AL: This is Aimee LaBree with the Minnesota Historical Society. Interviewee: Clifford Canku. Interviewer: Deborah Locke.

DL: Could you spell your name for me please?

CC: C-L-I-F-F-O-R-D, initial S, like in Sam. And last name is Canku, C-A-N-K-U

DL: Who were your parents?

CC: My parents are Elijah Harold Canku and my mother is Martha Dinah Grey.

DL: And your grandparents, what were their names, both sides?

CC: My grandfather on my mother's [side], his name was Samuel Grey. And he was a mixed-blood, part German and part Dakota. And then my paternal grandfather was George Canku.

DL: Are you an enrolled member of a Dakota reservation or community?

CC: Yes.

DL: Which one?
CC: Sisseton Wahpeton, Dakota tribe on the Lake Traverse reservation.

DL: Have you spent most of your life there or did you live somewhere else for a while?

CC: I lived there the first 16 years of my life, being educated there. Then after that I went to boarding school in Flandreau, South Dakota. Then I joined the U.S. Army and I spent 32 years off the reservation.

DL: Did you see any combat?

CC: No, thankfully. Instead of going to Vietnam I went to Germany.

DL: You were stationed on a base, then.

CC: Yes, Wiesbaden Air Force Base.

DL: Where did you go to school?

CC: I went to school at a local BIA day school called the Long Hollow Day School in our community.

DL: Did you go through high school in your local community?

CC: I went to Flandreau Indian School for high school, it's a boarding school.

DL: And college, beyond that?

CC: Yes, I went to University of Minnesota, a branch of the University, Morris Minnesota.

DL: What's the first news story you remember from your childhood? The first news you had beyond the reservation, a world event or a national event?

CC: Biggest thing that happened to us was the Second World War. All our men were involved in that war. Our men were killed or came back wounded, so it was the biggest thing that had ever happened in our community. Prior to that, the biggest thing that happened was the 1862 War and the exile that followed the War.

DL: It must have all been very traumatic.

CC: Yes.

DL: I forgot to ask when and where you were born.
CC: I was born at home and seven miles south of Sisseton, South Dakota. In a community called Long Hollow District. We have seven districts on our reservation.

DL: What day and year?

CC: July 10, 1938.

DL: Which relatives had the most influence on you?

CC: I would say the older men in our community who had tremendous knowledge of the ancient ways of life. And they're my heroes.

DL: Were you close with your uncles or your dad?

CC: We were all very close. Brothers, uncles, grandfathers and adopted relatives that were not blood but they had the same frame of reference of being Dakota warriors.

DL: Who would you say taught you the most about being Dakota?

CC: I would say those of our relatives, collectively in the community -- Long Hollow -- who spoke nothing but Dakota as our first language.

DL: You mentioned the Long Hollow?

CC: Yes.

DL: What is that?

CC: That's a district of our reservation. Where all of us relatives, called tiospaye, we live collectively in a group.

DL: So you learned the traditional ways even as a child.

CC: Yes.

DL: Do you have a Dakota name, and could you tell us what it is?

CC: My Dakota name, which I got in a ceremony, is Matowatkpe, which is Charging Bear.

DL: What did you learn about Dakota history when you were growing up?
CC: Knowing Dakota history was very sporadic in the sense that my mother would cry when she was asked about it. My father was raised in a Presbyterian boarding school, and he didn't want us to learn about our Dakota history.

DL: Then I would presume he was Christian and he wanted to raise the children in a Christian faith? Is that true?

CC: Yes, that's true.

DL: Did you come to understand Dakota spirituality later in life?

CC: Yes, I became a born-again Dakota in the 1960s.

DL: Some American Indians blend both their Christian background with their traditional ways of life. Have you been able to do that?

CC: I had to go on a vision quest to ask for permission from God, to see if I could participate in both. And God gave me permission that both ways are good, it's just the people – how they use the teaching from both sides. And so I was given permission by God that I would have no difficulties, no problems to do both.

DL: Did you ever hear of the 1862 Dakota War during your growing-up years?

