“Make Your Minds Perfectly Easy”

Sagoyewatha and the Great Law of the Haudenosaunee

Of all the Native orators of the early nineteenth century, Sagoyewatha (pronounced Shay-go-ye-wátha or Sa-go-ye-wat-ha) was one of the most famous in Angloamerica. Better known as Red Jacket, for the red coat given to him by the British for his services as a message runner in the Revolution, Sagoyewatha’s defiant opposition to missionary presence on Seneca reservations and his resistance to land sales earned him the title the “last of the Senecas” in his obituary in the Niles Weekly Register (13 February 1830: 411). His speeches appeared in broadsides, pamphlets, and even in schoolbooks during the early national period (Densmore 69). Although these records are subject to a variety of editing and transcription problems, a large number were translated by experienced interpreters, and many evoke the figurative language and irony for which Sagoyewatha became known (Taylor 23). And in contrast to many eighteenth- and nineteenth-century publications where Natives took no part in the print circulation of their words, toward the end of his career, Sagoyewatha had his speeches published in newspapers and handbills as part of a deliberate publicity campaign that the Senecas undertook after the War of 1812 to protect their lands.

Given that the Senecas often intended to enter the Euroamerican sphere of printed discourse after the Revolution, this essay interprets the archive of Red Jacket speeches (as well as those of a few other politically active Senecas of the early national period) from an Indigenous cultural framework. It foregrounds Seneca traditions and thoughtways that have received only token acknowledgment from literary scholars over the past two hundred years, drawing on historical and anthropological work (both Native and non-Native authored) that has not yet moved significantly into English literature studies. Most of all, it looks to Red Jacket’s own words for the
principles to guide the interpretation of this literature. In short, this essay is a preliminary attempt to develop a literary criticism of Red Jacket based on the practices and stylistics of Haudenosaunee (People of the Longhouse, Five Nations, Six Nations, or Iroquois) culture.

The idea that the literary traditions of the Haudenosaunee could include a distinctive hermeneutics is controversial, and it is connected to an ongoing debate about the possibility—or existence—of Native American literary theory. Taking their cue from Simon Ortiz’s 1981 essay “Towards a National Indian Literature,” in their collection American Indian Literary Nationalism, Robert Warrior, Jace Weaver, and Craig Womack lament that Native American literary criticism has been too long out of the hands of Native American leadership, and they argue that the interpretation of literature by Indigenous people needs to be guided by Native authority more than it currently is (that is, by consulting Indian informants of the past and present, and by paying respect to the sovereignty of the First Nations). In agreement with Elizabeth Cook-Lynn, they complain that just at the moment when Native scholars are beginning to take a tenured foothold in the academy, a fashionable skepticism about the authenticity of Indian identity threatens to undermine the political future of Native America (Cook-Lynn 12–15). Although most Native American scholars would agree that the continuing marginalization of Native America demands remedy, not all feel that re-assertions of aesthetic identity would be much help: the year after American Indian Literary Nationalism appeared, the talented Ojibwe novelist and academic David Treuer published a manifesto asking if Native American literature “exists” at all (3–4). Louis Owens expressed similar doubts in the late 1990s with his collection of essays Mixedblood Messages. In contrast to those who believe that Native literature is a theoretically untenable concept, the co-authors of American Indian Literary Nationalism argue that Indigenous literary scholarship has only just begun in earnest and would benefit from more research about different Native nations (what Weaver calls “pluralist separatism”) as well as a frank recognition of the role of religion in shaping distinctive Native literatures and culture (Warrior’s thesis).

Probably the most influential recent work for re-imagining Native literary criticism on the national level is Craig Womack’s Red on Red: Native American Literary Separatism, which sought to define a Creek literary tradition from the 1920s to the present. Womack’s shift away from a pan-
Indian orientation to an analysis of specific national and aggregated communities of Native experience was paradigm-breaking and it opened up a breathtaking new world of opportunity: if Womack could write a book on just 70 years of the permutations of Creek literary identity, what of the earlier years? And what of the literary histories and theories of other Indian nations?

