



# 38 Nooses: Lincoln, Little Crow, and the Beginning of the Frontier's End

*Scott W. Berg*

Download now

Read Online ➞

# 38 Nooses: Lincoln, Little Crow, and the Beginning of the Frontier's End

Scott W. Berg

## 38 Nooses: Lincoln, Little Crow, and the Beginning of the Frontier's End Scott W. Berg

In August 1862, after decades of broken treaties, increasing hardship, and relentless encroachment on their lands, a group of Dakota warriors convened a council at the tepee of their leader, Little Crow. Knowing the strength and resilience of the young American nation, Little Crow counseled caution, but anger won the day. Forced to either lead his warriors in a war he knew they could not win or leave them to their fates, he declared, “[Little Crow] is not a coward: he will die with you.”

So began six weeks of intense conflict along the Minnesota frontier as the Dakotas clashed with settlers and federal troops, all the while searching for allies in their struggle. Once the uprising was smashed and the Dakotas captured, a military commission was convened, which quickly found more than three hundred Indians guilty of murder. President Lincoln, embroiled in the most devastating period of the Civil War, personally intervened in order to spare the lives of 265 of the condemned men, but the toll on the Dakota nation was still staggering: a way of life destroyed, a tribe forcibly relocated to barren and unfamiliar territory, and 38 Dakota warriors hanged—the largest government-sanctioned execution in American history.

Scott W. Berg recounts the conflict through the stories of several remarkable characters, including Little Crow, who foresaw how ruinous the conflict would be for his tribe; Sarah Wakefield, who had been captured by the Dakotas, then vilified as an “Indian lover” when she defended them; Minnesota bishop Henry Benjamin Whipple, who was a tireless advocate for the Indians’ cause; and Lincoln, who transcended his own family history to pursue justice.

Written with uncommon immediacy and insight, *38 Nooses* details these events within the larger context of the Civil War, the history of the Dakota people, and the subsequent United States–Indian wars. It is a revelation of an overlooked but seminal moment in American history.

## 38 Nooses: Lincoln, Little Crow, and the Beginning of the Frontier's End Details

Date : Published December 4th 2012 by Pantheon (first published January 1st 2012)

ISBN : 9780307377241

Author : Scott W. Berg

Format : Hardcover 384 pages

Genre : History, Nonfiction, North American Hi..., American History, Military History, Civil War, Native Americans

 [Download 38 Nooses: Lincoln, Little Crow, and the Beginning of t ...pdf](#)

 [Read Online 38 Nooses: Lincoln, Little Crow, and the Beginning of ...pdf](#)

**Download and Read Free Online 38 Nooses: Lincoln, Little Crow, and the Beginning of the Frontier's End Scott W. Berg**

---

# **From Reader Review 38 Nooses: Lincoln, Little Crow, and the Beginning of the Frontier's End for online ebook**

## **Mmars says**

This excellent historical account of America in the 1860s belongs in every public and academic library in the country. No reading of Abraham Lincoln's presidency is complete without this account of his role in the events leading up to the largest public hanging in American history and no history of minority cultures in America should be told without this thoroughly researched narrative of Little Crow and the plight of the Dakota Sioux in Minnesota.

This is as straight-forward and neutral a telling as is possible. None of the players come out unscathed, either white or Lakota. But they are presented as objectively as possible. In other words they are human - both humane and inhumane.

I grew up on these lands 100 years after the "uprisings", always curious of what it must have been to be a settler there at the time. My direct ancestors were among the German settlers who acquired land within 10 years of the hangings. I was particularly fascinated with impact the Civil War had on the outcome of the "northwest frontier" although the lack of honesty in what was reported to Washington by white people of power in Minnesota did not surprise me in the least. We all know Native Americans were never given a fair chance and were grossly misunderstood. I would like to thank Scott Berg for the insight he has provided with this book.

