

basic call to consciousness

Edited by

AKWESASNE NOTES



NATIVE VOICES

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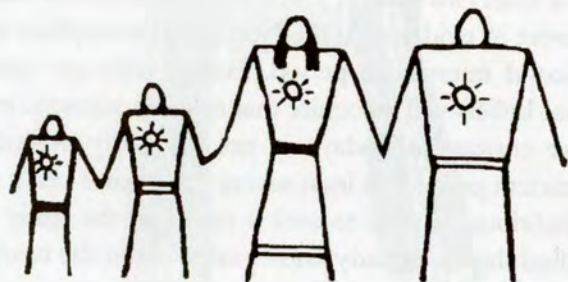
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destructive folly. It is, in short, the statement of a people who are ageless but who trace their history as a people to the very beginning of time. And they are speaking, in this instance, to a world that dates back its existence from a little over five hundred years ago, and perhaps, in many cases, much more recently than that.

And it is, to our knowledge, the very first such sentence to be issued by a Native nation. What follows are not research products of psychologists, historians, or anthropologists. The papers that follow are the first authentic analysis of the modern world ever committed to writing by an official body of Native people.



Spiritualism The Highest Form of Political Consciousness

The Haudenosaunee Message to the Western World

The Haudenosaunee, or the Six Nations Iroquois Confederacy, has existed on this land since the beginning of human memory. Our culture is among the most ancient, continuously existing cultures in the world. We still remember the earliest doings of human beings. We remember the original instructions of the Creators of Life on this place we call Ionkhi'nisténha onhwéntsia—Mother Earth. We are the spiritual guardians of this place. We are the Onkwehón:we—the Real People.

In the beginning, we were told that the human beings who walk about the Earth have been provided with all the things necessary for life. We were instructed to carry a love for one another, and to show a great respect for all the beings of this Earth. We are shown that our life exists with the tree life, that our well-being depends on the well-being of the vegetable life, that we are close relatives of the four-legged beings. In our ways, spiritual consciousness is the highest form of politics.

Ours is a Way of Life. We believe that all living things are spiritual beings. Spirits can be expressed as energy forms manifested in matter. A blade of grass is an energy form manifested in matter—grass matter. The spirit of the grass is that unseen force that produces the species of grass, and it is manifest to us in the form of real grass.

All things of the world are real, material things. The Creation is a true, material phenomenon, and the Creation manifests itself to us through

reality. The spiritual universe, then, is manifest to man as the Creation, the Creation that supports life. We believe that man is real, a part of the Creation, and that his duty is to support life in conjunction with the other beings. That is why we call ourselves Onkwehón:we—Real People.

The original instructions direct that we who walk about on the Earth are to express a great respect, an affection, and a gratitude toward all the spirits that create and support life. We give a greeting and thanksgiving to the many supporters of our own lives—the corn, beans, squash, the winds, the sun. When people cease to respect and express gratitude for these many things, then all life will be destroyed, and human life on this planet will come to an end.

Our roots are deep in the lands where we live. We have a great love for our country, for our birthplace is there. The soil is rich from the bones of thousands of our generations. Each of us was created in those lands, and it is our duty to take great care of them, because from these lands will spring the future generations of the Onkwehón:we. We walk about with a great respect, for the Earth is a very sacred place.

We are not a people who demand or ask anything of the Creators of Life; instead, we give greetings and thanksgiving that all the forces of life are still at work. We deeply understand our relationship to all living things. To this day, the territories we still hold are filled with trees, animals, and the other gifts of the Creation. In these places we still receive our nourishment from our Mother Earth.

We have seen that not all people of the Earth show the same kind of respect for this world and its beings. The Indo-European people who have colonized our lands have shown little respect for the things that create and support life. We believe that these people ceased their respect for the world a long time ago. Many thousands of years ago, all the people of the world believed in the same Way of Life, that of harmony with the universe. All lived according to the Natural Ways.

Around ten thousand years ago, peoples who spoke Indo-European languages lived in the area that today we know as the Steppes of Russia. At that time, they were a Natural World people who lived off the land. They had developed agriculture, and it is said that they had begun the practice of animal domestication. It is not known that they were the first people in the world to practice animal domestication. The hunters and gatherers who roamed the area probably acquired animals from the agricultural people and adopted an economy based on the herding and breeding of animals.

Herding and breeding of animals signaled a basic alteration in the relationship of humans to other life forms. It set into motion one of the true

revolutions in human history. Until herding, humans depended on nature for the reproductive powers of the animal world. With the advent of herding, humans assumed the functions that had for all time been the functions of the spirits of the animals. Sometime after this happened, history records the first appearance of the social organization known as “patriarchy.”

