

WE ARE NOT A COLD PEOPLEHOOD:  
THE TRAP OF BEING “TOO NICE” TO BE RACIST

**Bennett Mullozzi**

**Philosophy Thesis**

**May 3, 2024**

## Acknowledgements

*For love, I will handle your sins. For Justice? For Justice, I will show you mine. - Rory Ferreira*

Depending on how you measure such things, this project represents about a year (and change) of my own life poured into realizing an idea. The feelings that jut out in reflecting upon this are the most easily recognized, but it would be a disservice to not speak out in favor of the myriad intricacies that brought us here. Tasting the fruit of my labor is only possible thanks to the labor of others: the support that has kept me alive, the conversations that have revitalized my love of learning, and the efforts to find the narrative thread in my jumbled tangents.

Thank you to everyone in my community who has shown any level of interest in this work. Feeling your engagement and desire to discuss an overlooked part of our lives is the energy that carried me throughout this process. I hope that in further work I can connect and engage with even more of you fantastic folks.

Thank you to Marcus, Peter, Robert, and all those who reigned in my enthusiasm, or otherwise encouraged me to pull against the system's exploitation and avoid needless struggling. Life's too short to sell yourself shorter, or something like that.

My mind wells with admiration and gratitude for Dan, Katie, Shannon, and the rest of my peers and faculty in the Philosophy department at UMD. Thank you for making a space to steep in thought while tasting reality, and for maintaining diversity (against all probability). Challenging our individual perspectives and holding each other to account is vital (I'll work on my praxis, Tom).

My many thanks to Jeanine Weekes Schroer for provoking and enabling me, in the way only a good mentor can. I look forward to the remainder of my career path as a racism untangler, and I know you'll be proud when I figure out how to solve it.

My heart extends to Quill Cuff, Cecilia Dockry, Joseph Mullozzi, and the rest of my family for preserving my mind and body. I would not be so proud of my efforts without those breaks to read aloud Vonnegut or Pratchett, mending clothes, or discussing music. We must work to live well as heartily as we work to rectify our world and reify our goals.

Minnesota currently fails its progressive ideals because “Minnesota Niceness” (MN Nice) is a wishy-washy but very sticky norm. Wishy-washy in its lack of a moral center, equally capable to be a weight pulling for harm or healing, a lens to look at the world that cannot see the true moral value that decorum serves; sticky because it feels and looks good on the surface, making it broadly yet shallowly popular, a dangerous combination in a loosely representative democracy. We place it above other social norms because of these two traits, and it has had disastrous impacts.

Our move towards progress collapses as we move away from niceness, and race politics in the U.S. aren't nice. I will explain how I conceptualize MN Niceness through the lenses of American Exceptionalism and the aesthetics of civility, consider the historical cases in which MN Nice and race politics have collided, and evidence how a whiteness that legitimates resistance to change, the silencing/ignoring of non-White voices on the politics of race, and even explicit violence are all explained in the name of being nice.

### **THE MINNESOTAN IDENTITY**

What it means to identify as “Minnesotan” is just as loose and contradictory as identifying as “American”. There is no language, style of music or dress, or religious denomination that can be communicated from either identity. The raw descriptive power of both terms is nearly useless in terms of anthropology; a primary reason for the resistance of many Indigenous Nations to the term “Native American” is the fact that it erases thousands of different Peoples underneath a single blanketed name. The use of the term “Minnesotan” has a slightly greater ability to convey the geographical location of your home, but is still somewhat limited in its scope to capture a spirit.

However, in the realm of politics, self-identification as either American or Minnesotan can express something about what that person believes. To refer to oneself in these terms means that one finds the moniker to convey some value, and because this value is unlikely to be the ambiguous geographical information, this points to a belief structure that is centered in certain proposed folklore or an essence attributed to the identities. Saying “I’m Minnesotan” can be a grammatically simple way to communicate that despite the vast differences between all under the banner, the user believes there is

some essential unseen quality that unifies all true Minnesotans through their collective possession of it.<sup>1</sup> Using these terms as an identity, in direct spite of their impotence in identification, is a powerful indication of an individual's ideology. It is not a coincidence that these terms imply an affinity toward the concept of the special status of the United States (i.e., American Exceptionalism).

In common usage both "American" and "Minnesotan" are used to exclude those who should generally be underneath their umbrella, in a manner that is veiled but intentional. It is true that the perceived rudeness of treating Mexico and Canada as negligible by using "American" to mean a resident of the U.S. is a much bigger tell (about this disposition toward exceptionalism) than someone identifying as Minnesotan, but it nonetheless can communicate a pride for the state and a conception of oneself that has a great deal in common with the former. It is not as well known, but not unheard of for the identification of being a proud member of an established state being used to exclude members of Indigenous Nations.

Not one Minnesotan would be surprised by my suggestion that the Minnesotan identity is defined solely by Minnesota Nice. If there is a single thing that folks can agree on, it is that Minnesota takes the stereotypical politeness of the Midwest United States and really runs with it. But many would raise an eyebrow at the unflattering comparison to the rudeness of nationalist pride, and many more would press that Minnesota Nice, the crown jewel of the Minnesotan identity, directly contradicts the claim that identifying with our statehood could be used for this stated hostility. To justify the comparison between "Minnesotan" and "American" that I've been making, we will need to define the meaning of the term "MN Nice", clarify the shared theme of exceptionalism that is essential to these two identities, and see how exactly MN Nice clashes with any other parts of the Minnesotan identity.

---

<sup>1</sup> This may often generate a "No True Scotsman" fallacy, wherein specific claims set upon a vague identity let the user shut down debate, as counter-examples can be excluded, rather than considered.

## WHAT DO I MEAN BY ‘MN NICE’?

There is a set of important distinctions to be made between “nice”, “civil”, and “good”. Ian Ward makes a helpful case here, arguing that civility should be thought of as a virtue, a true good, through which individuals hold themselves, each other, and their government responsible by acting as a member of the community in a manner that maintains relationships so that injustice can be repaired, in contrast to those who act out of malice to subvert both our democracy and attempts to repair injustice (2016, 118).<sup>2</sup> From this position, nicety is better thought of as proper etiquette, the upholding of a standard of expected behavior. Similar to the cotillion classes popular in the south, it is a demonstrated value of a community, in this case the aesthetic value placed upon the appearance of civility as a norm. This norm is reinforced and upheld by the phenomenon of social facilitation: being among others who adhere to the behavior, expressing verbal or non-verbal support for it, shifts your individual ideology to conform with the group.

Ward, in an effort to save the baby he sees sailing amongst the discarded bathwater, defines niceness as the artificial appearance of civility. Where civility is a true good that provides a path for conflict resolution and reconciliation when we are collectively dedicated to maintaining it, civility-as-niceness uses the aesthetic appeal of “being civil” to hijack the drive to correct behavior that violates this communal commitment to serve another intent (I will be primarily using the terms “*civility*” and “*niceness*” when referencing these concepts for clarity). This provides the appearance that everyone at the table is not a bad actor and often manifests as the exact opposite of civility.

---

<sup>2</sup> Ward provides a particular and unique account of civility that relies on an argument that cannot be made in this thesis – that some virtue/norm here is necessary to democracy – because it is contested whether democracy is a thing that we have or potentially have ever had historically. Ward himself questions whether civility has ever existed as this ancillary virtue – a good that is necessary for justice to exist – but argues that it is necessary to act as though it can exist if one wishes to believe a healthy democracy is possible to create. I primarily sustain this distinction because the separation between something like niceness – a more aesthetic value – and something like civility – a more substantial virtue – explains why we find ourselves showing preferential treatment to niceness.

One way in which this appeal can manifest is as a fallacious call for civility, often made by politicians or ideologues to deliberately hurt attempts at reconciliation, an attempt to cash in on what Ward terms “counterfeit virtue” (2016, 122). This is a malicious attack *intentionally* using niceness as an affectation to hide from accountability.

The other manner in which a confusion between this virtue and the aesthetic of it can occur is personal. It is possible for a person or group to deceive themselves into thinking they are following civility, but are merely pursuing the semblance of it. Ward voices the concern:

If civility is nothing more than a generalized counsel of politeness, courtesy and well-mannered speech, even in situations of injustice, it is not difficult to see [the worry:] demanding civility in this sense can have the effect of creating a climate that discourages frank and passionate criticism. This can marginalize those harmed by the injustice, who may feel compelled to speak in frank and passionate terms. (2016, 123)

Minnesotans, in our collective folkways, acknowledge the fact that the social standard of MN Nice is not a *moral* good, but a social custom that is of indeterminate value and is sometimes purely negative. In fact, many humorous depictions of MN Nice bank on the popular understanding that holding to a demeanor of politeness even when two people disagree is a trademark of a two-faced or passive aggressive communication style.<sup>3</sup> Garrison Keilor voiced one way this is done: “[When something rude needs to be said:] No need to face the whole truth all at once” (2004, 150). Another instance is the slogans of “*Minne-sorta Nice*” or “*Keep Minnesota Passive-Aggressive (or not, whatever you think is best)*” plastered on merchandise (Amazon n.d.).

Regardless of whether the genuine article is conventional niceness and a simple byproduct of this norm is that people will be more passive aggressive or vice versa, every manifestation of MN Nice undeniably defers to the goals of avoiding direct conflict or even the appearance of rudeness. Whether it causes good or ill, the social norm is that

---

<sup>3</sup> There are too many cultural touchstones to enumerate, but my personal recommendations for further reading include the works of Howard Muhr, Garrison Keilor, and Barton Sutter.

interaction must be nice. Rather than an example of civility, gestures of MN Nice are either counterfeit or self-deception.

A point that should be acknowledged before we go too far is that Minnesotans have historically been progressive. The ways in which MN Nice and progressivism have influenced each other are varied, and I will investigate several to support my contention that this political leaning is not because of a love for the ideals of progressiveness, but because it has historically been the easier, less violent, “nice” way to operate. Advocating for a peaceful unity of diverse thoughts, opinions, and peoples sounds very nice, but this conception of diversity can only be entertained as long as no one increases social tension. This supposition is the necessary limit that is never said but is felt everywhere. When there isn’t a route to be nice in the advancement of progressive ideals, niceness and civility become opposed, and a true dedication to civility must directly attack the conformity of niceness. As we will see, the construction of race is one area where a drive towards progress comes into conflict with the desire to occupy and be a “nice” place in both setting and community.

Here is where we connect Minnesota’s political appearance with its political truth. This community value of niceness often leads to an apparent adherence to progressive political policies. Part of the reason for this is because the appearance of progressivism is in accord with the appearance of civil liberalism: citizens exercising their rights to nonviolent protest to maintain the slow and steady march for progress, living in a diverse polity of peaceful coexistence. But this appearance is not true to civility at its core. Progress is given preferential treatment, but for aesthetic appeal, not as a political ideal. Progressivism must yield to the norm of nicety.

Conflict as well, is held to this standard. Conflict is often a necessity in diverse spaces, so a truly progressive space would encourage ways to express conflict and maintain a place for conflict resolution. However, in Minnesota, we see that conflict is discouraged when it isn’t nice. You can disagree, but it should be in the right way. The right way is always through polite “nonviolent” speech.

This proceeds into the next extreme discrepancy: Hatred is tolerated when it is nice. This may seem at first to be too harsh, but it does logically follow that if hatred for

an individual or group always refrains from openly calling for or causing direct violence, and always keeps to the proper channels of nicety, it will be permitted. This is a vital claim that we will revisit in a moment.

Niceness and civility are similar in appearance, but nicety is a toxin that kills civility. The good (if any) that comes from civility is the dedication to our shared institutions that allow us to reconcile difficulties and strengthen our shared commitment to democracy, “the part of justice that disposes citizens to confront unjust relationships in ways that leave open the possibility of relational repair” (Ward 2016, 115). Civility can best be understood as the caveat to free speech that we all accept when existing together. You can speak your mind and others are free to criticize you, but if that speech makes democracy impossible or stops reconciliation efforts, the action and speech in protest should be accordingly much stronger to maintain a just polity. Ward suggests that this tendency is a virtue in and of itself, but can and has historically been co-opted by niceness, which is a virtueless desire and obligation to never engage in ways that break or even flex the social norm, rather than the social contract.

My use of MN Niceness throughout is derived from the observations I’ve made about how Minnesotans speak about themselves and conduct themselves with each other. I pull from the literature and folkways that describe niceness as an aesthetic value and MN Nice as a communal value (in the sense of it being a guideline, not in the sense of its moral value) to propose that MN Nice is a counterfeit virtue. A responsible untangling of MN Nice will require taking this understanding and connecting it to a working definition of exceptionalism to fully piece together how and why MN Nice is such a problem.

## **WE ARE NOT A COLD PEOPLEHOOD**

### ***Using American Exceptionalism As a Lens Of Analysis***

American Exceptionalism is a term encompassing a wide variety of religious, political, and philosophical beliefs. Over the hundreds of years that a nationalistic “self-concept” emerged, all these myriad views diverged, but they share an accepted

premise at their center: America is special in location, time, and influence, and is compelled by either the divine or by destiny to shape the world in its image (Caesar 2012).

James Caesar's analysis of the history of American Exceptionalism effectively supports the view that it does not logically follow to chalk up all of the major political movements that America has had to a single historical belief or starting point. Instead, the term exceptionalism defines the nature of these historical movements, a nature that was rarely explicitly supported by the prominent figures of the time, but nonetheless portrays their collective actions and endgoals well. American Exceptionalism is not describing the specific influence of the Puritanical idea of God's free nation, but rather how similar influences that preceded each other all shared a collectively held belief: The identity need not come from anywhere in particular, it is not tied down by political policy or religious tenets, it is instead loosely held by all those that think that the United States has had a special historical development that places it in a special regard, and this removes it from comparison to other places (Caesar 2012, 13).

