

University of Nebraska - Lincoln

DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln

---

Great Plains Quarterly

Great Plains Studies, Center for

---

2005

## "We Will Talk of Nothing Else": Dakota Interpretations of the Treaty of 1837

Linda M. Clemmons  
*Illinois State University*

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



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

---

Clemmons, Linda M., "'We Will Talk of Nothing Else': Dakota Interpretations of the Treaty of 1837" (2005). *Great Plains Quarterly*. 186.

<https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/greatplainsquarterly/186>

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.

# “WE WILL TALK OF NOTHING ELSE”

## DAKOTA INTERPRETATIONS OF THE TREATY OF 1837

LINDA M. CLEMMONS

During treaty negotiations with federal Indian agents in 1851, Taoyateduta (Little Crow), a Dakota representative, warned that the council members would “talk of nothing else” until conflicts related to the previous Treaty of 1837 had been resolved. His statement is surprising, given that government officials at the time, as well as subsequent historians, have interpreted the Treaty of 1837 as an uncontroversial, even positive, event for both the Dakota and the federal government. However, Taoyateduta and

the other Dakota did not view the Treaty of 1837 in the same way. Instead, Taoyateduta’s words illustrate the continued Dakota disillusionment and anger with the document, close to fifteen years after the Treaty of 1837 went into effect.

Nearly thirty years ago, anthropologist Raymond D. Fogelson called for ethnohistorians to study Native interpretations of historical events.<sup>1</sup> As Taoyateduta’s reaction to the Treaty of 1837 illustrates, this admonition applies equally to the present day. Although in recent years ethnohistorians have integrated Native viewpoints into their work, many authors still take the assumptions of white government officials as their starting point.<sup>2</sup> The Treaty of 1837, negotiated between the Mdewakanton band of Dakota (one of the four eastern bands of the Minnesota Dakota) and the federal government, serves as an excellent case study in how Native recollections of events and the historical record clash.<sup>3</sup> Indian agents at the time, as well as subsequent historians, have ignored the significance of the Treaty of 1837. The Dakota, however, attributed great importance to the document, and consequences from the events of 1837 influenced their relations with

**Key Words:** Antebellum Indian Policy, Eastern Dakota, Indian Historiography, missionaries, Treaty of 1837

*Linda Clemmons is assistant professor of history at Illinois State University. Her current research focuses on the interaction of the Dakota and American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions missionaries during the antebellum period. This article would not have been completed without funding from the Newberry Library Spencer Foundation and a research grant from Illinois State University.*

[GPQ 25 (Summer 2005): 173-85]



FIG. 1. Drawing of "Little Crow" (Taoyateduta) by Frank B. Mayer. (Ayer Art Mayer Sketchbooks) Courtesy Edward E. Ayer Collection, The Newberry Library, Chicago.

government officials and Protestant missionaries for decades to come. Indeed, the Treaty of 1837 served as the turning point in government-Dakota relations, instead of the Treaty of 1851, which usually is assigned this role by historians. The example of the Treaty of 1837 illustrates that Native perspectives must be incorporated into the historical narrative before a more nuanced and complete story of Indian-white relations in the antebellum era can emerge.

#### THE TREATY OF 1837

At first glance, there seems to be little controversy over the Treaty of 1837. In fact, the sequence of events leading up to the negotiation and signing of the document is fairly straightforward, especially when compared with other antebellum treaties. The Mdewakanton Dakota, like the Cherokee or Choctaw, signed treaties as part of Andrew Jackson's policy of Indian removal. According to this plan of

removal, which began in the early 1830s, the federal government hoped to relocate all tribes living east of the Mississippi River to areas west of the river. These newly vacated lands would then be opened for extracting resources (such as gold or timber), settlement, and cultivation.<sup>4</sup> The Mdewakanton Dakota, as the only Dakota band with villages on the eastern side of the Mississippi River, fell under the guidelines of this aggressive policy of removal. Indeed, as historian Gary Clayton Anderson argues, relocating the Mdewakanton Dakota across the Mississippi River would allow Andrew Jackson to nearly realize his ultimate goal of clearing the eastern lands for settlement and resource development.<sup>5</sup>

With regard to the removal of the Mdewakanton Dakota and other tribes, however, Andrew Jackson and federal Indian officials not only justified the land cessions in terms of the benefits that would accrue to settlers, land agents, and other investors, but they also insisted that the new federal Indian policy would help the Indians. According to this reasoning, Indians needed to become civilized, which involved, among other things, settling on permanent, single-family farms, learning to speak, read, and write English, following certain gender roles, and converting to Christianity. These things could not happen, the argument ran, because unscrupulous whites influenced the Indians in negative ways.

For example, fur traders encouraged Indians to roam over large areas of land searching for animals, at the expense of learning about the benefits of cultivating small farms and living in permanent log cabins. Government officials also worried about the amount of alcohol sold to the Indians by white traders. Agents argued that if the Indians were removed and placed on smaller tracts of land, they would be separated from amoral fur and liquor traders who did not have the Indians' best interests at heart. Government officials could then watch over the Indians until they became sophisticated enough to separate themselves from the unscrupulous elements of white society. On the reservations the Indians could also attend

school, receive intensive training in farming, and learn about Christianity. To summarize, the reservations were seen as arenas for social change where Indians could learn to become civilized Christians.

