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Kurt D. Bergemann. *Brackett's Battalion: Minnesota Cavalry in the Civil War and Dakota War.* St. Paul: Borealis Books, 2004. ix + 196 pp. $15.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-87351-477-4.

Reviewed by Angela Wilson (Department of History, Arizona State University)
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Waging Just and Unjust Wars: Minnesota's Men in the Civil War Era

The story of Minnesota during America's Civil War has remained an obscure one, overshadowed by the annals of places and people closer to the war's front. As a fledgling state, Minnesota could not contribute as many forces as more established Union states, and those who did enlist their military services divided their efforts between fighting their Confederate enemies to the south, and attacking their enemies back home. In 1862 the United States-Dakota War erupted in southern Minnesota, and even after this brief war was quelled, further military attempts were made to eradicate the "Sioux" threat to white interests once and for all, leading to military expeditions beyond the borders of the state and launching a series of "Sioux" wars on the northern plains that exceeded the longevity of the Civil War.

In *Brackett's Battalion: Minnesota Cavalry in the Civil War and Dakota War*, Kurt Bergemann sheds light on the overlooked and little-written about experiences of the group of Minnesota men who were part of Brackett's Battalion, shaping his narrative largely through the use of the soldiers' journals and letters. This group of volunteer cavalrymen was originally mustered in 1861 to serve in the Union Army but continued serving the U.S. military as part of the Northwestern Indian Expedition of 1864 to subdue "Indians" demonstrating resistance to America's expansionist efforts. Written by the great-great grandson of one of the men belonging to Brackett's Battalion, Bergemann chronicles their experiences as they were transformed from untrained novices at the time of enlistment, to experienced and battle-worn soldiers, proudly and faithfully fulfilling a lengthy term of service. By the end of the Civil War era, only eight volunteer regiments on the Union side served longer than Brackett's Battalion and among the Minnesota volunteer units they hold the title for serving the longest.

Because this work illuminates the perspectives of the soldiers of Brackett's Battalion, using their own words whenever possible, it is a valuable contribution to literature on both the Civil War and the wars waged against America's Indigenous inhabitants. The scarcity of literature on the topic is demonstrated by the fact that only one aged, previously published work, produced by the Minnesota Board of Commissioners, directly addresses Minnesota's involvement in these wars, namely *Minnesota in the Civil and Indian Wars* (1890). Though *Brackett's Battalion* provides a focused examination of one military battalion, Bergemann convincingly argues "because its service is so intertwined with other Minnesota units and Minnesota's mid-nineteenth century history, its story provides a broader account of Minnesota's presence in the war" (p. xi). *Brackett's Battalion* is also well-researched, though it is sometimes difficult to distinguish from what sources Bergemann is gaining his information as he typically provides citations only for the direct quotes.

The greatest weakness of this work rests in its lack of analysis about what participation in these two very different wars meant for the men of Brackett's Battalion. While troop movements, diet, weather conditions, and weaponry were covered extensively, there is little reflection about more significant aspects of the men's participation in the wars. Bergemann had ample opportunity, for example, to contemplate the difference in war aims. Though the men of Brackett's Battalion originally enlisted for myriad reasons, including the abolition of slavery, the desire to earn a better income, and the possibility of returning a war hero, Bergemann states their primary motivation was the preservation of the union of the United States. Those who enlisted to fight in the Indian Expedition in 1864, however, did so primarily as a way of inflicting revenge on the Dakota who had killed their friends and family during the U.S.-Dakota War of 1862 (p. xvii). While on the one hand the soldiers were engaged, at least in part, in helping to free black Americans from bondage, on the other they were helping to conduct a war of oppression and revenge against Minnesota's In-

digenous People, the Dakota. This blatant irony offers a compelling opportunity to engage in a comparative discussion of race and oppression, as well as the role Minnesota soldiers played in simultaneously waging what might be called just and unjust wars. However, rather than exploiting these provocative points of discussion, Bergemann repeatedly sweeps past the opportunities for potential analyses.

For example, Bergemann blandly reports, "Minnesotans believed that complete elimination of the Sioux was the only way to make the region safe and would finally bring the Sioux war to an end" (p. 90). However, rather than critically reflect on what it means to call for the extermination of a nation of people, usually discussed today as an act of genocide, Bergemann brushes over the point as if he is oblivious to the statement's meaning. Because this war aim differs so radically from the aims of war against the Confederacy, in which complete eradication of the enemy population (men, women and children) was never an articulated goal, this seemingly deserves comment from Bergemann.

His narrative rests heavily on the journal entries of Eugene Marshall, a member of Brackett's Battalion during both the campaigns in the South and against the Dakota/Lakota/Nakota. His observations provide a wealth of insight into the minds of the soldiers, and while Bergemann reports his comments, he rarely analyzes them. In one entry Marshall wrote about the people in Kentucky, who skirted the border between the North and the South: "One thing appears through the whole, that families have been divided, that brothers and neighbors have been arrayed against each other, that no one knew whom it would be safe to trust, in fact that a perfect reign of terror had been inaugurated throughout the country and that they, as a general thing, hail the Union Army as deliverers rather than invaders and destroyers" (p. 28).

This excerpt provides a perfect opportunity to contrast this with attitudes toward the Dakota, especially as we learn in Bergemann's narrative that the expeditions intended to punish the Dakota who fought against the United States in 1862 were actually carried out against Lakota and Nakota people who had no involvement in the war in Minnesota (pp. 96-97, 110, 124). This mattered little to the leaders of the expeditions because they believed the Dakota, who fled to Dakota Territory, would join with other Indigenous Peoples in an "attempt to threaten further white expansion" (p. 95). Meanwhile, the federal government was keen to encourage western settlement, especially near the Idaho goldfields so they could help finance the war in the South (p. 132). With these goals in mind, it was necessary to completely subdue, if not exterminate, the threatening populations who might resist illegal invasion of their lands. Certainly in this context, Brackett's Battalion is positioned as the group of "invaders and destroyers."

To offer another example, in reference to the blacks he encountered in the South, Marshall entered in his journal, "the race held in slavery here are not all black, they are not all stupid, they know and feel the degradation of their position, and they know that sooner or later this war must inure to their benefit, and they run away from their owners in droves" (p. 48). On the other hand, Marshall refers to the "Sioux" as "savages," demonstrating a dehumanization of the indigenous population (p. 114). Not only do the Dakota/Lakota/Nakota reap no benefit from the wars waged against them, they are subject to particularly brutal acts of warfare with long-term, devastating consequences. On one occasion Bergemann describes how General Alfred Sully destroyed two hundred tons of Lakota winter supplies (including all their dried food) because he knew this would inflict more death on the entire population than would engaging in direct battle with Lakota warriors (p. 117). In another expedition example, Captain James Fisk's train left behind a box of hardtack soaked in poison for the hungry Lakota to consume, killing an estimated twenty-five warriors through a form of chemical warfare (pp. 137, 139, 142).

The sources included in Bergemann's text clearly provide an abundance of fertile material necessary to make a rich and compelling argument about race and oppression in the Civil and Indian Wars, but unfortunately Bergemann does not seize that opportunity. This lack of a synthesized engagement with broader topics may be due, in part, to Bergemann's chronological organization of the book. Perhaps if this work were organized thematically the comparisons between the Civil War and Dakota War would have been better served. As it stands, Bergemann leaves plenty of room for another scholar to take up this important discussion.

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