“Lack of a Middle Ground”
The Sioux Uprising of 1862

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# Table of Contents

Acknowledgements.............................................................. ii  
Introduction........................................................................... 1  

Part I. Events of the Sioux Uprising of 1862................................. 10  
Chapter One. Leading Up to the Uprising................................. 11  
Chapter Two. Engaged in Warfare........................................... 20  
Chapter Three. Wood Lake and Future Relations....................... 36  

Part II. Liminal Figures.......................................................... 44  
Chapter Four. Little Crow..................................................... 45  
Chapter Five. Sarah Wakefield............................................... 67  
Chapter Six. Chaska............................................................ 85  
Chapter Seven. Abraham Lincoln........................................... 101  

Conclusion............................................................................. 117  
Bibliography............................................................................ 124
Introduction
In 1991, Richard White published a book entitled *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650-1815*. In his work, he argued that between 1650 and 1815, Minnesota, and the entire Great Lakes Region, became a ‘middle ground’ for white and Indian relations. The two societies shared a mutual understanding of their relationship. Each society used the other for own benefit. Unfortunately, those relations dissolved in the years that followed. In White’s period, men who brought together white and Indian society were celebrated. However, by the time of the Sioux Uprising of 1862, those people who tried to bring white and Indian societies together became outcasts. No longer was Minnesota tolerant to mediators. The only whites who associated with the Native Americans without bringing calamity to themselves were missionaries and traders; both sought personal benefits. If a person attempted to bridge the gap between the two societies simply for the sake of doing what was right, they were looked at with suspicion and a presumption of guilt. During and after the uprising, there was no ‘middle ground’.

The Native Americans had been exploited for their lands by the whites for years. By the 1860’s, the only reason why whites associated with Native Americans was that they wanted their land, or wanted to convert them. Although Indians traded with whites for material goods, their resources were being exploited. Furthermore, they were being exploited by the Bureau of Indian Affairs for their land. As a result, the Sioux in Minnesota violently rebelled against whites in an event now known as the Sioux Uprising of 1862. Since the Civil War was going on, whites were slow to find sufficient forces to combat the Sioux. For six weeks, those whites who were not fortunate enough to escape were either killed or taken into captivity. White troops eventually defeated the Sioux,
however those surviving Indians who committed the most atrocious acts fled west. The uprising came to a conclusion with President Abraham Lincoln sentencing thirty-eight captured Sioux to be hanged.

There are many sources available to research this topic. Some were written by Native Americans and whites, which reveal the differences in the experiences that were had by individuals. Although each person experienced the uprising differently, each person suffered chaos. This was a frightening time, filled with turmoil. The Native Americans constantly had to move their camp for fear of white soldiers. Whites experienced the uprising differently. The sources that are available are either from surviving women captives, those who retold their escape, or from soldiers who fought against the Native Americans. With one exception, the whites who had direct interaction with Native Americans, and left us records, did not acknowledge the individuality of Native Americans.

There were many captivity narratives that were circulated after the uprising. These narratives were either published as individual works, or preserved in the *Garland Captivity Narratives Collection*.¹ Many captives showed displeasure with being held captive, and never fully seem to understand that they were in midst of a war. White men also took an active part in describing the uprising. Missionaries and soldiers make up the bulk of the information that is available by white men. Since men were the ones who had the highest status within white society, their opinions influenced the way that others thought of Native Americans. One of the most intriguing sources was in the records kept

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¹ *The Garland Captivity Narrative Collection* consists of hundreds of volumes of captivity narratives. The editors reprinted all of the Indian captivity narratives which were published and put them into this multi-volume work.
by the U.S. government. There were letters from Lincoln, and to Lincoln, which greatly
broadened the outlook of my thesis.

Although Native Americans did not hold as high status as whites, and thus were
not seen as influential. Their narratives are nevertheless very important for understanding
the uprising. Their narratives explain why the uprising occurred, and show the feelings
that individuals had throughout. Thankfully, the narratives by Native Americans have
been compiled together in a work by Gary Clayton Anderson and Alan R. Woolworth,
*Through Dakota Eyes* (1988). I was able to read narratives from many different Native
Americans, including men and women, those who favored the attack on whites and those
who opposed. There were Indians who participated in battles and others who rescued
white women. The Native Americans whose narratives I used were: Chief Big Eagle,
Samuel Brown, Cecelia Stay Campbell, Joe Coursolle, Charles Crawford, George
Crooks, Godfrey, Good Star Woman, Joseph La Framboise Jr., Lightning Blanket, Little
Crow, Little Paul, Nancy McLure, John Other Day, George Quinn, Gabriel Renville,
Victor Renville, Thomas Robertson, Snana, Solomon Two Stars, Taopi, Wabasha, Esther
Wakeman, and White Spider. The narratives were initially published at different times
and for different reasons. Each story was different and added a dimension that does not
exist in typical textbooks. These narratives also provide a viewpoint which is different
from that of white society. They show that, even if they were not mistreated by whites at
first, the Indians always eventually faced discrimination.

The final source of information was available from the public arena. I used
newspaper sources, and “War Trial Transcripts” to show what the popular sentiment at
the time was. The *St. Paul Weekly Press* showed what citizens felt during the uprising. It
showed that prior to the uprising, Indians were an afterthought. But once the uprising occurred, Indians, or primarily their punishment, were found at the forefront of news. The “War Trial Transcripts” show what the generals who were in charge of their respective commands felt towards the Native Americans. Since they fought against the Indians, they reflected the attitudes of white society.

In order to understand the actions of individuals, it is vital to know what they went through, and the circumstances that surrounded their decisions. For that reason I chose to dedicate the first part of my thesis to discussing the significant events of the uprising. The first part of my thesis is broken into three chapters. At first I discuss what events led to the uprising in 1862. Then I have a detailed discussion of the events that actually triggered the violence from the Native Americans. Chapter two focuses on the battles that occurred during the uprising, and how whites and Indians experienced them. From this, it became evident that although the Indians tried to organize themselves, there were internal rifts. There were some Sioux who were totally against any insurrection against the whites, while other Sioux, mostly younger warriors, promoted violence. Finally, this part concludes with the outcome of the final battle, Wood Lake, and what happened to the Native Americans afterward. Since whites were not fond of Native Americans, it was interesting to see how the whites planned to deal with their former adversaries.

The most important part of my paper analyzes four individuals who vainly tried to transcend differences between white and Native American societies through their actions. The first person I discuss is Chief Little Crow. He was a highly influential leader of the Sioux, but unfortunately he was misunderstood. Although he was the leader of the
uprising, he was not a totally ruthless person, which he is often made out to be. He lived in a wooden house and even participated in the negotiation of treaties with the U.S. government. In the uprising he was able to save a few white women, but was not given proper credit. Instead, he was shunned by both societies. Due to the fact that he did not fully commit to one society, he was not celebrated as a great man who was able to save innocent people, but was labeled as the key transgressor of the uprising.

After analyzing the life of Little Crow, I chose to write about a white woman who was held captive throughout the uprising, Sarah Wakefield. She was the only woman who spoke kindly of the Native Americans. White society found this very strange and labeled her as a ‘fallen woman’. Through her actions, Wakefield was not following the norms of society. She was beginning to view Native Americans as individuals, and not as savage beings. With the help of rumors, spread by other captives, Wakefield completely lost all her standing within white society. Her testimony at the trial of the Indians was discredited and further cemented her as an outcast. Desperately trying to justify herself to white society, Wakefield wrote a couple of versions of her captivity narrative, *Six Weeks in Sioux Tepees*. Since she refused to totally commit to white society however, nothing helped her regain her status.

The Indian who saved Wakefield’s life was Chaska. Because Wakefield tried to show that Chaska was an individual, she was shunned and Chaska was hanged. Although Chaska had to go through a lot of hardships to save Wakefield, the individuals who were in charge of the hangings did not appreciate him doing so. Instead, they focused on the rumors circulating about Chaska and Wakefield, and punished him for supposedly being Wakefield’s lover. This was not true, however. Chaska was simply a man who did not
follow strict boundaries that society had made. He made his mediator status known through saving Wakefield, while sacrificing his own comfort. On August 26th, 1862, Chaska was purposefully hanged. His death was due to the fact that he was a person who tried to bring two societies together.

Finally, I end my thesis with the analysis of Abraham Lincoln. Although Lincoln was deeply burdened by the Civil War, he still managed to provide a general with military experience to the war against the Sioux. On the other hand, he did not succumb to public demands of executing all of the Sioux who were charged with crimes during the uprising. Lincoln managed to keep himself outside the norms of society and let justice prevail. He made sure that the men who were hanged deserved that punishment. Instead of hanging 303 Indians as originally requested, Lincoln decided that there were only 38 who deserved death. Unlike the many other officials during this time period, Lincoln did not worry about public opinion, even though the citizens of Minnesota were arguing in favor of the execution of all Indians. Just like the others, Lincoln became unpopular in Minnesota.

Throughout my thesis, I show that a ‘middle ground’ did not exist in 1862. Those who tried to bring white and Indian society together were negatively affected in some way. I use terms like mediators, liminal figures, and go-betweens, to define what it meant to follow a middle path. Those who followed the middle path did not conform to one society, but rather committed themselves to participating in both, societies, white and Indian. For their lack of conformity, they were not trusted, and defined as outcasts. These people should have been revered for their efforts, but instead they were mistreated. In fifty short years, society had changed drastically. Mediators lost any kind of respect, and
in some instances, even lost their lives. Those who prevailed were the ones who conformed to one society. My thesis seeks to analyze and understand liminal figures during the Sioux Uprising of 1862.

A Note on Language:

There are many names that the Native Americans are identified by. They are often referred to as Indians, Native Americans, or American Indians. Indigenous people at different regions preferred different designations, but to avoid taking sides in that discussion, I use all those words interchangeably. The Sioux Uprising of 1862 was fought by the Eastern Sioux, or Dakota, involving bands of Sissetons, Wahpetons, Mdewakantons, and Wahpehutes. In order to avoid confusion for a reader who is unfamiliar with Native American terms, I refer to these groups as the Sioux, Dakota, Indians, or Native Americans.

It is worth mentioning that the name for the incident of 1862 is also in dispute. Historically, it could be seen as an uprising, an insurrection, or a war. In order to justify taking the land of the Sioux, whites refer to it as a ‘just war’. The Sioux themselves might call this a war in order to justify their own violence. The word ‘uprising’ is problematic because it suggests that the people who were a part of it previously accepted the authority of the government. However, many Native Americans never accepted the U.S. government. However, since the most prevalent name for the incident of 1862 is an ‘uprising’, that is what I decided to refer to it as.

Finally I wanted to clarify my usage of the word ‘half-breed’. I do not use it as a term of disrespect, but I could not avoid using the language that was prevalent at the time.
The term that applies now to people of mixed race is ‘mixed-blood’, but for the purpose of preserving the true interaction between people, I chose to use ‘half-breeds’. Since a lot of whites and Native Americans used the word ‘half-breed’ in their language, I chose to authenticate my thesis by also referring to ‘mixed-blood’ people as ‘half-breeds’.
Part I

Events of the Sioux Uprising of 1862
Although the Sioux Uprising of 1862 was unexpected for many white citizens of Minnesota, the reasons behind the uprising were understandable. The way that the U.S. government dealt with the Indians was by all accounts atrocious. The government had made treaties with the Sioux in 1837, 1851 and 1858. In all treaties, the Indians were taken advantage of. In 1851, Little Crow went to Washington to negotiate on behalf of the Indians. What appeared to be a fair treaty, resulted in a hoax. Men like Governor Alexander Ramsey and trader Henry Hastings Sibley received huge sums of money out of the fund set aside for the Indians. Governor Ramsey was later charged for his shady business with the Sioux but reprieved of any wrongdoing by the Senate. As a result of the Treaty of 1851, the land near the mouth of the Cottonwood River was to be left in the possession of the Sioux. However, German settlers soon began occupying the area. Little Crow was very distraught about being exploited, and he brought up the Cottonwood River in the negotiations for the 1858 Treaty, but his statement was rejected by Charles Mix, who was an Indian commissioner negotiating on behalf of the U.S. government.

The Indians had further problems with the 1858 Treaty. The Indians were forced to move from their land to a place “where there was but very little game, and many of our people, under the treaty, were induced to give up the old life and go to work like white

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2 Isaac Heard, History of the Sioux War and massacres of 1862 and 1863 (Millwood, N.Y: Kraus Reprint, 1975), 41.
men, which was very distasteful to many.”⁴ After signing the treaty, the Indians were faced with another piece of paper and were forced to sign. That paper was made by the traders in order to obtain funding from the 1858 Treaty.

By signing the paper, the Indians gave away a portion of their annual payment to the traders for ‘past debts’. Wabasha, one of the most powerful chiefs at that time, was not even approached with such a paper. However, he was negatively impacted as well, “By the result of this paper signed without my consent or knowledge, the traders obtained possession of all the money coming from the sale of the land of the north side of the Minnesota River, and also half of our annuity for the year 1862.”⁵

Unfortunately, the treaties were not lone examples of misconduct towards the Indians. In his narrative, Chief Big Eagle, noted that “some of the white men abused the Indian women in a certain way and disgraced them, and surely there was no excuse for that.”⁶ The Dakota were a proud people, but whites had made a mockery of their lives. Furthermore, the overall demeanor of the whites was negative towards the Sioux, “Many of the whites always seemed to say by their manner when they saw an Indian, ‘I am much better than you,’ and the Indians did not like this.”⁷ To make matters worse, more whites constantly poured into their area and men whom they trusted were taken out of office. In 1860, Thomas Galbraith and Clark Thompson replaced Joseph Brown and William J. Cullen as Indian agents.⁸ These new men needed to earn the trust of the Indians, but they were unable to do so due to the events that were transpiring.

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⁵ Wabasha in Anderson and Woolworth’s *Through Dakota Eyes*, 30.  
⁷ Ibid.  
⁸ Ibid, 25.
Another grievance that many Indians had against the whites was that the whites in effect forced their culture upon them. One of the first things that the whites tried to accomplish was to force the Indians to farm. At first there was not a large number of Sioux who were willing to farm, so the whites had to provide incentives. If an Indian wanted to live the life of a farmer, “the government built them houses, furnished them tools, seed, etc., and taught them to farm.”\(^9\) However, this did not sit favorably with those Sioux who chose to keep hunting. A rift developed between those Indians who farmed and those who hunted. The hunter Indians were against the system of favoritism, “They were envious of them [farmer Indians] and jealous, and disliked them because they were favored. They called them ‘farmers’, as if it was disgraceful to be a farmer.”\(^10\)

The whites had also recognized the internal rift between the Indians. According to Isaac Heard, “These ‘Farmer’ Indians did very little work, had their lands plowed for them by the whites, and were much better supplied with food and clothing than the others, and the extra expense was deducted out of the common fund.”\(^11\) Not only were some of the ‘farmer’ Indians lazy, they were having work done for them. Furthermore, the money necessary to supply the ‘farmer’ Indians was taken out of the communal pot. While resentment for the ‘farmer’ Indians was slowly accumulating, resentment against the idea of farming was already enormous. Big Eagle argued: “If the Indians had tried to make the whites live like them, the whites would have resisted, and it was the same way with many Indians.”\(^12\) The Indians who wanted to keep their culture suffered, while people who wanted to take advantage of a situation prospered.

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\(^9\) Ibid., 24.
\(^10\) Ibid., 26.
\(^12\) Jerome Big Eagle in Anderson and Woolworth’s *Through Dakota Eyes*, 23.
Finally, the biggest grievance that the Sioux had was against the traders who constantly took advantage of them. Traders were people who owned stores and who exchanged goods for money. Many of the goods were sold on credit. In his narrative, Chief Big Eagle discussed how the annuity payment that was sent by the U.S. government was distributed among the Sioux: “When the government payments came the traders were on hand with their books, which showed that the Indians owed so much and so much, and as the Indians kept no books they could not deny their accounts, but had to pay them, and sometimes the traders got all their money.”13 Sarah Wakefield also witnessed the traders mistreating the Indians. Wakefield was present when the Indians were getting paid by the government and “saw a poor fellow [Indian] one day swallow his money”, this was very strange to her, and she “wondered he did not choke to death, but he said ‘They [traders] will not have mine, for I do not owe them.’”14

In order to remedy the situation, the Indians and traders, with the help of Agent Thomas J. Galbraith, got involved in a serious talk. The talks included discussions on how the Indians were to be fed. Since the Indians were starved while awaiting the gold from the East, they somehow needed to be taken care of. During the talks, a question was raised to the traders on what they intended to do regarding the present situation. Since no one had a solution, they turned to Andrew Myrick, who was esteemed because he owned stores at both Indian agencies.15 The answer that was given shocked and enraged many Indians. Myrick told the Indians to “go and eat grass.”16 Fortunately, Captain Marsh was

13 Ibid., 24.
15 Schultz, Over the Earth I Come, 27.
16 Jerome Big Eagle in Anderson and Woolworth’s Through Dakota Eyes, 56. See Also Joe Coursolle in Anderson and Woolworth’s Through Dakota Eyes, 59.
able to come from Fort Ridgeley in time to persuade Agent Galbraith to let the Sioux get food from the warehouse. Nevertheless, the damage was done. The words of Myrick would be one of the causes of the uprising. Not surprisingly, “at the trader’s was the first death-blow given in the awful massacre of August, 1862.”

Although the Indians had many reasons to be upset with the whites, the reason the Sioux Uprising of 1862 occurred was that four young men had killed several white people in Acton Township of Minnesota on August 17\textsuperscript{th} 1862. Since none of the four men wrote anything, the history of that moment is based upon hearsay. The most influential source on this topic is Chief Big Eagle. In his account, Big Eagle stated that he personally had talked to each one of the men and found out the events. His narrative was also the only primary source which mentioned the four men by name, Sungigidan, K Kom-de-i-ye-ye-dan, Nagi-wi-cak-te, and Pa-zo-i-yo-pa. According to Big Eagle, these four young men were returning from a hunt and came to a settler’s house. At that time, one of the men took eggs from a hen belonging to a white man, Mr. Robinson Jones. Another young Indian argued against it, he said, “Don’t take them, for they belong to the white man and we may get in trouble.”\footnote{Wakefield, "Six Weeks in the Sioux Tepees: A Narrative of Indian Captivity.", 247.} The one who took the eggs then questioned his friend’s courage by calling him a coward. His friend replied with, “I am not a coward. I am not afraid of the white man, and to show you that I am not I will go to the house and shoot him.”\footnote{Jerome Big Eagle in Anderson and Woolworth’s \textit{Through Dakota Eyes}, 35.} Consequently, the four young men went looking for a white man. They first went to the house of Mr. Robinson Jones, but he went to another house because he got\footnote{Ibid.}
alarmed. The four young men followed him and proceeded to shoot three men and two women.\textsuperscript{20}

Another Indian, Good Star Woman, also provided an account of the initial spark in her narrative. Good Star Woman’s description of the Acton killings also begins with four men returning from a hunt, but Good Star Woman provides more detail by mentioning that the four men were hungry. There happened to be a hen with some eggs and, again two of the men quarreled about taking the eggs. After a brief argument, the four men came to a white man’s house asking for some water so they could cook. The white man was angry and threatened them with his gun. The young man who was against taking the eggs turned to his friend and said “You called me a coward. Shoot this man. If you don’t I’ll kill you right here.”\textsuperscript{21} Upon hearing that statement, the Indian fired and killed the white man and his wife. After the incident, the four young men were chased away by a few whites.\textsuperscript{22}

There were also a few white women, who were held as captives, who published their versions of the initial killings in Acton. One of those women was Minnie Buce Carrigan. According to Carrigan, there were twenty men returning from a hunt. Two men quarreled about taking the eggs while the other eighteen left. The two men challenged each other’s bravery, but initially nothing resulted from this. They went to the house of Mr. Jones and were told to leave. Then they went next door, to the son-in law of Mr. Jones, and asked for, and received, water and tobacco. At that point, Mr. Jones and his wife came to visit, and the two Indians asked Mr. Jones for some whiskey. His wife

\textsuperscript{20} Ibid., 35-6.
\textsuperscript{21} Good Star Woman in Anderson and Woolworth’s \textit{Through Dakota Eyes}, 38.
\textsuperscript{22} Ibid.
replied “I had no whiskey to give to those red devils.”23 The two Indians proceeded to leave the house and met two other Indians from the eighteen who left, who were out looking for them. By now, the Indians became enraged, aimed their guns at one of the whites, and fired. Upon finishing their deed, the four young men returned to Shakopee, their Chief.24 Another white woman, by the name of Helen Carrigans Tarble, also provided an account of the killings but lacked many details. Her account amounted to four young men quarrelling and then deciding to go and kill the whites in order to show their bravery.25

The final primary account of the events was provided by Isaac Heard, a white man living in Minnesota at the time of the uprising. Just like Carrigan, Heard mentioned, that initially, there were more than four young men.26 After a while, they split up and four were left to themselves. To prove their bravery, they killed an ox, but apparently that was not enough and the one who shot the ox got challenged to kill a white man. The four young men heard shooting in the distance and assumed that the other 11 men were killing whites, so they decided to kill as well. They went to one house but found it to be unoccupied. Then they went to a neighbor’s house and decided to have a shooting contest with Mr. Jones, who did not refuse the challenge. The narrative ends with the whites being killed.27

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24 Ibid.
26 Heard, History of the Sioux War and massacres of 1862 and 1863, 15.
27 Ibid., 52-5.
Even the secondary sources contradict themselves rather than analyzing the differences between the stories. Duane Schultz, *Over the Earth I Come*, combines the narrative of Chief Big Eagle with the narrative of Isaac Heard. Schultz’s version had some facts that parallel Big Eagle’s account, but also mentioned the shooting match which is only evident in Isaac Heard’s account.\(^\text{28}\) Hank Cox, *Lincoln and the Sioux Uprising of 1862*, chose the same path as Schultz. Cox mentioned Big Eagle’s account, but just like Schultz, mentioned the shooting contest.\(^\text{29}\) This could be because Cox was influenced by Schultz, because Schultz’s book was published twelve years prior, and Cox cited her as a source. Finally, in order to avoid confusion, Gary Anderson, *Little Crow: Spokesman for the Sioux*, simply chose to avoid the details, and only mentioned that four young men were insulted by Jones and chose to kill him.\(^\text{30}\)

Although the exact truth will never be known, some details remain similar. There must have been four Indian men involved. They questioned each other’s bravery, and one of them suggested that the ultimate source of bravery was killing a white man. Considering that the art of war was sacred to the Indians, a challenge like that could not have been ignored. Mr. Jones was probably less than hospitable to the Indians, who always shared with their neighbors, and so this enraged the Indians even further. Whether there was a shooting contest or not, it is clear that Mr. Jones was the first white person to die in the uprising. After the murder, the four Indians went to their own village and contacted their chief, Chief Shakopee, on what to do next.

