

Part II: Liberating Eurocentric History

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I am now going to provide further detailed examples of the accomplishments and contributions of the First Nations that have been excluded from standard American history textbooks and classes. These examples will focus on four areas:

(A) political institutions, (B) sports, (C) agriculture and (D) philosophy.

(A) Democracy in North America did not begin with the formation of the United States of America. It began, so far as we know now, on August 31, 1152 near what is now Syracuse, NY. It was and still is known as the *Kaianerekowa*. It began in a vision by the father of American democracy, Deganawida. Deganawida was a Huron of the Great Lakes region. He was distressed with all the pain and suffering being experienced by warring nations. He went on a vision quest to seek a vision as to how to stop the violence and suffering, and get nations to live in peace with each other. In his vision he discovered the *Kaianerekowa*, also known as the Great Law of Peace. In his vision, he saw a great pine tree that had a hole or opening beneath it. As he called to the people of all nations to come to the tree, they came one by one and buried their weapons of war under this **Tree of Peace**, which was a white pine tree. The European colonists learned extensively about this vision, and it became a symbol for peace for them as well. Like Iroquois from whom they learned this phrase, whenever people overcame their anger and disagreements with each other and peace was restored, they would say “we buried the hatchet.” This phrase is still spoken today among Euroamericans, as well as among the Iroquois, when they have settled disputes without violence.

Then *Deganawida* saw himself plant another white pine tree that grew rapidly and had four principal roots extending in each of the four cardinal directions, and he saw people from many nations come and enjoy peace and justice under this tree. At the top of the Great White Pine Tree, *Deganawida* saw an eagle land. Then he saw the roots of this tree spread in four directions, bringing peace and well-being to all who came to it, basking in its nourishing and refreshing shade. He also saw the people who came to this tree replace their bad minds that had led to war with the Good Mind that led to Peace and Justice.

The vision also included the concept of a Grand Council where the elected representatives of the people would come to deliberate and make unanimous decisions that would be in the best interests of the people for the next 7 generations. *Deganawida* chose *Ainowatha* (spelled Hiawatha in Longfellow's writings) and *Jik-onsaseh, Mother of Nations*, to carry this message to the five nations of *Haudenosaunee* (called Iroquois by the French). To get the five nations to unite, *Aionwatha* used the metaphor of the bundle of arrows to show the people how one nation, symbolized by one arrow, could easily be broken, but five nations, symbolized by 5 arrows bound together, could not be broken. The Iroquois used this same metaphor in recommending over and over again to the colonists that they should unite in a confederacy similar to the one the five nations of the Iroquois had. It sank in finally and the colonists learned to form a federal union similar to the one the five nations had. The metaphor of the bundle of the 13 arrows representing the 13 colonies united, held by the eagle in *Deganawida's* vision, is on the back of every dollar bill in circulation today.

The Grand Council was composed of 50 sachems representing the five nations. The sachems were elected by the heads and members of the matrilineal clans of each of the nations. These clans were based on the mother-child bond which was the foundation of their social structure. These matrilineal clans not only elected the sachems to represent them in the Grand Council, but they also retained the right of recall if a sachem strayed from his duty. They also retained the right of initiative and referendum.

The council was composed of two groups called the younger brothers, the Cayuga and the Oneida, and the elder brothers Seneca and the Mohawk. The Onondaga hosted the council and provided its moderator, known as the Speaker of the Long House. The Sachems were not addressed or referred to by their names but by their titles such as “Elder Sachem from the Beaver Clan of the Turtle Moiety of the Seneca Nation.” Each speaker was allowed to speak as long as he wished and would be given a long pause at the end of his speech so he could add anything he might have forgotten to say. No one would interrupt another person speaking. To achieve unanimous decisions, oratory was highly valued. The sachem who could be the most persuasive in their oratory was given the highest regard. Those who could synthesize various perspectives and positions to enable the council to reach consensus were also highly admired.

The Confederacy of the Haudenosaunee became the most powerful political entity in the northeastern portion of North America until about 1780. The people of the Six Nations (the *Tuscarora* joined the confederacy in 1714) comprise the oldest living participatory democracy on earth. Their story and constitution based on the consent of the governed provided a model and a great deal of enlightenment to the colonists, most of whom were very familiar with its nature and structure. The creators of the US constitution, fashioned by such central authors as Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Jefferson, drew much their inspiration from this confederacy of nations. As I recall from readings listed below, Benjamin Franklin wanted to call congress, the Grand Council, but that suggestion was rejected in favor of the latin term congress. The moderator, however, was called Speaker of the House. On the 200th year celebration of the US constitution, the US Congress acknowledged this debt and contribution and thanked the Iroquois in a joint congressional resolution (100th Congress, 1st Session, S. Con. Res. 76, Sept. 16, 1987).

The documentation of the account presented above is discussed thoroughly in many books: Felix Cohen's chapter "Americanizing the Whiteman" in **The Legal Conscience, Forgotten Founders: Benjamin Franklin, the Iroquois and the Rationale for the America Revolution** by Bruce Johansen, **The Iroquois and the Founding of the American Nation** by Donald Grinde, **Indian Givers: How the Indians of the Americas Transformed the World** by Jack Weatherford, **Indian Roots of American Democracy**, a collection of papers given by about 15 scholars at a conference held in 1987 at Cornell University, **Exemplar of Liberty: Native Americans and the Evolution of Democracy** by Donald Grinde, **Debating Democracy: Native American Legacy of Freedom** and **Native American Political Systems and the Evolution of Democracy: An Annotated Bibliography** by Bruce Johansen.

Bruce E. Johansen, Frederick W. Kayser Professor of Communications and Native American Studies at the University of Nebraska at Omaha, is the most prolific author on the subject of American Indians and the evolution of democracy and federalism. Below is what he has had to say about Churchill:

I read in yesterday's Denver Post that the newspaper has editorially called for Professor Churchill to be fired (or to resign) because he is (in the newspaper's view), an activist and not a scholar. One major difference between journalism and the professorate (I used to be a newspaper reporter) is that we may "profess" — that is, we may develop expertise that allows us to take informed positions on issues, political and otherwise. The Denver Post is drawing a line that could be enforced only by making academia a very sterile place. The present controversy has focused on only a tiny fraction of Prof. Churchill's work. I have read some of his books, and find them to be well-argued and intensively documented in a scholarly manner. He occasionally has referenced my work, and he has done so properly. I realize that some of what he has written has incited controversy. I believe that engagement in controversy is proper for a scholar; any line between "activism" and "scholarship" is artificial. In my work I have advanced ideas regarding the role of the Iroquois Confederacy in the evolution of democracy that have become the object of intense scrutiny and intense controversy. Controversy and ac-

tivism are necessary ingredients in the contest of ideas on which the academy should be based.
wardchurchill.net/blog/statements/statements-of-support/bruce-e-johansen/

To Be Continued

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