CC: Only from one grandfather, his name was George Canku. He was born in Fort Kipp, Montana. And his mother only had a Dakota name, Oyehotawin. Oyehotawin means Grey Track Woman. And his father was... I forgot what his father's name was. But both of them were from the Wakute band in Minnesota. And they exiled, and traveled to Brockton, Montana.

DL: So you have a fairly direct connection to the events of the 1860s?

CC: Yes.

DL: And before?

CC: Yes.

DL: You mentioned that it was your grandfather who told you some of these stories when you were growing up. Were you a child? Did he sit down and talk with you?

CC: The kind of education that we received was what you call collective experience, where the old men would sit down and smoke kinikinic [tobacco] with the pipe and they would reminisce about what happened to their families during -- actually it was after the
1862 War. And that's the way they put it: “ya se okichize,” and they'd all say “the War”. After they fled, they would mention what had happened to them in different places as they tried to stay alive.

DL: What did [the old men] tell you about the war? What was their story?

CC: The most saddening thing about the story was that the innocent of our people were implicated just as severely as those who were participants, active participants in the War. There was injustice.

DL: So you heard the stories about how unfairly -- perhaps the women and children, even -- were treated at that time.

CC: Exactly. Some of our women lost all I guess, all the societal ways of belonging to the Dakota way of life. And also, the men lost a lot of the roles – being warriors and hunters – and they became fugitives.

DL: This occurred during the War? Before the War? After the War? When did this transformation occur for the people?

CC: After the 1862 War.

DL: And that was during a period of exile.

CC: Yes.

DL: Tell us about the experience of your grandparents, you said that they were forced to leave Minnesota.

CC: Yes.

DL: How did they – what happened to them? How did they have to leave? Were they related to Little Crow or any of the warriors?

CC: No. Wakute was our band leader. Some of our relatives in the Canku family were captured in 1862 and sent to Fort Snelling. There was nine of our family that were sent there. And then the rest escaped and went to the Plains.

DL: Was there any reason why they were imprisoned?

CC: They were implicated for being Dakota.
DL: Not necessarily that they had taken up arms and fought? It was just because they were Dakota.

CC: Yes. They were implicated. Just being Dakota means that you were guilty before any consideration of being innocent.

DL: Were they part of the group of 303 warriors who were supposed to die, according to the U.S. Government and Cavalry?

CC: I’m not certain yet. We’re still doing studies on who were the descendants that were severely incarcerated, and punished, and hung and sent to different concentration camps in Minnesota.

DL: So we’re at the point now where these nine members of your family are being held.

CC: Yes.

DL: What was their fate? How did their stories end?

CC: Nobody knows what happened to them. It’s like when you go to war, some people disappear. And we can just imagine that if they died they were…Their burial is right east of Fort Snelling.

DL: Do you recall hearing the names of any of them?

CC: Only what the U.S. Army provided us, the record, of only nine members of the Canku family. We didn’t know their first names.

DL: That is a tremendous mystery that your family lives with...

CC: Yes.

DL: Are you related to any of the chiefs or other important people from that time?

CC: The only one that we are related to was our band leader, Wakute. In fact, I recently obtained his picture, in one of the books, and he looks just like us, the Canku family.

DL: Can you tell us anything about the aftermath of the war and the scattering of the Dakota people? Your people in particular.

CC: Our people scattered in many different directions. And a lot of our people had children, small children, and they were left behind to be taken care of by some of the grandmothers and grandfathers who couldn’t flee. My extended family includes the Hart family on Lake Traverse Reservation. And my grandmother raised many orphans
because when they left, when these young couples left their children behind – a lot of times because of the distance, or they died, or because of suffering they experienced – the kids grew up under [my grandmother's] care. And so, I would say that we don't know what experiences happened as they scattered in many different directions. I have relatives, many relatives in Montana, many relatives in Canada, some relatives in Fort Totten, and some relatives here in Minnesota.

DL: Were the Dakota people ever united?

CC: We experienced factionalism when the missionaries first came. What specifically I'm talking about is in the religious area. In the ancient ways of worship, we had only one religion. And we didn't distinguish between denominations.

