

Case Study: The Dakota War Conundrum

The Dakota War was a conflict that happened in Minnesota in 1862 between the Dakota Sioux tribe and the American settlers near the small town of New Ulm. Although the war lasted only 6 weeks, it forever changed the destiny of native people in Minnesota, and it had a profound impact on the future history of the state.

Your task is to create a 5 paragraph response to this question:

Was The Dakota War unavoidable?

By looking through the resources provided to you in this packet, you will need to answer that question and give three reasons why. Once you have made a decision on your answer, you may write it on the last page of this case study and it will be submitted for review by historians. Make sure you look through all of the data before making a decision, however.

Good luck!

Background Information

This is an overview of the Dakota War, taken and then revised from Wikipedia:

When news broke in 1861 that Fort Sumter had been fired on, Minnesota was the first state to offer men to the Union to quell the rebellion. Governor Alexander Ramsey happened to be in Washington D.C. and rushed to give Lincoln Minnesota's support. Following through on its word, 22,000 Minnesotans served the north. The 1st Minnesota Volunteer Infantry became part of state lore with its actions at the Battle of Gettysburg.

The next year Minnesota faced its own crisis as the Dakota War of 1862 broke out. The Dakota had signed the Treaty of Traverse des Sioux in 1837 and the Treaty of Mendota in 1851, because they were concerned that without money from the United States government, they would starve, due to the loss of habitat of huntable game. They were initially given a strip of land of ten miles (16 km) north and south of the Minnesota River, but they were later forced to sell the land north of the river. The 1862 crop failures had left the Dakota short of food and government money was delayed. After four young Dakota men, searching for food, shot a family of settlers near Acton, the Dakota Chief Little Crow decided more attacks were needed to drive out the settlers. The attacks on the Lower Sioux Agency, Fort Ridgely, New Ulm, Hutchinson and surrounding farmsteads, resulted in the deaths of hundreds. These actions caused panic in the settlements up and down the Minnesota River Valley even as far away as the Red River Valley to the north. All of this provoked counterattacks by the Minnesota volunteer infantry in federal service, local militia and citizenry. The ensuing battles at Fort Ridgely, Birch Coulee, Fort Abercrombie, and Wood Lake punctuated a six-week war, which ended with the trial of 425 Sioux and one African American combatants. Of this number, 303 men were convicted and sentenced to death.

Episcopal Bishop Henry Benjamin Whipple pleaded to President Abraham Lincoln for clemency, and the death sentences of all but 39 men were reduced to prison terms. On December 26, 1862, 38 men were hanged by the 6th Minnesota Infantry at Mankato, the largest mass execution in U.S. history. The remaining Dakota woman, children and elderly as well as the non-combatant Winnebago, were forced to camp on Pike Island over the winter of 1862–1863. Governor Ramsey wanted the Sioux out of Minnesota immediately, but riverboat transportation had ceased with the freezing of the river. There were no males to hunt game, as Governor Ramsey had placed a bounty for the scalps of the men and had there been, there was no game to hunt in the vicinity of the fort. The food was meager. There was no sanitation and measles and cholera broke out. By the time river boats reached the camp in the spring, 300 had died. In addition, thousands of Sioux fled the state with many crossing the border into Canada. Two of those, Little Six and Medicine Bottle, were drugged, kidnapped across the border, and returned to Fort

Snelling to be hung. Little Crow was killed and scalped for the bounty. The survivors at Fort Snelling were exiled to the Crow Creek Reservation. Many more would die on the way and even more die after they got there. The Winnebago men moved quickly to get their people to a better situation. Later, some of the Mdewakanton moved to other reservations, notably Niobrara, Nebraska. Canada created multiple reservations for Minnesota's displaced Sioux. In 1868 the Minnesota Historical Society took possession of Little Crow's scalp for a trophy display. It would later get his skull and wrist bones as well. In 1971 those items were given to a Little Crow descendant for proper respect.

