



THE DAKOTA TRIALS OF 1862

POSSIBLE ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

- What does this incident tell you about the conflict between European settlers and Native Americans?
- Why are many of these stories absent from general consciousness?
- How does the way history is written impact today's local cultures and populations?

BACKGROUND

According to oral histories, Minnesota has been [the homeland](#) of the Dakota for thousands of years. Bdote, where the Minnesota and Mississippi Rivers meet, is noted in many origin stories as the birthplace of the Dakota people. As European immigrants began to settle in Minnesota, a conflict of cultures emerged. Between 1808 and 1858, Dakota lands were significantly reduced through the U.S. treaty process.

On August 17, 1862 four Dakota men were returning from hunting when they allegedly killed a farmer and his family. Though not the single cause, this event served as the catalyst that started the US Dakota War. Lasting over 5 weeks, the war ended with Dakota woman, children and elders being interned in concentration camps at Fort Snelling. A trial found over 300 Dakota warriors guilty and sentenced them to death. President Lincoln granted clemency to the majority of the sentenced; however 38 Dakota men were hanged in what remains the largest mass execution in United States history.

This case study aims to present a broad range of resources to allow students to explore the historical forces that led to the US Dakota War, the events of the war, the subsequent trials and hangings, and the larger cultural interaction between the Dakota and European settlers from then to now.

RESOURCES

Personal Stories

- [Dakota Prisoner of War Letters \(Minnesota Historical Society\)](#)
- [Oral History \(Minnesota Historical Society\)](#)

Articles

- [A man lost in history \(Star Tribune\)](#)
- [December 26, 1862: 38 Dakota men executed in Mankato \(Star Tribune\)](#)
- [US-Dakota War of 1862 \(University of Minnesota Holocaust and Genocide Studies\)](#)

Images

- [Map of the U.S.-Dakota War \(Minnesota Historical Society\)](#)
- [Scene in Prison \(Minnesota Historical Society\)](#)
- [LaBathe Cabin \(Minnesota Historical Society\)](#)
- [Execution of the Thirty-Eight Sioux Indians at Mankato \(Minnesota Historical Society\)](#)
- [Execution 2 \(Minnesota Historical Society\)](#)
- [Set 1: Trials and Executions \(University of Missouri-Kansas City\)](#)
- [Images \(University of Missouri-Kansas City\)](#)

Audio/Video/Podcasts

- [The Dakota War through a Minnesotan's Eyes \(MPR News\)](#)
- [Little War on the Prairie \(This American Life: 479\)](#)
- [Historic Fort Snelling Timeline \(Minnesota Historical Society\)](#)

Websites

- [Bdote Memory Map](#)
- [History of the Sioux War and Massacre \(University of Missouri-Kansas City\)](#)
- [U.S.-Dakota War Of 1862 \(Minnesota Historical Society\)](#)