And we didn't distinguish between being a farmer or being a progressive or being a traditional person like just being a hunter and a warrior. Back in those days, we didn't have those distinctions. Everything was different. In a Dakota setting for the men, we had societies. It had to do with being a warrior and spiritual leader. And the same way with women, they had their own societies -- very strong women that had their own roles and their own hierarchy within their own societies. So, women within the Dakota society were very highly -- I guess, organized -- and they were very strong.

DL: What about the Dakota women today. Have any of them regained that strength?

CC: Some are regaining that strength in many different ways, in many different avenues. One is to be just a mother, a wife and stay at home. A domestic wife. And some of them are very good at that role. But some of them have lost their way, too. And they lost the role of being a nurturing mother, a nurturing grandmother, and they become very dysfunctional -- because of alcoholism, or any kind of influence that they had, [such as] being abused in boarding schools and so on. And they lost their way, they lost their life. And they lost their spirit.

Then today we have women that are coming up, who are choosing to be career women. They know how to balance their lives in terms of whether they want to be single, or they want to be career women all their lives and stay single. Or, maybe they want to raise a family and still function as career women and have the best of both worlds. A lot of times it's harder for the women because they have to be nurturers but at the same time, they have to be strong and fit into the American dominant society – which does not reward humility or nurturing or being a spiritual woman. So that reward does not come from the American society. But the reward comes from their immediate families.

DL: What is the Dakota relationship to the land?
CC: Dakota relationship to the land is that she's our mother. And every hill, every river, every valley has its historical past in terms of what happened there. For example, me coming back to Minnesota. I have a strong spiritual relationship and sometimes even while sleeping at the Holiday Inn [while visiting], I have visitors who are spiritual. You could say they are spirits or you could say they are ghosts, but I call them friends. So our descendants have been here thousands and thousands of years. So every valley, every road, every location has a spiritual connection with it [the land] yet. And so, the way I look at it, is that this country is still ours, spiritually, because it is God-given. And when God does something, he doesn't take it back. So, even though physically this country is not ours no more, it is still ours.

DL: I have two questions from that. One of them is about the spirits who came and visited you. Are they welcoming?

CC: They're relatives in a sense, so they act very welcoming. They come in ways that either they want something from me or they want me to do something. They expect me to be able to do what they want me to do.

DL: An argument I have heard is this: when the Dakota came to Minnesota, they displaced the Cheyenne, so the land has a long history of different inhabitants. Therefore, when the Dakota were moved by both the Ojibwe and the European settlers in the 1850s and 1860s, it was just a natural sort of transformation. So, it's not that it was a good – but it was just the way that history sort of moves. What would you say to that?

CC: I would say they have their stories, and there's some motivation in terms of why they say that. It is to disconnect Dakota people from this location. But, we have factual information in terms of our creation account of how it happened here, between the confluence of the Mississippi River and Minnesota River, and the rivers that come here. This is where our creation began. So we were created here by God.

I think that in a sense, many voices say otherwise but we ourselves believe the truth – the truth is that we were created here. This is where our DNA has been, so that no matter what happened in the past, we always come back to Minnesota. This is our ancient homeland. For example, we have a lot of Dakotas but because they were exiled, they don't come here. But their hearts and minds, and spirits are connected here because it's the birthplace of the Dakota people. Wherever you are born, it's a sacred place. And so when we come back to this place, the spirits are happy to see us. And they say certain things to us or they have connection with us. And it's a humble experience but also an affirmation from God saying: "my son" or "my daughter." And when God says "my son" or "my daughter, welcome home," what can you say?
DL: When you describe the place where the creation story is located, would it be accurate to try to describe it to a non-Dakota person as the equivalent of the Holy Land? For example, Jerusalem? Is that a good parallel?

CC: I think a more accurate parallel would be the Old Testament’s Garden of Eden, where Adam and Eve had direct contact with God, and God placed them there. And so I think that when God placed us here, at the confluence of the rivers, it was kind of like the Garden of Eden. So I would say that it's comparable to the Garden of Eden, not necessarily Jerusalem.

DL: That's more clear.

CC: Yes.

DL: Back to the War. Have you ever been to Mankato to the execution site?

CC: Many times.

DL: What emotion do you experience when you go there?

