Indians little sympathy. As conditions worsened, some warriors began to wonder if it was time to take a forceful stand against their white neighbors.

Because of the Civil War, many young men were away fighting in the south, and the Indians acknowledged this influenced their decision to go to war. The Dakota Indians were well aware that a war raged between the Union and the Confederacy and they realized the small number of men in the Minnesota River valley gave them an advantage in starting the war in August 1862. The Dakota warriors believed an uprising would be met with little, if any, strong opposition.[57] According to Big Eagle, many young white men left Minnesota in the weeks preceding the Dakota Conflict because President Lincoln called for an increase in Union troops. Major Galbraith, who was also the Indian Agent, recruited men from the area to form a company to fight the Confederacy. The Dakota Indians, according to Big Eagle, "thought the whites must be pretty hard up for men to fight in the South, or they would not come so far out on the frontier and take half-breeds or anything to help them."[58] For the Dakota Indians who had had enough of government policies, it was the opportune time to drive the settlers from their lands.

After news reached the reservation that four Dakota hunters killed four settlers in Acton Township, the Dakota Indians decided it was the best time to drive the whites from the Minnesota River valley. Big Eagle said four Dakota Indians from Shakopee's band were hunting on 17 August. The hunt was unsuccessful, but the hunters found eggs along the fence of a settler. When one of the men took an egg, another man told him to put the eggs down because they belonged to the white man. The first man called the other man a coward, to which he replied, "I am not a coward. I am not afraid of the white man, and to show you that I am not I will go to the

57. Gerald S. Henig, "A Neglected Cause of the Sioux Uprising," Minnesota History 45, no. 3 (1976): 108-109.
58. Anderson and Woolworth, ed., *Through Dakota Eyes*, 25-26.

house and shoot him."[59] The four Indians went to the house of Robinson Jones, and for an unknown reason, the five of them went to the home of Howard Baker. The Indians challenged the white men to a target-shooting contest, and without a warning, the Dakota fired at the white settlers.[60] At the Baker home, the Dakota Indians killed two men and three women before driving away with a stolen team of oxen. That night, members of Shakopee's band marched to the home of Little Crow and asked him to lead the war. Big Eagle said, "Blood had been shed, [the Indians knew the] payment would be stopped, and the whites would take a dreadful vengeance because women had been killed."[61] Knowing the whites would seek retribution for the murder in Acton Township, the Dakota Indians felt the only thing they could do was fight and expel the settlers from their native land.

All of the causes listed above are articulated causes of the Dakota Conflict, but there is, however, one implicit cause of the war. Since the 1850s, and before, the traditional way of life for the Dakota Indians declined. The white men pushed the Indians off their native land and forced them to assimilate into the Anglo-American culture; and as a result, the decline of tradition was a threat to the Dakota Indians who wanted to live like their ancestors. Although he did not explicitly state that the whites threatened Dakota culture, Big Eagle did not like the idea of change. He said, "It seemed too sudden to make such a change."[62] When one witnesses the slow decline of one's culture, it will only be a matter of time before he or she will do anything necessary to save it. This is what happened with the Dakota Indians. They slowly witnessed their traditional customs fade and subconsciously knew they would have to fight to get it back.

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59. Big Eagle identified the four Dakota Indians as Brown Wing, Breaking Up, Killing Ghost, and Runs against Something when Crawling. See Anderson and Woolworth, ed., *Through Dakota Eyes*, 35.
60. Carley, *The Sioux Uprising of 1862*, 8-9.
61. Anderson and Woolworth, ed., *Through Dakota Eyes*, 35-36.
62. Ibid., 23.

There were articulated and unarticulated causes of the Dakota Conflict. Anglo-Americans and Dakota Indians had a different ways of life, and the cultural differences altered the way in which each group viewed the causes. The settlers recognized the causes, but they often failed to understand them with any depth. The accounts from the Dakota Indians shed light into the depth of the problems on the reservation. Understanding the causes of the Dakota Conflict from the settler and Dakota perspectives allows one to gain a balanced view of the situation.

