Press Kit:

Beneath the Same Stars:
A Novel of the 1862 U.S.-Dakota War

Phyllis Cole-Dai
phylliscoledai.com

This table of contents is hyperlinked for ease of navigation:

2. Book information.
3. Target audience.
5. Retail information.
7. Advance praise for Beneath the Same Stars.
8. Excerpts from the Novel.
9. Sample interview Q & A.
10. Editor bio.
11. Author contact information.
12. Images.
13. Review copies.


On August 18, 1862, Sioux Indians desperate for food and freedom rise up to attack traders, settlers and government workers in the vicinity of their reservation in southwestern Minnesota. Sarah Wakefield, the wife of a government physician, is taken captive with her two young children. Their fate falls into the hands of Ćaske, an Indian with whom she has slim acquaintance. As war rages, little does she know how entwined their lives will become.

*Beneath the Same Stars* is the gripping story of two people from different cultures who, caught between worlds, are willing to do almost anything to defend those they care about, including each other. But the drama is bigger than themselves. Tragic forces have been set in motion….

This novel is inspired by actual events surrounding the U.S.-Dakota War.
2. **Book information.**


3. **Target audience.**

*Beneath the Same Stars* is a great read for fiction lovers, especially historical fiction. It holds particular appeal for readers interested in the Upper Midwest, American Indian history, and/or contemporary tensions between the government and native peoples in the United States.

4. **Book one-sheet (flyer).**

Click [here](#) to view or download.

5. **Retail information.**

*Beneath the Same Stars* is primarily available through [Amazon](#).

6. **Book trailer.**

[Click here](#) to view (about 3:30 minutes). You are free to use the trailer in publicity.

7. **Advance praise for *Beneath the Same Stars*.**

I come from a family descended from Gabriel Renville (Ti Wakaŋ, Sacred Lodge), a Sisituŋwaŋ headman who helped to resolve the U.S.-Dakota War of 1862. But among my people that conflict never ended. It still divides us today. We were once a strong, spiritual people. We need reminders of who we really are and where we come from. *Beneath the Same Stars* helps us reexamine our own history and identity. Will that create some positive change among us? I hope so, for the sake of our children, most of all.

—Darlene Renville Pipeboy

Independent Dakota scholar and elder

This is a sensitive portrait of a complicated woman caught in the politically and culturally fraught conflict that led to the U.S.-Dakota War. It both reflects the prejudices and divisiveness of that time and offers bridges to help heal the rifts between and within the communities that continue to be affected by the events of 1862 and their aftermath. The novel turns historical figures into living, breathing embodiments of the conflict, making tangible both the historical events and the contemporary impact of those events on all the affected communities. It raises questions and concerns of substance rather
than trying to resolve them and is a constructive contribution to the dialogue we continue to need.

—Carol Chomsky
Professor, University of Minnesota Law School,
and author of “The United States-Dakota War Trials:
A Study in Military Injustice”

*Beneath the Same Stars* weaves feeling and concern into the tragic landscape of the U.S.-Dakota Conflict. Readers are taken on a journey beyond history-book headlines and into the world of a woman who, despite confusion and weakness, dares to care. The story has echoes for today—it invites us all to acknowledge and appreciate cultural differences despite the ever-present social anxiety directing us not to.

—Jim Green
Former director, Institute for Dakota Studies,
Sisseton Wahpeton Tribal College, and current co-director,
Center for Indigenous Teaching, Sinte Gleska University

This novel, whose title beautifully expresses the ongoing relevance of the so-called “past,” should be widely read and discussed in schools and communities. Through impressive research and powerful storytelling, Cole-Dai contextualizes one of this country’s most tragic histories exceptionally well. *Beneath the Same Stars* is a significant contribution to the literature of cross-cultural understanding.

—Charles L. Woodard
Distinguished Professor Emeritus, South Dakota State University, and author of *Ancestral Voice: Conversations with N. Scott Momaday*

8. **Excerpts from the Novel.**

*(From Part I, Chapter 10)*

At the sight of him peering in her parlor window, at home in Shakopee, [Sarah had] set down her teacup. She tracked him window to window as he circled the house, shadowed by his woman. In the kitchen she hurried to open the back door before he walked right in, as Sioux were wont to do.

“Hello,” she said through the screen. His bangs were cut low over his almond-gray eyes. Short plaits of hair hung at each side of his head.

