

The Protestant Mission and Native American Response: The Case of the Dakota Mission, 1835–1862

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INTRODUCTION

On August 18, 1862, a violent attack was begun by the eastern Sioux on the white settlements in Minnesota. The Indians were getting hungrier and angrier because they had not received the annuities they expected from the federal government that summer. Starvation accelerated their resentment, and some 600 whites were slaughtered and other whites fled in panic to the prairies. Among those who escaped were Stephen R. Riggs and Thomas S. Williamson, the American Board missionaries to the Sioux for more than a quarter of a century. They had fled under the guidance of Christianized Indians who saved the lives of more than 100 whites. Meanwhile, Little Crow (Taoyateduta), the leading chief who was long a friend of the Christian missionaries, reluctantly joined and led this uprising, persuaded by more militant chiefs. It was a crucial moment which tested all the efforts that the Protestant missionaries had made among the eastern Sioux since 1835.¹⁾

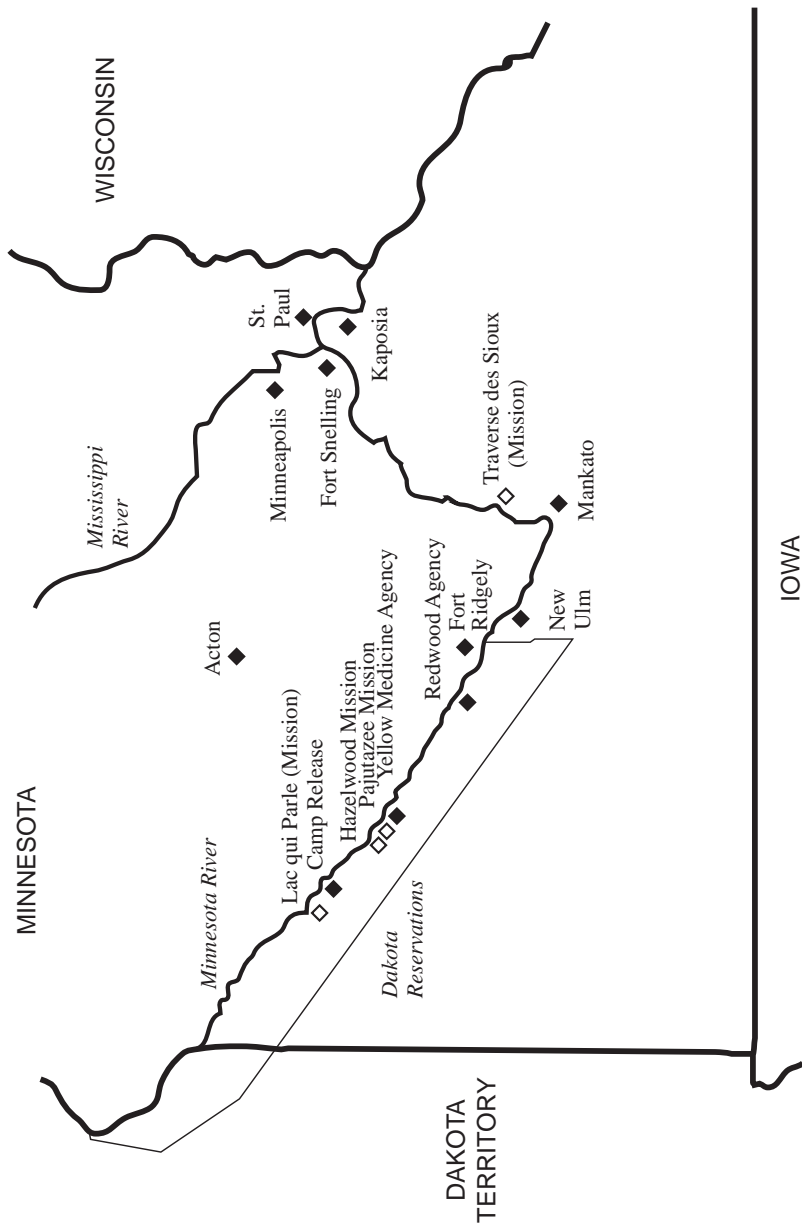
The Dakota War of 1862 was in many ways the beginning of a series of Indian-white conflicts on the northern Great Plains that culminated in the tragic affair at Wounded Knee in 1890. Although French and British traders had been among the eastern Sioux for well over a hundred years by the early nineteenth century, the Dakota people living in what would

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become Minnesota suffered little from contact with whites. The eastern Sioux—Mdewakanton, Wahpekute, Wahpeton, and Sisseton—dwelled along the upper Mississippi and roamed over Minnesota and areas to its west, fighting fiercely with the Ojibwa. A new era began for them after the United States Army moved up the Mississippi and established Fort Snelling at the mouth of the Minnesota River in 1819. In the 1820s their game herds began to disappear and the encroachment of white settlers put pressure on the eastern Sioux. As a result the following decades saw a dramatic change in their lives: through the Treaties of 1837, 1851, and 1858 the Dakota Indians relinquished claims to most of their original land and accepted settlement on small reservations in Minnesota.

While the Americans sought to control the upper Mississippi River they also tried to change the Dakota and their way of life. The nineteenth century was the era of missionary endeavor and the “savage.” Christianization of “heathens at home” had been a goal in North America since the colonial days as seen in the work of early missionaries such as John Eliot and David Brainerd. The evangelical revival from the end of the eighteenth century encouraged American Protestants to proselytize among Indians with the establishment of numerous missionary societies through the early 1800s.²⁾ The Dakota mission, started in 1835, served as the vanguard for civilizing the eastern Sioux. Although the early missionaries were deeply motivated with the spirit of “disinterested benevolence” for the salvation of Indians, their work coincided with white encroachment and the disintegration of traditional Indian lifeways. In many parts of North America the missionary stations were often outposts of colonial expansion foreshadowing the settlement of whites in Indian territory. For better or for worse, the mission constituted an essential part of the growing colonizing power.³⁾

In interpreting the pattern of cultural encounter, one of the most difficult tasks for historians is to shed light on the dispossessed since such people left few records. Notwithstanding disparity in accounts, the colonial process is a dialogical interaction and dynamics between indigenous and alien peoples. Although the full depth and range of the Indian response is often invisible in historical documents, we can infer their voice and attitudes from what the missionaries wrote and the limited narratives which Indians did leave.⁴⁾ In order to understand the significance of the previously mentioned episode in the development of Indian-white conflicts, I will explore the relationship of the eastern Sioux with the Protestant missionaries during the period from 1835 to 1862. Focusing



Mission Stations and Dakota Reservations in Minnesota, 1862

on the nature of the Indian response, I will examine how the work of the mission intervened in their lives and how it shaped the early Dakota-white relations, which ultimately collapsed in the Indian uprising of 1862.