Traditional Customs of the Dakota Indians

The settlers' misperceptions of the Dakota happened because they failed to understand their neighbors. In the eyes of the settlers, the Dakota Indians were savages without law and order. The Dakota, however, acted in the only way they knew how. It is important for one to understand about the traditional customs because it helps one understand the mindset of the Dakota Indians. The changes that occurred within the tribes had a profound effect on Dakota because the life they knew was gone. The Dakota struggled to keep the old word in the new one.

Before the Dakota Indians in Minnesota interacted with white men, they had a way of life that was different from Anglo-Americans. The Dakota Indians were communal people; individual ownership was not part of their culture and material possessions were only important if they benefited the tribe.[63] Land ownership was a foreign idea.[64] The Dakota Indians believed the earth gave life to all living things; therefore, they treated it with a great respect. Their hunting and gathering culture made them dependent on the land for survival. Since the Dakota Indians depended on the land, they also had a responsibility to take care of it. The Dakota believed that "if you take care of the land, it will take care of you."[65]

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63. Anderson, *Little Crow*, 5.
64. Elden Lawrence, *The Peace Seekers: Indian Christians and the Dakota Conflict* (Sioux Falls: Pine Hill Press, 2005), 11.
65. Lawrence, *The Peace Seekers*, 2.

The Dakota Indians were traditionally a hunting and gathering culture. Before encountering white men, the Dakota Indians lived completely off the land. The traditional lands of the Dakota Indians consisted of vast territory in the present states of Minnesota, Iowa, and South Dakota.[66] They used the lands to hunt buffaloes, elk, deer, bears and other small game. In the eyes of the Dakota Indians, hunting was a dangerous task, but it was necessary for survival. When the hunters returned, they spent a lot of time eating and regaining their strength. Many settlers, however, did not understand the strenuous nature of the hunting lifestyle and thought many of the Dakota men were "idle, lazy and disgraceful."[67] The Dakota Indians also fished the numerous lakes and rivers with spears.[68] They lived off food plants. Psincha and psinchincha were two important roots that grew at the bottom of shallow lakes or marshy ground. The Dakota also fed off wild turnips, water lilies, and wild rice. When food was scarce, the Dakota Indians ate acorns.[69] Wild berries and seeds formed an important part of the Indian's diet.[70]

As the Anglo-Americans interacted more with the Dakota, the traditional ideas about land ownership and survival changed. Some Indians adopted the white customs and began farming. The farmer Indians now cultivated land and called it their own. Instead of living off the land like their ancestors, those Indians farmed it like the white men. Yes, the farmer Indians still relied partially on the land for food, but they relied on homegrown food instead of wild animals and berries. The farmer relied less on the land for survival and relied more on purchased food from the general store on the reservation.

66. Blegen, *Minnesota*, 167-168.
67. Lawrence, *The Peace Seekers*, 67.
68. Blegen, *Minnesota*, 23.
69. Samuel W. Pond, *The Dakota or Sioux in Minnesota as They Were in 1834* (Saint Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1986), 28-29.
70. Anderson, *Little Crow*, 14.

The growing interactions with the white settlers caused changes in the Dakota tribe. Most notably, the Dakota Indians became divided between traditional, farmer, and Christian Indians. Most of the Christian converts were women and children. Very few Dakota men converted to Christianity, and it was not until the Dakota Conflict that the male converts stood up for their new religion.[71] One notable Christian Indian was John Other Day who lived near the Upper Sioux Agency at the time of the outbreak. Before John Other Day became a Christian, he was a successful warrior. In 1856, however, he left his old way and joined the Hazelwood Republic, a settlement with assimilated farmer Indians. When news reached the Wahpeton and Sisseton bands of the killings in Acton Township, they began debating the course of action. In the evening, the Wahpeton and Sisseton Indians decided to join the Mdewakanton band in the uprising. John Other Day, however, was opposed to war and warned the whites living at the

John Other Day[72]

Upper Agency about the impending danger. With his wife and four other relatives, John Other Day escorted the settlers to a brick building and stood watch outside until sunrise to make sure

