

RED JACKET'S RESPONSE

Red Jacket was a Seneca Indian leader who met in 1805 with other chiefs of the Six Nations to hear an address by a white missionary. His remarks (condensed here) express the Indians' independence of mind as Americans spread westward.

Brother, this council fire was kindled by you. Listen to what we have to 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 made it for the use of the Indians. He had created the buffalo, the deer, and other animals for food. He had caused the earth to produce corn for bread. All this He did 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 asked for a small seat. We took pity on them, granted their request, and they sat down among us. We gave them corn and meat.

We took them to be friends. They called us brothers. At length their numbers had greatly increased. They wanted more land; they wanted our country. Our eyes were opened. Wars took place. Indians were hired to fight against Indians, and many of our people were destroyed. They also brought strong liquor among us. It was strong and powerful, and has slain thousands.

Brother, our seats were once large and yours 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.

You say that you are sent to instruct us how to worship the Great Spirit. How do we know this to be true? We understand that your religion is written in a Book. If it was intended for us, as well as you, why did He not give to our forefathers the knowledge of that Book?



Brother, you say there is but one way to worship and serve the Great Spirit. If there is but one religion, why do you white people differ so much about it?

We also have a religion that 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 made a great difference between His white and His 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. 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?

We hope the Great Spirit will protect you on your journey and return you safe to your friends.

Group Discussion: *What are Red Jacket's main complaints about the behavior of white settlers? What arguments does he make to convince the missionary that the Indian religion is just as valid as the religion of the missionary?*