

# Stabbed in the Back

## Vincennes, Slavery, and the Indian “Threat”

PATRICK BOTTIGER

During the opening decade of the nineteenth century, two towns on the Northwest frontier stood in apparent opposition to one another. Native Americans established Prophetstown as a haven against the cultural assault of European Americans. European Americans, in the meantime, colonized Vincennes as an outpost in what they saw as a bountiful wilderness surrounded by savages. This simple dichotomy, however, fails even to scratch the surface of the complex story of the divisions and factions that beset both communities. As the two communities divided internally, they also moved toward overt conflict with each other. The violence that eventually erupted between the Americans and nativist Indians at the Battle of Tippecanoe in November 1811 was as much a product of intra-community factionalism as it was of the increasingly violent relationships between Indians and non-Natives on the frontier. Conflicting national visions in Vincennes exacerbated Americans' fears of Prophetstown and propelled them toward conflict with the nativist

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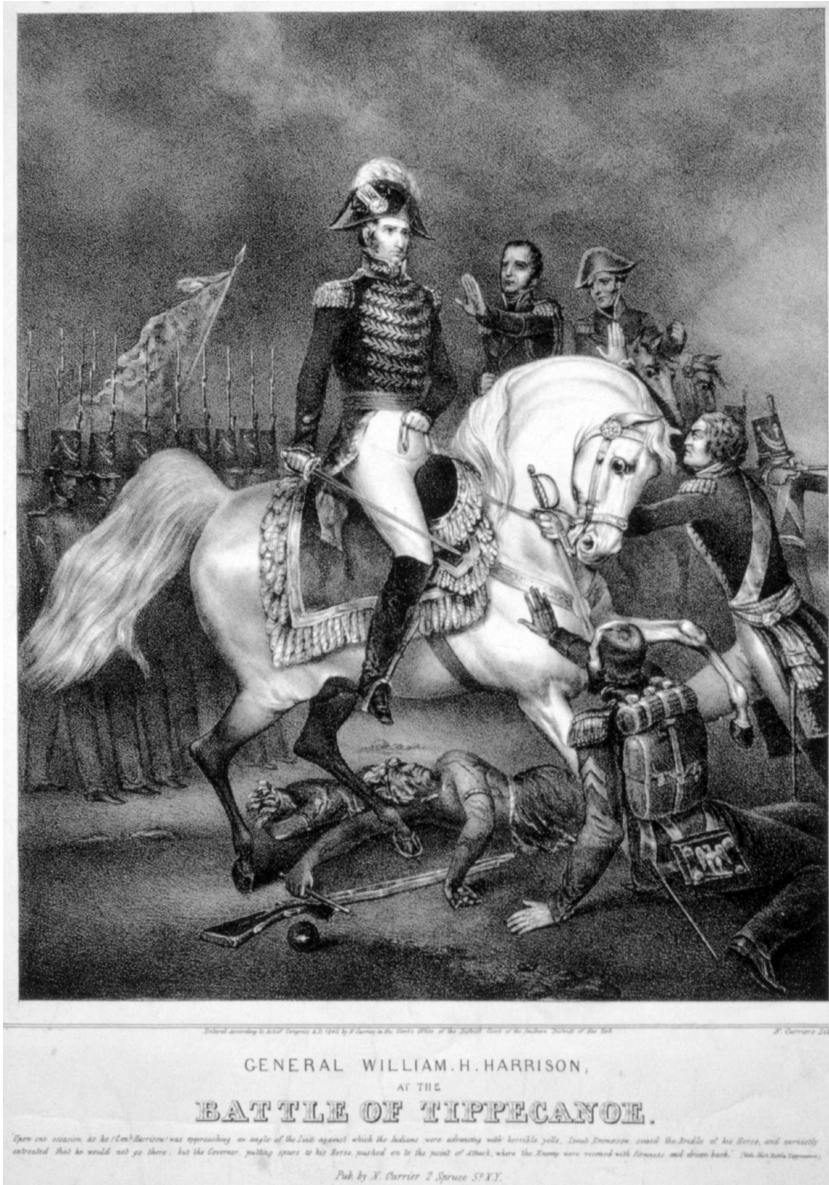
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Indians to their north.<sup>1</sup> What happened in Vincennes gains particular importance in contrast with other recent scholarship. Patrick Griffin argues that ideas of innate racial difference crystallized in the northern Ohio River Valley in the three decades after the end of the Seven Years War, largely as the result of the polarizing effects of constant violence and warfare. According to Griffin, white frontier settlers grudgingly recognized their common racial heritage with the revolutionaries in the East and sacrificed some of their autonomy in exchange for protection from the new government. Peter Silver, in his study of residents of the middle colonies, finds that they also developed a common racial identity because of shared victimization from Indian attacks. Both historians highlight the construction of late eighteenth-century Indian and European American racial identities based upon frontier violence between the two groups. In contrast, I argue that the concept of shared victimization was also constructed by European Americans in order to marginalize other European Americans. In Vincennes, American frontiersmen used issues surrounding Native Americans and Prophetstown as the basis for attacks against their political and social rivals; they showed equal or even greater concern with defending their individual honor and their conflicting national visions than with protecting their town or their shared racial identity.<sup>2</sup> My work argues that the internal

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<sup>1</sup>Works including R. David Edmunds, *The Shawnee Prophet* (Lincoln, Neb., 1983); John Sugden, *Tecumseh: A Life* (New York, 1997); Sugden, *Blue Jacket: Warrior of the Shawnees* (Lincoln, Neb., 2003); Robert Owens, *Mr. Jefferson's Hammer: William Henry Harrison and the Origins of American Indian Policy* (Norman, Okla., 2007); Harvey Lewis Carter, *The Life and Times of Little Turtle: First Sagamore of the Wabash* (Urbana, Ill., 1987); Bradley Birzer, "Entangling Empires, Fracturing Frontiers: Jean Baptiste Richardville and the Quest for Miami Autonomy, 1760-1841" (Ph.D. diss., Indiana University, 1998) analyze important figures in Vincennes and Prophetstown without fully evaluating the communities from which they emerged. Richard White, *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650-1815* (Cambridge, UK, 1991); and Gregory Dowd, *A Spirited Resistance: The North American Indian Struggle for Unity, 1745-1815* (Baltimore, Md., 1993) delve into larger social movements, but they only briefly evaluate Prophetstown and Vincennes. Scholars have framed their analyses around a racial dichotomy embodied by the expansionist-minded Americans whom the confederated Indians opposed. This article is part of a larger work that emphasizes how intra-community factionalism determined the relationships between Prophetstown and Vincennes.

<sup>2</sup>Barbara Jeanne Fields, "Slavery, Race, and Ideology in the United States of America," *New Left Review* 181 (May/June 1990), 95-118. Fields argues for the social construction of race; Patrick Griffin and Peter Silver have applied this theory to Indian affairs in the Ohio Valley. Patrick Griffin, *American Leviathan: Empire, Nation, and Revolutionary Frontier* (New York, 2007); Peter Silver, *Our Savage Neighbors: How Indian War Transformed America* (New York, 2008).



William Henry Harrison, portrayed as the victorious commander of the Battle of Tippecanoe in an 1840 lithograph by Currier and Ives. In 1811 Vincennes, Harrison was widely criticized by his opponents for his decision to attack Prophetstown and for the loss of troops during the battle. Later history was most likely to portray him as above.

Courtesy Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress

divisions within Vincennes and Prophetstown were as important to the development of racial ideologies, as was the frontier violence that developed between American Indian and European American communities.

Intra-community factionalism was nowhere more apparent on the Northwest frontier than at Vincennes during the early 1800s. Located on the Wabash River about 180 miles southwest of Prophetstown, Vincennes was not merely an outpost of European American civilization. It was a community riven by divisions, and as the factions contested with one another, they seized upon the image of Prophetstown for their own political and economic purposes. Such behavior was most apparent in their contest over the legal and moral justifications for allowing slavery in the territory. Unable to compromise over the role of slavery in the development of the territory, the Americans began fighting each other for control of territorial politics in order to institute their policies. Much of this debate focused on William Henry Harrison's governance and policies—in particular, his handling of Indian affairs. Eventually, Harrison and his supporters would attack his political opponents by identifying them with Prophetstown, continually connecting them with Tenskwatawa, his brother Tecumseh, and their militant designs on Vincennes. The Harrisonians' attempts to silence their adversaries failed; instead the rhetoric amplified perceptions of a militant Prophetstown and intensified native-white antagonisms that were ultimately unleashed in the Battle of Tippecanoe.<sup>3</sup> While historians have analyzed the violent relationship that developed between Vincennes and Prophetstown during the early 1800s, this article examines the extent to which the resulting bloodshed between Indians and Euro-Americans was a product of the factionalism that prevailed within Vincennes.

Although the territorial dialogue treated slavery as a national issue, the dispute was local in substance. The territorial government established in 1800 at Vincennes oversaw more than 5,000 Anglos in 200,000 square miles. Most of the twenty territorial officials lived within the confines of Vincennes and had few, if any, connections to the outlying settlements. Settlers' security rested fundamentally on their ability to maintain peaceful relationships with nearby Indian communities and to

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<sup>3</sup>My use of the term "white" does not refer to a racial group, but rather to the community of American, French, Swiss, and other cultural groups who lived in or near Vincennes. Using the term "American" would only speak to one aspect of the community and so would exclude other cultural groups such as the French.



earn a living by farming, trading, or speculating in lands that both Europeans and Indians wanted. Competition for resources demanded that Americans consider European and Indian interests, which required a delicate balance of trade and goodwill between the various peoples in the area. Vincennes as a political capitol was as much, if not more, a product of the interplay between the local cultures as it was of the political dictates from Washington, D.C. National laws mattered very little in a society where no single culture or party held sway.