71. Lawrence, *The Peace Seekers*, 38, 64.
72. Anderson and Woolworth, ed., *Through Dakota Eyes*, 121.

the Dakota warriors would not harm the settlers.[73] At daybreak, John Other Day led the settlers across the prairie to Cedar City in McLeod County.[74] Some Christian Indians stayed behind at the Upper Agency to occupy the homes of the settlers to prevent looting.[75]

The division between the traditional and the farming Indians was notable. Indians who kept the traditional Dakota culture followed the way of life the Dakota had been living for hundreds of years. The traditional Indians lived in tepees and kept the traditional Dakota religion.[76] Traditional Dakota Indians were angry that money from the general fund was used to give special assistance to the farmer Indians.[77] The farming Indians, on the other hand, tried to live like the white settlers. According to Big Eagle, the farming Indians lived in houses built by the government. The government gave the farmer Indians tools and seed then taught them how to farm.[78] The farmer Indians gave up their life of hunting food on the plains to cultivate land for food; and as a result, when the traditional Indians failed to have a successful hunt, they turned to their farmer Indian relatives for support. The farmer Indians, however, were not happy because the traditional Indians would eat them "out of house and home."[79] The farmer Indians assimilated into white culture while the traditional Indians kept the old way of life. The irreversible division between the Indians who assimilated and those who did not was a key factor in causing the Dakota Conflict of 1862.

The divisions among the Dakota broke up the sense of community within the bands and tribes. While some Dakota refused to become farmers and assimilate into white culture, other Indians willingly cut their hair and began to farm; therefore, the two groups became more

73. Ibid., 120-122.
74. Carley, *The Sioux Uprising of 1862*, 19.
75. Lawrence, *The Peace Seekers*, 97.
76. Anderson and Woolworth, ed., *Through Dakota Eyes*, 24.
77. C. M. Oehler, *The Great Sioux Uprising* (United States of America: Da Capo Press, 1959), 15.
78. Anderson and Woolworth, ed., *Through Dakota Eyes*, 24.
79. Charles Bryant and Abel Murch, *A History of the Great Massacre by the Sioux Indians in Minnesota* (New York: Kraus Reprint Co., 1977), 27-28.

polarized and unwilling to work with each other. The polarization “undermined the sense of unity and community that had bonded the Dakota together as a people for centuries.”[80] The growing division among the Dakota Indians partially uprooted the traditional Dakota ideas about kinship and loyalty. Instead of making one decision as one group of people, the Dakota Indians now made many decisions as a divided people.

Changes to the Dakota Indians were evident in the way they decided to go to war. When discussing the possibility of war, the Dakota Indians made the decision by non-traditional methods. First, the decision to go to war was not made by consensus. Major decisions were traditionally reached after much debate in the formal tribal councils. On the morning of 18 August, approximately one hundred Dakota warriors arrived at the doorstep of Little Crow and persuaded him to lead the Dakota in a war against the Anglo-Americans. Second, the warriors who persuaded Little Crow to lead the fight were not from the same Mdewakanton band. Traditionally, chiefs led their own band of warriors to war.[81] Lastly, it was untraditional for the warriors to seek out Little Crow because he was no longer the chief speaker. The position of chief speaker was an elected one that reflected one’s skill as an orator.[82] It was the job of the chief speaker to open councils, keep attention focused during councils, and to announce decisions. In the spring of 1862, the Mdewakanton Indians decided that Little Crow would no longer be the chief speaker because many Dakota Indians distrusted him after the 1858 treaty.[83] Little Crow initially turned the men away and told them to seek Traveling Hail because he was the spokesperson for the Mdewakanton people.[84] Instead of turning to the principle chief of the

80. Anderson, *Little Crow*, 89.
81. Ibid., 131-133.
82. Priscilla Ann Russo, “The Time to Speak is Over: The Onset of the Sioux Uprising,” Minnesota History 45, no. 3 (1976): 104.
83. Anderson, *Little Crow*, p. 15, 119-121.
84. Ibid., 132.

