

American Legal History – Russell

Tecumseh to Governor Harrison at Vincennes (1810), in *The World's Famous Orations 14-15* (Williams Jennings Bryan ed., Funk & Wagnalls 1906).

THE WORLD'S FAMOUS ORATIONS

IV

TECUMSEH TO GOVERNOR HARRISON AT VINCENNES (1810)

Delivered to Governor Harrison in council at Vincennes on August 12, 1810. Large tracts of land in Tecumseh's absence had been sold by the Indians on both sides of the Wabash River.

Born about 1768, died in 1813; a Chief of the Shawnee and twin brother of Elskwatawa, who was defeated by Harrison at Tippecanoe; joined the British in the War of 1812; fought in several battles in Canada; commanded the right wing of the allied Indian and British forces, who were defeated in the Battle of the Thames by General Harrison.

It is true 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 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 to 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. For 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 can not be tow 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.

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