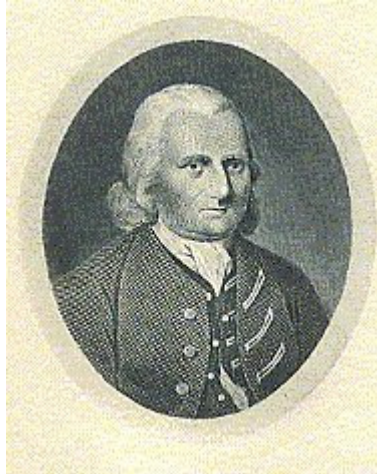


The Story of the Five Indian Nations (Iroquois)

The Forgotten Founding Fathers

In the words of Cadwallader Colden and Benjamin Franklin



Cadwallader Colden Sr.



Benjamin Franklin

Cadwallader Colden and Benjamin Franklin were close friends and colleagues, who instructed Colonists and Europeans alike, concerning the lifestyle, customs, government structure, and notions of individual liberty and freedom that they learned at the campfires and negotiating sessions of the Iroquois Confederation, known as the Five Nations. Colden's 1727 'History of the Five Indian Nations' book was the first documentary of the Indian culture written in English and America's first history book. It provided valuable information for American colonists who had little success in dealing with the American Indian Nations due to misunderstandings and a lack of appreciation for the Indian laws and culture.

An essay by Joseph Devine, December 2009.

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H I S T O R Y
O F T H E
F I V E Indian **N A T I O N S**
O F
C A N A D A,
Which are dependent
On the Province of **N E W - Y O R K** in **A M E R I C A,**
A N D
Are the Barrier between the **E N G L I S H** and **F R E N C H**
in that Part of the **W o r l d.**

Editor's note: This essay contains some graphic and violent material that might not be suitable for young children.



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An Introduction to Cadwallader Colden, Sr

Cadwallader Colden Sr (1688-1776) was born in Dunse, Scotland. He studied medicine at the University of Edinburgh and became a physician. At the request of his friend, New York's Governor Hunter, he settled in New York in 1718 and became the first Surveyor General of the colony, and later Lieutenant Governor.

Colden was also one of the most learned men in the colonies. He wrote about many aspects of science, astronomy and mathematics. He wrote a critique of Sir Isaac Newton, *The Principles of Action in Matter* in 1751. He became a botanist of the new Linnaean system of classifying flora and made significant contributions to medical literature. In 1743, an outbreak of Yellow Fever killed numerous people in New York City. Colden went house-to-house to treat the ailing people and he noticed trends about the environment where the stricken were most numerous. He correctly identified filthy water supplies as the cause of the epidemic and he fought for strict measures to protect water supplies. Cadwallader Colden was much admired on both sides of the Atlantic and he made several friends among the most highly regarded thinkers of the day.

In the mid 1700s, the Town of Montgomery was known as the Precinct of Hanover, Ulster County. This name would change toward the end of America's War of Independence, to the Town of Montgomery. Cadwallader Colden and his family resided in the current hamlet of Coldenham (known then as Coldenham with a g), in the eastern portion of Montgomery Township on the current Maple Avenue. Cadwallader Colden Sr. built several structures in the Township for family members over the years, most notably the Colden Mansion along current Route 17K, which was occupied by Cadwallader Jr in 1767 and is currently being restored by the Town of Montgomery.

Author's Note

Colden's 'Five Nations' was written using the more colorful English verse that was so common in that time period. It was also common to use an 'f' or two 'f's to denote the use of the letter "s". This text will use the more colorful original prose when necessary while using actual quotes from the book. Colonial Americans used capital letters for most nouns and slightly different spelling, as you will see with exact quotes herein.

The original 'Five Nations' book by Colden was written in 1727 (Part 1). Part 2 was published in 1747. During the period that Cadwallader Colden was working on Part 2 of the book, he was in almost constant contact, by letter, with Benjamin Franklin, with whom Colden had maintained a long friendship and mutual admiration. The author has added some quotes from Franklin in this text that were acquired from letters written by Franklin to Colden during the mid-Eighteenth Century as Native American issues were being discussed between these two gentlemen and scholars.

Ben Franklin's knowledge of the Iroquois Confederacy appears in his letters to the noted scientist, political figure and Iroquois scholar, Cadwallader Colden, as early as 1747, when Franklin requested and received copies of Colden's, *History of the Five Nations*. On January 27, 1748. Franklin mentioned to Colden in a letter that he had read the *History of the Five Nations* and thought "that 'tis a well wrote, entertaining and instructive Piece," which must have been "exceedingly useful to all those Colonies" who had anything to do with Indian affairs

Five years later, in a letter to Colden, Franklin noted that he had seen extracts of Colden's book "in all the magazines." Benjamin Franklin to Cadwallader Colden, October 25, 1753, *Ibid.*, V, p. 80.

History of the Five Nations Geography

The Five Nations consisted of the Mohawks, Oneydoes (Oneida), Onondagas (Onondaga), Cayugas and Sennekas (Seneca). This was the Iroquois League or Confederacy. The Tuscarora nation was added to make



the number six in later years. These Nations occupied much of northern New York. The map to the left was redrawn from the 1747, Part 2, version of the Cadwallader Colden book. This shows the area near the Finger Lakes, east of Lake Erie where the five tribes or nations lived. To the north were the French in Canada. Near the Five Nations were Dutch in Schenectady, which was a small village then. The British were located to the east near Albany and occupied most of southern and eastern New York. Other Indian tribes inhabited the land to the west of Lake Erie while more tribes lived near the French in Canada. To the south, British colonies were established in Maryland and Virginia and local Indians lived nearby, typically under friendly terms.