Little Crow[85]

band or the chief speaker, the Dakota warriors turned to a man whom they thought would lead the Dakota to victory.[86]

Dakota Indians were angry at the white settlers for refusing to share their food with the starving population. Hoarding anything, especially food, went against the traditional teachings of the Dakota Indians. The Dakota Indians saw the German or Scandinavian settlers taking scores of fish from the Minnesota River, yet the settlers refused to share their catch with the Dakota. The Indians also saw the new settlers eliminate almost all of the wild game in the region.[87] This left the Dakota with almost no wild animal food sources. The refusal to share meant a deep-rooted hatred began to grow between the Dakota Indians and the settlers.

Perceptions of the Dakota Indians

When the Anglo-Americans moved into the Minnesota River Valley, especially in the 1850s, many of them encountered Dakota Indians for the first time. The settlers saw a culture that was different from their own, and many developed stereotypes about their Native American

85. Ibid., 100.
86. Russo, "The Time to Speak is Over: The Onset of the Sioux Uprising," Minnesota History 45, no. 3 (1976): 106.
87. Anderson, *Little Crow*, 130.

neighbors. Instead of learning about Dakota culture, the settlers judged the Indians, which led to a cultural misunderstanding. The inaccurate depictions of Dakota Indians throughout history are the result of the stereotypes created by the first settlers to the region.

The Anglo-Americans in the Minnesota River valley viewed their culture as superior to that of the Dakota Indians. White settlers in the region constantly treated the Dakota Indians like inferior beings.[88] Jacob Nix clearly did not respect the Dakota Indians. His journal was full of

Captain Jacob Nix[89]

racist comments about them. Nix wrote, "But whoever has come in contact with savages, whether in Africa, Australia or America, or elsewhere on earth, and whoever has had the opportunity to observe them closely knows that the brute only slumbers in the savage, and, once

88. Clodfelter, *The Dakota War*, 39.
89. Ibid., 157.

aroused, may pounce with tigerlike bloodthirstiness upon the nearest victims."[90] Not only was Nix asserting white civilization's superiority over the Dakota Indians, but he maintained whites were superior to anyone he considered uncivilized.

In asserting their superiority over the Dakota Indians, the settlers failed to gain an understanding of Dakota culture. It was a dichotomy of black and white — right and wrong. The whites thought they had a superior culture, and forced the Dakota to change. According to Big Eagle:

> Then the whites were always trying to make the Indians give up their life and live like white men — go to farming, work hard, and do as they did — and the Indians did not know how to do that, and did not want to anyway. It seemed too sudden to make a change. If the Indians had tried to make the whites live like them, the whites would have resisted . . . The Indians wanted to live as they did before the treaty of Traverse des Sioux . . . and live as they could.[91]

The Anglo-Americans forced the change without consideration of how it would affect the tribal balance of the Dakota Indians. Although the settlers did not realize it, forcing the Dakota Indians to change led to a gradual breakdown of Dakota unity and this was a significant cause in the Dakota Conflict of 1862. The Indians went from being one large harmonious group to being a group full of fractions.

The settlers in southern Minnesota saw the Dakota Indians as uncivilized people. Anglo-Americans did not understand why the Dakota Indians wanted to live in tepees when materials for sturdy houses were available to them. Nor did the settlers understand why many Dakota Indians did not want to convert to Christianity, and they wanted the Dakota Indians to undergo complete acculturation to the Anglo-American way of life. Many settlers believed the only way the Dakota Indians could improve themselves was a total assimilation into white culture.[92] The

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90. Nix, *The Sioux Uprising in Minnesota, 1862*, ed. Don Heinrich Tolzmann, 81.
91. Anderson and Woolworth, ed., *Through Dakota Eyes*, 23.
92. McConkey, *Dakota War Whoop*, ed. Dale L. Morgan, 124-132.

Dakota Conflict of 1862 only strengthened the Anglo-American belief that Indians were wild savages.

