

Columns of Vengeance: Soldiers, Sioux, and the Punitive Expeditions, 1863–1864

Paul N. Beck

(Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2013. 314 p.

Cloth, \$34.95.)

The recent sesquicentennial of the start of the Civil War and the U.S.–Dakota War has resulted in new scholarship in both realms. Paul N. Beck’s *Columns of Vengeance* effectively illustrates how the later phase of the U.S.–Dakota War in Dakota Territory was “part of a larger conflict, the Civil War,” and that the “strategy and tactics of the campaign were like those of the war back East.” The U.S. Army embarked on the punitive expeditions of 1863 and 1864 in order to punish the Dakota for their 1862 attempt to uphold their tribal sovereignty and stave off starvation and Euro-American encroachment onto their ever-shrinking land base in Minnesota. Historians have largely ignored these expeditions but, as Beck indicates, they were events of major import on the northern Great Plains, for the war effort, and, in particular, for the various tribes of the Dakota nation. Through an extensive examination of first-hand accounts, *Columns of Vengeance* provides a useful and fascinating overview of these events.

In the late summer and fall of 1862, the Dakota of Minnesota engaged in one of the nineteenth century’s most bloody and devastating wars between the United States and Indian tribes. By the time of the mass execution of 38 Dakota prisoners on December 26, most Minnesota Dakota had fled north and west to Dakota Territory, Montana, and Canada. Over the next two summers, U.S. volunteer forces under the overall command of Gen. John Pope, who had recently been relieved of the command of the Army of Virginia, campaigned into Dakota Territory, intending to punish the Dakota for their attack on white settlers. The operations, led in two-prong attacks by Minnesota’s ex-governor Henry H. Sibley and Gen. Alfred Sully, resulted in six major battles in present-day North Dakota, some of which, from the Dakota perspective, were massacres. However, U.S. forces met few of the Minnesota Dakota in battle, instead attacking Iháŋktuŋwaŋna (Yanktonai) and Lakota encampments frequently comprised of women, children, and elders, leading to nearly a decade-and-a-half of warfare with these western members of the Dakota nation.

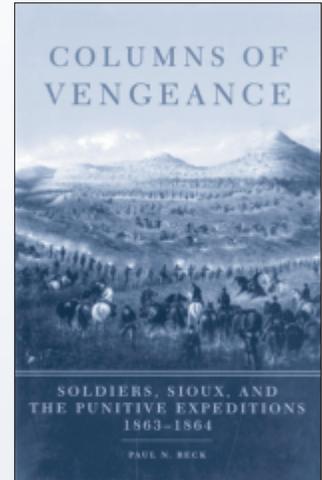
Beck combed the archives of six states in order to amass the most complete set of personal accounts of the punitive expeditions assembled to date. “What also sets this study apart,” he argues, is his reliance on “the points of view of the common soldier and those Sioux caught up in the conflict.” This bottom-up view provides a fresh perspective on the

expeditions, illustrating the everyday lives of low-ranking soldiers and demonstrating that many held racially motivated aspirations of extermination. *Columns of Vengeance* offers several significant reevaluations of events, most notably the fight in the Badlands, and explains that the primary purpose of the 1864 expedition was to protect routes to the gold fields of Montana and Idaho.

While Beck presents one of the best syntheses to date of the punitive expeditions from the Army’s viewpoint, the book’s promise to deliver a Dakota perspective falls flat. Indeed, not only is there a scarcity of Dakota accounts and a neglect of proper Dakota nomenclature, but the volume also suffers from a lack of engagement with works in Dakota culture or more general scholarship in American Indian studies. Dominated by white historical actors, the book portrays the Dakota as background characters with little ability to shape history. Another problem is its preoccupation with connecting this campaign with the Civil War. Although his argument that the punitive expeditions were a facet of the Civil War rather than a discrete event is convincing, Beck missed an opportunity to elucidate why this connection is important.

Despite the missing Dakota perspective, *Columns of Vengeance* reveals the severe impact that the punitive expeditions had on the Dakota nation. It exhibits broad, sound research and reasoning in terms of the American side of the conflict. Beck makes clear that the U.S.–Dakota War is not only an essential part of Minnesota history but of northern Great Plains history and deserves further study and a more significant place in the historical narrative of the region. His captivating account is a strong contribution to the literature on the Indian Wars and the social history of the U.S. Army that both scholars and historical enthusiasts will appreciate.

Reviewed by Jameson R. Sweet (Lakota/Dakota), a PhD candidate in history at the University of Minnesota, where he also studies the Dakota language. He is a managing editor of Native American and Indigenous Studies and is currently writing his dissertation on Dakota history.