The four distinct zeitgeists of American history (in Caesar's mind) were: the Puritanical movement building a nation of God in the 1600's, the founding fathers building a nation under God during the 1700's, the religiously fueled nationalist expansion of 1800's manifest destiny, and then the crusades of God's nation with its imperialist occupations in the 1900's (Caesar 2012, 14). They all have very different historical contexts and the people within these movements had very different religious, political, and philosophical beliefs, but when taken as a whole, their collective actions and written thoughts have a connective tissue that imbues these otherwise differing actions with a meaningful source. Each of these groups, especially as chronological juniors took inspiration from their predecessors' earlier modes of thought, acted from the premise that the structure they were making was historically significant due to its unique developing position in the world. This position hones itself over time as each historical movement feeds into it, making it more and more specifically defined as separate and distinct from any of their views but informed by them.

The U.S. is seen as exceptional because of the heights of the ideals of freedom it promises, so taking time to analyze this belief and finding glaring historical issues with it is against the spirit of the movement because you are assuming the U.S. is comparable to other nations. The U.S. is unable to be compared because comparing would assume peers. But even if we must compare this special place to others, past injustice is validated through the creation of this special thing, where assumed peers are culpable because harm was committed in the name of building an unexceptional place. The U.S. *presently* has a special status on the globe, which must be indicative of a strong essential character that has developed over time to lead to this success, which means that being held to widely recognized failures is impossible, as they are not truly comparable. The U.S. is comparable in its real world failures but incomparable in its abstract successes, so it would be unfair to anchor it in reality with the failures of any other place. The inherent specialness of the United States is the values of its character, which proponents frame as intrinsic and exceptional. The inherent goodness of the Minnesotan identity is very similar, as it is very much cut from the same historical backdrop, but has its own arbitrary geographical boundaries that encourage a separate collective consciousness to form.

### ***Building Minnesotan Exceptionalism***

With this understanding, we can see that proponents of a “Minnesotan Exceptionalism” might propose that Minnesota, like the U.S. as a whole, is unique and thereby exceptional due to its unique history of development and the contemporary feelings about its development, and there needn’t be any tangible demonstrations of it as unique. Like the rest of the U.S., Minnesota has a history filled with people empowered by its systems committing horrible acts, *but* it has a special historical context that has created a unique contemporary scene, so it should not be held to the same account as its neighbors. It also follows from our reading of exceptionalism that though there are many different pieces of historical context behind each of the events in Minnesotan history, an effective analysis of its history would not get lost in the weeds of

their slight differences, but identify their strong similarity. This comparison to the U.S. is not skin deep.

Before Minnesota had any distinguishing qualities, it had politicians arguing that it was somehow sufficiently different from Wisconsin to require recognizing it separately. The particular discourse around what it means to hail from Minnesota began the moment that Minnesota went from being occupied primarily by the Indigenous Peoples of the region (and the French and British fur trappers that seasonally lived and traded with them) to having representatives petitioning the government to establish it as a state. This turning point was achingly stretched out into a series of changes to unincorporated territory borders, when politicians like Alexander Ramsey (The first Governor of the Minnesota territory) and Henry H. Sibley (The first House Representative and later the first Governor of the state of Minnesota) argued to carve out a state separate first from the Wisconsin territory, then from Iowa and the Dakotas' claims of statehood (Abbett 2016). They asserted that Minnesota was sufficiently distinct from those other developing territories, and had that assertion validated by the union. This is as close to an origin as we will ever get, and it is entirely made of a constructed belief of difference.

The Minnesotan view that Minnesota is special and has a special role is similar to how the majority of Americans *think* that the U.S. is special and has a special role. The way that 'outsiders' are prompted to learn about our differences is *very* similar to the ways in which those not from the U.S. are told to learn and think about the U.S. by residents. While living outside of it and thinking these ideas are ridiculous is tolerated to a larger extent, it is considered disrespectful to come into the community and disregard this communal ideology. When House Representative Proctor Knott joked that Duluth is such a nothing town full of people pleasers that they could and would move it ten miles over to be an even four thousand miles from Liverpool if asked nicely, Duluthians laughed along and named a township after him (Jordan 1954). When the Daily Show came to Duluth to make fun of the recent news coverage of Duluth as a climate sanctuary (because we have horrible weather), Minnesotans enjoyed the fact that strangers were participating in our favorite winter pastime (The Daily Show 2024).

On the other hand, when Kathy Cargill ignored requests to explain her privatization and development plans for Park Point, and then was vocally offended by current Duluth mayor Roger Reinert's passive aggressive comments that "apparently a private notice from the mayor isn't good enough, so I'll send a notarized message from the city council", and then called the Wall Street Journal to complain that she hates this small-minded community and that she will exclude the community from her development plans forever, the community responds by making her "pissing in your cheerios" comment into a rallying cry for charitable campaigns and novelty taphouse drinks (Barrett 2024; KBJR 6 2024). This simultaneously affirms that our community is hostile towards individuals that violate the norms of niceness and that this hostility will stay in aesthetically nice avenues (i.e., charity) so that from a glance they are perceived as taking the higher ground. Some buy into it, others do not, but the overlying fact is that the observed difference comes from a collective *belief* that there is a difference, rather than anything substantial. MN Exceptionalism is a collective hallucination.

Caesar argues that there are many contextual elements that led to the United State's zeitgeists, but pointing to any single one as the root cause does not make sense and is full of contradictions.<sup>4</sup> Similarly, there are many small contextual elements that may lead to pieces of Minnesota history, but it would not follow to claim that any of them are the root cause of MN Nice. Instead, the commitment to this ideology as an essence, the belief that any or all of these ambiguous elements have caused Minnesotans to be intrinsically different and thereby exceptional should be seen as the generalized cause for these historical events throughout.

Minnesotan Exceptionalism shares two commonalities with American Exceptionalism: that we are exceptional, and thereby should not be subjected to the

---

<sup>4</sup> Caesar's primary intent for attacking the contemporary definition of American Exceptionalism is that it implies the religious puritanical movement in the 1600's should be understood as the cause for all the following movements, which he feels pushes an undue burden of responsibility upon religion for the blunders of American political actors that drew inspiration from their faith but were not primarily motivated by it. Though biased in favor of absolving religion of fault, this bias (in my view) is a motivation that is employed to strengthen his argument overall. His claim that the United States has been chosen by God to set a moral example by inciting holy war in his closing statements undercuts this point, and it becomes clear that the reader needs to parse what is historical rigor and what is theocratic zealotry.

treatment that our fellows receive for their actions; and that our way of existing in the world is a good one, that others would do well to emulate. This sense of superiority creates a mindset that, when coupled with overall Midwestern sensibilities, promotes a milieu where change is deemphasized and talking about important issues is uncomfortable and a *faux pas*. This lasting sense of superiority mixed with our polite aversion to conflict is largely credited as the essence that keeps Minnesota “being a liberal bastion in a sea of red states”, (see fig. 1) a claim backed up to some extent by decades of voting records (Lincoln 2022).

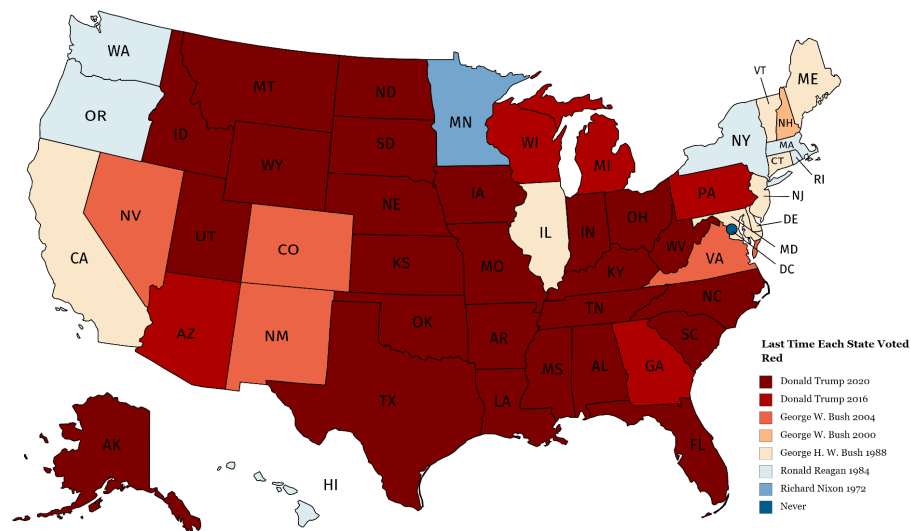


Figure 1. The Last Time Each State’s Electorate Voted Republican (u8eR 2018). An example of a popular depiction of Minnesota’s reputation as a “shining blue light” in the middle of the heartland.

We are different and thereby exceptional compared to our neighbors, so we are progressive because they are conservative, and this must be because of our niceness, because it's the sole trait of our identity. This feeling of special-ness is the very same toxic trait that keeps us from truly grappling with our ugliness in a manner that provides meaningful change.

In 1996, the artist formerly known as Prince, when prompted by Oprah on why he picked such an odd place to live, proclaimed that he would always live in Minneapolis.

The reason? “It’s so cold it keeps the bad people out” (Nelson). Garrison Keilor’s characterization of Minnesotans also asserts a goodness, a togetherness, kept up by the cost of comfort: “We tend not to be uncomfortable about silence” (2004, 5), “We are stoics in this room and can tolerate considerable misery without comment” (131), “*Silence, the purest democracy*” (5).

Perhaps it is best to start at the agreeable assertions and work inwards. The predominant view of we Minnesotans as a collective, it seems, is that we are a very odd bunch of nonetheless well-meaning people. Minnesotans have loves and motives that transcend outside comprehension, they trade comfort and sunlight for an austere nature that rebuffs all infatuation. Minnesotans are easygoing and deferential to a fault, but fight inequality in their passive support for a progressive party platform. Indeed, Minnesotans seem to accept a kind of bargain, sacrificing a good deal of personal comfort in the form of higher taxes and a lower standard of comfortable weather in return for a higher standard of living and a stronghold from the fast-paced world that is falling to pieces everywhere else in the country. “I live in Minnesota for the plain and simple reason that *I am not so different from these people* and also because the social contract is still intact here, despite Republicans trying to pound it out of us” (Keilor 2004, 5, my emphasis). You are welcomed if you can handle the entrance fee, and if you enjoy nicety.

Some potential reasons for why Minnesota is the way that it is have been levied before, but they do not stand up to scrutiny. Some cite the high taxes, the progressive safe space beliefs, or the cold weather as the reasons for why conservative, high income and elderly individuals are all fleeing the state in droves and causing Minnesota to stand out from its peers. Both liberal and conservative groups take the premise at face value: advocating for coming to MN because it is progressive or advocating leaving MN because it is progressive, respectively. The conservatives point out that Walz’s advertising of MN (Come to MN, it’s safe for your children) is entirely predicated on this assumption (Phelan 2023), so if this base assumption is not true, there is nothing that distinguishes us, there is no weight to these arguments. Callaghan of MinnPost points out how this conversation is easily manipulated and ahistoric (2023). The rates of people

moving out of state and the number of regular snowbirds (residents who “fly south” to wait out the winter months) have both stayed consistent over the past fifty years. There has consistently been ~40,000 snowbirds in MN over the past forty years, with the steadiness of that number indicating those who have the means to prioritize personal comfort do so as they age, and then permanently move away to Arizona or Florida when they retire (Craig 1992).

That proportion has increased slightly as younger Minnesotans who are able to do remote work have chosen to avoid the winter months (Burger 2020). The number of higher-income individuals moving out of Minnesota is insignificant, at about 4,000 people (2.4% of those that live here) during 2020 (Callaghan 2023). This was the highest year on record, and definitely not without its fair share of extraneous variables.

Wisconsin, a conservative state through the means of gerrymandering, has the same states with the highest migration into (Minnesota, Illinois) and the same vacating (Florida, Texas, Arizona). The argument that people leave Minnesota because it is a liberal utopia is not substantiated, so it is almost certainly about comfort (Deller 2023). The movement between neighbor states can also be attributed to the (arbitrary) state boundaries themselves: “Part of this flow can be explained by the growth of the Twin Cities metropolitan area into western Wisconsin and the Chicago metropolitan area into southeastern Wisconsin” (Deller 2023).

This view accounts for examples like the high rate of snowbirds that increase the conservatives in places like Florida, as well as the high number of liberal people from coastal cities that see Duluth as the escape from climate change (Kamin 2023). Keilor proclaims that “We are not a cold people” (2004, 76), and indeed, the people who get too cold seem to leave (for whatever that’s worth). In the article “*Out-of-Towners Head to ‘Climate-Proof Duluth’*” the affluent California climate dodgers are warmed by the welcome they received “due in large part to the culture of “Minnesota [N]ice” — a widespread politeness and friendliness that is a local point of pride. They pledged to follow the community guidelines, so “longtime Duluth locals insisted that the newcomers to their city were warmly welcomed, even if their presence was driving up

real estate costs across the board” (Kamin 2023). This image in of itself may be considered the primary factor that solidifies the *feeling* into a fact.

