

CHAPTER 9 / Comparing Points of View

The introduction of the railroad to Montana in the late 1800s brought extraordinary change to Indians in this region. To make room for the railroads (and white settlers), the U.S. government negotiated several agreements with Montana tribes. These agreements provided railroad right-of-ways and reduced the size of the reservations. Review the information in the chapter and read the quotes below from people involved in treaty negotiations between the U.S. government and the Crow Indians. Then answer the questions that follow.

“Such an extent of territory being greatly in excess of the quantity required for the necessities of the Indians, and the northern boundary thereof, throughout its entire length, being in close proximity to the proposed line of the Northern Pacific Railroad, it is desirable that the Indians should relinquish to the government at least a portion thereof and consent to confine themselves within more circumscribed limits. It is with this end primarily in view, that you should conduct your negotiations.”

—Edward P. Smith, Commissioner of Indian Affairs,
regarding negotiations with the Crow tribe, 1873

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“On the other side of the Yellowstone [River] the Great Father talked to me about giving up the land over there. I said yes, I will sell it. The money for that land, the Great Father has got it yet. They talked to me when the railroad went through. . . . I said yes, let it go. On Rock Creek they wanted to put a railroad after a while, I said yes, let it go. . . . The sheep and horses ran all over the reservation, we never quarreled. They [the white ranchers] paid the money and they have it in Washington yet. . . . The country we are selling . . . is worth lots of money. . . . I have done what you wish me to do. I want you to do what I wish. . . . Promise me that the Great Father will not trouble us about our land anymore.”

—Chief Plenty Coups to federal commissioners hoping
to negotiate a second Crow land cession in 1890

- (1) What does Commissioner Smith want from the Crow delegation?
- (2) What does Chief Plenty Coups say the Crow have done for the federal government?
- (3) What does Commissioner Smith imply by saying the territory “is greatly in excess of the quantity required for the necessities of the Indians”?
- (4) What does Chief Plenty Coups mean when he says: “Promise me that the Great Father will not trouble us about our land anymore”?
- (5) What do these two quotes tell you about the goals of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs and of Chief Plenty Coups?
- (6) Do you think these quotes are reliable sources of information? Explain your answer.