From these “Red on Red” interpretive frameworks, Sagoyewatha’s place in Longhouse tradition deserves close analysis. The operative questions become: What were the Senecas and Red Jacket trying to accomplish by publishing their council speeches? What of themselves did they contribute to North American political debate? What philosophies and social habits informed their words? These approaches are very different from those generally posed in scholarship about the “figure of the Indian” in the Euro-American imagination, because they are questions obliging us to learn more about Native culture and society rather than about what Euroamericans thought of them. Since the remarkable work of Roy Harvey Pearce in the early 1950s, academics have largely agreed that the picturesque spectacle of eloquent Indians contributed to the belief that they were soon to disappear (see Guthrie; Murray). As compelling as this argument is about Euroamericans, it tells us little about Native worldviews or their literary practices. Instead, the challenge facing the current generation of scholars studying Native literature is an exploration of Native poetics on their own terms (see also Sioui; White). Although the Mohawk political scientist Taiaiake Alfred is not a literary critic, his 1999 book, Peace Power Righteousness, is guided by principles of the Haudenosaunee Great Law in its critique of the current state of Native American studies, and it foregrounds the voices of a number of Indigenous scholars to define alternative political trajectories to Canadian assimilation. Red Jacket and the Senecas were making similar interventions in their own day, continuing a political tradition of their own that has come down to us an important literature in its own right. In this essay, I explore elements of Seneca diplomatic protocols, cosmology, and social structure to open discussion of Red Jacket’s literary career to its Native origins. Although I do not offer an exclusive definition of Longhouse literary tradition, I propose that ancient Haudenosaunee rituals and stories of the importance of acting with a clear and easy mind help us to appreciate Red Jacket’s literary achievements as a peacemaker rather than a firebrand.
TRADITION AND DISCOURSE

In his own day, Sagoyewatha was known among Angloamericans as a spokesman for Indian nationalism and a master of sarcastic rebuke. Sagoyewatha was fond of briefly impersonating the stereotypes expected of him by his opponents—the forest primitive; the creature of passion—and abruptly casting off those masks to reveal a politician of formidable awareness. This startling technique, a dramatic strategy of unveiling, was an important aesthetic reason he became famous in Angloamerica: it was an ironic and theatrical mode of disclosure that moved effectively from the council ground to the printed page. As I have argued elsewhere, Red Jacket's primary skill as a rhetorician was to understand the value systems of his audience and harness them for his purpose (“Cunning”; “Decolonization”). Fully aware of the rhetoric of the Revolutionary colonists, Sagoyewatha's lively declarations of Native independence even earned him the reputation of being emblematically “American” by a nationalist publication industry anxious to justify independence from Britain after the Revolution (New York Commercial Advertiser 30 Oct. 1811: 2; Spirit of Seventy Six 7 Dec. 1810: 4).

As valuable as it is to recognize Sagoyewatha's tactical manipulations of mainstream American values, it is also crucial to understand the ways in which Red Jacket was a traditional Seneca speaker, not an exception among his peers but a steward of the Great Law of Peace of the People of the Longhouse. Red Jacket’s early critics and biographers, greatly influenced by the prejudices of their day, focused on his most sensational performances and often neglected to discuss the principal reasons why he was appointed to the position of “speaker” in the first place—his skills exercising proper decorum and helping to achieve understanding.2

Describing Sagoyewatha's role as a traditional speaker is a tricky endeavor because Longhouse society endured major transformational crises between 1784 and 1815. The loss of 95 percent of their lands and the new politics of the reservation system, the changing roles of women, the rise of Christian conversion, and the spread of Handsome Lake's Good Message (the Gaiwiio)—these developments make it difficult to define Haudenosaunee tradition in simple terms. As Anthony Wallace has shown in his study of the legacy of Handsome Lake, The Death and Rebirth of the
Seneca, the “old ways” were invigorated with some startling novelties, some of which were borrowed from Anglos (3). Similarly, Red Jacket, who was Handsome Lake’s peer, was also a traditionalist who responded to the pressures of colonization with unorthodox tools.

