



Chief Black Hawk of the Sac

(1767-1838)

Speech to General Street (1832)

INTRODUCTION

Black Hawk became Chief of the Sac Indians in 1788, succeeding his father. He opposed a treaty signed in St. Louis in 1804 that removed his tribe from northern Illinois. He fought with the British against the Americans in the War of 1812 and in 1831 he moved his tribe from Iowa back into northern Illinois and began the Black Hawk War in an effort to drive the white settlers off the lands vacated by his tribe. The Governor of Illinois called out the militia, including young Abraham Lincoln and Robert Anderson, who later commanded at Fort Sumter when the Civil War began. Black Hawk was defeated in two battles in 1832, on the Wisconsin and Bad Axe Rivers. He surrendered to General Street, a militia officer, delivered the following speech to Street and was placed in the custody of young Lieutenant Jefferson Davis, who later became President of the Southern Confederacy. He was taken east to the White House and presented to Andrew Jackson, where he saluted the President with the words, "I am a man and you are another." Lieutenant Jefferson Davis then confined Black Hawk in Fort Monroe, where 33 years later, Davis himself was confined at the end of the Civil War.

SPEECH TO STREET

You have taken me prisoner, with all my warriors. I am much grieved; for I expected, if I did not defeat you, to hold out much longer; and give you more trouble, before I surrendered. I tried hard to bring you into ambush; but your last general understood Indian fighting. I determined to rush on you and fight you face to face. I fought hard. But your guns were well aimed. The bullets flew like birds in the air; and whizzed by our ears like the wind through the trees in winter. My warriors fell around me; it began to look dismal.

I saw my evil day at hand. The sun rose dim on us in the morning, and at night it sank in a dark cloud, and looked like a ball of fire. That was the last sun that shone on Black Hawk. His heart is dead; and no longer beats quick in his bosom. He is now a prisoner of the white men; they will do with him as they wish. But he can stand torture, and is not afraid of death. He is no coward. Black Hawk is an Indian. He

has done nothing for which an Indian ought to be ashamed. He has fought for his countrymen, against white men, who came, year after year, to cheat them and take away their lands.

You know the cause of our making war. It is known to all white men. They ought to be ashamed of it. The white men despise the Indians; and drive them from their homes. They smile in the face of the poor Indian; to cheat him; they shake him by the hand; to gain his confidence; to make him drunk, and to deceive him. We told them to let us alone; and keep away from us; but they followed on and beset our paths, and they coiled themselves among us like the snake. They poisoned us by their touch. We were not safe. We lived in danger. We looked up to the Great Spirit. We went to our father. We were encouraged. His great council gave us fair words and big promises, but we got no satisfaction: things were growing worse. There were no deer in the forest. The opossum and beaver were fled. The springs were drying up, and our squaws and papooses were without food to keep them from starving.

We called a great council and built a large fire. The spirit of our fathers arose, and spoke to us to avenge our wrongs or die. We set up the war-whoop, and dug up the tomahawk; our knives were ready, and the heart of Black Hawk swelled high in his bosom, when he led his warriors to battle. He is satisfied. He will go to the world of spirits contented. He has done his duty. His father will meet him there, and commend him. Black Hawk is a true Indian, and disdains to cry like a woman. He feels for his wife, his children, and his friends. But he does not care for himself. He cares for the Nation and the Indians. They will suffer. He laments their fate. Farewell, my Nation! Black Hawk tried to save you, and avenge your wrongs. He drank the blood of some of the whites. He has been taken prisoner, and his plans are crushed. He can do no more. He is near his end. His sun is setting, and he will rise no more. Farewell to Black Hawk!



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