

"Native Americans & the Legacy of the West"

Document #1

The Indians think that God made the earth and all that it contains for the common good of mankind...not for the benefit of the few. They give and are hospitable to all, without exception, and will always share with each other and then with a stranger.

Some traveling Indians put their horses to pasture in my little meadow overnight and I complained to them. After hearing my complaint, one of them said, "My friend, it seems you lay claim to the grass my horses have eaten, because you have enclosed it with a fence. Now tell me, who caused the grass to grow? Can you make the grass grow? I think not, and nobody can expect the Great Spirit. See, the grass that grows out of the earth is common to all of us. Besides, if you will consider, you will find that my horses did not eat all your grass."

Source: Father James, a white missionary, late 19c.

Document #2

When you first came we were many, and you were few; now you are many, and we are getting very few, and we are poor. You do not know who appears before you today to speak. I am representative of the original American race, the first people of this continent. We are good and not bad. The reports that you hear concerning us are all on one side....We are driven into a very little land, and we want you now, as our dear friends to help us with the government of the United States.

At the mouth of the Horse Creek in 1852, the Great Father made a treaty with us by which we agreed to let all that country open for fifty-five years for the transit of those who were going through. We kept this treaty; we never treated any man wrong; we never committed any murder or depredation until afterward the troops were sent into that country, and the troops killed our people and ill-treated them, and thus war and trouble arose; but before the troops were sent there we were quiet and peaceable, and there was no disturbance....

Colonel Fitzpatrick of the government said we must go to farm, and some of the people went to Fort Laramie and were badly treated. I only want to do that which is peaceful, and the Great Fathers know it, and also the Great Father who made us both. I came to Washington to see the Great Father in order to have peace and in order to have peace continue. This is all we want, and that is the reason we are here now.

In 1868 men came out and brought papers. We are ignorant and do not read papers, and they did not tell us right what was in these papers. We wanted them to take away their forts, leave our country, not make war, and give our traders something. They said we had bound ourselves to trade on the Missouri, and we said, no, we did not want that. The interpreters deceived us....

Look at me, I am poor and naked, but I am the Chief of the Nation. We do not want riches, we do not ask for riches, but we want our children properly trained and brought up. We look to you for your sympathy. Our riches will...do no good; we cannot take away into the other world anything we have—we want to have love and peace....We would like to know why commissioners are sent out there to do nothing but rob [us] and get the riches of this world away from us.

And I am going to leave you today, and I am going back to my home. I want to tell the people that we cannot trust [President Grant's] agents. I don't want strange people that we know nothing about....I don't want any more such men sent out there, who are so poor that when they come out their first thoughts are how they can fill their own pockets....

Source: Speech by Red Cloud, Chief of the Teton Sioux Nation, reported in *The New York Times*, July 17, 1870.

Document #3

The first white men of your people who came to our country were named Lewis and Clark....All the Nez Percés made friends with Lewis and Clark and agreed to let them pass through their country, and never to make war on white men. This promise the Nez Percés have never broken. It has always been the pride of the Nez Percés that they were the friends of the white men....

Do not misunderstand me [and] my affection for the land. I never said the land was mine to do with as I chose. The one who has the right to dispose of it is the one who has created it. I claim a right to live on my land, and accord you the privilege to live on yours. The earth is the mother of all people and all people should have equal rights upon it....

I knew I had never sold my country, and that I had no land in Lapwai; but I did not want bloodshed. I did not want my people killed. I did not want anybody killed....I said in my heart that, rather than have war, I would give up everything rather than have the blood of white men upon the hands of my people....

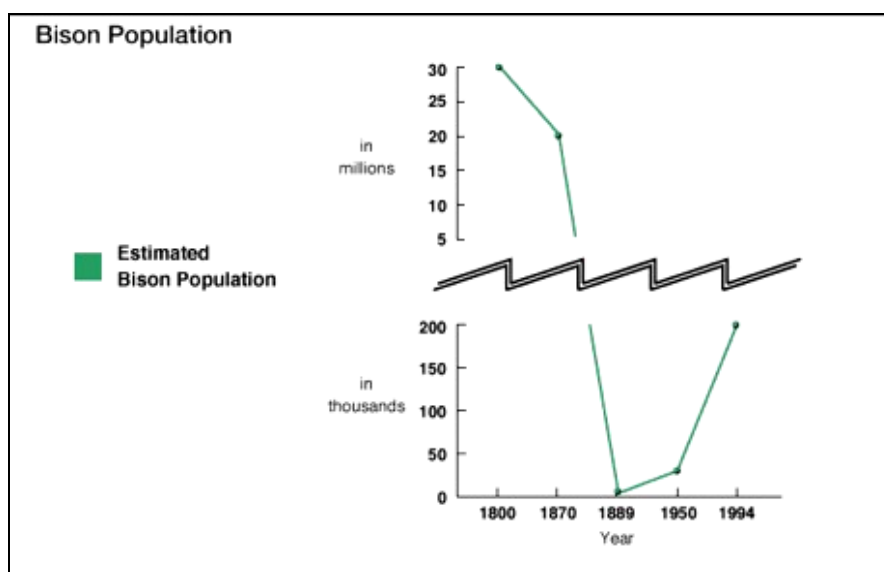
My people were divided about surrendering...[But] I could not bear to see my wounded men and women suffer any longer; we had lost enough already. Colonel Miles...promised that we might return to our own country with what stock we had left. I thought we could start again. I believed Colonel Miles, or I never would have surrendered....