I MISSIONIZATION

The Dakota mission, from its beginning in 1835 to 1871, was under the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions and the most influential mission among the Indians in Minnesota. In 1834 two pioneer missionaries, Samuel W. and Gideon H. Pond, arrived from Connecticut as enthusiastic young laymen.⁵⁾ Without any support from the church, they went to Fort Snelling, an army post of the federal government. After settling on the shore of Lake Calhoun and beginning to teach the Indians to farm, they started to learn the Dakota language and created an alphabet for it. In 1835 the company of Thomas S. Williamson and Jedediah D. Stevens arrived under appointment from the American Board, and soon the Ponds joined them. Lac qui Parle on the upper Minnesota River, two hundred miles west of Fort Snelling, was opened as the first mission station on July 7, 1835. The village there consisted of about 400 people, chiefly of the Wahpeton bands of the Dakota. Being deep in the interior, they received no annuities from the federal government in those days. Over the next twenty years Lac qui Parle remained a central station for the missionaries while several satellite sites were opened and closed. In 1837 Stephen R. Riggs and his wife Mary joined them, and Riggs was to be the most persistent and leading figure serving the Dakota for almost forty years, working with his colleague Williamson.⁶⁾

The first six years were a period of gradual development, if not great success, for the mission. The Indians initially received the young missionaries with interest and their attitude was generally amiable. From the beginning, the Dakota mission was devoted to civilizing the Indians through education. At Lac qui Parle a school was opened with 22 pupils and Sarah Poage serving as its teacher. In nineteenth-century Protestant missions, schools were considered to be the most important instrument to bring civilization to Indian children and their parents. It was only once in a while that Indian parents opposed sending their children to school in these early years. The missionaries found that the teaching of English was very difficult and did not yield much fruit, but they nonetheless print-

ed spelling and grammar books for learning English. At the same time the missionaries continued the study of the Dakota language, and translated hymns and prayers into Dakota. Later Riggs and the Ponds would publish a Dakota-English dictionary in 1852. The schoolroom at Lac qui Parle was crowded and 140 were enrolled at the school in 1842.⁷⁾

The church also grew in this period. In the autumn of 1837 Williamson organized a native church from seven Dakotas. The early converts were mostly women, children, and mixed-bloods, but five men were baptized in 1842. Among these was Anawangmani (He Who Goes Galloping Along), a young chief and the first full-blood Dakota man to become Christian. Given the Christian name Simon, Anawangmani immediately engaged in a civilized life. He put on white-man's clothes and planted corn and potatoes in a field next to the mission field, stopped feasting on Sunday, and put away his "consecrated" war club, spear, pipe, and medicine.⁸⁾ The conversion to Christianity meant converting to civilization or separating from the native way of life. In 1842, the number of church members was forty-nine, and on one Sabbath more than eighty Indians were present. Riggs wrote about those days that "There was evidently a quickening of the church. They were interested in prayer. What is prayer?—and how shall we pray? became questions of interest with them."⁹⁾ It was a hopeful beginning.

Several factors may explain the early success of the Dakota mission. In those days the relations between the Indians and the whites were not clearly established. Before the missionaries arrived, people at Lac qui Parle had not had much intercourse with whites. There was an army post of the federal government at Fort Snelling two hundred miles away, but the Indians still enjoyed considerable freedom and autonomy. Traditionally, the Dakota society was flexible in accepting foreigners if they showed a willingness to participate in their community and a generosity to share material possessions. In the Dakota culture community ties were highly valued and gift-giving had a special meaning in fulfilling obligations. It was therefore not uncommon that the missionaries offered inducements such as food and clothing to attract people to the church and the school.¹⁰⁾ This practice of material generosity fit the Dakota value of communal interrelatedness. In the eyes of the Dakota, the missionaries also appeared to possess special knowledge which could benefit the tribe. After 1835, epidemics such as smallpox and cholera began to ravage the Dakota. The use of white medicines often proved effective in treating such unfamiliar diseases.¹¹⁾ Even the ability of the

missionaries to read books and to write letters seemed a manifestation of their “wakan” (sacredness).

Joseph Renville played an important role in the development of the Dakota mission. A mixed blood and influential trader for the American Fur Company, Renville was raised by his French father after his Dakota mother left them. When he was ten he entered a Roman Catholic school in Canada, where he learned French and Christianity. He also had a good command of Sioux, and when he lived at Lac qui Parle as a trader, he served as a guard for Sioux relatives. Because he wanted his family and people to be educated, Renville invited the missionaries to come to the post, and he helped them by interpreting, contributing to their translation of the Bible, and removing prejudices of the Indians against them. Renville also persuaded Indians under his influence to attend religious meetings, and the twelve families related to him comprised the school and church members in the early days. His wife was the first full-blood Dakota woman to join the church, and she died in the Christian faith. Since Renville had acquired unlimited influence over many of them, people were willing to follow him according to the Dakota custom of strong kinship.¹²⁾

As seen in the case of Renville, during initial contact between the two races, those most able to adopt the new ways were mixed-bloods. Not all of them converted, but early pupils and converts came from among this group. Frequently they had a different identity from the full-bloods, and they tended to embrace some aspects of white culture, such as education and agriculture. They often spoke Dakota and English and thus provided a channel for communication and a model for their full-blood relatives to adopt the new ways. Without these mixed-blood mediators, the missionaries could not have gotten access to the majority of Dakota with whom they had less direct contact. Thus the role of John Renville as a cultural interpreter was crucial for the early missionary work.

In spite of this promising start, however, the equilibrium in the community proved brief and eventually the achievements of the mission began to decline in the early 1840s. Constant opposition arose among the Indians, and the missionaries made little headway from 1842 to 1848. Riggs opened a new missionary station in Traverse des Sioux, 125 miles below the Minnesota River and closer to Fort Snelling, but found the work there quite discouraging. Until it was abandoned in 1851, the Traverse des Sioux mission yielded no converts and had very few Indian students. The situation was similar in Lac qui Parle, still under

Williamson. Before 1842 the church usually gained ten new members annually, but subsequently only two Indians joined the church during the next four years. The influence of Renville was declining as he got old. While the missionaries tried to attract young pupils to the school, the attitude of adults was hostile. Most of the villagers were deaf to the exhortations and messages of the missionaries and had no intention of apostatizing their traditional beliefs.