Map from Colden's 1747 Book

By the mid-eighteenth century, when alliance with the Five Nations became an article of policy with the British Crown, English colonists had been living in North America for little more than a century. The colonies comprised a thin ribbon of settlement from a few miles north of Boston to a few miles south of Charleston. Barely a million people all told, the British colonists looked westward across mountains that seemed uncompromisingly rugged to English eyes, into the maw of a continent that they already knew was many times the size of their ancestral homeland. How much larger, no one at that time really knew. No one knew exactly how wide the forests might be, how far the rivers might reach, or what lay beyond them. There was a widespread belief that the Pacific Ocean lay out there, somewhere. The mapmakers settled for blank spaces and guesses.

Across the mountains were the homelands of Indian confederacies -- the Iroquois to the northwest, the Cherokees to the Southwest, and others -- which outnumbered the colonists and whose warriors had proved themselves tactically, if not technologically, equal to the British army on American ground. And there were the French, sliding southward along the spine of the mountains, establishing forts as close as Pittsburgh, their soldiers and trappers building the bases of empire along the rivers that laced the inland forests.

The British decision to seek the Iroquois' favor set in motion historical events that were to make North America a predominantly English-speaking continent. These events also provided an opportunity for learning, observation, and reflection which in its turn gave the nation-to-be a character distinct from England and the rest of Europe, and which thus helped make the American Revolution possible.

The diplomatic approach to the Iroquois came at a time when the transplanted Europeans were first beginning to sense that they were something other than Europeans, or British subjects. Several generations had been born in the new land. The English were becoming, by stages, "Americans" -- a word that had been reserved for Indians. From the days when the Puritans came to build their city on a hill, there had been some feeling of distinction, but for a century most of the colonists had been escapees from Europe, or temporary residents hoping to extract a fortune from the new land and to return, rich gentlemen all, to the homeland. After a century of settlement, however, that was changing.

From the days of Squanto's welcome and the first turkey dinner, the Indians had been contributing to what was becoming a new amalgam of cultures. In ways so subtle that they were often ignored, the Indians left their imprint on the colonists' eating habits, the paths they followed, the way they clothed themselves, and the way they thought. The Indians knew how to live in America, and the colonists, from the first settlers onward, had to learn.

What follows is only a first step, tracing the way in which Benjamin Franklin and some of his contemporaries, including Thomas Jefferson, absorbed American Indian political and social ideas, and how some of these ideas were combined with the cultural heritage they had brought from Europe into a rationale for revolution in a new land. There is a great case to be made in that American Indian thought helped make that possible.

The Five Nations and Adirondack Pact

Cadwallader Colden noted in his 1727 book that the Adirondacks lived to the north in Canada while the Five Nations occupied northern New York in the early 1600s. The Adirondacks prized their hunting ability while the Five Nations farmed and planted corn. The two nations were able to trade venison for corn and, for many years, this relationship proved good for both parties. When the game became scarce for the Adirondacks, they asked the Five Nations to provide some of their people to help with the hunting. The Five Nations quickly agreed so that their own young people could learn to hunt from the mighty Adirondacks. The years of farming had diminished the Five Nations hunting skills. It was the custom to divide their hunting teams into small parties with each having three to four square miles in area.



One group was comprised of six Adirondacks and six young hunters from the Five Nations' Iroquois. They had poor luck and were forced to eat roots and tree bark for a while. The Adirondacks then separated from the young men of the Iroquois, dividing the hunting area and agreeing on a day for their return to the original position. The Adirondacks had no good fortune and then returned to the agreed location, where they saw that the men from the Iroquois were not there, and they were presumed dead. In a short while, the men from the Iroquois returned with several Wild Cows (deer). Their hunting success was the result of being more patient and skillful than the Adirondacks. The Adirondacks congratulated the Iroquois on their success and all had dined, with civility, on the meat but soon the Adirondacks became jealous of the Iroquois success. During the nighttime, the Adirondacks murdered all six of the young men from the Five Nations and then dried the meat and then carried it all home.

The rest of the Five Nations inquired about their own young men and the Adirondacks said that they parted paths soon after they had left to hunt and that they knew nothing of their fate. The Five Nations men wanted to know something certain about their companions so they went to see for themselves. They followed the tracks of the hunting party and eventually found six dead bodies, which the forest beasts had dug up, and upon examination found that they had been murdered. Many complaints were made to the chief of the Adirondacks to make restitution to the families of the young men and to take care that revenge might be forthcoming from

the Five Nations. The Adirondacks ignored these pleas, and thus began the war between the Adirondacks and the Iroquois of the Five Nations. The Adirondacks were fierce and skilled in war so their attacks took a heavy toll on the Five Nations at first but, over time, the Five Nations acquired the war skills they needed to survive.

Piskaret of the Adirondacks

Colden's 1727 account of the Five Nations included particulars about the many treaties and negotiations between the British colonialists and the Five Nations. He provided a collection of hostile actions by small parties or of individuals, Native American, French and British. Very few battles were waged in full scale. Most of the conflicts occurred as the result of one small party surprising the other along a forest trail. The results of these encounters would provide the balance needed for the British to defend the colonies against the French who had wanted to control the Indians to better leverage this advantage for war

The chief captain of the Adirondacks, Piskaret, became so incensed when he learned that one of the chief captains of the Adirondacks had been burned alive by the Five Nations, that he took action himself. During one trip down the Trois River, Piskaret with four other captains (each with 3 two-barrel muzzle guns) traveled in one canoe and reached the Sorel River where they saw 5 canoes of the Five Nations' Iroquois with 10 men each. Piskaret and his soldiers were badly outnumbered.

“The Iroquois gave the war shout and demanded that Piskaret surrender. Piskaret bid the Iroquois meet him in the center of the river, which they did with surprising swiftness. The Adirondacks had beforehand loaded their weapons with two bullets each, which they joined together with a wire 10 inches in length designed to tear the Five Nations canoes to pieces since the canoes were made of birch bark. Each of Piskaret's companions chose a canoe and were told to level their shot between wind and water.” Cadwallader Colden 1727

The Adirondacks sung their death song as if to distract the Iroquois. Then everyone in the Adirondack canoe took up their piece and fired on the Iroquois canoes. The Iroquois were surprised since firearms were still new to them. The Iroquois canoes capsized in the fast moving river. The Adirondacks then moved their canoe into position and bashed their heads. Some of the Iroquois captains were taken prisoner and burnt alive.