Since Shakopee was not a very powerful chief, he went to see Chief Red Middle Voice, who was also very militant. Upon further consultation, “Shakopee took the young

\(^{28}\) Schultz, *Over the Earth I Come*, 31.
men to Little Crow’s house, and he sat up in bed and listened to their story.”\textsuperscript{31} At first Little Crow did not want to take any part of the violence against the whites. After all, he had visited Washington and seen what the whites were capable of. He saw the vast number of technology and of white people. He replied to Shakopee, and the young warriors, “You are fools. You cannot see the face of your chief; your eyes are full of smoke. You cannot hear his voice; your ears are full of roaring water.”\textsuperscript{32}

Although Little Crow refused to participate, Shakopee and other vigilant leaders continued to tempt Little Crow into joining. There were no previous indications that Little Crow wanted to start a war. Indian Agent Galbraith had a conversation with Little Crow days before the uprising had occurred and the result “furnished no indication of what was about to transpire.”\textsuperscript{33} The scene at Little Crow’s was overwhelming. The warriors who had gathered around his house were in a state of frenzy. The commotion was so great that Joe Coursolle heard the drums at his home, which was two miles away.\textsuperscript{34} After a long process, in which Little Crow’s courage was questioned, he finally succumbed to peer-pressure. Little Crow accepted the position of being the leader of the warriors. The position was not full of power, however, as the young warriors were highly disorganized and often did not obey Little Crow’s orders. Nevertheless, the Sioux needed a leader in order to start the uprising. Little Crow was charismatic, knew of the white ways, and had enough prestige to convince warriors to join the cause.

\textsuperscript{31} Jerome Big Eagle in Anderson and Woolworth’s \textit{Through Dakota Eyes}, 36.
\textsuperscript{32} Little Crow in Anderson and Woolworth’s \textit{Through Dakota Eyes}, 42.
\textsuperscript{33} Heard, \textit{History of the Sioux war}, 25.
\textsuperscript{34} Joe Coursolle in Anderson and Woolworth’s \textit{Through Dakota Eyes}, 58.
Chapter 2- Engaged in Warfare

Once Little Crow agreed to lead the warriors, they attacked the Lower Agency and caused mass chaos. Just as Sarah Wakefield mentioned, the traders were the first to suffer the consequences of their mistreatment of the Sioux. Among them was Andrew Myrick, the trader who told the Sioux to eat grass. Now he was lying dead on the ground, and had his mouth stuffed with grass.\(^1\) The violence did not end there and soon spread to the Upper Agency, as well as throughout Minnesota. There were many acts of violence that surfaced throughout the six weeks of the uprising.\(^2\) However, there were also times when the Indians saved some white women.\(^3\) Furthermore, at the Upper Agency, many of the converted Christian Indians saved missionaries such as Rev. Stephen Riggs.\(^4\)

Since the Civil War was also raging during this period, there would not be as many men available to fight the Sioux. General Henry Sibley, a trader by profession, was chosen to lead white soldiers against the Indians. Since Sibley had no prior military training, he was overly cautious in his movements. Joe Coursolle, a ‘half-breed’, recalled his time serving under Sibley, “we moved like snails. I could have crawled on my stomach and made faster time. Again we cursed Sibley. He was so slow!”\(^5\) General Sibley was so slow that he did not arrive at Fort Ridgely until two battles had been already fought. Again, Joe Coursolle was not happy, “we drilled and drilled and

\(^1\) Jerome Big Eagle in Anderson and Woolworth’s *Through Dakota Eyes*, 56.
\(^3\) Wakefield, “Six Weeks in the Sioux Tepees: A Narrative of Indian Captivity.”, 253. See Also: “Charles Ziercke” 1, and “Phinehas B. Hurd” 1, in Harper Workman’s *Early history of Lake Shetek country.*
\(^4\) John Other Day in Anderson and Woolworth’s *Through Dakota Eyes*, 122.
\(^5\) Joe Coursolle in Anderson and Woolworth’s *Through Dakota Eyes*, 239.
drilled… I thought we had enough to lick General Lee but Sibley kept drilling us.”

Coursolle had a good reason to make haste. He needed to rescue his daughters, who were lost while they were trying to make their escape from the Indians. Joe Coursolle, like many other ‘half-breeds’, was put into a difficult situation. At first, he was not sure of what was to be done with him since he had both white and Indian blood.

The ‘half-breeds’, as they were called during this time, were treated by many Indians as white people. They were in constant danger of being killed, even though they had Indian blood. In the beginning of the uprising, many ‘half breeds’ were in a state of confusion. Joseph La Framboise Jr. recalled being frightened when he first heard the news of the uprising and feared for his life. He was so cautious that he crawled up to a group of Indians with a blanket over his head in order to discern if they were friendly. A lot of the ‘half-breeds’ were taken captive by the Indians and were treated essentially like white captives. Other ‘half-breeds’, like Joe Coursolle, chose to volunteer with the white soldiers.

The fact that the Indians were fighting men who had Indian blood in them, made the Indians even angrier. Tensions escalated further with each passing battle. Nancy McLure remembered full-blooded Indians being “very bitter against us, for they said we were worse than the whites, and that they were going to kill us all.” Suddenly, the ‘half-breeds’, were no longer relatives, but were seen as interlopers. While in captivity, the ‘half-breeds’, just like the whites, would hear threats towards their lives, “another day the

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6 Ibid.
7 See Good Star Woman 53, Cecelia Stay Campbell 45, Esther Wakeman 54, Taopi 63-4, in Anderson and Woolworth’s *Through Dakota Eyes*.
8 Joseph La Framboise Jr. in Anderson and Woolworth’s *Through Dakota Eyes*, 139.
9 Nancy McLure in Anderson and Woolworth’s *Through Dakota Eyes*, 138.
cry was raised that the half-breeds were all to be killed.”

Just like the whites, the half-breeds were left in a state of confusion and helplessness.

After panicking, white refugees figured that they would be safe at Fort Ridgely. After all, Fort Ridgely had a military presence that could protect the whites from the Indians. The refugees tried to explain to Captain Marsh, the stationed commander of the fort, the dire circumstances, but Marsh greatly underestimated the size of the uprising and only took forty-six men with him to try and end the problem. Nancy McLure saw Captain Marsh’s men going towards the ferry. This would be the last time that she would see him alive. As soon as Captain Marsh reached the ferry, “an Indian dressed in citizens’ clothes appeared on the other side and told the captain that there were no Indians there.”

Like the other citizens of Minnesota, Marsh had no reason to distrust a ‘farmer Indian’. When Marsh attempted to cross the river, “the Indians began the attack from the bluff and also from the rear, for there was a large force concealed in the grass.” After the ensuing confrontation, only 14 soldiers were left alive, excluding Captain Marsh, who lay dead.

Little Crow tried to organize his men to attack Fort Ridgely in order to get rid of the soldier presence. However, most Indians refused, and favored an attack on the town of New Ulm. New Ulm was considered a much safer target for an attack because it was not well defended due to the lack of soldiers. Fort Ridgely was occupied by trained soldiers, while New Ulm was a town occupied by simple townspeople. According to William Hayden, a member of Captain Flandreau’s men, at New Ulm, “a few of the men

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10 Joseph La Framboise Jr. in Anderson and Woolworth’s *Through Dakota Eyes*, 139.
11 Nancy McLure in Anderson and Woolworth’s *Through Dakota Eyes*, 84.
13 Ibid.
had hunting guns, but the majority was without fire arms and had supplied themselves with pitchforks.”

Although Captain Flandreau was there, his men did not necessarily mean victory for the whites. The Indians had superior forces and had the advantage of a surprise attack.

The disadvantage for the Indians was the fact that they were all fighting without cohesion. Since “there was no one in chief command of the Indians at New Ulm”, it was “every man for himself.”

Although the whites were far from being perfectly organized as well, the Indians had zero organization. Since more white refugees were constantly pouring into the town, the different reports regarding the Indians only added to the confusion of Captain Flandreau’s forces. Just like the Indian forces, the whites were in dire need of order within their ranks.

There were a couple of people who were determined to keep everyone calm and find some way to create a defense against the Indian attacks. Although without a leader, the Indians tried to deceive the whites through a diversion. The Indians had set fire to some buildings and started firing, drawing the attention of the whites. Once the men rushed to take their positions, the Indians appeared behind them and started shooting into a crowded area. This was an effective strategy until the whites adjusted. Since only a few Indians followed that strategy, the diversion was not difficult to combat. Once the diversion was unsuccessful, the entire attack on New Ulm did not last long. Once the rain started, the Indians stopped trying to charge and focused on shooting from a safe

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15 Jerome Big Eagle in Anderson and Woolworth’s Through Dakota Eyes, 147.
16 Hayden, An account of the relief expedition sent from St. Peter to New Ulm, 5.
distance. The attack eventually dissipated, lasting only an hour and a half.\textsuperscript{17} Although the attack had stopped, the Indians remained at New Ulm until morning and then very solemnly went back to Little Crow’s village.\textsuperscript{18} Although the Indians only suffered a few casualties, they had faced their first defeat.\textsuperscript{19}

With the defeat of New Ulm, Little Crow now had full support for an attack on Fort Ridgely, which he organized on August 20\textsuperscript{th}. Ironically, the whole structure of Fort Ridgely, “did not deserve the name of fort.”\textsuperscript{20} Then again, most of the people occupying the Fort did not fit the definition of soldiers. Although they were under the charge of Capt. Sheehan, most “men who did not have a gun were armed with crowbars and axes.”\textsuperscript{21} Meanwhile, the Indians again had the advantage. Since they were on the offensive, they could use the element of surprise and use the timing of the attack to their advantage. Unlike the civilians who fled the countryside, the Indians were eagerly awaiting their attack upon the fort. According to Lightning Blanket, “the young men were all anxious to go, we dressed as warriors, in war paint.”\textsuperscript{22}

The instructions given by Little Crow, were to surround the fort and have Medicine Bottle’s, one of the chiefs, men be a diversion so that Little Crow’s, Big Eagle’s, and Little Six’s forces could “rush in and take the Fort.”\textsuperscript{23} However, once the Native Americans were presented with the challenge of actually taking the fort, they “paid no attention to the chiefs; everyone did as he pleased.”\textsuperscript{24} Native Americans did not attack the fort as was planned, and each separate column attacked at separate times,

\begin{enumerate}
\item Schultz, \textit{Over the Earth I Come}, 100.
\item Godfrey in Anderson and Woolworth’s \textit{Through Dakota Eyes}, 91.
\item Jerome Big Eagle in Anderson and Woolworth’s \textit{Through Dakota Eyes}, 147.
\item Earle, \textit{Reminiscences}, 14.
\item Ibid., 14.
\item Lightning Blanket in Anderson and Woolworth’s \textit{Through Dakota Eyes}, 154.
\item Ibid.
\end{enumerate}
giving the whites a chance to focus their fire on one direction. Lightning Blanket recalled rushing towards the fort, only to be repelled by fire from white soldiers. He stated that if Little Crow’s men had fired at the white soldiers, who were shooting at his column, the white soldiers would have been killed.\(^{25}\)

Meanwhile, the whites were overwhelmed with the demeanor of the Indians. When the Indians came running at the fort, “there was a terrible war whoop by the Indians and it scared a lot of the people.”\(^{26}\) The atmosphere was frightening and many soldiers were unprepared for the terror. As a result, many of the soldiers “had deserted their posts and gone up stairs with the women and children.”\(^{27}\) Unlike the many deserters, Joe Coursolle, was one of the men who fought very bravely. Nevertheless, he remembered being terrified while climbing to take a flaming arrow out of the roof of a building. While climbing up the ladder, “every Indian bow and gun would be shooting just at me.”\(^{28}\) His terror amounted to nothing, because the Indians misfired and he was left unhurt.

The strategy of the whites was to use musket fire in order to force the Indians to retreat. If the warriors became too concentrated in one area, the soldiers would use the cannon. The cannon had terrified the warriors. When the warriors heard the cannon, they would run away “as though the devil was chasing them.”\(^{29}\) With the use of the cannon, the soldiers inside the fort were successful at repelling enemy charges. Upon this failure, the Native Americans gave up their planning of rushing the fort and simply “shot at the

\(^{25}\) Ibid.
\(^{26}\) Earle, Reminiscences, 14.
\(^{27}\) Ibid., 15.
\(^{28}\) Joe Coursolle in Anderson and Woolworth’s Through Dakota Eyes, 159.
\(^{29}\) Ibid.
Due to their inability to defeat the white soldiers, the warriors became very angry.

The Indians were relying on the blazing arrows to do much of the damage. However, when the arrows did not light the roofs of the buildings, the Indians became even more reliant on their ammunition. Big Eagle reiterated the point that when setting fire to the roofs failed, the Indians “had to get more powder and bullets.” If they had enough bullets and powder, the 400 Indians could have fought the whole day because the warriors brought young boys to cook for them during the fight. Fortunately for the whites, the Indians could not sustain their assault and were forced to retreat.

As soon as the Indians left, the whites within the fort started getting prepared for another battle. They were unaware of the intentions of the Indians, but if they failed to repel an Indian attack, they would most likely all be killed. As evidenced by the earlier actions of the Indians, the women and children might have been taken captive, but the majority of the men, if not all, would be killed. Lieutenant Sheehan did not allow his men to celebrate for a long period of time because he started scolding them for acting cowardly during battle. This was a huge gesture because it meant that Sheehan did not have control of his men. It also meant that Sheehan predicted another Indian attack, and wanted to make sure that cowardly action would not be tolerated. While Sheehan was preparing his defenses, a disappointed Little Crow was taking his warriors back to his village in order to regroup for another assault on the fort.

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30 Ibid., 155.
31 Jerome Big Eagle in Anderson and Woolworth’s Through Dakota Eyes, 155.
32 Ibid., 156.
33 Earle, Reminiscences, 15.
The second battle had many more Indians involved. Little Crow was able to assemble approximately 800 warriors. According to Big Eagle, August 22nd was a “grand affair.” There was no doubting the importance of this battle. The fort had to be taken over. The Indians were expecting Sibley to reinforce the fort any day, so timing was of the essence. The Indians were generally in good spirits, their goals were illustrated by Big Eagle, “we went down determined to take the fort, for we knew it was of greatest importance to us.” Although Little Crow would not take a very active participation in the actual fighting, he carefully made a plan, which if followed, would have resulted in victory. Besides, “war was the greatest hunt, the greatest game, the greatest test of strength. It was what Dakota men trained for.” There was no way the Indians would lose again.

Just like the whites, the Indians did not let a day pass without making proper adjustments. The day previous to the attack, warriors had made bullets and packed more powder. Little Crow now had a large army, thanks to the significant number of Sissetons who came on this campaign. The strategy and the chiefs in charge were the same, as in the initial attack on the fort. However, just like Sheehan, Little Crow “had given strict orders on the account of the first failure.” The warriors were to rush the fort upon hearing three gun shots. Since the warriors were untrained in structured warfare, confusion broke out yet again. Some of Medicine Bottle’s men saw a mail carrier going to the fort and shot at him. Having missed, they fired twice more and thus accidentally

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34 Jerome Big Eagle in Anderson and Woolworth’s *Through Dakota Eyes*, 148.
35 Ibid.
36 Ibid.
37 Schultz, *Over the Earth I Come*, 145.
38 Lightning Blanket in Anderson and Woolworth’s *Through Dakota Eyes*, 156.
The men who heard them all rushed towards the fort, but repelled by the “big guns.”

The superior numbers were quickly noticed by the whites. “There were many more warriors in this attack than there were in the first battle.” The mentality of the whites did not change: they had to defend themselves, or else be killed. When the Indians charged, the soldiers repelled them with their fire, causing the warriors to retreat back into the woods. Their chiefs got angry with them and urged them back into the battle. Both sides were facing similar problems with desertion. It took a lot for commanders and chiefs to prevent their men from abandoning the fight. Captain DeCamp gave very explicit orders to the men under his supervision, “boys, I am ordered to shoot the first man who leaves his post without orders.” This was all part of Sheehan’s new strategy to keep his men from hiding during the battle. Sheehan divided his defense into squad lines and had a commander in charge of each squad line.

During the battle, the Native Americans again reverted to shooting at the buildings. The Native Americans were also trying to set fire to the roofs, so that the whites would be forced to expose themselves by coming out from the cover of the buildings. Unfortunately for the Native Americans, it began to rain, causing this strategy to become obsolete yet again. Around the late afternoon, the Indians gathered in one area for what Coursolle described as an attack which was “for keeps.” What the Indians did not know, was that the soldiers had a secret weapon.

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39 Ibid. The ‘big guns’ that Lightning Blanket is referring to are the cannons at the fort.
40 Joe Coursolle in Anderson and Woolworth’s Through Dakota Eyes, 159.
41 Earle, Reminiscences, 17.
42 Joe Coursolle in Anderson and Woolworth’s Through Dakota Eyes, 160.
The soldiers were keeping one of their cannons secret, and once the warriors charged, the white soldiers unloaded all of the cannons at their disposal. The cannon fire had “tore great holes in the ranks of the warriors”, and after an unsuccessful charge, the “Indians skedaddled and the fighting was over.” Six days later, General Sibley arrived at the Fort with his men. Chief Big Eagle admitted that the cannon was a big nuisance. Although it “did not hurt many”, the cannon successfully “disturbed” the Native Americans. This would prove to be the final fight for the fort. The Indians were left disappointed because, up to this point, they were unable to win any major battles other than the ambush of Captain Marsh’s men. Now that Sibley had arrived with his forces, an Indian victory was even less probable.

Little Crow now turned his sight to another target. He was determined to get to New Ulm before Sibley’s soldiers had a chance to arrive there. As soon as the Indians retreated from the second attack on Fort Ridgely, he took 400 men and went on the offensive against New Ulm. Meanwhile, refugees were pouring into New Ulm constantly. Before the battle was even fought, men were sent to find women and children who were hiding in tall grass from the Indians. This was a disruption within the town. The townspeople did not know the fate of the soldiers on the mission, and with the increasing threat of an Indian attack on the town, the townspeople were getting nervous.

When the battle began, the Indians just seemed to come out of the grass. Thirteen white soldiers, including W.H. Hazzard, were sent to the top of the windmill,
which offered a great defense of the perimeter. The main force of the soldiers was
stationed in the middle of the town behind barricades. Women and children were hidden
in the cellars of the stores within the barricades. The fighting went on in a very
disorganized manner. The people at New Ulm did not have military experience, and the
Indians were never organized to begin with. During midday, it appeared that the white
civilians were beginning to win. Around four in the afternoon, an order was given to the
soldiers to charge the Indians. This was highly unexpected and the Indians were forced to
retreat. When the night came, there was an order to burn the windmill, much to the
dismay of W.H. Hazzard. The town needed to be lit so that the defenders could see if
any Indians were sneaking in on them. The following day, the refugees withdrew to
Mankato. On their way, they were seen by a military unit and Thomas Hunt, one of the
soldiers, characterized them as a “sorry lot.” Although the fighting took a lot out of the
townspeople, at least now they were safe.

Meanwhile, General Sibley felt very safe at Fort Ridgely, and even sent out a
‘burial party’ under Captain Hiram Grant. This dispatch was supposed to go out and bury
the whites that had met a cruel fate at the hands of the Indians. On the way, Joe Coursolle
saw things that were “too terrible to describe.” The road was filled with bodies of
Captain Marsh’s men who were all scalped, not to mention the other citizens of
Minnesota who were scattered throughout the countryside. On the way, Coursolle saw
some kinnikinick, a plant which was used by the Indians for their guns. He quickly

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48 Hayden, An account of the relief expedition sent from St. Peter to New Ulm, 12.
49 Hazzard, Autobiographical sketch of Sioux Uprising experiences, 10.
50 Thomas Jefferson Hunt, Observations of T.J. Hunt in the Civil War: A narrative of the military life of
T.J. Hunt in the Sioux Indian and Civil wars of 1862-1865 (Reel 2. Frames 139-166. Dakota Conflict of
51 Joe Coursolle in Anderson and Woolworth’s Through Dakota Eyes, 161.
passed this information to his sergeant who reported to Joseph Brown. Brown disregarded this information and told Coursolle that there was nothing to fear. Being reassured of their safety, at the end of the day, the men were all tired and all went to sleep except those who were chosen as sentries.

The Indians, who were on the way to New Ulm, saw the trail of the whites and sent out scouts to investigate. At sundown, when the whites chose to halt and break for camp at the vicinity of Birch Coolie, the Indians decided to “surround the camp that night and attack it in at daylight.” Since the whites disregarded the information given to them by Joe Coursolle, no one suspected any Indians to be in the area. As a result, the Indians had no difficulty surrounding the camp. Luckily, Joe Coursolle’s friend, Desjeuner, saw one of the Indians and fired at him. The noise, in the middle of a quiet dawn, awakened the rest of the command. The Indians all sprang up and surrounded the camp while shouting and firing. Since the soldiers slept with their muskets loaded, they were able to repel the initial surprise attack. However, surviving this encounter would prove to be more problematic. The Indians had far superior numbers and positioning. The soldiers had to use their wagons and dead horses for protection from the bullets. Since the soldiers were running low on ammunition, Coursolle was one of the men sent on the dangerous mission of fetching more. Miraculously, Coursolle was again unhurt, even though he was exposed to enemy fire. Unfortunately for the soldiers, their extra bullets were too large for their guns, and they had to cut them down to the right size with their knives.

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52 Jerome Big Eagle in Anderson and Woolworth’s *Through Dakota Eyes*, 150.
53 Joe Coursolle in Anderson and Woolworth’s *Through Dakota Eyes*, 162.
54 Ibid.
Contrary to the whites, the Indians were not in a difficult position. Big Eagle bragged, “We had an easy time of it. We could crawl through the grass and into the coulee and get water when we wanted it, and after a few hours our women crossed the river and came up the bluff and cooked for us, and we could go back and eat and then return to the fight.”\textsuperscript{55} The battle did not end as quickly as the Indians hoped. The whites were firing back, led by the ‘half-breeds’. The Indians were so impressed by the fighting of the ‘half-breeds’ that they were willing to spare their lives. But the half-breeds, Joe Coursolle being one of them, “did not trust the Sioux.”\textsuperscript{56} According to Coursolle, the Indians decided to “starve and choke” the whites out, since the soldiers lacked food and water.\textsuperscript{57} As the engagement dragged on, the Indians became more impatient.