---

## **Terry says**

Despite the topic, this was a pleasure to read. Of all of the various works out there on the Dakota War, I found this to be one of the most unbiased, truly showing wrongs done on both sides. I don't think anyone wins in a war, and the Dakota War is a good example of that. I also learned new things --like Abraham Lincoln's grandfather was killed by a native American. Knowing this, I'm even more surprised that he didn't hang all of those "convicted" after the war. This is a tragic story, but well told and documented.

---

## **Kkraemer says**

Scott Berg weaves the Native American situation in the upper midwest with the background of the Civil War and even the Mexican-American war to show the prejudices and possibilities of that intensely political time.

The center of the story is the raids on American settlements in southern Minnesota, raids that were, at once, brutal and shocking and utterly understandable. The result, predictably, was the beginning of the end of any hope that the first people might have harbored about resisting the invasion.

Berg is a very good writer who paints pictures with his words and gives the reader just enough information to truly understand the events from the perspective of the human beings who were involved. He frames the story with that of a woman who was taken hostage, and the characters -- the real people -- are drawn with such precision that the reader understands their thinking and their personalities.. My favorite section, of

course, was about President Lincoln...a truly remarkable human being.

---

### **Kyle says**

The content of the short conflict in this book is interesting but the writing in the entirety of the book is not. The book plods along as if the goal was to get to 300 pages, not to be interesting. Not much happened in this 6 week "war" and finding an article online that summarizes it would be a more effective use of time.

---

### **Maryc says**

It was interesting reading Mr. Berg's account-clearly trying to be balanced, but just as clearly quite different from the accounts through the eyes of the First People of MN. I was privileged to take part in a workshop "from Genesis to Genocide" visiting sacred sites near the confluence of the Minnesota and Mississippi rivers, hearing this tragic history from the native perspective. There was a great deal of "understanding" of the white perspective in this book-and an emphasis on "it could have been so much worse" -if Lincoln had not commuted the sentences of most of the accused. Rather lame IMHO. Also, there was no good explanation of why women, children and elderly were marched a circuitous route (in November in Minnesota!) through towns with easily anticipated angry mobs. The many many deaths on this march as well as in the internment camp at Ft. Snelling are rather brushed over. It does focus a bit on one innocent victim of the hangings-but the whole process was so biased and bogus from start to finish that this focus on the one takes away from the potential/probable innocence of others. I happened upon this book accidentally, but I was left wanting to read more from someone who doesn't feel the need to "balance" or defend this stain on our history.

---

### **Carey J says**

I began reading this book on December 26th, the 150th anniversary of the largest mass hanging in the United States. Being a Minnesotan, I was familiar with the story of the Dakota War, but this well written account gave me a much deeper insight into the motivations, events and people involved in the conflict. This summer, I visited a couple important places in this conflict, and I know most of the places mentioned in the book, so again, as a Minnesotan, I really connected to the geography of the uprising.

I think it also gives the reader a better understanding of the complexity of the Native American experience. I've heard people wonder why, 150 years later, Native Americans "can't just get over it." I can't imagine reading this book and still wondering why there is still pain and a feeling of incompleteness.

Besides what was just stated, I would also recommend this book for those interested in American history, Lincoln, the Civil War period or Minnesota history.

---

## Hartung says

This is a new entry into the "Bury My Heart..." genre, enumerating and illustrating the tragic history of American/Indian relations. Obviously you know who loses from jump, but it is still a fascinating story weaving events and people from far and wide in the scope of American history. Lincoln and his cabinet are certainly familiar figures and military buffs will recognize many of the principals but this is history on the local scale. It is a small, but important, slice of the history of the settling of southwest Minnesota and the names of the towns and families are recognizable today. I found it interesting to follow the events using a Google map of the area and zooming in to find the creeks and coulees still bearing the names used in 1862. That the insurrection takes place during the Civil War adds another element to the complicated stew of person, place, time and tide. The author thoroughly researched and documented all aspects but does not footnote the text which, for me, makes for smooth reading since I am not tempted to interrupt my reading to refer to the notes. The notes are organized by chapter at the back of the book so they are available if you want to look but I enjoyed not being bedeviled by those "little numbers". Certainly Minnesotans interested in the history of their home state will find this an enjoyable read.

