

# Minnesota's origins

Birthplace of the American Indian Movement, the region now known as Minnesota has the distinction of being home to the United States' largest urban indigenous population as well as the United States' largest Somali and Hmong populations. As such, Minnesota's population differs from that of the rest of the United States, in which indigenous groups are typically rural and Latin@s are typically the largest immigrant group. Various indigenous peoples had settled in this region as long ago as 6000 BCE. Minnesota's largest two indigenous populations are described below.

By the early and mid-nineteenth century, the Anishinaabeg and Dakota were the largest groups living in Minnesota. Both had well-established hunting and gathering societies when the French arrived for the fur trade.



Moccasins, Artist Unknown, Anishinaabeg (Ojibwe), c. 1890-1910, Minneapolis Institute of Arts; The Frances M. Norbeck Fund; <http://www.artscnected.org/resource/9010/10/moccasins>

**Anishinaabeg**, which means “original people,” are one of the three largest and most widely distributed indigenous groups in North America. They are thought to have originally lived along the Hudson Bay, near the Ottawa and Potawatomi tribes. Around 1400, when the North American climate became colder, the Anishinaabeg (called Chippewa and

Ojibwe by the British and French, respectively) moved to the east side of Lake Huron, occupying territory extending north into Canada and west into the mountains of Montana.

During the fur trade and wars of the mid-seventeenth century, bands of Anishinaabeg migrated west. They settled in Minnesota, where they confronted Dakota groups (described below) in drawing from the area's natural abundance. The Dakota eventually moved south and west while the Anishinaabeg permanently settled along the regions' numerous waterways. Today, 200,000 Anishinaabeg live throughout their traditional territories, primarily around the Great Lakes region and in the Lake Superior area. They are known for their canoes and wild rice.

- ◆ The United States made 44 separate treaties with the Anishinaabeg—the first in 1785 and the last in 1867. Most of the treaties concerned land cessions to the United States in Michigan, Wisconsin, Minnesota, and North Dakota. Minnesota Treaties generally set aside tracts of land for the Anishinaabeg in exchange for the relinquishment of title to the United States for the remainder of Anishinaabeg territory. Treaties and land

cessions, along with a few Executive Orders, formed the basis of the establishment of “Indian reservations” for Anishinaabeg in Minnesota.

- ◆ The various bands of Anishinaabeg residing within the Bois Forte, Fond du Lac, Grand Portage, Leech Lake, Mille Lacs, and White Earth reservations united to form the Minnesota Chippewa Tribe in June 18, 1934. Status as a Tribal Government provides the Minnesota Chippewa Tribe with broad powers of self-governance granted by the Indian Reorganization Act and the right to be free from State interference within the six member-reservations as well as other immunities afforded any other federal entity. Members of the Minnesota Chippewa Tribe retain membership in their reservation and have rights of state (Minnesotan) and national (U.S.) citizenship identical to those of all other citizens. The Tribe and tribal membership reflect the historical sovereign status of Indian Tribes in the United States.
- ◆ Today, the Anishinaabeg are very concerned with the management of natural resources and defending wild rice growth and processing from commercial exploitation.