The Indians became dissatisfied and wanted to charge the camp. Just as they were, Captain McPhail’s regiment consisting of 250 men, was spotted by the Indians. However, Mankato, an Indian chief, took no more than fifty men and went to attack McPhail’s forces. This pushed back Captain McPhail two miles and forced him to dig in. After accomplishing that feat, Mankato left thirty men scattered around the woods and brought the rest to fight in Birch Coulee. According to Big Eagle, when the Indians came back to Birch Coulee, from their attack on Captain McPhail, “The Indians were laughing…at the way they deceived the whites.”\textsuperscript{58}

General Sibley, the man who had sent out Captain Grant’s and McPhail’s detachments, finally decided to take his whole force to rescue Captain Grant’s men. Initially, the Indians thought that the force was small and tried to surround it. Once they

\textsuperscript{55} Jerome Big Eagle in Anderson and Woolworth’s \textit{Through Dakota Eyes}, 151.
\textsuperscript{56} Joe Coursolle in Anderson and Woolworth’s \textit{Through Dakota Eyes}, 164.
\textsuperscript{57} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{58} Jerome Big Eagle in Anderson and Woolworth’s \textit{Through Dakota Eyes}, 152.
realized that Sibley’s force was quiet large, they fled. Rev. Riggs described Captain
Grant’s men as “a sad sight”, with dead men and horses everywhere.\textsuperscript{59} Even though the
Indians were not able to kill all the white and ‘half-breed’ soldiers, they had been able to
deal a sizable blow to the soldiers. From this point, soldiers would not be able to relax at
any point of time. The Indians could be hiding behind any tree and every time the whites
slept, they could awaken to an ambush, or worse, not awaken at all.

At the end of the Battle of Birch Coulee, Little Crow was given an opportunity to
end the war. Sibley had left him a note, in which Sibley was willing to try to come to a
peaceful resolution. This would begin a series of letters sent from Little Crow to Sibley.
In order to deliver the letters to Sibley, Little Crow sent Tom Robertson and Tom
Robinson, two ‘half-breeds’, to Fort Ridgely. Tom Robertson was trusted by Little Crow,
and was even offered a mule in order to ride in during his trip to Fort Ridgely. However,
as Tom Robertson later recalled, “I was, in secret, a messenger in the interests of the
friendly element and the release of over 150 prisoners in the hostile camp.”\textsuperscript{60}

Little Crow’s replies were written by the soldiers’ lodge; personally, he had no
say in them.\textsuperscript{61} He was a tool of terror. When Little Crow wanted to write a letter of peace,
the soldiers’ lodge refused to allow that. According to White Spider, “the nation was
determined and so pressed him to answer the letter as they wanted. Then some of them
deceived him and went and sent a letter secretly desiring peace.”\textsuperscript{62} This was
acknowledged by Gabrielle Renville, a ‘half-breed’ captive who was involved in

\textsuperscript{59} Stephen Riggs, \textit{Mary and I: Forty Years with the Sioux} (Massachusetts: Corner House Publishers. 1971), 166.
\textsuperscript{60} Thomas Robertson in Anderson and Woolworth’s \textit{Through Dakota Eyes}, 179.
\textsuperscript{61} A soldiers’ lodge was a group of young warriors who direct military operations. Normally a soldiers’
lodge is formed by influential chiefs, however, during the uprising, young warriors were able to gain
control.
\textsuperscript{62} White Spider in Anderson and Woolworth’s \textit{Through Dakota Eyes}, 62.
constructing these letters, “there were other letters written to General Sibley, but all unknown to the hostile Indians.” These negotiations amounted to naught, as Sibley refused to budge. He found out that Little Crow’s camp was divided, so he felt that Little Crow’s camp would dissolve on its own.

Little Crow saw the divide among the Sioux as a weakness, and attempted to get the ‘friendly’ Indians to join the uprising. However, when Little Crow attempted to band the two camps, friendly and hostile, “The Upper Sioux [friendly] protested against this most vigorously. They said plainly that they would not only not comply with the insolent demands of the Lower Sioux, who inaugurated the outbreak and must assume all responsibilities connected with it.” The ‘friendly’ Indians saw this as an opportunity to make a stand against any further action versus the whites. Since a lot of these Indians were already Christian, it was not difficult to create a pro-white sentiment throughout the camp. Furthermore, they saw Little Crow’s encroachment on their land as a sign of disrespect, and threatened to “take up arms against them and die on the spot rather than move into the camp of the insane followers of Little Crow.”

After threatening the Lower Sioux [hostiles], the Upper Sioux [friendly], were able to create a soldiers’ lodge and decided to take offensive action against Little Crow’s band of Lower Sioux. The day after threatening the Upper Sioux to join, the Lower Sioux returned, but upon noticing the soldiers’ lodge, left. The Upper Sioux meanwhile used this as an opportunity to go and follow the Lower Sioux back to their camp. They went to the Lower Sioux’s soldiers’ lodge, and Little Paul made a speech demanding their

63 Gabriel Renville in Anderson and Woolworth’s *Through Dakota Eyes*, 23.
64 For more information on the letters between Little Crow and Sibley, see Little Crow’s Chapter.
65 Samuel Brown in Anderson and Woolworth’s *Through Dakota Eyes*, 170.
66 Ibid.
property be returned. According to Brown, “the hostiles suggested that we should go through the camp and hunt up our property.”

Soon the ‘friendly’ Indians began strategizing how to set the captives free. Negotiations commenced on the topic of what should be done with the prisoners. The ‘friendly’ Indians wanted to let them go, while the ‘hostile’ Indians wanted to keep the whites. During the council, one of the Indians was determined “to make the white women and children stay with them and suffer with them.” While the two camps were filled with tension, Paul Mazakutemani (Little Paul) demanded the captives. To this, one of the warriors, Rattling Runner, replied, “We are men, and therefore as long as one of [us] lives [we] will not stop pointing guns at the Americans.”

Clearly, the ‘friendly’ Indians and the ‘hostile’ Indians did not want to negotiate. They both wanted to convince the other side to see things their way. Little Paul tried to convince the ‘hostile’ Indians to join his band of ‘friendly’ Indians, “all of you who do not want to fight with the white people, come over to me.” A few people chose to listen to Little Paul, and crossed to the ‘friendly’ camp. Without a consensus, “the council broke up with this so called friendly party taking a firm stand to work for the release of all prisoners.”

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67 Ibid., 171. See Also: Joseph La Framboise in Anderson and Woolworth’s Through Dakota Eyes, 199.
68 Victor Renville in Anderson and Woolworth’s Through Dakota Eyes, 193.
70 Little Paul in Anderson and Woolworth’s Through Dakota Eyes, 196.
71 Little Paul in Anderson and Woolworth’s Through Dakota Eyes, 197.
72 Thomas Robertson in Anderson and Woolworth’s Through Dakota Eyes, 182.
Chapter 3- Wood Lake and Future Relations

The Indians knew that they could not afford to keep losing to the whites. Just like everything else, the strategy for another attack was divided. Godfrey noted that “Some wanted to begin the attack in the night, but others thought ‘twas best to wait till the morning.”¹ The ‘hostile’ Indians wanted to win the battle and “wipe the white marauders from the face of the earth.”² The ‘friendly’ Indians wanted to avoid further white casualties. During the deliberations, the two sides argued the best time of attack. The ‘hostiles’ argued for a surprise attack during the nighttime, while the ‘friendly’ Indians wanted the attack in the daytime. The ‘friendly’ Indians convincingly swayed the opposition. They argued that an attack during the day would allow for better coordination for the Indians. However, they had a hidden agenda, “if the attack was made in daylight, the friendly Indians would have an opportunity to let the troops know what was planned.”³

Even though the ‘friendly’ Indians persuaded the rest of the Indians to attack during the day, many ‘friendly’ Indians did not accompany the ‘hostile’ Indians to the battle. Little Crow tried to force ‘friendly’ Indians to join the battle, but they “simply laughed.”⁴ When the ‘hostile’ Indians went to Wood Lake, the ‘friendly’ Indians dug themselves in, expecting a battle against the ‘hostiles’ when they came back.⁵ The

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¹ Godfrey in Anderson and Woolworth’s Through Dakota Eyes, 92. See Also: Thomas Robertson in Anderson and Woolworth’s Through Dakota Eye., 229.
² Samuel Brown in Anderson and Woolworth’s Through Dakota Eye., 222.
³ Gabriel Renville in Anderson and Woolworth’s Through Dakota Eyes, 231.
⁴ Samuel Brown in Anderson and Woolworth’s Through Dakota Eyes, 223.
⁵ Ibid., 222.
‘friendly’ Indians were also able to get hold of some of the captives. Even without the presence of the ‘friendly’ Indians, there were still 738 Indians at the Battle of Wood Lake, enough to be successful with a surprise attack.

The Indians planned to attack the soldiers on the road that led from Wood Lake. The Indians would hide their forces on the side of the road and surprise the troops as they were walking. They also planned to have men stationed near Wood Lake, who would attack from the rear of the white soldiers. Thus the soldiers would be trapped. At night, everything went as planned. The Indians were slowly creeping into position. According to Big Eagle, the best Indian fighters were at this battle, as it was considered to be the “deciding fight of the war.” Big Eagle also emphasized Sibley’s lack of military knowledge. Sibley did not send scouts out before traveling with his main troops. Likewise, on the night before the Battle of Wood Lake, Sibley only sent out his sentries a half of a mile away from his main camp. If there was no “accident” that “spoiled” the Indians plans, Sibley would have suffered a lot of casualties.

As was expected by the Indians, Sibley was extremely slow in his movements. His soldiers did not see any Indians. Sibley’s inaction benefited him, because some of his men went digging for potatoes and accidentally discovered hidden Indians in the grass. According to Rev. Riggs, since food was scarce, the men “were anxious to add to their provisions.” After the soldiers were fired upon, “almost immediately the hills around were seen to be covered with Indians on foot and on horseback.” Big Eagle explained

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6 Thomas Robertson in Anderson and Woolworth’s *Through Dakota Eyes*, 229. See Also: Victor Renville in Anderson and Woolworth’s *Through Dakota Eyes*, 238.
7 Jerome Big Eagle in Anderson and Woolworth’s *Through Dakota Eyes*, 236.
8 Ibid.
10 Ibid.
that the only reason why the Indians jumped up and attacked was because otherwise the white soldiers would have driven their wagons over them. The timing of the attack was unexpected and many Indians were not able to participate because they were not near the area of battle. Solomon Two Stars recalled waking up and not knowing what was going on. By the time he got to the battle ground, fighting had already broken out. The part of the Indian force that was engaged in the battle was soon overtaken and forced to retreat.

Little Crow’s forces now lost their morale. The Battle of Wood Lake was devastating for the Indians. Realizing that Sibley’s forces were too strong, Little Crow took his men back to the camp. After thinking about the future, Little Crow decided to flee from Minnesota, far away from Sibley’s wrath. Prior to leaving, Little Crow promised Cecelia Campbell Stay’s father to free all of the captives. Little Crow’s orders were followed and the captives were turned over to the ‘friendly’ Indians. For those who did not have direct communication with Little Crow, the ‘hostiles’ seemed to disappear overnight. Even Samuel Brown admitted that the ‘hostiles’, “folded their tents and stole quietly away.” General Sibley was now free to come and rescue the hostages without any opposition.

When Sibley came to rescue the captives, the area later became known as Camp Release, there was a general happy feeling, “When the troops were first sighted by the captives, the joy was unrestrained.” The celebration was mutual. Samuel Brown noted that “all were friendly to the whites and anxious to shake hands.” The Indians were scared for their lives, and sought clemency from the troops. Since most of the Indians

11 Solomon Two Stars in Anderson and Woolworth’s *Through Dakota Eyes*, 244.
12 Cecelia Campbell Stay in Anderson and Woolworth’s *Through Dakota Eyes*, 253.
13 Samuel Brown in Anderson and Woolworth’s *Through Dakota Eyes*, 223.
14 Schultz, *Over the Earth I Come*, 239.
15 Samuel Brown in Anderson and Woolworth’s *Through Dakota Eyes*, 224.
who had committed atrocities had escaped, the Indians who had been occupying the camp were among the friendliest to the whites. A lot of those who remained were Christianized Indians. However, once the ‘hostile’ Indians realized that surviving the cold Minnesota winter would not be easy, without any aid from the whites, “some of the hostile Indians with their families had been returning under the cover of the night, and pitched their tents among the friendly Indians.”

General Sibley was now faced with a dilemma. He had to separate, and provide a trial, for the Indians who were in Camp Release. Since Samuel Brown knew both languages, he was given a job as an interpreter. After the Indians were all moved to Yellow Medicine and put to work, Brown was given another task. He assisted in “causing the arrest and safely detaining in custody all the Indian men.” The whites had deceived the Native Americans. They claimed that the Indians had to be separated so that roll could be taken for the annuity payments. Considering the situation that the Native Americans were in, they believed the whites and gladly agreed to be disarmed, which unknowingly led to their imprisonment. Samuel Brown was in charge of separating the men from the women, and taking the weapons from the men. George Quinn, a half-breed, recalled his arrest, “He [Brown] put me under guard, but said I would not be a prisoner very long. I was a prisoner for four years.”

Many other Indians had similar statements to Quinn. For example, Big Eagle stated, “If I had known that I would be sent to the penitentiary I would not have surrendered.” While full-blooded Indians were suffering,

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16 Gabriel Renville in Anderson and Woolworth’s Through Dakota Eyes, 232. See Also: Samuel Brown in Anderson and Woolworth’s Through Dakota Eyes, 224.
17 Samuel Brown in Anderson and Woolworth’s Through Dakota Eyes, 225.
18 George Quinn in Anderson and Woolworth’s Through Dakota Eyes, 259.
19 Jerome Big Eagle in Anderson and Woolworth’s Through Dakota Eyes, 237.
Samuel Brown, a half-breed, was thoroughly enjoying his job. In his narrative, Brown, seemed to be proud of his job and mentioned that this “ruse worked like a charm.”

The lives of the Sioux did not get any easier after the uprising. While in Mankato, the Indians were treated as animals, their “food being mixed in one big pot and it wasn’t fit to eat.” It appeared that Sibley did not make any distinctions between ‘friendly’ and ‘hostile’ Indians. Sibley favored people he knew, and those who he did not, received no extra consideration. Even Thomas Robertson, one of the men who brought letters between Little Crow and Sibley pointed out that “no one could leave without a special permit from Sibley. Any Indian could come into this camp, but none ever got out.”

These people were not convicted of any crimes, their only crime happened to be that they were Indian, and put too much trust into the U.S. government.

On November 7th, the men, women, and children who were being kept in Mankato were sent away to Fort Snelling. On the way, when they were passing the town of Henderson, whites had gathered alongside the road and abused the Indians. One of the bystanders, a white woman, proceeded to “rush up to one of the wagons and snatch a nursing babe from its mother’s breast and dash it violently upon the ground.” George Crooks recalled being, “pounded to a jelly, my arms, feet, and head resembled raw beef steak.” His brother was killed during this trip, causing much grief to the poor Crooks, who was only six years old. His brother was only sixteen. Crooks would forever remember this moment, “I wished at the time that they had killed me.”

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20 Samuel Brown in Anderson and Woolworth’s Through Dakota Eyes, 226.
21 Esther Wakeman in Anderson and Woolworth’s Through Dakota Eyes, 55.
22 Thomas Robertson in Anderson and Woolworth’s Through Dakota Eyes, 230.
23 Samuel Brown in Anderson and Woolworth’s Through Dakota Eyes, 227. See Also: Gabriel Renville in Anderson and Woolworth’s Through Dakota Eyes, 233.
24 George Crooks in Anderson and Woolworth’s Through Dakota Eyes, 262.
25 Ibid.
Once the Indians arrived to Fort Snelling on November 13\textsuperscript{th}, it did not get any easier. The conditions were dreadful, in the words of Gabriel Renville, one of the ‘friendly Indians’, “we were so crowded and confined that an epidemic broke out among us and children were dying day and night, among them being Two Stars’ oldest child, a little girl.”\textsuperscript{26} Death was widespread at this time. Esther Wakeman lost three of her brothers to smallpox.\textsuperscript{27} Good Star Woman estimated that “Sometimes 20 to 50 people died in a day and were buried in a long trench.”\textsuperscript{28} Even Gabriel Renville began losing confidence in the white people, “We had no land, no homes, no means of support, and the outlook was most dreary and discouraging.”\textsuperscript{29} These Sioux were confined to a prison, even though they did not commit any crimes. What hurt the most was the fact that “the Sioux who started the trouble had run away to safety.”\textsuperscript{30}

Meanwhile, Sibley had too many Indians in his possession, and his personal bias, from fighting the Indians, influenced his decision-making. Sibley created a military tribunal court consisting of five members. Not surprisingly, the five members all had prior military experience against the Sioux.\textsuperscript{31} One of the men, William Marshall admitted “my mind was not in a condition to give the men a fair trial.”\textsuperscript{32} Regardless, the trial went as scheduled and “as many as forty were sometimes tried in a day.”\textsuperscript{33} A lot of the men were condemned on the evidence of a half-black, half-Indian man, named Godfrey. Rev. Riggs called Godfrey, Gusso, and said that his information “appeared to be accurate and

\textsuperscript{26} Gabriel Renville in Anderson and Woolworth’s \textit{Through Dakota Eyes}, 234.  
\textsuperscript{27} Esther Wakeman in Anderson and Woolworth’s \textit{Through Dakota Eyes}, 55.  
\textsuperscript{28} Good Star Woman in Anderson and Woolworth’s \textit{Through Dakota Eyes}, 264.  
\textsuperscript{29} Gabriel Renville in Anderson and Woolworth’s \textit{Through Dakota Eyes}, 234.  
\textsuperscript{30} Good Star Woman in Anderson and Woolworth’s \textit{Through Dakota Eyes}, 264.  
\textsuperscript{31} Schultz, \textit{Over the Earth I Come}, 247.  
\textsuperscript{32} Cox, \textit{Lincoln and the Sioux Uprising of 1862}, 173.  
\textsuperscript{33} Heard, \textit{History of the Sioux war}, 255.
Some Indians said only one sentence in their own defense. Only one white woman testified in favor of any Indian, Sarah Wakefield.

Once Sibley reported to President Abraham Lincoln that he was going to hang some of the condemned men, Lincoln quickly asked for the list. Lincoln promptly handed the list over to two lawyers, and they decided who should be hanged. The list was sent back to Minnesota with 39 names on it, but one man was later reprieved dropping the number to 38. The condemned men were separated from others on December 22nd, but not executed until December 26th in Mankato, Minnesota. In between the two dates, the condemned men were being tended to by Rev. Dr. Williamson, Rev. Van Ravoux, and Rev. S. R. Riggs. The missionaries were there to convert these men either to Protestantism or Catholicism.

On the faithful day of December 26th 1862, twenty eight men were hanged for their crimes during the uprising. Among them was Chaska, the man who saved Sarah Wakefield. Just prior to the hangings, a man named Frank Gauthier sent a postcard to Sibley offering his services to aid in the hangings. Sibley did not have trouble finding any person to hang the condemned because there were many angry townspeople in, or near, Mankato. The hangings were made into a giant spectacle for the crowd. The shape of the platform was square. There were a lot of soldiers surrounding the platform to prevent any unruly people from taking a charge at the condemned Indians. The condemned were brought out accompanied by a Catholic priest. During the execution, the

34 Riggs, Mary and I, 181.
35 See E-tay-go-ke-ya-dow, case number 144 in War Trial Transcripts.
36 Heard, History of the Sioux war, 285. For more on the trials, see Chaska Chapter.
Indians “men sang and recounted their war deeds and sent farewells to their absent relatives.” Finally, the ropes were dropped and the Indians were killed. One man’s rope broke and he was re-hanged. The other Sioux were left on the reservations and suffered greatly.

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39 Gabriel Renville in Anderson and Woolworth’s *Through Dakota Eyes*, 233.
Part II

Liminal Figures
Chapter 4- Little Crow

The life of Little Crow, or Taoyateduta, is highly misunderstood and misinterpreted. Little Crow was born in the village of Kaposia in Minnesota and eventually became the chief of the entire Sioux Nation.\(^1\) Although he is often portrayed as the villain of the Sioux Uprising of 1862, he was far from that. In fact, he was a man who tried to do whatever was best for his people, was very charismatic and a good politician. Although there were many instances when he helped white society, he will nevertheless be remembered as a ruthless leader of the savage onslaught against defenseless whites. He was a man with ambitions who sought to do whatever was necessary to ensure that his tribe survived. He maintained his native customs and also adopted some white practices. He was a dynamic figure who tried to transcend both the white and Native societies but was ultimately shunned by both.

Little Crow was born into a family that had a mutually beneficial arrangement with local whites. Even Little Crow’s grandfather, Cetanwakanman, had attempted to maintain “peaceful coexistence and friendly ties with the whites.”\(^2\) Prior to the uprising, being peaceful to whites had many advantages, such as allowing them to obtain supplies and food. Unfortunately for Little Crow’s family, this way of life could not be sustained. Soon the Native Americans began being dependant on the whites in every aspect of their lives. To make matters worse, whites no longer needed the Native people. They knew the terrain and were no longer afraid of the Native Americans. Migrants from the East settled

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2 Ibid., 23.
in large numbers and Minnesota became more domesticated, leaving less room for the Sioux to hunt.

In 1837, Indian Agents invited a few Native Americans to Washington in order to make a treaty to ‘buy’ some of the Sioux’s land. Among those who went to Washington was Little Crow’s father, Big Thunder. Although the Treaty of 1837 led to intertribal fighting and the failure of educational and farming systems, the annuity payments from the U.S. government kept the Native Americans relatively content.³ Meanwhile, in his youth, Little Crow did not participate in politics, but rather “[acquired] buffalo robes from western Sioux Indians through gambling or the use of liquor”.⁴ At this point of his life, Little Crow did not show characteristics necessary for a future chief. To Little Crow’s credit, he was very persistent and was a great warrior. These two qualities were seen when he went hunting with future general, Henry Sibley, and Alexander Faribault [trader] in 1841. The two men recalled Little Crow keeping up with their horses while on foot.⁵ Though Little Crow was an Indian, his company was enjoyed by whites, and in turn, Little Crow learned a lot from his encounters with different white people.

Little Crow was beginning to become a liminal figure between the white and Indian societies. He attended class run by Reverend Pond between 1844 and 1845 in Lac qui Parle.⁶ Although Little Crow learned a lot from his experience, he never converted to Christianity, much to the dismay of missionaries. His refusal to convert showed that Little Crow was not interested in completely embracing white culture. A newly converted Indian had to give up his native culture, and in a sociological way, become white. The

³ Ibid., 33.
⁴ Ibid., 37.
⁵ Ibid., 38.
⁶ Ibid., 43.
decision to keep his native religion must not have been an easy one, considering that his relatives, such as Joseph Renville, Eagle Help, Paul Mazakutemani, and Lorenzo Lawrence all converted in 1841 due to heavy religious influence from missionaries such as Gideon Pond and Stephen Riggs. Although Little Crow associated with whites and used them to his advantage, he did not convert to Christianity and never truly became a member of the white society. Instead, he chose a different path, which included participation within the white and Indian societies.

