**Sell a Country! Why Not Sell the Air?**

**Tecumseh**

In the early 1800s, two Shawnee brothers, Tecumseh and "the Prophet," organized many Native American nations into a confederation. They wanted to keep white settlers from taking more Indian lands. One problem they faced was that some Indian leaders agreed to sell land to the United States. In the following speech, Tecumseh argued that no one had the right to sell land since it belonged to all people.

Houses are built for you to hold councils in; the Indians hold theirs in the open air. I am a Shawnee. My forefathers were warriors. Their son is a warrior. From them I only take my existence. From my tribe I take nothing. I have made myself what I am. And I would that I could make the red people as great as the conceptions of my own mind, when I think of the Great Spirit that rules over us all. … I would not then come to Governor Harrison to ask him to tear up the treaty. [Tecumseh referred to the 1795 Treaty of Greenville, which gave the United States parts of the Northwest Territory. He had refused to attend the Greenville peace council.]

But I would say to him, "Brother, you have the liberty to return to your own country." You wish to prevent the Indians from doing as we wish them, to unite and let them consider their lands as the common property of the whole. You take the tribes aside and advise them not to come into this measure. … You want by your distinctions of Indian tribes, in allotting to each a particular, to make them war with each other. You never see an Indian endeavor to make the white people do this. You are continually driving the red people, when at last you will drive them into the great lake [Lake Michigan], where they can neither stand nor work.

Since my residence at Tippecanoe, we have endeavored to level distinctions, to destroy village chiefs, by whom all mischiefs were done. It is they who sell the land to the Americans. Brother, this land that was sold, and the goods that were given for it, was only done by a few. … In the future we are prepared to punish those who propose to sell land to the Americans. If you continue to purchase them, it will make war among the different tribes, and at last I do not know what will be the consequences among the white people.

The way, the only way to stop this evil, is for the red men to unite in claiming a common and equal right in the land, as it was at first, and should be now—for it was never divided, but belongs to us all.

No tribe has the right to sell, even to each other, much less to strangers. …

Sell a country! Why not sell the air, the great sea, as well as the earth? Did not the Great Spirit make them all for the use of his children? How can we have confidence in the white people? When Jesus Christ came upon the earth you killed him and nailed him to the cross. You thought he was dead, and you were mistaken. You have the Shakers among you, and you laugh and make light of their worship. Everything I have told you is the truth. The Great Spirit has inspired me.