CC: As a Dakota man, I'm not so emotional, in the sense that I have a psychic ability to be what I term a “superman”. What I mean by “superman” is that we have the physical experience of being a person, but we also have a spiritual experience that's beyond that. So when you get beyond that spiritual experience in the realm of the sacred, then you begin to have a universal sense of how things work. Parochial things that happened, like the hanging of the 38, is in the same category as the Holocaust. And so we say that, if it happened to people, it happened to us. Hopefully it would not happen to other people.

DL: Is it good to spend time reviewing the events of the 1860s and those horrible tragedies, and horrible treatment -- is it important to keep that in mind, or would you rather see more people spend their energy and time on the present? How do you balance the two? How do you balance the past without being driven into despair?

CC: Well, I would put it this way. To us Dakota the beginning of despair is if you don't know who you are. In other words, we're like trees. If we don't know our roots, in terms of who we are, and how we are connected from the very beginning – to creation, and to God, and to the land, and to the space and time in which we live – that's more important than what we are, which is the tree. So I think that in a sense, a lot of our young people are committing suicide because they lack the basic necessity of their identity – and that's the roots, the root part. If you don't have no roots, the tree falls. And it dies. Or if the roots dry up, then the tree dies.
So in a sense, Dakota people I think, to us, our identity -- is what nurtures us -- the nurture of Mother Earth, the nurture of sustaining life and the nurture of our frame of reference. I refer to Native sciences as an understanding of our unique way of looking at life and justifying what knowledge that we have from that source. So we have a tremendous amount of resources and understanding that sustains us away from the modern sciences that are so important to your American people.

DL: It sounds to me then, like what you're saying is that the very basic, fundamental Dakota culture is sustainable.

CC: Exactly.

DL: And that granted, the past is there, and you cannot leave it, but the present is a positive and good place to be – if you know who you are.

CC: Exactly, if you know your history, and if you know your language. And if you know your DNA, and what operates in your body. Because I think our DNA is very important, in the sense that once you are connected to your DNA and the gifts that we have as Dakota people, then you're proud of who you are. You use those skills that are connected to that. It's different from other cultures in the fact that others severed their DNA connection to the past. And sometimes they say "Well, I'm a Heinz 57." And, I don't know if they're proud when they say that, or their frame of reference. But for us Dakota people, what we say is that, we may be in the process of [becoming] Heinz 57, but our roots are still very much deeply embedded in our Dakota way of life.

DL: Have you been to any of these places that I'll mention, and what are your thoughts about them: Birch Coulee?

CC: I think when I go to Birch Coulee that I have a connection with the Little People of the woods. And they're still watching over some sacred places like Birch Coulee. They honor us Dakota people because they respect the way we live and they respect the natural sense of how we live. We don't want to harm them, we're not so curious about them – we leave them alone. So I think that in a sense, when you go to places like that, we appreciate one another without any evaluation. We just accept – with open heart, open mind, open spirit. So whatever is there we accept, in a good way.

DL: Who are the Little People?

CC: The Little People are--some people call them Will-o-the-Wisp. Some people call them the Natural Guardians of Nature – elves or whatever you want to call them. But to us, they're created by God to be natural entities that protect our sacred sites, our
medicines, our food, our water, our – whatever sustains life. They are there to protect it. That's their role.

DL: Have you been to Camp Coldwater?

CC: Yes.

DL: And what is your sense from that place?

CC: It's the same as a spiritual connection with creation. People like myself, when we would go there, the spirits of the ancient – whether Little People, or ancient people or God, or angels – they're very open and receptive. It's almost like going home to your relatives, wherever your relatives are. They hug you, they shed tears, and they have that kind of experience when you go there. It's very self-fulfilling.

DL: Is it a place of renewal, of sorts?

CC: I would say, that's one ingredient – renewal. But I think that the greatest one is affirmation. Affirming that there’s a connection there with us. And it will never – they are faithful, they are not fickle. So, when they're faithful, it's forever.

DL: Have you ever been to the Lower Sioux Agency?

CC: Yes.

DL: And you saw the storage building for example, where the food was held?

CC: Yes.

DL: What were your thoughts about that entire area?