Because of these terminological paradoxes, it may be useful to shift our understanding of tradition from a conservationist paradigm to an expressivist one. Folklorist Henry Glassie, greatly influenced by the discourse-centered approach of Dell Hymes and Richard Bauman, defines tradition as an artful and expressive process articulated through practice—what people say and do about the multiple (and sometimes competing) social systems that surround them. For example, modern Haudenosaunee elders have been recorded expressing their anxiety that their tradition is “going downhill” and losing its unique character to Anglo acculturation every day (Shimony 127), a verdict that suggests their traditions are slipping from their grasp. But the story does not end there: the expressions of their concern, and the corresponding innovations that they make to meet those exigencies, are exactly how continuities are maintained and traditions stay alive. In eschewing a declensionist position in his study of modern Yuchi ceremonial life, Jason Jackson has focused on the “artful” ways social life is organized and maintained (10). Drawing on the work of Clifford Geertz and others, Jackson emphasizes the actual, lived practices of representation in his notion of tradition. Yuchi ceremonies maintain their function, even though the English language is used more than Yuchi.

Similarly, an analysis of Sagoyewatha’s place in Seneca tradition needs to balance a respect for the habits of the past with his role as an expressive agent of those customs. For example, one of the most characteristic elements of formal Longhouse oratorical rituals is the repetitive rhetorical statement, this is the way of our forefathers. A chirographically based culture tends to find these repetitions unnecessary, but they constitute the deep structure of an oral culture (Ong, esp. 36–41). Although Annemarie Shimony did not self-consciously draw attention to the relationship between expressive discourse and tradition in her 1961 study of how the Six Nations at Grand River managed to conserve their culture during the first hundred years of colonization, she concluded that a repeated belief in the superiority of Indian life over Anglo life—a rhetoric—was the primary reason that they had preserved themselves for so long (290).
THE GREAT LAW AND DIPLOMACY

Sagoyewatha’s place in Longhouse literary tradition properly begins with the role of diplomacy in constituting the League of the Haudenosaunee, a league designed to bring about peace. In the national epic, the Deganawidah story, the nations that came to compose the Iroquois were locked in fierce wars among themselves and with their neighbors. About six hundred years ago (the date ranges between the 1100s to the mid-1400s), the author of the confederacy, the Huron Deganawidah, experienced a conversion to a new mind, a new way of living to bring an end to the conflict. For his insight, Deganawidah is also known as the Peacemaker. According to legend, the Hurons did not listen to him and he came south to Iroquoia. Because of a speech impediment, he recruited the woman Jikonshaseh and Hiawatha to speak for him to unite the five nations of the Iroquois (the Mohawks, Oneidas, Onondagas, Cayugas, and Senecas) into one body in which the chiefs would come to agreement—one mind—on the issues facing them all (Hale 18; Wallace, White 12, 19, 69). (The Tuscaroras became the sixth nation of the Longhouse in the early 1700s.) In this sense, the League itself originated in ideals of diplomacy, rather than in principles of democratic rule or imperial fiat. As the national epic makes clear, the League came from the union of Deganawidah’s ideas and Jikonshaseh and Hiawatha’s words, a synthesis of thought and compelling rhetoric. The role of ambassadors and speakers is central to Haudenosaunee culture.

As a speaker for the Haudenosaunee, Sagoyewatha was charged with upholding this tradition, one that sought to come to agreement rather than fight wars. Although it is tempting to conclude that the Six Nations were basically swindled from their lands by participating in treaty councils with Euroamerican powers before and after the Revolution, they saw negotiation as an intrinsic part of their culture—the essence of the Great Peace.

