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Renewing the Oyate: Dakota Language and Cultural Revitalization and
Commemorations of the U.S.-Dakota War, 1962-2012

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Introduction: “A bloody re-mapping of Dakota life”

Dr. Kim TallBear (Dakota) is an anthropologist whose research and writing examines how genetic science and notions of race and indigeneity constitute each other. An enrolled member of the Sisseton Wahpeton Oyate¹, TallBear was raised on the Flandreau Santee Sioux reservation in South Dakota, and descends from those Dakota communities² exiled from Mni Sota Makoce³ after the U.S.-Dakota War of 1862. These biographical details map the forced diaspora of the Dakota from their aboriginal homeland in territory known today as the state of Minnesota. In 2012, the war’s sesquicentennial, TallBear reflected on the war’s seminal role in historical memory: “As Dakota people,” she writes, “1862 may be our most important origin story today. Throughout Dakota country, we refer daily to 1862 whether at family gatherings, at community events, anywhere we gather and talk. It is always there even when we are silent.” Moreover, TallBear writes, family oral tradition, not “the necessarily narrow books of mainstream historians,” shaped her understanding of how historical events transformed the meaning of being Dakota. “My foundational knowledge

¹ The Sisseton Wahpeton Oyate, located on the Lake Traverse Indian Reservation in present-day South and North Dakota, is a federally-recognized tribe, and one of several tribes originally descended from the Dakota peoples expelled from their aboriginal homeland after the U.S.-Dakota War of 1862.

² These Dakota groups were the Mdewakanton (“the spiritual people who live by the water”), the Sisseton (“the medicine people who live by the water”), the Wahpekute (“the warriors who protected the medicine people and could shoot from among the leaves”), and the Wahpeton (“the people who live in the forest”), Gwen Westerman and Bruce White, ed., *Mni Sota Makoce: The Land of the Dakota* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2012), 22

³Dakota language for “land where the waters are so clear they reflect the clouds.” The state name Minnesota is derived from this Dakota place-name.

came from narratives handed down from my late great-grandfather, Felix Heminger,” writes TallBear. “His great-grandfather was Ta-oyate-duta, the reluctant 1862 leader.”⁴

When TallBear speaks of 1862, she refers to it as a defining moment that “re-circumscribed present-day Dakota geography, political economy, family relations, governance, and identity...a bloody re-mapping of Dakota life.” A devastating consequence of the war and subsequent federal policies that forced the Dakota people to assimilate was a drop in usage of the Dakota language. How have Dakota people made sense of this “bloody re-mapping”? In what ways have their understandings been shaped by efforts to reclaim and revitalize Dakota language and culture? What significance do such understandings hold for contemporary Dakota communities, and how have they changed over time? This essay, grounded in an analysis of government documents, periodicals, and oral history interviews, will argue that initiatives to revitalize Dakota language and culture have been the needle that has pulled the thread of the war’s commemoration for Dakota tribes and communities. The acts of recovering culture and language, re-incorporating them into individual, family, and community life, acknowledging and strengthening kinship bonds, and

⁴ KimberlyTallbear, “The US-Dakota War of 1862: Ethnic Strife or the Political Economy of War?” Oak Lake Writers Society (<http://www.oaklakewriters.org/2012/08/14/the-us-dakota-war-of-1862-ethnic-strife-or-the-political-economy-of-war/>).

reconnecting with the land constitute forms of indigenous knowledge recovery that have been practiced in powerful ways by Dakota people within the past thirty years. These intentional actions have also recontextualized traditional Dakota knowledge, and made it more readily available to Dakota communities as they evaluate the significance of this centrally-important historical event.⁵

The Dakota, like a growing number of North American Indian peoples, and Indigenous peoples on a global scale, have engaged in initiatives to revitalize their native languages. In past generations, their speakers often experienced systematic persecution, and indigenous languages suffered varying degrees of disuse as colonial regimes, nation states, and Christian missionaries applied both coercion and persuasion to compel their speakers to assimilate. Native advocates for indigenous language revitalization, from pioneering Blackfeet scholar Darrell Kipp, to Jessie Little Doe Baird (Wampanoag), to Anton Treuer (Ojibwe) have unanimously documented the power of Indigenous languages to function as linguistic conduits for the unique world views of their peoples.⁶ The work of Indigenous communities to rescue their languages from the brink of extinction has required, by necessity, an intergenerational effort that

⁵The concept of re-contextualizing is borrowed from Leanne Simpson (Missisauga Ojibwe), writer, storyteller, academic, and activist, in her talk “Can Aboriginal Knowledge Survive in the Modern World?” (<http://ww3.tv.org/video/165003/leanne-simpson>), accessed November 14, 2012.

⁶ Darrell Kipp, *Encouragement, Guidance, Insight, and Lessons Learned for Native Language Activists Developing Their Own Tribal Language Programs*, (Piegan Institute, 2000); Anne Makepeace, “We Still Live Here (As Nutayunean)”; *Oshkaabewis Native Journal*.

has resulted in families reconnecting, in lost, misplaced, or forgotten traditions being reclaimed and revitalized, and in traditional places of significance resuming importance in the lives of tribal communities.

The emphasis that indigenous communities place on their oral traditions and the authority they invest in them have often been at odds with the methodologies of professional historians who, generally speaking, operate within a framework of chronological time and have been trained to regard written documents as more reliable sources of information. Language revitalization is inextricably connected to the task of recovering and reinvigorating the oral tradition. The stories, songs, and ceremonies that comprise a tribe's oral tradition encapsulate its world view. They contain and express its source of creation and its beginnings, values, relationships with human and non-human entities, and instructions for living. My study departs from those of professional historians by taking language revitalization seriously both as a topic of study and as a repository of significant primary sources for study. My approach owes much to that of Waziyatawin Angela Wilson's *Remember This!: Dakota Decolonization and the Eli Taylor Narratives*, the first historical work to not only incorporate, but also to rely primarily, on Dakota oral history *in the Dakota language* as a primary source. As a document of Dakota peoples' engagement to revitalize the Dakota language, *Remember This!* conveys the understanding that for Dakota people, their language, as well as

their land, is regarded as a gift from the Creator. The act of using the Dakota language serves its fluent and emerging speakers as a compass, enabling them to access “cultural conceptions, categories, or ways of knowing (that) do not convert easily from Dakota to English.”⁷

Waziyatawin argues that giving primacy to the indigenous oral tradition highlights the colonized relationship that exists between indigenous people and written history and allows that relationship to be more clearly understood. Because the Dakota oral tradition is a primary source often neglected by historians, its active use in constructing history facilitates an understanding of the damage caused by colonizing forces. It emphasizes the perspectives missing from American-generated historical accounts, and strengthens present-day Dakota people in their efforts to recover traditional knowledge. Waziyatawin asserts that elder Eli Taylor’s stories also function as a “decolonizing” agent because they transmit traditional knowledge of Dakota ways and their value. She further emphasizes that because, from a Dakota cultural perspective, historical knowledge is related in the context of relationships developed between storytellers and listeners “and the worldview inherent in the Dakota language,”⁸ historians who wish to research and write about Dakota people, and Native

⁷Waziyatawin Angela Wilson, 10.

⁸Waziyatawin Angela Wilson, 23.

Americans in general, should expand their notion of authoritative sources, and invest the effort to learn indigenous languages.⁹

Dakota aboriginal homeland, dispossession, and the road to war and exile

Although the U.S.-Dakota War has come to define the Dakota in the U.S. public consciousness, Dakota communities have a rich history entirely apart from the devastating era of U.S. colonization. Dakota peoples historically and currently comprise the eastern-most branch of the Oceti Sakowin, or Seven Council Fires, a kinship-based confederation composed of Dakota-, Nakota-and Lakota-speaking peoples.¹⁰ Dakota oral history makes reference to the name Wicanhpi Oyate, or Star People, which speaks to the belief that their spirits “come from the Creator down the Canku Wanagi, the ‘spirit road,’ more commonly known as the Milky Way,” a concept elegantly mirrored by modern physicists as they have theorized the origins of life on Earth.¹¹ Dakota oral accounts further elaborate that the first Dakota people, after arriving from Canku Wanagi, emerged from the earth at Bdode, the confluence of the Minnesota and Mississippi Rivers. These accounts of Dakota origins can be found in the

⁹Wazyatawin Angela Wilson, 24-25.

¹⁰ Angela Townsend EagleWoman, “Wintertime for the Sisseton-Wahpeton Oyate: Over One Hundred Fifty Years of Human Rights Violations by the United States and The Need for a Reconciliation Involving International Indigenous Human Rights Norms,” 39 Wm. Mitchell L. Rev. 486 (2013).

¹¹ Gwen Westerman and Bruce White, eds., *Mni Sota Makoce: The Land of the Dakota* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2012), 18.

writings of both French and American visitors to the area, one hundred years apart.¹²

For millennia, the Dakota inhabited and cared for a land base that includes what is now southwest Minnesota, northern Iowa, and portions of Wisconsin, North and South Dakota. Their aboriginal territory was veined with rivers and lakes, heavily forested, and abundant in fish, game, and plant life. Placing great value on kinship relations, and ordering their society in ways to preserve and enhance their maintenance, the Dakota lived in villages of extended families (tiospaye) that followed seasonal rounds of hunting, fishing, planting, and harvesting both wild and cultivated vegetation. Even more than a source of sustenance, the land was regarded as a relative, Ina Maka (Mother Earth).

Kinship has always been essential to what it means to be Dakota. Ella Deloria (Yankton), who studied anthropology under Franz Boas at Columbia University, summarizes its importance:

Kinship was the all-important matter...By kinship all Dakota people were held together in a great relationship that was theoretically all-inclusive and co-extensive with the Dakota domain...the ultimate aim of Dakota life, stripped of accessories, was quite simple: One must obey kinship rules; one must be a good relative. No Dakota who has participated in that life will dispute that. In the last analysis every other consideration was secondary—property, personal ambition, glory, good times, life itself. Without that aim and the constant struggle to attain it, the people would no longer be Dakotas in truth.¹³

¹²Gwen Westerman and Bruce White, 19.

¹³Ella Deloria, *Speaking of Indians* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1998), 24-25.

Perhaps the most devastating consequence of the U.S.-Dakota War for Dakota people was the shattering of kinship bonds caused by the stresses of colonization. Contemporary Dakota people frequently refer to this loss as a kind of disequilibrium, and attribute many of the social and spiritual ills present in their communities, such as identity confusion, substance abuse, and family violence, to the damage done to their kinship system.¹⁴ Tamara St. John, archivist for the Sisseton Wahpeton Oyate, considers recovering a sense of Dakota identity to be an especially high priority for young people.

One of the most important aspects of studying our Dakota history is identity. So many of our young people really don't know who we are as a people. The impacts of the Dakota War had dispersed us, exiled out of Minnesota and split our families, so many of us need to remember that we are related. All of our families have connections to each other, and some of these things have become forgotten. And our elders remind us every day to remember our kinship ties to reinforce these things.¹⁵

The indigenous homelands, including those of the Dakota, that came to comprise the U.S. were first claimed during the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries as the result of exploratory voyages and the establishment of colonies by England, France, Holland, and Spain, legitimized by the Doctrine of Discovery. Unlike Native peoples who inhabited the Atlantic, Pacific, and

¹⁴Franky Jackson, interview with author, September 26, 2013, (in possession of the author); Teresa Peterson, interview with author, August 19, 2013, (in possession of the author).

¹⁵Tamara St. John, "Dakota Discussions: Exploring the history and consequences of the Dakota War in Dakota Territory," Center for Heritage Renewal, North Dakota State University, October 27, 2013, November 10, 2013 (<http://heritagerenewal.org/dakotawar/>).

Gulf coasts, the Dakota, who lived in the interior of Turtle Island, did not as rapidly encounter the grave challenges of first contact with Europeans. Tribes along the Atlantic Ocean, from north to south, for example, were faced with almost immediate challenges to peaceful co-existence with various groups of Europeans in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, as the Europeans physically encroached indigenous lands, and sought to establish colonies of settlement, imposing their own legal constructs to acquire them.¹⁶

The French were the first to enter Dakota country in the early decades of the eighteenth century. The French colonists established a government post along the Mississippi River in 1727, “involv[ing] a military officer and franchised traders.” They also established a trading company, but its field of operations was sharply circumscribed. It could only trade with Dakota, and only at designated sites. “Trading was supposed to take place only at the post, not in the Dakota hunting grounds.”¹⁷ For the next several decades, the French engaged in diplomacy with indigenous tribes in the Great Lakes region. They monitored warfare between Indian peoples and inserted themselves to construct or unravel alliances intended to enhance French advantage in the lucrative trade in furs, exchanging iron implements, cloth, weaponry, and other goods for animal pelts. In 1671, the French, adhering to the Doctrine of Discovery, ceremoniously “took

¹⁶ Stuart Banner, *How the Indians Lost Their Land: Law and Power on the Frontier* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2005), 10-84.

