

November 12, 1810

Vincennes *Western Sun*, December 8, 1810Dawson, *Harrison*, 164

Gentlemen of *the* Legislative Council, and House of Representatives:<sup>1</sup>

Presenting as we do a very extended frontier to numerous and warlike tribes of the aborigines, the state of our relations with them must always form an important and interesting feature in our local politics. It is with regret that I have to inform you that the harmony and good understanding which it is so much our interest to cultivate with these our neighbors have for some time past experienced a considerable interruption, and that we have indeed been threatened with hostilities by a combination formed under the auspices of a bold adventurer, who pretends to act under the immediate inspiration of the Deity. His character as a Prophet would not, however, have given him any very dangerous influence, if he had not been assisted by the intrigues and advice of foreign agents, and other disaffected persons who have for many years omitted no opportunity of counteracting the measures of the government with regard to the Indians, and filling their naturally jealous minds with suspicions of the justice and integrity of our views towards them.

The circumstance which was laid hold of to encourage disaffection on the late occasion was the treaty made by me at Fort Wayne, in the autumn of the last year.

But in all its transactions with the Indians our government has not been contented with doing that which was just only. Its savage neighbors have on all occasions experienced its liberality and its benevolence. Upon this principle, in several of the treaties which have been made, tribes have been admitted to a participation in their benefits who had no title to the lands ceded, merely because they had been accustomed to hunt upon and derive part of their support from them. For this reason, and to prevent the Miamies, who were the real owners of the land, from experiencing any ill effects from their resentment, in case they were excluded, the Delawares, Putawatamies, and Kickapoos, were made parties to the late treaty of Fort Wayne. No other tribe was admitted, because it never had been suggested that any other could plead even the title of use or occupancy of the lands which at that time were conveyed to the United States. It was not until eight months after the conclusion of the treaty, and after his design of forming a hostile combination against the United States had been discovered and defeated, that the pretensions of the Prophet with regard to the lands were made known.

As soon as I was informed that his disaffection at the late treaty was assigned as the cause of the hostile attitude the Prophet had assumed, I sent to inform him

—that he might come forward and exhibit his pretensions, and if they were really found to be just or equitable, the lands would be restored, or an ample equivalent given for them. His brother was deputized and sent to me for that purpose [August 12-20, 1810]. But far from being able to shew any colour of claim, either for himself, or any of his followers, his objections to the treaty were confined to the assertion that all the land upon the continent was the common property of all the tribes, and that no sale of any part of it could be valid, without the consent of all. A proposition so extremely absurd, and which would forever prevent any further purchase of lands by the United States, could receive no countenance from any friend to his country. He had, however, the insolence to declare, that by the acknowledgment of that principle alone could the effects of his resentment be avoided. No person who is in the least acquainted with the history of Indian affairs upon our northwestern frontier, for some years past, can be at any loss for the source of all this mischief, or will hesitate to believe that the Prophet is a tool of British fears or British avarice, designed for the purpose of forming a combination of the Indians, which in case of war between that power and the United States may assist them in the defence of Canada, or as the means of keeping back our settlements, and by rendering us suspected and hated by the natives, secure to themselves a continuance of the valuable fur trade, which they have so long engrossed.

*Messages and Papers of William Henry Harrison*, Logan Esarey, ed. (Indianapolis: Indiana Historical Society, 1922), 1: 487.