Slavery, legally prohibited by the Northwest Ordinance of 1787, persisted in the region after 1800: in part, because the French and Indian residents had a long-standing practice of owning slaves, but also because territorial governors like Arthur St. Clair and Harrison did not enforce its prohibition. The federal government during the early republic lacked the necessary machinery to regulate and check territorial governments. Territorial governors enjoyed great power and expected to benefit from their posts. Andrew Cayton argues that they were “frontier potentates, legally responsible only to the president of the United States, who appointed them to office in the first place.”<sup>4</sup> Such power meant that governors had no real impetus to do away with the institution of forced labor—an institution that benefited them as major landholders. Harrison’s failure to enforce Article Six of the ordinance risked no political repercussions because Thomas Jefferson was not about to fire a fellow Virginian with whom he shared similar political and racial ideals. Harrison also enjoyed an absolute veto over all territorial legislation; he appointed the territorial judges and secretary and thus controlled the opposition to slavery in the courts.<sup>5</sup> It is no surprise that he supported and signed the proslavery petition that the Indiana Territorial Convention sent to Congress in 1802. Territorial leaders claimed that the ban on slavery had forced many people to emigrate to the “Spanish side of the Mississippi, most of whom but for the prohibition contained in the ordinance would have settled in this Territory.”<sup>6</sup> Harrison and his

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<sup>4</sup>Andrew Cayton, *Frontier Indiana* (Bloomington, Ind., 1996), 229.

<sup>5</sup>Jefferson allowed Harrison to appoint the territorial judges and secretary. The president did not know them, felt that Harrison would make better choices, and returned the form on which he was supposed to have written the names, with his signature and the instruction to Harrison to fill it out himself.

<sup>6</sup>Memorial and Petition of the Indiana Territorial Convention to the U.S. Congress, December 28, 1802. Douglas E. Clanin and Ruth Dorrel, eds., *The Papers of William Henry Harrison, 1800-1815* (microfilm, 12 reels, Indianapolis, Ind., 1994), reel 1, pp. 461-62; Cayton, *Frontier Indiana*, 188.

supporters believed that the ban on slavery inhibited rapid, large-scale settlement of the territory and thus withheld revenues from the expensive territorial government at Vincennes.

By 1805, slavery had become the most divisive issue in Vincennes. The increasingly hostile environment in the town forced many of the territorial leaders to take sides regarding Harrison's policies. The resulting factions consisted of well-educated men from around the United States and Europe who had a firm understanding of republican ideology and the political atmosphere in Washington, D.C., which they used to defend their territorial vision. Benjamin Parke, Thomas Randolph, Elihu Stout, and William Henry Harrison were proslavery men who hoped to overturn Article Six of the Northwest Ordinance or at least pass a law restricting its application in the territory. From 1804 to 1808, Parke served as the territory's attorney general, a position held thereafter by Thomas Randolph, a first cousin to Thomas Jefferson. Stout, originally from New Jersey, had migrated to the territory from Kentucky to serve as the territorial printer in 1803. These four men represented Harrison's core group of supporters and defended the governor's stance on slavery as well as his policies toward the local Indians. They hoped to force the Indians out of the territory by purchasing their lands, and then to open up the area to slaveholders in order to spur settlement.

The anti-Harrisonians, while from divergent backgrounds, shared the belief that slavery would undermine American labor and prevent the settlement of the territory, and they disagreed with Harrison's Indian policy because it seemed to punish the Indians for defending their property. One of the influential leaders in this anti-Harrison faction was Swiss immigrant John Badollet, who in 1804 had been appointed as register for the new territorial land office. Besides Badollet, the most influential of these men were Nathaniel Ewing, Dr. Elias McNamee, Judge John Johnson, William McIntosh, and Jonathan Jennings. Ewing was the receiver of public monies, McNamee a doctor in town, Johnson a territorial judge, and Jennings worked with Stout before he became the territorial representative in Congress. McIntosh had moved to the territory after fighting with the British during the Revolutionary War, and had served as the territorial treasurer until 1804.

The two factions' differing perspectives on slavery reflected the developing economic structure in the territory. Most of the Americans owned individual farms outside of Vincennes, while the French continued to farm their communal holdings in town. Small manufacturers also popped up throughout the southern half of the territory, so that by 1810,

33 gristmills, 14 sawmills, 28 distilleries, 1,256 looms, 1,850 spinning-wheels, and 18 tanneries produced nearly \$160,000 worth of manufactured goods.<sup>7</sup> In other words, the local environment gave independent laborers better opportunities because it was conducive to small-scale manufacturing and farming, which dominated the economic landscape in the region. Most American residents opposed the legalization of slavery in the territory because it would provide incentive for individuals to buy vast tracts of land while also undercutting the need for hired help, thereby replacing free labor with slaves. Those who supported slavery tended to own more land and stood to benefit from the increased use of slave labor. They hoped that slaves and large-scale agriculture would increase their profits.

Vincennes lacked the restrictive slave codes present in the southern states, and, while the legal record reflects this, the public rhetoric regarding slavery does not. Many European Americans circumvented the Northwest Ordinance's ban on slavery by freeing their slaves and then forcing them to agree to ninety-nine-year indentures. Other residents found slavery in any form to be directly against the soul of the American Revolution. The town's factions argued about republican ideals and the founding fathers' relationships with slaves, but without mentioning the actual slave community in Vincennes. The judicial record of Vincennes reflects an African American community that enjoyed relative social and legal freedoms when compared to the more restrictive lives of slaves in the southern states. In 1807, for example, a female slave lodged a complaint against her master for "ill usage & cruel treatment"; the court responded in her favor.<sup>8</sup> Slaves and free African Americans gathered freely with each other and walked throughout the town without passes or supervision; even when imprisoned, slaves could count on the European

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<sup>7</sup>John B. Dillon, *A History of Indiana* (Indianapolis, Ind., 1859), 439.

<sup>8</sup>In December 1807, Ann, an indentured servant labeled a "Mulatto" and "Negroe" in the judicial record, lodged a complaint against her owner James Trimble for "ill usage & cruel treatment" in the Court of Common Pleas. The court ruled that Trimble "enter into recognizance" at the clerk's office and ordered that he "shall not in [the] future abuse or unreasonably chastise his said servant during the time she remains in his . . . controle." Court of Common Pleas for Knox County—Saturday, December 5, 1807, box 12, folder 856, Indiana State Archives, Indianapolis. I use the term "slave" to describe indentured African Americans in Vincennes because their ninety-nine-year indentures made them *de facto* slaves.

American community to protect their rights.<sup>9</sup> Yet despite a relatively greater degree of African American mobility, the antislavery men in Vincennes continued to point to slaveholding practices in the Carolinas and Georgia as exemplary for Indiana Territory. The disconnect between local reality and the antislavery rhetoric printed in *The Western Sun* reflected the extent to which the parties would ratchet up their language in order to marginalize their political enemies. The factions might have found common ground had they actually discussed the practical application of slavery in their community. Instead, they hardened in their opposition, seeking to influence Congress through petitions and by electing a territorial representative responsive to their views. Congress ignored their petitions, which left the factions to settle the issue themselves. They would continue to bicker over slavery and congressional representation, even as Indian affairs threatened to undermine the safety of their town.

The Americans spent much of 1807 and 1808 arguing about slavery through petitions and through attacks in the local newspaper, *The Western Sun*; in 1809, the factions continued to argue the issue when they began mobilizing for territorial elections. The rhetoric of the debate was unique to Vincennes, following a peculiar course that refashioned larger political ideologies and leaders in local terms. Associations with Jefferson played well among the voters of the territory, who increasingly feared the aristocratic tendencies of the Federalists. As the 1809 election neared, the anti-Harrisonians focused on differentiating pro-Harrison candidate Thomas Randolph from his cousin Thomas Jefferson. McNamee and Badollet saw Randolph's political principles as "diametrically opposite to those of Jefferson." McNamee even called Harrison a Federalist, recalling his role as a delegate to Congress from the Northwest Territory and relating how Harrison spoke in favor of Federalist principles like the need for a standing army and advocated "most of the extravagant measures of John Adams's administration." McNamee also reminded people that it was Adams who had "made [Harrison] governor of Indiana."<sup>10</sup> By characterizing Harrison as a Federalist and then associating Randolph with him, the anti-

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<sup>9</sup>In 1808, authorities discovered a "coloured man" named Caleb dead in the town jail, but after the coroner, Jacob Kuykendall, and twelve men inspected the body, they concluded that Caleb died from "natural sickness & malady, and not otherwise." The town authorities made sure that the slave's rights had been protected. Court of Common Pleas for Knox County—October 1808, box 15, file 1013, Indiana State Archives.

<sup>10</sup>*The Western Sun*, May 13, 1809.

Harrisonians hoped to undermine Randolph's Jeffersonian connections and convince people not to vote for him.