The famine which struck the eastern Sioux in 1842 was the direct cause of the people's alienation from the missions. Since the number of buffalo was declining, the Indians on the upper Minnesota increasingly relied on gathering wild plants and raising vegetables. In June of that year frosts killed off their corn crop, and prolonged drought caused the failure of other crops. At Lac qui Parle, some of the Indian Christians moved out to join the camps of Mdewakanton and Wahpekute Indians who lived along the lower Minnesota River, and one-half of the church members dispersed.¹³⁾ It is significant that the Indians attributed this environmental disaster to the influence of the missionaries. When one missionary visited a camp, an Indian woman said: "You visited us last winter; before you came there were a great many deer, but afterward none; and now we have made some sugar, but you have come, and perhaps we shall make no more."¹⁴⁾ They believed the drought was a punishment from their spirits for forgetting ancestral beliefs.

But the natural disaster was not the only cause of the declining success of the missions. An aloofness from the missionaries was already under way among the Indians. The process of Christianization did not simply impose white conceptions on the Dakota, but it also awakened their native consciousness. The increasing contacts between missionaries and the Dakota inevitably revealed differences in views of the world, as they were in disagreements over dress, rituals, polygamy, and "devil worship."

One of the early conflicts was over intertribal war. Eagle Help, the first full-blood man to learn to read and write Dakota, was one of the best go-betweens for the missionaries. Though his wife was Christian, he did not easily abandon his Dakota ways and customs. As a war prophet and a war leader, he occasionally fasted and practiced the ritual of "yoomne wachepe" (Circle Dance) to get a vision of the enemies. The missionaries did not understand the sacred meaning of this ritual and quarreled with Eagle Help over organizing a war party to kill Ojibwas. Since Eagle Help and his soldiers ignored their request not to engage in warfare, the

missionaries refused to grind corn for them, when asked, and predicted that the war would not succeed. The enraged Indians killed and ate two of the mission cows as revenge, just before they began their campaign. After they returned ashamed without having found their enemy, they attributed their failure entirely to the missionaries and killed another cow in the mission. Although Eagle Help would later help the missionaries, he claimed that his communicating power with the spirit world had been lost because of his knowledge of letters and Biblical scriptures.¹⁵⁾

It was common that the Dakota had only partially adopted the elements of civilization and Christianity. Some Indians mixed the Christian idea of God with their own Great Spirit. They simply accepted the Christian doctrines to the point that they did not threaten their cultural tenets. The historian Robert F. Berkhofer, Jr. called this attitude “cultural dualism,”¹⁶⁾ in which Indians, especially in the less acculturated tribes, maintained the respect or superiority of their traditional culture even after they accommodated missionaries. For Indians, sacred feasts, dances, hunting, and warfare were intertwined with their religions and personal relationships with the world of spirits. While Christianity and western civilization depended a great deal on the Bible and related teachings, the Indians had sustained their own religions through oral traditions, ancestral wisdom, prophecies by medicine men, and individual and collective rituals such as the vision quest and *Wiwanyag Wacipi* (Sun Dance). Communing with *Wakan Tanka* (the Great Spirit) gave a vision which determined one’s unique place in a universe where all things were interrelated. For the Indians, native customs and traditions were symbols and forums for meaningful action. Thus, most of them remained loyal to their traditional religion and Christianity could not completely replace it.¹⁷⁾

On the other hand, the missionaries claimed that Christianity and civilization were inseparable, and this is reflected in their early writings about education, agriculture, hard work, and Christianity. Their strong sense of the superiority of their civilization over the “savage” life of Indians also became obvious in the eyes of Indians. In a letter to the mission board in 1838, Riggs described the “animal excitement” of the killing, scalp dance, and songs of Indians, and he concluded: “Oh! When will the waters of the sanctuary wash away the abominations of the people, and heal their polluted souls! Our hope is in God who has promised to answer the prayers of his church, when accompanied by corresponding efforts for the salvation of the lost and perishing.”¹⁸⁾

This dogmatic attitude of the missionaries incited the Indians to alienate from the church and the school. As they realized that the white intruders attempted to transform their lives in the name of intolerant religion, the Indians became increasingly defensive.¹⁹⁾ As a result the people developed a series of strategies to resist and ostracize the missionaries. Opposition often began indirectly by trying to persuade the Christian Indians not to attend the meetings and school. When that failed, they began to snub and persecute them by cutting up their tents and blankets, killing their dogs, and destroying their guns. Parents then stopped sending their children to school or demanded the missionaries to pay for them to go. They also resisted the missionaries by taking down or burning the mission fences, breaking the school windows, and damaging the mission mill. Some also told lies and engaged in sabotage, and others annoyed the missionaries by stealing various objects such as food, animals and utensils.²⁰⁾

Since the missionaries did not succumb to these forms of harassment, the resistance gradually escalated. The Indians insisted that the missionaries were trespassers in their country and demanded money for use of their wood, water, grass, and land. Domestic animals such as cattle, hogs, and chickens were often slaughtered and eaten. At the commencement of missionary work in Traverse des Sioux, the Indians came to Riggs and demanded provisions as payment for the logs in his cabin. When Riggs refused they killed two mission cows in eight days, and he wrote: "there was a good deal of opposition. . . . It seemed as if they were determined that we should not stay. Did the Lord mean to have us give up our work there? We did not want to decide that question hastily."²¹⁾ Although killing cattle was at first a form of revenge, it became the symbol of native resistance and dissatisfaction. The Indians knew this domesticated animal served an essential part in mission life, so they began to slaughter three to ten a year in an attempt to drive the missionaries from their country. Although such opposition was prevalent, it remained a small-scale type of harassment so that dramatic conflict could be avoided. As a result of these protests, however, the growth of the church was halted and the number of church members decreased dramatically.