Federal Indian officials used all aspects of this preexisting rhetoric to justify opening negotiations with the Mdewakanton Dakota in 1837. The Commissioner of Indian Affairs at the time, Carey A. Harris, stated that it would be "better for both the Indians and the citizens of this Territory" if the Mdewakanton gave up their claims to their lands located east of the Mississippi River. First, the Commissioner argued that the land was of no use to the Dakota because it "was barren of game, and unfit for cultivation." Thus, the Dakota would be much better off accepting payments and goods for the land, which would keep them from starvation. Second, the Commissioner stated that a treaty would save them from unscrupulous lumber companies. According to Harris, lumber companies gave the Mdewakanton "very inadequate considerations" for their timber. This occurred because the Indians did not have "the intervention or supervision of any agent of the Government." The solution to the problem seemed obvious to Harris: the government needed "to purchase the whole pine country at once, and to give them a liberal compensation, to be applied for their benefit, under the direction of the President."<sup>6</sup>

Finally, as an added benefit, Commissioner Harris argued that a treaty would aid the Indians by paying their "debts and claims" to traders, and by providing funds for "the education of the young, the supply of agricultural implements and assistance, [and] the employment of interpreters, farmers, mechanics, and laborers" who would teach them civilized ways.<sup>7</sup> Clearly, the treaty would serve a civilizing purpose, whereby the government would promote agriculture and education among the Dakota.

Despite the fact that the Commissioner of Indian Affairs couched the treaty in terms of its numerous benefits to the Mdewakanton, various interest groups also influenced the government's decision to press for a land cession in



FIG. 2. Drawing of Dr. Thomas Williamson by Frank B. Mayer. (Ayer Art Mayer Sketchbooks) Courtesy Edward E. Ayer Collection, The Newberry Library, Chicago.

1837. Perhaps the most influential lobbyist was the lumber industry. Loggers clamored for unrestricted access to the pine forests of not only the Dakota but also of the Ojibwe to the north. Moreover, traders supported a treaty because they wanted funds from the land sale to be used to pay the Dakotas' debts for trade goods.

In theory, Protestant missionaries affiliated with the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM) also supported a treaty. In 1835 the ABCFM, one of the largest and most influential missionary organizations of the antebellum era, opened mission stations in Minnesota.<sup>8</sup> The organization sent Jedediah Stevens, Thomas Williamson, and their families to minister to the "savage" and "untamed" Dakota. Once they arrived in Minnesota, Stevens and Williamson, aided by two independent missionary brothers, Gideon and Samuel Pond, immediately established stations near Fort Snelling (located in present-day St. Paul) and at Lac qui Parle (approximately a hundred miles to the west). These stations, however, were expensive to construct and maintain, especially during times of financial uncertainty brought about by the Panic of 1837. Thus, the ABCFM missionaries hoped that treaty

money would be given to their organization to help defray the cost of constructing and running their mission stations. Moreover, the missionaries believed that a land cession would concentrate the Mdewakanton in one place, which would provide them with greater access to potential converts.

Finally, in addition to the Protestant missionaries, some *métis* Dakota pressed for a treaty. In the previous Treaty of 1830, negotiated between the Dakota, several other tribes, and the federal government, the *métis* had been given a tract of land lying by Lake Pepin for their use. Drawing on their previous experience, some *métis* saw a new treaty as an opportunity to once again benefit materially, either through a further land cession or through direct cash payments.<sup>9</sup>

In the summer of 1837 pressure from these diverse groups combined to convince government officials to open treaty negotiations with the Mdewakanton. At this time, Commissioner of Indian Affairs Harris instructed the Dakota agent, Lawrence Taliaferro, to choose a group of Mdewakanton representatives to travel to Washington, DC, to meet with Indian officials.<sup>10</sup> Taliaferro carried out his orders and left the agency on August 18 with a group of twenty-six Dakota. According to historian Roy W. Meyer, however, this delegation was not informed in advance that they would be discussing a land cession once they arrived in Washington. Instead, the group believed that the purpose of the trip was to negotiate a peace settlement with the Sac and Fox, with whom conflicts had arisen over the past few months.<sup>11</sup>

Once they arrived in Washington, the Dakota delegation met with Commissioner Harris and Secretary of War Joel R. Poinsett. Lawrence Taliaferro also sat in on the negotiations. During the first meeting, which took place on September 21, the group learned the true purpose of the negotiations; they had not been summoned primarily to settle differences with the Sac and Fox, but to sell part of their lands to the federal government. Indeed, representatives of the Sac and Fox peoples had not even arrived in Washington yet. Standing Cloud, one of the

delegates, expressed his dismay over this change in focus. He told the negotiators that "we never dreamed of selling our lands until your agent . . . invited us to come and visit our Great Father."<sup>12</sup> Despite the misunderstanding, Poinsett and Harris pressed ahead and lost no time in making an offer for the lands. They demanded that the Mdewakanton cede all their lands lying east of the Mississippi River for \$1 million.

The Dakota delegates did not accept the government's initial offer, and countered with the sum of \$1.6 million for the same land cession. Secretary Poinsett, however, refused to even consider their counteroffer, and remained firmly committed to his initial sum. The reluctance of the government to negotiate prompted Good Road, another delegate, to comment that the whites must "love money."<sup>13</sup> Despite their dissatisfaction with the proposal, once the delegates realized that the terms of the treaty were non-negotiable, they accepted the Secretary of War's initial offer. On September 29, 1837, they signed the document agreeing to the sale of approximately 5 million acres, encompassing "all their land, east of the Mississippi river, and all their islands in the said river."<sup>14</sup>

In return, the Mdewakanton received \$1 million. Like all treaties of the era, however, the Dakota would not get this payment in one lump sum or in yearly cash payments equal to the total amount. Instead, the payments would be divided in various ways. The first clause of the treaty (which would later turn out to be the most confusing and controversial part of the document) stated that the government would invest \$300,000 and pay the Mdewakanton "annually, forever, an income of not less than five percent . . . a portion of said interest, not exceeding one third, to be applied in such manner as the President may direct." The treaty also promised to pay the *métis* ("not having less than one quarter of Sioux blood") \$110,000 and the traders \$90,000 to cover Mdewakanton debts. The Mdewakanton themselves would receive a yearly payment of goods for twenty years worth approximately \$15,500.<sup>15</sup> Thus, although the Mdewakanton obtained some money and goods from their

land cession, the interests that had originally pushed for the treaty, including the *métis* and traders, benefited from the final document.

