



## Speech of Red Jacket (1805)

*Seneca leader Sagoyewatha gained the English name Red Jacket due to his having fought for the British during the American Revolution. He became famous among white Americans as an orator. Presented here are excerpts of a speech he is said to have delivered to Jacob Cram, a white missionary seeking permission to minister on the Seneca nation's Buffalo Creek reservation. This account of Red Jacket's speech, from an anonymous source, was published in a New England magazine four years after the fact; the speech was then republished repeatedly through the 1800s. Why was this speech so frequently republished? What did its 19th-century American readers—predominantly white and Christian, one would presume—make of this speech?*

In the summer of 1805, a number of the principal chiefs and warriors of the Six Nations of Indians, principally Senecas, assembled at Buffalo Creek, in the state of New York, at the particular request of a gentleman missionary from the state of Massachusetts. The missionary, being furnished with an interpreter and accompanied by the agent of the United States for Indian affairs, met the Indians in council, when the following talk took place. [...]

**Missionary:** “My friends— I am thankful for the opportunity afforded us of uniting together at this time. I had a great desire to see you and inquire into your state and welfare; for this purpose I have traveled a great distance, being sent by your old friends, the Boston Missionary Society. You will recollect they formerly sent missionaries among you to instruct you in religion and labor for your good. Although they have not heard from you for a long time, yet they have not forgotten their brothers, the Six Nations, and are still anxious to do you good.

“Brothers— I have not come to get your lands or your money, but to enlighten your minds, and to instruct you how to worship the Great Spirit agreeably to his mind and will, and to preach to you the gospel of his son Jesus Christ. There is but one religion and but one way to serve God, and if you do not embrace the right way, you cannot be happy hereafter. You have never worshipped the Great Spirit in a manner acceptable to him but have, all your lives, been in great errors and darkness. To endeavor to remove these errors and open your eyes, so that you might see clearly, is my business with you.

“Brothers— I wish to talk with you as one friend talks with another; and if you have any objections to receive the religion which I preach, I wish you to state them, and I will endeavor to satisfy your minds and remove the objections.

“Brothers— I want you to speak your minds freely, for I wish to reason with you on the subject and, if possible, remove all doubts, if there be any on your minds. The subject is an important one, and it is of consequence that you give it an early attention while the offer is made you. Your friends, the Boston Missionary Society, will continue to send you good and faithful ministers to instruct and strengthen you in religion if, on your part, you are willing to receive them. [...]

“You have now heard what I have to propose at present. I hope you will take it into consideration and give me an answer before we part.”

After about two hours consultation amongst themselves, the chief commonly called, by the white people, Red Jacket rose and spoke as follows: [...]

“Brother— Listen to what we say.

“There was a time when our forefathers owned this great island. Their seats extended from the rising to the setting sun. The Great Spirit had made it for the use of Indians. He had created the buffalo, the deer, and other animals for food. He had made the bear and the beaver. Their skins served us for clothing. He had scattered them over the country and taught us how to take them. He had caused the earth to produce corn for bread. All this he had done for his red children because he loved them. If we had some disputes about our hunting ground, they were generally settled without the shedding of much blood. But an evil day came upon us. Your forefathers crossed the great water and landed on this island. Their numbers were small. They found friends and not enemies. They told us they had fled from their own country for fear of wicked men and had come here to enjoy their religion. They asked for a small seat. We took pity on them, granted their request, and they sat down amongst us. We gave them corn and meat; they gave us poison [alluding, it is supposed, to ardent spirits]<sup>a</sup> in return.

“The white people had now found our country. Tidings were carried back, and more came amongst us. Yet we did not fear them. We took them to be friends. They called us brothers. We believed them and gave them a larger seat. At length, their numbers had greatly increased. They wanted more land; they wanted our country. Our eyes were opened, and our minds became uneasy. Wars took place. Indians were hired to fight against Indians, and many of our people were destroyed. They also brought strong liquor amongst us. It was strong and powerful and has slain thousands.

“Brother— Our seats were once large, and yours were small. You have now become a great people, and we have scarcely a place left to spread our blankets. You have got our country but are not satisfied; you want to force your religion upon us.

“Brother— Continue to listen. [...]

“We are told that your religion was given to your forefathers and has been handed down from father to son. We also have a religion, which was given to our forefathers and has been handed down to us, their children. We worship in that way. It teaches us to be thankful for all the favors we receive, to love each other, and to be united. We never quarrel about religion.

“Brother— The Great Spirit has made us all, but he has made a great difference between his white and red children. He has given us different complexions and different customs. To you he has given the arts. To these he has not opened our eyes. We know these things to be true. Since he has made so great a difference between us in other things, why may we not conclude that he has given us a different religion according to our understanding? The Great Spirit does right. He knows what is best for his children; we are satisfied.

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<sup>a</sup> *The phrase in square brackets is an editorial interpolation that appears thus in the source publication.*

“Brother— We do not wish to destroy your religion or take it from you. We only want to enjoy our own.

“Brother— We are told that you have been preaching to the white people in this place. These people are our neighbors. We are acquainted with them. We will wait a little while and see what effect your preaching has upon them. If we find it does them good, makes them honest and less disposed to cheat Indians, we will then consider again what you have said.

“Brother— You have now heard our answer to your talk, and this is all we have to say at present.

“As we are going to part, we will come and take you by the hand, and hope the Great Spirit will protect you on your journey and return you safe to your friends.”

As the Indians began to approach the missionary, he rose hastily from his seat and replied that he could not take them by the hand; that there was no fellowship between the religion of God and the works of the devil.

This being interpreted to the Indians, they smiled and retired in a peaceable manner.

It being afterwards suggested to the missionary that his reply to the Indians was rather indiscreet, he observed that he supposed the ceremony of shaking hands would be received by them as a token that he assented to what they had said. Being otherwise informed, he said he was sorry for the expressions.

**Source:** “Indian Speech,” *Monthly Anthology and Boston Review*, April 1809, 221-224, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/nyp.33433081739132>. Public domain, Google-digitized.

Excerpts edited and annotated by John-Charles Duffy. Explanatory footnotes in the source omitted, but a new footnote inserted by Duffy. Square brackets have been omitted where, in the source publication, they enclosed expository paragraphs; but square brackets enclosing an editorial interpolation within Red Jacket’s quoted speech have been retained from the source. Lighter square brackets enclose ellipses inserted by Duffy. Spelling, capitalization, and punctuation modernized and Americanized. Font size regularized. Small caps and italics omitted. Formatting of a dialogue tag emended to match other documents in the “Empire and American Religion” archive.

The use of lowercase for the racial labels *white* and *red* reproduces the usage of the source publication, as does the lowercasing of the Christian terms *gospel* and *son*. For the sake of modernization and readability, terms for offices and governmental entities (both indigenous and settler) have been converted here to lowercase, including *chiefs*, *warriors*, *missionary*, *interpreter*, *agent*, *state*, and *council*.

These edited excerpts from Red Jacket’s speech are intended for *teaching* purposes only. For *research* purposes, you should consult, quote, and cite the source publication listed above.



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