Another obstacle that the missionaries faced was the abuse of alcohol among some Indians. Because of proximity to St. Paul, the Indians in traverse des Sioux were increasingly engaged in the alcohol trade with white merchants, and great quantities of whiskey were brought in. They

exchanged pelts, guns, horses, or whatever else they had for whiskey. Under this situation the mission lost the important help of Christianized Indians. Simon Anawangmani, who was originally from Lac qui Parle, gave way to the temptation of strong drink, resumed wearing Indian dress, and sold whiskey in order to obtain horses. Finally he was suspended from the church and other seven full-blood men of the Lac qui Parle church also “backslided” to the dismay of the missionaries. These Dakota Christians suffered not only from the pitfalls of temptation but also from persecution for their beliefs. With an increasingly antagonistic air in the community, social pressure ranging from mild derision to threats of personal violence were directed at them.²²⁾

After four years of discouragement and hardship, many changes had been brought to the Dakota mission by 1846. Joseph Renville, who had mediated between the Indians and missionaries, died that year. The membership of the Lac qui Parle church was reduced to less than half of what it had been four years earlier. A half dozen or so Indians, chiefly women, who had been members had moved to Kaposia, or Little Crow’s village, which was ten miles below Fort Snelling. Hearing about the work of the missionaries from them, Little Crow and the head men of the village invited Williamson, through an Indian agent at Fort Snelling, to open a mission and a school there in 1846. Little Crow had lived in Lac qui Parle and knew some of the church members there. His invitation to Williamson primarily stemmed from his desire to educate children and to secure a white physician rather than from a religious motive.²³⁾ In response to this request, Williamson moved from Lac qui Parle to Kaposia, where he remained for six years. His place at the Lac qui Parle mission was filled by Riggs, who left Traverse des Sioux in 1846. By 1847 there were six missionary stations: Lac qui Parle, Traverse des Sioux, Oak Grove, Kaposia, Prairieville, and Red Wing.

From 1846 to 1851 the relations between the Dakota and the missionaries relatively improved because of economic stability. Good weather conditions in 1846 brought the Indians better corn crops than they had had for the past few years. Also, herds of buffalo, which had been away for several years, came back, so there was no threat of starvation. The resulting improvement in living conditions softened Indian hostility toward the missionaries. Some Indians also began to appreciate the missionaries in their roles as physicians and interpreters.²⁴⁾

Nevertheless, the Dakota generally remained on guard against the missions. The hardest thing to understand for them was the intention and

enthusiasm of the missionaries to change their lifeways. The Indians wondered why white men and women would come over to teach their religion year after year without expecting any special reward. Finally, a rumor spread that the missionaries were trying to get hold of the money the Indians received from the federal government.²⁵⁾ This false rumor turned out to be a great obstacle for the missionaries to continue their educational work. Although the Treaty of 1837 allowed an annual provision of 5,000 dollars for the support of education, most of it had not been used by the Indian Agent and by 1850 there was more than 50,000 dollars waiting to be used. Since white traders wished to have this money paid directly to the Indians so that they could settle accounts, they started the rumor about the missionaries trying to get Indian money and agitated the Indian opposition to education. The American Fur Company was especially hostile to missionary work as it felt that civilizing the Indians would cause a decline in their profits. Accordingly, Indians became suspicious that the missionary school finances came from their own funds.²⁶⁾

The missionaries also failed to get access to and understand the inner lives of the Indians despite their knowledge of the Dakota language. Around that time Riggs spoke with the old chief who had attempted to drive the missionaries away from Lac qui Parle. Riggs explained to him “the folly and wickedness of their own idolatrous system, and the danger of rejecting the salvation offered to their thought through the Son of God.” After hearing this, the old Indian declared that he had “heard enough on that subject” and told Riggs that he would be willing to receive Christianity if the missionaries would not require the Indians to abandon their own system of worship. As Riggs acknowledged, however, the missionaries could not accept dual worship: “our God is a jealous God—and the religion of the Bible is an uncompromising religion.”²⁷⁾ This fundamental gap between the Indians and the missionaries broadened in the critical decade that followed.

II ACCOMMODATION AND RESISTANCE

In subsequent years the relations between the Dakota and the mission became more complicated with the growing political issues. The Treaty of 1851 had a great impact on the lives of Indians as well as on the mission. In the 1840s white settlers had moved up the Mississippi. By the time Minnesota became a territory in 1849, its white population was

almost six thousand—more than double the number of Indians. According to the Treaty of 1851 the eastern Sioux yielded most of their lands in exchange for life on reservations and came to be called the “Annuity Sioux.” During the negotiations for the Treaty at Traverse des Sioux, Riggs and Williamson worked as translators. They basically supported the Treaty as an inevitability and hoped for more possibilities to civilize Indians. Because the missionaries could not understand the negative impact of the Treaty upon the lives of the Dakota, they lacked an ability to represent them well and therefore stood on the assimilationist side of the government.

The 1851 Treaty brought a dramatic change to the Dakota mission. Except for that at Lac qui Parle, all of the eastern Sioux missions were closed by 1853 because they were on ceded land and the Indians began to disperse. Accordingly, the number of mission staff decreased and only Williamson’s and Riggs’ families remained. The Redwood Agency (the Lower Sioux Agency) and the Yellow Medicine Agency (the Upper Sioux Agency), farther up the Minnesota River, became the headquarters of the Indian Agency for the eastern Sioux reservations. The Mdewakanton and Wahpekute bands settled within a few miles of the Redwood Agency, and the Sisseton and Wahpeton tribes near the Yellow Medicine Agency. Williamson arranged to open a new Pajutazee missionary station near Yellow Medicine in 1852 because the Indian population was expected to drift toward that Agency. Riggs closed the Lac qui Parle mission in 1854 after consulting with S. B. Treat, the secretary of the American Board, and moved to a new station called New Hope (later called Hazelwood), three miles from Yellow Medicine. Thus both Riggs and Williamson now worked close to the Upper Sioux Agency.²⁸⁾

By 1855, many of the eastern Dakota had finally settled on their reservations, and the Yellow Medicine Agency and two new missions attracted more Indians who accepted the civilized lifeways. Some Indians tried to adjust to reservation life by cutting their hair, moving into log cabins, and learning how to farm. In 1856 Riggs led a group of seventeen civilized Indians, of whom eight were mixed bloods, to establish a new band called the Hazelwood Republic. This community was a unique experiment by Christian Indians with its own constitution and local government. Under the guidance of Riggs these men drafted a constitution which declared Christian worship, education, and private property as the principles of their republic. They elected a governor, secretary, and three councilmen annually. By their request the Indian Agency recognized this

community as a separate band. Its members pursued a civilized life, including cutting their hair and wearing the same types of clothes as whites. Simon Anawangmani, who returned to the church in 1854, became a prominent member of the community.²⁹⁾

Although the members of this community adhered to Christian civilization ideals, these Indian Christians should not be regarded as blind followers of white culture. They often served as the "middle ground,"³⁰⁾ that is as cultural intermediaries to negotiate with and to accommodate effectively the dominant white society. They adopted Christianity and education to build the middle ground as the defence against the tribal annihilation. It was a kind of creative adaptation to retain certain autonomy in the presence of white power. Eventually the members of the Hazelwood Republic requested white officials to treat them as equal to whites, while pledging obedience to the United States government. In 1861 Riggs tried to get state citizenship for them and took nine full-blood members to the district court at Mankato. Although most of them were not accepted since the court decided that a knowledge of English was necessary to comply with state laws, Lorenzo Lawrence (Towanetaton, Face of the Village) nevertheless became the first full-blood Dakota to be granted Minnesota citizenship in 1861.³¹⁾