Enough people have gestured at MN Nice for it to be granted the recognition of one of the central tenets of the MN Identity. This does not make it any easier to define. In exchange for the ubiquity that has made it renowned, any prominent characteristics have been sanded down to make it appealing to the largest possible audience: anyone who wishes to identify as Minnesotan. There is no consensus on whether this niceness is more closely akin to passive aggression or genuine kindness. For the most part though, it seems that only our elected officials and others appealing to a sense of exceptionalism suitable for a tourism advertisement characterize MN Nice as a true good.<sup>5</sup> Most every other account takes a brief moment to recognize the irony of a place where there is a customary niceness that is offered but not truly felt. It often has to be explained to newcomers that politeness is compulsory, and displays of emotion or physical contact will be met with a cold shoulder, an awkward stare, or both.

MN Nice is based on a constructed identity that has an essentialist guise of a special, exceptional people, and is expressed through the aesthetics of niceties. That is to say, MN Nice is a social custom first and foremost. It is a custom with widely admitted downsides between those who act within it, but is upheld due to its powerful positive influence on how outsiders perceive Minnesota, as well as the uncomfortable social friction it would cause to act against it.

American Exceptionalism can at least point to its unique history and place in the world as a political agent as evidence of its uniqueness. It is one thing to point to the U.S. as exceptional for its particularly complex number of peoples all theoretically under one name, but trying to make the case that a single one of its states stands out in the complexity of all those around it is foolhardy. There is a reason the history of attempts are predominantly politicians and tourist knick-knacks selling slogans: claims with no ground can only be made of empty air. MN Exceptionalism doesn’t work because it consists of an unfalsifiable claim to a convoluted social phenomenon: the people who

---

<sup>5</sup> Emily Larson and Tim Walz both provide modern examples of this, citing the friendliness of the community towards newcomers touring or moving to the state.

live here identify themselves as Minnesotans and thereby take on a particular affect to fulfill this Minnesotan identity. Keilor says that we Minnesotans “take pains to not be Special” (2004, 5). We don’t think we’re special, we think we are nice compared to others, and that makes us special. Outside views sometimes take this messaging at face value, but mostly MN is seen as a weird asterisk in the middle of nowhere west.

Keilor (2004) lovingly lambasts:

Winter is long and Scandinavians can be sour and unreasonable and Minnesota drivers angry and dangerous and you can't buy wine in a grocery store or pay to see naked people here and the newspapers have all gone to pot and our cities sprawl for fifty miles in all directions, and politicians are short-sighted and winter is brutal, and yet, if that's what it takes to keep out the Texans, then we're happy. (131)

But just as with American Exceptionalism, we should ask: what about any of that is special, let alone exceptional?

### **MN NICE NORMALIZES RACIAL HARM: THREE HISTORICAL CASE STUDIES**

In what follows, I reflect on three instances of how MN’s commitment to “niceness” has legitimated (if not necessitated) racial harm. The cases are ordered chronologically, but they also reflect the development and refinement of this use of niceness: The initial case, “the Genocide of the Dakota,” establishes the “principles” of MN Nice as it combines MN Exceptionalism with the developing aesthetic commitment to civility. The second case, “Quiet Sundown Towns,” examines a mix of influences, where a completely unnice situation is held in tension with wanting to hold a story about MN being a nice place with nice people. The third case, “Attacking Civil Society,” is a more current and more transparent example, where the principles of MN Nice are at their most refined stage.

#### ***The Genocide Of The Dakotas***

The history of the territory and later state of Minnesota’s relationship with the many peoples who lived here before its establishment offers a great deal of perspective

and context for any discussion of race. Unfortunately, a truly accurate telling of all relevant details is far out of the scope of this paper. I will offer the details most vitally important to making my case for the connection to MN Nice that pervades throughout these events.

First and foremost, one of the primary stated goals of the many treaties signed between 1805 and 1867 was to establish a livable peace between the settlers and soldiers living under the name of Minnesota, and the many tribes of people that for legal distinction identified as Ho-Chunk, Ojibwe, or Dakota (Ross 2012, “Multinational Treaties at Prairie Du Chien”; “1847 Ojibwe Land Cession Treaties”). Many of the treaties set land buffers between Indigenous Peoples pressured to compete for food, and the 1851 Dakota land cession treaty was highlighted for being “sufficiently remote to guarantee the Indians against any pressure on the part of the [W]hite population for many years to come” (Ross 2012, “1858 Land Cession Treaties with the Dakota”).

Despite repeatedly asserting the primary intention to achieve peace for all peoples, the true application of these treaties was: first, steal as much as possible with the appearance of legality; then violate the terms of their agreements to make living separately impossible and assimilation inevitable. This reached a tipping point as more and more settlers increasingly identified as Minnesotan — justifying animosity for the “outsiders devaluing their land” and “threatening their safety” and making assimilation impossible. The aesthetic preference for a slow, systemized genocide that is shrouded with logistical issues that need time to resolve and declarations for an intent to establish a livable peace were all dropped in favor of a fullthroated, undeniable cry for genocide.

The rhetorical attempt to “save the man, kill the Indian” can be understood as one such attempt to maintain the appearance of nicety, while silently strangling a people who were seen as making civilized society impossible. In 1858, Dakota leaders were summoned to Washington D.C. and there were detained until they signed the treaty that “caused us all to move to the south side of the river, where there was but very little game, and many of our people, under the treaty, were induced to give up the old life and go to work like [W]hite men, which was very distasteful to many” (Anderson and Woolworth 2015, “1858 Dakota Treaty Delegation.”). When the Dakota gathered in

collective protest at the ultimatum between following their traditional means of gathering food and starving to death or assimilating, the U.S. government delayed their annuities, so they could not buy food from traders. When Dakota leaders asked the traders to extend them more credit for goods when annuity payments were late, the traders refused. Andrew Myrick, one of the merchants responsible for the starving of the Dakota, reasoned in a letter to his brother:

I am at a loss and so doing have given out no credits since last Sunday and at present deem it best not to give away any more for a week or ten days *hoping* it will produce a reaction. They will get very hungry and possibly if the officials are not engaged in it they may change their sentiments and favor paying their credits ...I wish you could [be here] and help straighten out the snarl the Indians have got us in. I have *not talked with them* yet, seeming it best to let them get hungry first hoping they might retract and *become decent again*. (Minnesota Historical Society n.d., my emphasis)

If a few of the Dakota men being forcibly starved hadn't chosen to fight back with violence, Minnesota would have been content to kill them in a manner that could be framed (from a distance) as a nicety: Forcing tribes onto overhunted land, dependent on shipments of food that are delayed, while *reeducating* "mixed blood" children.

This has three connections with the modern day. One, the assertion that a promise to fix or improve unkind conditions does make those conditions acceptable, because there is a plan to fix them; second, an assertion that it is acceptable to make nice promises that you don't intend to follow through with, because everyone is acting civilly. This then follows that thirdly, if either party (you) breaks the social contract, acting violently, they (you) have acted against the peaceful union. Intolerance towards violence is acceptable and can be met with violence, because the onset of violence was an unnecessary, uncivil action. Both parties had already agreed to a pact of reconciliation, so violent protests were completely unacceptable and an indication of moral culpability.

As alluded earlier, the framework of civility only works if everyone is an equal party in the agreement, and it must then exclude those that do not agree with its tenets and work to destroy it. This underlines a potential failure of Ward's work, as in the cases

where the framework is incorrectly applied to two groups that are misaligned in the degree to consent to maintaining civility and their ability to apply it to ensure reconciliation, this framework can appear to encourage genocide.

“The United States had made 12 treaties with Indigenous communities by 1858, 8 of which were negotiated by the University of Minnesota board of regents or included them as signatories”(Blue, Garagiola, and Goodwin 2023). Every single treaty was broken by the United States, the Minnesotan Government, and the University of Minnesota. Every obligation that the United States was to fulfill was nullified with the start of the U.S.-Dakota War, whereas every obligation that the Indigenous communities conceded was maintained and then some (Ross 2012, “1858 Land Cession Treaties with the Dakota”).

A properly functioning dedication to civility might see MN forge treaties through non-coercive means and then honor those treaty terms, as that would be an instance of two parties negotiating opposing claims by maintaining a standard by which both were entitled to reconciliation. This application would then hold that as each of these treaties was not only written by uncivil means but then clearly broken, the Dakota should not only have their purported obligations in these agreements nullified, but would be owed measures of repair for the harm done.

But this application of Ward’s conceived virtue of civility has several issues. Firstly, Ward’s application is rooted in the conception of a liberal democracy, one that does not account for people who *did not consent* to the conception of civility, but had it forced onto them.<sup>6</sup> Applying the framework of civility onto this situation may be a huge mistake if it overlooks this point. It seems to follow from the uncriticized framework that when the Dakota do not recognize the authority of the polity and negotiate outside of its influence, they should be counted as insurrectionists that do not agree to its terms and thereby are not afforded its protections. Indeed, this has been the historical argument made by many nation states in the wake of violating a treaty with an otherized group in an attempt to annex or conquer them. As Ward recognizes, any true claim to

---

<sup>6</sup> Ward does state that the ideal of civility has never occurred in our history, but could exist in our future. It is, to him, a necessary ancillary virtue to imagine a world where justice exists.

this moral good — civility — would account for this obvious failure. If the Dakota did not commit to civility, then there could be no binding contract made at all, which brings into question why Minnesota and the University saw fit to make so many treaties with them. If the Dakota did commit to the good of civility (as they had historically), then they were granted its protections, including the right to violent protest when it was clear that there was no peaceable method open to them. A functional civil agreement that was made when both parties were negotiating without coercive methods never occurred, as that would have triggered a ceding of land claims when payment was not made, or at the very least demanded recognition that the participant actively being starved without redress has a strong claim to violent protest, especially when there are dozens of accounts of peaceful appeals that were obviously ignored.

The Dakota were not seen as members of the polity, but still held to the obligations of the communal contract. The Dakota committed to both the concept of civility and the veneer of niceness that was implied by the United States as the only method to prevent warfare. The Dakota committed to civility in each instance of negotiation and signing a treaty, and when it failed to correct the behavior of the United States they even held to the veneer of niceness. The Dakota sent ambassadors to congress, sent peaceful appeals asking the United States government to pay its vast debts or even an increase in leniency towards the Dakota tribes holding their side of the bargain. The Dakota requested that when the United States was unable to pay them and send them shipments of food and supplies, that they be allowed to hunt to provide for themselves. This appeal cannot be seen as working within the commitment to civility; a group acknowledging that it is being wronged but still agreeing to follow the rules. This should be seen as conforming to niceness, as the Dakota leadership at the time believed that any action that was taken to right the wrongs would be seen as an attack on civility, erasing any chance they would have for reparations. Minnesota was the party refusing to follow civility, and thus was the party that civility would dictate be removed. This would be seen as when civility should have provided the Dakota reason and ability to violate the norm of niceness. Instead, we see the application of the aesthetic of niceness as a political tool to allow MN to apply a double standard that requires concessions paid

to them no matter the response. If the Dakota violated nicety then they don't belong and must be pushed out, but if they follow nicety they have no means of achieving reconciliation like they would with civility.

### ***Quiet Sundown Towns***

One of the biggest indications of MN Nice being employed in a racial capacity is the notable lack (comparatively) of racism enshrined in written law or community ordinance. James Lowen, a sociologist who spent a great deal of time documenting and compiling data from cities around the U.S. that indicated or confirmed their status as sundown towns, named Edina, MN as a primary example of a kinder, gentler form of white supremacy (Brown 2018). Edina is notable for being one of the only cities in Minnesota that was categorically a sundown town due to its well-documented racist covenants and housing policies, indicators that do not exist for a high number of MN cities. Minnesota has only 23 cities listed on Lowen's map, each with little direct data, where Wisconsin has 250 (Cheney et al. n.d.). This is not a point in favor of Minnesotan superiority however, as the number of Black residents in any MN city during the period covered typically hovers around 0-100. There is often no record of racial incidents, for the simple fact that there was no one for a racially incensed mob to attack.

A major exception to this is Duluth, MN, which in the 1900's flirted with an aesthetic style of outright violence multiple times, due to a growing minority influence of hardline religious zealots and media personalities whipping up a sizable percentage of the city (primarily Finnish immigrants and other low-income workers) with a brand of racialized moralism exemplified by muckraking newspapers like the Rip-saw. This strand of puritanical or moralist abhorrence for corruption or "indecentcy" was very popular and wide in its lens of criticism, but only when this abhorrence was *racialized* did it translate to this kind of violence.

Long before the lynchings of Isaac McGhie, Elmer Jackson and Elias Clayton, many seemed placidly or ardently awaiting violence to occur. The Duluth News Tribune cutely asked "My! My! What's Next? Race Riot in Fair Duluth?", where the Rip-saw (with its readership accounting for a third of the city) whipped up animosity towards Black

sex workers that made neighborhoods “offensive to decent, law-abiding residents” (Ramos 2024). When the rest of the state and the country reacted with shock at the news of the lynchings, local papers took every conceivable stance to either defend the killings or attack whatever influence they thought caused them: “capitalism, unions, draft-dodgers, ‘the rotten cowboy pictures shown in the movies,’ the media, ‘white-livered sentimentalists’ who opposed capital punishment...” (Ramos 2024).