¹⁷Gwen Westerman and Bruce White, 62.

possession” of the western Great Lakes region for the King, inviting “representatives of fourteen nations (adding) pictographic signatures to the document,” a *prise de possession*, which represented the Doctrine of Discovery; no Dakota are reported to have signed it.¹⁸ The French defeat by the British in the French and Indian War and their agreement, under the 1763 Treaty of Paris, to relinquish all territories in mainland North America resulted in the decline of their political and economic influence in the region. What followed was a brief period characterized by both stable trading and political transition, as the American republic established itself and consolidated its power. The fledgling American republic later acquired additional lands through nearly a century of coercive treaty-making that, although nominally acknowledging the sovereign status of Indian “nations,” also managed to violate nearly every recognized protocol of diplomacy practiced between the United States and European nations.¹⁹

It is commonly assumed that the Dakota first ceded land to the United States in 1805. The treaty-signing process that resulted in the U.S. acquisition of 100,000 acres upon which Fort Snelling was erected remains shrouded in controversy. Martin Case of the Indian Treaty Signer Project asserts, “On

¹⁸Gwen Westerman and Bruce White, 40.

¹⁹ Donna Akers, “Decolonizing the Master Narrative: Treaties and Other American Myths,” Academia.edu, (http://www.academia.edu/1473177/Decolonizing_the_Master_Narrative_Treaties_and_Other_American_Myths_2).

September 23, 1805, Zebulon Pike did meet with a party of about 150 Dakota people. He did request a land cession of 100,000 acres on which to build a fort, and cajoled two Dakota leaders into signing a piece of paper to that effect.”²⁰ Yet Kappler’s 1904 compilation of Indian treaties states, “This treaty does not appear among those printed in the United States Statutes at Large... An examination of the records of the State Department fails to indicate any subsequent action by the President in proclaiming the ratification of this treaty; but more than twenty-five years subsequent to its approval by the Senate the correspondence of the War Department speaks of the cessions of land described therein as an accomplished fact.”²¹ These inconsistencies call into question the validity of the negotiation process from both the Dakota and the American standpoint.

Under the Treaty of 1837, the Mdewakanton Dakota relinquished all their lands east of the Mississippi River. Fourteen years later, the Mdewakanton and the Wahpekute, and the Sisseton and Wahpeton, under the 1851 Treaties of Mendota and Traverse des Sioux, respectively, were dispossessed of a tract of land “larger than the state of New York,” according to Indian Affairs Commissioners Alexander Ramsey and Luke Lea. The four Dakota communities

²⁰ Martin W. Case, “‘Pike’s treaty’-One Bdode area myth,” Bdode Memory Map: Dakota homeland in the Minneapolis-St. Paul area (<http://bdote.wordpress.com/2010/03/14/pike-treaty-the-bdote-area-myth/>), accessed April 26, 2014.

²¹ Treaty with the Sioux, 1805, (<http://digital.library.okstate.edu/kappler/vol2/treaties/sio1031.htm>).

ceded a total of 24 million acres of land in what is now the state of Minnesota in exchange for the U.S. promise to pay \$1,665,000 in cash and annuities—roughly three cents per acre. White settlers, including new immigrants from Germany and Scandinavia, were charged \$1.25 per acre by the U.S. government. The government created two reservations for the Dakota, each 10 miles wide and 70 miles long, situated alongside the Minnesota River on its north and south sides.²²

Eric Kades argues in “The Dark Side of Efficiency: *Johnson v. M’Intosh* and the Expropriation of Indian Lands” that one U.S. government strategy to devalue indigenous lands was to utilize settlement to clear land, thin game, and increase competition for resources, with the expectation that Native peoples would be compelled to sell land cheaply and leave territories desired by whites.²³ The 1851 land cessions in Minnesota unleashed a flood of white settlement in Dakota lands, making reservation existence even more difficult. The 1851 treaties stipulated that the Dakota held title to the reservation lands flanking the Minnesota River “at the President’s pleasure.”²⁴ Without permanent title to the land, they were vulnerable to the schemes of politicians and land speculators (often one and the same) who stood to make fortunes from the sale of fertile Minnesota River valley land to thousands of settlers. Minnesota

²² Gary Clayton Anderson, *Kinsmen of Another Kind: Dakota-White Relations in the Upper Mississippi River Valley, 1650-1862* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press), 177-190.

²³ Eric Kades, “The Dark Side of Efficiency: *Johnson v. M’Intosh* and the Expropriation of American Indian Lands,” *University of Pennsylvania Law Review* 148, No. 4 (Apr. 2000).

²⁴ Mary Lethert Wingerd, *North Country: The Making of Minnesota* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), 274.

politicians inflated the number of Dakota people who had traded the hunting life to become farmers, and vigorously advocated for a new treaty requiring the Dakota to relinquish half of their reservation.²⁵ In 1858, as Minnesota became a state, a delegation of Dakota leaders travelled to Washington to discuss their annuities from previous treaties. They found that they had actually been summoned to sign a new treaty ceding the northern half of their reservation. Remaining reservation land “was to be allotted to individual Dakota families, who were to subsist on annuity payments and farming,” and from the proceeds “up to \$140,000 could be used to pay the Dakota people’s ‘just debts’” to traders.²⁶

By the early summer of 1862, as the United States was in the midst of the Civil War, the Dakota people were waging their own battle to retain their sovereignty in much the same way that the United States was defending itself against Confederate claims of sovereignty. Among the Dakota, kinship bonds had already been strained nearly to the breaking point because of the preferential treatment shown to the “improvement” Indians— those Dakota people who took up farming, cut their hair, adopted white dress, culture, and Christianity.²⁷ Crop failures that year produced hunger, white settlement caused a scarcity of game,

²⁵ Mary Lethert Wingerd, 274-275.

²⁶ Treaties Matter
(<http://www.treatiesmatter.org/treaties/land/1858-Dakota>).

²⁷ Gary Clayton Anderson, 255-260; Kenneth Carley, ed., “As Red Men Viewed It: Three Indian Accounts of the Uprising,” *Minnesota History* 38:3, 129-133.

and rumors circulated that the federal government would delay making annuity payments to the Dakota. Further breaching the terms of the 1851 treaties, federal authorities did not deliver rations as promised, and the agents at both the Upper Sioux and Lower Sioux agencies refused to distribute the remaining food kept in the agency storehouses until the annuity payments arrived. Local traders began to withhold credit from Dakota people. On August 17, four young men, returning empty-handed from a hunting expedition in the Big Woods, came across a nest of hen's eggs in the fence of a white settler. An argument about whether to take the eggs led to a dare—who was brave enough to kill a white man? One of the young men took up the dare, killing the settler and several of his family members. The young men rushed back to the reservation to tell their elders. Little Crow—Ta-oyate-duta—reluctantly decided to go to war, predicting that, in either case, all Dakota would be made to pay for the deaths of the white settlers.

The U.S.-Dakota War, described by historian Alvin Josephy, Jr. as one of the Civil War's western fronts, was not an isolated incident, but an unsettling extension of the Union Army's war with the Confederacy, and the United States' expansionist zeal.²⁸ It was fought by Dakota tribes in resistance to mounting grievances: the loss of aboriginal homeland; violations of the treaties they signed

²⁸Alvin M. Josephy, Jr., *The Civil War in the American West* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1991), xii-xiii.

with the United States; fraudulently acquisitive accounting practices of traders; starvation; and the pervasive threat to their way of life. This war marked the beginning of what we recognize as the Indian Wars that ended with the massacre of Lakota men, women, and children at Wounded Knee in 1890, and although less well-known, resulted in more bloodshed than any of the other Indian Wars. It culminated in the Dakotas' military defeat by an expedition of American soldiers and Dakota scouts commanded by General Henry Sibley, former fur trader, businessman-turned-politician, and acknowledged relative of a Dakota family.²⁹ On September 28, 1862, two days after Dakota warriors surrendered at Camp Release, Sibley established a commission of military officers to try Dakota men accused of participating in the war. On November 5, the commission completed its work.³⁰ 392 prisoners were tried, 303 were sentenced to death, and 16 were given prison terms. President Lincoln examined the trial transcripts of all 303 and commuted the sentences of all but 39 prisoners for fear that other Indian uprisings would occur.³¹

The day before the condemned men were moved to prison camp in Mankato, Minnesota, about 1,700 women, children, and elders were force-marched in late 1862 from their villages flanking the Minnesota River to Fort

²⁹William Porter Shortridge, "Henry Hastings Sibley and the Minnesota Frontier," *Minnesota History Magazine* 3, No. 3 (1919), 115-125.

³⁰Minnesota Historical Society, "The U.S.-Dakota War of 1862" (<http://www.usdakotawar.org/history/war-aftermath/trials-hanging>).

³¹Minnesota Historical Society, "U.S.-Dakota War of 1862," (<http://www.usdakotawar.org/history/aftermath>).

Snelling, the American military fortress built at Bdode, the Dakota place of origin, where the Mississippi and Minnesota Rivers meet, and detained through the winter under conditions of extreme stress and deprivation. On December 26, 1862, only days before Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation, 38 Dakota men were hung in Mankato in the largest mass execution in American history. The survivors were banished from Minnesota by Governor Alexander Ramsey's proclamation that Dakota people should either be exterminated or forever driven beyond the state's borders and subsequent legislation that abrogated all treaties with Dakota bands.³² They were then shipped by steamboat down the Mississippi River and up the Missouri River to a reservation created on the arid plains of Crow Creek in Dakota Territory.

It is important to note here that Dakota communities were far from unanimous in their decision to go to war to clear their homeland of white settlers. They had to make complicated decisions about how best to survive what must have seemed like an endless descent of land-hungry strangers with demanding ways into their midst. Moreover, significant numbers of Dakota people held kinship ties to European Americans via marriages and children. Given the primacy of the Dakota value to be a good relative, this made for incredibly complicated terrain.³³ No matter what position they had chosen to

³² "Message of Governor Ramsey to the Legislature of Minnesota," September 9, 1862 ([http: archive.leg.state.mn.us/docs/NonMNpub/oclc18189672.pdf](http://archive.leg.state.mn.us/docs/NonMNpub/oclc18189672.pdf)).

³³ Gary Clayton Anderson, 261-274.

take during wartime, all Dakota people were expelled from the state, creating a Dakota diaspora of refugees into Dakota Territory, Nebraska, Iowa, Montana, and Saskatchewan and Manitoba, Canada, in which the loss of aboriginal territory was compounded by relentless pressure to relinquish existence as a people.

“The bloody re-mapping of Dakota life” created a complicated legacy for the roughly 4,000 Dakota people in Minnesota who comprise four federally-recognized communities and one non-federally-recognized community, only about eight of whose members are fluent native speakers of the Dakota language.³⁴ Today, Dakota leaders and activists confront the brutal consequences of systemic oppression and federal assimilation policies, including violence, substance abuse, alcoholism, and dropout, suicide, and incarceration rates. As one Dakota historical site described, “The language, deemed wrong and illegal, was not encouraged for four generations.”³⁵

During the U.S.-Dakota War’s sesquicentennial year, the voices and perspectives of Dakota people publicly and prominently amplified the war’s historical significance for their communities. Dakota elders, scholars, language teachers and advocates, artists and other community members consistently located the reasons for the war in the U.S. government’s failure, dating from

³⁴ Dakota Wicohan
(<http://dakotawicohan.com/about/history>).

³⁵ Dakota Wicohan
(<http://dakotawicohan.com/about/history>).

1837, to honor its agreements with Dakota tribes, the corrupt trading system that sought to profit, with government cooperation, from Indian annuities, and the starvation and social dislocation brought about by the government's campaign to "civilize" the Dakota. They emphasized both the multi-generational impact of their loss of connection to homeland, but even more so, the survival and resurgence of their culture. These emphases marked important shifts in historical interpretation. By emphasizing the knowledge frameworks embedded in Dakota language, culture, and historical writing, such shifts in interpretation challenge commonplace understandings of historical events that have ignored the settler colonial legacy of the United States.

The renewed interest in cultural and language revitalization within Dakota communities over the last three decades can be attributed to a number of historical factors. First, communities began to acknowledge that elders were dying, taking irreplaceable cultural knowledge with them.³⁶ Second, Dakota tribes and communities had achieved a critical mass of college-educated young adults who had become active in tribal governance, education, and social services. Some of these individuals came of age during the Red Power movement of the late 1960s-1970s, or were influenced by it, secondhand. Armed, increasingly, with professional and advanced degrees, and knowledgeable about their tribal histories and U.S. Indian policy, this generation

³⁶ Terry Janis, conversation with author, November 2012.

simultaneously looked to their elders and ancestors for traditional knowledge and healing, and were also capable of using modern legal, legislative, and educational instruments to advance their peoples' well-being. Understanding these phenomena further requires that we revisit the decades of the 1940s and 1950s. During those years, Indian people, across tribes, responded to a confluence of events and processes: reversals in U.S. Indian policy, shifts in the American economy, and developments in international affairs. These experiences contributed to Native peoples' reappraisals of American society and what it had to offer, as well as their re-evaluations of tribal traditions and histories.