In the eyes of the settlers, the whites were a culture of law and order while the Dakota were men without rules and obligations. Many settlers noted in their narratives that the Indians came to the home of settlers, often looking for food. In her account of the Dakota Conflict, Mary Schwandt noted, "The Indians visited us almost every day, but they were not company for us. Their ways were so strange that they were disagreeable to me. They were always begging, but otherwise were well behaved."[93] To many of the settlers, this type of behavior was unacceptable because it went against Anglo-American norms and long established rules for conducting oneself in the presence of another. Many "whites believed that native people had no respect for ownership of food and other property. Their [the Dakota Indians] actions were certainly violations of etiquette—if not law—from a white point of view . . . To help yourself to another's food was theft. To be insistent in asking for anything was begging."[94] Settlers in the Minnesota River valley had culturally defined rules regarding behavior. These rules, however, were different from the customs practiced by the Dakota Indians. Since many of the settlers did not understand the culture of the Dakota Indians, the settlers developed stereotypes about the Indians, and the violation of the cultural rules, in the eyes of the settlers, was a sign the Dakota Indians were inferior to the whites.[95]

In their accounts of the Dakota Conflict, the settlers referred to the Dakota Indians as savages. Most of the white settlers filled their narratives with terms that are considered racist by current standards. Jacob Nix, for example, used works like "Redskins," "bloodthirsty," "wild

93. Mary Schwandt, *German Pioneer Accounts of the Great Sioux Uprising of 1862*, ed. Don Heinrich Tolzman (Milford: Little Miami Publishing Co., 2002), 10.
94. White, "Indian Visits: Stereotypes of Minnesota's Native People," *Minnesota History* 53, no. 3 (1992): 102.
95. Ibid., 102-103.

scoundrel," and "savage" to describe the Dakota Indians.[96] Spelbrink often referred to the Dakota Indians as "monsters."[97] Rudolf Leonhart, one of the defenders during the two battles in New Ulm, described the Dakota Indians as "murders and incendiaries."[98] These authors used those words without hesitation. In fact, a majority of the authors used such negative adjectives.

Throughout the narratives, the settlers used the terms as if they were a natural part of the language. Jacob Nix used the word "Redskin" more often than Dakota. The language of the accounts reveals how much the settlers disliked and disrespected the Dakota Indians. After reading the stories, one can tell the authors took extra care to point out the brave or honorable actions of the settlers. When Jacob described the second battle of New Ulm, he wrote, ". . . the brave defenders of New Ulm had stopped the Indians in the afternoon. . ."[99] Throughout his narrative, Nix used words like "brave," "respectable," and "courageous" to describe the defenders of New Ulm.[100] At the same time, the authors continuously emphasized the negative aspects of the Dakota. Charles Flandrau noted how the Indians burned the buildings in New Ulm, and used that tactic to intimidate the defenders and refugees.[101] In fact, the only narratives that expressed some sympathy towards the Dakota were the ones written by people who were taken captive during the conflict. Nevertheless, even those authors were reluctant to empathize with the Dakota.

The narratives of those who lived through the Dakota Conflict noted the brutal nature of the killings of the settlers at the hands of the Dakota and expressed shock at the nature of Indian warfare. In the eyes of Jacob Nix, the "tiger of the East Indian jungles might be considered a

96. Nix, *The Sioux Uprising in Minnesota, 1862*, ed. Don Heinrich Tolzmann, 77, 81.
97. Spelbrink, *The Indian Massacre of 1862*, papers, folder 25-4, Brown County Historical Society, Minnesota, 4.
98. Rudolf Leonhart, *Memories of New Ulm*, ed. Don Heinrich Tolzmann (Minnesota: Edinborough Press, 2005), 47.
99. Nix, *The Sioux Uprising in Minnesota, 1862*, ed. Don Heinrich Tolzmann, 115.
100. Ibid., 112-113.
101. Flandrau, *Charles E. Flandrau and the Defense of New Ulm*, ed. Russell W. Fridley, Leota M. Kellett and June D. Holmquist, 45.