Duluth, unlike the rest of Minnesota's contentment with faux-innocence, definitely had a counter-culture pushing to say the quiet part out loud, primarily because of the tensions of the upper-class majority that was almost entirely White, and the diverse working class full of many hoping to pull themselves into assimilation with whiteness at the expense of the others. John Morrison, the editor of the Ripsaw, aimed his puritanical cries against the corrupt officials of the city and sex workers alike, but after the Finnish residents of the St. Croix neighborhood in Duluth appealed to him and made a public appeal to the city that the Black prostitutes *specifically* were the cause of the indecency that was putting their children at risk, his tirades took on a specific, racist leaning that almost certainly induced the violence that would be seen one month later (Ramos 2024).<sup>7</sup> After these screeds lead to multiple lynchings, Duluth was shamed intensely by the rest of the communities in the state. The branches of the Klu Klux Klan that had been established were upset to find their public gatherings were becoming suppressed due to the bad optics they drew onto Minnesotan communities (Bandsaw 1923).<sup>8</sup>

A throwaway comparison to the Scandinavians that “made Minnesota” being politically progressive is used from time to time. This claim has a line to history and an unintentional weight to it: There was a history of class consciousness and pro-labor in Minnesota, but this force that brought about the Farm and Labor party and Community

---

<sup>7</sup> An unadulterated skewering of John Morrison needs to be told, though this paper is not the appropriate place. Do yourself the favor of reading up on the man who accused so many members of Duluth's political class and the cops that served them of venereal diseases that the SCOTUS granted freedom to the press.

<sup>8</sup> The veracity of many claims in the newsletter for the Minnesota chapter of the Klu Klux Klan can and should be disputed (e.g., They allege that the mayor that shut their events down applied for a membership), though the fact that they were quite popular is not.

Cooperatives has been reduced to wisps. The Farm and Labor party merged with the centrist Democrat party in due course because of a desire for less conflict. The Farm and Labor party set itself on a path where, in representing the working class and the first and second generation immigrants that supported it, it would have to take a pro-labor, anti-war, pro-socialist policy platform. This put it directly at odds with the state and federal government at the time of the Red Scare and the Vietnam War. Key members like Elmer Benson instead chose to work with Hubert Humphrey to inject more conservative, anti-communist views, seeing the less radical platform as a unifying force that would bring more people together (Buick 2009). Keilor (2004) again provides what I would describe as the folklore spin of this history, drawing the correlation between socialism then and the progressive liberalism of today:

[Minnesota] was settled by no-nonsense socialists from Germany and Sweden and Norway who unpacked their trunks and planted corn and set about organizing schools; churches; libraries; lodges; societies and benevolent associations; brotherhoods and sisterhoods, and raised their children to Mind Your Manners, Be Useful, Pay Attention, Make Something Of Yourself, Turn Down the Thermostat (If You're Cold, Go Put On A Sweater), Share and Share Alike, Be Satisfied With What You Have-- a green Jell-O salad with mandarin oranges, miniature marshmallows, walnuts, and Miracle Whip is by God good enough for anybody. I grew up in the pure democracy of a public grade school where everybody brought a valentine for everybody on Valentine's Day so we should feel equally loved though of course some valentines are more equal than others, some have little lace and little flaps under which special endearments are written, and others are generic, printed six to a page with bumpy edges where they were torn on the dotted line. But you should be happy with what you get and Don't Think You're Special Because You're Not. (4)

You can see in Duluth the same kinds of racialized strategies in the Finnish population being used when attempts to organize labor or practice communism were attempted (Julin 2001). Villages in MN were racialized against Black and Indigenous people, and so their progressive tendencies have been uprooted. There were 6,900 settlers in Minnesota in 1852, vastly outnumbered by the Dakota bands. After the treaties, 100,000 speculators swept in. The first generation immigrants living in barely established villages latched onto the dismissive racism that the federal government and

its officers had for the “collective” native peoples, but without the comfort of force that those in uniform had, unleashed an outcry for the complete removal of all Indigenous Peoples from Minnesota, including many groups that had not fought in any conflict, had not signed any treaty, but were nonetheless held categorically responsible for causing unrest against peaceful citizens and would not be tolerated. “The desire of colonists to remove all Indians from Minnesota led to a similar bill to evict the Ho-Chunk, who had been uninvolved in the war but resided on prime agricultural land that colonists wished to obtain” (Minnesota Historical Society, n.d.).

This connects to the literature of Setha Low (2009), who defined two strategies that are used to maintain whiteness and white privilege – a generalized *fear of others* and a desire for the aesthetic value of *niceness*–which has compounding effects for my work in this thesis. Low puts forth that the fear of others is used to create a relationship of difference between the user and an “other”, and that this relationship is inscribed into the landscape and aesthetic preferences of an environment. This sanctioning of behavior is present in broad sweeping policies such as MN offering to deliver parcels of land to Indigenous Peoples who assimilated, using European farming methods rather than their own practices (Ross 2012, “1863 & 1864”). It is important to note this offering was only for “male adult half-breed or mixed-blood ... who has adopted the habits and customs of civilized life, and who is a citizen of the United States” (“1863 & 1864”), as this is a process of granting whiteness and its tie to middle-class privileges to those chosen as acceptable members of the community who take on community values. This racialization of class and demarcation of “middle-class [W]hites” that are advantaged and the “other” that is disadvantaged are used to ease the emotional conflict of economic decline or social stress (84). This then conflates the desires to be good and distinct from bad, to maintain safety and stability of their economic position, and to live in a nice place.

Niceness adds an aesthetic appeal to the fear of others, as it distances itself from the aspect described as “avoiding discomfort by building barriers to make a surveilled, purified space where only a smaller and smaller portion of peoples, expressions, and behaviors are permitted” and emphasizes the simple, defensible argument to “keep

things nice” (Low 2009, 90). Being surrounded with “nice” people in a “nice” place that just so happens to maintain the value of your property and economic standing is just an argument for whiteness, and this emotional, intrapersonal, economic, and aesthetic appeal lets us understand how us/them thinking becomes embedded in the local culture (90).

Using this understanding, we can answer the question that is often asked when these incidents occur, drawing eyes to the worst racial inequality in the country (Myers n.d.): How could this happen in Minnesota, the nicest place in the country? What is the cause of this “paradox”? The answer is that Minnesota is seen as such a nice place *because* of its strong adherence to keeping things nice, a communal technology that increases injustice and protects white privilege.

Just like the Scandinavian countries that we fail to emulate in terms of social welfare and equity, Minnesota falls victim to this brittle progressivism. You can gesture towards the attempts made: reestablishing train infrastructure, bike paths, etc. but they are weak. Yes, Minnesota has the Mall of America, extremely high rates of homeownership among White families, high measures of health and wealth and other indicators of a “nice place.” But there is radical inequality, so how do we square this with our nice place filled with nice people? In defining “The Minnesota Paradox,” Samuel Myers Jr. recalls the response:

In a characteristically Minnesotan manner, political leaders blamed the problems of rising numbers of violent murders, mounting welfare caseloads, and deteriorating school performance in the black community on migrants from Chicago, Detroit, and Gary, Indiana. The problem was a problem of the dispossessed of other urban cores. This was not Minnesota. This was outside influence. (n.d.)

We have made a nice place, so the parts of it that aren’t nice are full of *outsiders*.

Minnesota has a vast and extensive history of racism against Indigenous Peoples, because they had an absolute, undeniable presence. The state was able to largely avoid a legacy of slavery, historically *obvious* sundown towns, and other markers of white supremacy by having a strong push to make marginalized communities uncomfortable, by being uncomfortable with them. Rich White liberals from California and Colorado

are welcomed with open arms by Minnesota Nice neighbors, who see their wealth as a welcoming sign of returning to days passed. Former Duluth mayor Emily Larson highlighted the fact that Duluth is actively failing lower income Duluthians (disproportionately BIPOC) and the fleeing elites trying to avoid climate change are actively making the situation worse. Now 25 to 30 percent of the people buying property are from out of state, when that number used to be barely 2 percent in the 2010's. The reaction is tongue in cheek, as always: "they describe us as this big utopia. But we have lots of cloudy days, a lot of cold weather and a lot of snow. For many people, that's not always perfect" (Kamin 2023). But it isn't just that this place is an acquired taste, it's that it has been built to be deliberately exclusionary. In other words, Duluth (and MN at large) is a sanctuary, but not for everyone.

This point has been belabored elsewhere in this text, but I feel compelled to reemphasize one aspect after reading Moira Ozias's (2023) paper *White Women's Affect: Niceness, Comfort, and Neutrality as Cover for Racial Harm*. Through this work, we can understand whiteness as a "technology of Affect", a series of actions initiated by emotion that serve to maintain relations of difference, between Other and self. Ozias highlights that in predominantly white spaces (such as universities) there is an effort to engage with issues that folks who are oppressed raise on a purely neutral and academic level. It highlights that this expectation works to exclude the people directly being harmed in favor of a nice, dispassionate discussion between peers (who are functioning with the system and therefore can entertain the suggestion that harm is being done as a possibility without having to feel it). This style of engagement also invalidates oppressed folks when they share their experiences or why they are angry, because they don't "do it in the nice way."

Discussing racial harm is done in an academic, disconnected way, separated from real life. This disconnection teaches the wrong lesson in several ways: students learn that being nice is more important than the beliefs they hold, being rude invalidates what you have to say, and, fascinatingly, if harm only exists in these "nice avenues" this provides a resolution to the cognitive dissonance of doing things that hurt people

around you without stirring self-reflection, shame, or reconciliatory efforts. This is why Minnesotans can't even really *talk* about race.

An excerpt from Ozias (2023, 37): For example, Ann (pseudonym) shared,

We talk about a lot of really hot topics [in my ethics & world religions class], issues that you're always told you don't talk about those things in public. It's nice because, in that type of setting, we're actually able to sit and debate and discuss, but nobody gets overheated. We can have a *civil discussion* which I feel like nowadays that's very hard to find. . . . we can sit, and we can voice our opinions and our arguments for it, but then at the end of class, it's still, 'Hey, let's go grab a bite to eat.' It's very civil . . . (emphasis added)

Soon after, she described a conflict she was having with one of her roommates who, after considerable probing, turned out to be Black. The 2016 election cycle was in full swing, and Ann mentioned "leaning conservative" politically. In the course of explaining how her roommate was inconsiderate—coming home late, leaving the kitchen a mess—she said,

It would do our world a lot of good if everybody could just be nice to one another . . . (But my roommate) she just got in my face the other day, and she put her finger in my face and started going off after the election because of my Facebook posts and how I voted. I was like, 'I keep trying to be nice to you.'

This gets further at something we have to reckon with, something that Ozias (2023) asserts will define how we will later react to injustice: When you learn about harm that is done by people who look like you, who think like you, who talk like you, do you find ways to assure yourself that you are "one of the good ones"? Or do you instead engage in solidarity-building action with people of color brought about from the racialized emotions of (a) anger at racism and racist systems, (b) frustration with other White people who ignored racism and perpetuated the status quo, and (c) guilt for feelings of fear and past inaction. These are the emotions that signal an affective ability to "tarry" with white complicity, troubling whiteness as a technology of affect (42). However, even after you have done so you are constantly liable to fall back into whiteness. Letting these emotions feel resolved, feeling comfortable with the work you

have done to achieve a state of goodness pulls you back into complicity. To interrupt these systems you must purposefully engage with discomfort and uncertainty, and divest from comfort or niceness in the interest of whiteness (43).

There is a messiness in this tension that we try to shake off. Mythologizing about who we really are as a people, being nice progressive people, a covering-up of the hate crimes after the fact, and also a social push at the breaking of the nice rules (instead of the violence displayed towards those considered “outsiders”).

### ***Attacking Civil Society***

In an opinion piece for the New York Times, David Grant strikes an interesting position in the national conversation that I’d like to highlight. He specifically says that “Minnesota Nice” is an appearance, a performance that is upheld, and that it creates a culture that both encourages individuals to consider themselves superior to their peers, while also discouraging any discussions of issues that are considered uncomfortable or may lead to a fracturing of the appearance of civic politeness (2021). He offers several arguments about why Minnesota and the Twin Cities in particular have a passive mindset that has led to unproductive conversations about race, but his prescriptions and analysis run on the passive side themselves. Perhaps it is because of this tonal conservatism that he was selected by (or perhaps more accurately he chose to write for) the New York Times; to be a moderate voice for the Black community in Minneapolis, reflecting and setting the tone for the conversation that inevitably would increase in volume leading up to the 1-year anniversary of George Floyd’s death at the hands of Derek Chauvin. He states that the rude awakening (that we as Minnesotans are not above racial violence we see in other places) has already occurred and real change is happening, but also says that our unwillingness to have these discussions is to blame for our lack of concrete reform. He provides several examples of how policing, specifically in Minneapolis, has been a method to establish and strengthen white supremacist ideology, but in the same breath says that the current system of policing is the best way in which we can ensure conformity with our agreed-upon ethical framework. His biggest failing is that in all of his discussion on what should be done, he does not

acknowledge the actual policy reform that had been suggested or the policy reform that was actually implemented, and particularly how the democratically-elected governing body of Minneapolis has chosen to engage with its citizens' proposed reforms. What was being advocated by the protesters and abolitionists in Minneapolis during the year after George Floyd's death, what was done instead, the fallout from those choices, and the information that we now know about the MPD's standard of conduct are all things we all need to reckon with.

Minnesota Governor Tim Walz, quoted previously on his professed love for not censoring free speech and "disagreeing with policies that are meant to hurt and marginalize communities," (Bakst 2023) activated the National Guard to stop the 2020 BLM protests from occurring. He reasoned, "Let's be very clear, the situation in Minneapolis is no longer, in any way, about the murder of George Floyd. It is about *attacking civil society*, instilling fear and disrupting our great cities" (Taylor 2020, my emphasis). This rhetoric echoes what has been employed in Kenosha, WI in 2020, in Detroit, MI in 1967, or a dozen other cities to criticize the violence that erupts at anti-racist protests. The accusation flits between a condescending disappointment in the failure to voice opinions in a manner befitting our community, and the outright denial that these opinions could originate from within our community due to the decidedly unbecoming way they are expressed.