A small number of Dakota managed to return to Minnesota in the 1880s establishing communities near Granite Falls, Morton, Prior Lake, and Red Wing. However, after this time the Dakota were no longer allowed to return to Minnesota with the exception of the meritorious Sioux called the Loyal Mdewakanton. This group had not participated in the Dakota uprising.

Analysis

The term lore can mean great knowledge, but that is not its intended meaning in this article. What do you think it means?

In the article, it says a preacher pleaded to Abraham Lincoln for clemency for the convicted Dakota tribesmen. Using the clues in the sentences around the word, what do you think it could mean?

It says that Little Crow was killed and scalped. The scalp is the top part of our head. What do you think it means when they said they "scalped" him? Why would they do this?

Time Machine Simulation

Using the link below, you are going to participate in a simulation activity that will take you back in time and have you taking on the role of one of the chiefs of the Dakota people. You will answer questions, and the choices you make will lead to different outcomes. Complete the activity here:

<https://bit.ly/32z3qAp>

Once you have completed it once, tell what the end result of your choices was:

Now, go and do the activity again, deliberately making *different* choices than you made the first time. List your new end result here:

What did you notice about the two results? Why do you think that happened?

Do you think the Dakota people felt this way as well? Why or why not?

The Attacks on New Ulm By Anton Gag



This painting was done by Anton Gag, who interviewed the settlers in New Ulm a few weeks after this battle happened. He did not witness the battle first hand, nor did he interview any of the Dakota people.

Take a look at this painting. What do you see?

Now, take a closer look at the painting. What **don't** you see? What is missing from the painting that might make the scene appear more like a battle?

If this is the only thing you saw regarding the Dakota War, what misperceptions might you be left with?

The Math of the War

Below you will find some numbers related to the Dakota War. Use the numbers, do some math, and answer the questions at the bottom of the page.

In 1862...

- 6,500 Dakota people lived in Minnesota
Less than 1,000 Dakota fought in the war

- 1,200 settlers lived in Renville County (where the war happened)
The US Army sent 7 battalions to fight in the war

Look up online how many soldiers are in a battalion. Compare the number of Dakota soldiers to the number of US Army soldiers below.

The population growth rate in the United State is about 1.05% each year. Using that percentage and the 6,500 Dakota people and the 1,200 settlers, calculate how many Dakota people should be living in Minnesota and how many Americans should be living in Renville County today.

Calculations

Dakota people in Minnesota: _____

Americans in Renville County: _____

Now, go and find the actual population of the Dakota people in Minnesota today and the population of Renville County. What do you notice? Why do you think that is?

Additional Research

The following books related to the Dakota War can be found at the Pleasant Hill Library:

The Dakota War of 1862 by Kenneth Carley

Massacre in Minnesota: The Dakota War of 1862 by Gary Clayton Anderson

Fire in the North: The Minnesota uprising and the Sioux War in Dakota Territory by Thomas Phillips

Dakota in Exile: the Untold Stories of Captives in the Aftermath of the U.S.-Dakota War by Linda Clemmons

Choose one or more of these books and do some more research. See if you can answer these questions:

What do you think would have happened if the Dakota War didn't take place?

Which perspective does the author write from? Are they a white person, a Dakota Sioux tribesman, or do they offer a different perspective?

Little Crow, one of the leaders of the Dakota Sioux, once said that he believed that his people had no other choice but to fight, even though he himself did not want to see violence. Why would he say this?

What are some "unforgivable acts" leading up to the war? In other words, what were some of the things that the settlers did or that the Dakota Sioux people did that were considered to be atrocious and unforgivable actions by the other side?

Final Summary

Now that you have had a chance to do some research on the Dakota War, you can answer the following question on the next page. Remember to answer in 5 paragraphs, where the first paragraph tells your opinion, paragraphs 2-4 give specific reasons why you believe that, and then the final paragraph summarizes your thoughts and restates your opinion.

Was the Dakota War unavoidable?

Answer on the next page

Paragraph 1: _____

Paragraph 2: _____

Paragraph 3: _____

Paragraph 4: _____

Paragraph 5: _____
