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## Speech to British Government Concerning Indian Land Claims, Niagara, October 22, 1796

by Joseph Brant

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Niagara 22<sup>nd</sup> October 1796.

Brother:

Hearken to what I am now going to say. I am happy in seeing you at this Council fire in the office you now hold as Agent of Indian affairs. At this Council fire we have ever met the English to transact business that related to our mutual interest. I now hope business will again be regularly conducted, as it has been rather at a stand for some time past, and the affairs of the Indians not been so regularly attended [to] as they might have been. I therefore hope as you are the person now set over us, and to whom we look up to for justice, that you'll take the earliest opportunity of making known to the Head Men of these Provinces our Grievances.

Brother,

The business I am now about to speak of is of a long standing, and may take up much time as I wish to be particular in giving a true relation of simple facts. I must therefore request your attention particularly as I shall endeavor to make

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the matter as short as the situation of our affairs  
will admit of as this is the last time I shall say  
anything more to the Head Men here on the present  
subject, having often spoken to them on the business  
and never been able to obtain anything like a plain,  
satisfactory, determined answer.

Brother:

What I have to say is concerning our Lands on the Grand  
River, and which has been the cause of great uneasiness to us.

Brother:

At the close of the late American war we applied to General Hal-  
deman for those lands that we might again settle ourselves and  
have a landed property that we might call our own as we  
formerly had. Gen. Haldeman without hesitation accord-  
ingly, granted us the same and we instantly upon ob-  
taining that, took Possession. His words gave us great  
satisfaction, frequently repeating that the lands should  
be our own property, and that he would give us a Writing  
in the King's name for the same, which he did, and the  
same instrument we now have in our possession, and  
with which we were fully satisfied. Now we understand  
from you white People that this Grant does not  
entitle us to call those lands our own, In consequence  
of this we applied to Governor Lindsay for a new Grant.  
He having promised on his arrival to settle this business

agreeable to our wishes he had a deed made out but which did not entitle us to do anything with the Lands neither to sell, lease, or give away, of course we could not take it, Genl. Haldimand being in our opinion the best Grant and as our intention was when we first obtained the Grant to make use of the whole of the tract granted us either by cultivating or leasing it in such way as to be able to ensure ourselves a certain annual Revenue to support us in case of our hunting failing. Upon our refusing to take Governor Lincolns Deed he was much displeased saying we were only Allies and could not possibly have King's subjects to be our Servants, but should we be determined to sell, we ought to sell to the highest bidder and put the money to interest for the use of the Indians on the Grand River. Upon this we Sold, at least Leased as we have before said it was our intention to do, when this arrived to the knowledge of the Governor he was much enraged and made use of very unfriendly language. We upon this sent to Lord Dorchester making known our disagreeable situation and received every satisfaction we could wish for, and then we confirmed those sales we had partly made previous thereto. Before Governor Lincoln left this Province we came forward, and was extremely happy to

find that he then consented to the Sales we had made<sup>33</sup>  
and the business referred to Mr. White, his Majesty's  
Attorney General, who was to have prepared the Grants,  
but being at a loss for the boundaries surveyors were then  
sent out to ascertain the same, who after laying out  
the Townships made their Reports. I then remained here  
at least a week in expectation of the Grants being com-  
pleted, but to my astonishment I was obliged to return  
as I came without them. The survey of the whole  
of the Townships made sale of are now completed, and  
still the Head men here seem to start innumerable dif-  
ficulties respecting any Grant to us.

Brother:

We are at a loss to know what to think of these  
Head men changing their minds so often and being  
so unsteady and undetermined. We cannot from this  
curious conduct of theirs find out their intention towards  
us nor what we may expect from them. Governor Lincoln's  
promises in the Spring was favorable, the Fall is now  
come and nothing more done for us than when he first  
came to this Province. It appears that they are determined  
to continue trifling with us for what good end I know not.