The Treaty of 1837 also included clauses designed to promote the government's civilization agenda among the Mdewakanton Dakota. Part of the land cession money would be used to purchase agricultural tools and to hire farmers, blacksmiths, and eventually, teachers. Specifically, \$8,250 would be expended annually to purchase "medicines, agricultural implements and stock, and for the support of a physician, farmers, and blacksmiths." Moreover, the Mdewakanton would receive a one-time payment of \$10,000 in agricultural tools and other implements to enable them to immediately begin "break[ing] up and improv[ing] their lands."<sup>16</sup> Although a majority in the U.S. Senate supported the Treaty of 1837 and the government's civilization agenda, the document's ratification stalled in Congress due to the nation's precarious financial situation at the time. Finally, however, the Senate approved the treaty on June 15, 1838, approximately nine months after its initial acceptance.

#### INTERPRETING THE TREATY OF 1837

Ever since the Treaty of 1837's ratification, government officials and other interest groups at the time, subsequent historians, and Dakota affected by the treaty have offered radically different interpretations of the document. These divergent responses ranged from those who stressed the unqualified success of the treaty (government officials and some historians), to those who denounced the treaty as a crime against all Dakota (originally the Mdewakanton, and later the three other Eastern Dakota bands who joined in these vocal protests). The ABCFM missionaries of the time occupied a middle position between these two extremes, supporting the document in theory but finding fault with the way the government carried out some of its provisions. From 1837 on, sources existed to document all these interpretations, but the historical record has largely ignored that of the Dakota (and

to a lesser extent, the ABCFM missionaries). In order to fully assess the Treaty of 1837, all interpretations must be considered.

Immediately after the treaty's ratification, antebellum government officials, including the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, touted the document as a positive achievement for the United States. After its ratification, Commissioner of Indian Affairs Harris, in his December 1, 1837, report, called the Treaty of 1837 a success because it secured "permanent boundaries" and a "more regular form" for the union.<sup>17</sup> Although the ceded Mdewakanton lands were a very small fraction of the Dakota's total holdings in Minnesota, and the document was signed by only one out of the four bands of Eastern Dakota, the Treaty firmly established a precedent for opening the area to settlement. Indeed, prior to the treaty, as historian William Watts Folwell points out, no lands in the Minnesota area had been open to settlement; all was Indian Territory.<sup>18</sup> The Treaty of 1837 changed this forever. Thus, even though the Treaty of 1837 did not receive as much press as other Indian removal treaties of the era, such as the Treaty of New Echota with the Cherokees, government officials believed that the Treaty of 1837 with the Mdewakanton would help to bring Andrew Jackson's policy of Indian removal one step closer to completion.

Government officials also lauded the Treaty of 1837 for its focus on civilizing the Mdewakanton. The money from the land sale bound the United States "to supply the Sioux, as soon as practicable," with medicines, agricultural implements, and stock, and to hire physicians, farmers, and blacksmiths.<sup>19</sup> The government farmers, along with the agricultural implements, would be utilized to convert the Mdewakanton men from hunters into settled farmers. According to the parlance of the day, teaching the Dakota men to farm would lead them to self-sufficiency and away from lives of starvation and privation which supposedly corresponded with a hunting existence.<sup>20</sup> The treaty would also provide teachers to instruct the next generation of Dakota in reading and writing in English and American civilization in general. Eventually,



government officials claimed, these teachers would turn the children into productive American citizens.

Agent Lawrence Taliaferro, who was charged with carrying out the Treaty of 1837 on the local level, did nothing to dispel the federal government's positive interpretation of the document. In his annual reports to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, Taliaferro continually stressed the ease with which the Mdewakanton accepted the terms of the treaty. Taliaferro confirmed that the clause of the treaty requiring the Mdewakanton to vacate ceded lands and relocate on the west side of the Mississippi River had been executed without incident or complaint. "After disposing of all their lands east of the Mississippi by the treaty of 1837, these people [the Mdewakanton] have been prevailed upon (such as had been residing east) to remove west," he wrote. This had been "arranged permanently," he continued, "*without expense or trouble* [emphasis mine], and they now rest upon their remaining soil west" of the Mississippi River.<sup>21</sup>

Taliaferro also informed officials in Washington that the Mdewakanton did not have any complaints about the distribution of monies and goods promised in the treaty. "The payment of the annuity to the Sioux Indians was made to the heads of families, and as far as I have been informed, was entirely satisfactory to the nation," he stated. "All of the bands of this tribe have, under the liberal provisions incorporated in their treaty, been supplied amply with agricultural implements; well-qualified farmers have been assigned to each town, and two blacksmith shops put in *blast* at points suited to the views and wishes of the Indians."<sup>22</sup> Thus, federal officials in Washington, bolstered by Taliaferro's reports, called the Treaty of 1837 a complete success.