---

## Sheila says

A revealing look at Minnesota history, Scott Berg's work is a true eye opener as to the reality behind the events of the Dakota War and all of the famous names associated with it. As the old saw goes, "[H]istory is written by the victors." However in this case, Berg does a great job of presenting the view of events from all sides through an extensive knowledge of the people and places involved. I was absolutely stunned by the breadth and depth of his research of an enormous series of intertwined events.

This book goes well beyond simple historical finger-pointing as to the events leading up to the first clash in this war, and explains how Abraham Lincoln's background may have shaped how he handled it while being in the midst of the bloody Civil War. There is significant background included about the native tribes, Abraham Lincoln and his family, and all of the main characters involved whether in Minnesota, in Washington D.C., or on the battlefields of the East. With this detailed background information, it is much easier to understand many of the actions taken during this time (1862, and the aftermath reaching to 1864 and later).

This is one of the most detailed history books I have read in a long time; it is not for the faint of heart or for the casually interested. All of the concentric circles of history that Berg links together create an intricate exploration of 19th Century Native American, political, and military figures. Berg's conversational tone and clear writing, however, make it the type of book that once you figure out what's going on, you have to keep reading. This is also a must-read for those interested in history who live in or around Minnesota, or who have, and want to know what really happened. There are no soothing tones of Dave Moore's voice discussing past architecture and events as in "Lost Twin Cities," nor the all-too-perfect recountings of figures such as Henry Sibley, Alexander Ramsey, or William Mayo in other local history productions. Sibley, Ramsey, Mayo, and Alexis Bailly are four locally well-known names; Berg pulls no punches and reports both the bad actions (quite a few) and the good (not nearly enough) of these well-known Minnesotans. (Mayo, a doctor, was involved in the grave-robbing of the 38 executed men\* and kept the bones of Cut Nose for many years in a cast-iron rendering pot to use for lessons in osteology for his sons, founders of the Mayo Clinic; they later put the bones on display in their new clinic. Bailly kept slaves and young mixed-blood Native American servants which his wife beat "...to keep the household running smoothly.") Berg further recounts the actions

of Civil War Generals Pope, McClellan, and Hooker and paints a remarkable portrait of each that at times includes stunning incompetence and irresponsibility. (Pope's reporting of the Dakota War to Lincoln transcends irresponsibility as all-out lying.)

This is an excellent book that I was recommending to others while I was in the middle of reading it. I feel well-prepared to read other history books on any of a number of specific topics relating to 1850's-60's Minnesota.

\*Grave-robbing was something that many physicians of the 19th Century participated in, not only to get cadavers for dissection and learning, but also to get a skeleton for the explanation of diagnoses to patients. But it doesn't make it any less shocking that a name as big as Mayo became, dug up, stole, and desecrated one of these bodies, does it?

---

### **Sherry says**

I had not heard of this event until I saw a panel discussion on C-Span about the Dakota War. I wanted to know more. I have read a lot about Lincoln and have come to think he may be our greatest president ever. To find out that something this horrific happened during his tenure and that he actually approved these hangings motivated me to find out more about the event. This book helped me to better understand the time and the event. I also read this book right after reading "Rise to Greatness", which I also strongly recommend. Rise to Greatness: Abraham Lincoln and America's Most Perilous Year They both cover the same time period but from different perspectives. The history shared in "38 Nooses" is sad and disturbing. America is a great country but we have not always acted as such. This story is about one of those times. The really sad thing is, many of the beliefs and actions described in the book are still present today. When will we learn that we are all equal? Read this book!