Rebound from allotment: Gathering strength and perspective

Beginning during the 1930s, the federal government launched policies that set the stage for changes in the social and economic standing of the Dakota. These reforms were called the "Indian New Deal," the broad suite of reforms in Indian policy inaugurated by John Collier, Commissioner of Indian Affairs under Franklin Delano Roosevelt from 1933 to 1945. Collier's earlier professional life as a social worker among European immigrant communities prompted his concern that the rise of individualism had eroded a sense of community in American life. Collier and others in his intellectual circle were influenced by "the growing academic interest in the notion of 'cultural

pluralism' as a plausible alternative to the assimilation of America's ethnic groups."³⁷ Prior to his appointment as Commissioner of Indian Affairs, Collier actively assisted Taos Indians in New Mexico during the 1920s in resisting encroachments on their ancestral lands and state legislation that banned their ceremonial dances. Firsthand involvement with Taos community life also led him to conclude that the communal and land-based ethos of American Indian tribal societies had much to teach mainstream American society.³⁸

Collier's reform package represented a reversal of the fifty previous years of U.S. Indian policy predicated on the "extinction" of the "Indian race," and a corresponding intention to totally assimilate Indian tribes by removing them from their lands (many of which were desired by whites), containing them on reservations, breaking up the tribal estate by allotment,³⁹ coercive schooling, and the banning of indigenous languages and religious practices. The preamble to the Wheeler-Howard Act of 1934, more commonly referred to as the Indian Reorganization Act, seems to implicitly call into question the status of Indian tribes as wards of the federal government: "An Act to conserve and develop Indian lands and resources; to extend to Indians the right to form business and other organizations; to establish a credit system for Indians; to grant certain

³⁷Stephen Cornell, "The New Indian Politics," *The Wilson Quarterly* 10 (1976-), No. 1 (New Year's 1986), 116.

³⁸Thomas W. Cowger, *The National Congress of American Indians: The Founding Years* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1999), 20.

³⁹Allotment refers to the division of tribal lands held in common among individual tribal members.

rights of home rule to Indians; to provide for vocational education for Indians; and for other purposes.”⁴⁰

Central to the IRA reforms was the official end to allotment: “On and after June 18, 1934, no land of any Indian reservation, created or set apart by treaty or agreement with the Indians, Act of Congress, Executive order, purchase, or otherwise, shall be allotted in severalty to any Indian.”⁴¹ The end of allotment was a critical aspect of the legislation, and a tacit recognition that Indian dispossession by white settlement was the bedrock of the so-called “Indian problem.” In his 1934 report to the Secretary of the Interior, Collier wrote, “Congress and the President recognized that the cumulative loss of land brought about by the allotment system, a loss reaching 90,000,000 acres—two-thirds of the land heritage of the Indian race in 1887—had robbed the Indians in large part of the necessary basis for self-support.”⁴² The proponents of the General Allotment Act, often referred to as the Dawes Severalty Act or Dawes Act because of its authorship by Senator Henry Dawes, sought to end conflict with Indian peoples by forcing them into white American modes of relationship to land, property and gender relations, and agriculture. As men and women

⁴⁰ Charles J. Kappler, ed., *Indian Affairs, Laws and Treaties, Public Acts of the Seventy-Third Congress, Second Session, 1934, Chapter 576, June 18, 1934. [S. 3645.] 48 Stat. 984* (http://digital.library.okstate.edu/kappler/Vol5/html_files/v5p0378.html).

⁴¹ June 18, 1934, ch. 576, §1, 48 Stat. 984.

(<http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/USCODE-2011-title25/html/USCODE-2011-title25-chap14-subchapV.htm>).

⁴² *Annual Report of the Secretary of the Interior, 1934-1937, 79* (<https://archive.org/details/annualreportofse34unit>).

reformers of their time who were convinced of the superiority of Christian “civilization” and committed to its spread, they were neither prepared for the resilience of indigenous practices and beliefs, nor politically willing to oppose the competitiveness, materialism, and sense of cultural superiority that compelled Euro-American elites and common citizens alike to grasp every possible opportunity to part Indians from their land, including reservation landholdings.

The second critical reform introduced by the IRA acknowledged Indian tribes as self-governing, if not fully sovereign, entities that possessed inherent rights to organize structures of governance and engage in government-to-government relationships. It affirmed the right of Indian tribes to organize their own governments, adopt constitutions and bylaws, subject to ratification by a majority of the adult members of the tribe. Although the Secretary of the Interior held the authority to approve such constitutions, as well as amendments to them, this aspect of the IRA represented a decisive reversal of federal Indian policy. Congress’s 1871 ruling ending the practice of negotiating treaties with Indian tribes had ushered in an era of unilateral decision-making for tribes by the Department of the Interior and the Bureau of Indian Affairs. The IRA increased the power of Indian tribes by authorizing the creation of tribal governments, establishing their rights to employ legal counsel and to negotiate with Federal, state, and local governments, and holding them responsible for securing the

consent of their tribes before lands could be sold, leased, or otherwise disposed of.⁴³

Despite the Dakota Removal Act of 1863, some of the Dakota who had opposed the war with the U.S. and actively aided white settlers remained in Minnesota under the protection of a handful of sympathetic Americans. When the U.S. government abrogated treaties with all four Dakota bands in 1863 and expelled them from Minnesota, Congress, during that same year, authorized the Department of the Interior to allocate 80 acres of land to each Dakota “loyalist.”⁴⁴ Other Dakota people began to trickle back to Minnesota less than twenty-five years after their expulsion from the state. “A survivor of the 1862 Minnesota Uprising reported in her interview the following: ‘We were driven out of Minnesota wholesale, though the majority of our people were innocent. But we could not stay away so we managed to find our way back, because our makapahas were here.’ The term means earth-hills and is the Santee idiom for graves.”⁴⁵

In 1886, the federal government was purchased 120 acres at Prairie Island for the landless Mdewakanton residing in Minnesota on May 20.⁴⁶ As

⁴³Wheeler-Howard Act, June 18, 1934
(<http://www.uintahbasintah.org/papers/indianreorganizationact.pdf>).

⁴⁴ Minnesota Indian Affairs Council
(http://mn.gov/indianaffairs/tribes_lowersioux.html).

⁴⁵ Gwen Westerman and Bruce White, 207.

⁴⁶ Indian Affairs Council, State of Minnesota,
(http://mn.gov/indianaffairs/tribes_prairieisland.html).

Dakota people began returning to areas on or near their original reservation in Minnesota, the Department of the Interior established a pattern of purchasing small tracts of land for their use. In 1883, census records indicated the presence of one Mdewakanton family in Redwood County, now the seat of the Lower Sioux Indian Community. By 1936, census records reported “20 Mdewakanton families, 18 families from Flandreau, South Dakota, and one Sisseton, South Dakota, family.”⁴⁷ Amos Owen (Prairie Island Mdewakanton Dakota), former tribal chairman of the Prairie Island Indian Community in Minnesota, recalled that most of the Dakota living on the small reservations created in Minnesota voted in referenda to accept the Indian Reorganization Act. “Prairie Island was one of the first to go under it. We thought it was a good way for the American Indians to be self-supporting, and to be able to get a little more land and be able to farm the land that they have. The Wheeler-Howard Act bought up I think, 300 or 380 acres of land out here. My brother and I, we were some of the ones that went into farming in 1938. We farmed until all of us left for World War II.”⁴⁸ Collier’s overarching intention in advocating for the Indian Reorganization Act was to support Indian tribes in breaking out of the demoralization and impoverishment engendered by the Dawes Act. In theory, ending allotment would help restore economic and physical well-being in Indian communities by

⁴⁷Indian Affairs Council, State of Minnesota, (http://mn.gov/indianaaffairs/tribes_lowersioux.html).

⁴⁸Joseph H. Cash and Herbert Hoover, ed., *To Be an Indian: An Oral History* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2004), 140.

providing the means for self-sufficiency. Likewise, encouraging the establishment of tribal governments had been aimed at undermining the dominance that many Bureau of Indian Affairs agents imperiously held over reservation life. Collier's third reform, expressed administratively to BIA agents in Circular 2970, addressed the suppression of Indian language, culture, and by extension, religion: "No interference with Indian life or expression will hereafter be tolerated. The cultural history of Indians is in all respects to be considered equal to that of any non-Indian group. And it is desirable that Indians be bilingual—fluent and literate in the English language, and fluent in their vital, beautiful, and efficient native languages."⁴⁹

The Indian New Deal attracted criticism and opposition, including from significant numbers of Indian tribes. In his study of the National Congress of American Indians, Thomas Cowger notes that sixty percent of the Indians in referenda on the IRA rejected the adoption of constitutions and the formation of tribal councils.⁵⁰ Cowger is one of several historians who concluded that Indian resistance to the IRA resulted from many years of negative experience with Federal Indian policy, including scores of broken commitments. He also noted that some Indian people feared that the IRA would force them to live in a segregated social order, while others, who had assimilated, worried that they

⁴⁹ Annual Report of the Secretary of the Interior, 1934-1937, 90 (<https://archive.org/details/annualreportofse34unit>).

⁵⁰ Thomas W. Cowger, 21.

would be “returned to the blanket” or forced to relinquish their individual property. Other historians have pointed to conservative elements in Indian society, particularly those from Oklahoma, who, foreshadowing the tone of the late 1940s and 1950s, raised the specter of communism in response to Collier’s commitment to tribal revitalization. Others characterized Collier’s behavior and policies as paternalistic, and noted that the IRA called for the creation of Western-style democratic structures and processes that were inconsistent with Native governance structures and processes, most of which traditionally relied on consensus and the consultation of acknowledged tribal elders and knowledge-holders.

These shortcomings, however, should not eclipse the successes of the IRA in empowering Native peoples to recover some of their land base, organize themselves to take greater control of their tribal affairs, and live as tribal people with less interference and persecution. Moreover, the Indian New Deal created a space in which Native languages stood a greater chance of survival than they did under the aggressively assimilationist period that preceded it, and Indian young people could at least hear, if not fluently speak, their languages under less threat of repression and persecution. Finally, the ability to create tribal governments meant that tribes could now exercise a greater degree of decision-making. Their ability to employ legal counsel and negotiate with various levels of government meant they could challenge unjust laws, advocate for legislation that would

benefit them, negotiate for the fair allocation of resources, and exercise greater control over the resources they possessed. Most importantly, they could decide what the needs of their communities were, and how best to meet them.

World War II was another watershed event, even for Indian tribes, that made conditions ripe for language revitalization, ironically, by giving them more exposure to people of various regional and ancestral backgrounds. Native peoples registered for the military draft and participated in warfare in disproportionately higher numbers than any other group within American society. They distinguished themselves in combat and military intelligence. Those who left their reservation communities for military service were rapidly immersed in American communities, institutions, and traditions, and for the first time rubbed shoulders with regularity not only with white and black Americans, but with Native people from other tribes.⁵¹

⁵¹Native Americans had also participated in the First World War in remarkable numbers; however, the aggressively assimilationist imprint of the General Allotment Act era prevented them from leveraging their wartime sacrifices to improve tribal well-being. As part of the drive to eradicate Indian nations, the Dawes Act promised American citizenship to Indians who took allotments under this legislation. The 1924 Indian Citizenship Act granted U.S. citizenship to all American Indians and authorized the Secretary of the Interior to issue certificates of citizenship to them. It “provided that the granting of such citizenship shall not in any manner impair or otherwise affect the right of any Indian to tribal or other property,”⁵¹ and although this universal declaration of citizenship for all Indians born within the United States did not attempt to sever them from tribal property, it was part of a final push to assimilate Native peoples. Citizenship did not guarantee Indians the right to vote, as state laws governed voting rights, but it did, however, subject them to the military draft. See Document for June 2nd: "Act of June 2, 1924, ... which authorized the Secretary of the Interior to issue certificates of citizenship to Indians."(<http://www.archives.gov/historical-docs/todays-doc/?dod-date=602>).