For example, Sagoyewatha began his public career at two important councils: the 1790 council at Tioga, and the 1791 council at Newtown (initially planned for Painted Post). At Tioga the Six Nations came to get justice for the murders of two men, as well as to protest being cheated, as they saw it, out of half the price of an enormous sale of their land, the Phelps-Gorham Purchase of 1788. These council minutes are important not just because they were successful (they were only partially so) but because the Six Nations spent so much time teaching the U.S. commissioner, Timothy
Pickering, how to conduct himself in accordance with their diplomatic traditions. In the extensive speech records of Tioga, Sagoyewatha constantly emphasizes the importance of Haudenosaunee custom to Pickering:

B.[rother] Now you will begin to hear a few words which y[ou]r. brothers have to say to you. ¶ B.[rother] You told us we must follow our anc[ien]t customs, in using belts. B.[rother] This was the mind of our forefathers. These were their rules & they told their sons to observe them as long as the world should last. Our for[father] used to tell us that when peace was made war might break out & directed us to use such belts as this to preserve friendship that it might never be broken. ¶ B.[rother] Our for[efather] used to tell us that the heads or chiefs us[e][to] have the most trouble to keep the minds of our nation quiet. ¶ B.[rother] our forefathers used to tell us, That we sh[oul]d meet with troubles, & we now find what they had said was come to pass. (Collected Speeches 4–5; Pickering 61: 71a–72)

Modern readers might wonder why the Six Nations spent so much time discussing prefatory matters, taking days to get to the substance of their complaints. Records of the Tioga council (as well as Newtown) are filled with sentences reiterating these sorts of phrases: “now you hear,” “now you see,” “now we are renewing the chain.” Later translations of Seneca speeches often silently delete these repetitions but they are integral for two reasons: First, the Senecas wanted to make sure that their unique rituals were understood by the outsiders with whom they were counseling. According to later Seneca testimony (by Red Jacket in particular), the Indians became satisfied that Pickering eventually learned that to negotiate properly Longhouse practices had to be followed—for example, using wampum, gifting practices, providing supplies, and waiting patiently to deliberate.

What Pickering did not fully grasp, however, was the larger picture of what the Haudenosaunee were trying to show him—that these rituals had been used successfully for several hundred years to keep the peace in situations as volatile as the friction between the United States and the Six Nations in the 1790s. The repetitions of the words have an illocutionary effect: the rituals that the Six Nations conducted with Pickering were not simply prefatory to peacemaking, they actually were the process of making peace. As is evident in Michael Foster’s ethnographic accounts of modern-day speechmaking in the Longhouse, the speaker constantly reminds the
audience of what is transpiring and what is occurring, so much so that it is often hard to distinguish when the speaker’s interpretation of the event ends and the practice begins (“Words”; From the Earth; see also Jackson).

Unlike their Anglo counterparts, the Haudenosaunee saw treaty agreements as requiring constant renewal and upkeep. The term they used was “brightening the chain of friendship.” The metaphor of the chain was initially developed between the Mohawks and the Dutch to symbolize the tether of the Dutch ships to the great Tree of Peace of the Longhouse. This metaphor was an agreement of rope (a ship’s dockline or hawser) and later an iron chain, which evolved with the English into the “covenant chain” of silver after 1677 (Jennings, History 116,160). Periodically the chain could become rusty. Settlers might trespass; traders might be murdered in arguments. Regular councils were expected to settle the conflicts that might arise. Participants in these councils had the opportunity to sound out the minds of each nation as to its general attitude toward peace (Merrell 272). These practices took time, and were seen by the Six Nations as the foundation on which agreements were made. By the time commissioner Pickering came to Canandaigua in 1794 (which resulted in a pleasing outcome for all nations involved), he had become accustomed to the fact that the rituals of brightening the chain were essential to success.