sympathetic creature" when compared to the Dakota Indians.[102] The narrative of Christopher Spelbrink noted that many of the settlers died "a most horrible death" and had no way to defend themselves against the Dakota warriors.[103] In her narrative, Maria Hartman-Bobleter told the story of how the Dakota Indians shot and killed the farm hand and shot her husband. When Mrs. Hartman-Bobleter found her husband, he was wounded and unable to move. She tried to drag his wounded body into a nearby cornfield, but she was overcome with grief. Her husband later died in the place his body fell.[104] In their personal accounts, Spelbrink, Juni and Nix claimed the Dakota Indians mutilated the corpses of the settlers with one swipe of their tomahawk.[105] Others reported the Dakota Indians clubbed children to death, removed the breasts of their female victims and cut off the genitals of the males.[106] Often times, the Dakota Indians killed and mutilated the bodies of settlers in front of family members.[107]

Emanuel Reyff, a man who was working on a farm near New Ulm in August 1862, said that when he, his brother Eusebius, and his nephew Ben encountered the Dakota Indians, they brutally murdered his family members. Reyff claimed the Dakota "cut off both his [Eusebius's] hands and scalped him before he was dead."[108] The settler also described the death of his ten-year-old nephew in detail. Reyff wrote:

> One of the Indians grabbed him by the hair . . . turned up the wagon tongue and tied Ben's feet together with a rope and hung him to the wagon tongue by the heels. They then cut his pants off with a butcher knife and slashed up his body . . . they poured powder over his body and set it one fire. He quickly died . . . they scalped him, also.[109]

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102. Nix, *The Sioux Uprising in Minnesota, 1862*, ed. Don Heinrich Tolzmann, 77.
103. Spelbrink, *The Indian Massacre of 1862*, papers, folder 25-4, Brown County Historical Society, Minnesota, 4.
104. Maria Hartman-Bobleter, *Memories of the Battle of New Ulm*, ed. Don Heinrich Tolzmann, 67.
105. See Nix, *The Sioux Uprising in Minnesota, 1862*, ed. Don Heinrich Tolzmann, 81; Juni, *Held in Captivity*, 12 and Spelbrink, *The Indian Massacre of 1862*, 4.
106. Oehler, *The Great Sioux Uprising*, 49
107. Larry Lundblad, "The Impact of Minnesota's Dakota Conflict on 1862 on the Swedish Settlers," *The Swedish-American Historical Quarterly* 15, no. 3 (2000): 214.
108. Emanuel Reyff, *German Pioneer Accounts of the Great Sioux Uprising of 1862*, ed. Don Heinrich Tolzman, 62.
109. Ibid., 62.

The author also noted that his sister-in-law and niece were also tortured, mutilated and scalped during the attack on the family farm.[110]

The mutilation of the corpses and the nature of Dakota warfare is the most prevalent aspect of most narratives. According to the settlers' idea of warfare, the fighters were not supposed to kill the women and children. Instead, they were to be taken captive. The Anglo-Americans who lived through the uprising were appalled at how the Dakota Indians killed whomever they encountered during the deadly first week of the conflict, and the way in which the Dakota Indians murdered the settlers confirmed their belief that the Dakota Indians were heartless murders waiting to release their inner demons. What the settlers did not understand, however, was that mutilating the corpses of enemies was a traditional element of Dakota warfare.[111] In the eyes of the white settlers, the Dakota Indians were not honorable in their method of warfare. Settlers believed the Dakota Indians fought only for the glory of receiving an eagle feather.[112] The different methods of warfare caused further separation between the Dakota Indians and the settlers. The two groups were fighting the same war, but in a different fashion.

The Dakota Indians had specific beliefs about retributions for wrongs committed against them. Dakota Indians were expected to avenge the death of a murdered relative. They believed in an "eye for an eye" reaction to wrongdoings, and the idea of forgiveness was a foreign concept to the Dakota Indians.[113] In the eyes of the Dakota, the uprising in 1862 was about seeking retributions for wrongs committed by the whites. Many Dakota warriors targeted settlers in the

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110. Ibid., 62-63.
111. Anderson, *Little Crow*, 139.
112. Blegen, *Minnesota*, 278.
113. Lawrence, *The Peace Seekers*, 9-10.

regions of Beaver Creek and Milford Township because they believed the settlers in those regions had stolen the land from them.[114]