The Dakota and other Indian peoples were motivated to fight as much out of an attachment to and reverence for their ancestral lands as for patriotic feelings toward the United States. In a seeming paradox, their participation in the war later contributed to their interest in revitalizing Dakota language and culture. Many historians focus on Indian peoples' affirmative response to the U.S. government's calls for national unity and the importance of defending "democratic ideals." Such interpretations tend to attribute the participation of Indians in the war exclusively to patriotic feelings towards the U.S. and an indication that Indians were well on their way to being assimilated. These viewpoints, however, miss the complexity of Indian peoples' relationship with the larger society. First, there is scant mention of the deeply emotional connection most Indian people had, and continue to have, with their ancestral homelands. Such an understanding might lead us to read something more from the groundswell of participation noted in John Collier's observation that "in 70 percent of all the reservations the number of Indians volunteering through enlistment or their National Guard has exceeded the number drafted."⁵² Perhaps Native peoples' sense of loyalty to the United States was not easily separated from their sense of attachment and responsibility to their ancestral homelands. The disproportionately high numbers of American Indian people who served in the war are often attributed to the importance of the warrior tradition in tribal

⁵² *Report of the Secretary of the Interior 1941-1944*, Office of Indian Affairs, 410.

societies. Franky Jackson (Sisseton Wahpeton), director of the Renville County Historical Society in Minnesota reflects, “The Dakota fought in the War of 1812 on the side of another power, so this isn’t something new to us. World War II followed the beginning of the reservation period, and coupled with national issues of the Depression and the economy, when you talk to older vets, they’ll tell you, ‘We did it as a means to survive.’ It allowed them to feed their families, and also to continue traditional society roles as warriors. You can compare U.S. military veterans to the akicita society role.”⁵³

Among the Iroquois, the war provided an opportunity to redefine the terms of their engagement by reminding the U.S. government of their sovereign status. In June 1942, the Iroquois Six Nations Confederacy drafted a formal declaration of war against the Axis powers:

We represent the oldest, though smallest, democracy in the world today. It is the unanimous sentiment among Indian people that the atrocities of the Axis nations are violently repulsive to all sense of righteousness of our people, and that this merciless slaughter of mankind can no longer be tolerated. Now we do resolve that it is the sentiment of this council that the Six Nations of Indians declare that a state of war exists between our Confederacy of Six Nations on the one part and Germany, Italy, Japan and their allies against whom the United States has declared war, on the other part.”⁵⁴

⁵³Franky Jackson, interview with author, December 5, 2013 (in possession of the author).

⁵⁴James William Chichetto, “The Iroquois Declaration of War on Germany, 1942,” *Combat: The Literary Expression of Battlefield Touchstones*.
[http://www.combat.ws/S3/BAKISSUE/CMBT04N4/IROQUOIS.HTM#\[1\]](http://www.combat.ws/S3/BAKISSUE/CMBT04N4/IROQUOIS.HTM#[1])[http://www.combat.ws/S3/BAKISSUE/CMBT04N4/IROQUOIS.HTM#\[1\]](http://www.combat.ws/S3/BAKISSUE/CMBT04N4/IROQUOIS.HTM#[1]), accessed April 26, 2014.

At the time of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, there were 5,000 Native Americans in the armed forces. One month later, in January 1942, Selective Service officials reported that 99 percent of all eligible American Indians had registered for the draft. That same month, 50,000 Navajos attended their tribal council's special convention to dramatize its support for the war effort. The growth of the defense industry and defense-related jobs also contributed to the migration of more than 46,000 Indian people from their reservations, most of which suffered from depressed economies, to urban centers throughout the United States.⁵⁵ In his article "The Indian in a Wartime Nation," Collier commented, "skilled Indian workers are to be found scattered throughout important war industries in almost every section of the country. They are doing highly technical jobs in aircraft industries on the west coast, in Kansas, and in New York State. They are to be found among the crews constructing bases in far-flung parts of the world."⁵⁶

By the end of World War II, Native Americans had collectively experienced a series of dramatic changes to their ways of life. Cornell recounts that, "in what the Interior Department described at the time as 'the greatest exodus of Indians from reservations that has ever taken place,' some 25,000 Indians joined the armed forces and saw action in Europe and the Pacific. Some

⁵⁵California Indian Education, Native American Veterans, Pearl Harbor (http://www.californiaindianeducation.org/native_american_veterans/pearl_harbor/).

⁵⁶ John Collier, "The Indian in a Wartime Nation," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 223, Minority Peoples in a Nation at War (Sep., 1942), 31.

40,000 quit the economic desert of the reservations for jobs in war industries.”⁵⁷

Indian military veterans began to pursue higher education opportunities newly available under the G.I. Bill. In each of these new environments, Native people from diverse tribes began to associate with each other, and discovered common experiences and world views.

The “Termination Era” and the renewal of traditional culture

The end of the war was accompanied by economic retrenchment and political conservatism on a national scale, soil in which criticism of the IRA rapidly germinated. The Cold War with Russia generated pressures for national unity and cultural homogeneity that bred discomfort with Indians’ insistence on tribal identities. Reservation and tribal life began to be characterized by some as “communitistic” because of tribes’ communal property ownership and governance structures that often appeared different from American political forms. Congress decreased its appropriations for Bureau of Indian Affairs programs established under the IRA and Collier’s oversight, thus reducing program effectiveness. Collier resigned from his post as Commissioner of Indian Affairs in 1945, leaving a vacuum in a key position of leadership and advocacy. Furthermore, the congressmen who held positions on committees relevant to Indian affairs had substantial ties to interests advocating for development of Indian land and

⁵⁷ Stephen Cornell, “The New Indian Politics,” *The Wilson Quarterly* (1976-)10, No. 1 (New Year’s 1986), 117.

resources, and postwar economic growth had fueled a demand for both.⁵⁸ The combination of these factors led Congress to distance itself from and eventually abandon its support for the IRA. It returned to advancing a vigorously assimilationist policy agenda for Indian tribes, characterized as “termination.”

Termination referred, in the first place, to Congress’s termination of its federal obligations to tribes. The notion of such obligations began with the Indian Trade and Intercourse Act of 1790, in which the Federal government was designated as the sole authority to regulate trade and other relationships with Indian sovereigns, and was further elaborated by the Marshal Trilogy,⁵⁹ three seminal Supreme Court cases that articulated and encoded into law the relationship between the United States and Indian nations.⁶⁰

Certain federal obligations originated from treaties signed with Indian tribes; as contractual agreements, treaties involved processes of negotiation in which Native tribes ceded land to the U.S. in exchange for its agreement to

⁵⁸Michael C. Walsh, “Terminating the Termination Policy,” *Stanford Law Review* 35, No. 6 (Jul. 1983), 1185.

⁵⁹Jamie Ford, conversation with author, February 20, 2014.

⁶⁰*Johnson v. McIntosh* (1823) found that Indians have the right of occupancy to their land, but not the right of ownership, and only the U.S. government (the “discovering nation,” a reference to the Doctrine of Discovery) has the right to settle their claims to land. As a result, Indians could sell land only to the federal government, not to individuals. *Cherokee Nation v. Georgia* (1831) found that the Cherokee, and other Indian nations are not “foreign nations,” but “domestic, dependent nations” whose relationship to the United States is that of “a ward to a guardian.” Though tribal sovereignty is inherent, that is, it pre-dates the United States, it is limited because tribes exist within the boundaries of the United States. Finally, *Worcester v. Georgia* (1832) found that Indian tribes constitute distinct nations, and within their own territory, their own laws apply. Reiterating Federal power over Indian affairs, *Worcester v. Georgia* found that states may not exercise their authority within the borders of tribal territory.

provide for the tribe's needs going forward—reserved land, food, agricultural implements, livestock, seeds, building materials, education, technical assistance, and cash payments. Other obligations, the federal trust responsibility, in particular, emerge from the Marshall Trilogy, and it was greatly expanded under the Dawes Act, when allotted land was required to be held in trust for individual Indians for a period of twenty-five years.⁶¹ Because of the guardian-ward relationship, and the fact that land cessions removed much of the basis of Native self-sufficiency, the federal government assumed the obligation and responsibility to protect Indian lands and resources and provide essential services to Indian people.⁶²

Termination of Congress's federal obligations to tribes was expressed through its effort to terminate the status of tribes as distinct political entities. In 1953, Congress passed House Concurrent Resolution 108 (HCR 108), introduced by Utah Senator Arthur Watkins. Declaring Congress's policy to "as rapidly as possible, to make the Indians within the territorial limits of the United States subject to the same laws and entitled to the same privileges and responsibilities as are applicable to other citizens of the United States, to end their status as wards of the United States, and to grant them all of the rights and prerogatives pertaining to American citizenship," HCR 108 legislated that Indian

⁶¹ Jamie Ford, conversation with author, February 20, 2014.

⁶² Federal Indian Law for Alaska Tribes, TM 112 Course Materials, (<http://tm112.community.uaf.edu/unit-1/marshall-trilogy-1823-1832/>).

tribes “should be freed from Federal supervision and control and from all disabilities and limitations specially applicable to Indians.”⁶³ Although the termination of tribal status was supposed to be determined on a tribe-by-tribe basis, HCR 108 identified several specific states whose tribes were to be terminated, and a group of specific tribes, such as the Menominee in Wisconsin and the Klamath in Oregon, whose economic prosperity was viewed as sufficient preparation for removing them from the supervision of the BIA.

Although comparatively prosperous, neither the Menominee nor the Klamath was prepared for the economic impact of the state and local tax burdens, post-termination, or for the erosion in quality of life that resulted from the BIA’s withdrawal of the housing, education, and healthcare services that their treaties with the U.S. had provided for. Facing dwindling resources, including the sale of trust land by the federal government, and the loss of self-sufficiency, many tribal members slid into unemployment, then poverty, and were left with no choice but to apply for welfare. Among the Klamath alone, the psychological and social damage produced by the loss of self-sufficiency and identity contributed to a 40% alcohol-related death rate between 1966 and 1980.⁶⁴

⁶³ Concurrent Resolution of the Eighty Third Congress, First Session, 1953, Indians, August 1, 1953 (H. Con. Res. 108) 67 Stat. B122.

(http://digital.library.okstate.edu/kappler/vol6/html_files/v6p0614.html)

⁶⁴ “The Economic Viability of the Klamath Tribes,” *Justice Newsletter*, Summer 1997, Native American Rights Fund (NARF)

(<http://www.narf.org/pubs/justice/1997summer.html>).

Relocating tribal members from their reservations in rural areas to major cities such as Chicago, Denver, Los Angeles, Oklahoma City, and Seattle became the other face of termination policy. Although significant numbers of Indian people had begun voluntarily moving from the reservation to urban areas to find work during the war years, relocation was a more systematic and aggressive campaign with rapid assimilation as its goal. For many Dakota people, relocation experiences of separation from family and community only compounded the emotions of alienation and isolation that were the intergenerational legacy of exile from Minnesota. These experiences sometimes led to conflicting messages given to children, such as the ones Teresa Peterson received from her mother.

I feel like I kind of got conflicting messages, and I think it's because of her relocation thing and feeling like she needed to assimilate, but not, you know, really wanting to lose her whole identity. I grew up with my mother telling me to marry Dakota, which I did, but she also said "Stay away from the reservation," which I didn't. (laughter)⁶⁵

An unintended consequence of the relocation era was the fierce resolve of some members of the relocation generation to embrace their traditional culture and intentionally build family ties. Franky Jackson and his sisters were sent each summer to spend a month with his maternal grandmother on the Sisseton Wahpeton reservation in Lake Traverse, South Dakota.

⁶⁵ Teresa Peterson, interview with author, August 19, 2013 (in possession of the author).

My mother is part of the relocation program and forced boarding school era. No matter where we lived, whether it was in Germany, whether it was in Denver, or Fort Polk, Louisiana, my mother always maintained a certain level of cultural identity for us as Dakota people. And that meant keeping us connected to our relatives and to reservation life. So growing up, I remember flying back to the United States on a plane, just me and my sisters. My mother sent us home every Fourth of July, and we spent the entire month of July in South Dakota. And significant meaning behind that: our tribe has the oldest powwow in the nation-I think it's 150 or 60 years old or something like that, close to 150 now, I think- but we would always come home for the powwow, we would always come home and stay with Kungsi, my mother's mom. That was one way my mother always maintained that connection between who we are as Dakota people and our kinship ties and responsibilities to our relatives on the reservation.⁶⁶

For many Dakota people, however, particularly in Minnesota, the ultimate goals of termination and relocation—assimilation—had weighed on them for generations. Stanley Crooks, tribal chairman, now deceased, of the Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux Community, observed that “for generations after the war, the Dakota people basically ‘kept their heads down,’ especially if they came back to Minnesota. ‘For my first 30 to 40 years, I was right on the track of assimilation. I didn’t deal with the language, the culture, and ceremonies. I worked at Whirlpool (in St. Paul) for 20 years, lived out here in Prior Lake,

⁶⁶Franky Jackson, interview with author, September 26, 2013 (in possession of the author).

drove back and forth every day and had minimal interaction with the community.”⁶⁷

The first documented public commemoration by Dakota people of the U.S.-Dakota War was held on the Flandreau Santee Sioux reservation in July, 1962. Beverly Wakeman, widow of former Flandreau Santee Sioux tribal chairman Keith Wakeman, recalls that

the first Siouxtennial was not a pow wow as such, it was commemorating the 1862 Uprising. I still have the letters Keith wrote to Indian people on reservations in Nebraska, Minnesota and North Dakota, asking for dancers to come here, because we didn't have any dancers here, nobody danced then. We forget that when our people came here years ago they left Santee, Nebraska; they came here because they wanted to be farmers, they wanted to live like white people and they wanted to be Christians.⁶⁸

Describing her tribe's origin as a group of exiled Dakota who left Santee, Nebraska to take up farming and Christianity in South Dakota, Wakefield provides information about the kind of adaptations made by tribal members as recently as the early to middle-twentieth century in order to survive in a white-dominated society. Her statement “the first Siouxtennial was not a pow wow as such” also raises an intriguing question. Just what differentiated the two events? Both would involve dancing and fellowship, often of an inter-tribal nature.

