

Cherusci, Dakota both resisted colonization

Anonymous

2009

“We must tell our children and our children’s children the story of the heroes of every land and every time who have given their lives that liberty and fraternity and equality might survive among men.”

— Governor David Marston Clough, Dedication of Hermann Monument, New Ulm, Minnesota

This is a letter to those who remember that before they were Americans, before they were Germans, they were Chatti, Cherusi, Harii, Marsi and Suebia.

This is a letter to those who remember their own homeland and the ways of their ancestors; to those who remain Tru.

This is a letter to those who remember that they too were once resisters of colonization.

This is a letter to those who remember Hermann Der Cherusker.

Two thousand years ago on this date, a handful of tribes were united for a brief glimpse in history. Deep in the forests of Teutoburg, these few thousand warriors stood against three legions of the greatest empire of their time. For three days, they fought for their existence as a People, driving the Romans out of their homelands, and holding them at bay for 400 years until the Empire’s collapse.

Rome was the greatest colonizing force of its time, with armies that rode out and conquered much of the known world. It brought thousands of Europe’s indigenous peoples under colonial rule through superior weapons, tactics and numbers. Yet, as written in the words of the Romans themselves, Hermann der Cherusker “challenged the Roman people not in its beginnings like other kings and leaders, but in the peak of its empire.”

Approximately 1400 years later, in a land called Mnisota Makoce, indigenous peoples would stand again to combat the New Rome. Just as the Chatti, the Cherusi, and the Marsi tribes fought against an invading imperial army, our People, the Dakota Oyate, fought against our own invading empire and defended our own way of life.

And once again, members of the Chatti, the Cherusci, and the Marsi would be present for this battle, but only after their own assimilation. The descendants of those who had once defended their lands against a colonial power so many centuries before would decide to dishonor their ancestors, betray their heritage, and ally themselves with the New Rome.

The citizens of New Ulm, descendants of Hermann der Cherusker, Uniter of Tribes, Defier of Rome, Resistor of Empires, would become perpetrators of colonialism against those who should have been their relations in a common struggle.

And so, the Dakota resistance came with much pain. Our women and children were force-marched to concentration camps before exile from our homelands. It was through the town of New Ulm that German-Americans threw rocks and harassed these captives. Boiling water was poured from windows onto passing elders and children. One young man was even pulled from the procession and severely beaten by the mob. His older brother was killed in the process of saving him.

Tribute is rightfully paid to Hermann, and two statues commemorate his resistance. One on a hill near the site of the Battle of the Teutoburg Forest. Another, 4,000 miles away in the town of New Ulm, in the heart of Dakota Territory.

While it is an honor that a tribute to a hero of liberation stands amongst us, it is both sad and ironic that the fields next to him stand empty, where a monument to the successful defenders of Dakota homeland should have stood had another people remembered their own tribal past. That emptiness is now only filled with the painful memories of the loss of our homeland, the genocide of our people, and the betrayal of descendants of a far-away tribe.

Tonight, we put out tobacco for all the descendants of Hermann der Cherusker, for the descendants of all who stood with him, and for our own ancestors who continued their fight. We do this in hopes that these descendants might remember the commonalities between our two peoples and our two struggles.

It is up to you to also honor those ancestors and to continue their fight. Stand with us, as you stand with them, and forever resist the New Rome.

In the Spirit of Hermann der Cherusker,
In the Spirit of Taoyateduta,
Unki tamakoce k'a oni unkitawapi!
Anpao Duta dena unkiyepi

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