Piskaret was also known as the fastest runner and highest jumper in the Adirondack nation. Today he would be hailed as a great athlete among great athletes. Once he approached an Iroquois village during the coldest day with heavy snow. He used his snowshoes and walked backward toward the Iroquois village and hid in a woodpile. At night he came from the woodpile and he noticed that there were no guards due to the intense cold. He entered one Iroquois cabin and used his axe to kill everyone there. The others heard some screams so Piskaret returned to the woodpile. The Iroquois looked for him but could only find the tracks Piskaret made by walking backwards with his snowshoes. They looked for a while and then returned to their cabins. The next night, Piskaret again moved from the woodpile and saw, again, that there were no guards. He entered a second cabin and used his axe to, again, kill everyone. This time, Piskaret ran from the village with a large party of men after him. Piskaret ran for many miles and only a few Iroquois were able to follow but none could overtake him. At the end of the next day, the remaining Iroquois who were in pursuit tired, and went to sleep believing that Piskaret would do the same. Piskaret did not go to sleep. He waited until all of the pursuing Iroquois were fast asleep and he then killed them all with his hatchet.

At one point, the French sent Jesuit priests to the Five Nations in an attempt to convert them for their own advantage. The Five Nations kept some Jesuits captive for a while in an attempt to keep the French impartial as they prepared to battle the Adirondacks and the Hurons (Quatoghies).

This scheme worked and Piskaret was killed in an ambush by the Five Nations and, in a battle that followed, the Five Nations nearly destroyed the Adirondacks, who had not gotten over the loss of their fearless leader. The Hurons also suffered greatly at the hands of the Five Nations.

Treaty with Maryland and Delaware

Cadwallader Colden's 1727 account of the Five Nations included particulars about the many treaties and negotiations between the British colonialists and the Five Nations. The American colonies were not united, so that a treaty between the Indian nations and one colony would not have the effect of protecting another colony from Indian attack. In July of 1684, the colonies of Virginia and Maryland were attacked by raiding parties of the Five Nations. These raids were meant to capture food stocks and capture prisoners as slaves. The Indians were particularly destructive, having destroyed food supplies that they could not carry and by killing colonists and friendly Indians without cause. The Canagesse Indians, friends of the Virginia colonists, and the Susquehana Indians, friends of the Maryland colony, each suffered major losses of life.



Iroquois and Colonialist Negotiation

several Murders and Robberys, carrying away our Christian women and children prisoners into your castles. All of which Injuriys we designed to have Revenged on you; but at the desire of Sir Edmond Andross, then Governor General of this Country, we desisted from destroying you and sent agents to make peace.”

Virginia's Governor Dongan proposed that:

“First, That you call out of our Country of Virginia and Maryland all of your young men or soldiers that are there.

Secondly That you do not hinder or molest our Friendly Indians from Hunting at our Mountains, it having been their Country and none of yours.

Thirdly – Tho the Damages you have done our Country be very great, and would require a great deal of Satisfaction, which you are bound to give, yet we assure you, that only by the Perswasions of your Governor, who is at a vast deal of Trouble and Charge for your Welfare, which you ever ought to acknowledge, I have passed it by and forgiven you, Upon this Condition, that your People, nor any living among you, never commit any Incursions on our Christians or Indians living among us, or in Maryland.”

The next day the Mohawks answered. Since the Mohawks did not break the covenant, they did not see the need to bury the hatchet but did acknowledge the “evil they have done” meaning the other

nations. Each nation, through their sachem, were quick to accept peace terms

“Thank Your Lordship for hearkening to lay down the Axe” and “We again thank Your Lordship that the Covenant Chain is Renewed”. They exchanged wampum belts and buried two axes in two pits, one for Virginia and Maryland and the other for the Five Nations. Burying axes in a deep pit was a symbolic method of noting that the parties to the agreement hold sacred their vows. Wampum was currency used by the Indians that consisted of large belts laden with beads, which they give in their treaties as signs of confirmation to remain with the other party.

Treaties like this one were difficult to enforce over long periods of time. There were challenges from the



French that compounded the problem. The change of leadership within the British colonies did not help either. Very little of the agreements were known to colonial militias after only a few years while the Indians were quite good at keeping their memories fresh even though no written word of the treaty was recorded by them. Evenings at the campfire were used by the Five Nations to constantly remind the members of the nation about the treaty contents. Very little of this information was lost over the years while colonial changes in leadership were made without much of a transition, even though the written word was there for research. This is why Cadwallader Colden’s 1727 and 1747

books were so valuable in highlighting the history of the Five Nations and their colonial treaties.

Five Nations Government Structure

Together the Five Nations comprise the oldest living participatory democracy on earth. Their governance was truly based on the consent of the governed, and contains a great deal of life-promoting intelligence for those of us not familiar with this area of American history. The original United States representative democracy, fashioned by such central authors as Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Jefferson, drew much inspiration from this confederacy of nations as introduced by Cadwallader Colden. In our present day, we can benefit immensely, through understanding of a government truly dedicated to all life's liberty and happiness, as practiced by the Five Nations for over 800 hundred years, well into what we refer to as prehistory.