---

### **Michael Morgan says**

38 Nooses is a good primer on the relationship between the FED.GOV and the Native Americans. It explains the failure of FED.GOV to honor existing treaties with the Native Nations, and to control the corruption that grows up around every Fed.Gov institution.

One topic I was very surprised to see included was a discussion of the plans for dealing with the freedmen after the Civil War ended. Very few authors will touch this subject at all because it exposes the Union's hypocrisy, and lays bare the attitude of the "Great Emancipator" for all to see.

---

### **Matt says**

The Great Sioux Uprising (as it is commonly known) of 1862 has always held a particular interest for me. It occurred, first of all, in my home state of Minnesota, so I am personally familiar with many of the massacre and battle sites. When I was young, my dad took me on a weekend's tour of the Upper and Lower Sioux Agencies, Fort Ridgely, and the town of New Ulm.

For me, a second early attraction of the uprising was its generally horrific nature. Before you demand that I go back in time and see a child psychologist, hear me out. Violence has an unmistakable allure. The Dakota Uprising was a paroxysm of pent-up anger, frustration, and desperation. In a short period of time, it cut a wide swath of bloodstained devastation. I was forbidden from watching R-rated movies in my youth; but I had full access to Kenneth Carley's *The Sioux Uprising of 1862*, with its graphic pen-and-ink sketches of places like "Slaughter Slough." History was an entrée into the forbidden world of adult knowledge.

Finally, as an adult, I've come to appreciate the complicated context of this event. The older you get, and the more compromises you make, tends to instill in you a realization that the world is gray. That nothing is all right or all wrong. The Dakota Uprising is *so* much more than poor white settlers getting murdered in their cabins and fields; it is also *so* much more than Cooper's noble savages enacting justified revenge. It is the extreme consequence of hundreds and thousands of conversations, decisions, rationalization, interactions, slights, misunderstandings, competing sovereign interests, and competing self-interests.

The Dakota Uprising is significant in both its local impact – resulting in the deportation of hundreds of Indians – and in numerical terms, as the bloodiest such uprising in our nation's long Indian Wars.

Yet the event is mostly unknown.

This past August was the 150th anniversary of the uprising. Outside of Minnesota, the sesquicentennial passed quietly. I probably would have missed it, were it not for a fortuitous visit to mom's house, and a Minnesota Public Radio symposium on the uprising. Compare this to the battle of Antietam, which reached 150 years of age almost exactly a month after the Dakota Uprising. The Antietam sesquicentennial made the *New York Times*, NPR, and resulted in new books by acclaimed authors.

As far as I can tell, Scott Berg's *38 Nooses* is the only major publication timed to coincide with the uprising's anniversary. It is also, to its credit, a bit unusual in its approach. This is not simply a more-modern retelling of an already-told story. Rather, it has its own unique angle, one that ties the Dakota Uprising (and its leader, Little Crow) to the rest of the nation (and its leader, Abraham Lincoln).

To be honest, I was a bit hesitant of Berg's strategy. After all, Abe Lincoln has never been more in vogue. It seems almost cynical to graft the 16th president onto a story in which he played only a secondary role: that of determining which of the convicted Dakota Indians would be executed (out of 265 condemned Indians, 38 were hanged, hence the title).

But I was pleased with the end result.

Berg's book provides only the most general overview of the Dakota Uprising. To be sure, he takes you through the seminal moments of the uprising, from the murder of a handful of settlers in Acton, Minnesota, to Little Crow's assault on Fort Ridgely, to the battle of Birch Coulee and the hangings of 38 Dakota warriors in Mankato. However, none of these incidents are handled in any great depth. If you are a newcomer to the chronology – or more interested in the day to day drama of the uprising – you are better served by starting with Duane Schultz's *Over the Earth I Come*, which is the standard work on the subject.

