



Chiefs and Elders Wisdom

If the old will remember (Chief Dan George, Coast Salish)

If the old will remember, the very young will listen.

Preparation of a Warrior (Geronimo, Apache)

To be admitted as a warrior a youth must have gone with the warriors of his tribe four separate times on the warpath. On the first trip he will be given only very inferior food. With this he must be contented without murmuring. On none of the four trips is he allowed to select his food as the warriors do, but must eat such food as he is permitted to have. On each of these expeditions he acts as servant, cares for the horses, cooks the food, and does whatever duties he should do without being told. He knows what things are to be done, and without waiting to be told is to do them. He is not allowed to speak to any warrior except in answer to questions or when told to speak. During these four wars he is expected to learn the sacred names of everything used in war, for after the tribe enters upon the warpath no common names are used in referring to anything appertaining to war in any way. War is a solemn religious matter.

If, after four expeditions, all the warriors are satisfied that the youth has been industrious, has not spoken out of order, has been discreet in all things, has shown courage in battle, has borne all hardships uncomplainingly, and has exhibited no color of cowardice, or weakness of any kind, he may by vote of the council be admitted as a warrior; but if any warrior objects to him upon any account he will be subjected to further tests, and if he meets these courageously, his name may again be proposed. When he has proven beyond question that he can bear hardships without complaint, and that he is a stranger to fear, he is admitted to the council of the warriors in the lowest rank. After this there is no formal test for promotions, but by common consent he assumes a station on the battlefield, and if that position is maintained with honor, he is allowed to keep it, and may be asked, or may volunteer, to take a higher station, but no warrior would presume to take a higher station unless he had assurance from the leaders of the tribe that his conduct in the first position was worthy of commendation. From this point upward the only election by the council in formal assembly is the election of the chief.

Old men are not allowed to lead in battle, but their advice is always respected. Old age means loss of physical power and is fatal to active leadership.

The Great Spirit raised both (Chief Red Cloud, Lakota)

The Great Spirit raised both the white man and the Indian. I think he raised the Indian first. He raised me in this land, it belongs to me. The white man was raised over the great waters, and his land is over there. Since they crossed the sea, I have given them room. There are now white people all about me. I have but a small spot of land left. The Great Spirit told me to keep it

Where today are the Pequot? (Tecumseh, Shawnee)

Where today are the Pequot? Where are the Narragansett, the Mohican, the Pokanoket, and many other once powerful tribes of our people? They have vanished before the avarice and the oppression of the White Man, as snow before a summer sun. Will we let ourselves be destroyed in our turn without a struggle, give up our homes, our country bequeathed to us by the Great Spirit, the graves of our dead and everything that is dear and sacred to us? I know you will cry with me, 'Never! Never!'

When a white army battles Indians (Chiksika, elder brother of Techumseh)

When a white army battles Indians and wins it is called a great victory, but if they lose it is called a massacre and bigger armies are raised. If the Indian flees before the advance of such armies, when he tries to return he finds that white men are living where he lived. If he tries to fight off such armies, he is killed and the land is taken away.

Children were encouraged to develop (Mourning Dove, Salish)

Children were encouraged to develop strict discipline and a high regard for sharing. When a girl picked her first berries and dug her first roots, they were given away to an elder so she would share her future success. When a child carried water for the home, an elder would give compliments, pretending to taste meat in water carried by a boy or berries in that of a girl. The child was encouraged not to be lazy and to grow straight like a sapling.

The white man's God (Chief Seattle)

The white man's God cannot love his red children or he would protect them. They seem to be orphans and can look nowhere for help. How then can we become brothers? How can your father become our father and bring us prosperity and awaken in us dreams of returning greatness? And when the last Red Man shall have perished, and the memory of my tribe shall have become a myth among the White Men, these shores will swarm with the invisible dead of my tribe, and when your children's children think themselves alone in the field, the store, the shop, upon the highway, or in the silence of the pathless woods, they will not be alone...The White Man will never be alone. Let him be just and deal kindly with my people, for the dead are not powerless. Dead, did I say? -- There is no death, only a change of worlds.

When the last Red Man has vanished (Chief Seattle)

When the last Red Man has vanished with his wilderness, and his memory is only the shadow of a cloud moving across the prairie, will these shores and forests still be here? Will there be any of the spirits of my people left?

Our land is everything to us (John Wooden Legs, Cheyenne)

Our land is everything to us... I will tell you one of the things we remember on our land. We remember that our grandfathers paid for it - with their lives.