

Red Cloud

(c. 1822 ~ 1909)



Red Cloud was Chief of the Oglala Lakota, a tribe of the Sioux people. He was the only Native American war chief to defeat the United States Army in war.

Red Cloud was born close to the forks of the Platte River, near the modern-day city of North Platte, Nebraska. His mother, an Oglala Lakota whose name translates as *Walks as She Thinks*, saw a red cloud in the sky at his birth. His father, *Lone Man*, was a Brulé Lakota leader. Among the matrilineal Lakota, children belonged to their mother's clan, and so Red Cloud was mentored as a boy by his maternal uncle, Old Chief Smoke.

While still young, Red Cloud proved himself to be a skillful fighter against other Indian tribes. In his 40s, he led the successful opposition to U.S. developments of roads through Wyoming and Montana — a period that came to be known as *Red Cloud's War*. The U.S. finally sued his tribe for peace under the Treaty of Fort Laramie, in which the United States agreed to abandon its forts and withdraw completely from Lakota territory. However, after gold was discovered in the Black Hills, the United States violated the treaty.

In the fall of 1877, the U.S. moved the "Red Cloud Agency" (a precursor to a reservation) to the upper Missouri River, then moved it again to the forks of the White River in present-day South Dakota, where it was renamed the Pine Ridge Agency. The tribe remains there today, among the poorest of Indian reservations.

In 1884, Red Cloud and his family, along with five other leaders, converted and were baptized Catholic. Even after being forced onto his reservation, he continued to resist the machinations of the U.S. government. In the late 1880s, he opposed two proposed treaties, including the Dawes Act, which broke up communal tribal holdings, but the government managed to get the treaties signed via subterfuge.

Red Cloud died at Pine Ridge at age 87, the last of the major Lakota leaders of the Indian Wars.

"They made us many promises, more than I can remember, but they never kept but one: they promised to take our land, and they took it."