Instead, Berg views the events through the prism of several different historical characters, some of them direct participants, others connected only at a distance. The viewpoints Berg has chosen include Little Crow, chief of the Mdewakanton Dakota; Henry Benjamin Whipple, a bishop and Indian advocate; Sarah Wakefield, a white captive; and, of course, Lincoln.



Little Crow is the man chosen by history as the leader of the uprising. In actuality, he was not a warlike man, only a man who wanted to hold onto his slice of the pie. Following the murder of several settlers in Acton, Minnesota, and with retribution sure to come, Little Crow was forced to make a choice: lead the rebellion or lose his primacy as a leader. He chose unwisely.

Bishop Whipple was a rarity, a white man concerned with Indian affairs while the frontier was still in flux. Whipple was passionate in his advocacy. Unfortunately, he was trying to get Lincoln's attention at the worst possible moment: while the North was losing the Civil War.

Sarah Wakefield is chosen by Berg to be the spine of the uprising narrative. She escaped the Upper Sioux Agency only to be captured and protected by the warrior Chaska. She survived the uprising under Chaska's auspices, and later wrote one of the classic captivity narratives, *Six Weeks in the Sioux Tepees*. As you might expect, with prevailing 19th century racial and sexual attitudes, her homecoming to the whites was not seamless. Her savior, Chaska, was hanged by mistake in Mankato.

Looming over these characters is Lincoln. As I mentioned above, including Lincoln is a bit of a stretch. I understand Berg's intent, but Lincoln's connection to the Dakota Uprising is as a distracted, distant observer. Indeed, one of Lincoln's chief moves in response to the disaster was sending Minnesota the disgraced General John Pope. Pope had recently lost the Second Battle of Bull Run (perhaps the greatest of all Union catastrophes) and Lincoln needed a place to store him. So he gave him to Minnesota (instead of the Federal troops that were requested).

More resonant, of course, is Lincoln's decision regarding the execution of 265 Indians. After the uprising had been quelled, Henry Sibley held rushed, quasi-legal (quasi-legal being extremely generous) military tribunals to ferret the guilty from the innocent. Some of transcripts of these trials are online, and they are not exemplars of the adversary process.

There is a reason that attorneys love to claim Lincoln as one of their own. He was pragmatic. He was diligent. He was concerned with questions of jurisdiction and precedent, even as he tested the limits on both.

He was also a Clintonian triangulator, a more subtler practitioner of Solomonic wisdom. He was a compromiser and an incrementalist. (Ex. A: the Emancipation Proclamation). Those qualities shine through in this incident. Lincoln assigned his aides to go through every transcript and ferret out the truly heinous crimes. First they tried rapes, but found only two. Next they looked for murders. Combining the two gave them 38. (Many of the original convicts had merely participated in the battles at Fort Ridgely and New Ulm). For those, like Whipple, who thought the Indians had been played a bad hand (lied to, cheated, starving on their shrinking reservation), 38 deaths were barbaric. For the white settlers on the frontier, 265 dead Indians didn't even amount to a good start.

Berg's story extends beyond the uprising and hangings (attended by Dr. Charles Mayo, who wanted corpses for science) and to the exodus of the Dakota. He follows Little Crow as he attempts to escape, describes how Fort Snelling was turned into a concentration camp (interestingly, I never saw that mentioned as a kid, when I used to buy rock candy at the sutler's), and even includes some of the aftershocks of the uprising, including Colonel Sibley's incursion into the Dakota Territory, resulting in the little known massacre at Whitestone Hill.

Berg intercuts the frontier bloodshed with eastern digressions, to visit the First Minnesota at the battle of Antietam. I think I understand Berg's point in tying together these two stories. History, after all, is not comprised of mutually exclusive events. All this bloodletting was occurring simultaneously. And really, it

didn't lessen my enjoyment. Still, *38 Nooses* is the newest mainstream book about the Dakota Uprising, and possibly the first on the subject for many readers. For them, these cutaways might prove annoying.