The Five Nations called themselves Rodinunchsiouni. The French called them Les Iroquois. Each of the Five Nations was an absolute republic by itself, governed in all public affairs of war and peace by the Sachems or Old Men. The chiefs were known as Captains. The great men, both Sachems and Captains, were poorer than others in the nation (common people). They give away their presents and plunder. If they should be suspected of selfishness, they would grow mean in the opinion of the people and then loose their authority. Each Sachem or Captain had to maintain strict adherence to poverty and personal suffering to be considered acceptable as representatives of the tribe or nation. The notion that the tribal elders and leaders would have to endure some form of poverty was contrary to prevailing thought, as it is even today. The British officials did not know what to make of this but they did, over time, learn that the Sachems and Captains spoke to them in a manner meant to benefit the people of their nations and not themselves. Sachems would routinely decline offers of special food and lodging during periods of negotiation so their judgment would not be clouded. Each nation comprised of three tribes or families. Each family had their own emblems or ensigns (bear, wolf. etc.). The Sachems of these families put their tribal mark or ensign on any document when they signed

The Iroquois' military leaders, like the civilian sachems, "obtain their authority . . . by the General Opinion of their Courage and Conduct, and lose it by a Failure in those Vertues," Colden wrote. He also observed that Iroquois leaders were generally regarded as servants of their people, unlike European kings, queens, and other members of a distinct hierarchy. It was customary, Colden observed, for Iroquois sachems to abstain from material things while serving their people, in so far as was possible:

“Their Great Men, both Sachems [civil chiefs] and captains [war chiefs] are generally poorer than the common people, for they affect to give away and distribute all the Presents or Plunder they get in their Treaties or War, so as to leave nothing for themselves. If they should be once suspected of selfishness, they would grow mean in the opinion of their countrymen, and would consequently lose their authority.”

Cadwallader Colden, 1727

The original form of Roman government, Colden believed, was similar to the Iroquois' system, which he described in some detail. This federal union of the Iroquois Confederacy, Colden said, "has continued so long that the Christians know nothing of the origin of it,"

“Each nation is an absolute Republick by itself, govern'd in all Publick affairs of War and Peace by the Sachems of Old Men, whose Authority and Power is gained by and consists wholly in the opinions of the rest of the Nation in their Wisdom and Integrity. They never execute their Resolutions by Compulsion or Force Upon any of their People. Honour and Esteem are their principal Rewards, as Shame and being Despised are their Punishments.” (Cadwallader Colden, 1727)

“The Five Nations have such absolute Notions of Liberty that they allow no kind of Superiority of one over another, and banish all Servitude from their Territories.” Cadwallader Colden, 1727

The Iroquois confederation was governed by a constitution, the Great Law of Peace, which established the league's Great Council: 50 male royaneh (religious-political leaders), each representing one of the female-led clans of the alliance's nations. What was striking to the contemporary eye was that the 117 codicils (articles) of the Great Law were concerned as much with constraining the Great Council as with granting it authority. “Their whole civil policy was averse to the concentration of power in the hands of any single individual,” explained Lewis Henry Morgan, a pioneering ethnographer of the Iroquois.

The council's jurisdiction was limited to relations among the nations and outside groups; internal affairs were the province of the individual nations. Even in the council's narrow domain, the Great Law insisted that every time the royaneh confronted “an especially important matter or a great emergency,” they had to “submit the matter to the decision of their people” in a kind of referendum open to both men and women.

The Iroquois Great Law of Peace, Article 24

The chiefs of the League of Five Nations shall be mentors of the people for all time. The thickness of their skin shall be seven

spans, which is to say that they shall be proof against anger, offensive action, and criticism. Their hearts shall be full of peace and good will, and their minds filled with a yearning for the welfare of the people of the League. With endless patience, they shall carry out their duty. Their firmness shall be tempered with a tenderness for their people. Neither anger nor fury shall find lodging in their minds and all their words and actions shall be marked by calm deliberation.

Although the Indian sachems on the Eastern Seaboard were absolute monarchs in theory, wrote the colonial leader Roger Williams, in practice they did not make any decisions “unto which the people are averse.” These smaller groups did not have formal, Iroquois-style constitutions, but their governments, too, were predicated on the consent of the governed. Compared to the despotisms that were the norm in Europe and Asia, the societies encountered by British colonists were a libertarian dream.

Not every European admired this democratic spirit. Indians “think every one ought to be left to his own opinion, without being thwarted,” the Flemish missionary monk Louis Hennepin wrote in 1683. “There is nothing so difficult to control as the tribes of America,” a fellow missionary unhappily observed. “All these barbarians have the law of wild asses - they are born, live, and die in a liberty without restraint; they do not know what is meant by bridle and bit.”

“Having frequent occasions to hold public Councils, they (the Iroquois) have acquired great Order and Decency in conducting them. The Old Men sit in the foremost Ranks, the warriors in the next, and the Women and Children in the hindmost. The business of the Women is to take exact notice of what passes, Imprint it in their memories, for they have no Writing, and communicate it to their children. They are the Records of the Council, and they preserve traditions of the Stipulations in Treaties a hundred Years back, which when we compare with our Writings we always find exact. He that would speak, rises. The rest observe a profound Silence. When he has finished and sits down, they leave him five or six Minutes to recollect, that if he has omitted anything he intended to say, or has anything to add, he may rise again and deliver it. To interrupt another, even in common conversation, is reckoned highly indecent. How different this is from the Conduct of a polite British House of Commons, where scarce a Day passes without some Confusion, that makes the speaker hoarse in calling *to order*; and how different from the mode of Conversation in many polite Companies of Europe, where if you do not deliver your Sentence with great rapidity, you are cut off in the middle of it by the impatient Loquacity of those you converse with, and never suffer'd to finish it” – Benjamin Franklin

Women’s Rights, Five Indian Nations

The Iroquois' extension of liberty and political participation to women surprised some Eighteenth Century Euro-American observers. An unsigned contemporary manuscript in the New York State Library reported that when Iroquois men returned from hunting, they turned everything they had caught over to the women. "Indeed, every possession of the man except his horse & his rifle belong to the woman after marriage; she takes care of their Money and Gives it to her husband as she thinks his necessities require it," the unnamed observer wrote. The writer sought to refute assumptions that Iroquois women were "slaves of their husbands." "The truth is that Women are treated in a much more respectful manner than in England & that they possess a very superior power; this is to be attributed in a very great measure to their system of Education." The women, in addition to their political power and control of allocation from the communal stores, acted as communicators of culture between generations. It was they who educated the young.

