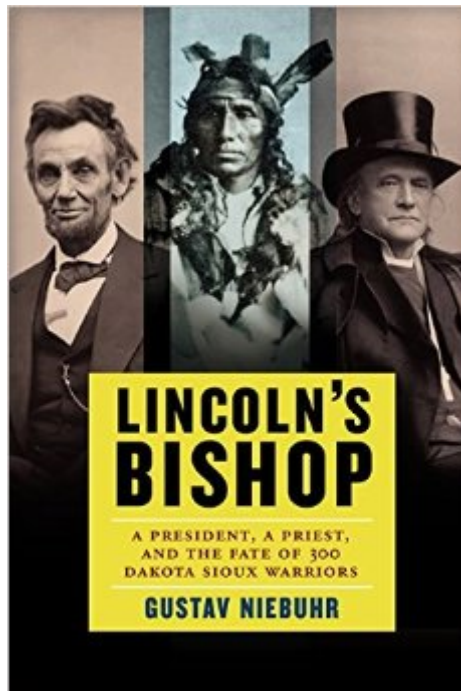


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# Lincoln's Bishop: A President, A Priest, And The Fate Of 300 Dakota Sioux Warriors



## Synopsis

In the tradition of Doris Kearns Goodwin's *Team of Rivals* comes Gustav Niebuhr's compelling history of Abraham Lincoln's decision in 1862 to spare the lives of 265 condemned Sioux men, and the Episcopal bishop who was his moral compass, helping guide the president's conscience. More than a century ago, during the formative years of the American nation, Protestant churches carried powerful moral authority, giving voice to values such as mercy and compassion, while boldly standing against injustice and immorality. Gustav Niebuhr travels back to this defining period, to explore Abraham Lincoln's decision to spare the lives of 265 Sioux men sentenced to die by a military tribunal in Minnesota for warfare against white settlers—while allowing the hanging of 38 others, the largest single execution on American soil. Popular opinion favored death or expulsion. Only one state leader championed the cause of the Native Americans, Episcopal bishop, Henry Benjamin Whipple. Though he'd never met an Indian until he was 37 years old, Whipple befriended them before the massacre and understood their plight at the hands of corrupt government officials and businessmen. After their trial, he pleaded with Lincoln to extend mercy and implement true justice. Bringing to life this little known event and this extraordinary man, Niebuhr pays tribute to the once amazing moral force of mainline Protestant churches and the practitioners who guarded America's conscience. *Lincoln's Bishop* is illustrated with 16 pages of black-and-white photos.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

In 1862, war broke out between the Dakota Sioux Indians and the white settlers in Minnesota,

where I currently live. Niebuhr's new book digs below the surface to tell the story, from a 19th-century Christian bishop's perspective. Niebuhr writes like a journalist, and he spent nearly the first half of the book setting the stage and introducing the major players (President Lincoln, Chief Little Crow, and Bishop Whipple). There were times I struggled to maintain interest, even in light of the mistreatment of Indians. But then hostilities escalated to warfare between the Sioux and the white settlers, and the story grabbed me by the guts. Indian tactics were gruesome, and half the state of Minnesota fled in terror. Tales of horrific massacre grew like gossip. Niebuhr presents both sides of the story, which is far from clear and hardly guiltless on either side. When the dust settled, 303 Indian warriors stood ready to be hanged, and public opinion was ready to lynch any others who remained. Enter Bishop Whipple, an Episcopal minister who took the side of the Indians. But what could Whipple accomplish against strong public opinion? How could he capture the ear of a distant President (Lincoln) whose attention was more strongly focused on civil war? What would be the fate of the 303 Indians, and hundreds of others who coexisted peacefully or even more astounding—risked their lives to save white men, women and children during the war? This is a story of out-of-control greed, human limits when backed against a wall, and the ugliness that results plus one man's determination to apply Christian principles where humanity could only fail. Highly recommended. HarperOne, © 2014, 210 pages ISBN: 978-0-06-209768-2

