



Recollections of an Interview with Cochise, Chief of the Apaches

Anderson Nelson Ellis (*Events described: 1871*)

Cochise was a Chiricahua Apache leader. When he was born, the Chiricahuas controlled territory located in what is now Arizona and New Mexico. Three Western nations laid successive claims to the Chiricahua territory during Cochise's lifetime: Spain, Mexico, and the United States. Through most of the 1860s, Cochise's forces waged guerrilla warfare against both Americans and Mexicans, conducting raids in Arizona, New Mexico, and the Mexican border state of Sonora. However, in 1871-72, Cochise met for peace talks with representatives of the US army. The US government wanted Cochise and the Chiricahuas to settle on a reservation in New Mexico, called Tularosa. Cochise refused; he negotiated instead the creation of a new reservation in Arizona. Four years later, though, the US government nullified the new reservation and relocated the Chiricahuas.

The following speech was reportedly given by Cochise (perhaps in Spanish; the source is ambiguous on that point) during an early session of the peace talks. The text comes from an eyewitness account written in English by Anderson Ellis, a white army doctor. Ellis reported that all the whites who heard Cochise's speech were "affected by this touching and eloquent address." At the same time, Ellis described Cochise as a man "cruel almost beyond belief," responsible for "red-handed murder" and the torture of prisoners. Ellis spoke of Apaches in general as needing to be "hunt[ed] down" and reduced to "eat[ing] the bread of dependency on reservations."

*Ellis did not publish his account until 40 years after the fact, and he did not indicate how creatively he may have reconstructed the speech based on more vaguely remembered impressions of it. Ellis's account of Cochise's speech belongs to a genre of mournful speeches attributed by white authors to defeated indigenous spokespersons. Therefore, this text may be more usefully read not as a record of Cochise's words but as a window into Ellis's colonialist imagination and desires. Why would it **appeal** to Ellis and his readers to picture Cochise saying these things?*

The sun has been very hot on my head and made me as in a fire; my blood was on fire. But now I have come into this valley and drunk of these waters and washed myself in them, and they have cooled me. Now that I am cool, I have come with my hands open to you to live in peace with you. I speak straight and do not wish to deceive or be deceived. I want a good, strong, and lasting peace.

When God made the world, he gave one part to the white man and another to the Apache. Why was it? Why did they come together? Now that I am to speak, the sun, the moon, the earth, the air, the waters, the birds and beasts, even the children unborn shall rejoice at my words. The white people have looked for me long. I am here! What do they want? They have looked for me long; why am I worth so much? If I am worth so much, why not mark when I set my foot and look when I spit?

The coyotes go about at night to rob and kill; I cannot see them; I am not God. I am no longer chief of all the Apaches. I am no longer rich; I am but a poor man. The world was not always this way. I cannot command the animals; if I would, they would not obey me. God made us not as you; we were born like the animals, in the dry grass, not on beds like you. This is why we do as the animals, go about of a night and rob and steal. If I had such things as you have, I would not

do as I do, for then I would not need to do so. There are Indians who go about killing and robbing. I do not command them. If I did, they would not do so. My warriors have been killed in Sonora.

I came in here because God told me to do so. He said it was good to be at peace—so I came! I was going around the world with the clouds and the air when God spoke to my thought and told me to come in here and be at peace with all. He said the world was for us all; how was it? When I was young, I walked all over this country, east and west, and saw no other people than the Apaches. After many summers, I walked again and found another race of people had come to take it. How is it? Why is it that the Apaches wait to die—that they carry their lives on their fingernails? They roam over the hills and plains and want the heavens to fall on them. The Apaches were once a great nation; they are now but few, and because of this, they want to die and so carry their lives on their fingernails. Many have been killed in battle.

You must speak straight so that your words may go as sunlight to our hearts. *Tell me, if the Virgin Mary has walked throughout all the land, why has she never entered the wigwam of the Apache? Why have we never seen or heard her?*

I have no father nor mother; I am alone in the world. No one cares for Cochise; that is why I do not care to live and wish the rocks to fall on me and cover me up. If I had a father and a mother like you, I would be with them, and they with me. When I was going around the world, all were asking for Cochise. Now he is here—you see him and hear him. Are you glad? If so, say so. Speak, Americans and Mexicans. I do not wish to hide anything from you nor have you hide anything from me. I will not lie to you; do not lie to me.

I want to live in these mountains; I do not want to go to Tularosa. That is a long ways off. The flies on those mountains eat out the eyes of the horses. The bad spirits live there.^a I have drunk of these waters, and they have cooled me; I do not want to leave here.

^a Other Apaches besides Cochise opposed relocation to Tularosa on the grounds that the area was inhabited by evil spirits. A 21st-century researcher believes that Apaches feared Tularosa's spotted owls, which, according to Apache lore, embody malignant human ghosts. Bud Shapard, *Chief Loco: Apache Peacemaker* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2010), 68-69.

Source: A. N. Ellis, "Recollections of an Interview with Cochise, Chief of the Apaches," *Collections of the Kansas State Historical Society* 13 (1913-14): 387-392, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/hvd.32044100151547>. Public domain, Google-digitized.

Excerpts edited and annotated by John-Charles Duffy. In the source publication, the entire speech is divided into only two paragraphs, with the break occurring at the beginning of the sentence "I have no father nor mother..." Additional paragraph breaks have been inserted here for readability. Three run-on sentences broken up. *Finger nails* emended to *finger nails*. Commas inserted or omitted in line with modern conventions. The use of italics replicates the source.

This edited presentation of Ellis's account of Cochise's speech is intended for *teaching* purposes only. For *research* purposes, you should consult, quote, and cite the source publication listed above.

See also:

Literary scholar Arnold Krupat identifies several statements attributed to Cochise by Ellis that Krupat argues are unlikely to be authentic. Krupat concludes: "There are bits and pieces of [Ellis's account of the speech] that probably did derive from things Cochise actually said; that much it is possible to estimate on the basis of cultural and historical facts. But [...] there is very little of traditional [Native American] elegiac expression in what Ellis [has] given us." Arnold Krupat, *That the People Might Live: Loss and Renewal in Native American Elegy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2012), 87-95.

If Cochise actually delivered something like this speech, in what language did he deliver it? Ellis does not clearly identify the language Cochise used. While describing the diplomatic preliminaries that opened the peace talks, Ellis writes that "the talking was done in Spanish" ("Recollections," 391). He then goes on to quote (in English) speeches made by Cochise and the leading US officer. It is unclear if Ellis's statement about the talking being done in Spanish applies only to the diplomatic preliminaries or also to the speeches that followed them. A different eyewitness's account of a later session of the peace talks reports that Spanish was used at some points during that meeting but implies that the meeting was conducted mostly in English and Chiricahua Apache via an interpreter. *Daily New Mexican*, March 30, 1872, as reproduced in "The Recent Talk with Cachise," *Weekly Arizona Miner*, April 20, 1872, <https://azmemory.azlibrary.gov/nodes/view/115548>.



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