CC: Last time we were there, I took some of my students who were Anglo students and they had more intuitive experiences than I had. Because it was like, "Yeah, this is where these things happened," and it's kind of like we just accept it for what it is. But Anglo students, some of them felt different feelings. We sat there, having lunch in front of the building there, the stone building. And two Anglo girls, students, jumped up and said, "The ground is too hot here." We were there, and we touched the ground, and the ground was very hot. And so we asked, what used to be here? And that was the jail. The jail was there. So it was very hot.

Then our president at the college, Dr. Elden Lawrence, was relating the story of the vultures after the 1862 War. Because of the abundance of human flesh that they were
eating, they got sick and went away for 100 years. While he [Dr. Elden] was discussing that, the Anglo students looked up and said, "Look up there!" And we looked up there and there were a lot of vultures flying all over. And so, sometimes Anglo students are shown more than us, because I think that, for us we just accept – we go with the flow, whatever. Whether it's sadness, whether it's any kind of feeling, we can be flexible and not make it a big deal.

But when Anglo students feel those things, it's special to them, and they make it a point to be very specific about it. So I would say Dakota people, our DNA is such that we are accepting of things like that. We are very flexible. And I haven't run into any Dakota women or men who have these fluctuations of feelings that you expect them to have. It's something like close to being stoic, but it doesn't mean that intensity is not there. It's just a difference in culture in terms of how we handle it.

Like myself. When something sacred comes to me, I accept it right away. I don't get scared, I don't have no pretense. I'm just: well, that's just the way things are. So it's normal to me. Whereas other cultures, they say "Oooh, I had a..." or they'll be scared, or they'll have sadness, or they'll have a fluctuation of feelings. Whereas Dakota people, we're very controlled in our feelings. Because it's not wild to us or it's not strange to us, because this is what we experienced thousands and thousands of years ago, of being here. It's nothing new to us.

DL: Another place: Fort Snelling.

CC: Fort Snelling? When we go below Fort Snelling in that cultural – I don't know what you call it – that cultural setting or center or whatever you call it, below the bridge there, we see spirits, mostly women. Along the bluff. The last spirit we saw was a woman, she had a shawl on. And half of her shawl was red and half was yellow. So we feel a connection with the ancient spirits of the people who were incarcerated there. Like myself, I had a pipe ceremony, using my pipe. And all of a sudden, a chief came and stood beside me, and another shorter person. And this chief had all buckskin on, and he was very astonishing-looking. And I felt it, but some of my friends down here, relatives are here, spiritual relatives are here, and they're standing beside you. You just see, kind of like a light. So I've had those experiences of having relatives come when I come there, from the spirit world. It's affirming in some way.

DL: There are some Dakota who have told us here at this institution that Fort Snelling should be burned down, that that whole area should be destroyed. There are some Dakota who have told us that the Fort should stay up as a place for remembrance. And there are some who have told us, who are veterans – that in their hearts it still is the symbol of a fort. It is still part of military history that supersedes anything that happened there in 1860. And for that reason they want it to remain as it is. Which of these is
accurate to you, or perhaps you feel a different way?

CC: I think the most important thing is to tell the truth. About how the land was swindled from us as Dakota people. It's shameful. It's a place of shame that should be corrected in whatever way, in our modern sense of justice. What can we do? That's the message I get every time the spirits come, is that we need to clean up our act. And that Fort is a sham. It's a Fort whose history is shameful. And so, its use is no longer applicable to us today. Maybe a historical marker could be placed there, and just tear it down. There may be something futurist, in terms of something that would help us today that could be erected there. Because I think -- what if we went to Germany, and some of those concentration camps. And we want to commemorate and stand there, and we'll say, “It's our history as veterans” – and these are Nazis. Would we go along with that? I don't think we would. And like myself, I'm a veteran. I served for years in the U.S. Army. But at the same time, anything that's shameful, I don't want to be a part of. I'm more optimistic for the young people. What can we do for our young people to make it a lot more truthful? How can they benefit from an old thing like that? Like myself, I wouldn't like young people to perpetuate this mythology that it's a good place. It's a shameful place.

DL: Here's another place. Fort Ridgely.