In the fall of 1845, Big Thunder died. His chieftainship was supposed to be passed down to one of his sons. Since Little Crow had not been in the village for quite some time, as he was acquiring furs at Lac qui Parle, one of Little Crow’s half-brothers was named Chief of Kaposia. Once Little Crow heard of these events, he came back to his village to assume his rightful position since he was the elder son. Upon his return, Little Crow had to fight his half-brother for chieftainship and was shot during the skirmish. The wound was so devastating that even upon recovery Little Crow was never able to have full control of his fingers. When he assumed his position as chief, Little Crow underwent a major change in his character and even brought missionaries to his village. He was so impressed by the works of the missionaries that he even sent his own children to study at a missionary’s home, Rev. Thomas Williamson, in 1849. However, due to growing Native resentment towards the missionaries, Little Crow soon removed his children. Evidently, Little Crow was unwilling to fully leave his native society.

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7 Ibid., 42.
8 Ibid., 44.
9 Ibid., 46.
10 Ibid., 51.
By 1851, the Indian Agents were trying to make the Natives sign another treaty so that they could take more land.\textsuperscript{11} Since Little Crow was considered to be a powerful chief, he was in the middle of the negotiations. A few chiefs, like Wabasha, who almost had as much leadership skills as Little Crow, were against the treaty. Conversely, Little Crow’s relatives, like Lorenzo Lawrence, were for it.\textsuperscript{12} Little Crow was caught in the middle. Due to the fact that he did not fully commit himself into one society, he had to make up his own mind about the treaty. Finally on August 5\textsuperscript{th}, Little Crow made his decision. He agreed to be the first one to sign the treaty, even though there had been threats made against such action. Little Crow responded by saying “I am willing to be the first…but I am not afraid that you will kill me. If you do, it will be alright.”\textsuperscript{13} Little Crow was able to compromise and satisfy everyone, for now. The Native Americans were going to get money which they needed for survival, and the whites would get land which they needed for expansion. Unlike the many Native Americans who took sides, Little Crow managed to retain the respect of both societies through compromise.

By 1857, the relations between whites and Native Americans were once again deteriorating and it was time for another treaty. Little Crow was again caught in the middle. There were two prevalent opinions about the treaty; one was that of “reservation administrators” and the other by “young warriors.”\textsuperscript{14} Although Little Crow reiterated the grievances of the Native Americans, he did sign the Treaty of 1857, selling more land to the U.S. government. According to Chief Big Eagle, chief of Black Dog’s village, the Treaty of 1857 “caused great dissatisfaction among the Sioux, and Little Crow was

\textsuperscript{11} Indian Agents in Minnesota negotiated on behalf of the U.S. government.
\textsuperscript{12} Ibid., 57.
\textsuperscript{13} Ibid., 53.
\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., 88.
always blamed for the part he took in the sale.”¹⁵ Even though Little Crow tried to do what he thought was best for the Indian society, he was condemned for dealing with the whites. From this point on, Little Crow would not have the same prestige among the Native Americans.

When time came to elect a new speaker for the Sioux in the spring of 1862, Little Crow was one of the candidates. Considering he had tremendous experience and was well known by most members of the Sioux, Little Crow thought he would be easily chosen. However, the ‘farmer’ Indians did not trust Little Crow due to his unwillingness to convert to Christianity, and thus Traveling Hail, a ‘farmer’ Indian, was chosen as the speaker. Being one of the candidates, Big Eagle, called the elections “exciting” even though he was not victorious.¹⁶ The reason why Little Crow did not win, according to Big Eagle, was that “many of the tribe believed him to be responsible for the sale of the north ten-mile-strip.”¹⁷ As a result of participating in a treaty with the whites, Little Crow was treated with some hostility by his tribe. Even before engaging in the Uprising, Little Crow experienced the negative consequences associated with liminality.

From this point onward, Little Crow began to gain more ‘white’ characteristics. He now had a log house built for him and also had some land set aside for his wives. However, he still never converted to Christianity.¹⁸ This was crucial for differentiating him from other Native Americans, who did convert. Unlike the Christian Indians, Little Crow did not fully give up his culture and abandon the Sioux way of life. Christianity usually forced people to completely give up their Sioux heritage because it was seen as

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¹⁵ Jerome Big Eagle in Anderson and Woolworth’s Through Dakota Eyes, 23.
¹⁶ Ibid., 25.
¹⁷ Ibid.
barbaric and savage. Perhaps Little Crow was too smart to convert. He saw that the Christian Indians were not respected by the other Sioux. Thus, by not converting to Christianity, Little Crow was able to use the whites when it was to his advantage, while remaining true to his Sioux culture.

Although Little Crow lost some of his prestige in the Native American community, no other chief was as great an orator as he. Soon after the killing of whites in Acton, chiefs of the men responsible, Red Middle Voice and Shakopee, quickly gathered their warriors at Little Crow’s house. Contrary to popular belief, Little Crow did not start the Sioux Uprising of 1862. In fact, he was attending a service by Reverend Samuel Hinman the day before, and even shook hands with the reverend.19 At first, Little Crow showed disinterest in joining the fight. He had been to Washington and seen what the whites were capable of and wisely discouraged an attack on the white people. His son, Wowinape, later remembered his father’s words, “Braves, you are like little children; you know not what you are doing.”20 Little Crow did not want to fight. However, warriors continuously kept questioning his bravery, and eventually Little Crow agreed to lead them. Even before Little Crow’s acceptance, “it was evident that the minds of those before him were made up, and that they would be joined by all the young men of the tribes.”21 Whether it was because he felt obligated to help his kin, or was politically motivated, or whether it was because on some level he wanted to prove himself as a brave, Little Crow reluctantly succumbed to their demands. In his acceptance, he reiterated that violence against the white was not wise, “You will die like the rabbits when the hungry wolves hunt them in the Hard Moon. Taoyateduta is not a coward: he

19 Jerome Big Eagle in Anderson and Woolworth’s Through Dakota Eyes, 56.
20 Little Crow’s Speech in Anderson and Woolworth’s Through Dakota Eyes, 40.
21 Heard, History of the Sioux War and massacres of 1862 and 1863, 60.
will die with you.”

Although Little Crow had agreed to lead the warriors, he managed to save some whites and ‘half-breeds’ from danger.

From the beginning of the Uprising, Little Crow did not fully stop participating in the white society. When initial violence broke out at the Lower Sioux Agency, Rev. Hinman saw Little Crow run past him towards the warehouse where food was stored. Once Little Crow was out of sight, Hinman overheard Little Crow questioning some of his braves on why they did not kill a particular white man. As soon as Little Crow finished his sentence, Hinman heard shots being fired. Although Little Crow ordered that a man be killed, he never did it himself. Likewise, Little Crow did not kill Rev. Hinman, even though he ran right by him. In fact, Hinman was so close to Little Crow, that he noticed Little Crow’s “savage expression.”

Even though Little Crow led his braves against the whites, he nevertheless saved some white lives throughout the uprising.

A young man named Samuel Brown recalled his interaction with Little Crow. Samuel Brown was a half-breed and was captured along with his family by Cut-Nose. Upon entering the Chief’s house, Samuel Brown remembered seeing “five white women”, showing that Chief Little Crow had managed to save them. Brown further noted that “he [Little Crow] greeted us very cordially and at once asked about mother, and gave us a blanket apiece and told us to go after her immediately, for he wanted to see

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22 Little Crow’s Speech in Anderson and Woolworth’s Through Dakota Eyes, 42.
24 Heard, History of the Sioux War and massacres of 1862 and 1863, 66.
26 Ibid., 4.
that she was properly cared for—made comfortable.”

Little Crow hoped that Susan Brown, Samuel’s mother, would use her influence with the Upper Sioux to persuade them join Little Crow. Samuel Brown understood this and called Little Crow a “wily old fellow!”

Although Little Crow’s goal was to have the Upper Sioux join forces with him, he most likely understood that Susan Brown would not be able to accomplish all that. This gesture was a sign of respect and not a plot to unite the Sioux. If Little Crow wanted to use Susan Brown as a way to unite the Sioux together, he would have called a counsel with the Upper Sioux. Since he did not, Little Crow’s actions show him following two different norms, one white and the other Indian. Although he participated in the war, he managed to save innocent people from danger.

Moreover, Little Crow even gave his own moccasins and a blanket to the husband of Samuel Brown’s sister, Charley Blair. Charley Blair was a white man and because Little Crow was choosing to save him, Little Crow’s life was also in danger. At one point a messenger, from the young Indian warriors, came to Little Crow’s door demanding the white man (Blair) to be killed. Little Crow understood the magnitude of the situation and helped Blair escape. Ironically, since Blair was wearing Indian clothes (in order to try to remain undetected among the Indians), once he arrived at Fort Ridgely, he was “placed under arrest, as a spy.”

Not only did Little Crow save ‘half-breeds’ and white men, he saved a few white women as well. Mrs. Urania White was one of the white women who had direct contact

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27 Ibid., 4-5.
28 Samuel Brown in Anderson and Woolworth’s Through Dakota Eyes, 131.
29 Brown, In Captivity, 5. See Also: Cecelia Campbell Stay in Anderson and Woolworth’s Through Dakota Eyes, 137.
30 Brown, In Captivity, 5.
31 Ibid., 6
with Little Crow while in captivity. In the beginning of her captivity narrative, Mrs. White noted that “Little Crow was all the time, as was afterwards proven, working upon his warriors in such a manner as to keep them excited and bloodthirsty.”\(^{32}\) Since Little Crow needed to motivate his warriors, Mrs. White’s statement is most likely true. Without proper motivation, the warriors would simply attack any defenseless whites that crossed their path. Mrs. White had been to Little Crow’s house and mentioned that no harm was done to her while she was there. At first she thought that Little Crow was conceited but continued to say that “his majesty [Little Crow] condescended to salute us with ‘Ho’, that was being their usual word of greeting.”\(^{33}\) Mrs. White acknowledged that even when Little Crow had a white woman at his disposal, no harm had occurred.

Another white woman who had direct contact with Little Crow was Mary Schwandt-Schmidt. Just like Mrs. White, Mrs. Schmidt was a captive in Little Crow’s camp. Schmidt remembered sitting next to a tepee and being frightened by Little Crow. Chief Little Crow “brandished his tomahawk over me a few times, then laughed, put it back in his belt and walked away, still laughing and saying something in Indian.”\(^{34}\)

Although it is not morally right to frighten a child, considering the circumstances, it should be noted that Little Crow did not kill her. Although he is branded with the term ‘bloodthirsty’, his actions indicate otherwise. He led the Native Americans in a fight against their oppressors and at the same time saved white people from death. Although Little Crow did not save Mary Schmidt from death, a Native American named Snana did,


\(^{33}\) Ibid., 404.

but he did not physically harm Schmidt. Little Crow was treading the path between the white and Indian society and never fully crossed into either.

Another person whom Little Crow saved was a young man by the name of August Gluth. Unlike the other instances, Gluth was literally saved by Little Crow. Little Crow prevented Gluth from being scalped by a brave. Once in captivity, Gluth tried to escape and was about to be scalped yet again, and again was saved by Little Crow.\textsuperscript{35} Although in his text, the young man does maintain that “Little Crow was a murderous killer and a cruel master”, he does not site specific instances in which Little Crow took a person’s life.\textsuperscript{36} Although this is of seemingly small account, it does show that Little Crow was a man who had morals and was not entirely one-sided in his thinking. It is also worth mentioning that boys were not usually taken captive, unless their mother was with them. It is far more frequent that a female was taken into captivity, while a male was usually killed.

Finally, Little Crow was even able to show compassion to a dead man. Isaac Heard related a story as to how Little Crow was disappointed that a man had been killed. On the way to the Lower Agency, Little Crow and his band saw a man sleeping on the side of the road. The braves quickly killed him in a brutal manner. At that point, Little Crow noted the poor condition of the man and said, “Poor fellow! His life ought to have been spared; he was too starved to have done us harm.”\textsuperscript{37} Little Crow showed his true self in front of his own warriors. Although he was leading them on the warpath, he was still

\textsuperscript{35} Harry West, August Gluth. \textit{A lad’s version of Chief Little Crow} (1933. Reel 1. Frames 488-494. Dakota Conflict of 1862 Manuscript Collections. Microfilm edition. Minnesota Historical Society), 1. The author of the passage was probably giving his audience information that they wanted to hear, just like a lot of other captives during this time period.

\textsuperscript{36} Ibid., 2.

\textsuperscript{37} Heard, \textit{History of the Sioux War and massacres of 1862 and 1863}, 141.
empathetic to an innocent person. He did not perceive the man on the side of the road as a threat simply due to the color of his skin. Little Crow maintained liminality by focusing on removing the soldiers from Fort Ridgeley and not killing innocent people who crossed his path.

Unfortunately for Little Crow, he was deemed as a ruthless person and later shunned by both societies. Although she had never had a direct interaction with Chief Little Crow, Minnie Buce Carrigan, a white female captive, blamed everything on him, “One thing I can tell is, that Little Crow was the cause of the Indian massacre of 1862 and that many families were murdered, many home ties shattered, many a child was left an orphan on the account of Little Crow.”38 Someone had to take the blame for the Uprising and it was cast upon the shoulders of Little Crow. Since Little Crow was the figurehead in charge, he was the likely target for accusation. However, he had no real power, because all of the decisions were made by the soldiers’ lodge, a collaboration of young warriors who were determined to attack the whites.39 Nevertheless, Little Crow held the leadership position, so he had to be the one who communicated with General Henry Sibley, who was chosen to lead the white soldiers. Due to his letters to General Sibley, Little Crow’s intentions were misconstrued even further.

While the Uprising was in full swing, Little Crow received a letter from General Sibley asking for his intentions. Once again, Little Crow found himself in between white and Native American societies. The letter that he wrote back to Sibley stated native grievances and also did not make any threats about future atrocities:

Dear Sir, For that reason we have commenced this war, I will tell you, it is on account of Maj. Galbraith we made a treaty with the Government a beg for what little we do get and

38 Carrigan, Captured by the Indians, 5.
then can’t get it till our children was dieing with hunger- it was with the traders that
commence Mr. A J Myrick told the Indians they would eat grass or their own dung. Then
Mr. Forbes told the lower Sioux that were not men then Robert he was making with his
friends how to defraud is of our money, if the young braves have push the white man, I
have done this myself. So I want you to let the governar Ramsey know this. I have great
many prisner women and childun it aint all our fault the Winnebagoes was in the
engagement, two of them was killed. I want you to give me answer by barer all at present.
Yours Truly, Little Crow.\textsuperscript{40}

All of what Little Crow said was accurate and described the Native American situation
perfectly. In his letter, Little Crow does not discuss the killing of more whites, and only
mentions the captives in order to get leverage with Sibley in negotiations. Little Crow
apparently had no intention of killing any prisoners, as seen through his previous actions.
The prisoners were suffering the same hardships and adversity that the Native Americans
had suffered ever since they were approached by the whites. The whites were not
interested in the plight that the Native Americans faced and only focused on their own
adversity. In the same issue of the \textit{St. Paul Press}, there was public outrage against the
treatment of the captives, who were “enduring what no tongue can tell- perish from
hunger, sickness, and cold?...Should not a public meeting be at once called?”\textsuperscript{41} The
whites only cared about their own race. It wasn’t General Sibley’s job to save the Native
Americans; it was his job to save the captives. General Sibley could have been a dynamic
figure had he recalled his past encounters with Little Crow. However, he did not. He
conformed to society’s standard of what a general should do. According to white norms,
a general should disregard whatever grievances that Little Crow had and only focus on
his own goals.

General Sibley was a remarkably stubborn leader. Instead of being a person
attempted to look at both sides, Sibley thought only of his white race. In response to

\textsuperscript{40} \textit{St. Paul Weekly Press}, September 18\textsuperscript{th}, 1862.
\textsuperscript{41} Ibid.
Little Crow’s letter, Sibley only offered a few words, “Little Crow: You have murdered many of our people without sufficient cause. Return me the prisoners under a flag of truce and I will talk with you like a man. H.H. Sibley.” Sibley did not acknowledge the grievances by Little Crow. There was no compromise. Sibley wanted things to be done his way. No leader would ever give in to Sibley’s demands. First of all, he blamed the entire uprising on Little Crow (that would explain why captives and newspapers labeled Little Crow as the villain of the uprising). Secondly, Sibley completely disregarded Little Crow’s justification of the uprising and claimed that the uprising occurred without any good reason. Thirdly, he asked Little Crow to send his only source of leverage (prisoners) to him without getting anything in return. If Little Crow gives up his prisoners, he has no other alternative but to either run away or surrender. The army would simply try and exterminate all of the Indians, because now they would not have to worry endangering civilians. Finally, in his letter back to Little Crow, Sibley even managed to question Little Crow’s manhood by saying that he would ‘talk to him like a man’ only once Little Crow released his captives. Unlike Little Crow, Sibley did not seem to want compromise.

To make matters even worse for Little Crow, the soldiers’ lodge would not allow him to write a statement of peace. Even though Little Crow wanted to end the violence, he was not allowed to do so by the soldiers’ lodge, “on the 1st of September, he [Little Crow] wrote letters to Governor Ramsey and Colonel Sibley, requesting a cessation of hostilities and a treaty of settlement, and that… they [soldiers’ lodge] would not allow them to be sent.” The memoir of White Spider, Little Crow’s half-brother, echoes this statement. When it came time for Little Crow to write a letter back to Sibley, “the nation

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42 Ibid.
43 Heard, History of the Sioux War and massacres of 1862 and 1863, 144.
was determined and so pressed him to answer the letter as they wanted. Then some of them deceived him and went and sent a letter secretly desiring peace.”

The letter that Little Crow managed to send to Sibley again mentioned the prisoners and ended with the following: “…I want to know from you as a friend what way that [I] can make peace for my people- in regard to prisoners they fair with our children and our selves as well as us. Your truly friend Little Crow.” If peace was mentioned in this letter, which was approved by the soldiers’ lodge, the letter that was rejected must have been even more lenient towards negotiations with Sibley. At this point, it is evident that Little Crow had lost all power because of his unwillingness to conform to one society. Even the Christian Indians, who took part in some of the battles against the soldiers, were dissatisfied with Little Crow and sent Sibley their own letter.

When White Spider spoke of deception, he was right. Thomas Robertson, a ‘half-breed’ who was held captive by Little Crow, was trusted to carry the letters to Sibley. Although Robertson admitted that Little Crow put a lot of trust in him, Robertson still deceived Little Crow and carried a secret letter to Sibley from the Christian Indians.

The Christian Indians deceived Little Crow, and sent Sibley a letter in which Little Crow was further vilified. Since Wabasha was a major chief, he was chosen to be the one who signed the following letter:

Dear Sir: You know that Little Crow had been opposed to me in everything that our people have had to do with the whites. He has been opposed to everything in the form of civilization or Christianity. I have always been in favor of and of late years have done everything of the kind that has been offered to us by the Government and other good white people- he has now got himself into trouble that we know he can never get himself out of, and he is trying to involve those few of us that are still the friend of the American in the murder of the poor whites that have been settled in he border; but I have been kept

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44 White Spider in Anderson and Woolworth’s *Through Dakota Eyes*, 62.
45 *St. Paul Weekly Press*, September 18th, 1862.
46 Thomas Robertson in Anderson and Woolworth’s *Through Dakota Eyes*, 179.
back with threats that I should be killed if I did anything to help the whites, but if you will now appoint some place for me to meet you, myself and the few friends that I have will get all the prisoners that we can, and with our family, go to whatever place you will appoint for us to meet…Your True friend Wabasha.  

This letter is filled with hypocrisy. Considering Little Crow’s past experiences with the whites, there is no way that he could have been opposed to them. He had signed multiple treaties with them, saved some captives from death, and even tried to persuade General Sibley into peaceful negotiations. How does that translate to Little Crow opposing whites? It is accurate to note that Little Crow had been opposed to Christianity, but that was due to his desire to maintain his own culture. That aspect does not make him be opposed to whites and their society. How could a man who lives in a log house and has acres of land oppose the white society? The only reason why Little Crow was not able to get himself out of his predicament was because he was caught in between two distinct groups each of which favored a particular society. The soldiers’ lodge favored Native American society and did not want to maintain relations with whites. The Christian Indians favored white society and opposed the soldiers’ lodge. Little Crow, a man who understood the grievances of his people and also understood that not all whites were to blame for his people’s hardships, was trapped in the middle without a resolution.

At this time, Sibley saw Little Crow’s weakness and again did not give Little Crow a way out. Sibley wrote: “You have not done as I wished in giving up the prisoners taken by your people. It would be better for you to do so…You have allowed your young men to commit some murders since you wrote your first letter. This is not the way to

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48 At first glance it seems that Christianity is the only contributing factor of establishing sides in the uprising. However, after looking at examples of Old Pawn and White Dog, it becomes clear that Christianity was not as important. For details on Old Pawn and White Dog see Wakefield Chapter.
make peace.” Sibley also sent a letter to the Christian Indians telling them that they would not be harmed if they waited for his soldiers with a “flag of truce” with prisoners that they were ready to give up. The deception by the Christian Indians worked and Little Crow was again labeled as a ‘bad guy’. Furthermore, in his letter, Sibley did not even consider the possibility of peace and shifted his attention to actions of a few warriors. Unbeknownst to Sibley, Little Crow had little control over his warriors and probably could not have prevented anything even if he tried. Regardless of this fact, the entire white society hated Little Crow, including the Christian Indians.

Both sides of the outbreak, white and Native, needed a scapegoat for the incident, and Little Crow seemed to be the obvious choice. Since he did not fully belong to either group, he was criticized for his actions by both. Men like Big Eagle blamed Little Crow for the entire uprising. There was a hint of jealousy in Big Eagle’s words when he spoke of Little Crow. Another Indian, Lightening Blanket, mentioned that Chief Wabasha also was jealous of Little Crow. That explains why Big Eagle made it a point to remind the reader of Little Crow’s position, “Many whites think that Little Crow was the principal chief of the Dakotas at this time, but he was not. Wabasha was the principal chief, and he was of the white man’s party: so was I.” The main purpose of this remark is to undermine Little Crow’s importance. Surely Wabasha could not have been the principal chief if he accepted Christianity. There is no way that the young warriors would accept a ‘traitor’ to their culture to lead them. Big Eagle was not a main chief like Wabasha and Little Crow, but was a ‘sub-chief’. Since he was close to Wabasha, he thought he had

49 Schultz, *Over the Earth I Come*, 221.
50 Ibid.
51 Lightening Blanket in Anderson and Woolworth’s *Through Dakota Eyes*, 154.
52 Jerome Big Eagle in Anderson and Woolworth’s *Through Dakota Eyes*, 25.
gained importance through association. However, considering that he designated himself to be a member of the ‘white man’s party’, his actions were contradictory during the uprising.