Although Lawrence Taliaferro and government officials in Washington penned glowing reports of the Treaty of 1837 and its implementation, ABCFM missionaries who lived closest to the Mdewakanton Dakota became increasingly conflicted over the relative merits of the document. As already mentioned, the

ABCFM missionaries at first supported the treaty. Like the federal agents, the missionaries shared the desire to civilize and Christianize the Dakota and wanted to obtain government funds to achieve these goals. Just as they had hoped, the missionaries initially benefited from the Treaty of 1837. For example, ABCFM missionary Gideon Pond was appointed to serve as the government farmer—a position that had been created by the Treaty of 1837.<sup>23</sup> The government's payment of Pond's salary freed up funds for investment in other missionary activities. Moreover, in 1838 the missionaries were pleased when Agent Taliaferro asked Washington to designate \$5,000 of the treaty funds for the ABCFM schools.<sup>24</sup> Again in 1839 the agent requested that the federal government give \$500 to the ABCFM school at Lake Harriet.<sup>25</sup>

Despite the fact that the missionaries happily accepted salaries and school subsidies from the treaty, they did not support all aspects of the document. At the same time Samuel Pond supported his brother's appointment as government farmer, he also criticized the Treaty of 1837 for providing annuities to the Mdewakanton. Pond wanted to teach the Mdewakanton to become self-sufficient small farmers, and he strongly believed that any handout of goods from the government would delay this process. Pond's comments about the subsequent Treaty of 1841 (which was negotiated and signed but never ratified) equally describes his reservations about the earlier treaty. Because the Dakota would not have to work for the annuities, Pond believed that these handouts would "render them indolent and dissipated." Annuities would allow them to "live without care, and waste their time in idleness and dissipation."<sup>26</sup>

In addition to criticizing a central aspect of the Treaty of 1837, the missionaries disagreed with Taliaferro's appraisal of the Mdewakanton satisfaction with the document and its implementation. Taliaferro reported that the Mdewakanton were happy with the treaty and that its terms had been carried out to the satisfaction of all. The missionaries, however, informed their home board in Boston that this

was far from the truth. First, the Dakota had been very upset over the delay in the treaty's ratification. Stephen Riggs, who had arrived in Minnesota in 1837 to minister to the Dakota, reported that "[o]wing to the delay in the ratification of the treaty last fall the Sioux here are, at present, in a very disturbed state. They can't conceive why the terms of the treaty should not be fulfilled."<sup>27</sup> Worse yet, once the treaty had been ratified, the promised payments and goods did not arrive on time, despite Taliaferro's assurances to the contrary in his reports. All these delays and broken promises caused Riggs to worry that the Dakota would lose all "confidence in our government."<sup>28</sup>

If the Dakota lost faith in the government, the missionaries realized that they would be the first to suffer the consequences. In the 1830s the Dakota (with reason) treated the missionaries as an extension of the federal government. Thus, if problems arose over government policy, the missionaries, as the closest government representatives, received the brunt of Dakota anger. Jedediah Stevens, who worked at the ABCFM mission, described this problem. "The Indians about us for several months past have manifested much dissatisfaction and restlessness, occasioned principally by a delay in carrying into effect the Treaty made with them last fall," he informed the ABCFM Secretary in Boston. As a result, the Dakota killed four of Stevens's mission cattle, which he estimated to be worth \$100.<sup>29</sup>

When analyzing the Treaty of 1837, most historians have downplayed or ignored missionary reports like Stevens's. Instead, they have treated the events of 1837 as relatively unimportant to the larger history of Dakota-government interaction. Two main reasons justify this lack of interest in the Treaty of 1837. First, historians point out that the treaty was signed by only one of the four bands of Eastern Dakota. Moreover, the final land cession was a relatively small amount of land when compared with the total holdings of the Dakota at the time. As Minnesota historian William Folwell stated, the "little delta of territory between the Mississippi River and the St. Croix acquired by

the treaty of 1837 was a trifling fraction of the immense domain embraced within the boundaries of Minnesota by her organic act."<sup>30</sup>

Second, the Treaty of 1837 was eclipsed by the subsequent Treaty of 1851, whereby the four bands of Dakota signed away all their lands in Minnesota in return for a reservation. Historian Bruce David Forbes argued that the turning point in Dakota-government relations "was 1851, when the Dakota signed two treaties that ceded almost all of southern and western Minnesota to the United States."<sup>31</sup> Although historian Roy Meyer mentions that the Treaty of 1837 caused some hard feelings among the Dakota, especially when the government failed to deliver the promised annuities and payments on time, he ultimately agreed with Forbes that "the small cession made in . . . 1837 involv[ed] lands no longer extensively used by them," and was ultimately eclipsed by the subsequent Treaty of 1851.<sup>32</sup>

While most historians have downplayed the significance of the Treaty of 1837, especially in relation to subsequent treaties, historian Gary Clayton Anderson, in his book *Kinsmen of Another Kind* and article "The Removal of the Mdewakanton Dakota in 1837," extensively analyzed the document. In both of these works Anderson provided a well-researched history of the events of 1837; indeed, he provides needed context and explanation that other historians fail to mention in their brief summaries. In his interpretation of the circumstances leading up to the treaty, as well as the document itself, however, the author echoed the rhetoric of the government officials at the time. In both works Anderson stressed the benign nature of the treaty, as well as its numerous benefits to the Mdewakanton Dakota. Indeed, Anderson interprets the Treaty of 1837 as an example of the positive results that could arise from Jackson's policy of Indian removal.<sup>33</sup>