Minneapolis mayor Jacob Frey reiterated this condemnation in many forms: "What started as largely peaceful protests for George Floyd have turned to outright looting and domestic terrorism in our region[.] We are now confronting white supremacists, members of organized crime, out-of-state instigators, and possibly even foreign actors to destroy and destabilize our city and our region" (Murphy et al. 2020). In other words, "This must be outsiders using the protests as an excuse to come into our community and hurt us", "the reasons for the protest are not commensurate with the action now being taken", or in the least amount of words, "this is uncivilized" (Flores 2020; Murphy et al. 2020). All of these statements are expressions of a single feeling: this violence cannot be a true reflection of the community that we have built, because our community is above this. No true Minnesotan would do something so violent, so unnice.

And this feeling of hurt, of betrayal, the reaction that is provoked when people are asked to respond to injustice and are not willing to tarry with the system, subsumes the sting of processing racial harm in their own minds. You can see this in Walz's response (and Frey's silence) when they were corrected: "I certainly wanted to believe this came from outside our community" (Murphy et al. 2020). Conversely, those who use this belief cling to the unsaid opposite implication: I love Minnesota and I love being Minnesotan, so I must be nice. Nice people don't treat people poorly, and I don't deserve to be treated like this.

While condemning violence and destruction of property is completely unproblematic in a vacuum, it becomes problematic when appeals to civility are employed in a context where genuine civility is not a factor. Instead, these appeals are decrying the fact that these actions violate the norm of niceness, but using the language of genuine civility, wherein the question of whether or not citizens have the ability to inform change and engage peacefully in their polity, and if they have had their alternative forms of expression revoked is not relevant. In that context, a riot and the violence in its wake is understandable, though not commendable. As John F. Kennedy said, "Those who make peaceful revolution impossible will make violent revolution inevitable" (1962). When reviewing the series of events in Minneapolis, I would challenge the reader to find the place where protesters were ever seriously considered, rather than placated.

After months of protesting the methods of the protesters, Minneapolis mayor Jacob Frey and his council reluctantly announced they would consider some manner of police reform (Flores 2020) and after weeks of obfuscation on what concrete policy would be done, they announced a potential reform to the city charter (Collins 2021). Frey went back and forth on this "policy" and the public vote's actual weight in his decision making process. Whether it was a referendum or an opinion poll changed, and contrary to the telling of events by national news coverage, Frey refused to *ever* truly offer abolition or a replacement for the police as an option. The charter reform would only have removed the Minneapolis Police Department (MPD) as an enshrined requirement to the city's existence, an update that would put Minneapolis in line with the rest of the

country. When the referendum failed, it was covered as a failure to enact police abolition (Kaste 2021).

The updates on policy were deliberately obfuscated so that Frey could appear to be doing the nice thing. Frey is being nice by promising abolition to the audiences friendly to that and not doing it with other audiences. Frey is being nice as a policy maker still persuing niceness as policy. Frey is being nice by lying to abolitionist constituents and to anti-abolitionist constituents. Frey puts forward a bill that isn't anything to anyone and all but ensures it will not pass.

The resistance to the popular narrative was only covered on a local level, with news outlets like Minnesota Public Radio leveling some scrutiny at the mayor's misrepresentations and unwillingness to hear out community outcries. Wayne Nealis, writing for MinnPost, leveled scrutiny on Frey for continuing the tradition of starting a committee or working group to recommend changes, then dissolving it when you disagree with their findings and making another one. Nealis highlights how the community has been straightforward and consistent with proposals: "[C]ommunity involvement in hiring, evaluating and disciplining officers[, and...] the granting of subpoena power to an oversight board to investigate police misconduct." (Nealis 2022)

Also, if a community board does not have subpoena power to compel testimony of officers it will lack authority. Currently, state law prohibits local governmental units from granting subpoena power to an oversight entity. The 2012 Legislature enacted this measure that was co-authored by John Harrington, then a state legislator, who is currently commissioner of the Minnesota Department of Public Safety under Gov. Tim Walz. Until state law is changed, any oversight board constituted is advisory only. For about a year in the late 1960s a citizens' review board in Minneapolis was granted subpoena powers to compel testimony. The Police Federation and officers refused to cooperate and ignored the board's subpoenas. A year later the City Council acquiesced and rescinded the board's subpoena power. Since then, all iterations of review boards have operated in an advisory capacity. (Nealis 2022)

On the national level, outlets like the National Public Radio, New York Times, and NBC news misconstrued the public referendum as a resounding public cry against "abolishing the police", as it is a much more appealing story.

Contrasting the conversation and coverage both at a national and state level, we can see which tangible policy proposals were entertained and which were shut down. Grant's opinion piece vaguely gesturing towards the idea of concrete change that either should happen or is happening is elevated to the national stage. Nealis and others like him show how the community of Minneapolis is still being disenfranchised, and warnings of the cost of this inaction are ignored, again. These series of news articles changed the conversation after the fact, framing the reforms that were voted on as transforming or abolishing the police, when the only vote that took place was to no longer have a compulsory police force, but a compulsory "public safety force" lead by the chief of police, as well as a police force that exists, just without the compulsion of the city charter (as is the case for every other city in Minnesota). The suggested proposal was to have two concurrently running departments both under the direct control of the mayor (who is resolute in his support of law enforcement), with no promises to disband or defund the police ever drafted into policy or seriously deliberated. After subsequent attempts were stifled and silenced, an increase to the MPD's budget was approved, and even slight reductions in funding have been met with harsh internal criticism (Collins 2022).

#### *The report and the aftermath*

After this situation was forced closed, the Federal Department of Justice (DOJ) released its report detailing its investigative findings on the Minneapolis Police Department (MPD) and its operations. The report is full of both sobering statistics that yield some understanding of the systemic issues that are at play and vivid firsthand accounts of the nature of abuse that is committed as part of the regular functioning of the department that has not received national attention, and therefore has not had any gestures towards reparation. As more detail is issued, it is worth considering that all of this data is collected from the stops that MPD actually recorded data for. Leadership in the MPD, the city, and the DOJ have made it clear that accountability from outside forces is deliberately avoided by violating reporting data policy:

Starting in late May 2020, officers suddenly stopped reporting race and gender in a large number of stops, despite MPD policy requiring officers to collect the data. We estimate the percentage of daily stops with known race data recorded dropped from about 71% just before May 25, 2020, to about 35% afterwards, a drop of roughly 36 percentage points. This sudden decrease in MPD officers recording racial data continued throughout the next two years. We are not aware of MPD taking any action to address this widespread policy violation—a policy violation that can make it more difficult to detect and counter discrimination. *Still*, our analyses of the reported racial data on or after May 25, 2020, showed significant racial disparities in searches and use of force... (US DoJ Civil Rights Division et al. 2023, 41)

Leadership in the MPD, the city, and the DOJ have made it clear that officers do not bother to mask their commitment to inflicting racialized violence, as accountability from internal forces is deliberately avoided. Supervisors lie to validate fabricated accounts that contradict bodycam footage, complaints are purposefully lost in the system, deleted, not given follow-up or interviews, or deliberately mislabeled to ignore aspects of misconduct (like racial bias being tagged as “unprofessionalism”):

Despite the repeated police misconduct that we observed at protests between 2016 and the present, MPD has only disciplined officers for their conduct at protests in connection with five incidents over that seven-year period. Notably, although the reviews in those cases considered issues like the use and reporting of force, they ignored the question of whether officers violated protesters’ First Amendment rights. (54)

Every instance of personal testimony is only the behavior that MPD officers felt comfortable enacting in front of Justice Department investigators, “the incidents we heard about, officers made little effort to hide them”(US DoJ Civil Rights Division et al. 2023, 44). This is the light that the department chooses to shine upon itself.

Leadership in the MPD, the city, and the DOJ have made it clear that the MPD does not operate as an ineffective public safety organization, but as a highly effective organization to inflict a pernicious degree of racialized violence in a manner that those who support nicety protect and support (42):

MPD used bodily force against Black and Native American [children] at rates 11.4 and 10.5 times higher per capita than they did against [W]hite [children], and at rates 1.8 and 1.7 times higher than they did against [W]hite *adults*. And MPD officers unholstered or pointed guns at Black and Native American [children] at rates 13.5 and 19.6 times higher per capita than [W]hite [children], and at rates 4.7 and 6.8 times higher than [W]hite *adults*. (38, my emphasis)

Everyone knows that they are doing it, no one is doing anything about it, and it's really bad. In any ten police interactions where force was used, six of them had no reason, probable or otherwise. When questioned about their motive, officers would state that they were working off frustrations. An officer was spat on by a man who was experiencing a mental health episode, and slapped and punched him in the face in response (although the man was handcuffed to a stretcher and not dangerous). He never expressed regret, indeed saying "I'm really proud of myself; I only hit him twice" (20). Deadly force is often used with no reason, probable or otherwise. These displays of violence are often accompanied with no arrest. "These indiscriminate uses of force suggest that officers' true purpose is not to prevent criminal activity, but to retaliate against protesters for their constitutionally protected speech" (49).

*Who's afraid of police abolition?*

An honest consideration of police abolition, as it has not yet been considered as a solution to the issues, should be put forward. Very few people have any real engagement with the police anywhere in the United States: about 23.7% of the population had interactions and about 8.9% of those related to being the victim or perpetrator of a crime (Harrel and Davis 2020). Of the few instances of public life where people do interact with the police, the police are not necessary to stop crime, and do not solve crime. Keilor claims the police have improved in his experience; cops used to make him lie face down on the shoulder of the road or tell him to get the hell out of town for having long hair in the sixties, instead: "In St Paul, if your car has been broken into, you get prompt service: the officer comes to your door, fills out the forms, gives you some tips on prevention, and gives you a cop's view of what's going on in the neighborhood these days. You feel well served" (2004, 114).

It would not be an exaggeration to say that the majority of individuals that exist today in the U.S. do so under conditions that can be described as anarchy, or at least the definition that is used to argue in favor of policing. The MPD and departments like it spend a vast amount of time on traffic and pretext stops that (often because they are racially biased) result in no citation or arrest. The result is thousands of hours of work, with little to no gains to public safety (US DoJ Civil Rights Division et al. 2023, 35). The true utility of a police department is a feeling of safety, and the cost-to-utility ratio of this luxury service is not practicable for most living spaces. The cost of police is more than most small towns in Minnesota can afford, even when subcontracting a force from a bigger city. The Moose Lake Police and thirty-five other departments have disbanded throughout the state since 2016, some the result of the city removing them, others the result of quitting en masse due to low pay (Hollingsworth 2024; Mewes 2023). Nearly 90% of property tax proceeds alone would have gone to the police department in Moose Lake after a 28% cost increase in police health insurance. This same reason is the primary attribution to Duluth's inability to balance a budget (Schuchman 2023, 1). Keilor dubs policing "a calling, a pure public service"(2004, 114), but it is a service that can not justify itself (unlike the rest of the public goods that Minnesotans defend as the reason for both the high standard and cost of living). The sense of safety for life and property that the police provide is questionable when compared to the St. Paul Fire Department, an institution Keilor holds in high esteem for responding to his daughter's health crisis in less than two minutes and saving her life (132).

#### *Niceness as white supremacy*

Those who trade in MN Nice genuinely believe that MN is unproblematic, especially as compared to our neighboring states, so reform does not occur because reform is not necessary. Governor Tim Walz, in reaction to what he claimed to be a lack of civility, called for violence against his community to protect property. Mayor Jacob Frey says that change is needed, but can't find a nice way to do it. He chooses to plead for Minneapolis to become nice again. "Frey appeared to be holding back tears as he said, 'I believe in Minneapolis ... I love Minneapolis'"(Donaghue 2020). In dedication to being nice, he says that he is listening and empathetic to the cause. But, he refuses to do what is asked.

Because we think and act the way that we do about ourselves and have this raised threshold of expected conformity, we have established a vigilant variant of white supremacy that is resistant to reform. As Jacob Frey stated previously, “I don’t want to abolish the police, I want a ‘culture change’” (Dernbach 2021), but reassigns the responsibility of actually doing so: “We cannot fix this ourselves, we need external help.” The DOJ (2023) notes this tension as well:

Both Mayor Frey and Chief O’Hara expressed a desire to engage with community based responses to violence like violence interrupters and hospital-based interventions. However, as Chief O’Hara acknowledged, law enforcement officers can be resistant to these approaches. At times, we saw MPD officers express open resentment for violence interrupters. For example, at a protest in October 2020, a sergeant who was preparing to make a mass arrest learned that violence interrupters were present. He responded, “Oh good. They’ll get arrested too.” (47)

The mayor and the former chief of police both maintain that they want change, but the force is resistant to progressive policies, so they don’t push the issue too hard. We have strong strains of conservative thinking – inclined towards preserving property value and institutions, and finding ways to tolerate racialized harm. Forgetting it, ignoring it, not talking about it, then when it is pushed to the breaking point, we apologize and try to move on. If that doesn’t work, make a memorial, and if that doesn’t work say that you’ll work on fixing it. Hopefully at this point the people asking for change are either dead or have given up.