After 1856 the farm programs on the reservations provided an incentive for other Indians to join the civilized ones. They were furnished with some food and were taught how to farm. Many reservation Indians tried to adjust to the civilized lifeways and about one-fourth of the Dakota adopted farming and a few had turned to practicing Christianity.³²⁾ Among them were some who had abandoned much of the Dakota way of life, moved from their villages to farms, and wore the same clothing as whites. Many also worked on the reservations, being employed by the traders as clerks or by the government as interpreters. In 1854 the Indian agent, Richard Murphy, with assistance from the missionaries, began surveying the reservations and selecting sites for individual farms by Indians. It is significant that the missionaries were the major proponent of individual ownership of farmsteads by nuclear Indian families since they considered the Dakota sense of community to be a great hindrance to the process of advancing civilization.³³⁾

With this growing acculturation program, however, the division among the Dakota people was becoming more serious. Many of the Indians who adapted to farming and civilized life were mixed-blood, Franco- and Anglo-Dakotas (the children or grandchildren of Dakota

women and white traders), who comprised roughly 15 percent of the Dakota reservation population by 1862.³⁴ Some of the mixed-bloods identified closely with whites sharing assimilationist views and had substantial influence in Dakota councils. While the mixed-bloods and native Christians developed political ties with whites, others found such adaptation difficult. As land was allotted on the reservations, the band structure was broken up, clothing and hair styles were changed, and sedentary farming was substituted for hunting as a livelihood. The power and influence of medicine men were disparaged by the missionaries. The government agents punished the Indians who waged war upon such traditional enemies as the Ojibwa. The indigenous social relations and subsistence patterns suffered major upheavals during this period.

Despite such changes and intervention, the majority of the Dakota retained a strong attachment to the tribal culture. The traditionalists often wore long hair, leggings, and breechcloths—the visible symbols of their Indian tradition. There were even some mixed-bloods who rejected the acculturation program of the government and the missionaries. Such traditionalists despised the civilized Indians as “farmers,” “cut-hairs,” and “pantaloons.” For them those Indians gave up the Indian way of life in exchange for governmental favors, such as a house and animals, provided by the Indian Agent for abandoning their traditional ways. The Dakota presented a united front in the early days, but by 1858 the rift among them was apparent. They were divided into factions of accommodation or resistance, which the government agency and traders would exploit to destroy tribal ties.

The Dakota's mistrust of the whites heightened in the course of the 1850s. After the Treaty of 1851, pressure from white settlers and the federal government increased. The treaty had promised the Indians reservations along the Minnesota River, an educational fund, and annuities, but it was not until 1854 that two reservations were designated as a “permanent home” by the Commissioner of Indian Affairs. Since, however, with the influx of the white population to Minnesota, the government postponed confirming these reservations, and in 1858 it revised the 1851 Treaty to acquire more land to accommodate the increasing number of white settlers, mostly German and Scandinavian immigrants. Accordingly, the Indians lost half of their “permanent home,” and in total, through the Treaties of 1851 and 1858, the eastern Sioux lost title to 28 million acres.³⁵ The increasing tensions with white settlers and the disappearance of buffalo compelled the chiefs to accept this cession.

Riggs recorded the response of the farming Indians as follows: "In regard to the treaty of last spring I doubt now if there will be any thing done by them to prevent its ratification. Every one speaks against it but no one acts."³⁶⁾

The traditionalist Indians were more critical of this land cession. They showed their discontent through resistance and disturbance on the reservations. They attacked short-haired Indians wearing clothes as "converts" to white culture, and once again there were stormy protests and persecution of Indians who demonstrated the least interest in Christianity. Directly attacking the missionaries was not their policy since they knew that it would incite drastic action by the federal government. In this critical period, however, some Indians even resorted to attacking the missionaries. On several occasions Riggs had been shot from behind and he once received a slight wound on his hand.³⁷⁾ In the eyes of these Indians, the missionaries came to be seen as hands of an overall white dominance.

The traditionalists also developed a cultural "underground" to regenerate the native lifeways and to retain independence. A secret organization of the Indians called the "Soldiers' Lodge" developed at both the Redwood and Yellow Medicine Agencies in the 1850s. This lodge had traditionally been a local committee to control the village hunt, but increasingly it evolved into a quasi-military society of young hunters for resisting acculturation and the reservation system. Unlike the more conventional tribal council, its members were mainly hunters, and it refused to admit farmers. In 1862, young hunters in the Mdewakanton Soldiers' Lodge turned to the "talk of war" and eventually persuaded Little Crow to lead an uprising.³⁸⁾ By this time the Dakota society was torn between followers of white civilization and traditionalists who opposed it.

III THE DAKOTA WAR

The bloody summer of 1862, mentioned briefly at the beginning of this essay, was the outburst of traditionalist Indian discontent which steadily mounted during the 1850s. The direct cause was the mismanagement of annuities by the federal government and its Indian Agent. After the Civil War broke out in 1861, the payment and distribution of annuities were delayed and caused a food shortage on the Sioux reservations that had begun the previous year. By the summer of 1862, the annuities were several months late in arriving at the agencies, and Indians

were starving and their patience was wearing thin. Frustration and anger could be found throughout the reservations.

Even before 1862 the annuities promised by the treaties had never been fully paid or handed out. Minnesota in the 1850s exemplified all the evils and corruption of the federal system of Indian administration. By one means or another, the money due to the Sioux always ended up in the pockets of local American officials and traders and other non-Indian claimants. Goods intended for allotment were sold at unfairly high prices in stores, and desperate Indians purchased them on credit, thereby creating yet another claim on the annuities by traders. The Office of Indian Affairs failed to investigate these charges as well as problems concerning illegal sales of liquor and mistreatment of Indian women by white men. It also encouraged the unequal distribution of annuity money and food only to Indians who showed some inclination to become farmers. It was a summation of such injustice and failures to honor treaty obligations, repeated year after year, that provoked the rebellion in 1862.³⁹⁾

The bitter resentment of Indians finally erupted on August 17, 1862, when four Indian hunters killed several white settlers near Acton in Meeker County. Returning quickly to the Redwood Agency, they told their story to Mdewakantons who had been resisting the attempt to make them farmers. The Mdewakantons sympathized with those involved in the attack and soon agreed to begin a war, seeking the support of Little Crow, the most influential of the Mdewakantons. Little Crow first opposed war and tried to dissuade the young men. He had been a negotiator and signer of the Treaties of 1851 and 1858. He also had made a trip to Washington, D.C. in 1854 to campaign for well-defined boundary lines for the Dakota reservations and had known what the power of whites was like. Nevertheless, when accused of cowardice in the presence of approximately one hundred members of the Mdewakanton Soldiers' Lodge, he delivered a powerful speech and reluctantly agreed to support a war:

