

SPEECH BY RED CLOUD

Speech

Author(s): Red Cloud

Date: 1870

Source: Red Cloud. Speech by Red Cloud. 1870. Reproduced in History Resource Center. Detroit: Gale.

Red Cloud, or Makhpiya-luta (c. 1822-1909), was the great leader of the Oglala Lakota (or Sioux) who prosecuted the so-called Red Cloud's War from 1866 to 1868 and forced the United States to close the Bozeman Trail and set aside the Great Sioux Reservation. Through the 1870s and 1880s, he continued to contend against both the U.S. Army and the reservation system. Late in his life, he declared, "I, who used to control 5,000 warriors, must tell Washington when I am hungry. I must beg for that which I own."

On June 16, 1870, following a delegation to Washington, DC, Red Cloud addressed an audience at Cooper Union in New York City. W.C. Vanderwerth, who reprinted the speech in his *Indian Oratory*, says that the chief's remarks indicate that he has "changed his mind about war and has become an advocate of peace." The assessment, however, misses the point of Red Cloud's remarks and underestimates his commitment to his people. In his speech, reprinted here, Red Cloud carefully omits any mention of his war two years earlier, but he alludes to the Fort Laramie Treaty and says he was "deceived" by the United States, which wanted only to confine the Sioux and send traders among them to engage in commerce. He tells his listeners, "All I want is right and justice. I have tried to get from the Great Father [the President] what is right and just. I have not altogether succeeded. I want you to help me get what is right and just." In his simple prose enlisting the aid of his audience and in his repetition of the key phrase "right and just," Red Cloud demonstrates his skill as a public speaker.

PRIMARY SOURCE DOCUMENT

I Represent the Whole Sioux Nation, by Red Cloud

My brothers and my friends who are before me today. God Almighty has made us all, and He is here to hear what I have to say to you today. The Great Spirit made us both. He gave us land, and he gave you land. You came here and we received you as brothers. When the Almighty made you, He made you all white and clothed you. When He made us, He made us with red skins and poor. When you first came we were very many and you were few. You do not know who appears before you to speak. He is a repre-

sentative of the original American race, the first people on this continent. We are good, and not bad. The reports which you get about us are all on one side. You hear of us only as murderers and thieves. We are not so. If we had more lands to give you, we would give them, but we have no more. We are driven into a very little island, and we want you, our dear friends, to help us with the Government of the United States.

The Great Spirit made us poor and ignorant. He made you rich and wise and skillful in things which we know nothing about. The good Father made you to eat tame game, and us to eat wild game. Ask any one who has gone through to California. They will tell you we have treated them well. You have children. We, too, have children, and we wish to bring them up well. We ask you to help us do it.

At the mouth of Horse Creek, in 1852, the Great Father made a treaty with us. We agreed to let him pass through our territory unharmed for fifty-five years. We kept our word. We committed no murders, no depredations, until the troops came there. When the troops were sent there trouble and disturbance arose. Since that time there have been various goods sent from time to time to us, but only once did they reach us, and soon the Great Father took away the only good man he had sent to us, Colonel Fitzpatrick. The Great Father said we must go to farming, and some of our men went to farming near Fort Laramie, and we were treated very badly indeed.

We came to Washington to see our Great Father that peace might be continued. The Great Father that made us both wishes peace to be kept; we want to keep peace. Will you help us? In 1868 men came out and brought papers. We could not read them, and they did not tell us what was in them. We thought the treaty was to remove the forts, and that we should then cease from fighting. But they wanted to send us traders on the Missouri. We did not want to go to the Missouri, but wanted traders where we were. When I reach Washington, the Great Father explained to me what the treaty was, and showed me that the interpreters had deceived me. All I want is right and justice. I have tried to get from the Great Father what is right and just. I have not altogether succeeded. I want you to help me get what is right and just. I represent the whole Sioux nation, and they will be bound by what I say. I am no Spotted Tail, to say one thing one day and be bought for a pin the next. Look at me, I am poor and naked, but I am the Chief of the nation. We do not want riches but we do want to train our children right. Riches would do us no good. We could not take them with us to the other world. We do not want riches, we want peace and love.

The riches that we have in this world, Secretary Cox said truly, we cannot take with us to the next world. Then I wish to know why commissioners are sent out to us who do nothing but rob us and get the riches of this world away from us? I was brought up among the traders and those who came out there in the early times treated me well and I had a good time with them. They taught us to wear clothes and to use tobacco and ammunition. But, by and by, the Great Father sent out a different kind of men;

men who cheated and drank whiskey; men who were so bad that the Great Father could not keep them at home and so sent them out there.

I have sent a great many words to the Great Father but they never reached him. They were drowned on the way, and I was afraid the words I spoke lately to the Great Father would not reach you, so I came to speak to you myself; and now I am going away to my home. I want to have men sent out to my people whom we know and can trust. I am glad I have come here. You belong in the East, and I belong in the West, and I am glad I have come here and that we understand one another. I am very much obliged to you for listening to me. I go home this afternoon. I hope you will think of what I have said to you. I bid you all an affectionate farewell.