CC: We've spent [parts of] some field trips at Fort Ridgely. And that place is also in the same category [as Fort Snelling]. It's in – I don't know what you call it – decay. And its usefulness, it's passed. There's a lot of foundations and old things [at the site]. A good plaque, historical plaque, honoring that place could be set up.

I don't think we need forts in the United States anymore. Because their usefulness is no longer beneficial to us today. And so I think we've outgrown those structures of colonial dominance over Native American people. And so if we expect Native American people to be a part of and proud of who they are and a part of American society, we need to start to make concessions, historical concessions of reconciliation. To take down shameful structures, and put a historical plaque up. And then maybe put something in its place that would be useful to the young people, or our generation. Educational institutions or whatever.

DL: In the 1860s before this war began, the Dakota people were divided on what to do next. And there were some bands that said, “We know this is futile”.

CC: Futile, yes.

DL: ...the war would be futile because the non-Indians will continue to move into Minnesota, and there will be more and more. There were some who were assimilated
as farmers and were fairly isolated from the warfare faction. And then there was the war faction, with Little Crow and he said, “We'll do this”. As you know he was somewhat reluctant, but he said: “I was not a coward, don't call me a coward, and I will join you but I know I'll die with you.” Today, who do you – of those groups, which one would you have gone with if you could have chosen?

CC: At the root of everything, factionalism was created when immigrants came to our way of living. And I think this factionalism was destructive to our people. And so, what you mentioned in terms of all these factions, is not the Dakota way of life. One ingredient that's still present today is that every Dakota person living at that period of time, I believe, knew that it [going to war] was futile. Every Dakota person knew that it was futile.

But at the same time they also were promised a lot through treaties. That if you—well, to kind of back up – back in 1830 there was a U.S. policy initiated by Andrew Jackson. It's called the Indian Removal Act of 1830. And the purpose of that was against the Cherokees because they were sitting on Georgia land that had gold. And so they were forcibly moved to Oklahoma. So I think the impetus for this conflict had to do with the same kind of Indian Removal Act of 1830. Before the treaties or anything happened, Indian removal was happening to our Dakota people. They were put into holding places – called Indian communities or reservations. So that impetus of taking away the land, the abundance of resources and so on was the main goal. What I know through study and what I teach today is that the United States was built on this conflict of democracy and capitalism. Democracy is good, but it's counterproductive to capitalism. So I think that in a sense, capitalism in a sense is a very frenzied activity, and I think that Indian removal was very negative to Native American people. It was a frenzied economic venture that cheated and underhandedly dealt with Native American people. That was the impetus of why they resisted. But what would you do if you were promised thousands and thousands of dollars? If you moved to a smaller portion of land and the United States said: “We'll feed you, we'll give you implements so you can be farmers, we'll do this, we'll do that.” But when you did move onto those small pockets of land, you were starving. Your children were starving. Your women and your grandmothers and grandfathers were starving. What were they to do?

So I think that in a sense, in this instance of Little Crow, that they were pushed into a corner where they were either going to starve or resist.

And so I think if I lived in those times, and my family was pushed to starvation, and regardless of what number – overwhelming number of a standing army – I would fight. I would fight today even though I knew it would be futile. Because you're going to die
anyway. You're going to starve. So, do you want to die honorably or you want to die being defensive, and just get old and die?

So, as a warrior today I would, even today, for example, if a foreign nation came and tried to do what they did to Dakota people – if the Chinese came and tried to do with Americans today, I would fight the Chinese even though it would be futile.

DL: One of the places we list for comment is New Ulm. And the reason we do that is we have done interviews in New Ulm as well, with the descendants of the farmers from the 1860s who were killed.

CC: Yes.

DL: You mentioned the horror of women and children who marched and who died, the way they were treated, and disease and the hunger...

CC: Yes.

DL: And the German descendants remembered their family members who were on the farms and did not speak English, did not necessarily understand that they had pushed the Dakota away by coming here.

CC: Yes.

DL: They weren't all fully aware of the implications.

CC: That's correct.

DL: Of their moving here.

CC: That's correct.

DL: And many of them died at the hands of Dakota.

CC: Yes.