The use of Indian women to provide an exemplar of feminist liberty continued into the Twentieth Century. On May 16, 1914, only six years before the first national election in which women had the vote, *Puck* magazine printed a line drawing of a group of Indian women observing Susan B. Anthony, Anne Howard Shaw and Elizabeth Cady Stanton leading a parade of women. A verse under the print read:

"Savagery to Civilization"

We, the women of the Iroquois
Own the Land, the Lodge, the Children
Ours is the right to adoption, life or death;
Ours is the right to raise up and depose chiefs;
Ours is the right to representation in all councils;
Ours is the right to make and abrogate treaties;
Ours is the supervision over domestic and foreign policies;
Ours is the trusteeship of tribal property;
Our lives are valued again as high as man's.

The pioneering suffragists Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Matilda Joslyn Gage, both Finger Lakes residents, were inspired by the Great Law's extension of legal protections to women. "This gentile constitution is wonderful!" they exclaimed.

French and British Competing Interests

The rivalry between the British and French was on Colden's mind as he wrote the introduction to the 1747 edition of his *History of the Five Indian Nations*:

"The former part of this history was written at New-York in the year 1727, on Occasion of a Dispute which then happened, between the government of New-York and some Merchants. The French of Canada had the whole Fur Trade with the Western Indians in their Hands, and were supplied with their Woolen Goods from New York. Governor Burnet, who took more Pains to be Informed of the Interest of the People he was set over, and of making them useful to their Mother Country than Plantation Governors usually do, took the Trouble of Perusing all the Registers of the Indian Affairs on this occasion. He from thence conceived of what Consequences the Fur Trade with the Western Indians was of to Great Britain." - Cadwallader Colden 1747

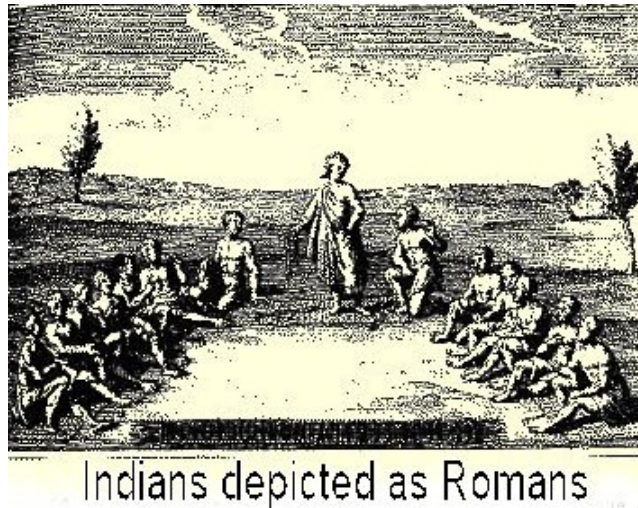
The Iroquois had not only the best route for trade and other transport, but also plenty of beaver. Colden recognized that to whom went the beaver trade might go the victory in any future war between France and Britain in North America. The mid-Eighteenth Century was a time when two nations could not join in battle unless they occupied neighboring real estate. The Iroquois' position, located between the French in Canada and the English in New York, indicated to Colden that their friendship, as well as business relations, must be procured if the English were to gain an advantage over the French.

To Colden, trade with the Five Nations also presented an opportunity to mix and mingle with the Indians, and to convert them to the British Colonial interest. Colden was acting as Surveyor General of the Province so he had ample opportunity to explore Iroquois lands and to meet with their elders. Cadwallader Colden was adopted by the Mohawk Nation due to their great respect for him.

As Colden had noted in his book, the British were assembling a wide-ranging program of trade and diplomatic activity to insure that in any future war, the Iroquois' powerful confederacy would side with them. Although, when the continent and its history are taken as a whole, the French were better at mixing with Indians and securing their alliance. At this particular time and in this place, the English had the upper hand. This was accomplished through a series of adroit diplomatic moves, many of which were performed with the help of a group of men like Colden and Franklin who, although English in background, were at home with the Iroquois as well.

The Barbarians and their Society

Colden found the Iroquois to be "barbarians" because of their reputed tortures of captives, but he also saw a "bright and noble genius" in these Indians' and "love of their country," which he compared to that of "the greatest Roman Hero's."



"When Life and Liberty came in competition, indeed, I think our Indians have outdone the Romans in this particular . . . The Five Nations consisted of men whose Courage and Resolution could not be shaken." Cadwallader Colden

Colden was skeptical that contact with Euro-Americans could improve the Iroquois:

"Alas! we have reason to be ashamed that these Infidels, by our Conversation and Neighborhood, have become worse than they were before they knew us. Instead of Vertues, we have only taught them Vices that they were entirely free of before that time. The narrow Views of private interest have occasioned this." Cadwallader Colden

"SAVAGES we call them, because their manners differ from ours, which we think the perfection of civility; they think the same of theirs" - Benjamin Franklin

"Perhaps, if we could examine the manners of different nations with Impartiality, we should find no People so rude, as to be without any Rules of Politeness; nor any so polite, as not to have some remains of Rudeness"
Benjamin Franklin

Despite his condemnation of their reputed cruelty toward some of their captives, Colden wrote that Euro-Americans were imitating some of the Iroquois' battle tactics, which he described as the art of "managing small parties." The eastern part of the continent, the only portion of North America that the colonists of the time knew, was, in Colden's words, "one continued Forrest," which lent advantage to Iroquoian warfare methods. Such methods would later be put to work against British soldiers in the American Revolution.

Colden also justified his study within the context of natural science:

"We are fond of searching into remote Antiquity to know the manners of our earliest progenitors; if I be not mistaken, the Indians are living images of them."

The belief that American Indian cultures provided a living window on the prehistory of Europe was not Colden's alone. This assumption fueled curiosity about American Indian peoples on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean throughout the Eighteenth Century. Colden's was one of the first widely circulated observations of this sort, which compared Indians, especially the Iroquois, to the Romans and the Greeks, as well as other peoples such as the Celts and the Druids. Looking through this window of the past, it was believed that observation of Indian cultures could teach Europeans and Euro-Americans about the original form of their ancestors' societies - those close to a state of nature that so intrigued the thought of the Eighteenth Century Enlightenment.