Each side constructed a version of Jeffersonian republicanism suited to its own stance on slavery, focusing on issues including the religious rationale for slavery and the ways in which slavery would affect free white labor. Badollet, like other anti-Harrisonians, spoke of maintaining "free and independent men" in the territory; another of his fellows argued that "in the stocking of our country with herds of negroes the now poor would become indigent, because in proportion as the negroes increase in our territory, the price of labor will assuredly decrease," causing the "hard working poor white man who now earns 50 cents per day to support himself and family" to be displaced by the slave earning no more than 25 cents. Slavery, he continued, would "tarnish the fame of our growing country, hitherto held up as the asylum of freedom!!" In opposition, loyal Harrisonian Parke claimed that slavery was necessary in the territory because a class of laboring poor did not exist in the area. Residents were "too proud and independent to be day labourers."<sup>11</sup> Slaves were like spinning machines and printing presses – they were tools necessary for the advancement of industry and the creation of a competitive and open market. If one restricted invention and progress, one courted aristocratic autocracy. Legalizing slavery allowed Americans to shape their own futures by creating the tools through which they could succeed. Parke argued that God had ordained slavery by favoring slave owners Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and he vowed to "unmask [the] gentlemen" who opposed the institution so that the public could "behold [them] in all [their] naked deformity."<sup>12</sup> Badollet blamed Parke for laying the groundwork for a factionalized Vincennes.

Allarmed at the approaching destruction of all his hopes[,] . . . he [Harrison] formed with Judge Park & Randolph a Caucus wherein were written & whence flew in every direction the most abusive and artfull pieces. Parke whose republicanism had been neutralized in the Governor's atmosphere, did not disdain at the nod of his master to descend from his elevated station, to enlist in the ranks, nay to place himself at the head of a faction.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>11</sup>"For the Western Sun," *The Western Sun*, February 4, 1809.

<sup>12</sup>"For the Western Sun," *The Western Sun*, February 7, 1808.

<sup>13</sup>John Badollet to Albert Gallatin, November 13, 1809, in Gayle Thornbrough, ed., *The Correspondence of John Badollet and Albert Gallatin, 1804-1856* (Indianapolis, Ind., 1963), 122.

Refusing to compromise on the issue, Harrisonians and anti-Harrisonians alike hoped that the upcoming vote would settle the debate. The factions viewed the election as a referendum on slavery, but the results left the issue unsettled. The election was extremely close—Jonathan Jennings, an antislavery advocate and friend to Badollet, received 428 votes to Randolph's 402. The Harrisonians refused to recognize the results, exacerbating the factionalism already present.<sup>14</sup>

The anti-Harrisonians recognized their opportunity and quickly began attacking Harrison and his policies. Once in Washington, D.C., Jennings called for a six-part investigation of the governor in an attempt to negate his reappointment. At the same time, John Johnson authored an article in *The Western Sun* claiming that Harrison had dissolved the territorial assembly when it failed to meet his expectations. Johnson's article echoed similar accusations offered by McNamee in a letter to the president of the Senate. The anti-Harrisonians recognized the governor's right, under the Ordinance of 1787, to dissolve the assembly, but felt that he had abused his power. In response, the Harrisonians sent Johnson's article throughout the territory in an attempt to garner support against their "malicious" and "vapid" enemies.<sup>15</sup> The letter only further angered the governor's supporters, who were already distraught over their loss in the territorial election. The reassigning of the western counties of Indiana to Illinois Territory in February 1809, as well as an increasingly democratic political atmosphere that reduced property qualifications for white males to vote and allowed territorial residents (rather than the House of Representatives) to elect their legislative council, isolated and marginalized Harrison thereafter.<sup>16</sup> While the Harrisonians had sought to construct a society around slavery, they were now fighting to maintain any sort of political power.

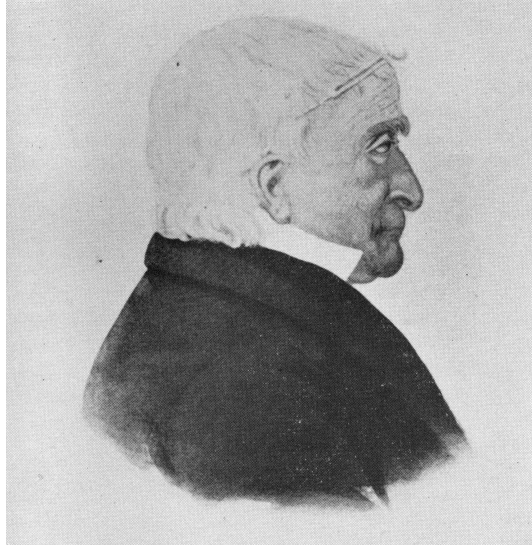
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<sup>14</sup>Ralph D. Gray, *Indiana History: A Book of Readings* (Bloomington, Ind., 1994), 66.

<sup>15</sup>William Henry Harrison to Thomas Randolph, November 13, 1810, William Henry Harrison Papers, reel 3, p. 645; Gayle Thornbrough and Dorothy Riker, eds., *Journals of the General Assembly of Indiana Territory, 1805-1815* (Indianapolis, Ind., 1950), 268, 314.

<sup>16</sup>Andrew Cayton writes: "Congress declared that the territorial delegate and the members of the legislative council would hereafter be elected by the people rather than the house of representatives. In addition, the legislature was to decide how to apportion seats in the lower house. These measures, combined with a reduction in the property qualifications for voting the previous year, amounted to a significant opening of the political system in the Indiana Territory." Cayton, *Frontier Indiana*, 248.





John Badollet, from an undated lithograph. Badollet became one of the leaders of the opposition to Harrison and his policies. He was particularly influential because of his longtime friendship and correspondence with Albert Gallatin.

Gayle Thornbrough, ed., *The Correspondence of John Badollet and Albert Gallatin*

Following the election, Harrison approached Badollet after discovering that he had circulated an antislavery petition throughout the territorial counties. Their heated discussion dampened what had been a sociable relationship. Harrison took personal offense to the petition and remonstrated against Badollet in a letter to Albert Gallatin, who was not only Badollet's longtime friend, but also an influential diplomat during his service as secretary of the treasury for Thomas Jefferson and James Madison. The governor related his demand that Badollet explain his actions, also writing that such an explanation was "Not given & a distant & Cold politeness Succeeded to our former intimacy." Claiming a desire to protect Badollet, Harrison wrote that he had "prevented a petition being Sent from this County Signed as I am Sure it would be by at least four fif[t]hs of the Citizens for the removal both of the Register [Badollet] & Receiver [Ewing]."<sup>17</sup> In an angry postscript comment, Harrison reminded Gallatin that there were people in Vincennes inti-

<sup>17</sup>Harrison to Gallatin, August 29, 1809, William Henry Harrison Papers, reel 3, pp. 474, 477.

mately connected to Jefferson, specifically Thomas Randolph. "Ewing's disposition for tatling & scandal," he warned, would likely result in Thomas's cousin John Randolph "calling upon you for an explanation." John Randolph was an influential Virginian congressman and a supporter of slavery. Harrison hoped that his claim to such a connection might intimidate Gallatin. Moreover, the governor claimed that Ewing had "said some time since at a tavern that [Gallatin] had informed him that Mr. J. Randolph [second cousin to Jefferson] was known to be entirely under British influence . . . & may probably have communicated it to his relation—altho' he declared his disbelief of the story at the time."<sup>18</sup> In a terse, unsigned reply, Gallatin defended Badollet and said that he had never made any comment about John Randolph. To Harrison, Badollet was now an enemy. To Badollet, Harrison was a "Moralameleon" with a "nefarious and impolitic project of introducing slavery into this Territory . . . whereby he has greatly impeded its population and filled it [with] intrigue and discord."<sup>19</sup>

Badollet's petition was just one element of a broader anti-Harrisonian campaign. Before the election, the antislavery men had allied with the proslavery Illinois factions in favor of territorial division. The residents of Illinois would win division from Indiana Territory and construct a government more responsive to their needs.<sup>20</sup> In the process, Harrison would lose a large group of proslavery supporters.<sup>21</sup> The governor's opponents, including Badollet and Ewing, saw this as a victory for Indiana Territory and for Vincennes, reflecting their provincial focus rather than a larger sense of national antislavery sentiment. Badollet said Harrison "became enraged against Ewing & [himself], accustomed to a

<sup>18</sup>Harrison to Gallatin, August 29, 1809, *Correspondence of John Badollet and Albert Gallatin*, 113.

<sup>19</sup>Badollet to Gallatin, November 13, 1809, and Gallatin to Harrison, September 27, 1809, *Correspondence of John Badollet and Albert Gallatin*, 116-17, 113-14. Brackets added by the original editors.

<sup>20</sup>Paul Finkelman states that in 1809, "the new Illinois Territory adopted the statutes that had supported slavery and servitude in Indiana Territory." In fact, Illinois Territory prohibited free blacks from immigrating into the territory. Finkelman, *Slavery and the Founders: Race and Liberty in the Age of Jefferson* (New York, 2001), 73.

<sup>21</sup>Francis S. Philbrick, ed., *The Laws of Indiana Territory, 1801-1809* (Springfield, Ill., 1930), xxx. Harrison had lost the western, heavily proslavery, counties currently in present-day Illinois and Wisconsin. Harrison continued to fight the territorial assembly and political factions within the region and as a result, "the Assembly instructed the delegate of the territory in Congress to procure a repeal of the absolute veto power, as also of the powers to prorogue and dissolve the Assemble, giving him only the powers held by the President of the United States."

blind devotion to his mandates, he could not conceive such independence, such rebellious boldness.”<sup>22</sup> Harrison’s anger was understandable; he had experienced a drastic decline in his ability to govern the territory on his terms. Not only was he politically weakened by the loss of the western settlements in Illinois country, but the territorial representative was actively lobbying against him in Washington City.