**CONDOLENCE AND THE CONTENDED MIND**

Another subtlety of Haudenosaunee tradition concerns the condolence portion of council proceedings. There is a sizable literature about Iroquois condolence councils themselves—councils devoted to mourning the loss of human life and the installation of new chiefs (see Fenton, esp. 136–202; Hale). William Fenton has described the condolence council as the “climax” or centerpiece of Iroquois political culture, an elaborate ritual of mutual assistance where the “clearminded” ease the troubles of the “mourners” (Fenton 135). Based on these practices, at the beginning of most political councils, the Haudenosaunee also give thanks to the Creator for allowing them to come together and recognize the hardships that attendees might have suffered on their way to council. Translated records generally pass over these condolence remarks, or signal them briefly by saying, “after the usual ceremonies &c., the speaker said . . .” Although it is unexceptional for our print-oriented culture to abbreviate council minutes in this
way, thinking of a council as an outcome rather than a human interaction misses the important function of the council format itself.

Condolence remarks are part of the origins of the League itself; they are Deganawidah’s psychological insight into the new mind. Recognizing that different chiefs coming to a council might have their judgment clouded by anger, jealousy, or mourning, or simply be grumpy from the hardships of travel, the condolence speaker (usually not the one charged with discussion of the main issue at hand) attempts to put people’s minds at peace with a moving introduction, sometimes called the “welcome at the wood’s edge” (Hale 117). John Mohawk has explained this protocol as intrinsic to the business of making peace (“Warriors”; “What Can”). In addition to thanking the Creator for the day, the speaker dries the eyes of the tears of attendees for the hardships they may have suffered; cleans their ears from the dust of travel that they may hear properly, and removes the obstructions from their throats that they may speak clearly. The short form of welcome generally includes reference to the eyes, ears, and throat; longer forms can include actions such as figuratively brushing off the benches, or combing the hair (Mohawk, “Warriors”; Fenton 136–202). Although the elements of the invocation remain largely the same, it is up to the speaker to make these “words of requickening” feel fresh and meaningful (Fenton 137).

One of the most detailed accounts of Sagoyewatha’s condolence speeches comes from Colonel Thomas Proctor’s 1791 attempt to travel west to negotiate peace with the Ohio Indians. Arriving at the Seneca council fire at Buffalo Creek with Cornplanter (Ki-en-twa-ke), one of the senior war chiefs of the Allegany Senecas, Proctor was welcomed with a moving speech by Red Jacket. After a detailed discussion of the hardships of travel, and a recognition of the importance of the message he was bringing, Sagoyewatha said:

You must now wipe away those tears occasioned by all the great dangers you have come through. And now we set you upon a seat where you can sit up straight,—and a seat where you are secure from the fears of your enemies;—where you can look round and see all your friends and brothers in peace. Besides, you have come along with your heart and your throat stopped up, to secure all that you had to say in your body. But now we open your heart with your brothers’ hands, and we run our fingers through to open your mouth, that you may speak clear, and
not be molested. Your ears also have been stopped by Honandaganius [President Washington] until you should see your brothers at this place, being spared by the Great Spirit to arrive safe. (Collected Speeches 17; Stone 49−50)

Sagoyewatha’s remarks are to put Proctor and Cornplanter at ease and to assure them that they sit securely in council where no one can hurt them. This appeal is both psychological and concrete, and it invites people to face each other with trust—a degree of intimacy underscored by Sagoyewatha’s language of caresses and assistance. War between the United States and the western Indian nations was on the horizon, and Sagoyewatha’s job was to recognize the importance of Proctor and Cornplanter’s task and to prepare their minds for the important work ahead of them. The condolence ceremony at the wood’s edge draws attention to the importance of a balanced mind—one guided by reason—in the business of making peace (Mohawk, “Warriors”; Alfred xix). It is a sign of the general ignorance of the meaning behind Native protocols that the printers of the American State Papers did not include this introduction in their reprint of Proctor’s journal.