Anderson argued that Jacksonian Indian policy, at least with regard to the Dakota, should be viewed as a positive event because it saved the Mdewakanton. Prior to the treaty, Anderson stated that Dakota who resided and hunted on lands east of the Mississippi were



starving. "Unfortunately," Anderson wrote, "the once bountiful herds of deer and buffalo had disappeared from the vicinity by 1837, causing severe food shortages."<sup>34</sup> Because of declining buffalo, "some kind of governmental action was necessary to save the Mdewakanton."<sup>35</sup> The Treaty of 1837 provided annuities, which "did much to subsidize the meager economy of the Mdewakanton, and they made up for the scarcity of guns and blankets."<sup>36</sup> Anderson called the annuity system an "overall success," once implemented, because it "obviously saved the Mdewakanton from utter destruction."<sup>37</sup> In the end, the Mdewakanton were better off a decade after the treaty went into force; it kept the tribe from starvation, provided educational opportunities, and ultimately "brought a certain degree of stability to the upper Mississippi Valley."<sup>38</sup>

Dakota at the time, especially the Mdewakanton, would have challenged this interpretation of the Treaty of 1837. First, the Treaty of 1837 was a seminal event for them, and took on more significance as time went on. Far from bringing stability to the Mississippi Valley, the document fomented protest, discord, and anger, among not only the Mdewakanton and the federal government, but among the three other bands of Dakota (the Sisseton, Wahpeton, and Wakpekute) who had not originally been involved in the treaty negotiations. Indeed, the Mdewakanton succeeded in establishing a loose alliance of Dakota villages across Minnesota united against the Treaty of 1837. Because of the significance that all four bands of Eastern Dakota came to attribute to the document, the Treaty of 1837 can be seen as one of the turning points in Dakota-white relations.

From the very beginning, many aspects of the Treaty of 1837 angered the Mdewakanton. Some Dakota questioned the underhanded method by which the Indian agents had conducted the negotiations; they pointed out that the delegates had been brought to Washington under false pretenses. Several Mdewakanton also were upset about the concessions that had been given to the traders and *métis*, while others believed the selling price for the land was much too low.

Once the treaty had been ratified, this initial dissatisfaction only increased. Despite Taliaferro's assurances to the contrary, the promised annuities and payments did not arrive on time, and the Mdewakanton strongly criticized the government's inability to carry out their side of the bargain. Jedediah Stevens, the ABCFM missionary near Fort Snelling, commented that the Mdewakanton were extremely upset that parts of the Treaty of 1837 had not been carried into effect. "They manifest considerable dissatisfaction toward the Govt. Agent [emphasis his], Traders and whites generally," he explained, "and at present seem to occupy rather a threatening position."<sup>39</sup>

Although delayed, the majority of the promised annuities and payments eventually arrived and were distributed to Mdewakanton families. The government, however, failed to follow through with one clause of the Treaty of 1837 for the next fifteen years. While seemingly minor, this provision took on extraordinary significance and led to a significant break in relations between the federal government, ABCFM missionaries living near their villages, and all four bands of Dakota. These problems continued from the early 1840s into the 1850s.

The disputed treaty clause stated that the government would invest \$300,000 and pay the Mdewakanton "annually, forever, an income of not less than five percent . . . a portion of said interest, not exceeding one third, to be applied in such manner as the President may direct."<sup>40</sup> In one sense, all involved parties agreed on the meaning of the treaty clause—the government was required to spend \$5,000 per year for the benefit of the Mdewakanton people. The agreement ended there, however. Government officials argued that during the treaty signing they had made it clear that the president would use the entire sum to pay for educational programs; they certainly never intended for the president to give the money to the Mdewakanton to spend as they pleased. The Mdewakanton, however, had a different understanding of the article's meaning. They told the Commissioner of Indian Affairs "that at the time of the treaty they were assured that the money would be

used for something other than education.”<sup>41</sup> As both sides dug in and refused to compromise, tensions increased as the government failed to distribute the funds for several years in a row, until by 1850 the payments had accumulated to an excess of \$50,000.<sup>42</sup>

Although the majority of the funds remained unspent, the ABCFM missionaries received several initial payments of the disputed money to help run their schools. This angered the Mdewakanton, who charged that the government paid the Protestants “for teaching the children here out of money due them . . . for their lands sold to the United States.”<sup>43</sup> Despite the fact that the missionaries promised that they no longer used any of the disputed funds by the early 1840s, Mdewakanton continued to believe that the ABCFM schools were “a scheme of the missionaries for making money out of them.”<sup>44</sup>

Because of these controversial school funds, the Mdewakanton focused much of their anger over the Treaty of 1837 on the ABCFM missionaries. Several other reasons also led the Dakota to direct their aggression at the Protestant missionaries instead of the federal government. First, the ABCFM missionaries were simply a better day-to-day target than the federal agents, as they lived closest to the Dakota villages and interacted daily with men, women, and children as they worked to spread their message. Second, the missionaries did not have military support of their own to counter any Dakota challenges to their authority. Finally, the Mdewakanton could express their anger over the Treaty of 1837 in a tangible way by targeting mission schools and churches.