When I was growing up, one of my many tactless uncles pointed to a hill and told me it was an Indian mound. *An Indian mound?* Yeah, he said. Underneath it is dead Indians. Thus, for much of my youth, whenever I saw a rolling hills, my mind took on x-ray vision, so that I could see beneath the grass, to the bleached white skeletons beneath.

Now I see the figurative truth in that assertion. Minnesota is a state marked by old Indian names and built on old Indian villages and roiled by the political clout of casino-rich, newly-resurgent Indian tribes. It's a complicated past leading to a complicated present. Berg's interpretation, focusing as it does on a handful human beings (the greatest complication of all), does justice to that reality.

---

### **Paul Pessolano says**

"38 Nooses, Lincoln, Little Crow, and the beginning of the Frontier's End", by Scott W. Berg, published by Pantheon Books.

Category – History

Three hundred Dakota Indians were sentenced to be hanged, but Abraham Lincoln intervened and only upheld the death sentence for forty while the rest were given jail sentences. Of the Forty, thirty eight were hanged, the largest government sanctioned execution in American history.

One could say it all began when the white man continued to break promises and treaties with the Dakota tribe. The continual late payment, if they received it at all, of the government promised annuities, the increasing encroachment of Dakota land, and the general feeling that the Indian was just a step ahead of the black slave, sparked the Dakota uprising of 1862. Although Little Crow became the leader of the uprising he did so reluctantly, he preferred to try and work with the United States Government, to no avail, and was swept up by the young Dakotas to go to war. This came at a very bad time for the United States and Abraham Lincoln because their attention was directed toward the Civil War. It is interesting to note that even though Little Crow did cause havoc, his exploits were so over exaggerated that a mere skirmish became a major battle. When he had but a few hundred warriors it was made out to be in the thousands.

Little Crow was not one of the thirty eight hanged; he was still trying to evade capture and finally was shot to death in a raspberry patch.

A very good read for those interested in history and Indian Affairs. The book really gives an excellent overview of the plight of the Native American.

---

### **Bobby D says**

The sweep of the American Frontier is in many ways the story of the sweeping away of the American Indian.

Although Scott W. Berg does not use the term genocide in this new book it is the overall power of that crime that fills his pages. Here we learn of what I believe may be an event many readers have not heard of. That in 1862 during the hard fought early days of the Civil War a band of young Dakota warriors went on a killing spree in the new state of Minnesota savaging several hundred white settlers who happened to be living on land given the Dakota by treaty. Little Crow found he had little choice but to lead his tribe in rebellion. Six weeks later the war was over and over 300 Dakota were tried by a military tribunal and condemned to be hanged. Eventually charges for many were commuted by President Lincoln and only 38 Dakota were hung. A mistake led to one Indian being hung despite the fact the President had commuted his sentence. This hanging became the largest mass execution in American history.

Much of the story hangs on the story of two individuals. The first being Sarah Wakefield who along with her Children became captives of the Dakota's. She was seen as an "Indian lover" by her fellow captives. Berg asks if this was truly the case. The other individual is Episcopal Bishop Henry Whipple who defended the Indian side of the story and met with Lincoln in an attempt to save the condemned from hanging. These two separate narratives elevate Berg's very interesting and somewhat sad and disturbing book.

The book does a great job weaving the reader back and forth from the Indian war in Minnesota and the Civil War battlefields indicating the Dakota Rebellion was a sideshow and distraction. When you read of the hate, the mistreatment, government corruption and lies and as Scott put's it the need for "private revenge" you are almost brought to tears that so many could have been so wrong, immoral, and unjustified all in the name of manifest destiny resulting in a deadly clash of cultures.

The Dakota uprising and what other Indian tribe's learned from watching Little Crow's destruction and his Dakota tribe's treatment such as the hanging, murder, and relocation lead to better inform future strong anti-settler Indian leaders like Crazy Horse and Sitting Bull. Always outnumbered and knowing they could never win they still would not bend to the will of history for over 40 more years. In the end they became players in Wild West Entertainments and as to the Frontier it was left with very few buffalo and Indians that got in the way of "progress". This is a grand book about an important small piece of the puzzle that no American should take lightly as just Frontier entertainment.

