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History 530 - Minnesota 1862
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Situating the U.S.-Dakota War of 1862 into society's historical memory is an essential task when teaching the history of Minnesota. Until only recently, it has been a task that has been overlooked or ignored by the curriculum in the K-12 setting in Minnesota. Fortunately, state educational standards for social studies since 2011 now explicitly require teachers to teach this history in 6th grade classrooms all across the state of Minnesota. Generally, three standards address the process of treaty-making and its consequences, related settlement that came before and after treaties in Minnesota, and Minnesota's progress towards statehood. One additional standard requires students to examine the causes of the war, perspectives of the Dakota and the settlers, and the effects of the war. Despite this shift towards a more open and frank discussion of the U.S.-Dakota War of 1862, students who were the first to have been educated under these standards are now only around 20 years old. Therefore, a major segment of the population is yet un- or undereducated on the topic, which creates situations ripe for additional harm to occur. Continuing and broader education about this war is necessary.

In my own classroom, learning about the U.S.-Dakota War of 1862 is really a culmination of much of the learning that occurs prior to it. In order to understand the complexity of the war, students must first understand treaty-making, settlement, and the push for statehood. In addition to all of this work, Saint Paul Public Schools has also engaged in training to bring Dakota-created curriculum to our classrooms through the *Dakotah Wicohan* project. This project's focus is to introduce Minnesota students to Dakota worldviews, values, traditions, and experience. However, education about the topics of the Dakota and the U.S.-Dakota War of 1862 should not and cannot stop after a student graduates from K-12 education. Exploration of and interaction with this topic belongs in higher education and academia, as well. As was evidenced in the 2017 controversy surrounding the art installation/sculpture *Scaffold* at the Walker Art Center, the wounds of the war and its aftermath are not acknowledged, or are not realized with the appropriate reverence, by far too many people—particularly adults. The

sculpture was meant to educate, but it appeared as a place for play and admiration rather than honor and memorialization. The space for education is too often pushed into public, with the responsibility on those affected and or harmed by misunderstanding, when the onus for education is squarely, and rightfully, in schools, colleges, and universities. Teaching the history of the war is key to beginning to restore historical harm and preventing further harm in the future.

Historians Gwen Westerman and Bruce White in chapter 5 of their book, *Mni Sota Makoce: The Land of the Dakota*, discuss several efforts to reclaim various aspects of the Dakota tradition in Minnesota. Several instances of these reclamation efforts have become or spurred public policy debates not only among the general public, but also in the legislature and within other government agencies. These debates demonstrate the critical need for further education of the population on the realities of the Dakota experience and the intentional exile and cultural erasure of their continued existence and legacy. A few of the recent debates that have received public attention include: reassessment and removal of historically inaccurate and culturally insensitive paintings from the Governor's Reception Room at the Minnesota State Capitol, restoring the Dakota name of Bde Maka Ska to the Minneapolis lake that was until recently officially identified as Lake Calhoun, and adding a reference to the Bdote of the Dakota people in the name on the sign at Fort Snelling and Fort Snelling State Park. One of the most interesting, and perhaps disheartening, arguments against these changes from those who oppose them is that the changes erase or alter culturally significant sites for non-native Minnesotans. These arguments clearly dismiss or ignore the profound irony that the changes are an attempt to reclaim erasure of the original inhabitants' culturally significant sites.

Mni Sota Makoce has been and continues to be a Dakota place. While the changes to this place and its people that have occurred over the course of the last 200 years, beginning during the fur trade and continuing to this day, will never be reversed, the realities of the past cannot be ignored. The U.S.-Dakota War of 1862 was the culmination of decades of misdeeds, disrespect, suffering, and deliberate lies. Fighting cost thousands their lives, and countless more

their homes and homelands. For educators to forego our responsibilities of bringing to light the realities of the past, including the history of the U.S.-Dakota War of 1862, is to abdicate our duty to those who lived it and those who have struggled and benefitted as a result.