In his account, Big Eagle stated that he was not participating of his own accord and was only persuaded to lead his men due to death threats from Little Crow. Big Eagle recalled that “Little Crow told some of my band that if I refused to lead them to shoot me as a traitor.”^53 That is eerily similar to Little Crow’s experience. Why did the two men receive different treatment? After all Big Eagle was not a Christian either. The answer is simple; Big Eagle conducted himself according to the dictates of the society that benefited him at the moment. For example, during the uprising, Big Eagle had participated in a few battles, and even went on an offensive against the town of New Ulm. However, while he was a prisoner to the whites after the uprising, Big Eagle explained that he only wanted to attack white soldiers and never innocent women and children. For some reason, Big Eagle apparently thought that the town of New Ulm was occupied with soldiers and not by the innocent civilians who usually resided there.

Although Big Eagle specifically mentioned not being at the first battles of New Ulm and Fort Ridgeley,^54 the narratives of George Quinn^55 and of Lighting Blanket,^56 prove otherwise. Finally, the best evidence showing that Big Eagle was an opportunist when deciding what society he wanted to belong to came in the second Battle of New Ulm. Big Eagle and some other sub-chiefs “concluded to go down and attack New Ulm again and take the town...So we took many of our women with us to gather up the

^53 Ibid., 26.
^54 Ibid., 147.
^55 George Quinn in Anderson and Woolworth’s *Through Dakota Eyes*, 157.
^56 Lightning Blanket Anderson and Woolworth’s *Through Dakota Eyes*, 154.
property and some other things, and we brought along some wagons to haul them off.”

Previous to this, Big Eagle made a statement that “all my men were with me; none had gone off on raids.” Perhaps Big Eagle had a different definition of the word ‘raid’, because an attack on a town for their goods fits the definition of a raid. This does not sound like the same man who claimed that losing the second battle of Fort Ridgeley was for the “best.” Big Eagle was simply trying to put himself into the most favorable position. When it was favorable to attack a defenseless town, that is what Big Eagle did, but when it was favorable to side with the whites, Big Eagle did not hesitate to do that as well. Unlike the actions of Little Crow, which show a pattern of liminality throughout, Big Eagle shows a pattern of conformity to the circumstances of the moment. The only people who seemed to speak in Little Crow’s favor were his closest relatives.

Although the account of White Spider, Little Crow’s half-brother, and Esther Wakeman, White Spider’s wife, should be cautiously read for bias, they do offer valuable insight into Little Crow’s persona. White Spider recalled receiving the following order from Little Crow: “Go and gather up what white women and children you can. This state of things won’t last very long. The Indians will have to go pretty soon, and then the captives will perish…So I took with me his strong young men, and I took a staff in my hand, and with that hand I took the captive women and children and saved them.” This statement does not stray far from what is already evident from other narratives.

Furthermore, White Spider also mentioned that “Little Crow kept a good many of the captives in his own home, and treated them the same as he treated his own children, and

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57 Jerome Big Eagle in Anderson and Woolworth’s Through Dakota Eyes, 149.
58 Ibid., 56.
59 Ibid., 148.
60 White Spider in Anderson and Woolworth’s Through Dakota Eyes, 61.
had them eat with him.”\textsuperscript{61} A person who was entirely anti-white would not share food with his prisoners. Likewise, a person who was entirely anti-Native would not lead them against the whites.

Just like White Spider, Esther Wakeman, recalled Little Crow helping the whites. In her narrative she stated that “Little Crow divided some white women and children who found it difficult to escape among his friends to protect them from the renegades.”\textsuperscript{62} Esther Wakeman also mentioned that the Sioux Uprising was not Little Crow’s idea and that he was pressured into joining the young warriors, “Little Crow wanted to make peace, but the majority of the people wanted him to lead them in a war. At a council meeting, they threatened him and called him a coward until he in anger agreed to lead them in war.”\textsuperscript{63} Little Crow was forced into the uprising because his man-hood was in question. In other words, Little Crow was never fully against the idea of an uprising because he understood the grievances that were raised by Native Americans.

Little Crow tried to be very tactical in his attacks upon the whites. However, due to clever maneuvering by white-sympathizers, his plans were foiled. Just as when Little Crow tried to communicate with Sibley, the white-sympathizers deceived him while he was making plans of attack. During the battle of Wood Lake, men like Gabriel Renville and Solomon Two Stars persuaded the warriors to make an attack on the whites in the daytime instead of the night. The reasons behind Little Crow’s strategy were obvious. An attack during the night would surprise the soldiers and cause fear and panic. This sort of an attack would yield a great victory for the Native Americans. Gabriel Renville and Solomon Two Stars understood that, and argued in favor of an attack during the daytime.

\textsuperscript{61} Ibid., 62.
\textsuperscript{62} Esther Wakeman in Anderson and Woolworth’s \textit{Through Dakota Eyes}, 55.
\textsuperscript{63} Ibid., 60.
The only advantage for attacking during the day would be that the Indians would be able to better communicate with each other. Solomon Two Stars claimed that the whites would have “pickets” set up around the perimeter, rendering a nighttime attack completely useless.\(^{64}\) When the counsel voted on the attack, it was decided that the attack was to be held during the daytime. The counsel was not aware of the real reason why the white-sympathizers wanted to attack during the daytime.

Apparently Gabriel Renville thought that Little Crow’s strategy would cause greater damage to the whites. Attacking during the daytime gave white soldiers the advantage since they were trained in fighting as a unit. Although the Native Americans were also fierce fighters, they were disorganized and their best fighting was done from ambushes and guerilla warfare. An attack during the day would not involve either of those. Gabriel Renville later admitted, “if the attack was made in daylight, the friendly Indians would have an opportunity to let the troops know what was planned.”\(^{65}\) Likewise, Solomon Two Stars also desperately tried to make the fight occur during the daytime for the same reason.\(^{66}\) Finally, Victor Renville, affirmed this strategy in his narrative, “Gabriel got up and opposed this plan [attacking during the nighttime] because he feared the hostiles would succeed in defeating the soldiers.”\(^{67}\) The battle strategy of the ‘friendly’ Indians worked in the favor of the whites and the Native Americans lost the battle of Wood Lake.

\(^{64}\) Solomon Two Stars in Anderson and Woolworth’s *Through Dakota Eyes*, 243. See Also: Gabriel Renville who called the sentries, “spy-glasses” that would be able to see the Indians coming. Anderson and Woolworth’s *Through Dakota Eyes*, 231.

\(^{65}\) Gabriel Renville in Anderson and Woolworth’s *Through Dakota Eyes*, 231.

\(^{66}\) Solomon Two Stars in Anderson and Woolworth’s *Through Dakota Eyes*, 243.

\(^{67}\) Victor Renville in Anderson and Woolworth’s *Through Dakota Eyes*, 238.
When Little Crow arrived back at his village his mood was somber. He told his men “I cannot account for the disgraceful defeat. It must be the work of traitors in our midst.”

To Samuel Brown, Little Crow seemed to be “despondent” and “almost heart broken.” Other than where to flee, Little Crow still had to decide what was to happen to the captives. According to Cecilia Campbell Stay, one of the ‘half-breeds’, Little Crow was persuaded by her father to let the prisoners be released. Since Cecelia Campbell Stay’s father was close to Little Crow, Little Crow honored his friend’s last request. Little Crow told his men, “any of you that have a prisoner or anything that belongs to them, give them back, and fetch them to this man [Cecelia Campbell Stay’s father].”

Having escaped west and then to Canada during the wintertime, Little Crow was having trouble getting food and shelter. After passing the winter in various villages, Little Crow ventured back to the state of Minnesota where on July 3rd 1863, he was killed while picking berries. The only person who was with him was his son, who claimed that Little Crow was not looking to fight the whites, but was looking to steal horses for his children. During his life he tried to transcend two societies, but at the end he was shunned by both of them. Little Crow’s body was even desecrated after his death, a mark of utter disrespect. According to Minnie Buce Carrigan, “after they were through celebrating they scalped him and threw him into a ditch. Someone cut off his head and was going to have it fixed up in a showcase.” Even though Little Crow had done many beneficial things for the whites, they still would not understand the man who could fight them. On July 16th 1863, the St. Paul Weekly Press covered the death of Little Crow with

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68 Samuel Brown in Anderson and Woolworth’s *Through Dakota Eyes*, 223.
69 Ibid., 222.
70 Cecelia Campbell Stay in Anderson and Woolworth’s *Through Dakota Eyes*, 253.
71 Wowinape in Anderson and Woolworth’s *Through Dakota Eyes*, 280.
72 Carrigan, *Captured by the Indians*, 4-5.
the following headline: “Exciting News! How the Scalp Was Taken!” The man who killed Little Crow, Nathan Lamson, received a five hundred dollar check.

The life of Little Crow was filled with tragedy. He was misunderstood and unappreciated by the two societies he tried to bring together. He did many things to help his people but at the end he was betrayed by them. Meanwhile, Little Crow had a log house, he conversed with missionaries, he saved captives from death, and most importantly for the history of America, and he signed a few treaties with the U.S. government ceding the land of the Dakota. Overall, he was a very dynamic character who lived outside of the rules of individual societies. He was a person who tried to bring two societies together through having characteristics of both societies and not swearing his allegiance to either. For his lack of commitment to one, Little Crow was killed and will be remembered as an evil man who committed atrocious acts.

74 Schultz, Over the Earth I Come, 273.
While the Sioux Uprising was a turbulent time for many people, the white women who were taken captive by Native Americans experienced the most hardships. Uncertain of the wellbeing of their families and loved ones, the captives had to endure a new environment while being held in captivity by people of a different culture. Unlike virtually all other captives, Sarah Wakefield did not conform to what white society expected from a white woman who was put into that situation. Instead of labeling the Natives as savages, Wakefield produced a pro-Indian narrative, and even defended her captor, Chaska, during his trial with the military tribunal. Through her liminality, Wakefield came to be seen as a ‘fallen woman’, a woman who had intimate relations with someone other than her husband. The fact that this man was not white made this rumor even more powerful. In order to clear her name and vent her frustrations about the way that the Native Americans were treated, Wakefield, in 1863, wrote a captivity narrative. Apparently this was not enough, and she had to add more information in a second edition in 1864. The 1864 edition was longer by eighteen percent than the 1863 edition.\footnote{Kathryn Zabelle Derounian-Stodola, \textit{The War in Words: Reading the Dakota Conflict through the Captivity Literature} (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 2009), 75.}

Although she wanted to remain a part of white society, she also wanted to show the world that the Native Americans were not simply ‘savages’, but were human beings. Unfortunately for Wakefield, since she wanted to respect both societies, she was accepted by neither.
Sarah Wakefield was not born a frontierswoman. She was born in Rhode Island and lived a middle class life.² Prior to moving to Shakopee, Minnesota, in 1855, with her husband John Wakefield, her interactions with Native Americans were limited.³ Since Minnesota was a new state in the Union during the time of the uprising in 1862, many other female captives were also new to the state.⁴ This shows that Sarah Wakefield was not predisposed to favoring Native Americans. Just like other captives, she had spent only a few years among the Indians in Minnesota. Once people get comfortable with each other, they may possibly put aside stereotypes and biases. However, Sarah Wakefield was not a typical frontierswoman. After all, she was a woman from the East and had to act accordingly. For example, she still tried to maintain her lifestyle, as seen through her wardrobe.⁵ She was a woman from the upper middle class who nevertheless tried to show the world that Native Americans were human beings. Unfortunately, the world was not ready for such a message, especially from the mouth of a woman. She was quickly cast aside and labeled as a ‘fallen woman’ for trying to bring white and Native American societies closer together. She wanted to make sure that both societies were aware of their similarities and did not only focus on the differences. For that reason, she was maligned, and as Wakefield wrote in the preface of each of her narratives (1863 and 1864), she was forced to “vindicate” herself.⁶

² Ibid., 68. See Also: June Namias, White Captives: Gender and Ethnicity on the American Frontier (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1993), 208.
³ Derounian-Stodola, The War in Words, 68.
⁵ Namias, White Captives, 208.
⁶ Sarah Wakefield, Six Weeks in the Sioux Tepees (Fairfield, Wash.: Galleon, 1985), 5.
Prior to writing the 1863 edition of her book, Wakefield must have written a pamphlet addressed to the public because in the 1863 edition, which is the first widely published edition, she mentions some publishing mistakes. There must have been a tremendous amount of pressure on Wakefield to explain her actions and defend herself from those who “abused” her. Wakefield learned that the public was not fond of someone trying to disturb the hierarchy of the social classes. A white woman should not see a Native American man as her equal. Perhaps she would be more justified in calling Chaska her equal if he were Christian. Since Chaska was not a Christian, according to Wakefield herself, and did not possess this important attribute of white culture, he was simply a savage. Any person, who is white, should not be associating themselves with savages. Due to the fact that Wakefield participated in this forbidden friendship, she was condemned by the public. For that reason, Wakefield hastily wrote her narrative in the year following her release, and then published another edition in 1864.

While the “civilized” race was busy avoiding the “savages”, as evidenced by the lack of coverage that Native Americans received in the Minnesota newspapers prior to the outbreak, the ‘uncivilized race’ began its outbreak on August 18th 1862. Sarah Wakefield was caught right in the middle and was captured by the Indians. When word first spread of the uprising, Wakefield was told to go with a driver, George Gleason, to Fort Ridgley. On the way, their wagon was attacked and overtaken by two Indians, Hapa and Chaska. Although Hapa wanted to kill Wakefield, Chaska would not permit it. According to Wakefield, Chaska saved her from Hapa “three or four times.” Wakefield was not even taken into captivity and yet Chaska already saved her more than once.

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7 Ibid.
8 Ibid., 19.
Perhaps the initial reason why Chaska had saved Wakefield was that he was previously acquainted with her in Shakopee, and had known Wakefield for approximately eight years.\textsuperscript{10} Maybe it was an act of courtesy at first, but it grew into something more, a human understanding. They were both liminal people who participated in both white and Native societies and were both adversely affected by their choices.

Wakefield’s preface is very interesting. In the 1863 edition, Wakefield recalled being saved by “a few friendly or Christian Indians,”\textsuperscript{11} but in the 1864 edition she recalled being saved by “a friendly or Christian Indian.”\textsuperscript{12} Although this may seem to be a minor discrepancy in the two editions, it is nevertheless a major change. Wakefield shifts focus from multiple Native Americans to a single one, Chaska. She is trying to make a statement that this is a very important aspect of her life; in fact she would not be alive if it was not for that man. Not only did Chaska rescue her from Hapa, he also fed and clothed her. This is another way of Wakefield ‘vindicating’ herself. She needed to show Chaska as a human being. Chaska was a single human being, and should not be categorized along with the other ‘bad’ Indians. After reading of what other captives went through, it was absolutely essential for Wakefield to separate Chaska from the Indians who committed travesties against the whites. It was important to emphasize Chaska as an individual who committed many brave acts to keep Wakefield and her children alive. It was easier to justify the actions of one person than the actions of an entire race of people.

\textsuperscript{11} Wakefield, \textit{Six Weeks in the Sioux Tepees}, 5.
\textsuperscript{12} Wakefield, “Six Weeks in the Sioux Tepees”, 241.
Wakefield thought that white society would accept her argument. Unfortunately, she was wrong.

Unlike other captives, Wakefield was very outspoken in her observations. Her narrative is filled with praise of Native Americans in an attempt to show that they were more than savages. Other female captivity narratives do not flow the same way that Wakefield’s does. Other women, like Mary Schwandt Schmidt and Mrs. J.E. DeCamp, do mention being grateful to the Indians who saved them, but they view their saviors as exceptions. Schmidt and DeCamp, along with all other women who wrote their captivity narratives, view Native Americans as mostly being composed of savage people who were responsible for the uprising. The men and women who saved them were people who were of exceptional character and acted in a very ‘un-Indian’ way. In contrast, in her narrative, Sarah Wakefield shows that the opposite is true. She shows that being family oriented and willing to help others were the norms in a Native American society. Wakefield would argue that the men who started the uprising were the exception, and proclaimed the following: “I wish every murderer hanged.”

However, she clearly believes that the norm for Indian behavior is being calm and fair. At the end of her narrative, Wakefield asserted that many women “told entirely different stories respecting their treatment, after Sibley came, than they did before.” Wakefield felt that the other captives unjustly vilified the Native Americans and wished to bring justice to the Native American society, especially her savior, Chaska.

Other female captives were not the only whites who were subjected to Wakefield’s criticisms. Wakefield condemned the behavior of the teachers: “Teachers

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13 Ibid., 250.
14 Ibid., 310.
[were] feeding their own pockets more than they did the children’s mouths.”¹⁵ She also cited the fact that traders constantly abused the Native Americans by tricking them into giving away money. A particular Native American literally ate his money and said “they will not have mine, for I do not owe them.”¹⁶ Wakefield was greatly affected by the suffering that the Native Americans went through. In her text, she made it a point to show that ordinary citizens were also blameworthy. Wakefield insisted that “if all these Indians had been fed and otherwise treated like human beings, how many, very many innocent lives might have been spared.”¹⁷ According to Wakefield, the blame was dispersed among many. Finally, her favorite target was General Sibley. Wakefield often made remarks about Sibley’s speed, or lack thereof. She felt that the captives went through unnecessary hardships due to Sibley’s slow pace. This anger can probably be explained by the fact that she was outraged by Sibley’s military tribunal, which sentenced Chaska to be hanged.

Unlike other captives, Wakefield wondered if an uprising was inevitable given the circumstances that the Native Americans faced. Wakefield often asks the readers to put themselves into the moccasins of Native Americans and walk a mile in them. Wakefield asks, “Suppose the same number of whites were living in the sight of food, purchased with their own money, and their children dying of starvation, how long, think ye, would they remain quiet?”¹⁸ Wakefield blatantly suggested that no matter the color of a person, no matter how calm or ‘stoic’ a person is, once they are put into a situation where they are so thoroughly subjugated, they will rebel. Although Wakefield makes such a bold

¹⁵ Ibid., 244.
¹⁶ Ibid., 247.
¹⁸ Ibid., 11.
statement, she then finishes it with the following: “I know of course, they would have
done differently, but we must remember that the Indian is a wild man and has not the
discrimination of a civilized person. When the Indian wars it’s blood for blood.”

This was the dilemma that a person who was stuck between two societies experienced in 1862.
On the one hand, Wakefield wanted to show the world that Native Americans were
mistreated and had been justified in their rebellion. On the other hand, she also wanted to
remain a part of the white society and had to appease her white readers.

Wakefield tried to obtain white empathy by emphasizing the hardships she
experienced. Upon describing a particular instance when she was helped by Chaska and
his family, Wakefield would then form a question for the reader regarding her own
feelings. An excellent example of that comes after Wakefield was threatened by Winona,
Hapa’s wife. Since Hapa was Chaska’s brother-in-law, Hapa and his wife lived in the
same tepee as Chaska and Wakefield. One day, Winona told Wakefield that she would be
killed soon and Wakefield got very frightened and hid herself. Some time afterward,
Chaska came back to the tepee and Wakefield was overjoyed. She posed the following
question to her readers, “Have I not reason to bless his name, and thank the man and his
family for all their goodness towards me and mine?”

As a mediator, Wakefield needed
to justify herself and her actions before white society. She tried to convince the readers
that she was unable to feel anything but reverence for Chaska and his family because of
their actions.

However, her strategy was unsuccessful, due to the fact that white society was
unable to consider Native Americans as civilized human beings. In the eyes of white

\[19\] Ibid., 11.
\[20\] Ibid., 30.
society, Native Americans were more comparable to animals than humans. It did not matter that an Indian man saved a white woman’s life. A white woman should not defend Native Americans, but should only discuss the evil acts that were committed against the far more civilized and superior white race. Given the fact that many captives were forced into helping their captors with chores, many white women were not fond of Native Americans.

Life in captivity for Sarah Wakefield was filled with labor. Wakefield claims to have been constantly busy with chores and cooking. Since Wakefield’s goal while in captivity was survival, she tried to do whatever necessary to ensure that her goal was reached. Likewise, to ensure survival, Wakefield had to wear Native clothing. Although she claimed that it was “humiliating”, it was still absolutely essential because at any point of time a drunken Indian could have stumbled into her tepee. She actively participated in Indian life. Wakefield did whatever was required of her. In order to avoid conflict, Wakefield tried not to complain. As the Indians hated people who complained, this was a very smart decision. Unlike many other captives, Wakefield did not let her emotions get the best of her. As a result, she was able observe Indian behavior more closely. Through constant interaction, Wakefield was able to internalize Indian struggles and further embed herself within the Native American society.

There was one instance when Sarah Wakefield was accepted by her Indian family. Since Wakefield was a captive, her clothes were owned by Winona, Hapa’s wife. Unfortunately for Wakefield, Winona, just like Hapa, disliked all white people, including Sarah Wakefield. Just like Hapa, Winona wanted to make Wakefield’s life as miserable.

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21 Ibid., 63.
22 Ibid., 22.
as possible. Wakefield constantly begged Winona for a sacque, a loose gown, and one day Winona finally succumbed to Wakefield’s request.\textsuperscript{23} However, the sacque was of poor quality and it got ruined in the rain. When Chaska heard about the situation, he forced Winona to give Wakefield a new sacque. Chaska “caught her by the hair, slapped her in the face, and abused her shamefully.”\textsuperscript{24} This demonstrated that Wakefield was able to be a part of Chaska’s family and even received more respect than Chaska’s sister in-law.

Chaska’s newest ‘family member’ even refused to spend time with other white women. White captives would often gather together and participate in “roving”, gossip, sessions, but Wakefield wanted no part of it.\textsuperscript{25} Why should she gossip with other women and be strictly influenced by white norms? Wakefield instead was able to transcend both, white and Indian, societies. Due to Wakefield’s constant absence from gossiping, the other white women began spreading rumors about Wakefield.

One of the rumors involved Wakefield falling in love with Chaska. At one point, Hapa, wanted to take Wakefield for his wife, but Chaska would not permit that. To appease the drunken Hapa, Chaska said he was willing to take Wakefield for his wife since his wife had recently died. So Chaska went and lay next to Wakefield. With that, Hapa became satisfied and went to sleep.\textsuperscript{26} As soon as Hapa was asleep, Chaska got up and went back to his own bed. Wakefield later wrote that “My father could not have done differently, or acted more respectful or honorable; and if there was ever an uptight, honest

\textsuperscript{24} Wakefield, “Six Weeks in the Sioux Tepees”, 262.
\textsuperscript{25} Wakefield, \textit{Six Weeks in the Sioux Tepees}, 38.
\textsuperscript{26} Ibid., 40.
man, he was one.”

However, word spread to the white captives that Wakefield was married to Chaska, which caused a great deal of shock. From that point, Wakefield was seen as a ‘fallen woman’. According to the captives, Wakefield had fallen in love with Chaska and was cheating on her husband. The white women failed to see the truth of the situation and realize that many ‘half-breeds’ could understand English. For that reason, Wakefield was not at liberty to discuss her situation. Through her association with Indian society, Wakefield was slowly alienating herself from white society.