Harrison’s anxiety during this period influenced his handling of Indian affairs in the territory. While the governor was absorbed with the congressional race between Randolph and Jennings, and then with the political fallout from the latter’s victory and new influence in Washington, a new Native American settlement had appeared 100 miles to the north of the territorial capital. In March 1808, the Shawnee leader Tecumseh and his brother Tenskwatawa had moved their followers from Ohio to a new town at the confluence of the Wabash and Tippecanoe Rivers. Tecumseh and his supporters adamantly opposed the continued westward settlement of non-Indians in the Wabash Valley, and now a relatively short trip down the Wabash would bring them to Vincennes. Both Meriwether Lewis and William Wells, the government Indian agent at Fort Wayne, warned Harrison of a possible war. The anti-Harrisonians waited, in vain, for the governor to send emissaries throughout the region. Instead, according to Badollet, Harrison “posted two companies . . . four miles from Vincennes, where they spent the working season in sloth and idle mockery of military manoeuvres.”<sup>23</sup> The anti-Harrisonians were especially angry at this because they believed that the militiamen would not be prepared in the event of an attack. While Badollet may have overreacted to the situation, even Parke, a close confidant of Harrison’s, expressed fear that the Indians on the Wabash were a threat.<sup>24</sup> Rumors of killings at Prophetstown, coupled with Indian depredations further west in Illinois Territory, convinced some residents that the violence was spreading in the direction of Vincennes.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup>Badollet to Gallatin, November 13, 1809, *Correspondence of John Badollet and Albert Gallatin*, 121.

<sup>23</sup>Badollet to Gallatin, November 13, 1809, *Correspondence of John Badollet and Albert Gallatin*, 127-28. On the conflict between Wells and Harrison, see Paul A. Hutton, “William Wells: Frontier Scout and Indian Agent,” *Indiana Magazine of History* 74 (September 1978), 204-222.

<sup>24</sup>Clarence Edwin Carter, ed., *The Territorial Papers of the United States*, vol. 7, *The Territory of Indiana, 1800-1810* (Washington, D.C., 1939), 650.

<sup>25</sup>The rumors were reports that a small war party of Ottawa and Ojibwe Indians killed an Indian woman at Prophetstown in the spring of 1809, and reports of an attack on Fort Madison by Sac and Ho-Chunk Indians in late 1808. Edmunds, *Shawnee Prophet*, 70-78.

The motives of the local Indian communities were increasingly at issue. Tenskwatawa and Tecumseh adamantly opposed the continued westward settlement of whites, but this opposition did not necessarily translate into a predisposition for war and violence. Mounting a war against the Americans or even attacking Vincennes was unlikely simply because the settlers at Prophetstown lacked the unity, resources, and numbers to maintain a prolonged conflict. Still, while Prophetstown may not have been gearing toward war during this period, violence between Indians and whites was relatively common. Fearing that a new Indian community would only exacerbate frontier violence was a logical conclusion given past incidents in the region. However, the polarized political atmosphere in Vincennes, in particular the debate over how Harrison handled Indian affairs, made the growth of Prophetstown after 1808 a flashpoint.

Harrison had already demonstrated that he could deftly use his powers as governor to expand American interests while marginalizing his political rivals. Now he used the threat of an Indian war to challenge those residents of Vincennes who had undermined his authority and, he charged, exacerbated an already tense situation with local Indian communities. Blaming his enemies for Indian depredations was an easy way for the governor to undermine any support they may have had in the territory. After several Wabash Indian communities declined to meet the governor during the fall of 1809, Harrison addressed the General Assembly at Vincennes, spreading the impression that, in Badollet's words, "[he] had met with difficulties in his negociation from the machinations of certain enemies of their country residing at Vincennes."<sup>26</sup> Harrison suggested that his political foes had failed to stop his policies in the assembly and had then, in order to destabilize the governor's leadership, convinced the local Indians to reject his attempts to negotiate treaties.<sup>27</sup>

As the factional strife became associated with differences over Indian policy, the participants became more agitated, sometimes turning to physical violence. Discovering that McNamee had questioned Harrisonian policies in the newspaper, Randolph challenged the doctor

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<sup>26</sup>Badollet to Gallatin, November 13, 1809, *Correspondence of John Badollet and Albert Gallatin*, 114. Brackets added by the original editors.

<sup>27</sup>Thornbrough and Riker, *Journals of the General Assembly of Indiana Territory*, 321-22.

to a duel.<sup>28</sup> McNamee, a Quaker, refused and had Randolph arrested. He swore to Judge Henry Vanderburgh “that Thomas Randolph of the county of Knox Esquire hath challenged him to fight a duel, and that he hath good reason to believe and doth verily believe that the said Thomas Randolph will take his life and do him some bodily harm.”<sup>29</sup> Randolph remained on the hunt, finding and attacking William McIntosh in the streets of Vincennes.<sup>30</sup> McIntosh suffered superficial cuts to his face, but Randolph was not so fortunate. McIntosh stabbed him in the back, leaving him close to death for several days. The vulgar rhetoric that had characterized the newspaper debate spilled out into the streets, reflecting the extent to which violence had replaced a balanced discussion of the issues.

The physical confrontation between the factions coincided with more rumors that the anti-Harrisonians had attempted to undermine treaty negotiations with the local Indian communities. Colonel John Small reported that “some abandoned profligate, in the garb of an American, attempted to frustrate, entirely, the treaty.”<sup>31</sup> This report, which reinforced the fear propagated by Harrison in his speech to the territorial assembly, may have been a ploy to discredit the governor’s political enemies. According to Small, someone had informed the discontented Indians that the President of the United States did not agree to the 1809 Treaty of Fort Wayne, the signing of which Tecumseh and Tenskwatawa had refused to attend. Some residents of the territory believed that Harrison had negotiated it only to “retrieve his declining popularity,” while others hoped to interrogate the men involved to learn the truth of what had transpired. When questioned about his sources, Small named Elias McNamee. When confronted, McNamee “said, that he had never told colonel Small any such thing!!!”<sup>32</sup> The Harrisonians attributed McNamee’s denial to yet another opposition trick. Rather than arrive at any sort of conclusion on the issue, the factions began using the information against each other.

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<sup>28</sup>Correspondence of John Badollet and Albert Gallatin, 119 n6.

<sup>29</sup>William Wesley Woollen, *Biographical and Historical Sketches of Early Indiana* (Indianapolis, Ind., 1883), 396-97.

<sup>30</sup>Carter, *Territorial Papers of the United States*, 7:667.

<sup>31</sup>The treaty of which Small speaks was an addendum to the Fort Wayne treaty of 1805. *The Western Sun*, November 18, 1809.

<sup>32</sup>*Ibid.*

Stout simultaneously printed pro-Harrison accounts of the 1809 treaty and requests for residents to return petitions in favor of the governor's re-appointment to his office. People throughout the Ohio Valley and the eastern seaboard read reprinted articles from *The Western Sun*, and Stout hoped that his newspaper would not only cast suspicion on Harrison's enemies but also demonstrate that the governor was still widely popular throughout the region. Stout owed his job to the governor, but he also shared Harrison's political ideals and feared that the "envious ambition" of the anti-Harrisonians might show "its demoniack crest, and malignant falsehoods . . . in Washington city," much as they had "in the Borough of Vincennes." The editor described Harrison's "declining popularity" as a myth, claiming that those who supported the governor "constitute[d] a majority of nine tenths of the Territory."<sup>33</sup> Stout's claim ignored the fact that many residents of the territory were seeking to expel Harrison from power. Hundreds of settlers from Knox, Clark, Randolph, St. Clair, and Harrison Counties had petitioned Congress to remove Harrison in favor of a governor who was "in principal opposed to slavery."<sup>34</sup> The division of the Illinois country from the territory had left Vincennes as the last vestige of Harrisonian policies, but as governor, Harrison still exercised a great deal of influence in the territory, specifically in Indian affairs.<sup>35</sup>

The anti-Harrisonians believed that replacing Harrison with an antislavery advocate would likely stop the political intrigue and violence. To that end, they attempted to delay the governor's reappointment. McNamee wrote to Vice President George Clinton and listed Harrison's offenses: he had promoted his friends' efforts to profit from land speculation; he had supported slavery; and he had ignored the law restricting Indian agents and superintendents of Indian affairs from trade-related activities with the Indians, entering into "a mercantile partnership with the contractors for furnishing Indian provisions" and profiting from it by switching similar local goods for the higher-quality

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<sup>33</sup>*The Western Sun*, November 18, 1809.

<sup>34</sup>Carter, *Territorial Papers of the United States*, 7:703.

