

Lincoln Hall Speech

Washington, D.C.

January 14, 1879

by Chief Joseph, Chief of the Nez Percé

1 At last I was granted permission to come to Washington and bring my friend Yellow Bull and our interpreter with me. I am glad I came. I have shaken hands with a good many friends, but there are some things I want to know which no one seems able to explain.



Chief Joseph

2 I cannot understand how the government sends a man out to fight us, as it did General Miles, and then breaks his word. Such a government has something wrong about it. I cannot understand why so many chiefs are allowed to talk so many different ways, and promise so many different things. I have seen the Great Father Chief;¹ the Next Great Chief;² the Commissioner Chief; the Law Chief; and many other law chiefs³ and they all say they are my friends, and that I shall have justice. But while all their mouths talk right I do not understand why nothing is done for my

¹ **Great Father Chief:** the President of the United States, President Rutherford B. Hayes

² **Next Great Chief:** the Secretary of the Interior

³ **other law chiefs:** members of Congress

people. I have heard talk and talk but nothing is done.

3 Good words do not last long unless they amount to something. Words do not pay for my dead people. They do not pay for my country now overrun by white men. They do not protect my father's grave. They do not pay for my horses and cattle. Good words do not give me back my children. Good words will not make good the promise of your war chief, General Miles. Good words will not give my people a home where they can live in peace and take care of themselves. I am tired of talk that comes to nothing. It makes my heart sick when I remember all the good words and all the broken promises. There has been too much talking by men who had no right to talk.

4 Too many misinterpretations have been made; too many misunderstandings have come up between the white men and the Indians. If the white man



wants to live in peace with the Indian he can live in peace. There need be no trouble. Treat all men alike. Give them the same laws. Give them all an even chance to live and grow. All men were made by

the same Great Spirit Chief. They are all brothers. The earth is the mother of all people, and all people should have equal rights upon it.

5 You might as well expect all rivers to run backward as that any man who was born a free man should be contented penned up and denied liberty to go where he pleases. If you tie a horse to a stake, do you expect he will grow fat? If you pen an Indian up on a small spot of earth and compel him to stay there, he will not be contented nor will he grow and prosper. I have asked some of the Great White Chiefs where they get their authority to say to the Indian that he shall stay in one place, while he sees white men going where they please. They cannot tell me.

6 I only ask of the government to be treated as all other men are treated. If I cannot go to my own home, let me have a home in a country where my people will not die so fast. I would like to go to Bitter Root Valley. There my people would be happy; where they are now they are dying. Three have died since I left my camp to come to Washington.

7 When I think of our condition, my heart is heavy. I see men of my own race treated as outlaws and driven from country to country, or shot down like animals.

8 I know that my race must change. We cannot hold our own with the white men as we are. We only ask an even chance to live as other men live. We ask to be

recognized as men. We ask that the same law shall work alike on all men. If an Indian breaks the law, punish him by the law. If a white man breaks the law, punish him also.

9 Let me be a free man, free to travel, free to stop, free to work, free to trade where I choose, free to choose my own teachers, free to follow the religion of my fathers, free to talk, think, and act for myself—and I will obey every law or submit to the penalty.



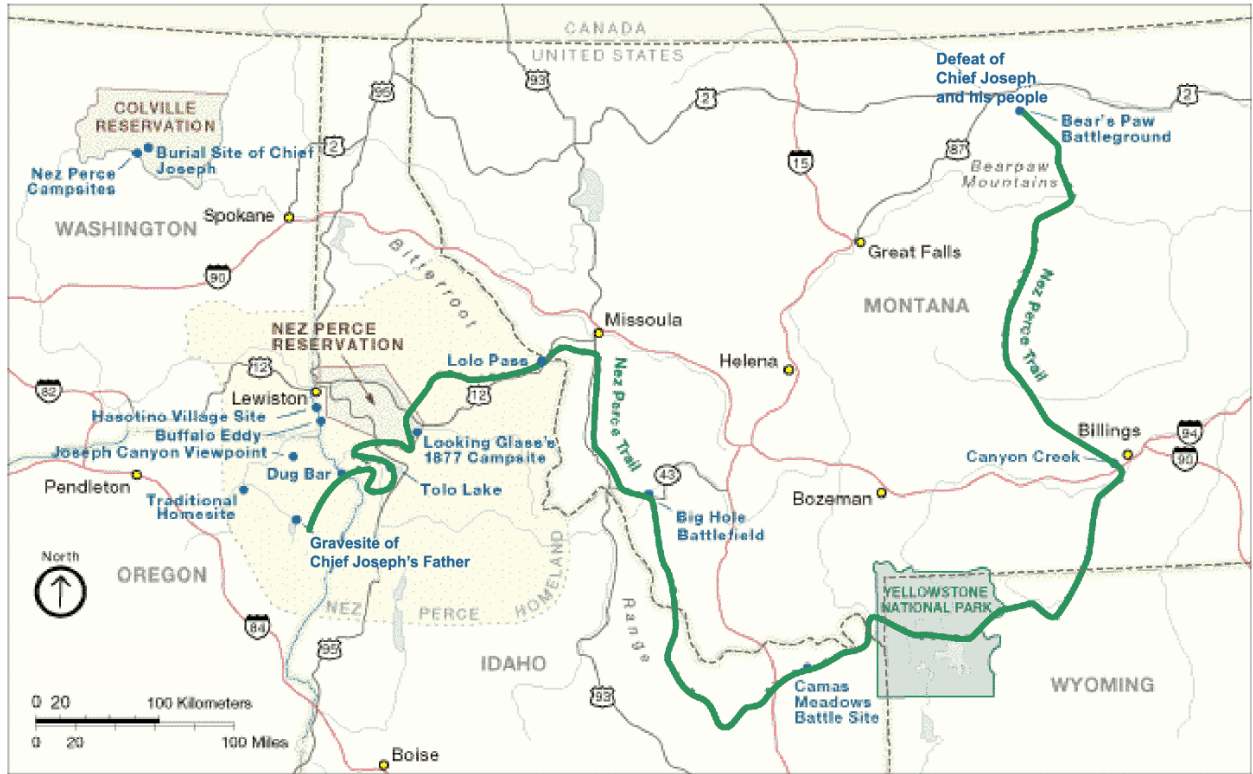
Chief Joseph

10 Whenever the white man treats the Indian as they treat each other, then we shall have no more wars. We shall be all alike—brothers of one father and mother, with one sky above us

and one country around us and one government for all. Then the Great Spirit Chief who rules above will smile upon this land and send rain to wash out the bloody spots made by brothers' hands upon the face of the earth. For this time the Indian race is waiting and praying. I hope no more groans of wounded men and women will ever go to the ear of the Great Spirit Chief above, and that all people may be one people.

11 Hin-mah-too-yah-lat-kekht⁴ has spoken for his people.

⁴ **In-mut-too-yah-lat-lat:** Chief Joseph's Nez Percé name, meaning "Thunder Coming Up Over the Land From the Water"



Trail of the Nez Percé March to Canada

Note: The Nez Percé march to Canada was led by Chief Joseph. It lasted three months and covered nearly 1,500 miles. The Nez Percé won several skirmishes and battles against U.S. troops during the march, but were eventually defeated only 40 miles from the Canadian border and freedom. Chief Joseph died in 1904. According to the reservation doctor, he died of a broken heart.