

The Black Hawk War of the Artists (1914)

Vachel Lindsay

2008

August 2, 2007 was the 175th anniversary of the Bad Axe massacre, when US soldiers, settler militias, and army gunboats slaughtered Sauk (Osakiwug), Fox, and Kickapoo Indians following the Battle of Wisconsin Heights. This mass killing effectively put an end to the Black Hawk Wars.

The wars, named for what the British had given the indomitable war chief Ma-Ka-Tai-Me-She-Kia-Kiak, began with conflict over long-simmering objections to the 1804 treaties. Black Hawk was captured, imprisoned, and put on public display all over the US. He later fell ill and died in Iowa.

In 1913, the Prairie Troubadour Vachel Lindsay wrote to congratulate the sculptor Lorado Taft on his monumental statue of Black Hawk (technically called The Eternal Indian) in Oregon, IL, calling it the one thing of its kind in America and as necessary a symbol as the Statue of Liberty in New York Harbor. The poem inspired by the statue appeared in print in 1914 and is reproduced below. In the manuscript for his classic utopian socialist science-fiction fantasy *The Golden Book of Springfield* (1918), Lindsay celebrated the Red Indian Truth, saying that native tribes were the terror of lying politicians.

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(To be given in the manner of the Indian Oration and the Indian War-Cry)

Hawk of the Rocks,
Yours is our cause to-day.
Watching your foes
Here in our war array,
Young men we stand,
Wolves of the West at bay.

Power, power for war
Comes from these trees divine;
Power from the boughs,
Boughs where the dew-beads shine,
Power from the cones-
Yea, from the breath of the pine!

Power to restore
All that the white hand mars.
See the dead east
Crushed with the iron cars—
Chimneys black
Blinding the sun and stars!

Hawk of the pines,
Hawk of the plain-winds fleet,
You shall be king
There in the iron street,
Factory and forge
Trodden beneath your feet.

There will proud trees
Grow as they grow by streams.
There will proud thoughts
Walk as in warrior dreams.
There will proud deeds
Bloom as when battle gleams!

Warriors of Art,
We will hold council there,
Hewing in stone
Things to the trapper fair,
Painting the gray.
Veils that the spring moons wear,
This our revenge,
This one tremendous change
Making new towns,
it with a star-fire strange,
Wild as the dawn
Gilding the bison-range.

All the young men
Chanting your cause that day,
Red-men, new-made
Out of the Saxon clay,
Strong and redeemed,
Bold in your war-array!

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