⁶⁷ Jay Furst, “Dakota War has left lasting scars,” *The Post Bulletin*, Rochester MN, August 17, 2012.

⁶⁸ “Beverly Redwing Wakeman...Remembering the Siouxtennial in 1962,” *Flandreau Santee Sioux Tribe Monthly Newsletter*, July 2009.

Typically, pow wows are an expression of specific tribal or general “Indian” pride; Mrs. Wakeman’s statement suggests that there was something that set Siouxtennial apart from such events. When we read further, “we didn’t have any dancers here, nobody danced then,” the significance of Siouxtennial is brought into sharper focus. By 1960-61, apparently, something shifted to create enough of a sense of safety—or urgency—that Flandreau Santee Sioux people felt comfortable displaying their Dakota cultural legacy and marking the centennial of the 1862 War.

Siouxtennial was a three-day affair that drew a crowd of 6,000 people, including members of Minnesota Dakota communities. It featured a parade with floats, traditional dancers, and a buffalo-meat barbecue supper. Speakers included South Dakota state historian, Will Robinson, and U.S. Representative Ben Reifel, the first Lakota to serve in the U.S. Congress and only Native congressman during the 1960s. Ironically, Reifel, who had also held the post of lieutenant colonel in the U.S. Army and earned a master’s degree at Harvard University, was described in the *Moody County Enterprise*, the local newspaper, as “a Sioux Indian,” who addressed the gathering “in the Sioux language and told of his early life in western South Dakota.”⁶⁹

The Moody County Historical Society recounts that “the main purpose of the two-day event was to show the progress made by the Indian people during

⁶⁹ “Siouxtennial Celebration Draws Crowd of Thousands,” *Moody County Enterprise*, July 26, 1962.

the past 100 years.”⁷⁰ Perhaps this comment referred to the tribe’s history as “the first of their race to take homesteads under the government laws.”⁷¹ After the expulsion of all four Dakota bands from Minnesota, the oyate was shattered and dispersed. The prisoners from the 1862 war who had not been sentenced to hang were imprisoned in Davenport, Iowa, while the women, children, and elders held at Fort Snelling in the winter of 1862 were transported to Crow Creek, a newly-created reservation in Dakota Territory. The suffering endured because of the losses and traumas of exile was compounded by spoiled or rotten rations, poor soil, and crop failures, all of which produced physical illness and hunger. The Williamsons, Presbyterian missionaries who accompanied the Dakota to Crow Creek, agitated with the government for several years to find a more suitable location for a Dakota reservation, with more fertile soil, so the tribal members could more quickly become sedentary farmers. By mid-June, 1865, the Dakota at Crow Creek were relocated to the mouth of the Niobrara River in Nebraska, where they were joined by the men recently released from prison in Iowa.⁷² For the next several years, various Dakota chiefs attempted to secure title to permanent reservation land. As debate ensued about allotment and citizenship, and the Fort Laramie Treaty rendered the status of the Dakota uncertain, a number of families left Niobrara for land near the Big Sioux River in Dakota

⁷⁰ “Century of Progress shown at Siouxtennial,” *Moody County Pioneer* 37, No. 2, 3.

⁷¹ “Century of Progress shown at Siouxtennial,” *Moody County Pioneer* 37, No. 2, 3.

⁷² Flandreau Santee Sioux Tribe, *A History of the Santee Sioux Tribe* (Tribal History Program, Flandreau, South Dakota, 1971), 50-60.

Territory. Although the Bureau of Indian Affairs did not authorize this migration, these Dakota people invoked Article VI of the Fort Laramie Treaty of 1868⁷³ to legitimize their claim to assistance from the federal government.⁷⁴

The tribe's official history recounts, "the settlers at Flandreau quickly gained favorable reputation among their white neighbors. In 1870, C.K. Howard, a Sioux Falls merchant, said their settlement gave more indication of civilization and industry and 'a show of living like white people than the same number of Norwegian families located a few miles below.'"⁷⁵ With a hint of irony, the official tribal history also observes "The Flandreau Sioux, who in 1869 had abandoned tribal relations and tribal religion were, as of 1971, deeply involved in asserting their Indian culture and identity. The Flandreau pow-wow, held in July, was a well-attended and colorful celebration, and the Tribe is an active member of the United Sioux Tribes of South Dakota."⁷⁶

Since the Flandreau Santee Sioux Dakota had proven their devotion to Christianity, their skill at agriculture, their loyalty to the United States by

⁷³ Article VI of the Fort Laramie Treaty of 1868 stipulates "If any individual belonging to said tribes of Indians, or legally incorporated with them, being the head of a family, shall desire to commence farming, he shall have the privilege to select, in the presence and with the assistance of the agent then in charge, a tract of land within said reservation, not exceeding three hundred and twenty acres in extent, which tract, when so selected, certified, and recorded in the "Land Book" as herein directed, shall cease to be held in common, but the same may be occupied and held in the exclusive possession of the person selecting it, and of his family, so long as he or they may continue to cultivate it.", http://avalon.law.yale.edu/19th_century/nt001.asp

⁷⁴ *History of the Santee Sioux Tribe*, Tribal History Program, Flandreau Santee Sioux Tribe, Flandreau, South Dakota, September 1971, 62.

⁷⁵ *History of the Santee Sioux Tribe*, 66.

⁷⁶ *History of the Flandreau Santee Sioux*, 10.

wartime military service, and their ability to co-exist peacefully with their white neighbors, perhaps they now considered it safe to more openly embrace their traditional Dakota culture. Anthropologists began to observe that “(i)n 1967 and the years following... many Sioux were beginning to question that assimilation was inevitable, and there was instead a tendency toward identification with the Sioux ‘tribal heritage’ ...the local expression of a general movement among Native Americans in Canada and the United States.”⁷⁷

By 1972, 110 years had passed since Dakota people had had a presence of any kind in Mankato, Minnesota. Because their ancestors had been executed there in 1862, Dakota people assiduously avoided Mankato, driving through it only at night, if they had to.

Prior to that, you talk to different people who grew up here on both sides of the river, the Dakota and the white people that lived here along the river there, on Riverfront Drive there used to be a gas station. And this gas station used to hang thirty-eight tires. And this is the location where the thirty-eight were hung. This wasn't a very welcome place for Dakota people, so that's why they stayed away. The Dakota were reluctant to be in the area, knowing that they were exiled from the state of Minnesota, but also in Blue Earth County, it was still in the record books, or in their laws, it was written that a bounty on a Dakota scalp was still there. Conceivably, somebody could scalp a Dakota, and they may get paid for their scalp. That was still there, and the Dakota people knew that, and so Mankato was not a place to really hang out.”⁷⁸

⁷⁷ Robert A. White, “Value Themes of Native American Tribalistic Movement among the South Dakota Sioux,” *Current Anthropology* 15, No. 3 (Sept. 1974), 284.

⁷⁸ Dave Brave Heart, interview with author, September 6, 2013 (in possession of the author).

Beginning in 1958, however, a relationship developed between Amos Owen and Bud Lawrence that catalyzed the return of Dakota people to Mankato, and radically shifted the relationship of this city and its citizens to its most infamous historical event.

Amos Owen (Prairie Island Mdewakanton) was an elder and spiritual leader in his tribe, and a spiritual guide to others throughout Indian Country. Raised on the Prairie Island reservation near Welch, Minnesota, Owen enlisted in the Army with his brothers after the attack on Pearl Harbor. Severely wounded during a Japanese attack in the Philippines, he spent eleven months in the hospital and was honorably discharged as a disabled veteran. While recovering from his injuries, Owen returned to the hobby of traditional pipemaking he had taken up as a younger man; “‘I went back to making pipes because for a long time that was about all I was able to do,’ he said.”⁷⁹ The quarrying of the unique red sandstone, found only in Pipestone, Minnesota, and carving it into sacred canunpa (pipe), used to communicate with the Wakan Tanka (great mystery) and to sanctify agreements and other communication between humans, was an essential Dakota tradition. Owen’s devotion to the pipe, and self-immersion in other aspects of Dakota ceremony, initiated his lifelong journey to preserve and renew Dakota language and culture. Owen’s son

⁷⁹Leon Pantenburg, *Downriver: A Mississippi River Canoe Journey*, Chapter 10 (<http://www.survivalcommonsense.com/downriver-chapter-10-amos-owen-dakota-holy-man-2/>).

Ray observed that although the family was raised in the Episcopalian faith (Owen was a church deacon who translated from Dakota to English), during the 1970s, especially with the number of young men who had been wounded or killed in the Vietnam War, and the losses of many elders in a single year, there was a transition back to the “old ways”:

The Grandmas were dying one right after another. In 1969 I think we lost 20 of them; there was a funeral every week. They had such a hard life and they fought and then at the end they just died. That’s not right. Then they wanted to do the traditional wake and they wanted viewing. My dad, with the elders, after everybody left, did songs. I remember some of them; they were chanting and stuff like that. We were in a transition, kind of going back to the old way and just empowering ourselves to deal with death, mourning, grief, whatever. The elders were the ones that were saying we had to go back the other way because we couldn’t live like we were living; we couldn’t survive like that; we had to go back. In order to go forward, we had to go back to our old ways.⁸⁰

Bud Lawrence, a Mankato businessman, learned, as a young boy, of the 1862 execution of 38 Dakota men while traveling by train during the mid-1940s to his grandparents’ home and sneaking off the train at the Mankato station to read the text of the headstone-like monument he had passed on previous trips: “Here were hanged 38 Sioux Indians.” Lawrence’s youthful determination to find out “Who were these Indians and what had they done that led to their hanging?” changed the course of his life.⁸¹

⁸⁰U.S.-Dakota War of 1862 Oral History Project: Interview with Raymond Owen, 10-11.

⁸¹Melodie Andrews, “The U.S.-Dakota War in Public Memory and Public Space: Mankato’s Journey Toward Reconciliation” in Annette Atkins and Deborah L. Miller, ed., *The State We’re*

In 1958, two years after Lawrence moved with his wife to Mankato to raise their family, he met Amos Owen on a fishing trip to Prairie Island. Their shared conversation became the beginning of a friendship that included discussions about Dakota history and culture, Indian-white relations, and possibilities for reconciliation between the two groups. By creating and nurturing a relationship grounded in mutual respect and honor, the two men successfully influenced significant people in their respective circles to participate in actions that acknowledged Dakota people as the aboriginal inhabitants of Mankato, educated Mankato citizens about living Dakota communities and cultures, and took steps to foster positive, respectful interaction between Dakota and white people in the area.⁸²

Amos Owen was elected tribal chair of the Prairie Island Mdewakanton Community in 1965. To honor his friend, Bud Lawrence walked from Mankato to Red Wing with Bob Rolfes and Barry Blackhawk (Winnebago), a student who later taught high school and college English to Native students. Later that year, the Prairie Island Mdewakanton Tribal Council, led by Owen and elders Wally Wells, Ed Jefferson, and Chris Leith, conducted a ceremony in the Mankato YMCA gymnasium. Four years later, Lawrence took another walk to

In: Reflections on Minnesota History (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2010), 50-51.

⁸² Joe Tougas, "Mending the Wounds," *Mankato Free Press*, Saturday, July 22, 2002 (<http://www.mahkatowicipi.org/lawrence.php>).

honor Owen, this time accompanied by his friend Jim Buckley, director of the YMCA in Mankato.⁸³

As Mankato civic leaders, Lawrence and Buckley were eager to improve recreational and educational opportunities for the area's citizens. While jogging together, Lawrence shared with Buckley the idea of hosting a powwow that would coincide with the international farm fest to be held in Mankato in the late summer of 1972, and promoted as an attraction for foreign visitors and Mankato residents alike. The two men met with Owen, and planning for the first Mahkato Wicipi began. "It was felt that the pow wow would bring back an important lost Dakota culture," wrote Lawrence. "In addition, the 38 Dakota who were hung in Mankato on December 26, 1862 would be forever remembered and honored. Buckley and Lawrence requested that the Y's Men's Club finance and furnish manpower for the pow wow, which they agreed to do. Amos Owen communicated the pow wow idea to the Dakota people, including the intertribal council of Minnesota. Subsequently, both the Mankato and Dakota communities laid the groundwork for the pow wow."⁸⁴

Although Dakota oral tradition about Mankato deterred some Dakota from participating in the Mahkato Wicipi, the influence of Owen, his wife Ione, and other respected Dakota elders such as Norman Crooks, first tribal chairman of the Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux Community, his wife Edith, hereditary

⁸³ Bud Lawrence, "A Brief History of the Mahkato Pow Wow, 2009," 4.

