

Crazy Horse, "I Have Spoken" (1877)

The discovery of gold in the Black Hills led to the disintegration of the 1869 treaty between the United States and the Sioux and Cheyenne nations. Miners and troops streamed into the region. In June 1876, General George A. Custer and 250 federal troops were ambushed at Little Big Horn. A year later, the last of the Cheyenne and Sioux who had carried out that attack were hunted down. This speech records the last words of Crazy Horse, their chief. How did he explain the violent conflict with white settlers? What kind of life and society did he want for his people? What options did the United States give to the Sioux and the Cheyenne, and why did the discovery of precious metals cause the peace to break down?

My friend, I do not blame you for this. Had I listened to you this trouble would not have happened to me. I was not hostile to the white man. Sometimes my young men would attack the Indians who were their enemies and took their ponies. They did it in return.

We had buffalo for food, and their hides for clothing and our tipis. We preferred hunting to a life of idleness on the reservations, where we were driven against our will. At times we did not get enough to eat, and we were not allowed to leave the reservation to hunt.

We preferred our own way of living. We were no expense to the government then. All we wanted was peace and to be left alone. Soldiers were sent out in the winter, who destroyed our villages. Then "Long Hair" [George A. Custer] came in the same way. They say we massacred him, but he would have done the same to us had we not defended ourselves and fought to the last. Our first impulse, was to escape with our squaws and papooses, but we were so hemmed in that we had to fight.

After that I went up on Tongue River with a few of my people and lived in peace. But the government would not let me alone. Finally, I came back to the Red Cloud Agency.... I came here with the agent [Lee] to talk with Big White Chief, but was not given a chance. They tried to confine me, I tried to escape, and a soldier ran his bayonet into me.

I have spoken