Braves, you are like little children; you know not what you are doing. You are full of the white man's *devil-water* (rum). You are like dogs in the Hot Moon when they run mad and snap at their own shadows. We are only little herds that once covered the prairies [that] are no more. See!—the white men are like the locusts when they fly so thick that the whole sky is a snow-storm. You may kill one- two- ten; yes, as many as the leaves in the forest yonder, and their brothers will not miss them. Kill one- two- ten, and ten times ten will come to kill you. Count your fingers all day long and white men with

guns in their hands will come faster than you count. . . . Braves, you are little children—you are fools. You will die like the rabbits when the hungry wolves hunt them in the Hard Moon (January). Ta-o-ya-te-du-ta [Little Crow] is not a coward; he will die with you.⁴⁰⁾

Once the decision had been made to wage war, the soldiers planned an assault on the Redwood Agency and attacked it in the morning of August 18. Nearly two dozen people, most of whom were either traders or government employees, were killed. Many Dakotas, especially Indian farmers and mixed-bloods, as well as whites, were surprised by news of the attack. Convinced of eminent danger, some of them fled with the whites to Fort Ridgely and New Ulm.

After clearing the countryside of white settlers, the leaders of the Mdewakanton Soldiers' Lodge headed for the Yellow Medicine Agency because they expected the army under Colonel Henry H. Sibley farther down the Minnesota River to march north. Little Crow's army reached Yellow Medicine Agency, the territory of the Sissetons and Wahpetons, on August 28. By the evening of August 18, rumors of the fighting had reached the Sissetons and Wahpetons, and since the fighting promised to involve Yellow Medicine, they started to debate it. When the Mdewakanton war party arrived, they found opposition to warfare to be growing among the Sisseton and Wahpeton leaders, and especially among the Christian and farming Indians under the influence of the missionaries. In the debates, the spokesmen for these "mission Indians" disagreed with the course taken by the Mdewakantons and even tried to prevent Little Crow and his people from campaigning on their lands. By this time there were two distinct camps. Little Crow, Jerome Big Eagle (Wamditanka), Robert Hakewaste (Good Fifth Son), White Spider (Unktomiska, John C. Wakeman), George Quinn (Wakandayamani, The Spirit That Rattles as It Walks), Lightning Blanket (Hachinwakanda, David Wells), and Wowinape (Appearing One, Thomas Wakeman) participated in the fighting and constituted the "war party," while such full-bloods as Paul Mazakutemani (He Who Shoots as He Walks, Little Paul), Simon Anawangmani, Taopi (Wounded Man), Joseph Wabasha (Red Standard), Akipa (Joseph Akipa Renville), and Lorenzo Lawrence as well as several mixed-bloods as Samuel J. Brown, Thomas A. Robertson, Gabriel Renville (Tiwakan, Sacred Lodge), and his son Victor Renville opposed the war and formed a "peace party."

Gabriel Renville, who was a nephew of Joseph Renville and lived six miles north of the Yellow Medicine Agency, became the organizer of

the Soldiers' Lodge for the peace party. As soon as the war began, Renville secretly advised the missionaries to flee. It is significant that Riggs, Williamson, and their families survived the massacre. Such members of the Hazelwood Republic as Simon Anawangmani, John Otherday (Ampatutokacha, Good Sounding Voice), Lorenzo Lawrence, and Ecetukiya (He Who Brings What He Wants, Big Amos), a nephew of Paul Mazakutemani, helped the missionaries and other whites to escape. During the uprising Lorenzo Lawrence rescued ten captured white women and children by taking them with his family from Yellow Medicine to Fort Ridgely. John Otherday was another full-blood who guided whites to safety. The arrival of refugees in St. Paul caused a great stir that was covered by the newspapers.⁴¹⁾

Paul Mazakutemani, an early convert to Christianity and a member of the Hazelwood Republic, became the leading spokesman for the peace party. In the intertribal councils convened in late August and early September Mazakutemani attempted to persuade the war party that:

The Americans are a great people. They have much lead, powder, guns, and provisions. Stop fighting, and now gather up all the captives and give them to me. No one who fights with the white people ever becomes rich, or remains two days in one place, but is always fleeing and starving.⁴²⁾

The war party and the peace party quarreled over the issues of war, captives, and plunder. Heated debate especially broke out concerning the fate of more than a hundred white captives in the hands of the war party. At times it seemed as if warfare would break out within the Indian camps. The peace party devised a strategy to negotiate with the whites and eventually started to contact Sibley. It formed a conclave called Camp Release and kept the captives there until Sibley's troops came. The rise of the peace party soon made it difficult for the Dakota warriors to sustain their war effort. As it became increasingly obvious that the Dakota could not win the war, the peace party rapidly attracted the support of the Sisseton and the Wahpeton, as well as the farming Mdewakanton and the mixed-bloods. The intertribal social and political discord intensified as the unpopularity of the war spread among the Indians. This reflected the wrenching divisiveness that had developed among the Dakota during the decade before the war.

The struggle within the Dakota community climaxed in mid September when more than a thousand Americans under the command of Sibley marched up the Minnesota River and quelled the battle. By September

26 the fighting in Minnesota had ended and around a thousand Indians were taken captive while the rest, including Little Crow, fled to Canada and the northern plains. After turning the captives over to the whites at Camp Release, most of the Christian Indians became scouts for Sibley and served throughout his subsequent campaigns in the northern Great Plains.

During October and November, nearly 400 full-bloods and mixed-bloods were tried by a military tribunal, and 303 were sentenced to death by hanging. Nevertheless, Henry B. Whipple, the bishop of the Protestant Episcopal Church in Minnesota, asked the federal government to consider the bitter wrongs committed by whites against the Indians and influenced President Abraham Lincoln to spare most of those who had been convicted. After having the case examined, Lincoln commuted all but 38 of the sentences.⁴³⁾ Those who were not hanged were imprisoned at Mankato, and two thousand of their family members were placed under guard at Fort Snelling. Williamson worked among the imprisoned Indians until he was forbidden to do so in 1863, when more than 300 prisoners were baptized. Although those imprisoned were released three years later, the uprising cost the Sioux their reservations; after the massacre about 1300 Dakotas were removed to the Crow Creek reservation, a drought-stricken place, in Dakota Territory. The sons of missionaries followed them to continue their work there.⁴⁴⁾ By the 1870s most of the resistance by the Plains Indians would be suppressed, and they were relocated on reservations.

