

Chief Tecumseh

Message spoken to a council of the southern tribes (1811)

We meet together in solemn council tonight because our merciless oppressors are still making attacks upon our race. The whites are already nearly a match for us all united, and too strong for any one tribe alone to resist. Therefore, unless we support one another with our collective and united forces--unless every tribe unanimously combines to give check to the ambition and avarice of the whites--they will soon conquer us completely, and we will be driven away from our native lands and scattered as autumnal leaves before the wind.

Have we not courage enough remaining to defend our country and maintain our ancient independence? Will we calmly suffer the white intruders and tyrants to enslave us? But what need is there to speak of the past? It speaks for itself and asks, Where today is the Pequod? Where the Narragansetts, the Mohawks, Pocanokets, and many other once powerful tribes of our race? They have vanished before the avarice and oppression of the white men, as snow before a summer sun. In the vain hope of alone defending their ancient possessions, they have fallen in the wars with the white men. Look abroad over their once beautiful country, and what see you now? Naught but the ravages of the pale face destroyers meet our eyes. So it will be with you Choctaws and Chickasaws! Soon your mighty forest trees, under the shade of whose wide spreading branches you have played in infancy, sported in boyhood, and now rest your wearied limbs after the fatigue of the chase, will be cut down to fence in the land which the white intruders dare to call their own. Soon their broad roads will pass over the graves of your fathers, and the place of their rest will be blotted out forever. The annihilation of our race is at hand unless we unite in one common cause against the common foe. Think not, brave Choctaws and Chickasaws, that you can remain passive and indifferent to the common danger, and thus escape the common fate. Your people, too, will soon be as falling leaves and scattering clouds before their blighting breath. You, too, will be driven away from your native land and ancient domains as leaves are driven before the wintry storms.

Sleep not longer, O Choctaws and Chickasaws, in false security and delusive hopes. Our broad domains are fast escaping from our grasp. Every year our white intruders become more greedy, exacting, oppressive and overbearing. Every year contentions spring up between them and our people, and when blood is shed we are required to make atonement, whether right or wrong, at the cost of the lives of our greatest chiefs, and the yielding up of large tracts of our lands. Before the pale faces came among us, we enjoyed the happiness of unbounded freedom and were acquainted with neither riches, wants, nor oppression. How is it now? Wants and oppression are our lot; for are we not controlled in everything? Are we not being

stripped day by day of the little that remains of our ancient liberty? Do they not even kick and strike us as they do their blackfaces? How long will it be before they will tie us to a post and whip us, and make us work for them in their corn fields as they do them? Shall we wait for that moment? Or shall we die fighting before submitting to such ignominy?

Shall we calmly wait until they become so numerous that we will no longer be able to resist oppression? Shall we give up our homes, our country, bequeathed to us by the Great Spirit, the graves of our dead, and everything that is dear and sacred to us, without a struggle? I know you will cry with me: Never! Never! Then let us by unity of action destroy them all, which we now can do, or drive them back whence they came. War or extermination is now our only choice. Which do you choose? I know your answer. Therefore, I now call on you, brave Choctaws and Chickasaws, to assist in the just cause of liberating our race from the grasp of our faithless invaders and heartless oppressors. The white usurpation must be stopped, or we, its rightful owners, be forever destroyed and wiped out as a race of people. I am now at the head of many warriors backed by the strong arm of English soldiers. Choctaws and Chickasaws, be no longer their dupes. If there be one here tonight who believes that his rights will not sooner or later be taken from him by the avaricious American pale faces, his ignorance ought to excite pity, for he knows little of the character of our common foe. Let us form one body, one heart, and defend to the last warrior our country, our homes, our liberty, and the graves of our fathers.

Choctaws and Chickasaws, you are among the few of our race who sit indolently at ease. You have indeed enjoyed the reputation of being brave, but will you let the whites encroach upon your domains even to your very door before you will assert your rights in resistance? Surely, if any people ever had, we have ample grounds to accuse the Americans of injustice. They are a people fond of innovations, while we are content to preserve what we already have. Their designs are to enlarge their possessions by taking yours in turn. Will you continue to dally, O Choctaws and Chickasaws? Haste to the relief of our common cause, for by blood you are bound, lest the day be not far distant when you will be left single-handed and alone to the cruel mercy of our most inveterate foe.

Chief Tecumseh was a powerful Shawnee orator and leader of a large tribal confederacy which became an ally of Britain and opposed the United States during the War of 1812.

More information: <https://www.accessgenealogy.com/native/meeting-1811.htm>