

Chief Pontiac—Orator and Warrior

Pontiac



OVERVIEW

The Ottawa leader Pontiac was a gifted orator as well as a fearsome warrior. Addressing an assembly of Potawatomie, Huron, and Ottawa peoples gathered in a village on an island in the Detroit River, Pontiac spoke out against the cruelty and condescension of the British toward Native Americans. The 1763 speech, which follows below, rallied his brethren to unite and take up arms against the British, and directly preceded the uprising called Pontiac's Rebellion, in which the Native Americans launched an attack on the British Fort Detroit.

GUIDED READING As you read, consider the following questions:

- What reasons does Pontiac give to justify military action against the British?
 - How does Pontiac claim the British and French differ in their treatment of Native Americans?
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It is important for us, my brothers, that we exterminate from our lands this nation which seeks only to destroy us. You see as well as I that we can no longer supply our needs, as we have done from our brothers, the French. The English sell us goods twice as dear as the French do, and their goods do not last. Scarcely have we bought a blanket or something else to cover ourselves with before we must think of getting another; and when we wish to set out for our winter camp they do not want to give us any credit as our brothers the French do.

When I go to see the English commander and say to him that some of our comrades are dead, instead of bewailing their death, as our French brothers do, he laughs at me and at you. If I ask for anything for our sick, he refuses with the reply that he has no use for us. From all this you can well see that they are seeking our ruin. Therefore, my brothers, we must all swear their destruction and wait no longer. Nothing prevents us: They are few in numbers, and we can accomplish it.

All the nations who are our brothers attack them—why should we not strike too? Are we not men like them? Have I not shown you the wampum belts which I received from our great father, the Frenchman [Louis XV]? He tells us to strike them. Why do we not listen to his words? What do we fear? It is time.

Source: Rosenstiel, Annette. *Red & White: Indian Views of the White Man, 1492–1982*. New York: Universe Books, 1983.