



Red Cloud: the Great Ogallala Sioux War Chief

Grace Raymond Hebard, Earl Alonzo Brininstool

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Red Cloud (1822 – 1909) was a very strong war leader and a chief of the Oglala Lakota. He led as a chief from 1868 to 1909. One of the most capable Native American opponents the United States Army faced, he led a successful campaign in 1866–1868 known as Red Cloud's War over control of the Powder River Country in northeastern Wyoming and southern Montana.

After signing the Treaty of Fort Laramie (1868), he led his people in the important transition to reservation life. Some of his US opponents mistakenly thought of him as overall chief of the Sioux (Dakota, Lakota, and Nakota). The large tribe had several major divisions and was highly decentralized. Bands among the Oglala and other divisions operated independently, even though some individual leaders such as Red Cloud were renowned as warriors and highly respected as leaders.

Red Cloud became an important leader of the Lakota as they transitioned from the freedom of the plains to the confinement of the reservation system. His trip to Washington, D.C. had convinced him of the number and power of European Americans, and he believed the Oglala had to seek peace.

In 1884 he and his family, along with 5 other chiefs, converted and were baptized as Catholic by Father Joseph Bushman.

Red Cloud continued fighting for his people, even after being forced onto the reservation. In 1887 Red Cloud opposed the Dawes Act, which broke up communal tribal holdings, and allocated 160-acre plots of land to heads of families on tribal rolls for subsistence farming. The US declared additional communal tribal lands as excess, and sold it to emigrant settlers. In 1889 Red Cloud opposed a treaty to sell more of the Lakota land. Due to his steadfastness and that of Sitting Bull, government agents obtained the necessary signatures for approval through subterfuge, such as using the signatures of children. He negotiated strongly with Indian Agents such as Dr. Valentine McGillicuddy.

He outlived all the other major Lakota leaders of the Indian Wars. He died in 1909 at the age of 87 on the Pine Ridge Reservation, where he was buried. He is quoted as saying in his old age, "They made us many promises, more than I can remember. But they kept but one--They promised to take our land...and they took it."

Editor's Note---This title has been excerpted from the following book of historical works:
The Bozeman Trail: Historical Accounts of the Blazing of the Overland Routes Into the Northwest, and the Fights with Red Cloud's Warriors, Volume 2
By Grace Raymond Hebard, Earl Alonzo Brininstool
Arthur H. Clark Company, 1922

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