Brother:

As you are the Person we now look up to we request that  
you'll use your influence to obtain from those Head men

a final answer for us, as assuredly this is the last time ~~we~~  
we shall again say anything to them on this subject, 33<sup>4</sup>  
Let them say plainly that these lands on the Grand  
River is our property, or not, - suppose they say the  
Lands are not ours, what must we then think of  
Genl Haldimand's great and friendly promises?  
Must we look upon them as false? Must we entertain  
the same opinion of Lord Dorchester's favorable assurances?  
And Governor Lincoln's innumerable promises, - is he to be  
looked upon in a similar light with those first two  
great men? Can we possibly in future believe anything  
your Head men may say to us?

Brother:

As we see many of your Great men here who have large  
Tracts of land we would ask them what do they intend  
to do <sup>with</sup> those lands? Do they mean to let them lay waste  
and not make most of them? Should they say  
yes; then we might in some degree not think so hard  
of our situation. Suppose a present made to one of your  
Head Men and the Person presenting was to annex a condition  
that should deprive of making any advantageous use of  
the present made, would this not be rather an astonishing  
proviso, and could any person of common sense  
believe it be given with an intention of its being  
for the interest of the person to whom presented?

Brother:

33<sup>5</sup>

I am flattered to think that I can with safety say every man of the Five Nations now inhabiting the lands on the Grand River are to a man steadily attached to the British Government & the Interest of that Nation. We are still the same in sentiment that we were during the American War.

Brother:

Suppose we should be disappointed in obtaining our Grant, agreeably, to our wish, from your Head Men, our feelings no doubt must be hurt, and I should be fearful that it would be a wound that we could not easily forget.

Brother:

As I understand from one of your Head Men here that Gen<sup>l</sup> Haldimand when he made us the Grant did not know the value of the Lands granted, — Gen<sup>l</sup> Haldimand knew well the value of the ~~Lands granted~~. He also knew our loyalty and firm attachment to the British Government. He knew that the Lands on the Mohawk River from which we came, was of at least equal value to any he could give us in this country. And it was well known to him that we did not wish to reside in any other Government than that of the English with whom we were resolved to sink or swim.

Brother:

I have before mentioned that Gen<sup>l</sup> Haldimand did know the

7. value of the lands he gave us. I must therefore beg leave to <sup>33</sup> observe that I imagine your Great Men who are now starting such numerous difficulties, do not know the value of them, nor the true Interest of this new Country, time will convince this. I cannot help honestly saying that we begin to entertain a bad opinion of your Great People. They exceed their Policy in many respects by their division and distribution in landed matters. Genl Haldiman now gave whole Townships to Yanky Land Jobbers, as has since his time been the case, and which has been the means of destroying the Hunting around the Grand River so that unless we are enabled to sell & lease the Lands granted us there we must many of us suffer through want,

Brother:

I cannot help remarking that it appears to me certain characters here who stood behind the Counter during the last War, and who we know nothing about, are now dictating to your Great Men in respect to our Lands. I should wish to know what property those officious Persons left behind them in their own Country, or whether through their Loyalty they ever lost any? I doubt it much but 'tis well known that scarcely a man amongst us but what sacrificed more or less property by leaving our Homes. I again repeat that if those officious Persons have made the smallest sacrifice of property then I think they may in some measure be allowed to interfere,

8. Although it may be well known that Personal interest prompts them to it, - not the good of the Public. 33?

Brother:

I again repeat that this is the last request of this kind we shall make. But you must not suppose (should we not be successful) that it will mean our affections from the British. No, it shall not. I shall go once more to England and there try my success. The ill treatment we may meet from Individuals shall not make us find fault with the Government who has sent them here as Perhaps those Individuals are doing what to them may appear best and most for the Interest of their Nation at large.

Brother:

I am sorry that what I have said should be so lengthy, but our situation demands our being Candid. You must therefore excuse me for taking up so much of your time, in a business no ways interesting to you, but truly so to us Indians and our Posterity. I must again beg that you'll obtain for us a final answer from those Headmen so that our long anxiety may be at an end.

I am in behalf of the Five Nations  
residing on the Grand River

Jos. Brand  
Jos. Brand