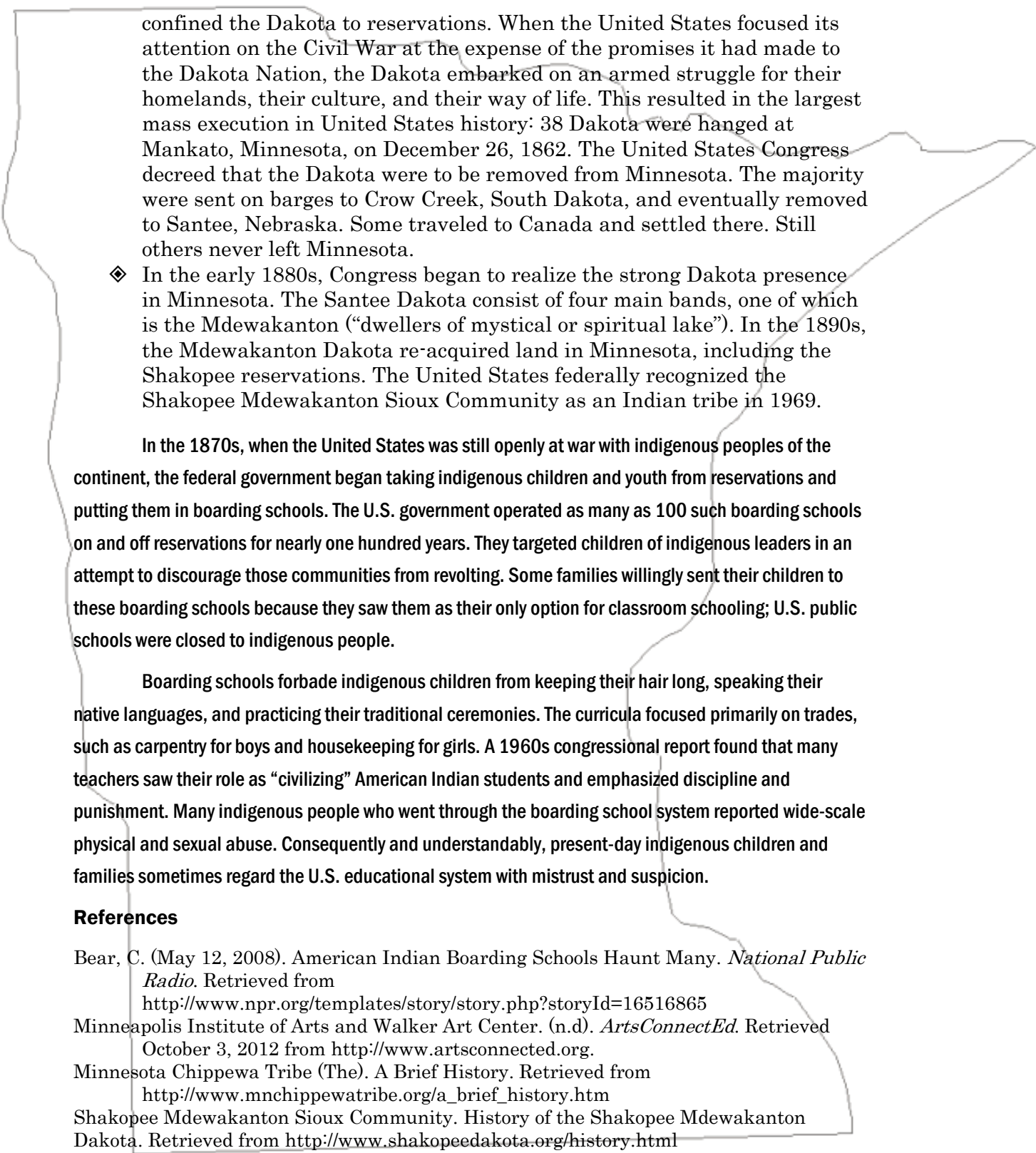
Moccasins, Mrs. Drags Wolf, before 1940, Minneapolis Institute of Arts; The Christina N. and Swan J. Turnblad Memorial Fund; <http://www.artsconnected.org/resource/3067/2/moccasins>

**Dakota** translates into English as “friends” or “allies”. The Dakota Nation, called the Sioux by the Europeans, includes the native peoples who once lived in the northern forests and along the upper Mississippi River in northern Minnesota. Over time, the Dakota Nation divided into three main groups speaking different dialects of the same language. The Dakota are the largest and considered

the mother group. The Nakota are second largest, followed by the Lakota.

The Dakota, also called the Santee Sioux because they camped for long periods in a place where they collected stone for making knives, lived farthest east—between forks of the Mississippi and Missouri Rivers. Prolonged conflict with the Anishinaabeg to their east drove the Dakota into what is now southern and western Minnesota. Leaders of the Eastern Dakota established villages along the banks of the lower Minnesota River, where they fished from the river, gathered rice from area lakes, hunted game, and engaged in some farming on the prairies and in the river valley woodlands.

- ◆ In 1805, U.S. soldiers arrived at the area called Mendota. Over the next 50 years of white settlement and expansion westward, a series of treaties



confined the Dakota to reservations. When the United States focused its attention on the Civil War at the expense of the promises it had made to the Dakota Nation, the Dakota embarked on an armed struggle for their homelands, their culture, and their way of life. This resulted in the largest mass execution in United States history: 38 Dakota were hanged at Mankato, Minnesota, on December 26, 1862. The United States Congress decreed that the Dakota were to be removed from Minnesota. The majority were sent on barges to Crow Creek, South Dakota, and eventually removed to Santee, Nebraska. Some traveled to Canada and settled there. Still others never left Minnesota.

- ◆ In the early 1880s, Congress began to realize the strong Dakota presence in Minnesota. The Santee Dakota consist of four main bands, one of which is the Mdewakanton (“dwellers of mystical or spiritual lake”). In the 1890s, the Mdewakanton Dakota re-acquired land in Minnesota, including the Shakopee reservations. The United States federally recognized the Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux Community as an Indian tribe in 1969.

In the 1870s, when the United States was still openly at war with indigenous peoples of the continent, the federal government began taking indigenous children and youth from reservations and putting them in boarding schools. The U.S. government operated as many as 100 such boarding schools on and off reservations for nearly one hundred years. They targeted children of indigenous leaders in an attempt to discourage those communities from revolting. Some families willingly sent their children to these boarding schools because they saw them as their only option for classroom schooling; U.S. public schools were closed to indigenous people.

Boarding schools forbade indigenous children from keeping their hair long, speaking their native languages, and practicing their traditional ceremonies. The curricula focused primarily on trades, such as carpentry for boys and housekeeping for girls. A 1960s congressional report found that many teachers saw their role as “civilizing” American Indian students and emphasized discipline and punishment. Many indigenous people who went through the boarding school system reported wide-scale physical and sexual abuse. Consequently and understandably, present-day indigenous children and families sometimes regard the U.S. educational system with mistrust and suspicion.

## References

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