

University of Nebraska - Lincoln

DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln

---

Great Plains Quarterly

Great Plains Studies, Center for

---

Summer 1985

**Review of *Kinsmen of Another Kind: Dakota-White Relations in the Upper Mississippi Valley, 1650- 1852* By Gary Clayton Anderson**

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/greatplainsquarterly>



Part of the [Other International and Area Studies Commons](#)

---

"Review of *Kinsmen of Another Kind: Dakota-White Relations in the Upper Mississippi Valley, 1650- 1852* By Gary Clayton Anderson" (1985). *Great Plains Quarterly*. 1856.  
<https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/greatplainsquarterly/1856>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Great Plains Studies, Center for at DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln. It has been accepted for inclusion in Great Plains Quarterly by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln.

## BOOK REVIEWS

*Kinsmen of Another Kind: Dakota-White Relations in the Upper Mississippi Valley, 1650-1852.* By Gary Clayton Anderson. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1984. Maps, notes, bibliography, index. xvi + 383 pp. \$25.00.

Gary Clayton Anderson's objective, indicated in the subtitle, is to provide an account of the long sweep of history leading up to the Sioux hostilities in Minnesota which began in mid-August of 1862 and culminated in the hanging of thirty-eight of the participants on 26 December of the same year. Although there is a large body of literature on the 1862 conflict, this book is a welcome addition because most studies have concentrated on the incidents comprising the uprising itself and Indian-white relationships immediately prior to the outbreak of hostilities.

Anderson theorizes that kinship was the organizing principle within and among the allied tribes making up the eastern Sioux or Dakota: the Mdewakanton, Sisseton, Wahpeton, and Wahpekute (often lumped erroneously as "Santee Sioux," a corruption of Issati which was another name for the Mdewakanton whose range extended into west central Wisconsin). Peaceful interaction with non-Dakota people required establishing bonds of kinship through intermarriage, adoption, or ascription.

The first three chapters deal with the ecological adaptations of the Dakota at the time of contact, the impact of European diseases, and the relative recency of the hostility between the Dakota and Ojibwe—popularly believed to reach back to time immemorial. In succeeding chapters, Anderson describes how the eastern Sioux incorporated French, British, and Americans as kin as each group, in turn, held sovereignty over the Dakotas' territory. He notes how whites learned and acted upon their roles

as "fathers" and "brothers" to further trade in the guise of gift exchange appropriate to kinsmen. As kin, they also insinuated themselves into tribal deliberations and decision making to their own advantage. The basic theme is that their Indian kinship became ever less important to the whites as the fur trade dwindled and American interests turned to acquisition of Indian land for white settlement. The trader kinsmen were replaced in large measure by different kinds of whites—the military, missionaries, government administrators, and European immigrants. The Indians fell out among themselves in trying to cope with the new order.

Traditionalists, according to Anderson, clung to the forlorn hope that treaty annuity payments for land losses meant the great father, the president, planned to subvert the old roving and hunting way of life as game and other resources diminished. Other Dakota accepted that they would have to learn new ways to support themselves by emulating white farmers. Contrary to the expectations of their white mentors, even the cooperative Dakota did not envision abandoning their entire identity as Dakota people. When the pressures became intolerable for the traditionalists and they resorted to violence, even some of the "acculturated" Indians were drawn into the fray, but it was not simply a racial war of Indians against whites, as the pattern of killing and sparing reflected recognition of obligations to those whites still perceived as kinfolk. This is perhaps the strongest point made in the book in regard to demonstrating the persisting significance of kinship for the Indians.

In his focus on kinship, Anderson has underscored an important dimension in understanding the history of Indian-white relationships, but his treatment of it is disappointing. His work is merely standard history of events and

participants and though useful and well written it is not the ethnohistory his title would imply. Anthropological sources and terminology are used but they are not employed systematically or with real understanding to provide a cohesive picture of Dakota culture showing how the Dakota perceived designated whites as kin. Whites used their Indian kinship opportunistically, but it would not have worked if not based on detailed realities of the Dakota system. As Indian-white relations deteriorated and Indian elders protested white kinsmen's womanizing, Anderson implies it was Indian dismay that what was once marriage had degenerated into mere prostitution. He does not try to test whether part of the problem, at least, was the indiscriminate choice of partners.

The book cries out for a diagram and discussion of the Dakota kinship system. Anderson makes casual references to cross-cousins without reference to parallel cousins, totally overlooking the need to study the different marital prescriptions and proscriptions implicit in these classifications in the Great Lakes area. He speaks of affinal kinship regarding marriages (of greater or lesser duration) between white men and Indian women but fails to provide any actual genealogical charts extending over several generations of prominent Indian-white families. He describes fictive kinship in the attribution of relationships to whites as "brothers" and "fathers," but his view is oversimplified and often an intellectual copout. The demanding but not impossible ethnohistorical task of kinship analysis is eschewed with facile excuses that time has erased the information.

The point is that the Dakota were far from unique in their dependence on putative and affinal kinship in dealing with outsiders. Anderson muffed the opportunity to go beyond what is superficial and common knowledge about Indian-white relationships in the frontier period. Further, while he makes frequent reference to soldier societies, he does not cite the anthropological literature which indicates that voluntary associations were taking on increasing importance in comparison to kinship as a basis of social organization for the northern Siouan

speakers as they began moving out toward the Plains.

Most distressing is Anderson's acceptance of stereotypes promulgated by an older generation of historians, particularly in regard to women, when newer studies of the documentary evidence are resulting in a massive reappraisal of sex roles in American Indian cultures. Anderson's Indian women remain unreconstructed drudges with no community standing or influence. The concept of "bride price" which publicly legitimized marriage contracts among the Indians, as religious and civil ceremonies serve this purpose (and dowries once helped to serve it) in our society, is reduced to only the uninformed white view that men were "buying" wives.

NANCY OESTREICH LURIE  
Anthropology Section  
Milwaukee Public Museum