

## **Surrender Speech (1832)**

### **Black Hawk**

North America had never been an "empty" land, and at the time of European settlement was settled by Native American tribes with well-shaped and well-functioning societies. The European settlers and the cultural values they brought with them clashed with those of the native inhabitants almost from the minute the English landed at the mouth of the Chesapeake. Prior to the Revolution the whites had gradually pushed those they called "Indians" westward; moreover, the goals and desires of the Europeans, such as colonization, land exploitation and religious conversions, conflicted sharply with native culture. According to some scholars, both Native American tribes and English settlers were in the process of nation-building--processes that unfortunately collided.

After the establishment of the United States, both state and national leaders recognized that the country had to adopt a national policy toward the Native Americans. Unfortunately, the policy adopted in the 1820s to solve the "Indian problem" was their removal and resettlement in the "Great American Desert." In 1830 Congress passed the Indian Removal Act and appropriated \$500,000 for the purpose. Under the presidency of Andrew Jackson some ninety-four removal treaties were negotiated, and by 1840 most of the Indians in the more settled states and territories had in fact been sent west.

Few tribes went willingly, and from April to August 1832 an armed band of Sauk and Fox under Chief Black Hawk sought to reoccupy the lands they had held in the Illinois and Wisconsin Territory. The natives faced famine and hostile Sioux to the west, and wanted nothing more than a place with decent land in which to plant their corn. The Illinois militia chased them into Wisconsin and massacred women and children as the tribe attempted to escape across the Mississippi River. Finally Black Hawk had no choice but to surrender, and in his speech he detailed the history of lies and betrayal the white men had perpetuated on Native Americans.

After his defeat, Black Hawk and his son Whirling Thunder were captured and sent by Andrew Jackson on a tour, to be displayed as "trophies" of war. But the two prisoners showed such dignity in their ordeal that the public quickly began to sympathize with them. The demand for western land, however, would not abate, and governmental policy continued to treat the tribes as barriers to progress, either to be removed to some distant reservation or killed. Not until the twentieth century, after the United States had spread across the continent and had restricted the tribes to reservations, did the federal government attempt to seek a different policy.

For further reading: Black Hawk: An Autobiography (Jackson, ed., 1955); Grant Foreman, Indian Removal (1932); Ronald N. Satz, American Indian Policy in the Jacksonian Era (1974); Michael D. Green, The Politics of Indian Removal (1982); and Francis Paul Prucha, The Great Father: The United States Government and the American Indians (1986).

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Black-hawk is an Indian. He has done nothing for which an Indian ought to be ashamed. He has fought for his countrymen, the squaws and papooses, 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. But the Indians are not deceitful. The white men speak bad of the Indian, and look at him spitefully. But the Indian does not tell lies; Indians do not steal.

An Indian, who is as bad as the white men, could not live in our nation; he would be put to death, and eat up by the wolves. The white men are bad schoolmasters; they carry false looks, and deal in false actions; they smile in the face of the poor Indian to cheat him; they shake them by the hand to gain their confidence, to make them drunk, to deceive them, and ruin our wives. 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 were becoming like them, hypocrites and liars, adulterers, lazy drones, all talkers, and no workers.

We looked up to the Great Spirit. We went to our great 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 without victuals 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 all spoke before the council fire. It was warm and pleasant. 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.

Source: <http://usinfo.state.gov/usa/infousa/facts/democrac/12.htm>

Frank E. Stevens, The Black Hawk War (1903), 372-73