---

## **Rose says**

This book looks at a series of individual stories from the US-Dakota war and ties them in to the events of the conflict, and the greater arena of United States history. The author tells the tale with digestible and easy to read prose, and most importantly manages to rein in Eurocentric bias far more than many other scholarly works relating the war's events and aftermath.

---

## **Steve says**

"A nation which sowed robbery would reap a harvest of blood."  
~ Bishop Henry Whipple, letter to Abraham Lincoln, March 1862

In August of 1862, President Lincoln is weighed heavily by continued criticisms of his slave ideology and by the danger of a Confederate invasion of the North by Robert E. Lee. Lincoln's commanding general, George

B. McClellan, has been slow in his movements and growing more infuriating. By August 29th, Lee and James Longstreet have joined and commenced battle with the Union forces at the Second Manassas/Bull Run. At this point of the war, Lincoln has been biding his time, waiting for a key victory that would permit him to play what he considers his trump card: the Emancipation Proclamation. Thus far, he has had to keep it held in his pocket. Waiting.

Out west, in Minnesota, events are unfolding that for a majority of people is a little-known or long-forgotten moment of history, one that would shape the fate and future of the American West forever. In 38 NOOSES, author Scott W. Berg does a great service to the history of Minnesota and of the nation, exploring the dark chapter of our history that is rarely discussed as it is often lost in the greater conflicts of the Civil War battlefields of the East.

The Dakota tribes are growing weary of failures by the white government to properly fulfill their annuity payments for ceded land, and the traders are manipulating credit dealings that are driving the Dakota to the point of unspeakable debt. Yet another case of treaties being broken or simply ignored intentionally. This frustration reaching its boiling point, a small band of warriors killed a group of white hunters. Returning to camp, they spoke of their anger to their leader, Little Crow. Initially reluctant to begin a full offensive, he eventually agreed to bring battle to the white traders, and the Dakota War began.

Dakota war parties moved through the lower Minnesota River Valley, burning villages, and indiscriminately killing civilian men, women and children. By the time the actual fighting had ended, over 300 civilians were dead with hundreds missing. This is the greatest casualty by whites in any Indian war in America. Yet through all his bluster and threats, Little Crow did not have the forces to match General Pope and Colonel Sibley. The Dakota leader and a hundred or so followers would flee west while the majority of his people would remain behind and surrender under white flags of truce, believing Sibley and his claim that no harm would come to those who turned themselves in. Quickly establishing a military commission, Sibley and his men would hold 392 trials over 30 days, sentencing 303 of the surrendered Dakota to hanging for simple complicity in the war, finding men guilty for merely firing a shot during battle, even if they had not engaged in the atrocities along the River Valley.

Far away, in Washington, DC, Lincoln established his own board of review and halted the executions of the 303 Dakota until proof of their atrocities could be confirmed. When all was said and done, 39 were sentenced to hang as Lincoln's commission had found the majority were not guilty of the vilest offense. Prior to hanging, one more would earn a reprieve, bringing the final total to 38.

On December 26, 1862, 5,000 Minnesotans, including Dr. William W. Mayo, who would one day establish the renowned Mayo Clinic, watched as 38 Dakota were hanged in what was, and still remains, the largest mass execution in US history. From this moment on, the US government began a quick dispersal of the Dakota people, shipping them out of Minnesota and doing their best to eradicate them from the area by any means. Sibley continued his hunt for Little Crow, who would ultimately be shot, scalped, beheaded, and have his body dumped in a gravel pit in Minnesota the following summer.

