



A Native American Speaks

"How can you buy or sell the sky — the warmth of the land? The idea is strange to us. We do not own the freshness of the air or the sparkle of the water. How can you buy them from us?"

"We know that the white man does not understand our ways. One portion of the land is the same to him as the next for he is a stranger who comes in the night and takes from the land whatever he needs. The earth is not his brother, but his enemy, and when he has conquered it, he moves on. He leaves his birthright is forgotten. The air is precious to the red man. The white man all things share the same breath — the beasts, the trees, the man. The white man does not seem to notice the air he breathes. Like a man dying for many days, he is numb to the stench . . .

"The white man must treat the beasts of this land as his brother. I am a savage and I do not understand the other way. I have seen a thousand rotting buffaloes on the prairies left by the white man who shot them from a passing train . . . What is man without beasts? If all the beasts were gone, men would die from great loneliness of spirit, for whatever happens to beasts also happens to man. All things are connected. Whatever befalls the earth befalls the sons of the earth. . . . One thing we know which the white man will one day discover. Our God is the same God. You may think now that you own him as you wish to own our land. But you cannot. He is the Body of man. And his compassion is equal for the red man and the white man. This earth is precious to him. And to harm the earth is to heap contempt on its creator . . . Continue to contaminate your bed and you will one night suffocate in your own waste. . . . We might understand if we knew what it was that the white man dreams, what hopes he describes to his children on long winter nights, what visions he burns into their minds . . .

"Our warriors have felt shame. And after defeats, they turn their days in idleness and contaminate their bodies with sweet food and strong drink."

— Chief Sealth of the Duwamish and Suquamish Tribes (From a letter to U.S. President Franklin Pierce in 1855, protesting the proposed purchase of land now called "Seattle," a corruption of the great chief's noble name.)