⁸⁴ Lawrence, 1.

chief Ernest Wabasha and his wife Vernell, drew 2,000 Dakota people, and members of other tribes, from North and South Dakota, Wyoming, Montana, Wisconsin, Iowa, and Minnesota.⁸⁵ For the first time in 110 years, Dakota people came to Mankato as free, sovereign people.

A permanent non-profit organization comprised of Dakota people, other Native Americans, and Mankato whites grew out of the pow wow in Mankato. The Mahkato Mdewakanton Association was created in 1976 as the vehicle to organize the annual powwow. It's work significantly expanded to include the production each year of an educational program for third grade students; "Between 1987 and 2000, over 10,000 children teachers, parents and Native American resource persons have participated in a unique direct cultural exchange education program held in conjunction with the annual Dakota Mahkato Mdewakanton pow-wow or Wacipi at Land of Memories (Wokiksuye Makoce) Park each September."⁸⁶

The Mahkato Wicipi had its roots in relationships that had been established and nurtured over a period of many years. Dakota tribal members returned to Mankato as teachers, cultural ambassadors, and peers, offering the city's non-Dakota citizens valuable knowledge about the culture that had emerged from and sustained the land for thousands of years. In turn, the favorable and respectful reception of the Dakota by the Mankato community

⁸⁵ Joe Tougas, "Mending the Wounds."

⁸⁶ Mdewakanton Association Purpose and History, <http://www.mahkatowacipi.org/mdeass.php>.

was carefully prepared by visionary civic leaders who embraced Dakota cultural traditions and protocols of honor and respect and were receptive to Dakota perspectives about Minnesota's history. The Mahkato Wicipi became an annual tradition for Dakota people, and a new ceremony of honor for the 38 that planted the seeds of reconciliation between Native and non-Native people in Minnesota. It also marked the beginning of the creation of new ceremonies for Dakota people, several of which were based on personal visions received by individual tribal members.

The notion of "new ceremonies" was formally articulated by author, historian, and activist Vine Deloria, Jr. (Yankton Dakota) as he addressed Native American and white Minnesotans at a symposium marking the 125th anniversary of the U.S.-Dakota War. Deloria "issued a pragmatic challenge for reconciliation which included creating 'new ceremonies' or communally-created and shared activities that involved the land and the collaborative efforts of the Minnesota Dakota and non-Natives."⁸⁷ The key element of such new ceremonies was the willingness to surrender: "When elders had a problem and went to the Medicine man, if he didn't know how to solve the problem, he would say 'let's do a ceremony.' He would use paint and smoke (the pipe.) He created a ceremony

⁸⁷ Sheryl L. Dowlin and Bruce Dowlin, "The Dakota Conflict Remembered," paper prepared for the 35th Annual Northern Great Plains History Conference, September 28-30, 2000, Mankato, MN, 8(<http://www.dowlinconsulting.com/images/00%20The%20Dakota%20Conflict%20Remembered.pdf>).

and when a similar problem came up, they would do the ceremony again.

(Minnesota) Anglos and Indians in 1987 said in effect—‘let’s do a ceremony.’”

That is why your project worked. A ceremony includes a little bit of each party being willing to give—to surrender something.”⁸⁸

Between 1978 and 1989, Amos Owen conducted a ceremony in Mankato every December 26 to honor the 38.⁸⁹ In 1986, a Standing Rock Lakota man, Willie Male Bear, “had a dream in which he saw himself running along a road carrying an eagle staff.”⁹⁰ Sensing that the dream had some connection to the U.S.-Dakota War, Male Bear shared his vision with the Dakota Studies Committee, a cross-cultural Minnesota organization organized in 1977 by Dr. Chris Cavender (Dakota) to study Dakota history and culture. The Dakota Studies Committee, planning to mark the 125th anniversary of the U.S.-Dakota War, embraced Male Bear’s vision and organized a new ceremony, a commemorative run that would depart from Fort Snelling on December 25, 1986 and arrive in Mankato on the morning of December 26, 1986 around the time the 38 would have been executed.⁹¹

⁸⁸Dowlin and Dowlin, 19.

⁸⁹ Lawrence, 4.

⁹⁰Elitta (Cavender) Gouge, “Remembering the First Mankato Runs: 25 Years of Honoring and Remembering,” Twin Cities Daily Planet, December 28, 2011 (<http://www.tcdailyplanet.net/news/2011/12/28/free-speech-zone-remembering-first-mankato-runs-25-years-honoring-and-remembering>).

⁹¹Elitta (Cavender) Gouge, “Remembering the First Mankato Runs: 25 Years of Honoring and Remembering.”

Some overlap existed between the membership of the Dakota Studies Committee and the Mdewakanton Association, and the two organizations collaborated to raise public awareness about the war's 125th anniversary. The Dakota Studies Committee was able to gain the support of Minnesota Governor Rudy Perpich who, following its lead, issued a proclamation to declare 1987 "The Year of Reconciliation" to commemorate the 125th anniversary of the U.S.-Dakota War.

Whereas: The year 1987 marks the 125th anniversary of the Dakota Conflict in Minnesota, an event which resulted in great suffering and loss of life; and

Whereas: The anniversary of this tragic conflict offers an opportunity for Minnesotans to learn more about the life and culture of the Dakota people;

Whereas: A ceremony in Mankato on December 26, 1986, will mark the beginning of a year's activities in which the Dakota people will join with others in appreciation of cultural diversity and human understanding;

Now, therefore, I, Rudy Perpich, Governor of the State of Minnesota, do hereby proclaim the year 1987 to be Year of Reconciliation in Minnesota.⁹²

The Minnesota Historical Society, local historical societies, colleges, and arts organizations throughout Minnesota sponsored a variety of lectures, symposia, art exhibits, and theatrical productions to mark the year. *The St. Paul Pioneer Press Dispatch* published "The Great Dakota Conflict," a five-part

⁹²Elitta (Cavender) Gouge, "Remembering the First Mankato Runs: 25 Years of Honoring and Remembering."

series of articles in their Sunday edition that outlined in great detail the events before, during, and after what had long been called ‘The Sioux Uprising.’”⁹³ Dakota people reacted to the Year of Reconciliation with mixed reviews. Roger Head, of Minnesota’s Indian Affairs Council commented, “I think we have accomplished our goals: reconciliation. I really believe there’s a greater understanding.” Mrs. Vernell Wabasha remarked to a reporter, “It’s a farce. As far as I’m concerned, there wasn’t any change except more white people coming in, looking at us again. You can’t change history. It’s history and it’s going to be that way. The whole year should have been looking ahead at Indians’ future, changing things.”⁹⁴ Lower Sioux tribal chairman David Larsen conceded that the year’s activities had succeeded in promoting “a more neutral vocabulary for describing the conflict and its participants.” For generations, the war had been called “the Great Sioux Uprising,” a name that laid the responsibility for the war at the feet of Dakota tribes, and that used “Sioux,” viewed as a pejorative by many Dakota people, since it derives from the Ojibwe name for “snake” or “enemy.” Larsen also observed, however, that efforts to involve larger numbers of Dakota people in shaping the commemorative activities were lacking.⁹⁵ Such comments reveal the range of perspectives that existed within Minnesota’s

⁹³Sheryl L. Dowlin and Bruce Dowlin, 9.

⁹⁴ “Indian Incident in 1862 Still Stirs Deep Emotion,” *New York Times*, December 26, 1987.

⁹⁵ “Indian Incident in 1862 Still Stirs Deep Emotion,” *New York Times*, December 26, 1987.

Dakota communities about the purpose of commemoration and how it ought to be pursued.

Internationally, during the late 1980s, indigenous peoples were involved in a number of significant processes that were to have a direct impact on Dakota communities. First was a series of international conferences, spearheaded by the U.N. Working Group on Indigenous Populations (1982-2007), that addressed the protection and promotion of the human rights of indigenous people and drafted international standards to articulate a recognition of indigenous peoples' rights to live as distinct peoples, to protection of their aboriginal land, languages, laws, and cultures, to self-determination, and to be fully consulted in decision-making processes with the governments of nation-states on matters of mutual concern. Second was the revival of the Maori language in New Zealand, marked the Kohanga Reo (Language Nests) movement, initiated in 1981, the Maori Language Act of 1987, and the subsequent establishment of the Maori Language Commission. The Maori Language Act "declares the Māori Language to be an official language of New Zealand," confers "in Courts of Law, Commissions of Inquiry and Tribunals...the right to speak Māori to any member of the Court, any party, witness or counsel," and "establishes Te Taura Whiriite Reo Māori (Māori Language Commission)."⁹⁶

⁹⁶Māori Language Commission
(http://www.tetaurawhiri.govt.nz/english/about_e/about.shtml).

Kohanga Reo emerged from the realization of many Maori that their language was “dying.” In other words, according to educator and Waitangi Tribunal member Sir Tamati Reedy, by the 1970s, it had ceased to be the language in which children were socialized. Reedy noted that “for Maori, then, the twentieth-century experience seems to have followed the classic pattern of language decline and loss worldwide—moving from total fluency in the mother language to individual bilingualism, and then to monolingualism in the new language, all of which can be effected in a matter of three generations.”⁹⁷ A grassroots effort, supported by government funding, created hundreds of language nests and immersion preschools, in which young children were taught Maori. Key to their success was the active involvement and support of parents, and involving grandparents and other elders as “the most important resource for cultural and language transmission... whose knowledge is deemed essential in the learning environment of Kohanga Reo.”⁹⁸ A similar movement, Aha Pūnana Leo (“nest of voices”), was also underway among native Hawaiian people, who, since 1896, had been forbidden to speak their language in schools.⁹⁹

The remarkable success of Maori and native Hawaiian language revitalization efforts and strategies attracted the attention of Dakota and other

⁹⁷Tamati Reedy, “Te Reo Māori: The Past 20 Years and Looking Forward, *Oceanic Linguistics* 39, No. 1 (June 2000), 158.

⁹⁸Tamati Reedy, 159.

⁹⁹Aha Pūnana Leo, “A Timeline of Revitalization,” (http://www.ahapunanaleo.org/index.php?/about/a_timeline_of_revitalization/).

American Indian tribes concerned with language decline. Of particular importance were their emphases on incorporating families in their children's education, using the language to socialize and teach children, and reviving relationships between elders and the young as a key way of transmitting the peoples' values, laws, and way of life. In 1997, Pezihutazizi (Upper Sioux Indian Community) tribal council decided to establish an immersion preschool program as part of its effort to revitalize the Dakota language. Waziyatawin, then a graduate student in history at Cornell University, served as project director. The school, Pezihutazizi Wahohpi Wohdakapi Unspe (Pezihutazizi Language Learning Nest), opened in October 1999 with six elder Dakota language speakers/teachers and two graduate students from the University of Minnesota serving as classroom aide and curriculum coordinator, respectively, and fifteen children, aged one through five, enrolled by November 1999.¹⁰⁰ While she acknowledged the project's overall significance, Waziyatawin remembers its day-to-day functioning as "politicized and full of conflict," and disrupted by disagreements among the fluent-speaking elders about the efficacy of immersion education, among other issues.¹⁰¹

The Dakota immersion preschool program enjoyed short-term success in that within six months, the children were speaking Dakota in full sentences.

¹⁰⁰CURA Reporter, "Project Update: Dakota Immersion Preschool at Pezihutazizi," Center for Urban and Regional Affairs, University of Minnesota, 2003, 8.

¹⁰¹Waziyatawin, conversation with author, January 11, 2013.

However, the daily tension and contentious atmosphere mounted, and Waziyatawin recalls that “it imploded after the end of the first year. It was not sustainable.” Faced with a need to regroup after what she considered a devastating loss, she left to complete her graduate education, “immers(ing) myself in decolonization literature. I saw that language work must have a decolonization agenda with it because of all the mixed feelings that come up.”¹⁰²

In Waziyatawin’s work, one can observe an attempt to bridge the divergent worlds of academic scholarship, political activism, and traditional Dakota forms of knowledge transmission. Her father, Dr. Chris Mato Nunpa, associate professor of Indigenous Nations and Dakota Studies at Southwest Minnesota State University from 1992 until 2008, taught and wrote about the genocide of indigenous peoples in the U.S., and the genocide of Dakota people, specifically. Waziyatawin has also taught and written extensively about Dakota people’s history, asking critical questions that have compelled Minnesotans to confront the truth that the price of statehood was the removal and exile of the Dakota. Extending her father’s work, Waziyatawin has used the framework of the United Nations Convention on Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide to analyze the U.S. government’s policy of removing the Dakota from homeland and exiling them from Minnesota.¹⁰³ Her scholarship specifically

¹⁰²Waziyatawin, conversation with author, January 11, 2013.

