

UCLA

American Indian Culture and Research Journal

Title

Through Dakota Eyes: Narrative Accounts of the Minnesota Indian War of 1862. Edited by Gary Clayton Anderson and Alan R. Woolworth.

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/3j78w05d>

Journal

American Indian Culture and Research Journal , 12(4)

ISSN

0161-6463

Author

Meyer, Melissa L.

Publication Date

1988-09-01

DOI

10.17953

Copyright Information

This work is made available under the terms of a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial License, available at <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>

REVIEWS

Through Dakota Eyes: Narrative Accounts of the Minnesota Indian War of 1862. Edited by Gary Clayton Anderson and Alan R. Woolworth. St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1988. 316 pages. \$24.95 Cloth. \$11.95 Paper.

“You have been threatening us and trying to get us to join you in what you have done. We have consulted amongst ourselves . . . and have decided not to do so” (page 198). Joseph La Framboise, Jr., son of a Franco-Dakota trader and a Dakota woman, had joined with others who opposed the Dakota insurrection to turn back the violence that had erupted on the Minnesota frontier in 1862. His sentiments reflected the diverse elements that comprised Dakota society at this difficult time of transition.

Although the Dakota had interacted intensively with Euro-American traders for generations, the symbiotic way of life they had evolved had begun to unravel. Dwindling game populations, encroaching white settlement, heavy-handed treaty negotiations that resulted in the loss of much of their land base, the failure of the U.S. government to adhere to treaty terms, and the exploitative policies of traders had all combined to make it increasingly difficult for the Dakota to adapt. Some had attempted to do as U.S. policymakers and missionaries wished and turned to farming, wearing Euro-American-style clothing, speaking English, and practicing Christianity. Agency officials rewarded their efforts, but often at the expense of those who were less enamored with the cultural transformation that was expected of them. The complexity of the circumstances that the Dakota faced had prompted a whole variety of initiatives and responses on their part.

Popular Minnesota folklore has not recognized such diversity within the Dakota population and, as a result, has not sought complex explanations for what has now been termed the "U.S.-Dakota Conflict." Until very recently, accounts have emphasized the "bloodthirsty cruelty" of the "savages" as one of the deadliest Indian wars, with almost 500 white civilians and a large through indeterminate number of Indians killed, settled into its niche in the regional imagination. With 1987, the 125th anniversary of the war, having been declared the "Year of Reconciliation" by the Governor of Minnesota, who also pardoned the leader Little Crow, perhaps a new tenor of public opinion and historical understanding is within reach.

Through Dakota Eyes should help further this end. In the decades following the war, numerous whites composed accounts upon which most subsequent commentaries and historical treatments have rested. Needless to say, they have reflected more of the hysteria that gripped American settlements than the internal dynamics of Dakota communities. Gary Clayton Anderson and Alan R. Woolworth have scoured archives and historical societies across the U.S. and Manitoba, Canada and reviewed published collections to assemble 36 excerpts of 63 known narratives listed in the Appendix to the book. Through these documents, the "Dakota perspective" takes on much more multi-faceted dimensions.

The editors included the most detailed, informative selections by individuals who were present from the beginning of the hostilities and whose accounts enhance an understanding of the overall context of the conflict in general and of Dakota perspectives in particular. Some were transmitted orally in Dakota through a translator; others were written by the informant in English. Many diverse points of view are represented: young and old; men and women; "mixed bloods" and "full bloods;" those who participated in the violence and those who opposed it. With insight, the editors point out that "degree of Indian or white blood did not necessarily determine an individual's loyalties during the conflict," (page 6) illuminating individual adaptations that were much more variable than oversimplified dichotomous labels will allow.

The materials are arranged chronologically in ten chapters, each of which focuses on a major event or period during the conflict. Longer narratives have been segmented to conform to this

organization and page numbers at the end of each section direct the reader to its continuation. In this way, the reader can opt to follow one person's account over time. The editors have prefaced each chapter with an introduction providing historical context, and each narrative with a biographical sketch that includes information about collaborators.

The number of Indian narratives that exist about this topic is surprising and the compilation truly makes a substantial contribution. For teaching purposes the book would make an excellent companion volume for Gary Anderson's *Little Crow: Spokesman for the Sioux* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1986) at the undergraduate level. There is not enough material representing Indian voices and perspectives at this time period—especially about a war of this nature. Scholars and teachers should take note.

Melissa L. Meyer
University of California, Los Angeles

Abstracts of Native Studies, Volume 1. Abstracts of Native Studies, Volume 2. Edited by R. C. Annis. Brandon, Manitoba: Abstracts of Native Studies Press, 1984. 109 pages and 180 pages. Subscriptions: Individuals, \$15.00. Institutions, \$20.00. Paper.

The first two annual volumes of *Abstracts of Native Studies* represent a significant contribution to Native studies scholarship. Not only are these basic reference tools: each volume also contains a useful essay on the current state of Indian/Native Studies in Canada and the United States.

Volume 1 includes over 1,200 citations to periodical literature published during 1984 and Volume 2 includes over 1,300 citations for 1985. Over 150 journals were examined in 1984 for relevant materials, over 250 for 1985. That the journals represent such diverse fields as anthropology, art, English, history, law sociology and psychology is an indication of the interdisciplinary philosophy which underlies this effort.

Both volumes have the same subject arrangement: economic activities; education; law, government, policy, and claims; linguistics; native culture (expressive, physical and material, social, spiritual, white relations); physical functioning; psychological