38 NOOSES drives home the point that --- despite the end of the war and Little Crow meeting his end, no matter that 38 Dakota were hung for their crimes, overlooking that the Dakota were scattered to pathetically located and unsustainable reservation lands --- the war to eliminate the native presence in the west had truly begun in these months. The pursuit of Little Crow and his followers did nothing but fuel further urges to drive the tribes farther west. Berg highlights the Battle of Killdeer Mountain, which was a loss for the native peoples in terms of casualties, but it did what Little Crow had failed to do in Minnesota: it united varied bands together, this time under the leadership of a survivor of Killdeer Mountain --- the Hunkpapa warrior

Sitting Bull, who refused any treaty talk and understood that to give any land was to lose all land.

Berg does a surprisingly good job weaving together the many individual stories, which goes a long way into making this more than just a dry historical text.

The passion of Governor Ramsey addressing the state legislature, saying “the Sioux Indians of Minnesota must be exterminated or driven forever beyond the borders of the state.”

General Pope, angry at being relieved of command in the Civil War out East and having to deal with Indian affairs out West, and just as eager to see Ramsey's wish fulfilled.

Sarah Wakefield's flight from her home and subsequent capture by the Dakota, falling under the care and protection of one named Chaska, who guarded her and her young children from malfeasance by anti-white warriors in camp, and her lifelong shunning by the white community after she was freed, cast aside as an “Indian lover.”

Bishop Whipple's desire to see the Indian matter handled and reformed, knowing from his time among them that they were being manipulated and lied to by government agents and traitors alike.

President Lincoln, desperate for the tide to turn in the Civil War, finally able to push his Emancipation Proclamation into daylight and his determination to see that only the truly guilty in the Dakota War were hung.

Chaska, who defied Little Crow and others by caring for Sarah Wakefield, who was removed from the execution list by Lincoln, but was hung anyway, leaving Wakefield wracked with grief and guilt for the remainder of her days.

Little Crow and his hesitation to begin a war he knew would end in the extinction of his people, his flight for freedom and protection in Canada, only to be turned away by every native and British settlement he encountered.

Colonel Sibley and his drive to seek justice for the slaughter of innocents, even by finding guilt in the smallest of supposed infractions to justify a higher execution count.

One of the book's greatest achievements is that Berg shows that events do not live in a historical vacuum. They do not begin and end within the covers of the book, neatly started and stopped before moving to the next major event. Not only does he illustrate how the Dakota War led to the more rapid extermination and usurpation of the Native American people of the West, his final chapter surprisingly cycles back to the front, discussing the Black Hawk War and Lincoln's involvement as a young man not yet decided on politics, hunting down Chief Black Hawk in 1832. Lincoln never found Black Hawk during his brief military service, but the government agents sought help from other tribes in tracking him down. One such hunter was Jack Frazer, who in 1862 would be spared by Little Crow and would become a scout for Sibley. His Dakota companion in hunting Black Hawk? Taoyateduta, who would become Little Crow.

In 38 NOOSES, Berg does not simply choose sides. Actually, he does little to dissuade the fact that the horrors the initial assaults by the Dakota had were some of the most heinous imaginable. Yes, he does offer the historical record and the explanation that these acts, in the minds of their undertakers, may have been justified. Yet he himself walks that fine edge, showing that a great many ills existed on both sides of the matter. However, he does --- and quite rightly so --- do a great service in bringing more light to the plight of the native people of the day, and how they were wrongly dealt with over many decades, victims of the corrupt, the greedy and the powerful. He quotes Edwin Stanton in one of the most moving and infuriating passages, in response to Bishop Whipple's pleas for better dealings with the native people: “If he 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. But the Government never reforms an evil until the people demand it. Tell him that when he reaches the heart of the American people, the Indians will be saved.”

Stanton's words echo an eternity, both in our prior handling of the issues of the Native American people and in our modern everyday governmental practices. They illustrate the carelessness by which those in power continue to act without regard for the outcomes, even when they know of the ills, and how the American people remain duplicitous in their continued silence.

---