<sup>35</sup>The western portions of Indiana Territory, while more supportive of slavery, felt that they were not represented in the territorial government. Francis Philbrick states that the governor's "appointments to territorial offices were indeed made exclusively from his intimates of Knox County." Philbrick, *Laws of Indiana Territory*, lvi.



goods supplied by the government.<sup>36</sup> McNamee characterized Harrison as a man motivated by profit, not by a desire to protect the citizens of the territory. Although the anti-Harrisonians lacked proof to substantiate their claims, they continued to brand the governor's Indian policy as corrupt. Harrison was aware of McNamee's attempts to undermine him and his supporters. In November 1809, he wrote to Gallatin—a letter that departed from his typical professional and diplomatic tone. He attacked Badollet, Ewing, McIntosh, and others, in fear that their letters and complaints had helped to delay his reappointment, already several months late.<sup>37</sup>

Amidst the calls for Harrison's replacement, Randolph traveled to Washington, D.C., to protest the election results.<sup>38</sup> The territorial election committee had declared unanimously that Governor Harrison lacked the authority to hold the territorial election from which Jennings had emerged victorious. After making his case, Randolph left the federal capitol confident that Congress would overturn the election and give him the advantage over Jennings for the next election; however, the House of Representatives refused to do so.<sup>39</sup> Jennings was astonished by the efforts of his "great enemy the Govenor" to overturn the election, but Randolph's protest made sense in the context of the changing political atmosphere ushered in by the election of 1809.<sup>40</sup> By 1810, Vincennes had almost divided into two separate communities—one in favor of slavery and against the Indians and the other rejecting slavery and urging common sense with the Indians. Badollet felt that "as long as our Governor is really or is thought friendly to the admission of Slavery, this Territory will know no peace . . . . Our next Executive ought surely to come from either the State of New York or Pennsylvania, no more Virginians."<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>36</sup>McNamee to the President of the Senate, December 12, 1809, in Carter, *Territorial Papers of the United States*, 7:682.

<sup>37</sup>Philbrick, *Laws of Indiana Territory*, xliii n1.

<sup>38</sup>Harrison to Christopher G. Champlin, November 21, 1809, William Henry Harrison Papers, reel 3, p. 655.

<sup>39</sup>Jonathan Jennings to David G. Mitchell, January 16, 1810, in Dorothy Riker, ed., *Unedited Letters of Jonathan Jennings* (Indianapolis, Ind., 1932), 172-74.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid., 174.

<sup>41</sup>Badollet to Gallatin, November 13, 1809, *Correspondence of John Badollet and Albert Gallatin*, 144.



Albert Gallatin, from a sketch by Van Huffel c. 1815. Gallatin was a leading Republican, a policymaker and diplomat, and served as secretary of the treasury under both Thomas Jefferson and James Madison. Because of his influence, he received correspondence from Harrison as well as from his supporters and opponents.

Courtesy Prints and Photographs Collection, Library of Congress

Political changes in the territory greatly curtailed the powers of the governor while extending the franchise to more white men. By 1812, according to Andrew Cayton, “a centralized, vertical system of politics” had transformed “into a decentralized, local system.”<sup>42</sup> Control of the territory now rested more with its inhabitants than with the governor and the officials in Washington. Cayton refers to these democratic openings as the “revolution of 1808-1810,” which culminated in Harrison’s wartime resignation in 1812. Although federal policymakers may have wanted to replace Harrison for his politics, they could not ignore his success in actively aiding territorial expansion and especially in making

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<sup>42</sup>Cayton, *Frontier Indiana*, 251.

Jefferson's and Madison's Indian policies successful.<sup>43</sup> Madison reappointed Harrison, despite the changing political climate, because the governor still had many influential supporters in the region, including several French traders who helped him maintain his influence with the various nearby Indian communities.

By the spring of 1810, fears surrounding events at Prophetstown began to trump the slavery debate in *The Western Sun*. That spring, tales of western tribes—including the Sac, Fox, and Kickapoo—visiting Prophetstown spread throughout the countryside, alarming countless settlers.<sup>44</sup> Harrison called Badollet to a meeting and told him that the Prophet intended to attack Vincennes, kill the governor, and then attack the other residents. The governor, Badollet later wrote, “painted his fears in lively colours and said that if it was not for fear of spreading too great an alarm, he would immediately send his family to Kentucky and convert his house unto a fort.” Although Badollet respected the intelligence concerning the Indians, he noticed that most of the men present at the meeting were Harrison's supporters, and he “suspected a trap.”<sup>45</sup> It appeared to Badollet that Harrison had manipulated his followers into asking him to order out the militia so that his actions would not appear heavy-handed.

Many residents of Vincennes favored sending a diplomatic mission to Prophetstown, but Harrison asserted his right as territorial governor to control diplomacy. Hearing rumors of a Native militancy, Toussaint Dubois, one of the French traders trusted by both Harrison and Badollet, offered to visit Prophetstown and inquire about Tenskwatawa's intentions. Despite the fact that several public officials supported Dubois, Harrison decided to send his own speech to the Prophet. In an impromptu meeting, Badollet discussed the situation with Ewing and Judge Johnson. They all believed “that the alarm was unfounded,” like the governor's previous warnings, but they agreed to respect Harrison's authority on the issue. Dubois said that he would go only “if the Governor would send him” and Badollet accepted that answer.<sup>46</sup> Shortly

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<sup>43</sup>Owens, *Mr. Jefferson's Hammer*; Cayton, *Frontier Indiana*, 244-52.

<sup>44</sup>Edmunds, *Shawnee Prophet*, 83.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid., 151; Badollet to Gallatin, June 24, 1810, *Correspondence of John Badollet and Albert Gallatin*, 152-53.

<sup>46</sup>Nathaniel Ewing to Gallatin, June 26, 1810, *Correspondence of John Badollet and Albert Gallatin*, 162.

thereafter, however, Badollet learned from Ewing that the governor had ordered Judge Johnson to meet him at the secretary's office. In front of several witnesses, Harrison "in an angry magisterial and insulting manner had called him to account" for his involvement with Badollet's faction. He accused the men of treason and demanded that they abide by his decisions. Ewing said Harrison "exults in the idea that he will make us smart severely for our daring perseverance in opposing his darling and never abandoned plan of slavery."<sup>47</sup> Harrison's opponents on the issue of slavery had again provoked his anger, this time by questioning his policies regarding Native Americans. The governor proceeded to use his authority in Indian affairs to marginalize his political enemies. If the majority of people believed that the Prophet was a militant threat, then the governor could legally condemn those who opposed his policies.

In a letter to Gallatin, Ewing detailed the extent to which Harrison had manipulated the Dubois affair. On the night of the meetings described above, Ewing and Judge Johnson had been on their way to complete some business at Colonel Francis Vigo's residence. They stopped at Badollet's office for a few minutes, where the judge noticed McIntosh, Antoine Marechal, P. Rieue, John Caldwell, Elias McNamee, John Johnson (the judge's son), and a few others, all of whom had opposed slavery or the governor's policies. Judge Johnson, in his own version of the events, stated: "The conversation turned on the common report of the Indians being hostile it appeared to be the general opinion of those present that there was no truth in the report which coincided with my own."<sup>48</sup> Johnson insisted that no ulterior motive lay behind the meeting and that all of the men present recognized and respected Harrison's authority in the matter.<sup>49</sup> Yet the Harrisonians, Badollet protested, still spoke of "a *treasonable* meeting, the object of which was to bring the indians on" Vincennes.<sup>50</sup> The governor's sup-

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<sup>47</sup>Badollet to Gallatin, June 24, 1810, *Correspondence of John Badollet and Albert Gallatin*, 156-57.

<sup>48</sup>John Johnson to Gallatin, June 26, 1810, *Correspondence of John Badollet and Albert Gallatin*, 165.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid. Johnson heard the discussion over Dubois and suggested that, "it would be well in doing this not to infringe on the prerogative of the Governor as he had the exclusive superintendence of Indian affairs. McIntosh and some others present said they did not intend to interfere with the proceedings of the Governor in any respect whatever."

<sup>50</sup>Badollet to Gallatin, September 25, 1810, *Correspondence of John Badollet and Albert Gallatin*, 169.

porters condemned the participants as conspirators and then spread rumors “that numbers of us [those at the meeting] had a close correspondence with the Prophet and had agreed with him upon signals designating those who were to be sacrificed & those who were to be spared.”<sup>51</sup> In order to intensify the charges and to marginalize opposition leaders, Harrison convened a grand jury of twelve men to consider whether the secret meeting had constituted treason. Three of the “conspirators,” including Dubois (whom Harrison had referred to as “one of the most respectable Indian traders in this country”), were grilled about the meeting and the intentions of the anti-Harrisonians.<sup>52</sup> The jury did not agree on an indictment, and thus, according to Badollet, Harrison’s “diabolical plan” was “at last disappointed.”<sup>53</sup> The Harrisonians, he noted, continued to maintain that “certain individuals in calling public and private meetings for the purpose of adopting measures relating to the present crisis, have been dictated rather by personal enmity to the Governor, than motives of public benefit.”<sup>54</sup> The governor’s opponents were well within their rights to question Harrison’s policies toward the Indians of Prophetstown; even if the caucus had gone too far, their actions in no way had earned accusations of treason.

After witnessing the governor’s tirade, Ewing found himself increasingly fearful of the Harrisonians, even writing Gallatin for “protection against the persecutions of Governor Harrison.” Ewing also worried that Harrison had done little to protect the town if indeed the Indians attacked. Although the governor “raised a dreadful alarm of Indians [and] drafted two companies of militia,” he stationed them at the upper end of the town of Vincennes near Grouseland, prompting Ewing to wonder if Harrison’s real intent was to protect his own home. Ewing was also suspicious of Harrison’s policies toward Tenskwatawa because, as he wrote to Gallatin, the Prophet and his people appeared

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<sup>51</sup>Ibid., 170.

<sup>52</sup>Ibid.; William Henry Harrison to Secretary of War William Eustis, April 18, 1809, William Henry Harrison Papers, reel 3, p. 392.