Minnesota's Miracle: Learning from the Government that Worked

Tom Berg

(*Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012.*
319 p. Paper, \$22.95.)

Minnesota's Miracle is a civics lesson drawn from one of the most dramatic periods in modern Minnesota history, if the word modern can be used to define things that occurred when disco was king. From the Minnesota Miracle's tax-and-school funding reforms of 1971, followed by a liberal Democratic-Farmer-Labor legislative takeover in 1973 that produced a raft of what we would now call "big-government" programs to the Minnesota Massacre's Independent Republican party rebound in 1978, this icy northern state was politically red hot.

As explained by the author, Tom Berg, who served as a DFL House member in the 1970s, and a group of book collaborators who were also part of the drama, many of these changes still define Minnesota and are hotly contested to this day. Berg tells the tale from the victors' side—that of the Democrats who were mostly running the show—but he also hearkens to a time when moderate Republican legislators co-authored tax hikes and gun-control bills. Yes, we're talking ancient history here.

In 1971 the legislature was controlled by Republicans (then known as Conservatives), as it had been for decades. A dynamic new Liberal (DFL) governor, Wendell Anderson, worked with the Republicans to craft the basic tenets of the Miracle—a fairer school-tax funding system that was not dependent on each district's property-tax wealth; measures that funneled money to "property poor" communities for basic services; and hefty increases in statewide income and sales taxes to help pay for these reforms.

There was also bipartisan support in 1971 for the landmark Public Employee Relations Act, which allowed public-employee unions and bargaining, thereby changing the state's political landscape by inserting a powerful new player, these unions, into the mix. And once the DFL gained control of the legislature in 1973, the floodgates were open: Environmental controls, consumer-protection laws, the state's first and only gun-control law, same-day voter registration, consumer affairs reforms, open-meetings and public-data laws, campaign-finance reforms, a landmark indoor clean air (anti-smoking), and law and transportation and transit projects bloomed under the hands of legislators who saw government as a good thing—a solution, not a problem.

Berg is expert in describing the way relations between governments changed during this period—between the

feds and the state and also between the state and local governments. The era cemented into law (and into the DFL Party's DNA) the belief that state-collected taxes should help "buy down" local property taxes. Gov. Mark Dayton's 2013 budget, enacted by a DFL-controlled legislature, reflects this enduring philosophy.

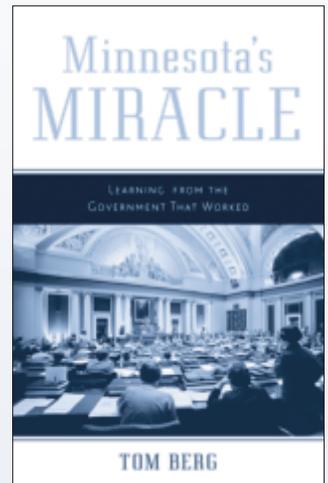
The rise of DFL U.S. Sen. Walter Mondale to the vice presidency in 1976 created what Berg describes as a political chain reaction. In short order, Anderson resigned as governor and had his successor, former Lt. Gov. Rudy Perpich, appoint him to Mondale's Senate seat. Within two years, both Anderson and Perpich were ousted by the voters, and the DFL lost both U.S. Senate seats. An IR governor, two IR senators, and a deadlocked Minnesota House (split 67 to 67) suggested the DFL party was over.

But not quite. While Ronald Reagan led a national conservative resurgence when he won the presidency two years later, Perpich and the DFL returned in 1982 to win the governorship and legislative control for much of Reagan era. The legacy of the Miracle years remains largely untouched.

This book, which may primarily be of interest to those with avid rooting or academic interest in the workings of state politics (like yours truly), suggests that the loss of the ability to compromise is perhaps our government's greatest flaw. It hearkens to a time when bipartisan bills really were just that—a mixture of support and opposition on both sides.

Whatever we think of the foundation laid for state government during the period of Minnesota's Miracle, Berg wisely reminds us that coming to St. Paul or Washington with minds made up and promises to keep has become government's greatest burden.

Reviewed by Jim Ragsdale, a politics and government reporter at the Minnesota State Capitol for the Star Tribune (Minneapolis). He has covered state politics and government off and on since late 1981, including the tenures of six governors as well as the death of U.S. Sen. Paul Wellstone, the day-to-day circus of Gov. Jesse Ventura's governorship, and the Coleman—Franken U.S. Senate recount.





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