I am tired of fighting. Our chiefs are all killed. Looking Glass is dead....The old men are all dead. It is cold, and we have no blankets. The little children are freezing to death. My people, some of them, have run away to the hills, and have no food. No one knows where they are....I want to have time to look for my children, and see how many of them I can find. Maybe I shall find them among the dead. Hear me, my chiefs! I am tired. My heart is sick and sad. From where the sun now stands I will fight no more forever....

Good words do not last long....Good words do not pay for my dead people. They do not pay for my country, now overrun by white men....Good words will not get my people a home where they can live in peace and take care of themselves. I am tired of talk that comes to nothing. It makes my heart sick when I remember all the good words and broken promises....

Source: Chief Joseph, 1877.

Document #4



Document #5

...It makes little difference, however, where one opens the record of the history of the Indians; every page and every year has its dark stain. The story of one tribe is the story of all, varied only differences of time and place; but neither time nor place makes any difference in the main facts. Colorado is as greedy and unjust in 1880 as was Georgia in 1830, and Ohio in 1795; and the United States Government breaks promises now as deftly as then, and with an added ingenuity from long practice...

President after president has appointed commission after commission to inquire into and report upon Indian affairs, and to make suggestions as to the best methods of managing them. The reports are filled with eloquent statements of wrongs done to the Indians, of perfidies on the part of the Government; they counsel, as earnestly as words can, a trial of the simple and un-perplexing expedients of telling truth, keeping promises, making fair bargains, dealing justly in all ways and all things. These reports are bound up with the Government's Annual Reports, and that is the end of them. . . .

The history of the Government connections with the Indians is a shameful record of broken treaties and unfulfilled promises. The history of the border white man's connection with the Indians is a sickening record of murder, outrage, robbery, and wrongs committed by the former, as the rule, and occasional savage outbreaks and unspeakably barbarous deeds of retaliation by the latter, as the exception.

Taught by the Government that they had rights entitled to respect, when those rights have been assailed by the rapacity of the white man, the arm which should have been raised to protect them has ever been ready to sustain the aggressor.

The testimony of some of the highest military officers of the United States is on record to the effect that, in our Indian wars, almost without exception, the first aggressions have been made by the white man. . . . Every crime committed by a white man against an Indian is concealed and palliated. Every offense committed by an Indian against a white man is borne on the wings of the post or the telegraph to the remotest corner of the land, clothed with all the horrors which the reality or imagination can throw around it. Against such influences as these are the people of the United States need to be warned....

Cheating, robbing, breaking promises-these three are clearly things which must cease to be done. One more thing, also, and that is the refusal of the protection of the law to the Indian's rights of property, "of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness."

When these four things have ceased to be done, time, statesmanship, philanthropy, and Christianity can slowly and surely do the rest. Till these four things have ceased to be done, statesmanship and philanthropy alike must work in vain, and even Christianity can reap but small harvest.

Source: Helen Hunt Jackson, *A Century of Dishonor*, 1881.

Document #6

The outbreak among the Sioux which occurred in December last is as to its causes and incidents fully reported upon by the War Department and the Department of the Interior. That these Indians had some just complaints, especially in the matter of the reduction of the appropriation for rations and in the delays attending the enactment of laws to enable the Department to perform the engagements entered into with them, is probably true; but the Sioux tribes are naturally warlike and turbulent, and their warriors were excited by their medicine men and chiefs, who preached the coming of an Indian messiah who was to give them power to destroy their enemies. In view of the alarm that prevailed among the white settlers near the reservation and of the fatal consequences that would have resulted from an Indian incursion, I placed at the disposal of General Miles, commanding the Division of the Missouri, all such forces as we thought by him to be required. He is entitled to the credit of having given thorough protection to the settlers and of bringing the hostiles into subjection with the least possible loss of life. . . .

Since March 4, 1889, about 23,000,000 acres have been separated from Indian reservations and

added to the public domain for the use of those who desired to secure free homes under our beneficent laws. It is difficult to estimate the increase of wealth which will result from the conversion of these waste lands into farms, but it is more difficult to estimate the betterment which will result to the families that have found renewed hope and courage in the ownership of a home and the assurance of a comfortable subsistence under free and healthful conditions. It is also gratifying to be able to feel, as we may, that this work has proceeded upon lines of justice toward the Indian, and that he may now, if he will, secure to himself the good influences of a settled habitation, the fruits of industry, and the security of citizenship.

Source: Benjamin Harrison, Report on Wounded Knee Massacre and the Decrease in Indian Land Acreage, 1891.