<sup>53</sup>Badollet to Gallatin, September 25, 1810, *Correspondence of John Badollet and Albert Gallatin*, 170.

<sup>54</sup>*Correspondence of John Badollet and Albert Gallatin*, 156 n10, quoting *The Western Sun*, June 30, 1810.

“peaceable” and treated non-natives “well.”<sup>55</sup> Ewing respected the Prophet’s effort to cultivate corn, raise cattle, and build fences, concluding that any disturbances were the result of conflicting religious ideology. The Prophet and his people had no “intention to meddle with the whites”; it was Harrison who intended “to make war on them.”<sup>56</sup> Ewing saw a vengeful governor and a town increasingly fearful of an attack, and he believed that he had few options left but to complain to federal authorities.

While many frontier settlers feared the militancy of the Prophet, Tecumseh, and Indians throughout the region, the anti-Harrisonians believed that the inhabitants of Prophetstown were not a threat to Vincennes. Badollet considered that the Prophet “had effected more toward civilizing them & thereby seconding the benevolent and philanthropic views of the General Government than all the indian agents that have been or may be sent amongst them.”<sup>57</sup> Harrison, on the other hand, could not comprehend why some Americans were helping the Indians, a people he considered inherently predisposed to war. “The mind of a Savage,” Harrison argued, was “so constructed that he cannot be at rest,—he cannot be happy unless it is acted upon by Some strong stimulus . . . if he hunts in the winter he must go to war in the Summer.”<sup>58</sup> By 1811, Stout saw a more malicious international influence at play. He suspected a “deep laid scheme of villainy” connected to the British rather than simply rogue Americans trying to hurt the governor.<sup>59</sup>

Having weakened several powerful Indian groups through a series of treaties and diplomatic measures, the governor grew irate at settlers who challenged his authority in a region still suffering from periodic Indian attacks. Harrison viewed the implementation of his policies as a personal referendum. He interpreted opposition as a threat to his governorship, rather than simply a reflection of the democratic political

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<sup>55</sup>Ewing to Gallatin, June 26, 1810, *Correspondence of John Badollet and Albert Gallatin*, 159, 161-62.

<sup>56</sup>*Ibid.*, 163. Ewing recognized that peace in the region north of Vincennes would be profitable for a man who at times traded with the local Indians. George E. Greene, *History of Old Vincennes and Knox County, Indiana* (Chicago, 1911), 323.

<sup>57</sup>Badollet to Gallatin, September 25, 1810, *Correspondence of John Badollet and Albert Gallatin*, 167.

<sup>58</sup>Harrison to Eustis, August 28, 1810, William Henry Harrison Papers, reel 4, p. 180.

<sup>59</sup>“Negotiations at an Indian Council,” *The Western Sun*, August 10, 17, 1811.



process. When confronted, he usually tried to isolate and attack his enemies rather than to negotiate. This attitude was evident in his response to the territorial assembly's 1810 repeal of an 1805 act that had allowed slaves to be indentured when brought into the territory. Badollet wrote to Jennings "with a heartfelt pleasure" to tell him that "the law about slavery has at length been repealed."<sup>60</sup> Victory for Badollet, however, produced a concomitant reaction from Harrison—a speech to the assembly suggesting that those who had spread "falsehoods amongst the Indians" be punished because they had undermined the foundations of government and a peaceful society.<sup>61</sup> Unconvinced, John Caldwell challenged the governor, asking him to "lay before the house such documents as were in his possession, proving the existence of a treasonable correspondence between persons of this place and the indians, & to name such persons."<sup>62</sup> According to Badollet, Harrison responded first with confusion, then retraction, and finally by restating his previous conclusions. He offered no proof and actually "gave in writing an *errata* or correction of his message," retracting his statement that Vincennes residents had associated with the Prophet.<sup>63</sup> However, he remained on the offensive, suggesting that the legislature pass a law against traitorous activity and warning "that much mischief has been done by others, who, actuated by no views that were inimical to their country, have suffered their passions, prejudices, and personal animosities to lead them astray, and to do that which their cooler judgments must condemn. Whilst a penal law would perhaps deter the former," he continued, "it would be the means, as an expression of the public sentiment, of reclaiming the latter to their duty." Harrison hoped, in short, to use the proposed law to silence those whom he suspected of undermining his authority.<sup>64</sup> Subsequently, he also withdrew his recommendation of Caldwell as a deputy surveyor.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>60</sup>Philbrick, *Laws of Indiana Territory*, 136-38; Badollet to Jonathan Jennings, December 25, 1810, *Correspondence of John Badollet and Albert Gallatin*, 175.

<sup>61</sup>"Message of the Governor," November 12, 1810, Thornbrough and Riker, *Journals of the General Assembly of Indiana Territory*, 352-55.

<sup>62</sup>Badollet to Jennings, December 25, 1810, *Correspondence of John Badollet and Albert Gallatin*, 176.

<sup>63</sup>Badollet to Gallatin, August 6, 1811, *Correspondence of John Badollet and Albert Gallatin*, 190.

<sup>64</sup>Thornbrough and Riker, *Journals of the General Assembly of Indiana Territory*, 355.

<sup>65</sup>Harrison to Jared Mansfield, March 6, 1811, William Henry Harrison Papers, reel 4, p. 408.

Harrison's public theatrics, at least for the short term, exerted greater influence on territorial policy than did the anti-Harrisonians' voluminous letters to Washington, D.C. Harrison used the occasion of Tecumseh's visit to Vincennes during the summer of 1811 as an opportunity to draw a strict racial line between European Americans and the Indians. Harrison had already portrayed the Indians as bloodthirsty savages searching for a reason to murder the residents of Vincennes. Now the governor recognized that such a visit provided an excellent political opportunity as well. According to Badollet, as Tecumseh approached Vincennes, Harrison, "clad in a hunting shirt, and addressing [the militia] by the familiar name of fellow soldiers, drew an animated picture of the meditated blood shed with such success, that it was with difficulty, that they could be refrained from running to Tecumseh's camp" and slaughtering the inhabitants.<sup>66</sup> Harrison ordered the townsmen to greet the delegation of Native Americans clad in hunting shirts and holding their weapons.<sup>67</sup> He reminded the militia that there were people in Vincennes who were "friends" to Tecumseh, doing his best to direct white residents' fears of an Indian attack to the Americans who were supposedly aiding the Indians.<sup>68</sup>

Not everyone allowed Harrison's racial rhetoric to sway their perceptions of the Prophet. Badollet had seen the governor's tactics before:

This is the third year that rumours of indian war have been issued forth from head quarters here and the parades of the militia have taken place in consequence thereof. It appears plain to me that the first alarm and the mock precautions resorted to, were intended to pave the way to the treaty, the second to stifle

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<sup>66</sup>Badollet to Gallatin, August 6, 1811, *Correspondence of John Badollet and Albert Gallatin*, 182-92, quote p. 187.

<sup>67</sup>Harrison to Eustis, August 13, 1811, William Henry Harrison Papers, reel 4, pp. 713-14. Harrison wrote: "Heedless of futurity, it is only by placing the danger before his eyes, that a Savage is to be control'd. Even the gallant Tecumseh is not insensible to an argument of this kind. No courtier could be more complaisant, than he was upon his late visit. To have heard him one would have supposed, that he came here for the purpose of complimenting me. This wonderful Metamorphosis in manner, was entirely produced by the gleaming & clanging of Arms, & by the frowns of a considerable body of hunting Shirt men, which accidentally lined a road, by which he approached to the council House."

<sup>68</sup>Badollet to Gallatin, August 6, 1811, *Correspondence of John Badollet and Albert Gallatin*, 183-84.

the discontents of the Indians arising therefrom. This present apparent panic has the same object and to induce a belief at Washington that the Prophet is a chief of banditti, a very designing and dangerous man from whom the United States and especially this place have every thing to dread.<sup>69</sup>

McIntosh accused Harrison of “defrauding the Indians in the Treaties” that he had made with them, “making chiefs to answer [his] own particular purposes” by excluding those Native leaders who might oppose him.<sup>70</sup> In his correspondence, Badollet continued to portray the Prophet as a peaceful man who had settled along the Wabash in an effort to aid his people. They had “cleared, fenced in and planted in corn,” constructed homes, refrained from alcohol, “[gone] regularly to work every morning,” and most importantly, they “appear[ed] to be governed by regular kind of institutions, & rise, go to their meals, and to their rest at stated hours with as much regularity as monks, they seem[ed] to taste the comforts of civilized life.” For Badollet, Prophetstown represented the realization of the civilizing ideal behind Jeffersonian philanthropy. He spoke of a “perfect peace” in the area and of people passing Prophetstown daily, “not only undisturbed but well treated.”<sup>71</sup>

Despite his success in marginalizing his enemies in Vincennes, Harrison feared that the anti-Harrisonians might have enough influence in Washington, D.C., to succeed in replacing him as governor. He wrote to Secretary of War William Eustis and asked him to disregard any charges that his actions toward the Prophet had been “premature and unfounded.” Harrison reminded Eustis that the president was “too just to censure an officer for an unintentional error or to lend a favourable ear to the calumnies” produced by the governor’s enemies.<sup>72</sup> The governor also sought the support of the religious men of Vincennes to legitimize those of his policies that had come under attack. He had

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<sup>69</sup>Ibid. Badollet’s letters are often very colloquial, as, in this instance, he refers to Harrison et al. as “head quarters.”

