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Speech to Governor Harrison at Vincennes, Indiana Territory

Tecumseh

August 12, 1810

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mgouldhawke.wordpress.com

Text (mostly) as it appears in Jack D. Forbes' "The Indian in
America's Past" (1964), as excerpted from Samuel G. Drake's
"Book of the Indians of North America" Book V (1836)

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I am a Shawnee. My forefathers were warriors. Their son is a warrior. From them I take only 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 up 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 the Redman, 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 to stop this evil, is for all the Redmen to unite in claiming a common and equal right in the land, as it was at first, and should be yet; for it was never 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. It requires all to make a bargain for all. All Redmen 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 traveling; 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.