These gestures have been seen again and again in Minnesota’s responses to asking to engage with the Dakota or the lynchings of Duluth. Alexander Ramsey, our territory Governor, called for the Dakota People to “be exterminated or driven forever beyond the borders of the State.” It took until 2012 for this declaration to be repudiated (Brown 2012; Pugmire 2019). After ignoring protests for generations, it was Governor Dayton who finally acknowledged that the genocide that had been committed was a moral wrong in no uncertain terms and declared a day of remembrance. It took until his successor was sworn in for even another attempt to be made. In 2019, Governor Walz

participated in the Dakota's traditional memorial, riding on horseback to echo how the Dakota were forcefully expelled from the state (Walz and Flanagan 2020). It wasn't until 2021 that a non-symbolic gesture was offered, with Walz and the state legislature transferring ownership of *115 acres* to the Dakota People.

Ward's work (Civility vs. Niceness) explains the political leveraging that is used to avoid systemic action. A genuine form of "virtue signaling" might actually be accurately identified in the instances of Frey and Walz and their predecessors repeatedly reiterating that something must be and is being done about this very important matter in the place of actually initiating action. Saying something must be done is very nice, actually doing something drastic in response to the dire situation is not. We say something must be and is being done, and this is sufficient. Investigating the MPD and ridding the MPD of its racist culture takes a long time, so we need to be patient rather than continuing to inquire what the specifics of the plan are (Kolls 2023a).

Low's work explains why protecting property and the aesthetics of MN as a nice place are being given preference over justice. Every offer of a change, every slow silted step, from making a public statement of acknowledgement, to making a public denunciation of past poor behavior, to putting up plaques, to putting up statues, are all attempting to avoid shedding privilege unto the marginalized community members that have been othered.

MN Nice avoids reform by being conflict averse, and encourages avoidance of individual action. Getting involved is a *faux pax* and pushing upstream against the community is wrong. Any *internal* efforts to make change were soundly defeated by the MN supreme court finding that it is unconstitutional to "defund the police", and Frey's pleas for *outside* help were crushed by the Department of Justice not wanting to be too harsh to the very nice people who work here. While the DOJ has found without the shadow of a doubt that the MPD does not serve either the community or the "law", but rather is an organization dedicated to causing crime and violence, they still decided that the best course of action was to make sure that MPD are protected because they "seem dedicated to change" and have promised to be better. MN Nice stops change by allowing what would otherwise be a grossly unacceptable volume of violence to feel acceptable to

those who do not interact with them. By Frey's own definition, MPD could charitably be called 'members of organized crime' and perhaps more precisely, definitionally be called 'domestic terrorists' (Taylor 2020). The MPD's right to violence over the community is given via the city, state, and federal governments, through explicit financial support and implicit consent to violent acts through lack of prosecution. Minneapolis has been losing police officers faster than they can hire, at what the chief calls an 'unsustainable rate' (Kolls 2023b). Without these forces artificially propping it up, the organization would collapse, since it is without community support and struggles to maintain itself as such.

The main point is that the police are ostensibly about serving a community, being part of a community. The community has not seen it that way. The suggestions to improve the institution are not practicable, as the community is unwilling to partake in staffing the institution and forcibly removed from participation in other ways. Even with benefits like free college for full and part time officers, 90,000 dollars a year starting pay, and an average overtime pay of 200,000 dollars per officer, they cannot fulfill their requirements (Kolls 2023b).

As an institution, the MPD is *that* corrupt, is *that* reviled by the community it is supposed to protect, and *that* poor at finding a place among them. The irony of the police chief's (and Walz's) comments that the majority of the violence at the protests came from *out-of-state actors* that do not represent the wishes of the community cannot be left as subtext (Donaghue 2020). While the vast majority of protesters detained in 2020 were locals, the same cannot be said for the MPD. In 2017, less than 1 in 10 officers lived in the city, a number that Frey acknowledged was a issue and proposed solving by offering officers rent control and bonuses for living in the city, as well as 'changing the culture' of the department by naming a new police chief and trying to change the way the department is perceived by the community (Callaghan 2017). A full seven years later, Frey's strategy has remained unchanged, calling for "a necessary culture shift that is long overdue, that has needed to be in place for years and generations" (McFarlane 2024). But as no one in the community wants to work in the department, those bonuses are going to out-of-state hires, the vast majority of whom are found through recruiters

touring military bases (Kolls 2023b). Minneapolis cannot find .0432 percent (for context, that is four ten-thousandths, or the size of a small high school) of its population to participate in this institution, and was found in violation of its laws by the MN supreme court, which mandated that funding the police more to achieve compliance was the only solution (Navratil 2021). This facet also sheds light on the argument that the police department couldn't be demolished, as it would be effectively disenfranchising heavily armed and angry members of the community into our midst. It isn't *nice* that we have awarded a group of outsiders the right to inflict violence against those they wish to, but feeling safe is, and wanting to believe that we're not perfect but we're listening and improving is, so the untenable decisions are validated.

The effects of MN Nice, our feelings of exceptionalism, and our dedication to niceness instead of civility repairing injustice take their toll. There is a four year expiration date on the consent decree from the time of implementation, a clause meant to reward good behavior by removing the strict regulation the force is currently facing. This was added because the DOJ felt that more stringent regulation would be a waste of resources *unless* "the DOJ doesn't believe that the state of Minnesota can do an adequate job getting the [Minneapolis police] to change its pattern or practice"(Peters 2022). Despite the fact that the Department of Justice's report (2023) directly quotes Frey saying "We need help changing and reforming this department," (2) and that city leaders have known they have a problem and have not remedied the situation for decades, (42) "the cooperation and candor" (2) of City and MPD officials during the investigation ultimately led them to the judgment that Minneapolis can be left to its own devices on this issue. The thousands of hours of work and effort taken to analyze this problem and prove without a shadow of a doubt that the institution is beyond saving were repeatedly invalidated: First by Frey fearmongering about abolition, then by pigeonholing resolutions made by the city council, then by the failure of the referendum, then by the MN supreme court denying the possibility to ever fix this problem in the future. All of this work provided nothing except another few committees that made nonbinding resolutions that were immediately and easily ignored, and binding agreements from an external force that were softened due to the effects of niceness, to the extent that these

decrees can easily be undone. Martin Luther King Jr. (1963) famously stated that the biggest threat to racial equality is:

The people who stand in the way of progress, because they are committed to its ideas in only a lukewarm manner. And everytime you move to try to solve a problem, they will respond by saying 'you're moving too fast, you ought to cool off, you should put on brakes.' and they end up more devoted to order than justice. *I'm devoted to an assault on negative peace, which is just the absence of tension, to reach a positive peace, which is the presence of justice.* [...They stop these efforts] because they get close enough to you to at least discuss your plans. And they become friendly enough to talk with you or at least have dialogue with you but they want to stand in the way of every move forward. This has been my disappointment. *I think at times it is better to have outright rejection and misunderstanding from people of ill will than to have lukewarm acceptance from people of good will.* (my emphasis)

Keilor (2004) explains what we as Minnesotans have learned from the civil rights movement: "Decent people don't wink at racism *anymore*"(115, my emphasis). As the DOJ reported one cop saying to a Black teenager (in response to them asking if the person in plainclothes brandishing a lethal weapon was a member of the police department), "Really? How many White people in the city of Minneapolis do you know who have guns?" (US DoJ Civil Rights Division et al. 2023, 44) The implicit assumption spelled out: The White liberal majority in Minneapolis are very uncomfortable with violence, so they turn to hiring mercenaries who enjoy enacting violence on marginalized people for the sake of creating the feeling of safety for the middle-class, White members of the community. They don't want to live in a peaceful place, they want to feel safe; Peace cannot be achieved through fascistic violence. Functional civility cannot be achieved through niceness. Both are impulses towards small-mindedness, shrouded in the guise of moral good that need to be eliminated if we are to ever live in positive, *true* peace.

## COMFORT AND SECURITY

Violence is unacceptable, hatred is acceptable. The Duluth lynchings, police brutality, and the Dakota genocide are obviously unacceptable and unbecoming for our community, *but only because* they are blatantly, undeniably violent, which breaks our social customs. The examples of intolerance that refrain from explicit violence are not only acceptable, not only encouraged, but are *the underlying landscape* that the unacceptable violence was employed to construct in our past and erupts to maintain in our present. The Duluth lynchings seems like a bizarre outburst, but makes sense when it is looked at as the kind of violence necessary to both assuage and reinforce the uncomfortability of white supremacy towards Black bodies. Stillwater was a hotbed for the KKK, and had virtually no racialized instances of violence; Stillwater is not currently considered as a sundown town. Why? Because it already had achieved what white supremacist groups use violence to achieve: A communal conflation of the idea of white homogeneity with the feeling of comfort and security, persistent enough to exist almost entirely in subtext rather than explicit racist screeds. Rest assured, screeds did exist, and an interesting facet is that sometimes these quiet sundown towns solidify the deniability of their identity through their success.

In the wake of the Duluth lynchings in the 1920's, many of those living in quiet sundown towns complained of the Klan's continued existence there, not because of a disagreement on their views, but because they believed that regular organized KKK events like parades and speeches would increase the amount of organized animosity and conflict against them, increasing the risk of violence breaking out to protest them. They did not have disagreements with the values expressed, but a fear of the violence that would naturally follow from their rhetoric. The mayor of Stillwater broke up a Klan event for this very fear, but despite their vexation and public threats and his very strong words in response that they would never be allowed to organize publicly while he was mayor (Call of the North 1923), this display of intolerance for the intolerant was more for the benefit of print media and to give the extremist group a slap on the wrist, and did not correlate into action like other proclamations for expulsion in our history, as we

have seen. In 1991, leaders of the KKK still referred to Stillwater as their headquarters in the state (Brown 2018).

Much like the Scandinavian countries that are named as our developmental and cultural influences, whatever progressive tendencies exist are thanks to a racially homogenous identity, and are more concerned with creating feelings of comfortability rather than lifting up marginalized groups. Constructed spaces like ours can seem like civil utopias of liberalism one second and then completely fall into extremist violence the next, because the allegiance is not to this system of government but to the feelings of comfort its image provides. This form of white supremacy rarely needs to function in a manner that displays intolerance, as any instance where someone would have to be tolerated had been ultimately excised.

The literature connecting white discomfort directly to worries about falling property value are especially insightful here, because the majority of incidents of public fervor that either bubbled into mob violence or constrained itself to social exclusion of both white supremacist groups and minorities rose from the concern of their inability to maintain the appearance of “civility”. Property is valuable because it is sought after, it is sought after because it feels safe to those that seek it, and those feelings of safety are built by the walls put up to keep racialized conflict out. Every manifestation of both civil progressivism and authoritarian violence rises from this instilled value.

## **SUMMARIAL THOUGHTS**

In 1949, Arthur Baum put forward a different likeness of that effervescent Duluthian character:

Mayor Johnson believes that the people of Duluth possess a marvelously co-operative spirit — a doubtful premise, since there are several cleavages along its stringy length. The main personality split in Duluth occurs about where an interfering spine of rocks comes down from the hill to Superior Street just a few blocks west of midtown. West of this point of rocks Duluth is politically left, east of it it is politically right. (Lundgren 2019)

The remarkable uniqueness we point to is a character flaw. MN Nice is a reason that we are worse, not better, than our redder state neighbors. Now this is far from an

endorsement of their systems, or to say that participating in active fascist rhetoric and policy is preferred. However, when Wisconsin bans CRT or starts targeting teachers with hostility, it is met with direct protests, with direct action. Their systemic issues are clumsy and blatant regressions. Minnesota, on the other hand, slips out of any direct confrontation with its problems, refuses to acknowledge issues, then voices support for criticisms of itself, while stalling any change from occurring, and finally proclaims an inherent superiority of character over its troubled sisters. We have done all the same atrocities, we have the same outdated views, we've just talked ourselves out of being called out for it; after all, we're good, better than most.

Walz, Keilor, Frey, and the rest believe we have built a marvelously co-operative community, something worth and in need of protecting. They want to believe, as I do, that Minnesotan is a moniker that can fit anyone; any who seeks the beauty of this place will have it. The language we use and the policies we write have the same tone as the old ideals upon which the U.S. was founded: "Sanctuary," "Safe Harbor," and "place of refuge" (Ferguson 2023; Minnesota Historical Society 2023; Linehan 2023). But, unfortunately, it turns out that despite all those ideals, *that place* is not a safe place. The reality is, we do not take care of our community. When I look around in my city, I don't see a shared sense of care. I see the police called, regardless of whether someone is asking for change in the parking lot or dying of an overdose because "[they are] an indecent sight." I hear complaints about how businesses like the communally owned grocery store aren't strict enough, don't do enough to *force* "seedy people" from the store, the sidewalks, and the streets. The five cop cars that were routinely stationed directly across the street due to the concerns raised aren't doing enough to promote a feeling of safety because they aren't being made to leave, being removed from sight.<sup>9</sup>

Trying to change by "living up" to our imagined superiority will always end in failure, as it is the very thing that holds us back. If we want to be better, we should not only look at what Wisconsin is currently doing so that we can maintain our contrarian status, we need to reflect on ourselves and change how we address our own problems as a community.

---

<sup>9</sup> Staff at the Whole Foods Co-Operative in discussion with the author, January 2024;

The problem is that Minnesotan white liberalism is *homooousion* – of the same stuff – as white Conservatism. That stuff is white supremacy. It is very difficult to change systemic issues if we buy into the same problematic philosophy, we just think we're unproblematic examples of it (Green et al. 2007). This is because if we think we are unproblematic examples of the system (of white supremacy), we implicitly endorse the idea that the system *can* produce good, at least some of the time. This makes us discourage anyone from making criticisms against the system even further.