<sup>70</sup>Harrison to Eustis, April 23, 1811, in Logan Esarey, ed., *Messages and Letters of William Henry Harrison*, vol. 1, 1800-1811 (Indianapolis, Ind., 1922), 509.

<sup>71</sup>Badollet to Gallatin, August 6, 1811, *Correspondence of John Badollet and Albert Gallatin*, 184-86.

<sup>72</sup>Harrison to Eustis, July 10, 1811, *Papers of William Henry Harrison*, reel 4, p. 630.

succeeded at intimidating Tecumseh, but had failed to silence the anti-Harrisonians, a fact that fueled his fear that Madison might “censure” him.<sup>73</sup> With Harrison’s support, Presbyterian Rev. Samuel T. Scott and Baptist minister Alexander Devin formed a committee to draft a letter advocating an attack on Prophetstown. Three members of the group were ministers or were associated with missionary work, and Francis Vigo had acquired great standing in the town after aiding George Rogers Clark in his campaign against the British. Vigo and Luke Decker (a slave trader) were both adamantly proslavery; Scott and Devin, accompanied by McClure, may have hoped to court Harrison’s favor in order to access federal funds for their missionary work.<sup>74</sup> Most of these men had a stake in seeing Harrison and his policies succeed. The committee’s completed letter to President Madison claimed that the governor’s measures against the Prophet had stopped the “destruction of this place, and the massacre of the inhabitants.”<sup>75</sup> The anti-Harrisonians viewed the committee as “too ignorant to be consulted on public measures” because the men had not played any role in policy decisions or diplomatic negotiations. Badollet described it as “one of the tricks of our immaculate Governor,” whom he accused of using the committee members like puppets.<sup>76</sup>

Having spent several years negotiating treaties with Indian tribes in the territory, Harrison recognized the extent to which his policies had upset and in some cases polarized relationships between Indians and settlers. He was worried especially by Tecumseh’s trip to the southern states in an effort to win support for the Prophet’s efforts at Prophetstown. Believing that Prophetstown was the logical result of this growing polarization and that it represented an immediate threat to the region, the governor moved to destroy the nativist settlement. However, he encountered problems mobilizing an effective fighting force. By late October 1811, his troops numbered less than 800 men—Indiana militia-

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<sup>73</sup>Earlier that year, Jennings had written: “The governor is very unpopular here and daily becomes more unpopular – I have received depositions and certificates with charges against Harrison and have shwen [sic] them to several members of Congress and they all tell I am bound to give them their usual cause and declare he ought to be out of office – His political career is ended. I shall lay the groundwork of an impeachment before ten days. The above is confidence until I see you.” Jennings to unnamed, January 22, 1811, in Riker, *Unedited Letters of Jonathan Jennings*.

<sup>74</sup>Owens, *Mr. Jefferson’s Hammer*, 133.

<sup>75</sup>*The Western Sun*, August 3, 1811.

<sup>76</sup>Badollet to Gallatin, August 6, 1811, *Correspondence of John Badollet and Albert Gallatin*, 189.

men, Kentucky volunteers, and army regulars—just over half of his force he had upon leaving Vincennes. Harrison attributed this problem to his personal enemies, who had “united with the British agents in representing that the expedition was entirely useless & the Prophet as one of best & Most pacific of Mortals.”<sup>77</sup>

In late September 1811, Harrison marched a force of 1,300 regulars and militia eighty miles north of Vincennes (near present-day Terre Haute) to construct Fort Harrison, built as a staging area and a point for Harrison’s men to prepare, if need be, for an assault on Prophetstown. While laying the foundation for the fort, the regulars and militia argued “to such a pitch that both parties were ready to fall on each other but by the interference of the officers” whose efforts stymied “their mutinous conduct.”<sup>78</sup> A full-scale fight had nearly erupted within the ranks of Harrison’s army, which likely convinced many militiamen to go back to their farms.<sup>79</sup> Rather than admit his failure to unite the militia, Harrison blamed the intra-community factionalism in the territorial capitol.

Many Vincennes residents believed that Harrison’s march toward Prophetstown during the fall of 1811 had been made necessary in part by his failed policies. In their view, the best option left to the governor was to destroy the Indian town at Tippecanoe with minimal casualties and to hope that the corresponding accolades would reinvigorate his leadership. Badollet and other anti-Harrisonians continued to doubt claims that the Prophet and his brother planned a massive attack, and they questioned the intelligence behind an article in the *National Intelligencer* reporting Tecumseh’s plan to sack Vincennes.<sup>80</sup> Badollet lamented: “All I fear is that such a madman [Harrison] will goad the Indians into some act of despair to make good all what he has got published of their pretended views. Oh God! Oh God!”<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>77</sup>Harrison to [Governor] Charles Scott, December 13, 1811, William Henry Harrison Papers, reel 5, pp. 146-47.

<sup>78</sup>Henry Swearingen letter, October 7, 1811, OM 0066, Indiana Historical Society, Indianapolis.

<sup>79</sup>Historians have not discussed the problems within Harrison’s force or adequately explained why such large numbers of soldiers defected.

<sup>80</sup>*National Intelligencer*, September 17, 1811; Badollet to Gallatin, October 15, 1811, *Correspondence of John Badollet and Albert Gallatin*, 195.

<sup>81</sup>Badollet to Gallatin, October 15, 1811, *Correspondence of John Badollet and Albert Gallatin*, 195.

Badollet was able to use his son Albert, a member of the militia, to spy on their activities. Albert wrote his father a few times during the march toward Prophetstown, expressing his own anxieties about the mission. Reminding him that he was serving “involuntarily” and that he possessed pure morals and “conduct unlike that of many of [his] age,” John asked his son to keep a journal. “I beseech you to do it,” he wrote, because “it will be an useful exercise for you, and will afford me a great satisfaction in reading your unsophisticated reflections on the passing events.”<sup>82</sup> More importantly, the elder Badollet requested that Albert “note down *every* occurrence as they take place, such an exercise [would] have the advantage of making time hang less heavily upon [him].”<sup>83</sup> Given his actions during the previous months, Badollet’s insistence on his son’s journaling may have been part of a larger effort in his campaign to undermine the governor.

Badollet and his supporters saw their fears realized in the attack on Prophetstown and in the aftermath of the Battle of Tippecanoe. The battle of November 1811 was only a minor disruption in a region divided by discord. What appeared to be solely a racial struggle was in fact a far more complicated event built upon factional relationships. As Harrison’s force marched back to Vincennes with nearly 130 wounded, they feared an attack from the many Indians who roamed the area. Soldiers had burned Prophetstown to the ground, but they had also desecrated an Indian burial ground, possibly inciting many neutral Indians. They returned to Vincennes minus sixty-two soldiers who had died on the field of battle. The death count included Thomas Randolph. It was ironic that the violence at Tippecanoe had resulted in the death of Randolph, who had been Jennings’s main challenger for territorial representative to Congress. Many anti-Harrisonians believed that the governor’s rhetoric about Prophetstown had been the result of his frustration in not getting Randolph elected, so that, in a way, Harrison’s decisions had led to the death of his ally.

As Harrison’s men marched into Vincennes, they were not greeted by victorious fanfare or congratulatory cheers. Most of the soldiers wondered if they had just ignited a frontier war, while others questioned the

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<sup>82</sup>John Badollet to Albert Badollet, October 18, 1811, John Badollet Papers, Regional History Collection #6, Lewis Historical Library, Vincennes University, Vincennes, Indiana.

<sup>83</sup>*Ibid.*, italics added by author for emphasis.



need to attack Prophetstown in the first place. The experienced soldiers feared that more of their neighbors would die when the Indians counter-attacked, but such an attack never came. Many of the neutral Miami had fled the area around Prophetstown, while Indians from other tribes withdrew after watching their harvest and homes go up in flames. The Prophet had not organized the first attack, nor did he want to put his community at further risk with another.<sup>84</sup>

While the residents of Vincennes initially came together to mourn their dead, they spent the months following the battle confronting each other. There was a funeral every day, sometimes two, as injured soldiers died from their wounds. Each day reminded the residents that they had paid a heavier price than the Indians, even though the Americans had burned Prophetstown to the ground. Coffin processions were “followed by a soldier . . . marching to the tune of Roslein Castle beat upon muffled drums.”<sup>85</sup> As the shock of the battle passed, people began questioning the governor’s leadership during the late action, and some even wondered if their loved ones had died in vain. Rumors spread throughout the territory that the militia had tried to retreat during battle because of Harrison’s ineffective leadership. Almost two months later, reports surfaced that the Indians were resettling Prophetstown. Residents of Vincennes, eyeing the many fresh graves, wondered just who had benefited from the battle.

Within weeks, the factions began using the battle as a way to attack each other. They had a well-established tradition of using territorial affairs against each other, and the Battle of Tippecanoe proved no exception. Badollet wrote that the “little band of the Prophet and his brother, were not a banditti” but “a set of orderly sober and industrious men . . . whom we have driven to despair, in spite of their repeated cries for peace.”<sup>86</sup> Rumors circulated through town that one of the sentinels who had heard the first shots had actually shot himself by accident or been shot by one of his fellow soldiers. Some people now believed that the

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<sup>84</sup>Alfred A. Cave, “The Shawnee Prophet, Tecumseh, and Tippecanoe: A Case Study of Historical Myth Making,” *Journal of the Early Republic* 22 (Winter 2002), 653-54.