The area between the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers was the homeland, in ancient times, of various peoples, many of whom spoke Semitic languages. The Semitic people were among the first in the world to develop irrigation technology. This development led to the early development of towns, and eventually cities. The manipulation of the waters, another form of spirit life, represented another way in which humans developed a technology that reproduced a function of nature.

Within these cultures, stratified hierarchical social organization crystallized. The ancient civilizations developed imperialism, partly because of the very nature of cities. Cities are obviously population concentrations. Most importantly though, they are places that must import the material needs of this concentration from the countryside. This means that the Natural World must be subjugated, extracted from, and exploited in the interest of the city. To give order to this process, the Semitic world developed early codes of law. They also developed the idea of monotheism to serve as a spiritual model for their material and political organization.

Much of the history of the ancient world recounts the struggles between the Indo-Europeans and the Semitic peoples. Over a period of several millennia, the two cultures clashed and blended. By the second millennia BC, some Indo-Europeans, most specifically the Greeks, had adopted the practice of building cities, thus becoming involved in the process they named “civilization.”

Both cultures developed technologies peculiar to civilizations. The Semitic peoples invented kilns, which enabled the creation of pottery for trade and the storage of surpluses. These early kilns eventually evolved into ovens that could generate enough heat to smelt metals, notably copper, tin, and bronze. The Indo-Europeans developed a way of smelting iron.

Rome fell heir to these two cultures and became the place where the final meshing occurs. Rome is also the true birth place of Christianity. The process that has become the culture of the West is historically and linguistically a Semitic/Indo-European culture, but has been commonly termed the Judeo-Christian tradition.

Christianity was an absolutely essential element in the early development of this kind of technology. Christianity advocated only one God. It was a religion that imposed itself exclusive of all other beliefs. The local

people of the European forests were a people who believed in the spirits of the forests, waters, hills, and the land. Christianity attacked those beliefs and effectively despiritualized the European world. The Christian peoples, who possessed superior weaponry and a need for expansion, were able to militarily subjugate the tribal peoples of Europe.

The availability of iron led to the development of tools that could cut down the forest, the source of charcoal to make more tools. The newly cleared land was then turned by the newly developed iron plow that was, for the first time, pulled by horses. With that technology, many fewer people would work much more land, and many other people were effectively displaced to become soldiers and landless peasants. The rise of that technology ushered in the Feudal Age and eventually made possible the rise of new cities and growing trade. It also spelled the beginning of the end of the European forest, although that process took a long time to complete.

The eventual rise of cities and the concurrent rise of the European state created the thrust of expansion and a search for markets that led men, such as Columbus, to set sail across the Atlantic. The development of sailing vessels and navigation technologies made the European "discovery" of the Americas inevitable.

The Americas provided Europeans a vast new area for expansion and material exploitation. Initially, the Americas provided new materials and even finished materials for the developing world economy that was based on Indo-European technologies. European civilization has a history of rising and falling as its technologies reach their material and cultural limits. The finite natural world has always provided a kind of built-in contradiction to Western expansion.

The Indo-Europeans attacked every aspect of North America with unparalleled zeal. The Native people were ruthlessly destroyed because they were an unassimilable element to the civilizations of the West. The forests provided materials for larger ships, the land was fresh and fertile for agricultural surpluses, and some areas provided sources of slave labor for the conquering invaders. By the time of the Industrial Revolution in the mid-nineteenth century, North America was already a leader in the area of the development of extractive technology.

The hardwood forests of the Northeast were not cleared for the purpose of providing farmlands. Those forests were destroyed to create charcoal for the fires of the iron smelters and blacksmiths. By the 1890s, the West had turned to coal, a fossil fuel, to provide the energy necessary for the many new forms of machinery that had been developed. During the first half of the twentieth century, oil had replaced coal as a source of energy.



Over the years many peoples of the world have come into alliances with the movement for the recognition of Native nations. Spiritual peoples, in particular, have no difficulty understanding the quest for peace and the wish to respect all beings in the Sacred Web of Life. The Most Venerable Nichidatsu Fujii (1885-1995), Japanese Buddhist teacher, rode his wheel chair on the Longest Walk. Speaking on the U.S. Capitol steps at the conclusion of the Longest Walk, July 16, 1978, Nichidatsu Fujii said, "The religious faith that the Native Americans have carried down to this day will be the fountainhead for creating lasting peace in the future."