Whiteness in American society is really an assumed identity that means “the people of the system.” There is a reason why “it's okay to be white” is a neo-nazi slogan meant to fly under the radar. To many White Minnesotans, saying it's okay to be white seems completely unproblematic. Because it fits within how we like to view ourselves, it serves as an endorsement of our systemic issues, a confirmation that the system has to stay in place. Our preference for negative peace, as King put it, rather than justice, prioritizes making the people privileged by the system feel a sense of safety above actually curating a livable space for the people who have to live in it. This sense of safety, when considered throughout the historical events that I've transected: defending the property value of White settlers by committing genocide against the Dakota, enforcing housing policies and excluding non-White people, and the violence employed against protesters to halt damage to property and decreasing property value, has been racialized and individualized and needs threats of violence to uphold it as a standard of living. We cling so tightly to the *sense* of safety – to niceness over civility – that it is fracturing our community in a way that turns every *other* into an *Othering force*.

Engagement with one another is already uncomfortable and requires a level of trust that violence does not beget. We as Minnesotans are conditioned to avoid the uncomfortable, and our failing infrastructure and expansive suburbia exacerbate this. Our avoidance of justice and reparations exacerbate this. Our acceptance of the nationalized bipartisan political system rather than having political parties that suit our needs as a community exacerbates this.

If your existence is anti-social, then the way you exist is antisocial. Having a community is necessitated through accepting uncomfortability, and there is some hope

to be had that we are at the point where positive changes can occur when we do so (Kolls 2023a). Unfortunately, with each passing year, the hostility against genuine safety that the *sense* of safety requires has ruined chance after chance for improvement. The consent decree that MPD and Minneapolis signed has been implemented at a crawling pace to discourage scrutiny, and has almost already made its way to the end of its expiration, with no media or practical successes to show for it. Again, King's words maintain their relevance:

[These White moderates] mean well, but they stand in the way of progress because they refuse to understand the problem and they live by the myth of time... They think that if you just leave things alone and don't push too much, time will solve the problem. This view is invalid because it proposes there is something in the very nature or structure of time that will miraculously solve all problems. Time really is neutral: it can be used either constructively or destructively. (1963)

Racism is just one manifestation of a very human problem: The necessity of social engagement without traumatizing vulnerability at odds with our invariable tendency towards biases – and justificatory narratives about comfort, safety, decency – that amplify them. Systemic violence occurs to reaffirm a status quo that is comfortable for the ruling classes (Bonilla-Silva 2009). When we say that we value decency, this is realized by suppressing that which is labeled indecent. This necessitates harm against the natural diversity of human expression, because otherness is uncomfortable and can feel contrary to our desire to establish a community.

It needs to be said how bad this is for everyone, especially including those who perpetuate harm against marginalized communities through their feelings of discomfort. Keilor and the Minnesotans he speaks for do not realize this: "I am a liberal and liberalism is the politics of kindness. Liberals stand for tolerance, magnaminty, community spirit, the defense of the weak against the powerful, love of learning, freedom of belief, art and poetry, city life, the very things that make America worth dying for" (2004, 20). As Ward (2016) highlights, these: "[O]ther citizens, deprived of the occasion to undergo frank and passionate criticism, are left to continue walking in their sleep, unaware of the shameful gap between their conduct and the democratic ideals

they profess. The social fabric frays further” (123). The “natural” feelings that white supremacy appeals to are ahistorical. Minnesota, particularly for those who have experienced living in the working class, has always been multicultural (Hudelson et al. 2006). We currently have many people in positions of influence that pay lip service to the importance of having conversations about racial injustice, but they directly discourage this very thing by saying that we are already having those conversations and progress is already being made, to halt doing so.

As we have seen, Minnesota currently fails its progressive ideals because MN Niceness is a wishy-washy but very sticky norm. Wishy-washy in its lack of a moral center, equally able to be a weight pulling for harm or healing, a lens to look at the world that cannot see the true moral value that decorum serves; sticky because it feels and looks good on the surface, making it broadly yet shallowly popular. This is a dangerous combination in a loosely representative democracy. We place MN Nice above other social norms because of these two traits, and it has had disastrous impacts. Our move towards progress collapses as we move away from niceness, and race politics in the U.S. aren't nice. Our exceptionalism and whiteness and white supremacy are all infused by this conflict between progress and niceness. If we are a progressive haven, it is *specifically upper class, white progressivism*. As I have explored, the commitment to the ideal of whiteness overrules the lukewarm commitment to progressivism and creates a space for racialized harm to be perpetuated.

## **UNEXPLORED BUT RICH AVENUES REVEALED BY THIS ANALYSIS**

### ***Gentrification***

Another avenue in which progressive-appearing places like Minneapolis and Duluth fail to actually foster and grow their communities is through the practice of gentrification. As Joy White (2020) and others have explored, gentrification should be understood as slow racial violence, and this understanding may further develop my case that the tendency to make things look and feel “nice” overpowers the attempts to actually make things nicer. In particular, Duluth is experiencing gentrification directly because of the rhetoric of being a safe and nice place, which drew in wealthy White

entrepreneurs to the area from California and New York. They have started boutique businesses, bought up a majority of rental properties, and constructed a much higher proportion of luxury apartments than are needed (while the waiting list to apply for affordable housing grows), all of which have steadily, deliberately increased the cost of living for working class people to a cruel extent. This destabilization of all of Duluth's working (and eventually middle class) is permitted because of the perception that it will provide a more comfortable space at the cost of destabilizing *only* the "uncomfortable" people. More research should be done to measure the current demographic makeup as it relates to property ownership and how this correlates to the redlining of Duluth in the 1930's, the economic stagnation and decline of the city, the development of I-35, and the failure of modern developments to address these inequalities.

### ***Homelessness***

The criminalization of "undesirable" or uncomfortable members of our community is an aspect I have detailed, but there is much more work that can be done to unpack why Duluth, MN is considered to be a "nice place" when it has such problems with solving these crises. By my own initial estimates (data via Duluth News Tribune 2020; Passi 2021; Slater 2021), there are 600 homeless people identified through a yearly survey, but there are 1,321 households of homeless people, typically between 1-2 people, on the city's list for aid. Taking that second number as a more accurate ballpark that includes people who don't want to identify as homeless, that averages out to approximately 1,981 people. Forty percent of this number are Black and Indigenous people, which is about 792 people. The total number of Black and Indigenous peoples in Duluth is 4 percent of the population, or 3,454 people. This means that 22 percent of our BIPOC population is homeless, as opposed to ~1.5% of the white population. We know that at least 45 people that can be identified as homeless die every year, which is at least 2.3% of our homeless population annually. This is a specific, slow, but undeniable violent act of systemic racism that showcases another potential way that MN Nice hides ugly truths.

## ***Labor***

A crucial aspect of this history is the history of labor, as race and class are often closely intertwined. Work has already been done to showcase how Minnesota is very similar to Wisconsin and Michigan when it comes to being at the center of the nation's rise of radical socialist movements, but Minnesota is unique among them because of its comparative lack of urban density and racial diversity (Hudelson and Ross 2006; Simkin 2020). Minnesota was the home of a labor movement that had strong initial support due to the cultural ideals of the immigrants who moved there, but was able to be easily, peacefully assimilated by a centrist movement appealing to laborers' desire to achieve whiteness. In Wisconsin and Michigan, leftism was expelled through the most successful gerrymandering ever constructed and violent force. The diverse communities made up such a strong coalition that generations of direct hostility have been unable to overwhelm them. As I alluded earlier, in Minnesota, it seems quite possible that the promise of Niceness and whiteness caused the expulsion of leftist ideals to be much more successful in comparison – the Duluth lynching of Olli Kinkkonen in 1918 may prove another interesting case study – there is more to be done in exploring the role niceness has in the tolerance of these acts of extreme violence.

## ***The Psychology Of MN Nice***

Research suggests passive aggressive communication styles are objectively the worst both for the transmission of information and for promoting healthy relationships. This might connect to MN Nice as a communal technology, similarly to the research on whiteness as “a technology of Affect” (Ozias 2023). I have explored some of the ways in which individuals employ MN Nice or how they conceptualize it, but there is more needed to develop a fuller understanding of the ways in which this presents. The response of people at the transmitting or receiving end of MN Nice is a dry irony in which they recognize that a harm is being done but act like it isn't, but an articulation of the emotional process this engages has not been done. The problem with this specific emotional response is that it blinds the user from the extent of the harm they've inflicted. It is not just that you have found a paradigm that provides justification for

harm, it's that it obscures the sheer extent of the harm ultimately caused at an individual, intrapersonal, and institutional level. This may also connect to Cherry's work on racial rules and emotionality, where she expresses that racialization often forces individuals to suppress emotional responses, and exhibiting emotions like anger can be an act of resistance (2021, "Breaking Racial Rules Through Rage").

### **FINAL WORDS**

Thinking through MN Niceness also gives us some insight into the rejection of and resistance to certain accountability strategies within antiracist movements – extended protests, protests directed at individuals, protests that end in property damage, and protests that result in violence. These responses that reflect the anger protesters feel at the state violence and inequity are rejected for being not nice. This is how niceness translates to racial antipathy. If we do not care enough about each other to stop racialized harms when they occur, then politicians can get away with the non-reason for inaction: that the calls for radical change need time to be properly handled. That is a nice answer, so we excuse and tolerate the current harms that are done because there is a promise for better in the indeterminate future. This paradigm, left unchecked, is the same as our relationship with the Dakota, with the same natural endpoint.

If we have a preference for talk instead of action, which we let develop into talking to stop action, and finally empty language to fill the space where meaningful conversation should go; coupled with an extreme tolerance for suffering in silence, and an intolerance for loud rule breaking, we have made a place where only polite bigotry feels at home.

## References

- Abbett, Catherine. 2024. "Minnesota's First Governor." Dakota County Historical Society. <https://www.dakotahistory.org/first-governor>.
- Anderson, Gary Clayton, and Alan R Woolworth. 2015. "1858 Dakota Treaty Delegation." Minnesota Historical Society. <https://www.usdakotawar.org/history/multimedia/1858-dakota-treaty-delegation>.
- Anderson, Theo. 2017. "The Great Midwestern Divide: Why Minnesota and Wisconsin's Political Schism Matters." *In These Times*, July 26, 2017. <https://inthesetimes.com/article/two-paths-diverged-in-the-midwest-scott-walker-mark-dayton>.
- Amazon. n.d. "Keep Minnesota Passive Aggressive or Whatever." Amazon. [https://www.amazon.com/s?k=Keep+Minnesota+Passive+Aggressive+Or+Whatever&crid=2D5P7FGYW5YCM&srefix=keep+minnesota+passive+aggressive+or+whatever%2Caps%2C109&ref=nb\\_sb\\_noss](https://www.amazon.com/s?k=Keep+Minnesota+Passive+Aggressive+Or+Whatever&crid=2D5P7FGYW5YCM&srefix=keep+minnesota+passive+aggressive+or+whatever%2Caps%2C109&ref=nb_sb_noss).
- Bakst, Brian. 2023. "Walz Seizes Time on National Scene to Contrast MN with GOP-Led States." *MPR News*. March 3, 2023. <https://www.mprnews.org/story/2023/03/22/walz-seizes-time-on-national-scene-to-contrast-mn-with-gopled-states>.
- Bandsaw. 1923. "Klansmen Forbidden to Speak in Stillwater." *Call of the North*. (St. Paul, MN). August 31, 1923. <https://legalelectric.org/f/2022/11/Call-of-the-North-August-31-1923.pdf>
- Barrett, Joe. 2024. "Why Did a Billionaire Snap Up Homes on a Sandbar in Duluth?" *The Wall Street Journal*. March 23, 2024. <https://www.wsj.com/us-news/why-did-a-billionaire-snap-up-homes-on-a-sandbar-in-duluth-67776881>.

- Blue, Misty, An Garagiola, and Audrianna Goodwin. 2023. "The Truth Project Presentation November 13th, 2023". *American Indian Studies at UMD*. Video, 21:55. YouTube, December 7, 2023.  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wkds2tnl1lU>.
- Bonilla-Silva, Eduardo. 2009. *Racism without Racists: Color-Blind Racism and the Persistence of Racial Inequality in America*. Third Edition. Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers. (Particularly Chapter 2)
- Brown, Curt. 2012. "Epilogue: Reaching Back to Touch the Past." *Star Tribune*. August 17, 2012.  
<https://www.startribune.com/epilogue-reaching-back-to-touch-the-past/166163716/>.
- Brown, Curt. 2018. "Book, Website Track History of Racist 'Sundown Towns' in Minnesota, U.S." *StarTribune*. July 28, 2018.  
<https://www.startribune.com/book-website-track-history-of-racist-sundown-towns-in-minnesota-u-s/489425621/>
- Buick, Adam. 2009. "Farmer-Labor Party." FARMER-LABOR PARTY (1918-1924) history of the various F-L Parties. Marxist Internet Archive.  
<https://www.marxists.org/history/usa/eam/flp/farmerlaborparty.html>.
- Burger, Kevyn. 2020. "Minnesota Snowbirds Weigh Pros and Cons of Heading South During the Pandemic." *StarTribune*. October 6, 2020.  
<https://www.startribune.com/minnesota-snowbirds-weigh-pros-and-cons-of-heading-south-during-the-pandemic/572649942/>.
- Callaghan, Peter. 2017. "Frey Says 'real' Police Reform Means Changing the Culture of the Minneapolis Police Department." *MinnPost*. September 5, 2017.  
<http://www.minnpost.com/politics-policy/2017/09/frey-says-real-police-reform-means-changing-culture-minneapolis-police-depar/>.