<sup>85</sup>Lydia B. Bacon, entry for November 30, 1811, *Journal*, May 9, 1811–August 19, 1812, New York Historical Society Manuscript Collection, New York.

<sup>86</sup>Badollet to Gallatin, December 30, 1811, *Correspondence of John Badollet and Albert Gallatin*, 220. The quote is from a letter written to Col. John Boyd, a copy of which Badollet enclosed in his letter to Gallatin.

battle had started due to incompetence and not because the soldiers had tried to protect themselves.

The anti-Harrisonians used the rumors to disparage Harrison and went as far as claiming that Harrison had panicked during the battle and was responsible for the death of several soldiers. Several members of the faction created a resolution which praised Col. John P. Boyd, who had served as second-in-command at Tippecanoe. The document neglected to mention Harrison's leadership of the militia forces. Several of Boyd's supporters, including Judge Johnson, Caldwell, Ewing, and Badollet, met in secret and issued a public statement extolling the conduct of the regular army, while failing to offer any comment about the local militia. The Harrisonians took offense at what they regarded as blatant libel. Parke and several militiamen, gathered at Parmenas Beckes's inn in Vincennes on December 7, 1811, adopted resolutions that rejected the public appraisals of Boyd.<sup>87</sup> They "resolved unanimously" that the address put forth by the anti-Harrisonians was done to "injure the character of Governor Harrison."<sup>88</sup> Parke's group condemned

the conduct of said individuals (*almost every one of whom are the avowed enemies of the Commander in Chief – and several of whom have uniformly discountenanced and opposed every measure of the government, in respect to the Shawanoe Prophet and his party, and none of whom were on the Campaign*) in daring to speak in the name of the Militia, as highly presumptuous and unwarrantable.<sup>89</sup>

As if to stoke the fire, and probably to sell more papers, Stout published these resolutions in his January 4, 1812, edition of *The Western Sun*. It quickly engulfed the town in yet another dispute. For the Harrisonians, the attack on their governor was personal. In their view,

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<sup>87</sup>Robert S. Lambert, "The Conduct of the Militia at Tippecanoe: Elihu Stout's Controversy with Colonel John P. Boyd, January, 1812," *Indiana Magazine of History* 51 (September 1955), 239-41.

<sup>88</sup>Resolutions adopted at a meeting of the Knox County Militia, William Henry Harrison Papers, December 7, 1811, reel 5, p. 159. This document is one of two enclosures in a Dec. 18 letter from Harrison to Gov. Scott. *Italics original.*

<sup>89</sup>*Ibid.*, 160.

American settlers had incited the Indians in an effort to end Harrison's governorship; now the regular army had assaulted the governor. Harrison responded by trying to control people's perceptions of the battle.

As the governor and his supporters worked to rally public opinion, John Johnston, the Fort Wayne Indian agent, concluded that Native forces at Prophetstown had been far fewer in number than Harrison's command. Such a low estimate looked very bad, considering the much higher number of Americans who had died. The imbalance demonstrated to the governor's enemies that Harrison was indeed poorly equipped to lead a militia force against the Indians and reinforced calls for his resignation. The governor claimed that "it is impossible to believe that there were less than seven hundred Indians in the late action," an estimate that would have made the American and Indian forces relatively equal. He questioned Johnston's "false" report and concluded that the agent's estimate reflected what the Indians had told him, which Harrison believed to be unreliable. Harrison even claimed that Johnston had failed at his duty: "Sixteen days after the action he was replenishing the powder horns and pouches of many of those Indians whom he knew" to have participated at Prophetstown.<sup>90</sup> Johnston was not the only person questioning the governor's efforts at the battle. Residents of Vincennes were mailing out information to national newspapers, including Pennsylvania's *The Reporter*, which claimed that Harrison was to blame for the death of Maj. Joseph Hamilton Daviess. After hearing that the *New York Commercial Advertiser* published a derogatory letter sent by a resident of Vincennes to Congress, Harrison told Stout that he would "give a reward of ONE HUNDRED DOLLARS for the names of the Writer, and the person to whom it was addressed."<sup>91</sup> Angered by the attacks on the governor, several Harrisonians signed their own letter, expressing their opinion "that the Governor was calm and deliberate—that his orders were precise and distinct" during the battle and that "victory was obtained by his vigilance and activity."<sup>92</sup> The debates raging in Vincennes, although framed around the meaning of Tippecanoe, fell

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<sup>90</sup>Harrison to Eustis, January 14, 1812, William Henry Harrison Papers, reel 5, p. 273.

<sup>91</sup>Harrison to Stout, February 12, 1812, William Henry Harrison Papers, reel 5, p. 359.

<sup>92</sup>Statement by Officers, November 19, 1811, in Esarey, *Messages and Letters of William Henry Harrison*, 1:634.

across the same factional lines that had crystallized during the debate over slavery.

Similarly, some residents of Vincennes continued to invoke the Prophet as a means to express their feelings by publishing editorials concerning the battle in Stout's newspaper. Convinced that he must defend Harrison, Stout continued the fracas with an editorial of his own. After learning that Colonel Boyd planned to travel east on a furlough (an undeserved trip in Stout's eyes), Stout published an article that mocked Boyd's leadership and commitment. The article closed with a highly inflammatory and sarcastic paragraph:

We cannot withhold from the Colonel our sense of his *merit* and the great *loss* our country will sustain by being deprived of his services. Should there be a second expedition against the Indians, the Man, who by his *personal* skill and bravery decided the action of the 7th November, and took with his own hands the *war club* of their great warrior, the *magic cup* of the Prophet, and the *scalp* of a Chief, together with a number of other acts of bravery not necessary here to mention, but which will forever immortalize the Hero.<sup>93</sup>

Incensed at the articles and demanding vengeance, Boyd's party (which consisted of several anti-Harrisonians) insisted that Stout reveal the author of the article. When Stout refused, Boyd marched into his office demanding to know the author's identity. Stout, with self-proclaimed "mildness and a smile" answered: "You may consider *me* as the author!"<sup>94</sup> Boyd swung at Stout with his cane, but the nimble printer grabbed Boyd and his stick and then beat him in self-defense. Boyd's orderly, Josiah Bacon, seized Stout and tried to restrain him, but militia Lt. Robert Buntin yanked Bacon away from the printer and hurled him to the office floor.<sup>95</sup> Boyd retreated, leaving Stout to gloat in victory in that week's newspaper in an article headlined "ANOTHER BATTLE on the Wabash, or Colonel JOHN P. BOYD'S DEFEAT!!"

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<sup>93</sup>*The Western Sun*, January 18, 1812.

<sup>94</sup>Lambert, "Conduct of the Militia at Tippecanoe," 243-44.

<sup>95</sup>*Ibid.*, 244.

Does not, or is not every one ready to cry out shame! that such an *experienced* officer who has so highly boasted of his superior *skill* and *abilities*, should be thus ingloriously defeated, by a man who had never seen a “*tented field*?” Can such a man be trusted with the defense of our common country? Has he talents adequate to a corporals command? The Printer pronounces he has not!!<sup>96</sup>

Even after the governor and the army defeated the Prophet at Tippecanoe, Tenskwatawa retained a symbolic influence in the town. As a tool for the factions in Vincennes, he became central to their political identities. The people of Vincennes endured years of palpable fear that the Indians at Prophetstown would strike. Few could have imagined that the only substantive attack in Vincennes would be initiated by one American upon another. Understood in context, the violence at Stout’s office makes sense. Its underlying causes stemmed less from Prophetstown and more from disputes surrounding Vincennes’s role in and symbolic value to the future of a republican nation. Would slavery be tolerated? Would territories be governed by an autocratic governor and his council, or by the larger white community? These were questions central to the political and economic life at Vincennes during the early 1800s, and while territorial residents rightly questioned and even feared Prophetstown, their understanding of the Prophet devolved within the polarized political atmosphere of the town. While fear of an Indian attack was certainly real, fear over the decline of the republican ideal was just as present. Both fears co-existed at Vincennes and shaped how territorial residents in Indiana discussed and understood the Indians at Prophetstown. As a result, Prophetstown came to symbolize the debate over slavery and questions over Harrison’s governance—issues that the Battle of Tippecanoe failed to settle.

The debate in Vincennes was local in substance, but also added to larger racial developments in the United States during the early republic. Fearful of an Indian war in the Ohio Valley and a rapidly expanding slave population in the South, Americans increasingly attributed the problems between themselves, Indians, and slaves to inherent

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<sup>96</sup>*The Western Sun*, January 25, 1812.

differences among racial groups.<sup>97</sup> The motivation for violence between whites and Indians in Indiana Territory was racial in part, but the actions of Vincennes's political factions further polarized regional relationships to such an extent that room for any diplomatic measures quickly dissipated by 1810. As a result, violence erupted at the Battle of Tippecanoe and with it came strained and bloody relationships between white settlers and Native Americans on the frontier. At a time when racial theory was gaining greater acceptance, Americans were more likely to see that violence as a product of their encounters with inherently inferior and violent American Indians, rather than to recognize the complicated political factionalism that had led to war in Indiana Territory.



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<sup>97</sup>Michael A. Morrison, *Race and the Early Republic: Racial Consciousness and Nation-Building in the Early Republic* (Baltimore, Md., 2002); Bruce Dain, *A Hideous Monster of the Mind: American Race Theory in the Early Republic* (Cambridge, Mass., 2003); Nancy Shoemaker, *A Strange Likeness: Becoming Red and White in Eighteenth-Century North America* (Oxford, UK, 2006).