Because of their ease as a target, as well as their initial receipt of money from the Treaty of 1837, attendance at the ABCFM schools located near Mdewakanton villages sharply declined beginning in 1839. Anti-treaty Mdewakanton used many different methods to keep students from attending classes. For example, angry Mdewakanton lined the path to the schools and attempted to intimidate the students into returning home. In other cases, parents who sent students to school were mocked, and in sev-

eral cases even ostracized, by village members. As a result, attendance dropped precipitously. Jedediah Stevens reported that his school at Lake Harriet only had between five and eight students because of the growing anger over the Treaty of 1837. He expected things to get worse, predicting that “portentious [sic] clouds [hung] over the future” of the ABCFM mission.<sup>45</sup>

Stevens’s prediction proved to be prescient, as anti-treaty Mdewakanton not only continued to harass mission schools located near their own villages throughout the early 1840s, but also worked to spread their discontent to the three other bands of Dakota. At first the Mdewakanton focused their efforts on the Wahpeton, as the band located closest to them geographically. In 1842 several Mdewakanton traveled to the Wahpeton village of Lac qui Parle to inform them about the conflict with the government and missionaries over education funds from the Treaty of 1837. They urged the Wahpeton to join their protest even though the treaty officially applied only to the Mdewakanton. In the end, the majority of Lac qui Parle Wahpeton chose to support the Mdewakanton in their dispute with the government and missionaries. Stephen Riggs reported that after meeting with the Mdewakanton, the Wahpeton immediately “ordered the missionaries to leave.” Much to Riggs’s chagrin, this opposition “continued to embarrass our operations till the treaty of Mendota in 1851.”<sup>46</sup>

The success of the anti-treaty Mdewakanton in convincing the Lac qui Parle Wahpetons to join their cause inspired them to spread their message to other Wahpeton, Sisseton, and Wahpekute villages located near mission stations. They also worked to keep the Mdewakanton united. To create and maintain this loose anti-treaty alliance, Mdewakanton emissaries traveled to communities near mission stations. At each of these villages, the emissaries attended a council meeting, presented their case against the ABCFM, and urged the members to unite with them in opposing the missionaries, and by extension, the Treaty of 1837. For example, in 1843 Thomas Williamson reported that “Tatepose has sent

word" about the missionaries' role in the controversy over the Treaty of 1837 "as far as he could and that was his principal business when he was up [here] and they held those consultations last spring."<sup>47</sup> Likewise, Daniel Gavin, a Swiss missionary associated with the *Société des Missions Évangéliques de Lausanne*, warned Samuel Pond that "Wakouta has just come down the St. Peter again" to talk to other Mdewakanton near his mission at Red Wing. According to Gavin, Wakouta seemed determined "to exert all his efforts to obtain the funds set aside" by the treaty for educational purposes. Missionaries like Williamson and Gavin wished that Wakouta and other emissaries would "have been content with doing mischief in his own band" instead of spreading discontent to other villages.<sup>48</sup>

When the emissaries spoke at councils, they used many different arguments to convince the village members to join their cause. Most importantly, they appealed to the cultural and kinship bonds between villages. In 1846 Williamson noted that a visiting Mdewakanton asked the villagers living near his station to "please their relatives" by joining in their protest.<sup>49</sup> The emissaries also told the council members that the treaty crisis affected all Dakota people because the ABCFM stole money from the Treaty of 1837 to fund all their mission schools, not only those located near the Mdewakanton. According to Thomas Williamson, "[s]ome ill disposed persons" told the Wahpeton that "we were paid for teaching the Warpetonwan here out of the money due the Mdewakantonwan."<sup>50</sup> Finally, the emissaries warned council members that the Treaty of 1837 created a dangerous precedent. If council members chose not to join the protests, the government could sign similar treaties that would use Dakota funds to support mission projects. Because the Mdewakanton emissaries backed up their criticism with personal experience, they made an impact on the councils. The federal government had indeed given some of the education funds to the ABCFM schools, had subsequently failed to distribute any funds, and had ignored the Mdewakanton interpretation of the education clause.

For these reasons, the Mdewakanton emissaries succeeded in convincing villages located near mission stations to join with them in opposing the ABCFM missionaries. Letters and reports written by the missionaries note the existence of such a loose alliance. In 1844 Stephen Riggs reported that the Mdewakanton "have been making efforts to form a league among themselves against missions and schools. The Warpekute, Warpetonwan and Sisitonwan bands . . . have been imbibing too much of the same feeling; and some . . . have become open opposers. This is peculiarly true at Lac qui Parle."<sup>51</sup> Riggs also noted that in the 1840s, a "strong organized opposition grew up" among the Dakota "on the Mississippi and lower Minnesota."<sup>52</sup>

Ten years later, the government still had not released the disputed funds. As a result, the united opposition to the missionaries continued throughout Dakota country. In 1850 Thomas Williamson summarized the chilling effect that problems arising from the Treaty of 1837 had on missionary work, not only among the Mdewakanton but also at stations located near Sisseton and Wahpeton villages. As "the sum [from the education fund] increased," he wrote, "so have the difficulties from this source increased."<sup>53</sup> These continuing problems over the Treaty of 1837 caused all Dakota villages, regardless of their involvement in the original treaty negotiations, to distrust the federal government, and their proxies, the ABCFM missionaries.

## CONCLUSION

Thus, when Dakota representative Taoyateduta refused to "talk of nothing else" but the controversy over the Treaty of 1837 during the 1851 negotiations for Dakota lands, he was referring to an almost fifteen-year history of sustained conflict in the upper Mississippi region. Taoyateduta's reference to the united and long-running opposition of the Dakota to the Treaty of 1837 illustrates that government officials at the time, as well as subsequent historians, have underestimated the significance of the document. The Dakota did not see the

Treaty of 1837 as an insignificant or positive event, nor did they forget the document as they headed into new treaty negotiations with the government. Indeed, it can be argued that the Treaty of 1837 served as the turning point in government-Dakota relations, instead of the Treaty of 1851, which usually is assigned this role. By 1851 the Dakota had already learned to mistrust the government and to question their ability to follow through with promises made during treaty negotiations.