New and Noteworthy--Lincoln, An Episcopal Priest, Bureaucratic Corruption And 300 Sentenced To Be Hanged  
Lincoln's Bishop: A President, A Priest, And the Fate of 300 Dakota Sioux Warriors, Gustav Niebuhr, Harper One/Harper Collins Publishing, 210 pp., four b/w images, bibliographic notes, bibliography, index, \$26.99. The Dakota War of 1862 began on August 17 in southwest Minnesota and ended with the mass execution of 38 Dakota tribe warriors on December 26, 1862. Throughout the late 1850s, treaty violations, unfair annuity payments and bureaucratic corruption by Federal government agents caused destitution and starvation among the Dakota tribes. In early December, my military court 303 Sioux prisoners were convicted of murder and rape sentenced to death. Some trials were conducted without defense attorneys; other trials lasted less than five minutes. Abraham Lincoln reviewed the court proceedings and commuted the death sentences of 264 prisoners and allowed the execution of 38. Lincoln received the counsel of Henry Benjamin Whipple, a native of New York, a missionary priest to Chicago, an elected first Episcopal bishop of Minnesota, did not meet a Native American until he was 37 years old. Whipple met and respected the Dakota Sioux, watched and learned first had the corruption of the Federal Office of Indian

Affairs. By letters and a visit to Washington D.C., he informed the President that the agency was corrupt, the agents were political hacks,, the vendors were greedy providers of illegal alcohol and abusive of Native American women. At stake for Whipple was not only an injustice but an offense to religious principles that demanded aggressive resistance. By 1860 he began a letter writing campaign that described the problems and proposed remedies. The 15th President, James Buchanan did not respond; the 16th President did. After a face-to-face interview of Whipple, Lincoln mentioned to a friend that Whipple's testimony had 'shaken him down to his boots.' Whipple organized other bishops, who by virtue of their habits, were reluctant to speak out on the issues of public issues, even those issues of slavery, secession or politics. In Lincoln's Bishop, Gustav Niebuhr carefully offers evidence of Whipple's investigation and engagement with politicians regarding the Dakota Sioux. Niebuhr is a professor of newspaper and online journalism, the founding director of the Carnegie Religion and Media Program, and winner of awards for the reporting of religion. Lincoln's Bishop offers a clear and concise narrative supported by primary sources. It moves briskly does not stray away from the central features of the story. Currently 'telling truth to power' is often a slogan to justify personal self absorption, narcissism and self promotion. Niebuhr's work offers the story of one man's 'telling truth to power' as selfless and motivated by the gospel.

I am always amazed at how many stories there are about Abraham Lincoln that have yet to be told. Gustav Niebuhr provides the reader with a fascinating but tragic tale of the Dakota War of 1862 in Lincoln's Bishop: A President, A Priest, and the Fate of 300 Dakota Sioux Warriors. As with most histories of the American Indian, Lincoln's Bishop does not have a happy ending, although things could have been worse. Bishop Henry B. Whipple was an Episcopal priest who became the first bishop of Minnesota. A new state, Minnesota needed a bishop and Whipple actually took a decrease in pay to minister to the residents and the Indian population. Unlike many Americans at that time, Whipple believed that Indians had souls and he spent time traveling through Indian territory, converting, preaching, and worshipping with these natives. It also did not take him long to realize that the Office of Indian Affairs was brutally, dangerously corrupt and needed a thorough reform in the name of peace and the nation standing with God. He also believed that bad treaties, ignorant agents, and greedy and self-serving traders had turned the Dakota into a tribe beset by poverty. Niebuhr details the Dakota War of 1862 which was caused by the very things that Whipple warned about. Unlike President James Buchanan, Abraham Lincoln returns Whipple's letters and even meets with him in the White House. What the

bishop managed to do was set the war [Dakota War of 1862] within the context of federal government corruption and ineptitude. He created for Lincoln a lens through which to view the war. Unfortunately, Lincoln didn't live long enough to live up to his promise to Whipple to address America's other racial sin after first dealing with slavery and secession. As an Episcopalian, I was also fascinated by some of the Civil War history of the Episcopal Church. I did not know that the national church was split in two, north and south, just like our country. I also never knew that Lincoln sent Bishop Charles McIlvaine of Ohio to Great Britain to convince his fellow Anglicans against recognizing the Confederacy as a sovereign nation. You will have to read Lincoln's Bishop to discover what happened to those 300 Sioux warriors. But I think it's good that Bishop Henry Whipple is finally getting his due. It's about time someone recognizes his accomplishments and brings them to light.

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