Callaghan, Peter. 2023. "Are People Moving Out of Minnesota Because Of High Taxes? Question Is 'An Easy One To Manipulate'." *MinnPost*. December 14, 2023.

<https://www.minnpost.com/business/2023/12/are-people-moving-out-of-minnesot-a-because-of-high-taxes-question-is-an-easy-one-to-manipulate/>.

Ceaser, James W. 2012. "The Origins and Character of American Exceptionalism." *American Political Thought* 1, no. 1: 3–28. <https://doi.org/10.1086/664595>.

Collins, Jon. 2021. "The Yes 4 Minneapolis charter amendment, explained." *MPR News*. August 21, 2021.

<https://www.mprnews.org/story/2021/08/31/the-yes-4-minneapolis-charter-amendment-explained>.

Collins, Jon. 2022. "New Minneapolis police chief concerned after city cuts 0.5 percent of police budget." *MPR News*. December 12, 2022.

<https://www.mprnews.org/story/2022/12/02/amendments-to-mpls-budget-concern-new-police-chief>.

Duluth News Tribune. 2020. "Concern Grows along with Duluth's Homeless Population." *Duluth News Tribune*. July 15, 2020.

<https://www.duluthnewstribune.com/community/concern-grows-along-with-duluths-homeless-population>.

Craig, William J. 1992. "Seasonal Migration Of The Elderly: Minnesota Snowbirds." *Southeastern Geographer* 32, no. 1: 38–50. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44370895>.

Deller, Steven. 2023. "The Wisconsin Migration Paradox: Net Losses and Gains Explained." *Community Economic Development*. March 2, 2023.

<https://economicdevelopment.extension.wisc.edu/2023/03/02/the-wisconsin-migration-paradox-net-losses-and-gains-explained/>.

Dernbach, Becky Z. 2021. "No One Has More Power to Change the Minneapolis Police Department than Mayor Jacob Frey. We Asked Him What He's Accomplished."

- Sahan Journal*. May 3, 2021.  
<http://sahanjournal.com/policing-justice/minneapolis-mayor-frey-police-reform/>.
- Ferguson, Dana. 2023. "'You Belong Here': Minnesota House Passes Trans Health Refuge Bill." *MPR News*. March 24, 2023.  
<https://www.mprnews.org/story/2023/03/24/you-belong-here-minnesota-house-passes-trans-health-refuge-bill>.
- Flores, Elizabeth. 2020. "Minneapolis commission takes up proposal to disband police." *NBC News*. August 5, 2020.  
<https://www.nbcnews.com/news/nbcblk/minneapolis-commission-takes-proposal-disband-police-n1235874>.
- Grant, David L. 2021. "What 'Minnesota Nice' Sweeps Under the Rug." *The New York Times*. April 16, 2021.  
<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/04/16/opinion/sunday/daunte-wright-racism-minnesota.html>.
- Green, Meredith J., Christopher C. Sonn, and Jabulane Matsebula. 2007. "Reviewing Whiteness: Theory, Research, and Possibilities." *South African Journal of Psychology* 37, no. 3: 389–419. <https://doi.org/10.1177/008124630703700301>.
- Harrel, Erika, and Elizabeth Davis. 2020. "Contacts Between Police and the Public, 2018 – Statistical Tables." *U.S. Department of Justice: Office of Justice Programs: Bureau of Justice Statistics*. Published December 2020, NCJ 255730. Revised February 3, 2020.  
<https://bjs.ojp.gov/content/pub/pdf/cbpp18st.pdf>
- Hollingsworth, Jana. 2024. "Moose Lake Votes to Disband Police Force." *Star Tribune*. February 15, 2024.  
<https://www.startribune.com/moose-lake-votes-to-disband-police-force-contract-with-county/600343742/>.

- Hudelson, Richard, and Carl Ross. 2006. *By the Ore Docks: a Working People's History of Duluth*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- Jordan, Philip D. 1954. "Proctor Knott's Speech on Duluth." *Minnesota Historical Society*.  
<https://www.mnhs.org/research>.
- Julin, Chris. 2001. "The Other Lynching in Duluth." *Minnesota Public Radio*.  
<http://news.minnesota.publicradio.org/projects/2001/06/lynching/olli.shtml>.
- Kamin, Debra. 2023. "Out-of-Towners Head to 'Climate-Proof Duluth.'" *The New York Times*. March 10, 2023.  
<https://www.nytimes.com/2023/03/10/realestate/duluth-minnesota-climate-change.html>.
- Kaste, Martin. 2021. "Minneapolis voters reject a measure to replace the city's police department." *NPR News*. November 2, 2021.  
<https://www.npr.org/2021/11/02/1051617581/minneapolis-police-vote>
- KBJR 6. 2024. "Kathy Cargill Comments On Plan For Park Point, Now Scrapped." *Northern News Now*. March 24, 2024.  
<https://www.northernnewsnow.com/2024/03/24/kathy-cargill-comments-plan-park-point-now-scrapped/>.
- Keillor, Garrison. 2004. *Homegrown Democrat: A few plain thoughts from the heart of America*. New York, NY: Penguin.
- King, Martin Luther. 1963. "An hour with Martin Luther King Jr.: David Susskind meets MLK." By David Susskind, WPIX-TV, by Timeline, video, 39:39,  
<https://youtu.be/wDktwJoOYQ0>
- Kolls, Jay. 2023a. "Minneapolis City Council vote could bring major changes to

- Minneapolis Police Department." *5 Eyewitness News*. March 27, 2023.  
<https://kstp.com/kstp-news/top-news/minneapolis-city-council-vote-could-bring-major-changes-to-minneapolis-police-department/>.
- Kolls, Jay. 2023b. "Minneapolis Losing Police Officers Faster Than They Can Hire, Chief Calls It 'Unsustainable'." *KSTP*. August 8, 2023.  
<https://kstp.com/kstp-news/top-news/minneapolis-losing-police-officers-faster-than-they-can-hire-chief-calls-it-unsustainable/>.
- Lincoln, Elizabeth, ed. 2022. "Minnesota Elections: Dates and Vote Totals." *Minnesota Legislative Reference Library*. <https://www.lrl.mn.gov/mngov/electionresults>.
- Linehan, Heather. "Libguides: Hmong-Americans in Minnesota: Overview." Gale Family Library, 2023. <https://libguides.mnhs.org/hmong>.
- Lundgren, Paul. 2019. "The Saturday Evening Post's Duluth of 1949." *Perfect Duluth Day*. <https://www.perfectduluthday.com/2019/04/16/the-saturday-evening-posts-duluth-of-1949/>.
- Editor, Al McFarlane. 2023. "Mayor, Chief: Culture Shift Long Overdue." *Insight News*. June 24, 2023.  
[https://www.insightnews.com/news/mayor-chief-culture-shift-long-overdue/article\\_8882deec-1254-11ee-8cc3-4fbc48d3be93.html](https://www.insightnews.com/news/mayor-chief-culture-shift-long-overdue/article_8882deec-1254-11ee-8cc3-4fbc48d3be93.html).
- Mewes, Trey. 2023. "Entire Police Force Resigns in Southeastern Minnesota City." *Star Tribune*. August 14, 2023.  
<https://www.startribune.com/southeast-minnesota-towns-police-force-resigns/600297035/>.

Minnesota Historical Society. Last modified December 20, 2023. "Hmong-Americans in Minnesota: Overview" *MN Historical Society: Gale Family Library*.  
<https://libguides.mnhs.org/hmong>.

Minnesota Historical Society. n.d. "The US-Dakota War of 1862" *MN Historical Society: Historic Fort Snelling*. Accessed April 5, 2024.  
<https://www.mnhs.org/fortsnelling/learn/us-dakota-war>.

Murphy, Brett, Josh Salman, Dak Le. 2020. "Officials Blame 'Out-of-State' Agitators But Those at the Heart of Protests Are Homegrown" *USA Today*. May 31, 2020.  
<https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/investigations/2020/05/31/george-floyd-protest-agitators-mostly-homegrown-not-outsiders/5300362002/>.

Myers, Samuel L., Jr. n.d. "The Minnesota Paradox". *University of Minnesota Research Centers, Roy Wilkins Center for Human Relations and Social Justice*. Accessed April 5, 2024.  
<https://www.hhh.umn.edu/research-centers/roy-wilkins-center-human-relations-and-social-justice/minnesota-paradox>.

Navratil, Liz. 2021. "Minnesota Supreme Court Denies Minneapolis' Appeal on Ruling Requiring it to Hire More Police Officers." *Star Tribune*. August 10, 2021.  
<https://www.startribune.com/minnesota-supreme-court-denies-minneapolis-appeal-on-ruling-requiring-it-to-hire-more-police-officer/600086706/>.

Nealis, Wayne. 2022. "Will Frey's Working Group on Police Reform Succeed Where Others Failed?" *MinnPost*. February 3, 2022.  
<https://www.minnpost.com/community-voices/2022/02/will-freys-working-group-on-police-reform-succeed-where-others-failed/>.

- Nelson, Prince. 1996. *The Oprah Winfrey Show*, Chicago. Interview by Oprah Winfrey. *The Oprah Winfrey Show, National Syndication*. Video, 23:58.  
<https://vimeo.com/325702411>.
- Nelson, Sarah. 2023. "Minnesota Governor Unveils Little Free Library at State Capitol." *Little Free Library*.  
<https://littlefreelibrary.org/2023/03/minnesota-governor-unveils-little-free-library-at-state-capitol/>.
- Ozias, Moira L. 2023. "White Women's Affect: Niceness, Comfort, and Neutrality as Cover for Racial Harm." *Journal of College Student Development* 64 (1): 31–47.  
<https://doi.org/10.1353/csd.2023.0000>.
- Passi, Peter. 2021 "Residents Pay Tribute to Duluth's Homeless on Christmas Eve Day." *Duluth News Tribune*. December 24, 2021.  
<https://www.duluthnewstribune.com/community/residents-pay-tribute-to-duluths-homeless-on-christmas-eve-day>.
- Peters, Joey. 2022. "Mayor Jacob Frey Contends Minneapolis Police Should Obey One—Not Two—Consent Decrees to Reform the Department." *Sahan Journal*. May 4, 2022.  
<https://sahanjournal.com/policing-justice/jacob-frey-minneapolis-police-human-rights-consent-decree/>.
- Phelan, John. 2023. "These Are The States That Minnesotans Are Fleeing To." *American Experiment*. March 9, 2023.  
<https://www.americanexperiment.org/these-are-the-states-that-minnesotans-are-fleeing-to/>.

- Pugmire, Tim. 2019. "Gov. Dayton Repudiates Actions by Gov. Ramsey, 150 Years Later." MPR News, August 26, 2019.  
<https://www.mprnews.org/story/2012/08/16/gov-dayton-repudiates-actions-by-gov-ramsey-150-years-later>.
- Ramos, John. n.d. "Duluth's Rip-Roarin' Rip-Saw Newspaper." *Zenith City Press*. Accessed on April 5, 2024.  
<https://zenithcity.com/archive/legendary-tales/duluths-rip-roarin-rip-saw-newspaper/>.
- Ross, Tom. 2012. "Relations: Dakota & Ojibwe Treaties." *Why Treaties Matter*.  
<https://treatiesmatter.org/index.php>.
- Schuchman, Noah. "2023 Adopted Annual Budget." Duluth: City of Duluth, 2023.
- Simkin, John. 2020. "Farmer-Labor Party." *Spartacus Educational*.  
<https://www.spartacus-educational.com/USAfarmertilabor.htm>.
- Slater, Brady. 2021. "As Homeless Crisis Worsens, Duluthians Strive for New Solutions." *Duluth News Tribune*. December 12, 2021.  
<https://www.duluthnewstribune.com/news/as-homeless-crisis-worsens-duluthians-strive-for-new-solutions>.
- Taylor, Derrick Bryson. 2020. "George Floyd Protests: A Timeline." *The New York Times*.  
<https://www.nytimes.com/article/george-floyd-protests-timeline.html>.
- The Daily Show. 2024. "Is Duluth, MN a Climate Change Safe Haven? Michael Kosta Investigates | The Daily Show." YouTube.  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=83DX5XDwz40>.

United States Department of Justice Civil Rights Division, and United States Attorney's Office District of Minnesota Civil Division. *Investigation of the City of Minneapolis and the Minneapolis Police Department*. June 16, 2023.

<https://www.justice.gov/opa/press-release/file/1587661>.

u8eR. 2018. "Why Has Minnesota Historically Been a Liberal Bastion in the Typically Conservative Midwest." Reddit.

[https://web.archive.org/web/20230610004927/https://www.reddit.com/r/AskHistorians/comments/7u4mko/why\\_has\\_minnesota\\_historically\\_been\\_a\\_liberal/](https://web.archive.org/web/20230610004927/https://www.reddit.com/r/AskHistorians/comments/7u4mko/why_has_minnesota_historically_been_a_liberal/).

Walz, Tim, and Peggy Flanagan. 2020. "Governor Walz Makes Historic Apology for 1862 Mass Hanging in Mankato ..." *ICT News*. January 7, 2020. IndiJ Public Media. <https://ictnews.org/the-press-pool/governor-walz-makes-historic-apology-for-1862-mass-hanging-in-mankato>.

Ward, Ian. 2017. "Democratic Civility and the Dangers of Niceness." *Political Theology* 18 (2): 115–36. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1462317X.2016.1227047>.

White, Joy. 2020. *Terraformed: Young black lives in the inner city*. London, UK: Repeater Books, an imprint of Watkins Media Ltd.