

*By the Kansas Historical Society*

## Document 5: Transcript of Robert Miller's speech at the 2005 American Indian Symposium in Omaha, Nebraska

ROBERT MILLER: Thank you, Chris. Thank you all for coming. I want to thank the Nebraska Lewis and Clark Commission for inviting me and bringing me out here for beautiful weather, too. My discussion today, as Chris said, is to set the scene as Thomas Jefferson and Lewis and Clark went forth. How did they view Indian tribes? What were the relationships between the United States and Indian tribes in 1803?

... So these government folks understood that tribes were sovereign entities that had control over people and territory and if you wanted to buy some land or you wanted to arrange for peace and security, you spoke to the leaders of this individual tribe....

... So the Articles of Confederation Congress says they forbid anyone from settling or claiming any lands or receiving or buying lands from Indian tribes. This Congress kept the peace with tribes through diplomatic relationships and by gift-giving to chiefs and keeping people happy. And we enacted what's called the Northwest Ordinance in 1787. I'm from the Pacific Northwest, so every time I see this I think it's talking about us. But no, this is what's called the old Northwest, what is now the five states, I think, of Michigan, Minnesota, Ohio, Illinois, perhaps Indiana. In January of 1787 the Articles of Confederation Congress passes a law as to how we're going to absorb that territory, break it up into states, and how we're going to deal with Indian tribes. . . .

... A very important provision in the Northwest Ordinance of 1787 was that we will exercise perfect good faith towards the Indian tribes. We will respect their rights and property and will never take them without their permission. So the Articles of Confederation Congress continued, if I haven't beat you over the head enough with this, continued to recognize that to deal with Indian tribes is to deal with a political government. And you do it by government to government negotiations and treaty-making. And that's what our Articles of Confederation Congress said was the way to deal with tribes. . . .

... In Article 1 of the Constitution it defines the population for a state to determine how many members of the House of Representatives a state has. Now you may remember that this was the provision that counted the black slaves of the South as 3/5 of a human being towards counting the population of a state. Were Indian people counted at all? No. And here's the provision in ...Article 1 of our Constitution. "Excluding Indians not taxed." Unless an Indian person had voluntarily joined the colonial community, the state community, and voluntarily paid taxes—now how many of us do that?—anyway they were not to be counted as the population of the state at all.

Now why is that? Whose citizens were they? They were citizens of their own governments, weren't they? Of their own tribal nations. They were not a United States citizen unless they voluntarily joined the economic life of the state. . . .

. . . Do you know it took the Hudson Bay Company two years to capture a fur out in either Canada or the Pacific Northwest or the Midwest, take to Hudson Bay, get it to England, get it processed, and get it around the world to China? Jefferson was hoping for a direct communication. He told both the Congress that; he told Meriwether Lewis that, too. Secondly, what did he tell Meriwether Lewis to do? Well, exactly what he told Congress he would have the expedition do: confer with the Indian tribes about commerce. Where would you like us to build a trading post? Will you trade us furs? Do you like metal pots? Do you want metal hatchets? Do you want mirrors? Do you want needles? Etc. . . .

. . . This is exactly what Jefferson told Lewis to tell the tribes. We are now your new fathers and your new friends. The French and the Spanish have sailed away, never to return. These are the directions that Jefferson gave Meriwether Lewis. He told him, there's only one tribe that Jefferson mentioned by name. He was concerned about the Teton Sioux—the power the Sioux had, controlling transport on the river and so he told him, "Make friends of the Sioux if at all possible." But he also told Meriwether Lewis, be as friendly and as conciliatory towards all the tribes as you can, because we want to deal with them both commercially and in the expansion of American interests. . . .

. . . Jefferson also asked Meriwether Lewis to try to arrange to send delegations of tribal chiefs back to Washington, D.C. What's the purpose of that? He also encouraged them to send their children back to be educated, if they want. Well, I think it's pretty obvious that Jefferson was trying to impress on tribes the size and the power of the United States. And quite a number of tribal delegations—I think I've read as high as 26 different tribal delegations went back to Washington, D.C. at the request and arrangement of Lewis and Clark. And they were impressed with the size of the United States. In fact, I have read that some of the tribal representatives were not then believed when they returned home and talked about the population that was available in the United States. . . .

. . . And so, when Thomas Jefferson sent the Lewis and Clark expedition forth, he sent them to do the same things: deal politically, diplomatically, and commercially with the Indian tribes. Tie them to us, the United States. Let's make an alliance. Let's try to be friends. Let's trade. Let's sign treaties. Let's live together. The same status today, folks. American Indian tribes as sovereign governments control over people and their territory, the same status today as they faced and had in Thomas Jefferson's era.