¹⁰³Waziyatawin, *What Does Justice Look Like? The Struggle for Liberation in Dakota Homeland* (St. Paul: Living Justice Press, 2008), 37-70.

refers to the U.S. policy of removing Dakota bands from Minnesota as a form of ethnic cleansing, the internment of Dakota people at Fort Snelling as a concentration camp experience, and the policy of offering bounties for Dakota scalps, as well as forced assimilation policies, and the disproportionately-high rates of family violence, incarceration, substance abuse, suicide, and poor physical and mental health among Dakota descendants.

Joining with a small group of other Dakota people, Waziyatawin organized the first Dakota Commemorative March in 2002 to honor the ancestors imprisoned at Fort Snelling over the winter of 1862. By providing a vehicle for Dakota women, men, and children to re-trace the route their ancestors took on the 150-mile forced march from their villages along the Minnesota River to Fort Snelling, the Dakota Commemorative Marches facilitated the strengthening of connections between descendants and their ancestors, and between descendants and the land. The marches provided a public, collective space for the work of mourning great-great grandparents whose existence had made possible the survival of contemporary Dakota people. This grief work was both collective and personal; at specific points along the route, prayer stakes with strips of red cloth were driven into the ground. Each stake “was inscribed with two names, one on each side. The names represented the heads of families who were on the original march and who were then imprisoned at Fort Snelling. Because the march to Fort Snelling was primarily

composed of women, most of the names were those of women. In all there were about three hundred such names...¹⁰⁴ The march became a bi-annual event, with the most recent one taking place during the sesquicentennial of the U.S.-Dakota War.

Revitalizing the Dakota language by “remembering, reclaiming, and reconnecting”

Dakota language revitalization work has re-invigorated the sense of distinct peoplehood at the heart of sovereignty, and strengthened tribes’ knowledge of their collective histories. As more individuals and families learn to speak, or resume speaking Dakota, it contributes to healing intergenerational historical trauma within individual families and restoring connections between individual and extended families, thus strengthening kinship ties and facilitating the fulfillment of kinship obligations.

Language recovery has a ripple effect on its participants and unexpected outcomes, including changed perspectives of family and collective history. “Language is healing,” says Teresa Peterson, executive director of Dakota Wicohan, a Minnesota-based regional organization working with youth and families to preserve and teach the Dakota language. Peterson, whose mother

¹⁰⁴ Wilson, Waziyatawin Angela; “A Journey of Healing and Awakening” in Wilson, Waziyatawin Angela, ed., *In the Footsteps of Our Ancestors: The Dakota Commemorative Marches of the 21st Century* (St. Paul: Living Justice Press, 2006), 100.

experienced the Indian Relocation Act, told how her simple desire to learn the Dakota language altered the relationship between her, her mother, and her grandmother:

When I started out learning the language, my intention was to learn the language. I wanted to speak it. That was my goal. And when I spent that year with my grandma, I grew up hearing my mom always say, “I was the black sheep, no one ever wanted me around.” She always said that, or things like that. And then my grandma would ask me, “Gee, Joyce, she never wanted to be back here, she never wanted to be with her family.” And it was so strange to me to hear, these two sides, these two versions.

A greater awareness and affirmation of Dakota history allowed her to understand a painful family rift within the broader context of destructive federal policies toward Native Americans. Peterson explained,

When I started learning about my history, about the Indian Relocation Act and its purpose and intent, it dawned on me... then I heard the story later about my mother, how the Bureau of Indian Affairs official came and how my grandma signed for her to go, when she was seventeen, with this person to learn a trade, and so, you know, I was able to tell them both, each in a certain way, that that wasn't true. It was the government. It was the policy. “No, Ma, it wasn't that they didn't want you.” And because I got to spend that year with my grandma, learning language, I had come to that understanding, and then later my mom went back to Upper Sioux, and she got to be with her mother and take care of her until she passed away, that language is healing. And so, I didn't set out for all that to happen, but that all happened because of the language.¹⁰⁵

Dakota Wicohan, a non-profit organization whose name means “the Dakota way of life,” has worked for more than twelve years in Minnesota to

¹⁰⁵ Teresa Peterson, interview with author, August 19, 2013 (in possession of the author).

preserve and renew Dakota language. The name is apt, for the organization's strategy for revitalizing language is to strengthen family bonds in the process.

Peterson described the evolution of the organization's approach:

That whole kinship system which is the basis and foundation of our culture is messed up. That was part of our thinking behind this: what we developed was we were just going to nurture individuals and families, and we would of course work within capacity, because we saw that even our own families weren't getting along. They always say the mother is the one who is the culture bearer. So we supported and we nurtured families, and we work with primarily the mother to promote the language in the home. That's the model we used. Our kinship system starts with this, it's tiwahe, tiospaye, oyate. Family, extended family, community. It's like a circle, and then it goes out and goes out. We're working at that very core. And so even when you work with a tiwahe, when you have a couple of little families working together, then the most logical step is tiospaye, which means your extended family. If you look at Dakota Wicohan, you'll see these ripples of family coming.¹⁰⁶

Following in the footsteps of Piegan Institute founder Darrell Kipp (Blackfeet), Peterson and the Dakota Wicohan family use the master-apprentice model of language learning. Linguist Leanne Hinton explains that "the master-apprentice program is designed so that a highly-motivated team consisting of a speaker and a learner can go about language teaching/learning on their own, without outside help from experts."¹⁰⁷ In Native American language programs that follow this model, a master speaker, typically an elder, is paired with a novice speaker for a committed number of hours each week. As Kipp

¹⁰⁶ Teresa Peterson, interview with author, August 19, 2013 (in possession of the author).

¹⁰⁷ Leanne Hinton, *How to Keep Your Language Alive: A Commonsense Approach to One-on-One Language Learning* (Berkeley: Heyday Books, 2002), xiv.

emphasizes, this is language immersion, not bilingual education. “We all speak English too well,” Kipp muses. “Bilingual programs are designed to teach English, not your tribal language. We aren’t against English, but we want to add our own language and give it equal status.”¹⁰⁸

Peterson learned Dakota language in this way after earning a graduate degree in education at Southwest State University and feeling “like I had a calling to learn language. I met Gaby Strong, who worked for the Grotto Foundation at the time, and I said, ‘This is what I want to do. I want to hang out with my grandma and some other people and learn language informally.’ And she said, ‘Yeah, we can possibly do something.’ So I took a year, kind of like what I would call a self-designed sabbatical, and learned language from my grandma and my father-in-law.”¹⁰⁹ Language apprentices actually help guide language instruction because they have to ask themselves, “What do I want to learn to say?” They also participate in re-creating a speech community by providing a context and reason for the teacher to actively use her language.¹¹⁰ During that “sabbatical” year, Peterson met Yvonne Leith, Strong’s mother, and Mary Peters, and the three women started Dakota Wicohan “out of the need...at

¹⁰⁸ Darrell Kipp, *Encouragement, Guidance, Insight, and Lessons Learned for Native Language Activists Developing Their Own Tribal Language Programs* (Piegan Institute, 2000), 3.

¹⁰⁹ Peterson, Interview with author, August 19, 2013 (In possession of the author).

¹¹⁰ Leanne Hinton, xv.

that time there were twenty speakers in Minnesota that were first-generation speakers and they were all elderly. So we started a non-profit.”

Dakota Wicohan embraces the motto “learners are teachers,” a stance which empowers its language apprentices to teach others what they know, and to leverage the fragile but growing resource of Dakota language facility more widely throughout the community. One of the organization’s earliest projects was to document the words and experiences of the remaining fluent Dakota speakers in Minnesota. This, and the work of rapidly developing a cohort of language teachers, became urgent because, by 2008, only eleven of the fluent-speaking elders were still living. Dakota Wicohan received a small grant from the Minnesota Historical Society to record the elders’ oral histories. Within several years the project expanded to a full-length documentary, “Dakota Iapi Teunhindapi” (We Cherish the Dakota Language). The film’s several purposes include “to promote understanding, respect, and awareness of the Dakota language as well as to bring about healing within Dakota communities and between Dakota and non-Dakota peoples,” and so will be screened in four Dakota communities in Minnesota, as well as in the Twin Cities and some of the towns that border the reservations. Peterson spoke of intentionally using the documentary to create a safe space within which to talk about the emotional issues related to language.

The documentary is about building cross-cultural relations, but in our own Dakota communities, it's a healing piece, because, you know, people wonder why did, like for example, why didn't my grandma pass the language on to her daughter and all her kids? Or she did with the older ones and then quit doing that. And so, why is that prevalent with all these families, why didn't the language get passed on? So, then, the story about boarding school and this "English only," Americanization, and all that in the schools, all of that had an effect on whether the parents were trying to protect their children. So that story is really important for Dakota people to hear. To understand why, and understand that it was an act of love.¹¹¹

Dakota Wicohan's programming is grounded in the strategies "to remember, to reclaim, and to reconnect." Peterson explains, "'Remembering' is to remember our history, our language, and so the documentary fits under that. To reclaim is practicing doing those things, like the Dakota teacher-apprenticeship and our youth programming." Dakota Wicohan runs leadership development programs for young women and young men, and began a program for families to reinforce language learning in the home.

Some of the youth are really excited about language, but then they take it home and nobody cares about it there, or we have high transition, so youth are coming and going, and we keep on teaching the beginning over and over. So we decided that we would add a focused component of tiwahe, which was our original work around families. Every Wednesday night we have a meal and we share language. We teach language through our Dakota language apprentices, who teach in a very interactive way, and it's been really successful.¹¹²

¹¹¹ Teresa Peterson, interview with author, August 19, 2013 (in possession of the author).

¹¹² Teresa Peterson, interview with author, August 19, 2013 (in possession of the author).

Peterson believes that commemorating the U.S.-Dakota War flows organically from reclaiming and learning to practice the many dimensions of Dakota history and culture. From her perspective, the journey to heal from colonial oppression is a personal and lifelong quest.

When you go and educate and blast people with their history, and then leave them, I think that does an injustice, especially for our young people. Because what do we leave them with? Where do they turn to? I think, things in their own time. That's why I really like our reclaiming thing, because you come to understand that those kids, when they first started riding Suntanka,¹¹³ did they know they would be riding in the Dakota 38 Memorial Ride, and what that was about? No, they liked coming because they liked riding horse. And over time they learn those things, and to me, it's a healthier way.¹¹⁴

This perspective is shared by Vanessa Goodthunder, a twenty-year-old college student, Dakota language apprentice, and Suntanka participant since she was in fourth grade.

I think we all need to heal. Everyone is at their different stages of healing. Things like the walk and the ride are great gatherings to commemorate and remember the strength and rich culture of our people. It also is a great place to get to see a lot of Dakota people at and get to be around your people. You meet friends and family, it's like you're creating family and relationships when you keep coming back and seeing them once a year. Then you always have a friend in different places. You know you can call someone there.¹¹⁵

¹¹³ Suntanka is an afterschool program of Dakota Wicohan that engages young people in learning to ride and care for horses, and in learning the spiritual significance of the horse to Dakota people. Suntanka participants have participated in the annual Dakota 38 +2 Memorial ride that starts at the Lower Brule Reservation in South Dakota and ends in Mankato, Minnesota on December 26, the anniversary of the executions of the 38 Dakota men.

¹¹⁴ Teresa Peterson, interview with author, August 19, 2013 (in possession of the author).

¹¹⁵ Vanessa Goodthunder, interview with author, February 23, 2014 (in possession of the author).

Language revitalization is part of a web of initiatives that Dakota people have utilized to strengthen self-determination and sovereignty. Such initiatives fit within the scope of global Indigenous initiatives described by Maori scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith in her seminal text *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*. Smith theorizes an Indigenous-framed “ambitious research programme” of projects currently being pursued by various Indigenous communities that includes *making claims, storytelling, naming, representing, celebrating survival, envisioning, reframing, protecting, returning, remembering, reading, restoring, writing, and connecting*.¹¹⁶ Smith’s framework is useful in considering the array of projects that Dakota elders, activists, scholars, and youth have engaged in, and helps us better understand the specific understandings that the commemorative dimensions of the work aim to communicate to Dakota audiences and the wider public.