Colden, elaborating, wrote

"The present state of the Indian Nations exactly shows the most Ancient and Original Condition of almost every Nation; so, I believe that here we may with more certainty see the original form of all government, than in the most curious Speculations of the Learned; and that the Patriarchal and other Schemes in Politicks are no better than Hypotheses in Philosophy, and as prejudicial to real Knowledge." Cadwallader Colden

Colden used the words of Monsieur de la Poterie, a French historian, to summarize his sentiments about the Iroquois' system of society and government:

"When one talks of the Five Nations in France, they are thought, by a common mistake, to be mere Barbarians, always thirsting after human blood; but their True Character is very different. They are as Politick and Judicious as well can be conceiv'd. This appears from their management of the Affairs which they transact, not only with the French and the English, but likewise with almost all the Indian Nations of this vast continent." Cadwallader Colden, 1727

Iroquois as Negotiators and Orators

When the British decided to send some of the colonies' most influential citizens to seek alliance with the Iroquois, the treaty councils that resulted provided more than an opportunity for diplomacy. They enabled the leading citizens of both cultures to meet and mingle on common and congenial ground, and thus to learn from each other. The pervasiveness and influence of these contacts has largely been lost in a history that, much like journalism, telescopes time into a series of conflicts. Cadwallader Colden captured the importance of observing and understanding the nature of these meetings quite well in his 1727 book.

Many of the treaties and informal agreements between the British and Indians were broken because one side or the other did not understand the true meaning of the treaty or agreement. Colden wanted the genius of the Native Americans to “better appear”. Colden wrote that he had accepted a great task “to show the Wit, and Judgment, and Art, and Simplicity, and Ignorance of the several Parties, managing a Treaty, in other words than their own”.

Another matter that surprised many contemporary observers was the Iroquois' sophisticated use of oratory. Their excellence with the spoken word, among other attributes, often caused Colden and others to compare the Iroquois to the Romans and Greeks. The French use of the term Iroquois to describe the confederacy was itself related to this oral tradition; it came from the practice of ending their orations with the two words *hiro* and *kone*. The first meant "I say" or "I have said" and the second was an exclamation of joy or sorrow according to the circumstances of the speech. The two words, joined and made subject to French pronunciation, became Iroquois. The English were often exposed to the Iroquois' oratorical skills at Eighteenth Century treaty councils.

“The politeness of these savages in conversation is indeed carried to excess, since it does not permit them to contradict or deny the Truth of what is asserted in their Presence. By this means they indeed avoid Disputes, but then it becomes difficult to know their Minds, or what Impression you make upon them. The Missionaries who have attempted to convert them to Christianity, all complain of this as one of the great Difficulties of their Mission. The Indians hear with Patience the Truths of the Gospel explained to them, and give their usual Tokens of assent and Approbation: you would think they were convinced. No such Matter. It is mere Civility” Benjamin Franklin

“A Swedish Minister, having assembled the Chiefs of the Susquehanah Indians, made a Sermon to them, acquainting them with the principal historical Facts on which our Religion is founded, such as the Fall of our first Parents by Eating an Apple, the Coming of Christ to repair the Mischief, his Miracles and Suffering, etc. When he had finished, an Indian Orator stood up to thank him. What you have told us, says he, is all very good. It is indeed bad to eat Apples. It is better to make them all into Cyder. We are much obliged by your Kindness in coming so far to tell us those things which you have heard from your Mothers. In Return, I will tell you some of those we have heard from ours” Benjamin Franklin

“In the Beginning, our Fathers had only the Flesh of Animals to subsist on, and if their hunting was unsuccessful, they were starving. Two of our young Hunters, having killed a Deer, made a Fire in the Woods to broil some Part of it. When they were about to satisfy their Hunger, they beheld a beautiful young Woman descend from the clouds, and seat herself on that Hill which you see yonder among the blue Mountains. They said to each other, it is a Spirit that perhaps has smelt our broiling Venison and wishes to eat of it: let us offer some to her. They presented her with the Tongue: She was pleased with the taste of it, and said, your Kindness shall be rewarded. Come to this Place after thirteen Moons, and you shall find something that will be of great Benefit in nourishing you and your Children to the latest Generations. They did so, and, to their Surprise, found Plants they had never seen before, but which from that ancient time have been constantly cultivated among us to our great Advantage. Where her right Hand had touch'd the Ground, they found Maize; where her left Hand had touch'd it, they found Kidney-beans; and where her backside had sat on it, they found Tobacco. The good missionary, disgusted with this idle Tale, said, what I delivered to you

were sacred truths; but what you tell me is mere Fable, Fiction, and Falsehood. The Indian, offended, repli'd My Brother, it seems your Friends have not done you Justice in your Education; they have not well instructed you in the Rules of common Civility. You saw that we who understand and practice those Rules, believed all your Stories; you refuse to believe ours." Benjamin Franklin

Iroquois at the University

"The Indian Men, when young, are Hunters and Warriors; when old, Counselors; for all their Government is by Counsel, or Advice, of the sages; there is no Force, there are no Prisons, no Officers to compel Obedience, or inflict punishment. Hence they generally study Oratory; the best speaker having the most Influence. The Indian Women till the Ground, dress the Food, nurse and bring up the Children, and preserve and hand down to posterity the Memory of Public Transactions. These Employments of Men and Women are accounted natural and honorable. Having few Artificial Wants, they have abundance of Leisure for Improvement by Conversation. Our laborious manner of Life, compared with theirs, they esteem slavish and base; and the Learning, on which we value ourselves, they regard as frivolous and useless." Cadwallader Colden 1747

