
Tecumseh
Address to the Osages
1811

Tecumseh allegedly delivered this speech to a band of Osages to solicit support for a pan-Indian confederacy to fight U.S. encroachment on their lands. The sole account of this speech is by John Dunn Hunter (1798?–1827), an Anglo-American, who claimed to have been raised among the Osages. Because Hunter's Memoirs of a Captivity Among the Indians of North America (1823) prompted criticism of U.S. Indian policies, American officials quickly concerted counterattacks to discredit the author. Consequently, the authenticity of the speech has been widely questioned. However, United States War Department records validate that Tecumseh did visit the Osages in 1811 and Tecumseh's reference to a great mid-western earthquake date the speech to roughly that same year. Though his trip was to end after meeting with the Osages, Tecumseh extended his campaigning northward up the Mississippi River after learning about the battle of Tippecanoe and the destruction of Prophetstown. Weakened by defeat and enjoying only marginal success in recruiting allies, Tecumseh and his confederacy fought the War of 1812 alongside the British. He was shot and killed by American troops in 1813 while continuing a stand on the Thames River, despite being abandoned by allied British troops on the battlefield.

—Benjamin Reiss

Bibliography: John Sugden, *Tecumseh: A Life* (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1998).

[1] Brothers, we all belong to one family; we are all children of the Great Spirit; we walk in the same path; slake our thirst at the same spring; and now affairs of the greatest concern lead us to smoke the pipe around the same council fire!

[2] Brothers, we are friends; we must assist each other to bear our burdens. The blood of many of our fathers and brothers has run like water on the ground, to satisfy the avarice of the white men. We, ourselves, are threatened with a great evil; nothing will pacify them but the destruction of all the red men.

[3] Brothers, when the white men first set foot on our grounds, they were hungry; they had no place on which to spread their blankets, or to kindle their fires. They were feeble; they could do nothing for themselves. Our fathers commiserated their distress, and shared freely with them whatever the Great Spirit had given his red children. They gave them food when hungry, medicine when sick, spread skins for them to sleep on, and gave them grounds, that they might hunt and raise corn. Brothers, the white people are like poisonous serpents: when chilled, they are feeble and harmless; but invigorate them with warmth, and they sting their benefactors to death.

[4] The white people came among us feeble; and now that we have made them strong, they wish to kill us, or drive us back, as they would wolves and panthers. Brothers, the white men are not friends to the Indians: at first, they only asked for land sufficient for a wigwam; now, nothing will satisfy them but the whole of our hunting grounds, from the rising to the setting sun.

[5] Brothers, the white men want more than our hunting grounds; they wish to kill our old men, women, and little ones.

[6] Brothers, many winters ago there was no land; the sun did not rise and set; all was darkness. The Great Spirit made all things. He gave the white people a home beyond the great waters. He supplied these grounds with game, and gave them to his red children; and he gave them strength and courage to defend them.

[7] Brothers, my people wish for peace; the red men all wish for peace; but where the white people are, there is no peace for them, except it be on the bosom of our mother.

[8] Brothers, the white men despise and cheat the Indians; they abuse and insult them; they do not think the red men sufficiently good to live. The red men have borne many and great injuries; they ought to suffer them no longer. My people will not; they are determined on vengeance; they have taken up the tomahawk; they will make it fat with blood; they will drink the blood of the white people.

[9] Brothers, my people are brave and numerous; but the white people are too strong for them alone. I wish you to take up the tomahawk with them. If we all unite, we will cause the rivers to stain the great waters with their blood.

[10] Brothers, if you do not unite with us, they will first destroy us, and then you will fall an easy prey to them. They have destroyed many nations of red men, because they were not united, because they were not friends to each other.

[11] Brothers, The white people send runners amongst us; they wish to make us enemies, that they may sweep over and desolate our hunting grounds, like devastating winds, or rushing waters.

[12] Brothers, our Great Father [the King of England] over the great waters is angry with the white people, our enemies. He will send his brave warriors against them; he will send us rifles, and whatever else we want—he is our friend, and we are his children.

[13] Brothers, who are the white people that we should fear them? They cannot run fast, and are good marks to shoot at: they are only men; our fathers have killed many of them: we are not squaws, and we will stain the earth red with their blood.

[14] Brothers, the Great Spirit is angry with our enemies; he speaks in thunder, and the earth swallows up villages, and drinks up the Mississippi. The great waters will cover their lowlands; their corn cannot grow; and the Great Spirit will sweep those who escape to the hills from the earth with his terrible breath.

[15] Brothers, we must be united; we must smoke the same pipe; we must fight each other's battles; and, more than all, we must love the Great Spirit: he is for us; he will destroy our enemies, and make all his red children happy.

Discussion Questions:

1. What was the theme of Tecumseh's address? Describe the attitudes expressed toward American settlers.
2. According to Tecumseh, what would be the result if the Osages and others failed to unite as a confederacy against the United States?
3. Tecumseh stated that like American Indians, both the "Great Spirit" and "Great Father over the waters" were angry with white settlers. What role did these beliefs and assurances have in Tecumseh's determination to mobilize a resistance?

SOURCE: Sir Isaac Brock, *The Life and Correspondence of Major General Sir Isaac Brock, K.B.*, edited by Ferdinand Brock Tupper (London: Simpkin, Marshall, & Co., 1845).

[This text was created by Benjamin Reiss as part of the "Documenting American History" project, supervised by Professor David Voelker at the University of Wisconsin–Green Bay. This project had support from UWGB's Research Council.]



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