The spirit of goodwill reflected in the condolence portion of speeches reflects the larger meaning of the Great Law—the new mind—which is that people need to treat each other, even their enemies, with kindness and humanity. In his modern introduction to the White Roots of Peace, League chief Tadodaho, Leon Shenandoah, emphasized that chiefs face the difficult task of being peacemakers, not warlords. Shenandoah wrote that leaders need to have “seven layers of skin” so that their minds do not get deterred from the “interest of peace and the well-being of everyone” (Wallace, White 15). Shenandoah’s teaching comes from the Great Law itself, which states that chiefs in council must have thick skin, and hearts full of peace and good will. They must be patient in their duties; firm but tender; their words and actions marked by calm deliberation, not anger or fury. They should always seek peace at least three times (Kaianerekowa 13: 43).

Such decorum is evident in many of Sagoyewatha’s early speeches, most notably in his reply to Rev. Jacob Cram in 1805, who had requested that the Senecas accept a missionary at their Buffalo Creek reservation. Although Christopher Densmore has pointed out significant problems with the transmission history of this speech—it was first published four years after it was
spoken, and it was more likely delivered in November 1805 rather than during the summer (64–69)—Sagoyewatha was aware of what was published about him and he never disclaimed the translation." In this widely published speech, Red Jacket politely argued that the Senecas did not want a missionary because their own religion served them well. Leaving open the possibility that their minds might change in the future, he asked to shake hands with Cram and bid him good will on his departure. According to the anonymous narrator, Cram refused, telling the Senecas that “there was no fellowship between the religion of God and the works of the devil.” When the Indians heard his words, “they smiled, and retired in a peaceable manner” (Collected Speeches 143; “Indian” 224).

In other speeches to missionaries, such as to the Rev. Elkanah Holmes in 1800 and 1803, Red Jacket was extraordinarily kind, and he tried not to give offense or to hurt the minister’s feelings. In declining the missionary’s offer in 1800, he told Holmes that the Senecas were convinced that he meant well, and he repeatedly asked that Holmes and the New York Missionary Society “make their minds perfectly easy” despite their lack of success (Collected Speeches 104; “Letter” 70, 71). In 1803, he was able to tell Holmes that the Senecas were willing to let the missionaries build a church-school for their young, even though not all the chiefs at Buffalo Creek were willing to accept Christian teachings (Collected Speeches 130–32; Covell 28–34). These diplomatic responses on controversial issues—attempts to make people’s “minds perfectly easy”—explicitly show Red Jacket working from the new mind of the Great Law.

Noticeably absent in Sagoyewatha’s speeches to Holmes were explanations of the rise of Handsome Lake’s teachings, which were the principal reasons why the Senecas resisted the missionary’s offers. Holmes would have been aware of the controversy; by 1803 other visitors to Buffalo Creek remarked on the rise of the prophet’s influence (New York Missionary Magazine June 1803: 203). Although Handsome Lake had adopted the advocacy of temperance, agriculture, and marriage codes from the Quakers at Allegany, he also fiercely supported the preservation of many Haudenosaunee customs in contrast to Christian assimilation. Sagoyewatha’s disinclination to talk about Handsome Lake, whose teaching he himself chose to follow, was probably not to give offense to Holmes. Instead, he told Holmes only that the chiefs were divided.