CONCLUSION

Missionary work among the Dakota coincided with the mounting pressure from white encroachment and the development of political and social divisions within Dakota society. The initial contact and early missionization were rather peaceful because the power relationship between the Indians and the whites was not rigid. Some Indians, especially the mixed-bloods, converted to Christianity and received an education. Nevertheless, the missionaries found themselves the objects of escalating suspicion and hostility because the increasing contacts revealed their intolerance and bias toward the people. The Indians initiated a campaign of open harassment and eventually thwarted the missionaries in the 1840s. Most Dakota tried to preserve their ancestral spirituality and practice as a response to the pressure to civilize, so the very traditions and

culture which the missionaries condemned became a focal point of their identity. It was during this phase that the Indian consciousness was awakened.

Nevertheless, the growing economic dependence on the part of the Indians and their land cessions in the 1850s intensified the intervention of whites in the lives of the Dakota. The mission on the reservation became the spearhead of acculturation, and some Indians tried to adopt the white way of life. While the Indian Christians tried to create a "middle ground" in order to negotiate with and accommodate the whites, the alienated traditionalists showed their resistance and developed an "underground" culture in the Soldiers' Lodge. The Dakota no longer acted in unison but were torn apart over their relations with whites, which accelerated their social disintegration. After a series of injustices and mismanagement of the reservations by whites the traditionalists finally resorted to war in 1862. This war revealed the undercurrent divisions in Dakota society, and the reluctance of Sisseton and Wahpeton leaders under the influence of the mission to join Little Crow's war party thwarted attempts at intertribal unity. In order to take a more rational policy of negotiation and accommodation, Christianized Indians and mixed-bloods tried to discourage the war proceedings of the traditionalists. Although the peace party helped to bring about an early end to the war, the compromise with whites ultimately sacrificed their own people and their last foothold in Minnesota, the ancestral homeland.

In this process the missionaries were rather ineffective as cultural mediators, because, despite devoting their lives to the Indians and even earning the respect of some Christian Indians, they neither reflected upon their assimilationist views nor comprehended the tenacity of native belief. Although government and missionary interests were not always identical, the mission became the locus of cultural and political conflicts providing the silent battleground. The divided response and ultimate failure of the Dakota to accommodate the evolving political situation illustrates their dilemmas and struggles in the face of white intervention. Thus the history of the Dakota mission reveals the limitations of both the whites and the Indians that led to a clash between two cultures.

NOTES

¹ Stephen R. Riggs to S. B. Treat, August 24, 1862, Papers of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (deposited at Houghton Library, Harvard University; hereafter cited as ABCFM) 18.3.7. vol. 3; J. M. Semerndike, "One Hundred Years of Missionary Work," ABCFM 18.8. vol. 1:57:3-4.; Stephen R. Riggs, *Mary and I: Forty Years with the Sioux* (Boston: Congregational Sunday School and Publishing Society, 1880), 171-187. For studies on the Dakota War of 1862, see Kenneth Carley, *The Sioux Uprising of 1862* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society, 1976); C. M. Oehler, *The Great Sioux Uprising* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1997; first published in 1959); Gary Clayton Anderson and Alan R. Woolworth, eds., *Through Dakota Eyes: Narrative Accounts of the Minnesota Indian War of 1862* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1988); Gary Clayton Anderson, *Little Crow: Spokesman for the Sioux* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1986).

² Henry Warner Bowden, *American Indians and Christian Missions: Studies in Cultural Conflict* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), chap. 6; Robert F. Berkhofer Jr., *Salvation and the Savage: An Analysis of Protestant Missions and American Indian Response, 1787-1862* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1965); William R. Hutchison, *Errand to the World: American Protestant Thought and Foreign Missions* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1987), chap. 1; Clifton Jackson Phillips, *Protestant America and the Pagan World: The First Half Century of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, 1810-1860* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1969), chap. 3.

³ For discussion of the missionaries as colonizers, see George E. Tinker, *Missionary Conquest: The Gospel and Native American Cultural Genocide* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993).

⁴ For works focusing on the Indian response to Christianity, see "Special Issue: Native American Women's Response to Christianity," *Ethnohistory* 43, 4 (1996); Michael Harkin, "Power and Progress: The Evangelical Dialogue Among the Heilstuk," *Ethnohistory* 40, 1 (1993): 1-33; Carol Devens, *Countering Colonization: Native American Women and Great Lakes Missions, 1630-1900* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992).

⁵ They were volunteer missionaries who were later appointed by the American Board in 1837. About Gideon H. Pond, see Riggs, *Mary and I*, 361-373. Foreign Roman Catholic missionaries such as the Belgian Pierre Jean De Smet and the Frenchman Augustin Ravoux also engaged in missionary work among the Sioux.

⁶ Semerndike, "One Hundred Years of Missionary Work," ABCFM 18.8. vol. 1: 57:1-2; "Lac-qui-parle and American Board Mission to the Sioux," ABCFM 18.8. vol. 1: 59, 60. In 1872 Williamson was transferred to the Presbyterian Board but Riggs remained in the American Board. In 1883, missionary work among the Dakota was transferred to the American Missionary Association.

⁷ Riggs, *Mary and I*, 75, 79. Despite the civilizing enthusiasm there was a certain opposition to the work of education within the mission circle as seen in Rufus Anderson, senior secretary of the ABCFM in the mid nineteenth century. Hutchison, *Errand to the World*, 77-90.

⁸ Riggs, *Mary and I*, 91.

⁹ Riggs, *Mary and I*, 73-74.

¹⁰ Riggs, *Mary and I*, 45-46.

¹¹ About the spread of smallpox, see Riggs to D. Greene, March 28, 1838, ABCFM 18.3.7. vol. 2.

¹² Riggs, *Mary and I*, 54–55; Stephen R. Riggs, *Tah-Koo Wah-Kan; the Gospel among the Dakotas* (Boston: Congregational Publishing Society, 1869), chap. 10.

¹³ Riggs, *Mary and I*, 101.

¹⁴ Riggs, *Mary and I*, 118–119.

¹⁵ Riggs, *Mary and I*, 76–78.

¹⁶ Berkhofer, *Salvation and the Savage*, 107.

¹⁷ For Dakota customs and tradition, see Samuel W. Pond, *The Dakota or Sioux in Minnesota as They Were in 1834* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society, 1986; first published in 1908); Stephen R. Riggs, “Dakota Grammar, Texts, and Ethnography,” in *Contributions to North American Ethnology* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1893) vol. 9, 155–232.