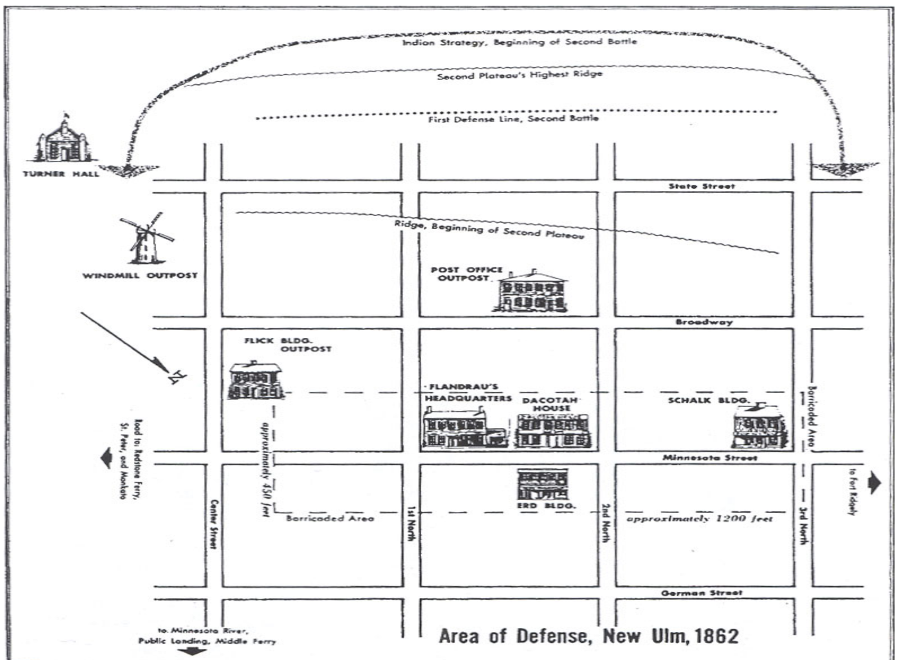
During war, the Dakota Indians did not differentiate between age or gender when classifying the enemy. In their eyes, the enemy was the enemy and they had no compassion for them.[115] Killing an enemy, regardless of age or gender, gave a Dakota warrior the right to wear an eagle feather.[116] Sometimes, the warriors removed the clothing of Anglo-American women to offend the men in the enemy camp. By August 1862, many of the Dakota Indians viewed the white settlers as enemies; therefore, no longer worthy of respect.[117]

The Dakota Indians also mutilated the bodies of the enemy during the Conflict. Mutilating bodies was a traditional part of Dakota warfare. It was normal for Dakota men to scalp, decapitate and disfigure the bodies of their enemy.[118] The scalps of the dead men were sometimes taken so the Dakota warrior could prove he had killed an enemy. Bringing home a scalp ensured a warrior that he would be rewarded for his bravery during the fighting.[119] Furthermore, the Dakota believed they would have to fight the same enemies in the afterworld. Since the warriors would have to fight the enemies they killed in another world, they did not want to leave the bodies in tact because that would give them an advantage during the second fight.[120]

Many settlers noted the war practices of the Dakota Indians in their accounts of the Dakota Conflict. The mutilation of corpses appalled the Anglo-Americans, and they thought decapitating or scalping the head of an enemy was barbaric. The Anglo-Americans fought a

114. Anderson, *Little Crow*, 139.
115. Pond, *The Dakota or Sioux in Minnesota as They Were in 1834*, 127.
116. Anderson, *Little Crow*, 139.
117. Gary Clayton Anderson, *Kinsmen of Another Kind: Dakota-White Relations in the Upper Mississippi Valley, 1650-1862* (Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1984), 268.
118. Ibid., 139, 267.
119. Pond, *The Dakota or Sioux in Minnesota as They Were in 1834*, 131.
120. Anderson, *Little Crow*, 139.

different style of war than the Dakota Indians. During war, it was taboo to kill women and children. Instead, the Anglo-Americans took them captive. It was uncommon for the Anglo-Americans to mutilate the bodies of the dead. Once a man was dead, he was no longer a threat. Settlers living in the Minnesota River valley did not understand that disfiguring enemies was a traditional part of Dakota warfare, and when many of the settlers encountered the scalped corpses, probably for the first time, the scene was horrifying.