An instance of this occurred at the Treaty of Lancaster, in Pennsylvania, 1744, between the Government of Virginia and the Five Nations. "After the principal Business was settled, the commissioners from Virginia acquainted the Indians by a Speech, that there was, at Williamsburg, a College, with a Fund for Educating Indian Youth; and that, if the Five Nations would send down half a dozen of their sons to that College, the government would take Care that they should be well provided for, and instructed in all the Learning of the white People. It is one of the Indian Rules of Politeness not to answer a public Proposition the same day that it is made; they think it would be treating it as a light Matter; and that they show it Respect by taking time to consider it, as of a Matter important. They therefore deferred their Answer till the day following; when their Speaker began by expressing their deep Sense of the kindness of the Virginia Government, in making them that Offer; for we know, says he, that you highly esteem the kind of expensive to you. We are convinced, therefore, that you mean to do us good by your Proposal, and we thank you heartily. But who are wise, must know that different Nations have different Conceptions of things; and you will therefore not take it amiss, if our Ideas of this Kind of Education happen not to be the same with yours. We have had some Experience of it: Several of our Young People were formerly brought up at the Colleges of the Northern Provinces; they were instructed in all your sciences; but when they came back to us, they were bad runners, ignorant of every means of living in the Woods, unable to bear either Cold or Hunger, knew neither how to build a Cabin, take a Deer, or kill an Enemy, spoke our Language imperfectly; were therefore neither fit for Hunters, Warriors, or Counselors; they were totally good for nothing. We are however not the less obliged by your kind Offer, though we decline accepting it; and to show our grateful Sense of it, if the gentlemen of Virginia will send us a dozen of their Sons, we will take great Care of their Education, instruct them in all we know, and make *Men* of them." Benjamin Franklin

"...Indian Children have been carefully educated among the English, cloathed and taught, yet, I think, there is not one Instance, that any of these, after they had Liberty to go among their own People, and were come to Age, would remain with the English, but returned to their own Nations, and became as fond of the Indian Manner as those that knew nothing of a civilized Manner of living." Cadwallader Colden 1747

Iroquois Urge United Colonies

Franklin was reading Colden's book at a time when alliance with the Iroquois was assuming a new urgency for his home state of Pennsylvania. During 1747, French and Dutch privateers had raided along the Delaware River, threatening Philadelphia itself for a time. In response, Franklin organized a volunteer militia that elected its own officers (a distinctly Iroquoian custom). The militia grew year-by-year, repeatedly electing Franklin its colonel until the British, worried about the growth of indigenous armed forces in the colonies, ordered it disbanded in 1756.

Beginning nearly two generations before the Revolutionary War, the circumstances of diplomacy arrayed themselves so that opinion leaders of the English colonies and the Iroquois Confederacy were able to meet together to discuss the politics of alliance -- and confederation. Beginning in the early 1740s, Iroquois leaders strongly urged the colonists to form a federation similar to their own. The Iroquois' immediate practical objective was unified management of the Indian trade and prevention of fraud. The Iroquois also stressed that the colonies should have to unify as a condition of alliance in the continuing "cold war" with France.

This set of circumstances brought Benjamin Franklin into the diplomatic equation. He first read the Iroquois' urgings to unite as a printer of Indian treaties. By the early 1750s, Franklin was more directly involved in diplomacy itself, at the same time that he became an early, forceful advocate of colonial union. All of these circumstantial strings were tied together in the summer of 1754, when colonial representatives, Franklin among them, met with Iroquois sachems at Albany to address issues of mutual concern, and to develop the Albany Plan of Union, a design that echoed both English and Iroquois precedents, which would become a rough draft for the Articles of Confederation a generation later.



Canassatego In 1742, Pennsylvania officials met with Iroquois sachems in council at Lancaster to secure Iroquois alliance against the threat of French encroachment. Canassatego, an Iroquois sachem, spoke on behalf of the Six Nations to the Pennsylvania officials. He confirmed the "League of Friendship" that existed between the two parties and stated that "we are bound by the strictest leagues to watch for each other's preservation."

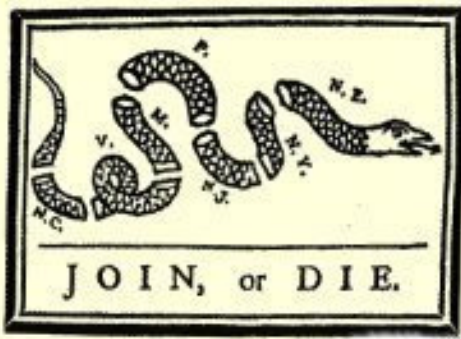
Two years later, Canassatego would go beyond pledging friendship to the English colonists. At Lancaster, Pennsylvania in 1744, the great Iroquois chief advised the assembled colonial governors on Iroquois concepts of unity.

"Our wise forefathers established Union and Amity between the Five Nations. This has made us formidable; this has given us great Weight and Authority with our neighboring Nations. We are a powerful Confederacy; and by your observing the same methods, our wise forefathers have taken, you will acquire such Strength and power. Therefore whatever befalls you, never fall out with one another."

Canassatego, Iroquois Sachem, Lancaster Treaty Council, 1744

Canassatego's admonition would echo throughout the colonies for over a generation, and it would be used not only as a rallying point against French colonial designs but also against British tyranny. In 1747, the Royal Governor, George Clinton of New York, observed that most American leaders who favored democracy "were ignorant, illiterate people of republican principle who have no knowledge of the English Constitution or love for their country." Clearly, these unread Americans were gaining a new identity and a sense of freedom from the European environment long before the outbreak of the American Revolution.