In her narrative, Wakefield distinctly mentions one white woman, Mrs. DeCamp. Wakefield described DeCamp as a reckless woman who did not value her life. Wakefield mentioned that DeCamp constantly “cried and fretted” and was also “complaining and threatening them [Indians].” Wakefield made a distinction between herself and DeCamp by pointing out that DeCamp acted in a reckless manner. Due to her stubborn disrespect for the Native Americans, DeCamp was not treated as well as Wakefield during her captivity. Unlike Wakefield, DeCamp did not bother getting closer acquainted with her captors, and as a result did not see the Indians as human beings. DeCamp, and most other women, viewed the Native Americans as savages, with only a few exceptions. DeCamp also wrote a narrative and although it was written more than thirty years after the uprising, it still gave a lot of insight in the way that DeCamp viewed Native Americans. Likewise, the structure of DeCamp’s captivity narrative is very different from Wakefield’s narrative.

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27 Ibid.
28 Wakefield, “Six Weeks in the Sioux Tepees”, 283. Some of the women could understand Dakota, the language of the Sioux, including Sarah Wakefield.
29 Ibid., 283.
The basics of DeCamp’s narrative mirror that of Wakefield’s. DeCamp was initially saved by two Indian chiefs, Chief Wacouta and Chief Wabasha. Later she was taken by another Indian family, though she does not specify their names. She described moving a lot from place to place and wading rivers. She recalled the name of the Indian who brought her away from the Indian camps, Lorenzo Lawrence. Unlike Wakefield, she does not rave about her savior throughout the narrative. There is one paragraph devoted to thanking him as a person and she calls him a “true friend.” In fact, throughout the two pages where DeCamp describes her escape with Lorenzo Lawrence, she referred to him as “the Indian.” Even thirty years later, she is still unable to call her savior by name in the span of two pages. Wakefield, meanwhile, calls Chaska by name constantly and continuously referred to him as her savior. What makes DeCamp’s survival even more impressive is the fact that she was pregnant all throughout her captivity. According to DeCamp’s narrative, she gave birth to a baby only a few weeks after she escaped captivity. Through her actions, Wakefield was not as much of a burden as DeCamp, and the fact that DeCamp was close to nine months pregnant, makes her survival even more improbable. She should have been thanking her captors for letting her live throughout her narrative. However, unlike Wakefield, DeCamp did not.

Another woman who sought to discredit Wakefield in the eyes of white society was Mary Schwandt Schmidt. Just like Mrs. DeCamp, Schmidt faced hardships while in the Indian camp. Schmidt was forced to wear Native clothing and was also protected by an Indian. Unlike both DeCamp and Wakefield, Schmidt was protected by a woman,

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31 Ibid., 390.
32 Ibid., 388-9.
33 Ibid., 389.
named Snana. She cared for Schmidt greatly. In her narrative, Snana wrote: “I loved her and pitied her, and she was dear to me just the same as my own daughter.”

Schmidt also had kind words about her savior. In her narrative, Schmidt called Snana her “mother.”

Since Schmidt was a child of fourteen, she might not have had the same negative stigma attached to her as Wakefield. The most important difference between Snana and Chaska was the fact that Snana was a woman and Chaska a man. Since sexual relations could not have transpired between Snana and Schmidt, the relationship that the two shared was purely circumstantial. For those reasons, Schmidt was pardoned for her relationship.

What makes Schmidt’s narrative so significant is the fact that she mentioned Wakefield by name. In her narrative, Schmidt recalled “Mrs. Wakefield and Mrs. Adam…painted and decorated and dressed in full Indian costume and seemed proud of it. They were usually in good spirits and appeared to enjoy their new life. The rest of us disliked their conduct and would have little to do with them.” Schmidt’s statement is filled with animosity towards Wakefield. Wakefield’s actions and her pro-Indian words must have truly been detested by white society in 1862. Considering that Schmidt was able to recall Wakefield in a narrative which was written over thirty years after the uprising, Wakefield’s actions must have been considered outrageous in 1862. Being in the same tent while in Camp Release, did not change Schmidt’s view of Wakefield. Schmidt must have personally seen Wakefield try and save Chaska’s life, and she must have despised her for it, just like the rest of white society.

34 Snana in Anderson and Woolworth’s Through Dakota Eyes, 143.
35 Schwandt-Schmidt, “The Indian Captivity Narrative”, 398.
36 Ibid., 399.
37 Carrigan, Captured by the Indians, 17.
The narrative that was most similar to Wakefield’s, was written by a woman named Martha Riggs Morris, whose account was printed in a book by Reverend Stephen Riggs. In her narrative, Mrs. Morris, described an Indian as a “brave, handsome man, whose eye you could not but trust.” If the entire narrative continued in such manner, Mrs. Morris would perhaps have been ostracized as much, if not more than, Sarah Wakefield. Towards the end of Mrs. Morris’s account, her intentions became clear. She mentioned that the Christian Indians should be commended and not be punished with the rest of the Sioux. Since Mrs. Morris had limited interaction with her ‘handsome’ Indian, white society avoided labeling her as a ‘fallen woman’. Since there was no chance for any intimate contact with the Indian, Mrs. Morris was not doubted by her society.

By contrast, more doubt was cast upon Sarah Wakefield at Camp Release. Although Wakefield was looking forward to her release, she was not too fond of the soldiers and people who were in charge of Camp Release. When she first saw the soldiers, Wakefield admitted the following: “Instead of joy, I felt feelings of anger.” As captive who was held against her will, Wakefield should not have felt animosity towards her liberators. Conversely, Mrs. White remembered the soldiers with “joy and admiration” and Mrs. Carrigan remembered the soldiers as the “Stars of Hope.” Even Rev. Riggs, who was one of the members of the Sibley camp, recalled the moment that the captives were free with “gladness” and remembered men crying with joy. Wakefield failed to see white soldiers as liberators and that could have potentially negatively

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39 Ibid., 178.
40 Ibid., 177.
41 Wakefield, *Six Weeks in the Sioux Tepees*, 73.
42 White, *Captivity Among the Sioux*, 420.
categorized her. Wakefield’s reaction also perhaps explained why Schmidt acted the way she did towards Wakefield.

Subsequently, Wakefield testified on behalf of Chaska during the War Trials. This upset all of the whites because there was no other female testifying in favor of any other Indian. Out of the 104 white women and children who were held at Camp Release, not one of them testified in favor of the Indians.\(^{45}\) The soldiers and other white women had no explanation for Wakefield’s lack of conformity to white standards of action towards Native Americans. What Wakefield told the military commission was not anything that could have led the commission to suspect an affair between her and Chaska. She simply told them that Chaska had saved her and her children from Hapa and that Chaska was a good man. She also mentioned that he had to make sacrifices for her, “They are very poor, he and his family. They have had to beg victuals [food] for me and he had given his coffee? and food to my children and gone without himself.”\(^{46}\)

Unfortunately, the soldiers did not take Wakefield’s testimony seriously. The commission, after a “deliberation” found Chaska guilty.\(^{47}\) Just because Chaska stated that he aimed at George Gleason, he was sentenced to be hanged. Wakefield’s testimony did not make any difference upon the commission’s decision. Ironically, her testimony and actions most likely caused his death, because the whites would not permit their friendship. Although Chaska and Wakefield were only friends, whites perceived them to be lovers, and as a result, both were punished.


\(^{47}\) Ibid.
At one point during the proceedings, Colonel Marshall told Wakefield “if you have anything more of a private nature to relate, you can communicate it to Mr. Riggs.” The white men and women had misconstrued Wakefield’s character. They saw her as a weak woman who had fallen prey to her Indian savior, and did not even realize it. They assumed she had acquiesced to sexual relations. Wakefield’s character was in fact the opposite; she was a strong-willed woman who tried to transcend racial boundaries. White society was not able to comprehend that fact, and thus Wakefield was shunned. As a result, Chaska was hanged “mistakenly.” This event hurt Wakefield in both societies. Chaska’s mother, her only friend within the Native American society (other than Chaska), could no longer respect Wakefield because she failed to live up to her promise of saving Chaska. Likewise, white society could no longer respect Wakefield because she was a ‘fallen woman’ and a traitor to white norms.

In order to figure out how Chaska’s life could have been ‘mistakenly’ taken, Wakefield sent letters to Rev. Riggs and even President Lincoln. In total, she sent three letters to Rev. Riggs. Surprisingly, the letters were not filled with rage. Instead, Wakefield looked to Riggs as a man of God. Wakefield asked Riggs a lot of religious questions, but amid religion, Wakefield still managed to discuss the hardships she faced due to her friendship with Chaska. In the second letter to Riggs, Wakefield claimed that she has no more friends and they have all disappeared like “dew before the sun.” In the final letter, which was very lengthy compared to the other two, Wakefield wrote that

49 Ibid., 308.
50 Ibid., 304.
Chaska’s mother blamed her for killing her son.\textsuperscript{52} As a result of her liminality, Wakefield had lost her white friends, her husband’s pity, and even hurt her only Native American friend.

In her third letter, Wakefield reiterated that she had problems with her husband after the uprising. Wakefield wrote the following: “My husband blames me very much for my talking so much at Camp Release and does not have the pity for me that he would have otherwise. He says I have brought my trouble upon myself and now I must bear it.”\textsuperscript{53} Even John Wakefield had assumed the worst, his wife being unfaithful. If her own husband could not trust her, how could the rest of society? John Wakefield’s demeanor was similar to Mr. John Wright’s, another white man who went through a similar circumstance. John Wright’s wife was taken into captivity and was raped. Once she was released from captivity by General Sibley, John Wright “secured a divorce, saying he did not care to have a woman occupy his bed who would not die rather than submit to the treatment she did from the Indians.”\textsuperscript{54} At least John Wakefield remained married to his wife without leaving her. However, the fact that he did not put complete trust into her shows that Sarah Wakefield had lost a great deal of credibility within white society.

In the letter to Lincoln, Wakefield explained the whole situation about Chaska’s death in detail. She noted that Chaska did not have evidence against him, and “his name was among others requesting that his punishment should be commuted to imprisonment.”\textsuperscript{55} Wakefield also explained that she was not in love with Chaska, and that they were simply friends. For her to blatantly tell Lincoln that she and Chaska were not

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\textsuperscript{52} Wakefield’s letter to Riggs number 3, “Many Persons say I am a ‘mono-maniac’”, 22.
\textsuperscript{53} Ibid., 21.
\textsuperscript{54} “John Wright” in Harper Workman’s Early history of Lake Shetek country, 2.
\textsuperscript{55} Wakefield’s letter to Abraham Lincoln, 2.
lovers suggests the amount of social pressure facing Wakefield must have been tremendous. She further asked Lincoln to hang the right person and claimed it would be “gratifying” to her. With that statement, she brought herself back into white society, but then also reverted to Indian society when she said that Chaska’s mother was left “broken hearted.” Even in the letter written to President Lincoln, Wakefield made it known that she was a person who wanted to transcend two societies. She finished her thought by saying that “we are all brothers, made by one God.” Wakefield was not Chaska’s lover; she was a person who saw benevolence within a person of a different race.

Perhaps Wakefield knew that Lincoln transcended Indian and white societies as well. Lincoln only sentenced 38 to be hanged out of 303, while there was great pressure for him to hang all. Wakefield might have felt comfortable confiding in Lincoln. Nothing could change the fact that Chaska was dead and Wakefield’s reputation in white and Indian societies was ruined. Through defending Chaska, Wakefield took on a tough role. She was able to maintain her role throughout her life and did not change her mind. She was not like the many white women in the camp who failed to publicly celebrate their saviors. Certainly other women mentioned their saviors for a brief moment in their narratives, but they did not go into great detail about just how hard the task was for the Native Americans. They saved white women at a time when alcohol, bad tempers, and fear were controlling how people acted. Native Americans put their lives on the line to protect white women, but only Wakefield was able to truly relate that to the public. Just as Little Crow did within the Indian society, Wakefield transcended the white society by

56 Ibid., 3.
57 Ibid.
58 Ibid.
refusing to be controlled by the norms. By speaking in favor of the Indians, she risked, and lost, her social standing within white society.
Chapter 6- Chaska

One of the truly sad cases was that of the Indian man named Chaska. His Indian name was We-Chank-Wash-ta-don-pee.\textsuperscript{1} However, he was commonly referred to as Chaska, because it means ‘oldest son’ in Dakota.\textsuperscript{2} As mentioned in the previous chapter, he was the savior of Sarah Wakefield. He was in apparent danger from the very moment that he stopped his brother, Hapa, from shooting Sarah Wakefield.\textsuperscript{3} Unfortunately, Chaska’s life came to an abrupt end, all because he helped Sarah Wakefield. Due to the uprising, the tension between Native Americans and whites mounted, and many atrocities were committed by both sides. The death of Chaska was perhaps the biggest atrocity of all. It showed a man being punished for his actions of bringing together two societies, because they did not want to be one.

At the point of his capture, Chaska must have been well known throughout Camp Release, and most likely well-despised by the whites. In a distorted view of reality, the white men, fueled by the erroneous rumors spread by white women (who were held captive along with Sarah Wakefield), most likely wanted to take revenge on this savage who was able to manipulate a white woman to fall in love with him.\textsuperscript{4} The soldiers disrespected Wakefield’s honor, and misinterpreted Chaska’s intentions. What they probably saw was a dangerously threatening man. They were threatened by the fact that just as white men had done earlier, white women might now select Native partners.

\textsuperscript{1} Derounian-Stodola, \textit{The War in Words}, 71.
\textsuperscript{2} Brown, \textit{In Captivity}, 5.
\textsuperscript{3} Wakefield, “Six Weeks in the Sioux Tepees”, 254.
\textsuperscript{4} Ibid., 304.
Assisting in the survival of a white woman was fine, but once Sarah Wakefield was safe, there was no longer a need for this Indian man in white society.

Unfortunately, Chaska was never able to personally share his story; but there are plenty of other sources which provide insight into his character. In the preface of her 1864 edition, Sarah Wakefield described Chaska as a “Friendly or Christian Indian”, but this does not necessarily mean that this man was in fact a baptized Christian.\(^5\) It is undisputed that Chaska was a farmer Indian, but other than the preface, there is no other indication of Chaska being a baptized Christian. Wakefield praised the work of the missionaries for making Chaska a good person. She compared him unfavorably with Hapa, an Indian who did not get any training by the missionaries. Wakefield again described Chaska as a farmer Indian and pointed out that Chaska “had worn a white man’s dress for several years; had been to school and could speak some English, and read and spell very little.”\(^6\) However, no where else does she mention his religion. Considering that Chief Little Crow was able to wear white man’s clothing and go to white man’s school, without converting to Christianity, it is plausible to think that Chaska was simply a farmer, and not a Christian.\(^7\)

Ever since the missionaries had come to Minnesota, they tried to convert as many people into their religion as possible. However, from day one, they experienced many problems with conversions. The Indians pretended to be Christians one day and collect the benefits from conforming to the white man’s ways, and then the next day would return to their own religion. Relations were worsened by broken treaties, and soon farming, and especially being Christian, was looked upon as disgraceful by the Indians

\(^5\) Ibid., 241.
\(^6\) Ibid., 255.
who chose to keep their traditional ways. Just because Chaska was a farmer did not mean that he was a Christian Indian as well. It is a very important distinction to make, because the Christian religion forced the Native Americans to drop all their traditional practices and become ‘white men’. This is exactly what several well known Natives had done.

The list of notable Natives who converted to Christianity includes Little Paul, Lorenzo Lawrence, Taopi, and John Other Day. However, because of their religion, they no longer retained their Native culture and were not liminal people. Yes, they were Native Americans who saved the lives of countless people, but since they converted to Christianity they are excluded from the conversation. They chose the white society rather than their own. They are not traitors to their culture, but should be seen as people who chose a different path in life. Chaska did not abandon his culture; he retained it, but also helped whites throughout the uprising.

Chaska was able to maintain his connections to the white world through his clothes and farming, while keeping his Native culture in his religion. This is demonstrated in an instance when Sarah Wakefield, being ignorant of Native customs, washed her feet in a pail. While getting some water by the bank, she decided to wash her feet because they had become muddy. Apparently some one witnessed this violation, and confronted Chaska about it. With the help of an interpreter, it was explained to Wakefield that “all vessels belonging to a tepee were sacred,” and unfortunately for women, they were not allowed to touch them.\(^8\) Nowhere in the Christian religion does it state that a woman cannot wash her feet in a pail. If there was such a rule in Christianity, Wakefield would know because she was highly religious and mentioned God, and Christianity, throughout her narrative. Chaska was so upset by this incident that he left the pail behind

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\(^8\) Wakefield, “Six Weeks in the Sioux Tepees”, 287.
once their camp was relocated.9 Chaska’s lack of Christianity is shown through his actions.

So what kind of a man was Chaska? As evidenced by Sarah Wakefield, he was a courageous man who was willing to sacrifice his family’s livelihood in order to save another’s life. In her letter to Abraham Lincoln, Wakefield claimed to have known Chaska and his family for eight years.10 It is unthinkable that Wakefield would associate herself for eight years with a Native American whom she did not perceive to be a good person. In fact, Wakefield claimed that Chaska had treated her better than Christian Indians.11 Chaska’s character can further be seen in a narrative written by Cecelia Campbell Stay. As soon as the uprising began, Stay recalled being scared for her father’s life because he worked for one of the traders, Andrew Myrick.12 Since Andrew Myrick had told the Indians to go and “eat grass,” Stay had good reason to worry about her father’s well-being.13 Much to Cecelia Stay’s joy, her father was returned to her by eight men, one of whom most likely was the chivalrous Chaska.

Although Cecelia Stay was not certain about the identities of all the men who rescued her father, she suspected that “Chaska and Ha-Pan might be the [among the] others.”14 It is more than coincidence that she mentions Chaska by name along with his brother. The eight men protected Stay’s father, along with his brother, by surrounding them so that “no stray bullet could hit but an Indian.”15 Considering Cecelia Stay’s residency at the [Lower] Redwood Agency at the time of the uprising, it was feasible that

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9 Ibid., 287.
10 Wakefield’s letter to Abraham Lincoln, 3.
11 Wakefield, “Six Weeks in the Sioux Tepees”, 279. Wakefield mentioned that Good Thunder and his wife did not share their water with Wakefield.
12 Cecelia Campbell Stay in Anderson and Woolworth’s Through Dakota Eyes, 46.
13 Jerome Big Eagle in Anderson and Woolworth’s Through Dakota Eyes, 56.
14 Cecelia Campbell Stay in Anderson and Woolworth’s Through Dakota Eyes, 49.
15 Ibid.
the Chaska that she is talking about was the same one who saved Wakefield. The Lower Agency was located in between Fort Ridgely and Yellow Medicine [Upper Agency].

Sarah Wakefield was traveling to Fort Ridgeley with George Gleason, when they were overtaken by Hapa and Chaska. While in captivity, Wakefield recalled seeing Chief Shakopee. Shakopee’s village was located across the river from the Lower Agency. Noting Chaska’s character, it is not farfetched to assume that he was also the savior of Cecelia Stay’s father. Even if Stay was mistaken in her identification of Chaska as her father’s savior, just the fact that she mentioned him as a person who potentially rescued her father, means that he was a morally upstanding person.

Chaska proved his character once again, by rescuing Wakefield, who was put into a defenseless situation once Hapa killed George Gleason. According to Wakefield, Chaska saved her from Hapa on several occasions. Chaska convinced Hapa to let Wakefield live, and brought her back to his village. That was only the beginning of Chaska’s burden. At the camp, rumors were constantly being circulated that all white people were to die, which made saving Wakefield even harder for Chaska. Chaska, along with his family, his uncle and mother, regularly hid Wakefield and shielded her from harm. Chaska had to take care of Wakefield in all aspects of her life. Since Wakefield did not have any possessions while in captivity, Chaska had to provide resources for Wakefield in order to ensure her survival. He had to feed Wakefield and her two children, and also keep them warm at night. It is very important to realize that no Native American was rich, and so Chaska had to sell his coat in order to obtain extra flour for his ‘guests’.

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16 Ibid., 44.
18 Namias, White Captives, 206-7.
Likewise, Chaska also had to give his blanket to Wakefield, so that she and her children were warm at night.\(^{20}\) His actions during the uprising were very heroic, as he put Wakefield’s safety above his own comfort.

While Chaska saved Wakefield, he still was immersed in his culture, and had to fight against the whites. Wakefield mentioned several instances when Chaska had to leave the village in order to go and fight. Although he was reluctant to leave Wakefield without his protection, if he did not go and fight, he would have been killed.\(^{21}\) While Wakefield urged Chaska to stay, towards the end of Wakefield’s narrative, Chaska claimed that if it was found out that she had prevented him from engaging in battle, they both would die. Just before heading out for the final battle against the whites, Chaska made it a point to tell Wakefield not to go to the friendly camp.\(^{22}\) Chaska did not fully trust the ‘friendly’ camp because it was filled with white-sympathizers. If Wakefield went there, she might have been killed by ‘hostile’ warriors after they returned from battle. The best place for Wakefield to remain was with the ‘hostile’ Indians or the ‘friendly’ Indians; it was in Chaska’s tepee. Chaska was not fully embracing white culture; otherwise he would have been living in the ‘friendly’ camp. Furthermore, Chaska was not fully embracing the popular Indian sentiment of the time; otherwise he would have killed Wakefield. Chaska’s affiliation laid in-between the two societies.

As a reward for his efforts of returning Wakefield, Chaska received a death sentence. Ironically, the man who tried to be a mediator to two societies had fallen victim to his own liminality. Since Chaska did not conform to a particular society, he was punished. Once Sibley brought his troops to Camp Release, Wakefield introduced Gen.

\(^{20}\) Ibid., 305.
\(^{21}\) Ibid., 292.
\(^{22}\) Ibid.
Sibley and missionary, Stephen Riggs, to Chaska and apparently they “shook hands with him, and made quite a hero of him for a short time.” 23 Unfortunately, the celebration of Chaska was short-lived, because the military commission sentenced him to be hanged. The military commission consisted of soldiers who fought against the Indians. One person on the commission, Lieutenant Colonel William Marshall, admitted after: “My mind was not in a condition to give the men a fair trial.” 24 How could men who were prejudiced against the Native American give them a fair trial? William Marshall was not the only one who was prejudiced. It seemed like the whole commission wanted to hang as many Indians as possible. There were many cases of Indian men, in which the commission was forced to cross out the word ‘guilty’, and replace it with ‘acquitted’ or wrote in a jail sentence. 25 The odds for being convicted were overwhelming. Out of the 393 that were tried, 303 were sentenced to be hanged. Apparently, even before appearing in front of the jury, the Indians were sentenced to be hanged.