New Ulm Area of Defense[121]

It was evident that the settlers in New Ulm and the surrounding area feared the idea of being captured by the Dakota Indians. As soon as word reached New Ulm about the uprising, the citizens quickly began building a barricade around a three-block area on Minnesota Street in the downtown. The men worked on building the barricade with wagons, barrels, and crates while the women waited in the Dacotah House, the Erd Building and other sturdy building within the barricade.[122] According to Mrs. Benedict Juni, a refugee in New Ulm during the fighting, "A keg

121. Daniel John Hoisington, *A German Town: A History of New Ulm, Minnesota* (New Ulm: City of New Ulm, 2004), 33

of powder was placed in this cellar [of the Erd Building], which the women were to ignite if the Reds should reach their hiding place."[123] All of the women in the Erd Building knew that someone would light the fuse to kill everyone inside because they would have rather die than fall into the hands of the Dakota warriors.[124] The settlers taking refuge truly must have feared whatever fate would await the women and children if they were captured by Dakota Indians. The willingness to take one's life out of fear of captivity is a strong statement of fright.

The ideas about the brutal nature of the Dakota Indians did not end with the settlers. Some scholars claimed the Dakota Indians were naturally brutal and their savage nature led them to rise up against the white settlers. According to many settlers, a beast within the Dakota Indians woke up in August 1862.[125] The book by the scholar Harriet E. Bishop McConkey claimed the Dakota Indians had a natural hatred for settlers and they waited for the opportune moment to strike their enemies.[126] According to the Minnesota historian William Watts Folwell, it was natural for the Dakota Indians to mistreat people who wronged them. Folwell also asserted anger is a universal emotion. The natural behavior of the Dakota towards people who mistreated them combined with human nature to feel anger was a deadly combination during the Dakota Conflict.[127] Theodore Blegen, another Minnesota historian, asserted the Dakota Indians "were proud, warlike, [and] uncivilized."[128]

These are assertions, however, created by settlers and scholars. The settlers who survived the Dakota Conflict experienced the loss of family members and friends. Some people also experienced the complete destruction of the family farm. One can understand why the settlers

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122. Ibid. 29.
123. Juni, *Held in Captivity*, 22.
124. Hoisington, *A German Town*, 31-32.
125. Nix, *The Sioux Uprising in Minnesota, 1862*, ed. Don Heinrich Tolzmann, 81.
126. McConkey, *Dakota War Whoop*, ed. Dale L. Morgan, 252.
127. Folwell, *A History of Minnesota*, 212-213.
128. Blegen, *Minnesota*, 263.

were reluctant to express sympathy towards the Dakota Indians. The problem, however, is that the negative words used to describe the Dakota Indians, words written with pure emotion, have stuck over time. Settlers in the Minnesota River valley failed to gain a true understanding of why the Dakota starting an uprising in August 1862, and this failure led to a scholarly misunderstanding of the Dakota Conflict.

Conclusion

There is not one single cause of the Dakota Conflict of 1862. Instead, numerous causes developed because of a cultural misunderstanding. The Anglo-American population misunderstood the Dakota Indians and their culture. The settlers viewed the Dakota as barbaric or savage. On the other hand, the Dakota Indians misperceived the settlers in the Minnesota River valley. They saw white men and women as foreigners who wanted to take their land without understanding that the settlers thought they had a right to conquer it.

The cultural misperceptions developed because neither the Dakota Indians nor the settlers made a real effort to understand their neighbors. Instead, the two groups simply judged each other. The settlers saw the Dakota Indians as inferior beings and tried to assimilate them without a full understanding of how the assimilation would affect traditional Dakota culture. The forced assimilation led to a breakdown of the Dakota tribes, which led to further tensions between the whites and Indians. The tensions grew so large that in August – September 1862, Minnesota was the home to one of the bloodiest battles between Native Americans and Anglo-Americans.

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