

LETTER FROM JOSEPH BRANT TO SAMUEL KIRKLAND

Grand River 8th Mar. 1791

My dear friend,

I am happy in having the pleasure to acknowledge your favour by Mr E. Phelps dated the 12th Ult. in which I observe with no small regret that you are discouraged of ever making that progress in civilization amongst the Indians in which you once appeared much more sanguine. ---

I must acknowledge that the present face of Affairs seems to throw a damp upon the undertaking, and makes the prospect more gloomy. as it again spreads that dark veil which had begun to remove from off the minds of some, which will not only make the Undertaking more difficult, but protract the work, while those already enlightened, are moving gradually off the Stage, to leave the completion to less experienced hands. ---

Altho' the minds of the Ind. ^{ns} seem to be unimpaired in a degree which their own strength of Judgment cannot remove, and their prejudices so great that access becomes difficult, still, I, cannot censure them when I consider the many reasons which operate upon them. --- To compute it to defect in Nature would be censuring the blame where we have no right to search --- they believe the same supreme power created both them and the white people, but perhaps for different purposes; there originates the first prejudice -- a chain of concurring circumstances, and events, seems to convince to them that the white people, under whatever pretence, aim at their destruction --- persons with such Ideas their prejudices naturally encrease and seeing the sword in one hand, supported by injustice and corruption, is it any wonder that they suspect the sincerity of any proposals made on the other

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hard for so great a change as civilization must make, in whatever colour it is represented — No: they must first be convinced that a Change will not place them in a worse situation than they are now in — and that must be begun by a strict adherence to the dictates of Justice, a rigid observance of all compacts and engagements on the part of the white people — Boundaries may be fix'd and Territory's describ'd, Unity and Concord, amongst themselves must be encourag'd, and their own customs rather nourished than discouraged whilst you introduce agriculture — by this showing and proving that you have the happiness of them, and their posterity at heart you may gain their confidence by degrees, and civilization will then make progress —

But whilst the white people, who have already engross'd the best part of their former Territory continue to crowd, disunite, and raise dissension amongst the Indians, and Individuals who are conversant with them, and pretend the greatest friendship & recommend civilization and adherence to the manners & customs of the white people as an essential means of securing happiness, will not only connive at, but be the secret instrument of effecting the designs of those wicked encroachers, harmony cannot long prevail, nor civilization flourish. — and the more knowledge the Indians acquire, the clearer they will see the impositions which has been practic'd upon them by the White people, and consequently they will be the more averse to adopting the Manners of such people in place of the customs of their Forefathers who liv'd happy, & free from strife before they became acquainted with them —

You express a desire to see my Indⁿ History complete — I sincerely wish I could gratify my friends and the world with it, but the unhappy barrier which at present presents itself will either put a final stop to it, or furnish materials for its enlargement, at any

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rate it will protract the work. —

It has been my constant study since the peace between Great Britton and the United States to Unite the Indians together, and make such a peace between them and the States, as would remove all prejudices and enable us to set quietly down on our seats free from apprehensions and jealousy, and if not become more respectable at least not more contemptible. —

Could I have been instrumental in accomplishing that, I should have been satisfied and have had leisure to [have] visited the distant Nations and collected matter to proceed upon with my History, and to make it more serviceable to the public it's necessary to inform myself with the Idea's entertain'd by the different Nations of the Creation and of a future State, the customs preserv'd by tradition amongst them and also a knowledge of the Medical Plants natural to their Soil & Climate. —

You also wish me to suggest my Idea's on the practicability of an accommodation between the Western Indians and the U States, to which I answer candidly that I think it still practicable, if proper measures are pursued by the States, but they must alter their system materially — Lay down the Hatchet, and call a general Treaty with the United Nations. If they are sincere in their pretensions to establish peace and live friendly with all the Indian Nations, they should cherish the Union, and make such proposals as will place the Indians on a more respectable footing then they have hitherto attempted — give up the Idea of taking possession of the country as conquered Land. Abandon that wicked mode of calling them out in separate Nations, or parties, to treat with them, which only serves to irritate and inflame their minds, instead of healing the sore, and removing the prevailing

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prejudices. ---

If Governor Sinclair's Line be thrown aside, the Indians will still allow them a sufficiency of Land, and be ready to establish an accommodating line upon reasonable terms --- and if the States treat with them as a free property and abandon the Idea of Conquest they may always enlarge it at proper times, as their Jurisdiction over the Country will not be disputed ----

Let the Americans Look back and take a view of their own affairs at the beginning of the late War, they say themselves that it was not the am^t. of tax, but the manner of Levying it that gave disgust, because it was opening the door for extending it to posterity without bounds --- now it is not the quantity of Land claim'd at this time, which ~~gives~~ alarms the Indians; but the principles upon which it's claim'd, because it's opening a door for extending it over the whole of the Indian Lands within the United States; which would be very hard, and the highest degree of Injustice upon nine-tenths of the Indians, who so far from taking an active part against the Americans in the late war, they hardly heard of such a war --- but as the Idea of conquest circulates amongst them the contagion becomes more alarming and every man feels the injury and makes it his own case (as your people did) by which means the disgust is spreading where no prejudices had before taken place. ---

Therefore continuing the war will Unite them against you, and prejudices against the white people will take such root that they will not be easily erased --- whereas making a general peace and endeavouring to Unite them as a fair & happy people will win their affections, and whoever is most instrumental in accomplishing that happy end, will be most likely to reap the advantages which it must produce ---

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from the best information I have had of the Battle at Miami, the Indians fell in with a party of the Light Horse & cut them off— the commanding Officer next day sent out a stronger party and a warm engagement ensued the Indians after some time made a faint retreat to give time for a reinforcement to come up, when they renew'd the action and repuls'd the Enemy, with the loss of about twenty five men in all. the Loss of the White people is supposed by the Indians to be between five & six Hundred, but your situation will enable you to get a more accurate acc^t of their Loss than I can give you. —

I have fully comply'd with your request in the Length of my letter, if I have not answer'd your expectations in other respects — and I hope you will return the compliment by return of the Bearers and then I shall be convinc'd that you mean to be a good correspondent.

I am

Y^r
B friend

your most Obed^t

and very Humble Serv^t

d r l
Rev. M. Sam. Kirkland

Joseph Brant