In one of America's first editorial cartoons, Benjamin Franklin advocated colonial unity in 1754 with the slogan "Join, or Die" under a disjointed snake, each piece of which had the name of a colony. The drawing appeared in the *Pennsylvania Gazette*, May 9, 1754, just before the Albany Conference with the Iroquois and the English colonies. The snake (sometimes accompanied by the phrase "Don't Tread on Me.") became a popular symbol of colonial unity, much like the covenant chain image Franklin later would use in designs for early United States coins. It is significant that the New York Tammany Society retained the Rattlesnake as the clan totem for Pennsylvania throughout the 19th century



political cartoon by Benjamin Franklin

On the eve of the Albany Conference, Franklin was already persuaded that Canassatego's words were good counsel, and he was not alone in these sentiments. James DeLancey, acting Governor of New York, sent a special invitation to a Mohawn sachem, that the English called Hendrick, to attend the Albany Conference, where the aging Iroquois provided insights into the structure of the League of the Iroquois for the assembled colonial delegates. In letters convening the conference from the various colonies, instructions of the delegates were phrased in Iroquois diplomatic idiom. From colonist to colonist, the letters spoke of "burying the hatchet" -- a phrase that entered idiomatic English from the Iroquois Great Law -- as well as "renewing the covenant chain."

“It would be a very strange thing if Six Nations of Ignorant Savages should be capable of forming a Scheme for such a Union and be able to execute it in such a manner, as that it has subsisted for Ages, and appears indissoluble, and yet a like Union should be impracticable for ten or a dozen English colonies.”

-- Benjamin Franklin to James Parker, 1751

Shortly after attending the Albany meeting of 1754, Franklin stopped at Coldenham to see Colden and thank him for the notes that he had sent to him while at Albany. Upon his return to Philadelphia, Franklin wrote to Colden that he had journeyed "to meet and hold a treaty with the Ohio Indians." Franklin promised Colden a copy of the treaty and stated that he had left his copy of Colden's book with a friend in Boston. *Franklin Papers*, V, pp. 80-81.

The 1744 treaty, one of the more dramatic during this period, impressed Franklin when the interpreter's record was delivered to him a few weeks later. He printed 200 extra copies and sent them to England. Within three years after he printed the proceedings of the 1744 treaty, with Canassatego's advice on Colonial union, Franklin became involved with Cadwallader Colden on the same subject. A new edition of Colden's *History of the Five Indian Nations Depending on the Province of New York in America*, first published in 1727, was issued during 1747. Franklin was a frequent correspondent with Colden at this time; both had similar interests in politics, natural science, and Deism. The unification of the colonies would not happen until the War of Independence settled the matter years later.

Conclusion

It is interesting that the first British villages in North America, thousands of miles from the House of Lords, had lost some of the brutally graded social hierarchy that characterized European life. But it is also clear that they were infused by the democratic, informal brashness of American Indian culture. That spirit alarmed and discomfited many Europeans, aristocrat and peasant alike. Others found it a deeply attractive vision of human possibility.

In his correspondence with Benjamin Franklin, Cadwallader Colden offered this insight into the source of a nation's power:

“It is a common agreement that the power and strength of a nation consists in its riches and money. No doubt money can do great things but I think the power of a nation consists in the knowledge and virtue of its inhabitants and in proof of this history everywhere almost shows us that the richest nations abounding in silver and gold have been generally conquered by poor but in some sense virtuous nations.”

Colden penned these words in November of 1749, but little did he realize that the next half-century would prove the truth of his belief.

On June 11, 1776 while the question of independence was being debated, the visiting Iroquois chiefs were



Iroquois at the Continental Congress

formally invited into the meeting hall of the Continental Congress. There a speech was delivered, in which they were addressed as "Brothers" and told of the delegates' wish that the "friendship" between them would "continue as long as the sun shall shine" and the "waters run." The speech also expressed the hope that the new Americans and the Iroquois act "as one people, and have but one heart." After this speech, an Onondaga chief requested permission to give John Hancock, the Congress President, an Indian name. The Congress graciously consented, and so the president was renamed "Karanduwann, or the Great Tree." With the Iroquois chiefs

inside the halls of Congress on the eve of American Independence, the impact of Iroquois ideas on the founders is unmistakable. History is indebted to Charles Thomson, an adopted Delaware, whose knowledge of and respect for American Indians is reflected in the attention that he gave to this ceremony in the records of the Continental Congress.

So vivid were these examples of democratic self-government that some historians and activists have argued that the Great Law of Peace directly inspired the American Constitution. Taken literally, this assertion seems implausible. With its grant of authority to the federal government to supersede state law, its dependence on rule by the majority rather than consensus and its denial of suffrage to women, the Constitution as originally enacted was not at all like the Great Law. But in a larger sense the claim is correct. The framers of the Constitution, like most colonists in what would become the United States, were pervaded by Indian images of liberty.

Historians have been reluctant to acknowledge this contribution to the end of tyranny in America. Yet a plain reading of famous scholars shows that they took many of their illustrations of liberty from native examples. So did the colonists who held their Boston Tea Party dressed as Mohawks. When others took up European intellectuals' books and histories, images of Indian freedom had an impact far greater than their own lodges.

Just like their long-ago counterparts in Boston, protesters in South Korea, China and Ukraine wore "Native American" makeup and clothing in, respectively, the 1980's, 1990's, and the first years of this century. Indeed, it is only a little exaggeration to claim that everywhere liberty is cherished - from Sweden to Soweto, from the streets of Manila to the docks of Manhattan - people are descendants of the Iroquois Confederation.

Two great men, Cadwallader Colden and Benjamin Franklin, instructed the colonists about the interesting concepts of democracy they saw in the Iroquois Confederation, and they continued to enlighten future American patriots about these sacred beliefs throughout their lifetimes. They got on together well and often until 1765

when Colden, then Lieutenant Governor of New York, was burned in effigy for enforcing the Stamp Act. Colden considered the solemn pledge he took, when he assumed his office and filed his oath to the Crown, as a sacred vow that he could not, under moral penalty, break. Toward the end of his life, as Britain became more and more difficult in dealing with the colonies, he tried to temper her demands. It has been said that if his advice had been taken, there might not have been a Revolutionary War.

E. B. O' Callaghan's Documentary History of New York State reads: "Posterity will not fail to accord justice to the character and memory of a man to whom this country is most deeply indebted for much of its science and for very many of its most important institutions. For the great variety and extent of his learning, his unwearied research, his intellectual talents, and the public sphere which he filled, Cadwallader Colden may justly be placed in a high rank among the distinguished men of his time."

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