¹⁸ Riggs to Greene, October 24, 1838, ABCFM 18.3.7. vol. 2.

¹⁹ For an example of conflicts with medicine men, see Riggs to Greene, February 8, 1846, ABCFM 18.3.7. vol. 3: 220.

²⁰ Riggs, *Mary and I*, 60, 100–101, 121, 388; Stephen Riggs, “Annual Report of the Station at Traverse-des- Sioux,” May 1, 1844, ABCFM 18.3.7. vol. 3.

²¹ Riggs, *Mary and I*, 110–111, 127–128, 388. For the attitude of the Ojibwa toward mission cattle, see Rebecca Kugel, “Of Missionaries and Their Cattle: Ojibwa Perceptions of a Missionary as Evil Shaman,” *Ethnohistory* 41, 2 (1994): 227–244.

²² Riggs, “Annual Report of the Station at Traverse-des- Sioux,” May 1, 1844, ABCFM 18.3.7. vol. 3; Riggs to Greene, February 8, 1846, ABCFM 18.3.7. vol. 3; Riggs to Greene, April 29, 1846, ABCFM 18.3.7. vol. 3:223; Riggs, *Tah-Koo Wah-Kan*, 202–204, 220–230; Riggs, *Mary and I*, 91, 112–113.

²³ Jon Willard, *Lac qui Parle and the Dakota Mission* (Madison, Minn.: Lac qui Parle County Historical Society, 1964), 185–188, 194; Anderson, *Little Crow*, 38–43, 46–50.

²⁴ Riggs, *Mary and I*, 128–129; Willard, *Lac qui Parle and the Dakota Mission*, 190–191.

²⁵ Riggs to Treat, March 7, 1848, and March 24, 1849, ABCFM 18.3.7. vol. 3: 244–245.

²⁶ The fact was that the missionaries previously had received small grants from the government school fund, but this fund had little effect on the efforts by the American Board to educate the Dakota during this period. Riggs, *Mary and I*, 79; Riggs, *Tah-koo Wah-kan*, 245–246; Willard, *Lac qui Parle and the Dakota Mission*, 198–201; Samuel Pond to Treat, September 12, 1852, ABCFM 18.3.7. vol. 3.

²⁷ Riggs to Treat, March 7, 1848, ABCFM 18.3.7. vol. 3: 244.

²⁸ Riggs to Treat, October 15, 1852, ABCFM 18.3.7. vol. 3; Riggs to M. McLeod, February 12, 1851, ABCFM 18.3.7. vol. 3; Williamson to Treat, February 10, 1851, ABCFM 18.3.7. vol. 3.; Samuel Pond to Treat, June 23, 1851, ABCFM 18.3.7. vol. 3.

²⁹ Riggs, *Mary and I*, 160; Riggs to Treat, July 31, 1856, ABCFM 18.3.7. vol. 3: 337, 347; Henok Maheyahdenapa, Secretary of Hazelwood Republic, “Declaration of Sentiment,” February 26, 1857, a newspaper clipping in ABCFM 18.3.7. vol. 3: 46.

³⁰ Richard White, *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650–1815* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), x. According to White the “middle ground” refers to “the place in between: in between cultures, peoples, and in between empires and the nonstate world of villages.”

³¹ Riggs to Treat, December 9, 1859, ABCFM 18.3.7. vol. 3: 357; Riggs to Treat, February 22, 1861, ABCFM 18.3.7: vol. 4: 10; Riggs, *Mary and I*, 157. For an extensive discussion of the “middle ground” in regard to the Dakota, see Dacee McLaren, “Living the Middle Ground: Two Dakota Missionaries, 1887–1912,” *Ethnohistory* 43, 2 (1996), 277–305.

³² Anderson and Woolworth, eds., *Through Dakota Eyes*, 6.

³³ Riggs to Treat, March 9, August 3 and 26, 1854, January 11, 1855, ABCFM 18.3.7. vol. 3; Williamson to Treat, March 28, 1854, June 13, 1855, ABCFM 18.3.7. vol. 3.

³⁴ Anderson and Woolworth, eds., *Through Dakota Eyes*, 5.

³⁵ Robert M. Ultey, *The Indian Frontier of the American West 1846–1890* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1984), 76–77.

³⁶ Riggs to Treat, November 2, 1858, ABCFM 18.3.7. vol. 3: 347.

³⁷ Berkhofer, *Salvation and the Savage*, 145–146; Willard, *Lac qui Parle and the Dakota Mission*, 181.

³⁸ Anderson, *Little Crow*, 21–27. For discussion of the underground culture, see Joel Martin, “From ‘Middleground’ to ‘Underground’” in David G. Hackett, *Religion and American Culture: A Reader* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 131.

³⁹ Ultey, *The Indian Frontier*, 76–78; Riggs, *Mary and I*, 171–173.

⁴⁰ Hanford L. Gordon, *The Feast of the Virgins and Other Poems* (Chicago: Laird & Lee, 1891), 343–344; *Indian Legends and Other Poems* (Salem, Mass.: Salem Press Co., 1910), 381–383, cited in Anderson and Woolworth, eds., *Through Dakota Eyes*, 40–42.

⁴¹ For recollections of the war by members of the peace party, see Gabriel Renville, “A Sioux Narrative of the Outbreak in 1862, and of Sibley’s Expedition in 1863,” *Minnesota Historical Society Collections* 10 (1905): Part II, 595–618; Lorenzo Lawrence, “Story of Lorenzo Lawrence,” 1894, Lorenzo Lawrence Papers, Division of Libraries and Archives, Minnesota Historical Society; John Otherday, “Highly Interesting Narrative of the Outbreak of Indian Hostilities,” *Saint Paul Press*, August 28, 1862, 2; Victor Renville, “A Sketch of the Minnesota Massacre,” *Collections of the State Historical Society of North Dakota* 5 (1923): 251–272; Anderson and Woolworth, eds., *Through Dakota Eyes*, 105–108, 120–125, 192–194, 200–201, 205–215.

⁴² Paul Mazakutemani, “Narrative of Paul Mazakutemane,” *Minnesota Historical Collections* 3 (1880): 82–90.

⁴³ Ultey, *The Indian Frontier*, 81; Anderson and Woolworth, eds., *Through Dakota Eyes*, 171–172. Of the 303 convicted Indians, 17 were of the Upper Sioux and 286 of the Lower Sioux; of the 38 who were hanged, two were of the Upper Sioux and 36 of the Lower Sioux.

⁴⁴ Semerndike, “One Hundred Years of Missionary Work,” ABCFM 18.8. vol. 1: 57: 5–7.