7-12 Speech to Tecumseh and the Prophet (1811) and Report to the Secretary of War (1814)

William Henry Harrison would be elected president of the United States in 1840 largely because of his reputation as an Indian fighter. His nickname, “Tippecanoe,” celebrated his victory over the followers of Chief Tecumseh and his brother Tenskwatawa (the Prophet) at the Battle of Tippecanoe on November 7, 1811. As governor of the Indiana Territory, Harrison carried out the Democratic Republican policy of divesting Native Americans of their land (see Document 7-8). Tecumseh and Tenskwatawa formed a coalition to resist this policy of piecemeal dispossession. As Harrison warned in his speech to Tecumseh and the Prophet, he had assembled an army of seasoned Indian fighters. He soon moved them to Tippecanoe Creek near the hostile Indian encampment called Prophetstown. Convicted by the Prophet that they were invincible, the Indians swelled into the American camp in the predawn darkness. But Harrison’s men held their ground, formed a defensive line, and soon turned the Indians back with heavy losses.

Tecumseh’s people abandoned Prophetstown (which Harrison subsequently burned) and, fighting in small bands, made war on settlers across the Northwest. During the War of 1812, Tecumseh joined forces with the British. At the Battle of the Thames on October 5, 1813, Harrison’s forces decisively defeated the Indians and their British allies and killed Tecumseh. In his letter to the secretary of war, Harrison summarized the Democratic Republican Indian policy and his successes in implementing it.


(a) Harrison to Tecumseh and the Prophet, June 24, 1811

Brothers,—Listen to me. I speak to you about matters of importance, both to the white people and yourselves; open your ears, therefore, and attend to what I shall say.

Brothers, this is the third year that all the white people in this country have been alarmed at your proceedings; you threaten us with war, you invite all the tribes in the north and west of you to join against us. . . .

Brothers, our citizens are alarmed, and my warriors are preparing themselves; not to strike you, but to defend themselves and their women and children. You shall not surprise us as you expect to do; you are about to undertake a very rash act; as a friend, I advise you to consider well of it. . . . Do you really think that the handful of men that you have about you, are able to contend with the Seventeen Fires [the seventeen states then composing the United States], or even that the whole of the tribes united, could contend against the Kentucky Fire alone?

Brothers, I am myself of the long knife fire; as soon as they hear my voice, you will see them pouring forth their swarms of hunting shirt men, as numerous as the mosquitoes [sic] on the shores of the Wabash; brothers, take care of their stings.

(b) Harrison to the Secretary of War, March 22, 1814

I received instruction from President Jefferson, shortly after his first election, to make efforts for extinguishing the Indian claims upon the Ohio, below the mouth of the Kentucky river, and to such other tracts as were necessary to connect and consolidate our settlements. It was at once determined, that the community of interests in the lands among the Indian tribes, which seemed to be recognized by the treaty of Greenville, should be objected to. . . . Care was taken . . . to place the title to such tracts as might be desirable to purchase . . . upon a footing that would facilitate the procuring of them, by getting the tribes who had no claim themselves, and who might probably interfere, to recognize the titles of those who were ascertained to possess [sic] them.

This was particularly the case with regard to the lands watered by the Wabash, which were declared to be the property of the Miamis, with the exception of the tract occupied by the Delawares on White river, which was to be considered the joint property of them and the Miamis. This arrangement was very much disliked by Tecumseh, and the banditti that he had assembled at Tippecanoe. He complained loudly, as well of the sales that had been made, as of the principle of considering a particular tribe as the exclusive proprietors of
any part of the country, which he said the Great Spirit had given to all his red children.

The question of the title to the lands south of the Wabash, has been thoroughly examined; every opportunity was afforded to Tecumseh and his party to exhibit their pretensions [land claims], and they were found to rest upon no other basis than that of their being the common property of all the Indians.

Questions
1. Why did Harrison expect his image of “swarms of hunting shirt men” to intimidate Tecumseh and the Prophet?
2. By what means did Harrison intend to extinguish Native American land claims along the Ohio River?
3. Why did Tecumseh protest against these methods and organize resistance to them?

7-13 Hartford Convention Resolutions (1814)

In 1814 the Federalist minority in Congress and the nation had good cause to complain about “Mr. Madison’s war.” Few of them had supported going to war against Britain in the first place; indeed, all forty Federalists in Congress in 1812 had opposed the war declaration, and subsequent disasters only confirmed their reservations. Proud claims of the United States’ military prowess proved to be empty boasts once the fighting began. The British occupation of Washington, D.C., in August 1814, and the burning of the Capitol and the White House shocked the American public. Buoyed by the rising tide of discontent, the more radical elements of the Federalist Party in Massachusetts called for a general conference of New England states. Connecticut and Rhode Island joined Massachusetts in electing delegates to the proposed convention, but in New Hampshire and Vermont only selected counties chose to send representatives. In all, twenty-six men met at Hartford, Connecticut, from December 15, 1814, to January 5, 1815, and agreed to the following resolutions.


Therefore resolved.—That it be and hereby is recommended to the Legislatures of the several States represented in this Convention, to adopt all such measures as may be necessary effectually to protect the citizens of said States from the operation and effects of all acts which have been or may be passed by the Congress of the United States, which shall contain provisions, subjecting the militia or other citizens to forcible drafts, conscriptions, or impressments, not authorized by the Constitution of the United States.

Resolved.—That it be and hereby is recommended to the said Legislatures, to authorize an immediate and earnest application to be made to the Government of the United States, requesting their consent to some arrangement, whereby the said States may separately or in concert, be empowered to assume upon themselves the defense of their territory against the enemy; and a reasonable portion of the taxes, collected within said States, may be paid into the respective treasuries thereof, and appropriated to the payment of the balance due said States, and to the future defense of the same. The amount so paid into the said treasuries to be credited, and the disbursements made as aforesaid to be charged to the United States.

Resolved.—That it be, and it hereby is, recommended to the legislatures of the aforesaid States, to pass laws (where it has not already been done) authorizing the Governors or Commanders in Chief of their militia to make detachments from the same, or to form voluntary corps, as shall be most convenient and conformable to their Constitutions, and to cause the same to be well armed, equipped and disciplined, and held in readiness for service; and upon the request of the Governor of either of the other States, to employ the whole of such detachment or corps, as well as the regular forces of the State, or such part thereof as may be required and can be