DL: What would you say to them today? They too are sad for their family members who were shot, or stabbed or tomahawked or whatever. What would you say to them, and do you think that there's a chance that the Dakota of today could reconcile with those Germans from New Ulm who have vivid memories of what happened?

CC: I would compare it to what's happening to the United States in the countries that we're involved in war – like Afghanistan, Iraq, in those places where we are doing the same thing to those people. And are we going to be feeling sorry for those people?
Every day we have news coverage of innocents, women and children being bombed and killed. And we're making a tremendous amount of enemies. And are we willing to turn the other cheek, and say slap me on this side because I killed your women and children? Or, are we going to justify it and say "Well, it was a state of war." If I was back in those days, I'm sure Dakota people were smart enough to realize that the United States government was not telling the whole truth to these German immigrants and saying, "There's free land out there! And you can come." There were policies that said – I forgot what policy it was – that said if you took the land and worked on it for five years, and plowed the ground and improved it, then you could have that land for yourself to farm and own. [A later addition to the interview: Mr. Canku said that the policy was called the Homestead Act of 1884. It stipulated to immigrants that if they became farmers and improved the land for four or five years, the federal government would give the farmers title to the land that was initially occupied by Native tribes.]

But at the same time, not telling them that this was Dakota land? The [settlers] were encroaching. They were very much a threat to Dakota way of life. They were moving on to Dakota lands that were encroaching on Dakota livelihood. So I would say that, if you have land today, what if a foreign country was encroaching onto your land? And they were doing that? Would you retaliate, or would you just keep moving and let them take your land? Or take your cars, or home or whatever?

So I think that we need to understand the minds of Dakota in saying "We are warriors." And regardless of what happened to the Germans, they were encroaching on our livelihood – our way of life, our lands. So at that time, we were saying these people were not good neighbors. They didn't share, or they didn't want to get along with Dakota people. And the Dakota called them "Bad Speakers." Because they were also producing alcohol, and it was destructive to Dakota way of life. So these people were looked at as threats. And so what if you experienced a threatening group of people coming on to your land and taking that space and not being friendly--whatever nationality that would be. I really think that they [the Dakota who fought the war] really didn't evaluate what nationality they were. They were just thinking: these people are a threat. So if I lived back in those times, I would say, it was an experience of war. And if I killed somebody, I killed out of a fair war.

DL: What do you think about the treaties?

CC: I think the treaties are still valid, and that the United States needs to honor those treaties and do what they need to do in order to do justice to all the Native American tribes in the United States. I think the treaties are the conscience of this continent. I think there was a singer who said, "America will never be great unless it does justice to the first Americans on this continent." I have never heard any politician or president or
any person of leadership worth their salt say that. If a person says that, then I'll think highly of that person. Because I think the treaties need to be honored, and the only place that they'll be honored is at the United Nations. That's the recourse, because the United States is not going to honor these treaties they made with the United States. It's a mentality – it's a sickness of mentality, these treaties, to American people. It's like not wanting to admit that they have stolen property that they are benefiting from even today. For example, if I stole your home, you car and so on, and you say, "I'm enjoying it" – what does that mean? It's not my property. I'm benefiting, in terms of stolen property. It would be on my conscience. So I think that it's the same level of justice. The treaties need to be dealt with justice, without going to the United Nations and the United Nations forcing the United States to honor these treaties.

DL: If you had a magic wand, what would you wish for the Dakota people today?

CC: I would wish for the best of the Dakota world and the best of American society, the best of both worlds for our young people. To be skilled in the Dakota way of life, and being true to who they are, but at the same time having skills in the dominant American society and having the best of both worlds.

And living and being, and not becoming marginal. For example, I think I'm one person that can do that. I can live in the Dakota world -- all my life-- and have the skills to do that. And I can live in the American dominated society and have the skills to live a comfortable life. So I think that I'm one person who could be a role model, for the best of both worlds.

[Later addition] It is imperative that in 2012 that Native voices be heard. All we ask is equal representation to voice our opinions on the matter of the 1862 War. Native Americans need to be interviewed for their opinion as to what should be done to continue the dialogue for the future well being of our U.S. institutions and the tribal people.

DL: Thank you.