When it was Chaska’s turn to face the commission, he received the same treatment as everyone else. Chaska admitted that he went to three battles and that he had aimed at Gleason. Interestingly, Chaska tried to reason with the commission by saying, “If I had done any bad act, I should have gone off.” 26 He did not kill a person and if he did, he would have run away with the rest of those who committed murders. His strategy of using reason, did not work against unreasonable men. Ironically, Wakefield’s testimony did more detriment than good. Although she defended Chaska, just like in her narrative, the commission simply dismissed her testimony. Regardless of the facts

23 Ibid., 298.
26 Sioux War Trial Transcript number 3, We-Chank-Wash-ta-don-pee.
surrounding his case, Chaska was sentenced to be hanged. However, due to Abraham Lincoln’s quick analysis, Chaska was left off the list of men to be executed. This must have made a few men angry, and they took advantage of the chaos of the moment, and executed Chaska anyway. On December 26th, he was ‘mistakenly’ hanged, along with thirty-seven other Native Americans.

How could a man be sentenced to death if he just saved a woman’s life? There are two possible reasons for this. One is that it was an honest mistake and Chaska was hanged for another man who shared the same name. Apparently “four men had the name of Chaska.”

Rev. Stephen Riggs, according to trial recorder, Isaac Heard, was the “Grand Jury of the court.” Riggs wrote a letter to Wakefield explaining that what happened to Chaska was a mistake, and everyone felt badly that such a mistake should occur. To call this occurrence a ‘mistake’ was to really stretch meaning of the word. Chaska’s death was not the result of a mistake, but was the result of punishment for not conforming to society’s norms.

Chaska was killed because the white men who were in charge of running the execution felt that Chaska got too close to Wakefield. At first glance, this idea may seem preposterous. However, there is a lot of evidence that indicates that Chaska was hanged on purpose. The purpose behind Chaska’s execution was because he was a mediator, and was a threat to white masculinity. After all, how could a ‘savage’ make a white woman believe that he was good? Chaska’s reputation was further hurt due to the fact that white

28 Heard, History of the Sioux War and massacres of 1862 and 1863, 251.
women were spreading rumors about Wakefield and him being “married.”\textsuperscript{30} The fact that Wakefield was the only woman to testify in favor of a Native American only made matters worse. In the eyes of the soldiers, and the rest of the white men at Camp Release, Chaska was just like the rest of the Native Americans. He was not Christian, and so was not a ‘blanket Indian’. The only feasible explanation that the whites could have come up with is that Chaska was Wakefield’s lover.

After the trial, Chaska was imprisoned, just like most other Native Americans. When the list of 39 men was sent back to Sibley, Chaska was not on it, but was hanged in place of another Indian. Apparently, the name of ‘Chaskay-Dan’ was called, case number 121, and Chaska stepped out. Chaskay-Dan was convicted of “shooting and cutting open a woman who was with child.”\textsuperscript{31} Chaska was merely charged with murder of George Gleason, and was supposed to be acquitted based on Wakefield’s testimony. Confusing the two men with similar names could have been an honest mistake on the part of the men in charge of conducting the trials. However, these names were called out on December 22\textsuperscript{nd} and the men were not executed until December 26\textsuperscript{th}. That gave a four day opportunity for this ‘mistake’ to be fixed. Unfortunately for Chaska, the ‘mistake’ was always planned to be permanent.

It still could have remained a simple mistake if no one ever visited the prisoners. But according to Isaac Heard, the condemned men “were constantly attended by Rev. Dr. Williamson, Rev. Van Ravoux, and Rev. S. R. Riggs.”\textsuperscript{32} This list excludes Major Joseph Brown, who was in the cell when interviews were conducted with the prisoners, and

\textsuperscript{30} Ibid., 283.
\textsuperscript{31} Sioux War Trial Transcripts, number 121 Chaskay-Dow. Unfortunately there are no sources indicating what happened to Chaskay-Dan after he escaped being hanged.
\textsuperscript{32} Heard, \textit{History of the Sioux War and massacres of 1862 and 1863}, 285.
Captain Grant with whom Wakefield discussed Chaska’s heroism.\textsuperscript{33} Grant even claimed that Chaska would only be sentenced to imprisonment for five years.\textsuperscript{34} In fact, Sarah Wakefield’s husband hinted that Major Brown was the ‘murderer’ of Chaska.\textsuperscript{35} Unfortunately, Sarah Wakefield did not provide the reasons why her husband thought that Brown was the culprit. Regardless if Mr. Wakefield was right or not, there was still a very long list of people who knew of Chaska, and could have prevented his death, but none intervened on his behalf.

The man who had the biggest chance of noticing the ‘mistake’ was Rev. Riggs. Not only did he spend a lot of time with the prisoners, but Riggs also interviewed them before they were sentenced to be hanged.\textsuperscript{36} This information was acknowledged by Isaac Heard as well as a ‘half-breed’, named Samuel Brown. In his narrative, Samuel Brown discussed the trials of the Sioux and also the hangings. Right before the condemned were hanged, Brown acknowledged that Riggs interviewed the men and provides a published copy of the information that Riggs obtained from each condemned person. The Indian, who was condemned to be hanged under the number twenty, said the following in his interview with Riggs just prior to being hanged:

20. Chas-kay-dan (first born, if a son) says he went to the stores in the morning of Monday; then he saw Little Crow taking away goods; he then went up to Red Wood with a relation of his; they were told that a white man was coming on the road; they went out to meet him, but the first who came along was a half-breed; They let him pass; then came along Mr. Gleason and Mrs. Wakefield; his friend shot Mr. Gleason, and he attempted to fire on him but his gun did not go off; he saved Mrs. Wakefield and the children, and now he dies while she lives.\textsuperscript{37}

\textsuperscript{33} Ibid., 284.
\textsuperscript{34} Wakefield, “Six Weeks in the Sioux Tepees”, 305.
\textsuperscript{35} Wakefield’s letter to Abraham Lincoln, 4.
\textsuperscript{36} Heard, History of the Sioux War and massacres of 1862 and 1863, 278.
\textsuperscript{37} Brown, In Captivity, 5.
Clearly this was Wakefield’s Chaska. Any person who wanted justice would have remembered the only Native American whose good character was confirmed by a white woman. Riggs could have easily seen the fact that no man was condemned for killing George Gleason. Riggs could have easily remembered Chaska since he was considered the ‘grand jury’ of the trials. If both those things slipped his mind, he could have remembered the name of Sarah Wakefield. The human mind seems to forget things that are similar, but not things that stand out. This had to have stood out in his mind. Chaska’s trial transcript was extensive, when compared to others. Riggs could have forgotten men like E-tay-go-ke-ya-dow, whose entire case was based upon the simple fact that the prisoner said “I fired one shot at the Fort through a window.”\(^\text{38}\) There was no other evidence or witnesses, and this man was one out of 303 condemned to be hanged, but was later reprieved by Lincoln. Obviously he could have forgotten that man, but not Chaska, whose trial transcript was seven to eight times longer than most other Indians. With a four day interaction period between Chaska and others, it is unfeasible that he could not have been saved.

Reverend Stephen Riggs published a significant work in 1880 and briefly mentioned this incident. Riggs blatantly agreed to two mistakes that happened after the 39 men were separated from the rest.\(^\text{39}\) One of them got fixed, it was the case of Round Wind, who was mistakenly identified by two boys and was later reprieved by President Lincoln just prior to the execution. However, Riggs never explicitly stated what the second mistake was and whose fault it had been. What seems odd in the book by Rev. Riggs is the fact that Riggs said that the men in charge of the executions sought to avoid

\(^{38}\) Sioux War Trial Transcripts. Case number 144.

\(^{39}\) Riggs, *Mary and I*, 184.
mistakes by “examining closely the individual charges.”\footnote{Ibid.} That is a good strategy to employ, considering the fact that the whites in Minnesota forgot to retain the original numbers for each prisoner. Riggs further admitted that he “acceded to their requests [of the condemned Sioux], and spent a whole day with them, writing down such things as they wished to say.”\footnote{Ibid., 185.} If the strategy for avoiding mistakes was to ‘examine individual charges’, then how did the man who interviewed each condemned Sioux not notice the difference between Chaskay-Don’s charge and Chaska’s charge? Riggs should have promptly noticed the mistake and corrected it.

Instead, Riggs decided to shift the blame away from him, and set it upon Joseph R. Brown. Perhaps Wakefield was told by Riggs that Joseph Brown was to blame for the killing of Chaska, and that is why she accused Joseph Brown in her letter to President Lincoln. Riggs claimed that Brown was in charge of separating out the men sentenced for hanging and pointed out that Brown “did not recognize all perfectly.”\footnote{Ibid., 184.} Regardless if Joseph Brown mistakenly selected Chaska, Riggs still had time to acknowledge the mistake and fix it. Considering the fact that Riggs understood that Brown was not perfect in his knowledge of each Sioux man, Riggs should have been even more careful in analyzing each of the condemned men’s testimonies. It is also very strange not to see anything mentioned by Riggs in his book regarding Chaska or Sarah Wakefield. By excluding Wakefield and Chaska, Riggs made himself seem guiltier of murder. A person who has nothing to hide, would not exclude significant facts from a book. Granted, the book was published twenty eight years after the military trial, mentioning the death of an innocent person should have been of utmost importance. Riggs must have remembered
Chaska and Wakefield since he mentioned that there were two mistakes during the executions. By avoiding a detailed explanation of events, Riggs cast a shadow of doubt upon himself.

For that reason it is not too hard to think that this was not an oversight, but a murder, of an innocent man whose crime was trying to bring two societies together. Certainly, Chaska did not bring the chief of the whites, Lincoln, and sit him down with the chief of the Native Americans, Little Crow, but this man did manage to save a life of a white woman at a time when most other Natives would not bother. If Chaska killed Wakefield, no one would have known about it other than himself and Hapa. Considering Hapa’s character, he would not have given up his brother. Chaska gave up his life by resisting conformity to either culture, while men like Riggs conformed to the fullest.

The Native Americans had a lot of men who conformed to their culture when they were faced with the adversity of the Sioux Uprising. Many Native American men betrayed the trust of whites when faced with a choice either to aid whites or attack them. One such man was Old Pawn. According to Lavina Eastlick, Old Pawn was a Native American whom she knew. In fact, on the day of the uprising, she had a brief conversation with him and shook hands. When the uprising was just developing, Old Pawn even helped the whites in finding all their children. This way he was able to earn their trust. For his help, he was given a gun by the whites so that he can further protect them from the ‘savage Indians.’ However, the story turned for the worst for Eastlick and her friends, because Old Pawn betrayed the whites and led the massacre against them, Isaac Heard also mentioned the cruelties that the whites experienced at Lake

44 Ibid., 4.
Shetek, he recalled “three women and six children were shot by one man, who was the recipient of frequent charities from the hands of the whites whom he killed.” Shetek, he recalled “three women and six children were shot by one man, who was the recipient of frequent charities from the hands of the whites whom he killed.” The Indian to whom he is referring to was Old Pawn, and those murdered, were the friends and family of Lavina Eastlick.

Unlike Chaska, who saved a white woman, Old Pawn did the opposite, he led the attack on whites in Lake Shetek. The Indians forced Eastlick’s group into a slough. In the slough, the Indians persistently shot at the settlers until Old Pawn said that they would not hurt any more women and children if they gave themselves up. Upon conferencing, the women accepted the offer, only to be shot at again. Eastlick was shot in the back by Old Pawn and was left to die. Luckily for her, the Indians thought she was dead and left her alone. This unfortunate incident illustrated how benevolent Chaska’s actions had been. Old Pawn was able to flee along with the rest of these brutal murderers without any repercussions because according to William Duley, a white man who was able to survive the Lake Shetek Massacre and who cut the rope at the hangings, none of those hanged were present during the massacre at the Lake.

Another major example of a conformist Native American, who stuck to his traditional ways, was White Dog. According to Chief Big Eagle, White Dog was a farmer Indian, who was employed by Agent Joseph Brown to teach Indians how to farm. On the surface, he seemed to be a decent individual. However, he was not so kind to Captain Marsh, because he was a decoy who lured 30 soldiers, including Marsh, to their death. Again, unlike Chaska, White Dog conformed and committed actions that were favorable

45 Heard, History of the Sioux War and massacres of 1862 and 1863, 99.
46 Eastlick, The Lake Shetek Indian massacre in 1862, 7.
47 “William J. Duley” in Harper Workman’s Early history of Lake Shetek country, 1.
48 Jerome Big Eagle in Anderson and Woolworth’s Through Dakota Eyes, 25.
49 Heard, History of the Sioux War and massacres of 1862 and 1863, 72.
to him. At the time when it was advantageous to take part in the white society, White Dog was a farmer. But when there was an opportunity to benefit from looting, White Dog relinquished his ties with white society and took part in the uprising. Unlike Chaska, who followed a middle path throughout, White Dog was among many Native individuals who picked the culture in power at any given time. According to Isaac Heard, “Several of the worst characters, who had been in all the battles, after they had confessed the whole thing, wound up by saying that they were members of the Church!” Chaska was neither a church member nor a murderer. Unlike Old Pawn and White Dog, he was a good man who attempted to save a white woman. Unfortunately, his actions made him seem odd because he was transgressing white and Native American societies. Finally, because he was perceived as crossing boundaries by the whites, he received the punishment of death.

To make matters even worse for Chaska, his body was mutilated after his death. A man by the name of J.F. Meagher believed that Chaska killed George Gleason. In order to get some revenge, and have some fun, after the hangings, he and some friends went and dug Chaska up. After this atrocious act, Meagher cut off a piece of Chaska’s hair and kept it as a souvenir. Meagher had kept Chaska’s hair as a souvenir for Gleason’s relatives but when he was not able to find them, he sent it along with a letter to the Minnesota Historical Society. Due to the fact that Riggs did not correct this ‘mistake’, there was a lot of confusion because Meagher referred to Chaska as Chaska-Don, the name of the person who should have been hanged. How unfortunate it is that a man was disturbed even after his death. His only mistake was thinking that the white society would be able to treat him with the same respect as he gave Sarah Wakefield. Chaska’s actions

50 Ibid., 258.
caused a great sort of confusion among the whites who not only killed him, but tortured his remains afterwards.

Just like Sarah Wakefield and Chief Little Crow, Chaska was a person stuck in the middle, between two societies. Unfortunately, just like the others, he was not celebrated, but vilified. A marshal of the prison told Bishop Henry Whipple the following: “I went to the prison to release a man who had been acquitted for saving a woman’s life, but when I asked for him, the answer was, ‘You hung him yesterday.’ I could not bring back the redskin.”\(^{52}\) That was a telling encounter, because unfortunately the right people became aware of situation too late. If Wakefield discovered that it were Chaska being prepared to be hanged, she could have saved him. She was too late and Chaska died for committing the greatest sin at a time of uprising. He was caught in between two societies who were not yet ready to integrate.

\(^{52}\) Whipple, *Lights and Shadows*, 132.
In order to get a broader perspective on the Sioux Uprising of 1862, the perspective of a white man needs to be discussed. There is no more significant white man during this time period, than President Abraham Lincoln. At first glance, there appear to be many white men who have liminal qualities as well. Most of those men were missionaries. However, missionaries were forcing their religion upon the Indians and were not favorable towards Indian characteristics. The ultimate goal for the missionaries was to convert Indians to Christianity. In contrast, for Abraham Lincoln, conversion was not the ultimate goal. His goal was to ensure fair treatment of the Indians after the uprising. Additionally, Lincoln was a mediator of not only for white and Indians societies, but also for African-Americans.

Although Abraham Lincoln favored fair treatment of the Indians, he was preoccupied with saving the Union and abolishing slavery. In most history books, if there is any mention of the Sioux during the 1860’s, then it is done very briefly. The best discussion of the way Lincoln handled the Sioux Uprising of 1862, is in a book entitled Lincoln and the Sioux Uprising of 1862, by Frank Cox. Cox discussed the Civil War throughout his book because the two events, Sioux Uprising and the Civil War, occurred at the same time period and need to be discussed simultaneously. It is no coincidence that the arrival of annuity payments was late in 1861, because that is when the civil war began. Cox suggests that the annuity payments that were to be made to the Indians, as part of the 1857 Treaty, were late because Congress was busy dealing with the Civil

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1 The missionaries are discussed in detail on pages 109-11.
Although Lincoln was preoccupied with the Civil War, he did not remove all his attention away from the war in the West. Lincoln had always taken the middle road when dealing with the Native Americans. He did not believe in discrimination and felt that it was his duty to be fair to all races.

Just like Little Crow, Lincoln was born into a family that favored equality. According to Cox, Abraham Lincoln’s father, Thomas Lincoln, “was adamantly opposed to slavery, and it was one of the reasons he uprooted his family from Kentucky and moved across the Ohio River into Indiana in 1816.” Just like Little Crow, Lincoln was exposed to nonconformity towards society’s norms at an early age. He grew up in an environment where prejudice was not acceptable, and he was challenged to think for himself, rather than blindly following society’s expectations. Although this had nothing to do with Native Americans, at an early age, Lincoln favored the intermingling of races, something that was seen as preposterous by most of society. In fact, many people in Minnesota had often overlooked the Native Americans prior the Sioux Uprising. When Native Americans were mentioned in newspapers, it was because something was either stolen, or there was an intertribal battle, or the Native Americans were receiving their payment, or Native Americans were being ‘Christianized’, or a Chief came from the West and was impressed by the ingenuity of white people.

The Native Americans knew that the white male population in Minnesota was depleted due to the Civil War. In fact, Lincoln had asked Governor Ramsey for more men to be sent to the war in the East. Ramsey was willing to due so, considering that he could not predict what was about to happen. Even sources close to the Indians, such as Agent

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3 Ibid., 36.
Galbraith, could not have predicted that the Uprising would occur.\(^5\) Furthermore, the traders often made up rumors that annuity payments would not come, and that “the great white chief was thinking, not about red people, but about black people.”\(^6\) To an extent, this was true. Lincoln was more preoccupied with emancipating the African American people, but he never forgot about the Native Americans throughout this time period. The traders would further degrade the Indians by making them seem less important in comparison to African-Americans. In order to ensure that the Indians understood this message, and their low status in society, the traders would purposely degrade the African-American people through malicious wording. The traders made it known to the Indians that Lincoln was way too friendly with the “niggers” and would not take care of the Indians.\(^7\) This was even worse than the previous rumor because the Dakota Sioux relied on the whites for subsistence. Once the Native Americans realized that the ‘great white father’ would not protect them and take care of them, they became even more disillusioned. The militant soldiers’ lodge was able to gather a large following and encouraged violence. Contrary to the rumors, Lincoln had made no indications that he would stop assisting the Native people, but they did not know this. They knew that the U.S. army was otherwise engaged, and soldiers were far away.

Likewise, there were rumors circulating throughout white society regarding the Sioux Uprising. Since the whites were preoccupied with the Civil War, newspapers suspected that the South had forced the Indians to attack settlers in Minnesota as a distraction. On October 9\(^{th}\) 1862, an article in the St. Paul Press mentioned that the

\(^7\) Schultz, *Over the Earth I Come*, 8.
Southern rebels were behind the surprise attack on the whites in Minnesota. Just like the Native Americans, whites were misled. The uprising occurred because of rumors by the traders, and the whites were increasingly frightened due to the rumors by the newspapers. On August 17th, 1862, the Indians, led by the soldiers’ lodge, attacked innocent white settlers. The attack first began at the Redwood Agency, but quickly spread throughout the state. The violence was unexpected by the whites, and they turned to the man in charge of the country, in order to solve the problem.

Although Lincoln was dealing with a war that could have potentially destroyed the Union, he did not forget about the white people in Minnesota, who found themselves in danger due to the uprising. While Governor Ramsey was faced with a decision on whether to send the requested troops to Lincoln or dispatch them back to attend to the Indian Uprising, Lincoln made it simple for him. Instead of urging Ramsey to send the troops to the East, Lincoln told Ramsey: “Attend to the Indians. If the draft can not proceed, of course it will not proceed. Necessity knows no law. The government cannot extend the time.” Even at the time of tremendous necessity, Lincoln still had the troops dispatched back to Minnesota. This was a very significant decision because his general in the Civil War, General George McClellan was constantly asking for more troops.

While Lincoln was a great leader himself, he was dealing with a lot of incompetence from those under him, especially from people in high positions. Men like General George McClellan and General Henry Sibley only made matters worse in their respective wars. Both men were slow in their decisions and even slower in their actions. For example, McClellan had 87,000 men under him, at the Battle of Antietam, while

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8 *St. Paul Weekly Press*, October 9th, 1862.
10 Ibid., 60.
General Robert E. Lee only had half of that, yet McClellan was hesitant to move forward with the attack.\textsuperscript{11} Just like McClellan, Sibley was very slow and deliberate in his actions. Joe Coursolle, one of the men in Sibley command, wrote the following in his narrative, “we moved like snails. I could have crawled on my stomach and made faster time. Again we cursed Sibley. He was so slow!”\textsuperscript{12} Although the two generals were not good fighters or technicians, Lincoln was able to successfully maneuver both armies to two separate victories.

Before victory was evident, Abraham Lincoln needed to create a winning strategy. In order to try and appease Governor Alexander Ramsey and offer some support to the state of Minnesota, Lincoln formed the Department of the Northwest and put General John Pope in charge.\textsuperscript{13} Although Pope was not the greatest general, considering he had his shortcoming while in the Civil War, this was the best that Lincoln could do with the resources that were available. Lincoln hoped that Pope could offset the lack of military experience that General Sibley had. Since Sibley was a trader by profession, and not a military man, in Lincoln’s eyes, Pope could have shared invaluable strategies and tactics with Sibley. The appointment of Pope should have helped the situation in the west had Pope not been totally overwhelmed. Just like McClellan and Sibley, Pope began complaining about the lack of resources that were available in Minnesota. He also wrote to General Halleck from the War Department that the operation against the Sioux “will require a large force and much time.”\textsuperscript{14} Pope was disillusioned with the kinds of resources that were available for Lincoln. Nevertheless, due to the fact that the Native

\textsuperscript{11} Cox, \textit{Lincoln and the Sioux Uprising of 1862}, 111.
\textsuperscript{12} Jerome Big Eagle in Anderson and Woolworth’s \textit{Through Dakota Eyes}, 239.
\textsuperscript{13} Cox, \textit{Lincoln and the Sioux Uprising of 1862}, 80.
\textsuperscript{14} Schultz, \textit{Over the Earth I Come}, 225.
Americans were not organized and had limited resources, Pope and Sibley eventually defeated them. It took much longer than it should have, but Sibley managed to rescue the captives and hold the Indians as prisoners.

Although most of the Native Americans were innocent, the soldiers wound up capturing 1,918 Indians and 162 ‘mixed-bloods’ and imprisoning them at Camp Release.\(^{15}\) Without much deliberation, the military commission began trying the Indians. Isaac Heard, the court recorder, noted that “as many as forty were sometimes tried in a day.”\(^{16}\) That left a lot of room for error. The number of men who were condemned was even more astounding, “the number of prisoners tried was over four hundred. Of these, three hundred and three were sentenced to death, eighteen to imprisonment.”\(^{17}\) A trial in which 75% of the people were sentenced to be hanged does not seem to be fair. Even while busy with the Civil War, Lincoln quickly and explicitly asked Sibley for trial records of each individual Indian.\(^{18}\) Unlike most other white people, Lincoln sought fairness. He wanted to punish those who were guilty and avoid harming the innocent.