When considering traditions that rely primarily on the spoken word to encode and preserve information about the past, the question arises of what effect the loss of memories may have on the tradition. Terry Janis (Lakota), attorney and former foundation officer of the Indian Land Tenure Foundation, offered the explanation that at issue for Indian peoples is not loss of memories, but loss of *experience*: “The value of our spiritual practices is a very direct and personal experience with the land. Spirits come and speak to us in our language.

¹¹⁶ Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*, (London: Zed Books Ltd., 1999), 142-161.

There is a direct experiential dynamic.” Janis suggested that the three “bases of engagement” for Indian people today are language revitalization, land recovery, and the strengthening of sovereign governments, and concluded that “each of our nations has a traditional spiritual life that is part of our daily life. It defines the culture of that community, and is a land-based energy.”¹¹⁷ Contemporary Dakota tribes in the United States, both federally-recognized or non-federally-recognized, are engaged in some way with language revitalization, and it is likely, because of its positive effect on community cohesiveness and emotional health, that this work may also have a positive impact on the other two areas of engagement.

Within the past two decades, Dakota tribes have used federal national historic preservation legislation as a tool to assert their sovereignty and reinforce their nation-to nation relationships with the U.S. government. The 1992 Congressional amendments to the National Historic Preservation Act (P.L. 102-575) allow federally-recognized Indian tribes to “take on more formal responsibility for the preservation of significant historic properties on tribal lands. Specifically, Section 101(d)(2) allows tribes to assume any or all of the functions of a State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO) with respect to tribal land.”¹¹⁸ Tribal Historic Preservation Office (THPO) status gave tribes authority in a number of areas: identifying and maintaining inventories of culturally

¹¹⁷Terry Janis, conversation with author, November 2012.

¹¹⁸Franky Johnson, interview with author, September 26, 2013 (in possession of the author).

significant properties, nominating properties to national and tribal registers of historic places, conducting reviews of Federal agency projects on tribal lands, and conducting educational programs on the importance of preserving historic properties.”¹¹⁹ Section 106 is particularly significant, because it mandates that Federal agencies are required to consult with tribes before any transportation or development project commences on reservation property. As Dakota tribes skillfully utilize Section 106 they are also adroitly maneuvering within a legal system intrinsically limited by its doctrinal definition for Indian nations as “domestic, dependent nations” that possess “limited” sovereignty subject to Congressional plenary power.

Franky Jackson (Sisseton Wahpeton and Haliwa Saponi), director of the Renville County Historical Society in Minnesota and cultural resources management consultant was recruited in 2002 by the tribal planner for the Sisseton Wahpeton Sioux Tribe at the Lake Traverse reservation to develop its Tribal Historic Preservation Office. At the time, only two Dakota tribes had THPO status. Once the Sisseton Wahpeton Oyate’s grant application was funded by the National Park Service, making it the fifty-sixth tribe to receive THPO status, Jackson made it his personal mission to help other Dakota tribes do so. He successfully assisted the Crow Creek Sioux Tribe, the Santee Sioux Tribe, the Yankton Sioux Tribe, and the Lower Sioux Indian Community, in addition to

¹¹⁹ National Association of Tribal Historic Preservation Officers (<http://www.nathpo.org/aboutthpos.htm>).

several non-Dakota tribes. Jackson reiterates the importance of Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act as a tool for Dakota tribes:

For instance, when we're negotiating on, say, a road project, a major development coming to or through reservations, or projects that have the potential to impact sites of importance for Dakota people, it's a great opportunity to work hand-in-hand with the federal agencies and the tribe to, first, try to mitigate any potential damage to the sites, and secondly, to record those sites, and work with Dakota people to fully interpret those sites.

And what this allows us to do is, existentially, we get to re-ignite those sites. We get to educate our communities, Native and non-Native, about the significance of those sites. For instance, if we come across rock cairns that are indicative to a prayer altar, it's important that we document those sites. It's important that we know where those sites are, as Dakota people, and it's more important that we allow our practitioners and our elders to interpret these sites for us and give us a stronger and better understanding of why these sites should be important to us as Dakota people. And that engages us in everything from revitalizing our language to revitalizing societies that, again, went underground or faded away because of the effects of assimilation.¹²⁰

It is unlikely that the authors of the National Historic Preservation Act had the revitalization of Dakota culture in mind when they drafted this legislation; nevertheless, it has contributed in important ways to enhancing the ability of Dakota communities to take account of their places of significance, protect them from encroachment and development, and to interact with elders who carry deeper knowledge of the sites' meanings in the context of Dakota beliefs, values, and lifeways. It has also contributed to the process of

¹²⁰Franky Johnson, interview with author, September 26, 2013 (in possession of the author).

reconnecting Dakota people who have been dispersed from their aboriginal territory for generations to that land and to each other.

The “Legacy of Survival: Coming Home” event held in Flandreau, South Dakota from August 15-17, 2012 exemplified the sense of renewal created as Dakota people from across their diaspora reconnect with each other. Jackson collaborated with J.B. Weston, THPO for the Flandreau Santee Sioux Tribe, Melvin Houston of the Santee Sioux Nation, and others to organize a three day event highlighting “the cultural resiliency of the 14 Dakota tribal communities who live in exile.” Legacy of Survival focused on Dakota cultural survival, rather than the causes of the U.S.-Dakota War, and called for amending the 1863 Removal Act that bans Dakota people from their Minnesota homeland. Dakota people from several states and Canada gathered to share, practice, and celebrate knowledge of traditional Dakota lifeways: music, drumming, dance, horse culture, fishing, pipestone quarrying, lacrosse, and language. Minnesota Historical Society staff members were present to digitize family photographs, documents, and other memorabilia. Historical discussions highlighted the histories of the exiled Dakota tribes, and genealogists helped families identify ancestors and connect to lost relatives.¹²¹

“When we were removed to various reservations and reserves up in Canada,” explained Jackson, “it severed our kinship ties with each other.

¹²¹ Franky Johnson, interview with author, September 26, 2013 (in possession of the author).

Because of the Removal Act and reservational oppression, most of these families have been disconnected. At our event, we saw people from Canada visiting with their relatives from Santee for the first time in 150 years.”¹²²

“Our whole intent was to bring Dakota people together to heal together,” said Jackson. “We had a political and a cultural motivation. The three exiled tribes wanted to focus on more than 150 years of survival, removed from their aboriginal territory, and to address some historical wrongs.” Specifically, the tribes partnered with Minnesota Representative Dean Urdahl and several other legislators working to repeal the 1863 Dakota Removal Act, and with Governor Mark Drayton, who issued a new proclamation repudiating Governor Ramsey’s 1863 proclamation that laid the groundwork for Dakota removal and in ensuing years, the bounties on Dakota lives.¹²³

The event concluded with a walk to Minnesota, including a “welcome back” ceremony hosted by a group of Minnesota citizens. Ceremony was a powerful component of the Legacy of Survival event, and reflected the survival and reinvigoration of Dakota traditional knowledge.

We worked with firekeepers of the Oceti Sakowin. In 1862, when we were expelled from Minnesota, that sacred fire was taken into Canada, and it has slowly made its way back down. On the morning of August 17, there as a ceremony that took place between eight Dakota women. Four of those women were from Dakota communities in Minnesota, and the other four were from

¹²² Franky Jackson, interview with author, September 26, 2013 (in possession of author).

¹²³ Franky Jackson, interview with author, September 26, 2013 (in possession of author).

communities outside Minnesota, and they had a ceremony bringing the sacred fire back into Minnesota. For everybody who experienced this ceremony and was there to witness it, it was a very emotional and powerful ceremony.¹²⁴

In a fascinating development, Dakota artists and scholars who have contemplated the meaning of the U.S.-Dakota War have engaged in creating autoethnographic texts “in which people undertake to describe themselves in ways that engage with representations others have made of them.”¹²⁵ Artist Mona Smith has used the internet’s storytelling capacity and ability to connect people across time and space to create Bdode Memory Map. An ironic feature of the electronic media is its ability to engage viewers in a medium that is harmonious with Dakota oral tradition. Its format mirrors the non-linear aspects of indigenous storytelling, in which those in the audience are expected to draw their own conclusions by reflecting about the stories they heard. The website features interviews of contemporary Dakota community members in which they offer perspectives about the enduring significance of the Minneapolis/St. Paul area as the site of Dakota origins. The videos embedded in Bdode Memory Map frequently reference Dakota place names and other language in connection with history handed down by tribal elders.

For Dakota people this is a very exciting time to be a Dakota person, in this place, because Dakota people are coming back here, back home. Slowly, bit by bit. It was into the twentieth

¹²⁴ Franky Jackson, interview with author, September 26, 2013 (in possession of author).

¹²⁵ Mary Louise Pratt, “The Arts of the Contact Zone,” *Profession* (1991), 35.

century that farmers in certain parts of Minnesota would shoot at Dakota if they were seen. There was once a bounty. And the legacy of that bounty on Dakota lives continues. So it's a very difficult history of Dakota people here. And a wonderful time of transformation and healing...taking place here at the site of our genesis... I just said to somebody the other day, who was kind of complaining about the way one Dakota person chooses to express the notion of this being the site of our genesis and genocide. My answer to that is that Dakota people communicate every way. We write, we talk, we teach classes, we sing songs, we write poetry, we tell jokes, we're tremendously congenial, and sometimes we're really angry. And in my opinion, we need all of those ways. The media that I do is another way for me to put—as a partner has described it—unmediated voices on the Web for people to hear Dakota voices. In my opinion, listening to Dakota people is an extremely radical act.¹²⁶

Conclusion: Resilience and renewal

It is in this daily, ritualized way that the various members of the Dakota community are breathing new life into their language and culture. Their efforts and the devastating U.S.-Dakota War that contributed to the need for language recovery in the first place, destabilize the stories that many historians customarily tell—and omit—about American nation-building. It underscores patterns in U.S. Indian policy of unilateral decision-making, failure to honor agreements, removal, and forced assimilation that have been endemic, as well as the white-supremacist assumptions that undergird it. For many generations, federal administrations assumed it best for Indian tribes to disappear as distinct

¹²⁶ Jennifer A. Macchiorlatti, "Video as Community Ally and Dakota Sense of Place: An Interview with Mona Smith" in M. Elise Marubbio and Eric L. Buffalohead, eds., *Native Americans on Film: Conversations, Teaching and Theory* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2013), 333.

tribal entities, and worked vigorously to make this a reality. The United States' politically dominant relationship to Indian peoples promotes a widespread misunderstanding by many American citizens of what are legally nation-to-nation relationships between tribes and the U.S. government. Historical narratives downplay the nation's origins in the conquest of Indigenous people; in the case of Minnesota, both Dakota and non-Dakota people report that the U.S.-Dakota War and its historical antecedents were excluded from their K-12 social studies curriculum.¹²⁷ Academic institutions, as some of the principal creators and disseminators of knowledge about Indians, bear much of the responsibility for relegating Indian peoples to the past, as subjects for anthropological and archeological study, rather than living nations that have survived the many attempts to eradicate their existence. Even well-meaning anthropologists, sociologists, historians, and interdisciplinary scholars may mistakenly subsume Indians within the category "ethnic minority," a classification that conceals both their distinct relationships to aboriginal territories ceded to the United States, and their sovereign status. For historians working in the fields of U.S. and Native American history, what is at stake is that it is simply not possible to write "good history" without the robust incorporation of Native American oral traditions, other primary sources, and scholarly interpretations.

¹²⁷ Dave Larsen & Kenneth Freed, "To Be Certain of the Dawn," The Martha Fast Horse Show, [blogtalkradio.com](http://www.blogtalkradio.com/marthafasthorse/2012/10/13/dave-larsen-kenneth-freed--to-be-certain-of-the-dawn) (<http://www.blogtalkradio.com/marthafasthorse/2012/10/13/dave-larsen-kenneth-freed--to-be-certain-of-the-dawn>).

Although one might argue that there has been a gradual increase in awareness among American citizens about troubling historical events such as the U.S.-Dakota War and the Dakota exile, as a nation, we have not sufficiently accounted for the costs of Dakota loss of homeland, language and cultural erosion, and diminishment of political power, or connected the impact of these losses to the challenges that contemporary Dakota communities face.

Grounded in traditions of determined resilience, American Indian tribes have remained intact, despite the expectation of politicians of earlier historical eras that they would “disappear” and the profusion of challenges to their integrity and survival. In fact, after a nadir at the turn of the twentieth century, the Dakota and other tribes have shown important signs of demographic, cultural, and economic resurgence amidst stubbornly persistent problems of poverty, economic underdevelopment, compromised physical and behavioral health, and limited control of and access to their own land and resources. It is essential that American citizens attempt to understand the complexity of Indian histories and identities on their own terms precisely because we are interconnected—certainly not a new phenomenon, but one that when viewed with an enlarged perspective, contains the possibility of healthier nation-to-nation relationships based on mutual respect and a shared future based on the indigenous ethic of taking care of the land we inhabit together.

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