As such, a study that includes Dakota reactions to the Treaty of 1837 not only adds another dimension to the story of Dakota-white relations in the antebellum period, it significantly alters the historical narrative. Without an understanding of the Dakota response to the Treaty of 1837, Taoyateduta's words during the 1851 negotiations remain elusive. However, his statement comes sharply into focus once the Dakota history of strong and sustained protest to the Treaty of 1837 is brought to light. At the same time, however, the positive interpretations by government agents at the time and by subsequent historians should not be entirely dismissed. Rather, both stories should be integrated to form a further illustration of the miscommunications, misinformation, and conflicting agendas that frequently characterized Indian-government relations both during, before, and after the antebellum period. Only in this way can the volatile and conflicting relations between Indians and whites begin to become comprehensible.

## NOTES

1. Raymond D. Fogelson, "On the Varieties of Indian History: Sequoyah and Travelling Bird," *Journal of Ethnic Studies* 2, no. 1 (Spring 1974): 106. Fogelson repeated this same call fifteen years later, stating that ethnohistorians "need to recognize what Indians consider to be eventful." Fogelson, "The Ethnohistory of Events and Nonevents," *Ethnohistory* 36, no. 2 (Spring 1989): 142.

2. Ethnohistorian Sergei Kan self-consciously set out to respond to Fogelson's call for Native-centered history. For example, in his article on shamanism and Christianity among the Tlingit, he states that the "aim of this article had been to demonstrate the

importance of paying attention to indigenous versions of history in reaching a much more thorough understanding of the past and present experience of Native North Americans." Sergei Kan, "Shamanism and Christianity: Modern-Day Tlingit Elders Look at the Past," *Ethnohistory* 38, no. 4 (Fall 1991): 381.

3. The Eastern Dakota belong to the *Očeti Šakowin*, which include the Mdewakanton, Wahpekute, Wahpeton, Sisseton, Yankton, Yanktonais, and Teton (also known as the Lakota). For information on the divisions of the Dakota, see Gary Clayton Anderson, *Kinsmen of Another Kind: Dakota-White Relations in the Upper Mississippi River Valley, 1650-1862* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1984), 2; Raymond J. DeMaillie and Douglas R. Parks, eds., *Sioux Indian Religion: Tradition and Innovation* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1987), 7; Royal B. Hassrick, *The Sioux: Life and Customs of a Warrior Society* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1964), 3-6; Stephen Riggs, *Dakota Grammar, Texts, and Ethnography* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1893; reprint, Minneapolis: Ross and Haines, Inc., 1973); and Riggs, *Tah-Koo Wah-Kan; or, The Gospel among the Dakotas* (Boston Congregational Sabbath-School Publishing Society, 1869), 3-4. All of the *Očeti Šakowin* originally lived in Minnesota near Mille Lacs. Over time, however, the Teton, Yankton, and Yanktonais left the Minnesota region for areas farther west, leaving the four divisions of the Eastern Dakota, or Santee Sioux, in Minnesota. For information on the original location of the Dakota and their subsequent migration, see Gary Clayton Anderson, "Early Dakota Migration and Intertribal War: A Revision," *Western Historical Quarterly* 11, no. 1 (January 1980): 17-36; Anderson, *Kinsmen of Another Kind*, 2-3, 19-28; and J. V. Bower and D. L. Bushnell Jr., *Memoirs of Explorations in the Basin of the Mississippi*, vol. 3 (St. Paul: H. L. Collins Company, 1900). For detailed studies of the location of the Dakota at various times assembled for the Indian Claims Commission, see Harold Hickerson, *Sioux Indians I: Mdewakanton Band of Sioux Indians* (New York: Garland Publishing Inc., 1974); and Wesley R. Hurt, *Sioux Indians II: Dakota Sioux Indians* (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1974).

4. The report of the commissioner of Indian Affairs, issued in December 1837, clearly defines Jacksonian Indian policy. In general, the Indian Removal Act of 1830 allowed for "negotiations with the tribes east of the Mississippi for the extinguishment of their titles; with those of the Western prairie, for the establishment of friendly relations between them and the Mississippi and Missouri rivers, for the adjustment of difficulties and the preservation of peace. They include the removal of the Indians in New York, Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, and Wisconsin to the north, the west, and the north-

west; and in Georgia, North Carolina, Tennessee, Alabama, Mississippi and Florida, in the south and southwest, to new homes southwest of the Missouri river." See U.S. Office of Indian Affairs, *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs to the Secretary for the Year 1837* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1838), 525.

5. Gary Clayton Anderson, "The Removal of the Mdewakanton Dakota in 1837: A Case for Jacksonian Paternalism," *South Dakota History* 10:4 (Fall 1980), 310.

6. U.S. House, *Exchange of Lands with Indians*, 24th Cong., 2nd sess., 1837, H. Doc. 82, 4.

7. Office of Indian Affairs, *Annual Report of the Commissioner* (1837), 525.

8. For general information on the ABCFM, see Clifton Phillips, *Protestant America and the Pagan World: The First Half Century of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, 1810-1860* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1969). Studies on ABCFM missionaries stationed in other locations include Robert F. Berkhofer Jr., *Salvation and the Savage: An Analysis of Protestant Missions and American Indian Response, 1787-1862* (New York: Atheneum, 1972); Patricia Grimshaw, *Paths of Duty: American Missionary Wives in Nineteenth-Century Hawaii* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1989); Julie Roy Jeffrey, *Converting the West: A Biography of Narcissa Whitman* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991); Genevieve McCoy, "Sanctifying the Self and Saving the Savage: The Failure of the ABCFM Oregon Mission and the Conflicted Language of Calvinism" (PhD diss., University of Washington, 1991); Genevieve McCoy, "The Women of the ABCFM Mission and the Conflicted Nature of Calvinism," *Church History* 64, no. 1 (March 1995): 62-82; and Mary Zwiep, *Pilgrim Path: The First Company of Women Missionaries to Hawaii* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1991).