Document #7

Longer and closer consideration of the subject has only deepened my conviction that it is a matter not only of importance, but of necessity that the Indians acquire the English language as rapidly as possible. The Government has entered upon the great work of educating and citizenizing the Indians and establishing them upon homesteads. The adults are expected to assume the role of citizens, and of course the rising generation will be expected and required more nearly to fill the measure of citizenship, and the main purpose of educating them is to enable them to read, write, and speak the English language and to transact business with English-speaking people. When they take upon themselves the responsibilities and privileges of citizenship their vernacular will be of no advantage. Only through the medium of the English tongue can they acquire a knowledge of the Constitution of the country and their rights and duties thereunder.

Every nation is jealous of its own language, and no nation ought to be more so than ours, which approaches nearer than any other nationality to the perfect protection of its people. True Americans all feel that the Constitution, laws, and institutions of the United States, in their adaptation to the wants and requirements of man, are superior to those of any other country; and they should understand that by the spread of the English language will these laws and institutions be more firmly established and widely disseminated. Nothing so surely and perfectly stamps upon an individual a national characteristic as language....

Deeming it for the very best interest of the Indian, both as an individual and as an embryo citizen, to have this policy strictly enforced among the various schools on Indian reservations, orders have been issued accordingly to Indian agents....

It is believed that if any Indian vernacular is allowed to be taught by the missionaries in schools on Indian reservations, it will prejudice the youthful pupil as well as his untutored and uncivilized or semicivilized parent against the English language, and, to some extent at least, against Government schools in which the English language exclusively has always been taught. To teach Indian school children their native tongue is practically to exclude English, and to prevent them from acquiring it. This language, which is good enough for a white man and a black man, ought to be good enough for the red man. It is also believed that teaching an Indian youth in his own barbarous dialect is a positive detriment to him. The first step to be taken toward civilization, toward teaching the Indians the mischief and folly of continuing in their barbarous practices, is to teach them the English language....

But it has been suggested that this order, being mandatory, gives a cruel blow to the sacred rights of the Indians. Is it cruelty to the Indian to force him to give up his scalping-knife and tomahawk? Is it cruelty to force him to abandon the vicious and barbarous sun dance, where he lacerates his flesh, and dances and tortures himself even unto death? Is it cruelty to the Indian to force him to have his daughters educated and married under the laws of the land, instead of selling them at a tender age for a stipulated price into concubinage to gratify the brutal lusts of ignorance and barbarism?...

Source: Congressional Report on Indian Affairs, 1887.

Document #8

Horace Greeley was the most prominent exponent of the American agrarians' notion that the availability of free lands beyond the frontier would operate as a safety valve to lessen the possibility of social and economic unrest in the East. His response to the Panic of 1837, the exhortation to "Go West, young man, go forth into the Country," and his later endorsement of the 1846 National Reform program demonstrate his belief in the safety valve's ability to establish an independent agrarian yeomanry on the public lands of the West. Greeley, like George Evans, argued that citizens given the opportunity to work for themselves would do so, and therefore the encouragement of frontier settlement would lessen the possibility of strikes by urban workers. This notion can be found in political thinking throughout the 17th and 18th centuries--from Governor John Winthrop to British colonial policymakers--and had traditionally been used to encourage individual economic self-reliance and assuage British concerns about industrialization in the colonies.

American independence fostered a different national image, that of America as a refuge for oppressed populations of the world. Washington and Jefferson had celebrated the fortunate influence of free land on the developing American society, contrasting their hopeful conceptions of the rich opportunity of the West with the poverty and urban depravity of Europe. In 1829, Senators Robert Y. Hayne and Thomas H. Benton charged New England industrialists with opposing westward emigration because it would inspire factory laborers to leave the manufacturing states for the land states and the chance to become independent freeholders. Twenty years later Congressman Josiah Sutherland of New York opposed the Homestead Act precisely because of this potential to raise the costs of labor and manufactures.

The Republican Party adoption of Evans's safety-valve theory in the 1850s made it official doctrine, but it did not make an end of unemployment and social problems. Very few settlers on the agricultural frontier came from eastern industrial centers, largely because they lacked both the money needed to transport their families to the free public lands and the needed farming skills to survive once they got there. The influence of the safety-valve idea throughout the nineteenth-century owes much to its relation to the myth of the garden of the world and to its ability to suggest that nature would provide what the industrial cities could not. The safety-valve theory also ominously implied that the ultimate disappearance of free land would make America into another Europe, that the ills of the Old World would eventually make a home in the New.

Southern apologists for slavery such as Thomas R. Dew and George Fitzhugh suggested that when the free land was all settled, continued Northern belief in progress and free labor would bring about factional struggle and mob violence and necessitate a military despotism. The only alternative, claimed these dissenters to the cult of progress, was to resort to slavery to control the threatening insubordination of the laboring class. In arguments like these the overtones of "safety-valve," from its first invocation by Greeley as an alternative to industrial strikes, reveal a covert concern with the protection of the property of the rich against the potential violence of the poor. Melville's *Clarel* (1876) captures the anti-democratic implications of the safety-valve in its suggestion that the settlement of the West can only temporarily stave off a class war which will announce the "arrest of hope's advance" in the once-promising New World.

Source: Henry Nash Smith, *The Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and Myth* (Chapter 20: "The Garden as Safety Valve"), 1950.