
9-3 A Shawnee Argues for a United Indian Resistance, 1810

After mistreatment of the Native Americans by Presidents Jefferson and Madison, Tecumseh, a Shawnee, tried to organize the Midwestern Indian tribes into a united political alliance to thwart the steady advance of the white settlers. Tecumseh argued that the land belonged to all Indians and hence, no individual tribe could strike a treaty or sell their land because of this common ownership. Indians led by Tecumseh's brother, "The Prophet," were defeated in the Battle of Tippecanoe in 1811, largely putting an end to the Indian confederacy. The British made Tecumseh a general in the War of 1812 where he recruited Indians for the British and died fighting in the Battle of the Thames in Canada in 1813. The following is a speech by Tecumseh to Governor William Henry Harrison.

SOURCE: Samuel G. Drake, *Biography and History of the Indians of North America* (Boston: O.L. Perkin, 1834).

Speech to Governor William Henry Harrison at Vincennes, August 12, 1810

Tecumseh (Shawnee)

It is true I am a Shawanee. My forefathers were warriors. Their son is a warrior. From them I only take my existence; from my tribe I take nothing. I am the maker of my own fortune; and oh! that I could make that of my red people, and of my country, as great as the conceptions of my mind, when I think of the Spirit that rules the universe. I would not then come to Governor Harrison, to ask him to tear the treaty, and to obliterate the landmark; but I would say to him, Sir, you have liberty

to return to your own country. The being within, communing with past ages, tells me, that once, nor until lately, there was no white man on this continent. That it then all belonged to red men, children of the same parents, placed on it by the Great Spirit that made them, to keep it, to traverse it, to enjoy its productions, and to fill it with the same race. Once a happy race. Since made miserable by the white people, who are never contented, but always encroaching. The way, and the only way to check and stop this evil, is, for all the red men to unite in claiming a common and equal right in the land, as it was at first, and should be yet; for it never was divided, but belongs to all, for the use of each. That no part has a right to sell, even to each other, much less to strangers; those who want all, and will not do with less. The white people have no right to take the land from the Indians, because they had it first; it is theirs. They may sell, but all must join. Any sale not made by all is not valid. The late sale is bad. It was made by a part only. Part do not know how to sell. It requires all to make a bargain for all. All red men have equal rights to the unoccupied land. The right of occupancy is as good in one place as in another. There cannot be two occupations in the same place. The first excludes all others. It is not so in hunting or travelling; for there the same ground will serve many, as they may follow each other all day; but the camp is stationary, and that is occupancy. It belongs to the first who sits down on his blanket or skins, which he has thrown upon the ground, and till he leaves it no other has a right.

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1. *Different views of land ownership were a constant source of conflict between Native Americans and the government. What is Tecumseh's view of land ownership? Do you agree with it?*
 2. *Pretend you were Governor Harrison. What response would you make to Tecumseh?*
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