9. Anderson, *Kinsmen of Another Kind*, 150. For another summary of the Treaty of 1830, see Roy W. Meyer, *History of the Santee Sioux: United States Indian Policy on Trial* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1993), 50-51.

10. Lawrence Taliaferro served as the Dakota' Indian agent from 1819 to 1840. For information on Taliaferro, see Edward Neill, ed., "Autobiography of Major Lawrence Taliaferro: Written in 1864," *Minnesota Historical Society Collections*, no. 6 (St. Paul, MN: Pioneer Press Company, 1894), 189-255.

11. Meyer, *History of the Santee Sioux*, 56.

12. Mark Diedrich, *Dakota Oratory: Great Moments in the Recorded Speech of the Eastern Sioux, 1695-1874* (Rochester, MN: Coyote Books, 1989), 30.

13. *Ibid.*

14. Meyer, *History of the Santee Sioux*, 409.

15. *Ibid.*, 409-10.

16. *Ibid.*

17. William Watts Folwell, *A History of Minnesota*, vol. 1, (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society, 1921), 160.

18. *Ibid.*, 213, 266.

19. Office of Indian Affairs, *Annual Report of the Commissioner* (1838), 445.

20. The desire to turn the Dakota into farmers ignored the fact that Dakota women already cultivated acres of corn and other crops. Official reports only counted male Dakota as farmers. Thus, antebellum ideas about gender influenced perceptions of Dakota subsistence patterns.

21. Office of Indian Affairs, *Annual Report of the Commissioner* (1838), 494.

22. *Ibid.*

23. Samuel Pond to David Greene, November 15, 1838, 141:88, ABCFM Papers, Minnesota Historical Society, St. Paul.

24. In his annual report to the commissioner of Indian Affairs, Taliaferro wrote: "It becomes my duty to ask that the sum of \$5000 set apart in the Sioux treaty of September 29, 1837, may be divided, in just proportions, and paid to the gentlemen having charge of the several missions." See Office of Indian Affairs, *Annual Report of the Commissioner* (1838), 523.

25. David Greene to Samuel Pond, August 14, 1839, Pond Papers, Minnesota Historical Society, St. Paul.

26. Samuel Pond to David Greene, May 10, 1842, 141:97, ABCFM Papers.

27. Stephen Riggs to David Greene, June 22, 1837, 141:46, ABCFM Papers.

28. *Ibid.*

29. Jedediah Stevens to Henry Hill, September 12, 1838, 192:23, ABCFM Papers.

30. Folwell, *History of Minnesota*, 266.

31. Bruce David Forbes, "Evangelization and Acculturation among the Santee Dakota Indians, 1834-1864" (PhD diss., Princeton University, 1977), 238.

32. Meyer, *History of the Santee Sioux*, 73.

33. Anderson qualifies this argument with regard to other tribes. For example, he stated that "it was an injustice to remove southern Indians." At the same time, however, he clearly states that although there were certainly injustices, "removal policy itself should not be viewed solely from the standpoint of its abuses in the South." Anderson, "Removal of the Mdewakanton Dakota," 333.

34. *Ibid.*, 311.

35. *Ibid.*, 315.

36. Anderson, *Kinsmen of Another Kind*, 158.

37. *Ibid.*, 161.

38. Anderson, "Removal of the Mdewakanton Dakota," 312, 332.

39. Jedediah Stevens to David Greene, June 26, 1838, 141:35, ABCFM Papers.

40. Meyer, *History of the Santee Sioux*, 409.
41. Office of Indian Affairs, *Annual Report of the Commissioner* (1849), 1016.
42. *Annual Report of the ABCFM* Boston: The Board (1850), 191.
43. Office of Indian Affairs, *Annual Report of the Commissioner* (1846), 313. Samuel Pond also noted, "Reports have been circulated . . . that the object of the missionaries in teaching their children is to obtain their money." Samuel Pond to David Greene, February 7, 1844, 141:100, ABCFM Papers.
44. Stephen Riggs to Selah Treat, March 24, 1849, 244:245, ABCFM Papers.
45. Jedediah Stevens to David Greene, March 23 1839, 141:39, ABCFM Papers.
46. Stephen Riggs to the ABCFM, "A Sketch of the Missionary Labors among the Dakotas," January 2, 1862, 309:173, ABCFM Papers.
47. Thomas Williamson to Samuel Pond, November 16, 1843, Pond Papers.
48. Daniel Gavin to Samuel Pond and Lucy Gavin to Cordelia Pond, February 14, 1844, Pond Papers.
49. Thomas Williamson to David Greene, "Eleventh Annual Report of the Lac qui Parle Mission School for the Year Ending June 20 1846," 244:371, ABCFM Papers.
50. Thomas Williamson to David Greene, "Eleventh Annual Report of the Lac qui Parle Mission School for the Year Ending June 20 1846," 244:371, ABCFM Papers.
51. Stephen Riggs to David Greene, May 1, 1844, 141:83, ABCFM Papers.
52. Riggs, *Tah-Koo Wah-Kan*, 245.
53. Thomas Williamson to Selah Treat, June 1850, 244:13, ABCFM Papers.