

December 30, 2013

Mr. James Pagliarini
President and CEO
Twin Cities Public Television
172 East Fourth Street
St. Paul, MN 55101

Dear Mr. Pagliarini,

As an historian and author who spent about six hours being filmed for your recent documentary, *The Past is Alive Within Us: The U.S.-Dakota Conflict*, I write to complain about the program's coverage of that conflict. The Dakota War is an endlessly fascinating subject precisely because neither side had a monopoly on right or wrong in 1862. By sanitizing, misstating, or omitting most evidence of Dakota wrongdoing during the war, and by amplifying evidence of white perfidy, Twin Cities Public Television (TPT) presented a story that is fundamentally misleading and racially biased.

As one example of many, your program described in lurid detail the killing of one Dakota child by an outraged white person at Henderson, an act that occurred in early November, 1862. But you withheld from viewers the long-documented fact that more than 100 white children had been slain intentionally by Dakota soldiers before that single Dakota child died. We have the names of most of those victims, and there are many accounts documenting the brutal ways in which they were slaughtered by Dakota warriors who carried out the race-based orders of the Soldier's Lodge issued on August 18 to "kill all the whites." Nothing inflamed Minnesotans more than the murders of those children, yet viewers of your film will have no idea that more American children were intentionally killed by Dakota warriors in 1862 than have been slain in any other conflict or terrorist attack in U.S. history.

Another heart-wrenching story in your film referred to the killing of one Dakota woman by a white soldier. Viewers of your documentary were not told, however, that at least 40 white women had been murdered before that one Dakota woman died, let alone that many other white women were taken as human-shield captives. Your viewers were not left to wonder (as historians still do) if the unidentified white soldier who killed the Dakota women was seeking revenge for his murdered wife or daughter, for your racially-slanted coverage omitted all stories of the murders of white female victims.

I suspect that some of the non-Dakota historians who agreed to be filmed for your program regret their participation as much as I do. As a former Minnesota trial lawyer who has studied and written extensively about the post-war trials, I was shocked that TPT cherry-picked my strong criticisms of the prosecution of ordinary Dakota soldiers to include in the program, but omitted everything I said during my interview or have written about the relative fairness of the trials given Dakotas who were charged with and convicted of murdering or raping defenseless white victims. Instead, you chose to quote a non-lawyer Dakota man to the effect that “many” of the Dakota men hanged were “innocent,” and you left viewers in the dark about why 38 men were executed at Mankato on the orders of President Lincoln. Your comedy-troupe filming at the Lincoln monument tastelessly and unjustly slurred the memory of America’s greatest president, while your coverage omitted the published standards Lincoln announced for his post-war review of the trial records. Lincoln proclaimed that he was ordering the hanging only of those men implicated in murder or rape. Since I have personal knowledge of what was disclosed to and available to TPT staff on this subject, it would appear in this instance that your staff intentionally distorted Lincoln’s long-known role in connection with the Dakota War.

I could provide many more examples of the one-sided and racially biased coverage in your film, and I’m confident that other non-Dakota historians you interviewed would offer similar objections were you to contact them. Your program purports to promote the worthy goal of reconciliation between white Minnesotans and the Dakota people. But true reconciliation, as Nelson Mandela taught the world, requires full and specific confessional disclosures by both sides to heal a racial schism. By focusing almost exclusively on the misdeeds of one side while minimizing or eliding those of the other side, your program makes true reconciliation less likely and thereby undermines the very purpose it claims to advance.

Yours truly,

Walt Bachman

Cc: Diane Steinbach, Executive Producer, TPT and Terry O’Reilly, Chief Content Officer, TPT