“Haŋ, Peźihuta Wićaśa Tawiću.” Calling her *Doctor Wife*, as did all Śakpe’s people.

“Ćante waśte nape ćiyuza pi do.” A traditional greeting, something about a *good heart*. She didn’t try to repeat it.
He held up a string of walleyes. “Books see?”

His use of English took her aback. She looked at his big, gleaming fish—half a dozen, at least. He seemed to be proposing a trade, his catch in exchange for a peek at her bookshelves; a generous swap, even if John wasn’t fond of freshwater fish.

She wagged her finger at his gun. “No mazawakaŋ in tipi.”

With obvious reluctance he propped his gun against the house. She opened the door to admit him and showed him a hook above the sink for his fishline.

She escorted him to the large walnut bookcase in the parlor. As he stepped toward his reflection in its glass doors, she studied him from behind. The striped trade blanket folded over his shoulders. The long braid hanging down his back, decorated with ribbons. The blue calico shirt. The typical buckskin leggings and breechcloth. The filthy bare feet.

He flattened his palms against the glass pane, squinting through the door to her little library. “Book house.”

She smiled at his unwitting poetry. “No, not book house. Bookcase.” She could see him watching her mouth in the glass. “Book case.”

“Book … case.”

“Very good! Waśte! You read?” She pointed at him and made the sign of a book.

“Learn. Wasiću wakaŋ Pond.”

“Reverend Pond taught you?”

“Haŋ.” It is so.

He understood English better than he spoke, like she did Dakota. “Books are good,” she said. “Books waśte.”

“Haŋ, waśte. Books wakaŋ?”

His question stole her breath. Wakaŋ was a word she knew well, embedded as it was in so many others. *Holy,* it meant, or *sacred*; perhaps anything powerful that couldn’t be understood. *Wakaŋtanka*—*the Great Mystery,* God of the Sioux. *Wakaŋ iža*—*children.* *Śunjka wakaŋ*—*horse.* *Mazawakaŋ*—*gun.* *Wakaŋđi*—*lightning.* *Wasiću wakaŋ*—*a white minister,* like Samuel Pond. Why, wakaŋ was even at the heart of this Indian’s band of Dakotas, the Mdewakaŋtuŋwaŋ—*People Of The Sacred Lake.*

“Books wakaŋ?” he repeated.

She unlocked the bookcase doors and retrieved the Wakefield Family Bible from the bottom shelf. “This book is wakaŋ.”

“Book. Woyapi.”

“Yes, woyapi. This woyapi is wakaŋ.” She pointed to the words gilded on the ancient leather cover. “Ho-ly Bi-ble.” Tapping each syllable as she read.

“Haŋ,” he said without interest, or perhaps he hadn’t understood. Suddenly he stretched out his arms, as if to embrace the bookcase. “Books wakaŋ!”

Fire spilled down her spine. She was the one who hadn’t understood. The Indian wasn’t asking. He was declaring. *Books are sacred.*

“Haŋ, koda,” she said, calling him *friend.* “Woyapi *are* wakaŋ!”

His name, he told her that day, was Ćaske. “Chahz-KEH,” she said after him, easily enough, and met with his approval. For him, “SAIR-uh” proved difficult, his alphabet having no equivalent for *R.* She applauded his best attempt.

After he left, she looked up his name in her Dakota dictionary. “The name of a first-born child,” it said, “if a son.”
From the Afterword:

Beneath the Same Stars is based on the life of Sarah Wakefield, a white doctor’s wife who was caught up in the U.S.-Dakota War of 1862. That conflict, obscured in national memory by the concurrent Civil War, saw a faction of the Dakota nation (i.e., “the eastern Sioux”) rise up against American traders, settlers and troops in southwestern Minnesota. Though lasting only six weeks, from August 18 to September 23, the war was pivotal in the history of this continent. It resulted, first of all, in more American casualties and refugees than any other Indian war. At least 650 Americans were killed, most of them unarmed men, women and children, and more than a fifth of Minnesota’s 170,000 citizens were displaced.