Akwesasne Notes photo: Jean-Francois Graunard

The Western culture has been horribly exploitative and destructive of the Natural World. Over one hundred forty species of birds and animals were utterly destroyed since the European arrival in the Americas, largely because they were unusable in the eyes of the invaders. The forests were leveled, the waters polluted, the Native people subjected to genocide. The vast herds of herbivores were reduced to mere handfuls; the buffalo nearly became extinct. Western technology and the people who have employed it have been the most amazingly destructive forces in all of human history. No natural disaster has ever destroyed as much. Not even the Ice Ages counted as many victims.

But like the hardwood forests, the fossil fuels are also finite resources. As the second half of the twentieth century progressed, the people of the West began looking to other forms of energy to motivate their technology. Their eyes settled on atomic energy, a form of energy production that has by-products that are the most poisonous substances ever known to man.

Today, man is facing the very survival of the human species. The way of life known as "Western Civilization" is on a death path, and its culture has no viable answers. When faced with the reality of its own destructiveness, Western civilization can only go forward into areas of more efficient destruction. The appearance of plutonium on this planet is the clearest of signals that our species is in trouble. It is a signal that most Westerners have chosen to ignore.

The air is foul, the waters poisoned, the trees dying, the animals are disappearing. We think even the systems of weather are changing. Our ancient teaching warned us that if man interfered with the natural laws, these things would come to be. When the last of the Natural Way of Life is gone, all hope for human survival will be gone with it. And our Way of Life is fast disappearing, a victim of the destructive processes.

The other position papers of the Haudenosaunee have outlined our analysis of economic and legal oppression. But our essential message to the world is a basic call to consciousness. The destruction of the Native cultures and people is the same process that has destroyed and is destroying life on this planet. The technologies and social systems that have destroyed the animals and the plant life are also destroying the Native people. And that process is Western civilization.

We know that there are many people in the world who can quickly grasp the intent of our message. But experience has taught us that there are few who are willing to seek out a method for moving toward any real change. But if there is to be a future for all beings on this planet, we must begin to seek the avenues of change.

The processes of colonialism and imperialism that have affected the Haudenosaunee are but a microcosm of the processes affecting the world. The system of reservations employed against our people is a microcosm of the system of exploitation used against the whole world. Since the time of Marco Polo, the West has been refining a process that mystified the peoples of the Earth.

The majority of the world does not find its roots in Western culture or traditions. The majority of the world finds its roots in the Natural World, and it is the Natural World and the traditions of the Natural World that must prevail if we are to develop truly free and egalitarian societies.

It is necessary at this time to begin a process of critical analysis of the West's historical processes, to seek out the actual nature of the roots of the exploitative and oppressive conditions that are forced upon humanity. At the same time, as we gain an understanding of those processes, we must reinterpret that history to the people of the world. It is the people of the West, ultimately, who are most oppressed and exploited. They are burdened by the weight of centuries of racism, sexism, and ignorance, which has rendered their people insensitive to the true nature of their lives.

We must all consciously and continuously challenge every model, every program, and every process that the West tries to force upon us. Paulo Friere wrote in his book *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed*¹ that it is the nature of the oppressed to imitate the oppressor, and by such actions try to gain relief from the oppressive condition. We must learn to resist that response to oppression.

The people who are living on this planet need to break with the narrow concept of human liberation and begin to see liberation as something that needs to be extended to the whole of the Natural World. What is needed is the liberation of all the things that support life—the air, the waters, the trees—all the things that support the sacred Web of Life.

We feel that the Native peoples of the Western Hemisphere can continue to contribute to the survival potential of the human species. The majority of our peoples still live in accordance with the traditions that find their roots in the Mother Earth. But the Native peoples have need of a forum where our voice can be heard. And we need alliances with other peoples of the world to assist in our struggle to regain and maintain our ancestral lands and to protect the Way of Life we follow.

We know that this is a very difficult task. Many nation states may feel threatened by the position that the protection and liberation of Natural World peoples and cultures represent, a progressive direction that must be integrated into the political strategies of people who seek to uphold the dignity of man. But that position is growing in strength, and it represents a necessary strategy in the evolution of progressive thought.

The traditional Native peoples hold the key to the reversal of the processes in Western civilization that hold the promise of unimaginable future suffering and destruction. Spiritualism is the highest form of political consciousness. And we, the Native peoples of the Western Hemisphere, are among the world's surviving proprietors of that kind of consciousness. We are here to impart that message.