

## Letter from an American Indian

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For father,

For Brethren,

To silence,

I

My name is Sisle from the Cheyenne group of the Great Plains.

We were two groups,

and I belong to the Tsitsistas - the arrow people.

I lived with father and mother.

All three had our own activity, not duty.

Father was hunting, sometimes fishing.

He hunted bison, he went 70 to 80 miles west for it.

Mother took care of the land,

she grew grains and crops from the seeds.

I helped her filling water.

But I preferred to gather wood in the forest and attach it to my back.

We started before sunrise.

Our tribe sacrificed animals to make feasts,

and shared the harvested crops.

Vehoo'o gathered with the people of their groups,

others played on the drum,

while the minority were around fire.

The feasts were the moment I fancied most in the year.

We thanked the universe spirits for all their goodness towards us and their yielding of our noble land.

I used to stay with father besides our tipi; he taught me everything I should.

I remember one night,

I woke up and saw father preparing his white bag;

he was filling it with arrows, nets, tomahawks and his calumet.

He was standing, carrying his bag on one shoulder, wearing his arc in the other and the lace in his right hand.

Father walked many distances to reach his prey, sometimes with horse.

He went at dusk time, and spent three or four days to come with our food.

I was much younger,

I was seven years old and I have never seen father again.

I waited, and I still wait in the white hills of the cold season,

or beside the withered leaves of haricots and maize.

Where is father? He went for food...

II

Thou, white intruder, thou hast taketh father. Thou hast entered my land.

Thou hast chased us and trampled us in our homes.

How could thou? And thou call me a savage?

I can only see your mane and your fierce straws.

We had our Ma'heo'o, we had our own beliefs,

why hast thou brought your war?

Thou, white men, look at what thou hast done!

Thou hast taken father away from child.

Our Culture, our Mores, our Life, our Greatness, thou hast plundered.

O White eye, thou hast so dark a glance.

Thou hast loosened our tight civilization.

Thou hast taken father, why?

He was here for child! He was teaching me how to live.

O Maahotse O Father

What will I do now?

We built a civilization based on Indian virtues.

If we fight, we fight for our Dignity, save our roots, protect our sacred lands, you fight for mercantile.

Our véhoo'o could not have rested until none of us lacked food or shelter.

Véhoo'o never let justice lurk behind.

We never run away from our obligations and our duties,

and we know how to respect others' rights.

Wise Motzeyouf had warned us and predicted thee evil, and the chaos thou would bring

If just you were here to guide us and bring back our pride.

III

I want to correct the prejudices those people have advanced on us. Please, reader, listener, don't believe them. We are not ignorant. We had a real organized deep-rooted system of government. We had our beauty, loyalty, our sense -- our feathers had a sense. We lived in harmony with our nature, and they call us barbarous. They took my identity, made me a wanderer without kinship. They turned my dwelling to a roaring place, my brethren to manufactured agonizing beings- and our previous life, our—lost throb of life...

I have more to say, but I will stop for the moment. I think I will write a whole book for father and brethren and silence.

I have one last thing to add:

If thou hast taken my life,

thou canst not take my Honor, thou knowest why?

Because Honor is our life,

whatever blood thou hast oozed,

my Honor survives thou.

I know that thou canst not understand. I say:

From the sun we rose, never striping the night,

Hollow soul to the blissful ye resolve to fight,

Merely, beware venom I may own in grasping my right

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Sisle

Maahotse: 'Sacred Arrows', symbol of male power.

Véhoo'o: chiefs or leaders

Calumet: or 'peace pipe' used to order peace between two tribes

Ma'heo'o: sacred being/god

Motzeyouf: known as 'Sweet Medicine' or 'Arrow Boy' he was an important legendary prophet and medicine man of the Cheyenne group who helped them in many fields. He had mainly predicted the arrival of missionaries and white men.

By Safwa Anfel Yargui