Since America is a democracy, Lincoln had to keep the Senate aware of his actions. In a letter to the Senate, he explained his actions and his plans for the future. Lincoln told the Senate: “I intentionally telegraphed to have the transcripts of the records in all the cases forwarded to me.”\(^{19}\) Upon receiving the transcripts, Lincoln then gave them to two attorneys, George Whiting and Francis Ruggles, for review.\(^{20}\) While the two attorneys were reviewing the transcripts, Lincoln received many letters from people

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\(^{15}\) Brown, *In Captivity*, 10.
\(^{16}\) Heard, *History of the Sioux war*, 255.
\(^{17}\) Ibid., 267.
\(^{18}\) Schultz, *Over the Earth I Come*, 253.
\(^{20}\) Schultz, *Over the Earth I Come*, 259.
based on “appeals in behalf of the condemned, appeals for their executions and expressions of opinion as to proper policy in regard to them.” Everyone was on edge. Lincoln had the power and he could do as he pleased with it. He could have executed all the Native Americans or he could have pardoned them all. Lincoln took the middle road, which was based on fairness.

Lincoln’s strategy of taking the middle road pleased no one. Many people wanted all of the Native Americans killed. For example, General Pope did not care to distinguish the innocent from the guilty. To him being an Indian was criminal enough, “the only distinction between the culprits is as to which of them murdered most people or violated most young girls.” General Sibley affirmed Pope’s statement, and projected that violence would ensue if the prisoners were pardoned. Unfortunately for Indians, both of these men were in control of the military in Minnesota. Both men had fought against the Native Americans. Most importantly, both men let society dictate their actions and conformed to society’s expectations. Lincoln was not a conformist to any aspect of the society. Upon closer examining Lincoln’s actions, it is clear that he was an unconventional man.

Lincoln’s mailbox was also filled with letters from politicians who tried to persuade Lincoln to execute all of the Native Americans. Senator Morton Wilkinson and two members of House of Representatives, Cyrus Aldrich and William Windom, sent a letter to Lincoln with their opinions on what should happen to the Native Americans. Their reason for writing the letter was to “protest” against Lincoln’s decision to pardon

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21 Lincoln, “Message of the President of the United States”, 2.
22 Schultz, Over the Earth I Come, 253.
23 Ibid., 256.
most of the Indians. The letter, which was written to Lincoln from these Minnesota Representatives, was filled with gruesome details of Indian savagery meant to change Lincoln’s mind. They constantly stressed the fact that those who were targeted by the Indians were women and children, thus defenseless. The representatives claimed that the only reason that the lives of some mothers and daughters were spared was to “take them into captivity which was infinitely worse than death.” They were trying to stress the fact that females would have been taken into captivity only to be raped. Although that happened in some cases, a lot of women were taken care of by Native Americans and were never molested. The representatives sought to persuade Lincoln through bringing up extreme circumstances. Fortunately, Lincoln was too smart to be swayed through emotional stories, and he remained focused on justice.

The letter to Lincoln goes on to mention specific instances of atrocities that were committed by the Native Americans. The writers were taking an act which was committed by a group of people and holding all individuals accountable for it. Wilkinson, Aldrich, and Windom claim that all the Indians were well taken care of by the Sioux Agent, Thomas Galbraith. As a result, the Sioux had “no justification or pretext, even, for these brutalities.” There were also no justifications for the Sioux being stripped of their lands. There were no justifications for the Sioux to be stripped of their culture by the missionaries. Just like not all whites were taking advantage of the Native Americans, not all Native Americans were killing and raping whites during the Sioux Uprising of 1862. Many men and women conformed to their respective societies and did what was popular

25 Ibid.
26 Ibid., 4.
at the time. Fortunately for two hundred and seventy five Native Americans, Lincoln was not a conformist.

Non-conformity was not easy considering the way that Wilkinson, Aldrich, and Windom finished their letter. The end of the letter contained two separate paragraphs which began with the statements “we protest against the pardon.” Their point was clear; they did not want any Native Americans to get a pardon. According to the letter, if some Native Americans were pardoned, then the “Indians will become more violent and cruel than ever before.” Finally, the representatives ended their letter by threatening Lincoln. They wrote: “You can give us peace, or you can give us lawless violence. We pray you, sir, in view of all that we have suffered, and of the danger which still awaits us- let the law be executed; let justice be done our people.” What that statement does not talk about, is the justice for the Native Americans. Instead, just like Sibley, Wilkinson, Aldrich, and Windom unsuccessfully try to threaten Lincoln with violence. The reason for such an extensive letter is that the white people of Minnesota were advocating the hangings.

Just for good measure, the people of Minnesota also wrote a letter to President Lincoln protesting any pardons. They also cite the fact that this violence was “unprovoked.” They reiterated that the Sioux cannot be trusted and that the citizens need the government to protect them. They reminded Lincoln of Minnesota’s agricultural potential and of the need for farming. Instead of focusing on violence, they try to convince Lincoln that they need his protection. Since they purchased their homes from

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27 Ibid.
28 Ibid.
29 Ibid.
the government, the citizens do not want to be “driven into exile by the savages from whom government bought the soil of almost the whole State.”31 As stated earlier, a lot of Minnesota citizens have tried hard to avoid any sort of contact with Native Americans prior to the uprising. If only the Indians were paid in full for their lands, then they would not be walking around begging for food. Since white society found the Indian to be a nuisance, a lot of individual whites did not care for Native Americans. The hardships that were experienced by the Native Americans were not of concern for the whites. Now that the ‘nuisance’ had ‘unjustifiably’ attacked the white society, the only sensible thing to do was to exterminate them. Apparently the citizens and the representatives of Minnesota conformed to what the popular sentiment was. Luckily, Lincoln remained true to his character, and retained his liminal position throughout the conflict.

For Lincoln, the middle road consisted of taking both societies and compromising on behalf of them. That was exactly what Lincoln admitted to the U.S. Senate, “Anxious to not act with so much clemency as to encourage another outbreak, on the one hand, not with so much severity as to be real cruelty, on the other.”32 Although others had urged Lincoln to think one way, or the other, Lincoln was not swayed by a stranger’s opinion and based his decision on his own beliefs. Men like Henry Whipple, Henry Sibley, Cyrus Aldrich, M. S. Wilkinson, General John Pope, Governor Alexander Ramsey, and countless other people did not manage to change Lincoln’s mind. The popular sentiment at the time was in favor of hanging all the Indians. Minnesota was screaming with death for Indians and Lincoln was caught in the middle.

31 Ibid., 6.
32 Lincoln, “Message of the President of the United States”, 3.
The newspapers of Minnesota only made Lincoln’s decision harder. Although a few people were opposed to removing the Indians from the state, such as one of the correspondents of the St. Paul Press who said that the removal for the Indians would be “selfish”, most others were in favor of total annihilation of the Indians. On August 28th, 1862, there was a column in the St. Paul Press entitled “A WAR OF EXTERMINATION AGAINST THE SIOUX SAVAGES”, the column read, “Nothing short of the entire destruction of the Sepoy devils … will ever satisfy our people, or restore confidence to the settlements. Every warrior that can be overtaken should be killed and the whole tribe driven beyond the western border of the State.” Even people who did not see themselves as prejudice called for the removal of Indians from Minnesota. A man named Jonathan wrote to the St. Paul Press that the removal of the Indians “should be a settled question”, but had issues with what was to be done with them. He proposed moving them to New England, where they “justly belong.” Clearly, the President’s choice to remain liminal was a very unpopular one.

It was so unpopular that missionaries felt that it was their duty to ‘save’ the President. Reverend Thomas Williamson had to write a column in the St. Paul Press entitled “President’s leniency defended by an old Indian missionary.” The article provided justifications for President Lincoln pardoning a majority of the Sioux. Likewise, Reverend Stephen Riggs received numerous letters in which citizens were “demanding the execution of every Indian coming into our hands.” It is no wonder that the President’s decision was extremely unpopular. Since Abraham Lincoln’s decision was

34 Ibid., August 28th 1862.
35 Ibid., December 25th 1862.
36 Ibid., January 15th 1863.
37 Riggs, Mary and I, 180.
based on the middle ground and justice, citizens became outraged and even angry towards him. Another man who went through a lot of unpopularity due to his actions towards the Sioux was Bishop Henry Whipple. Just like the liminal actors, Whipple maintained a path that tried to satisfy two societies, and just like Lincoln, Wakefield, Chaska, and Little Crow, he was ostracized.

Whipple was made unpopular in Minnesota and elsewhere in the United States because he spoke of many truths. He spoke of how the Indians were adversely affected, and often blamed the Indian Department within U.S. government. United States was not ready to hear things like “at whose door is the blood of these innocent victims? I believe that God will hold the nation guilty.” Whipple often wrote articles depicting the way that the Indians were abused, but his words often fell upon deaf ears. In an article in the St. Paul Press, Whipple made it public that his opinions have been detrimental to his persona. Whipple wrote, “I have been charged with indiscretion and sympathy with savage crimes.” Just like Wakefield, Whipple tried to use the truth to combat the prejudice that he received through his association with the Native Americans.

Unfortunately, even the truth did not dispel prejudice. In his book, Whipple wrote, “while the truth of my statements was not denied, I was bitterly abused.” Even though he was ‘abused’, Whipple nevertheless was a determined person. He never gave up his quest to expose problems with the way the government dealt with the Indians. For that reason, Whipple was one of the many men who tried to sway Lincoln’s decision on what should be done to the Indian prisoners. Unlike the citizens of Minnesota, Whipple constantly restated the grievances of the Sioux. At one point Whipple recalled his

38 Whipple, Lights and Shadows, 127.
40 Whipple, Lights and Shadows, 123.
interaction with General Halleck, when Secretary Stanton was tired of speaking to Whipple. Stanton told Halleck, “If he [Whipple] has come here to tell us of the corruption of our Indian system and the dishonesty of Indian agents, tell him that we know it.”

Whipple also had many interactions with Lincoln; leaving Lincoln very impressed with Whipple’s character. At first glance it would seem as though Whipple, and other missionaries, could also be liminal individuals. However, when examining the facts, it becomes clear that they are not.

It is true that many missionaries were mistreated and tried to make the lives better for the Sioux. Whipple himself was often told, “Bishop, don’t you know that everybody is against you?” He also helped the Sioux by making their grievances known to the public through the newspapers. However, he is far from being a mediator. Ironically, he is far from liminality. According to Derounian-Stodola, “even committed friends of the Indian like himself [Whipple] were actually cultural imperialists.” Clearly the missionaries were not trying to be mediators between societies. They were trying to make the Sioux, as well as other tribes, conform to the norms of white society. They were trying to convert the Native Americans into Christians. By doing so, the missionaries would take away the culture that the Native Americans had, and turn them into ‘civilized’, or ‘white’, individuals. Unlike the missionaries, Lincoln was not trying to convert the Indians ‘white’. Lincoln was trying to mediate between two societies which were at an impasse.

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41 Ibid., 144.
42 Schultz, Over the Earth I Come, 221.
43 Whipple, Lights and Shadows, 160.
44 Derounian-Stodola, The War in Words, 64.
According to Hank Cox, Lincoln had the option of letting someone else deal with the prisoners of the uprising. He did not necessarily have to do anything, and could have been perfectly justified due to his involvement in the Civil War. According to Cox, Lincoln’s action was extremely risky and as a result, his political career was in jeopardy. Cox speculated the following: “assuming a tight contest inevitable- the loss of Minnesota could have ended his political career and even been the decisive factor in the irreparable breakup of the Union. His action in the Sioux matter was politically reckless.”\(^{45}\) The move to act as a mediator and follow a middle path made Lincoln extremely vulnerable in his political career. In future elections, his actions would be challenged, and he could potentially lose. To make matters worse, if the whole state of Minnesota was enraged by the outcome of the uprising, then the whole Union could be lost as well. By taking on the execution of the Sioux and attempting to fairly punish the guilty, Lincoln was exposing a weakness. This weakness could potentially have been exploited by those who would be willing to conform to society’s standards, i.e. be willing to execute all of the men who were found guilty by the Sibley commission.

What Abraham Lincoln did was quite contrary to popular sentiment. According to his letter to the Senate, he ordered thirty-nine men sentenced to be hanged on December 19\(^{th}\) 1862.\(^{46}\) However, there was still one more difficulty that remained for Lincoln. It was crucial to avoid confusing the white soldiers back in Minnesota about his decision. There were a lot of Indians with similar sounding names and Lincoln had to account for that. For that reason, Lincoln sent a list back to Minnesota which consisted of each man’s name, the number which was given to that man at the trial, as well as a description of

\(^{46}\) Lincoln, “Message of the President of the United States”, 4.
each man’s crime.47 This was a deliberate step in order to ensure that the right men got punished. Lincoln viewed all aspects of the executions as crucial and did not wish to overlook any details, no matter how minor. Unfortunately for Lincoln, not everyone was a mediator, and a wrongful hanging did occur. This was through no fault of Lincoln’s, but through anger on the part of the men who were designated to oversee that the Indians who were called out matched the descriptions provided by Lincoln.

Although Lincoln had a lot of power, he could not control all aspects of the military. Chaska, Sarah Wakefield’s savior died, not because of Lincoln’s negligence, but due to the racism on the part of whites back in Minnesota. Although Sarah Wakefield wrote Lincoln a letter in which she asked Lincoln to make Chaska’s wrongful execution public, there was nothing that Lincoln could do at that point.48 Lincoln had tried his best to appease both, Native American and white, societies. Through his actions, he could have been adversely judged by both societies. The citizens of Minnesota could have voted for a new president. The Native Americans could have not trusted the ‘great father from Washington’ anymore. Lincoln successfully took the risk and the responsibility of being an intermediary person.

Just like the rest of the liminal individuals mentioned in previous chapters, Sarah Wakefield, Little Crow, and Chaska, Lincoln was adversely affected in the white and Native American societies. Lincoln was no longer trusted as the ‘great white father’ by those Native Americans who did not convert to Christianity. Lincoln was also negatively affected in his standing with the public of Minnesota. Although the Sioux Uprising was overshadowed by the Civil War, the people of Minnesota still held a grudge. The rest of

48 Wakefield’s letter to Abraham Lincoln, 4.
the country might not have noticed, but the people of Minnesota were infuriated. Finally, it is worth mentioning again that Lincoln did the best he could with the limited resources that were available at his disposal. Although Lincoln did not have many supplies and troops to spare for Minnesota, he did excuse the Minnesota volunteers from serving in the Civil War so that they could resolve the problems in their own state. Furthermore, Lincoln sent a general with military experience to help General Sibley, who lacked any sort of military training. Although General Pope was not the greatest general, he did have military experience and that had to amount for something. Lincoln did many things to help the whites and also the Native Americans during the Sioux Uprising of 1862, but because he tried to do something for both societies, he was negatively judged by both.
The Sioux Uprising of 1862 came at a turbulent time for everyone. The Civil War was raging between Northern and Southern states. Meanwhile, the new state of Minnesota was having its own problems. Since most whites did not pay any attention to the apparently defeated Indians, the uprising came as a shock. Because the settlers were not prepared for any kind of violence from the Indians, a lot of damage was caused. People were killed, buildings destroyed, and relations between whites and Indians ruined. Henceforth, if someone tried to transcend the time period by participating within both societies, then that person would be negatively affected. Liminal characters such as Little Crow, Sarah Wakefield, Chaska, and President Abraham Lincoln, were examples of how people who tried to blend the two societies together and respect both, failed to keep a positive standing within either world.

Little Crow was the most intriguing person from the uprising because he was the leader of the Indians, and yet he saved a number of women from being killed. Little Crow fit the mold of a mediator, and was not trusted. From Little Crow’s life, it was clear that he was not a person who lived within the boundaries of his own society. He frequently dealt with whites and was well esteemed in the white community, through being an excellent speaker and politician. Although Little Crow was an active participant in white society, he was also deeply entrenched in his native culture, which is seen in him having multiple wives and maintaining a traditional religion.

From the very beginning, Little Crow was not overly motivated to participate in the uprising. He visited Washington, saw what whites were capable of, and also understood the benefits of farming. Nevertheless, he was eventually convinced to participate by two militant chiefs, Red Middle Voice and Shakopee. The two chiefs were
in charge of rambunctious young braves. Since the young braves lacked any discipline, they did not follow Little Crow’s instructions. When Little Crow tried to make peace with the whites, these young men and their soldiers’ lodge did not allow this to happen. Instead they told him how to act, making Little Crow seem even more devious to the whites and ‘friendly’ Indians.

What the whites failed to notice was the fact that Little Crow was able to save white men and women from death. He saved white women, Mrs. Urania White and Mrs. Helen Carrigan Tarble, and even kept them inside his own house. Little Crow was also able to save a family of ‘half-breeds’, the Browns. Likewise, Little Crow saved a young boy named August Gluth. Finally, he also had an interaction with Mary Schwandt Schmidt, in which he threatened her with a tomahawk her. Although he made a threat toward Schmidt, he never went through with the act. In fact, there are no accounts of Little Crow actually committing any type of murders or rapes. He was simply a person who was misunderstood because he was a go-between in the white and native societies.

The person who lost the most status in white society was the white woman named Sarah Wakefield. She was a woman who originally came from the east coast and was saved during her captivity with the Sioux, by a man named Chaska. Unlike all other white women, Wakefield testified on behalf of her savior during the Sioux War Trials. She was very grateful for Chaska’s help and wanted to repay him by saving his life. However, she inadvertently wound up costing him his life. As a result of Wakefield’s ‘outlandish’ interpretation of white norms, she was labeled as a ‘fallen woman’ and lost credibility within white society.
I compared Wakefield’s narrative to many other white captives who were saved by Indians, and there are blatant differences in the styles of writing. Although there are many similarities in all of the narratives, such as being protected by an Indian, and being fed, Wakefield’s narrative is the only one which is written in a ‘pro-Indian’ manner. There are two women who tie directly to Wakefield through their narratives. They are Mary Schwandt Schmidt and Mrs. DeCamp Sweet. DeCamp was mentioned by Wakefield as a woman who was constantly jealous of her while in captivity. Wakefield made it a point to identify DeCamp in her 1864 version instead of leaving her as a ‘white woman’, like she is referred to in the 1863 version. Schmidt was a woman who named Wakefield in her narrative and recalled Wakefield enjoying her life as a captive. However, this could not be further from the truth since Wakefield went through a lot of hardships while in captivity.

Wakefield went through six weeks in captivity with her children. Not only did she have to worry about her own safety, she constantly had to watch her children. Between that and doing chores for her benefactors, Wakefield had little time to get together with other white women captives and gossip. Unfortunately for Wakefield, no one explained her behavior as good mothering. Her absence at the gossip sessions symbolized her withdrawal from white society. Finally, Wakefield made it a point to show her grievances in her book, by condemning the soldiers, General Sibley, other white captives, Rev. Riggs, traders, and teachers. This made Wakefield even less popular and respectable within white society. By trying to expose some of the underlying problems with the ways the Indians were treated, Wakefield was ostracized. By trying to bring two societies together, Wakefield was misunderstood and was labeled as an outcast.
Chapter six concerns Chaska, Wakefield’s savior. Throughout the uprising, Chaska tried his best to save Wakefield and her children. Chaska willingly made sacrifices to keep Wakefield and her children alive. According to Wakefield, he had to give up his clothes and food, so that Wakefield’s family was properly taken care of. Every time a rumor was spread that all the whites were to be killed, Chaska hid Wakefield. Chaska was even able to deter Hapa from raping Wakefield. When the General Sibley’s troops came to ‘rescue’ the hostages, Chaska had a choice of running away. Wakefield persuaded him to stay, and as a result of white prejudice, Chaska was hanged.

Chaska’s trial was extremely lengthy, and he was the only Native American who had a white woman testify on his behalf. Furthermore, his case file was considerably larger than the rest, making it highly improbable that men like Rev. Riggs, would forget Chaska. Rev. Riggs was with Chaska the whole week prior to the day of his execution, and even took down his testimony. There were also other missionaries who were present during that week, including Rev. Dr. Williamson and Rev. Van Ravoux. None of those men, Joseph Brown, or Captain Hiram Grant, managed to prevent an innocent death from happening, even though all knew of Wakefield’s case. Such an oversight could not have been a mistake; it had to be a punishment for transcending two societies.

The final chapter includes an in-depth look into the way that President Abraham Lincoln handled the situation of the Sioux Uprising. Although all his resources were tied to the Civil War, Lincoln still allowed Minnesota’s Governor Ramsey to keep his men in Minnesota, to fight against the Indians. Lincoln also was able to spare one of his generals from the civil war, General John Pope. After the uprising was subdued, Lincoln did much
more for the Sioux. Considering the fact that people of Minnesota were crying for mass executions, Lincoln acted like a mediator between white and Indian societies and reviewed the case for every Sioux member.

This was a highly unpopular move in Minnesota. Since Abraham Lincoln had a whole nation to save, it is very surprising that he took the time to carefully examine each case for a people who were seen as inferior. Even though Lincoln did help the whites, his actions were quickly forgotten and Lincoln lost those people’s support. Missionaries had to argue in favor of Lincoln in order to restore his reputation, but since missionaries were already seen to be too friendly with the Sioux, they were also dismissed. Unlike Lincoln, the missionaries had one goal in mind, to convert the Sioux, so they are not be used as examples of mediators, since they were people seeking to conquer the Sioux through religious means.

Lincoln’s letter to the Senate was a highly influential document because he had to explain to the country why he chose to pardon over two hundred Indians. Lincoln reiterated to the Senate that he wanted to act in a conciliatory fashion. On the one hand, he wanted to punish those who were guilty, but on the other hand, he wanted to avoid blindly punishing all Indians. His choices were made further difficult by the fact that he was receiving threatening letters from Minnesota Senators and Minnesota citizens, claiming that if he did not punish all the Sioux, a mass riot would break out. Having processed all of the information, Lincoln acted as a mediator and was adversely affected. The people of Minnesota did not approve of such actions and the Indians no longer had any trust in their ‘Great White Father’. Such was the effect on all people who tried to
bring the Indian and white societies together. Instead of being celebrated, due to the deep prejudice at the time, they were adversely affected.

1862 was completely different from 1650, and even 1815. No longer was a mediator trusted. During the uprising, the two societies were polarized. Intermingling was looked down upon. Any kinds of relations were unwelcome. For those who tried to act as mediators, and attempted to bring white and Indian societies together, there would be no reward. Rather, they would be punished, either by death, as Chaska and Little Crow, or by public shunning, as Sarah Wakefield. Conformity to society’s roles was crucial during this time. People who conformed and acted according to society’s norms, reaped benefits, as did General Sibley. Although Richard White’s analogy of a ‘middle ground’ was applicable to Minnesota from 1650 to 1815, it was no longer valid in 1862. Times and people had changed. The ‘middle ground’ became no longer acceptable.
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