The Dakota side also suffered. Perhaps 100 warriors fell in battle. Another 303 Dakota men were condemned to death by U.S. military tribunals speedily convened after the war. Forty were eventually hanged, 38 of them on December 26, 1862, at the order of President Abraham Lincoln. It was the largest judicial mass execution in American history. Of the roughly 278 men whose sentences were commuted to prison terms, at least a third would die in confinement. Meanwhile, the remaining Dakotas in Minnesota were rounded up and interned for half a year in a stockade at Fort Snelling. Hundreds in the camp perished from malnutrition, disease and murder. In May, 1863, American authorities expelled the surviving detainees to a reservation in Dakota Territory. Hundreds succumbed during and immediately after their deportation.

The 1862 uprising ignited decades of fighting between the U.S. Army and the Očeti Šakówiŋ (the Seven Council Fires of the Dakota, Nakota and Lakota confederacy, more commonly referred to as “the Sioux”). That period of military engagement effectively ended on December 29, 1890, with the massacre at Wounded Knee. By that point, American subjugation of the West was almost complete, and the eastern Dakotas had been splintered into a diaspora people. Today, Dakota communities are found in five states and two Canadian provinces.

Generations after these nineteenth-century events, their painful repercussions are still with us. Yet a remarkable number of people remain unaware that the U.S.-Dakota War of 1862 ever happened.

9. Sample interview Q & A.

Why did you write this book?

I first heard about the U.S.-Dakota War of 1862 in 2012, when Minnesota commemorated the 150th anniversary of the uprising. I was surprised that in eastern South Dakota, where I’d been living since 2000, few people were aware the war had happened or that its effects were still being felt in the region. My ignorance and curiosity drew me to the subject. I began to read everything I could find. Eventually I stumbled onto Sarah Wakefield’s narrative about her captivity during the conflict. I was stunned by her and Časke’s story. I thought their story needed to be told. It has relevance for us today. It helps us grapple with tough questions. How is this history still alive? How should we
relate to people of different cultural backgrounds from our own? How does competition for land and resources continue to drive and shape what happens in our country?

**What was the biggest challenge you faced, writing this book?**

My biggest challenge was probably my distance from the characters, especially Sarah and Ćaske. Their story takes place more than 150 years ago. Sarah was born in Rhode Island. To understand her, I had to learn about Rhode Island culture and history. Then I had to try to figure out how she ended up in Minnesota as the wife of a doctor. For some of her life story, her book *Six Weeks in the Sioux Teepees* provided guidance. Plus, I was helped by the fact that like Sarah I’m of European descent, was raised in the Christian faith, and am a woman. For these and other reasons, after enough research I could begin to imagine my way into her character.

Ćaske’s character was even harder. Almost all of what I know (or think I know) about him is filtered through a white lens. I gleaned the information from Sarah’s book, the records of Abraham Lincoln’s administration, newspaper reports, that sort of thing. How reliable are those sources? It’s difficult to say. I made efforts to access oral stories about Ćaske, but without much success. So I had to “invent” him to a greater degree than I did Sarah.

As a white woman I felt a lot of trepidation trying to create Ćaske and the other Indian characters. I relied heavily on Dakota people who were gracious enough to teach me about their culture, their language, the war…. But that doesn’t mean I got it right. I’m an outsider to all of it and at a great historical remove from actual events. It was tough. I just tried to do the best I could to interpret the story from Sarah’s limited perspective, even as she herself had to do at the time.

10. **Editor bio.**

Originally from Ohio, **Phyllis Cole-Dai** now makes her home in Brookings, South Dakota, where she resides with her husband and teenage son in a cozy 120-year-old house. *Beneath the Same Stars*, her debut novel, is her ninth book. She has also created four music albums and is in demand as a public speaker. “My profession,” she likes to joke, “is whatever doesn’t pay well.” But don’t let her humor fool you. Her work is driven by a profound desire to help create a more humane world for this and future generations. In 2013 her adopted city awarded her the 14th annual Dorothy and Eugene Butler Human Rights Award.

11. **Author contact information.**

*Email:* phyllis@phylliscoledai.com, *Phone:* 605-592-6293 (Central). *Website:* phylliscoledai.com, *Social Media Platforms:* Facebook Profile and Page, Twitter (@phylliscoledai), Instagram, Pinterest.

12. **Images.**

High-resolution photographs of the cover and the author may be downloaded using these links: Book cover, Phyllis Cole-Dai.
13. **Review copies.**

Digital review copies (PDF, MOBI, EPUB) are available from the author.