Similar acts of Sagoyewatha’s diplomacy appear in William Johnston’s
journal of his trip to the Glaize in 1792 (at the fork of the Auglaize and Maumee rivers in Ohio), where he narrates his surprise at how successfully Sagoyewatha brought a hostile audience over to his side. The difficult political context of the trip was an attempt by the Six Nations to convince the western Indians to make peace with the United States. In concert with several other nations, the Shawnees, Miamis, Wyandots, and Delawares living in the Ohio area were furious that the Six Nations, who they nominally recognized as their “elder brothers” from previous Indian wars, were coming as pawns of the United States, a government that claimed to be making peace at the same time it was sending troops up the rivers into Ohio. During the first days of the council, the Six Nations met with Delaware Captain Pipe and 40 of his nation to mourn the recent murder of a Delaware by some warriors of the Six Nations in western Pennsylvania. Red Jacket spoke for the Haudenosaunee and gave a detailed account of the aboriginal history of the continent, reviewing the ancient friendship of the Delawares and the Longhouse (probably referring to their allied war against the Allegewi in Ohio (Hale 10–14)). Then he turned to the arrival of the colonists, and discussed the history of conflict between the French and the British through the Seven Years’ War, as well as the “late” circumstances concerning the Americans. Referring to the lack of treaty provisions for Indian allies of the British at the close of the Revolution, he said that the King of England had abandoned them to make peace as well as they could. The “disagreeable” result was that some young warriors had been recruited by the Americans. He asked the Delawares to “blot out” from their minds these unfortunate circumstances and to think of their older ties to the Six Nations. Johnston, who was a British agent and a fluent translator of Seneca, knew very well how angry the Ohio Indians were, and he indicated astonishment in his journal that Red Jacket’s speech won them over: “[T]he Delawares in a Body, rose up, shook hands, and saluted them [the Six Nations], in a very friendly manner!!!” The next day the Delawares said that they were “happy and thankful” to recall the “intimacy and connection that once subsisted between them,” and that they hoped that this pleasing memory would also guide their Uncles, the Six Nations, in the future (Johnston n.p.). (Unfortunately, several days later in council with the Shawnees and Miamis, Sagoyewatha was not as successful convincing them of the Six Nations’ wisdom.)

As Sagoyewatha’s early career shows, one of the most admirable elements of Seneca diplomatic traditions was to give a speech entirely ad-
dressed to maintaining peaceable relations in spite of the tensions that might have surrounded the diplomats. The shorthand way of expressing this mode of address is to keep straight, from the metaphor of walking a straight path, where a speaker does not mingle pledges of friendship with barbs and threats. In councils with Timothy Pickering in the early 1790s, the Six Nations occasionally had to remind the Americans how to speak properly. At Newtown in 1791, Red Jacket interrupted the proceedings to tell commissioner Pickering:

When you are talking to us of friendship and peace, you bring in past misfortunes; and your discourse is intermixed with friendship and trouble. When we speak to you, we speak of friendship unmixed.—You must excuse what we are going to repeat.—Now I also must look back to some things that are past. In ancient times, when we were called to a treaty of peace, our discourse was of nothing but peace. We did not repeat misfortunes, when brightening the chain: because we put our minds of peace & friendship all in a heap. Now this was in old times. We not only made the chain of friendship very bright; but we locked arms, and took fast hold of each other's hands, and left the token of friendship.—Now as for this matter, you ought to know how your end of the chain of friendship should be brightened. (Collected Speeches 26; Pickering 61:105–6)

In a lesson also appropriate for healing domestic strife, Sagoyewatha reminded Pickering that making peace requires declarations that mean one thing—peace—and mixing in language of blame or criticism simply fouls the process.Exercising this mode is speech in the heat of disagreement is difficult because it requires finding expressions of good will that the speaking parties are fully able to stand behind despite the anger they may feel. Pickering sometimes had problems conforming to Haudenosaunee expectations; at the Treaty of Canandaigua several years later, Red Jacket had to cry out "keep straight" to stop Pickering from making similar mistakes (Collected Speeches 65; Savery 134). Although John Heckewelder wrote that the Six Nations enjoyed wit in their diplomacy, of messages artfully packaged (138–42), it would be a mistake to confuse the judicious declaration of peace with doubletalk.

The Haudenosaunee urge to speak with one mind is reflected in the Earthgrasper creation stories of Skyholder and Flint, the two grandchil-
dren of Skywoman, who fell from the other world and landed on a turtle’s back. In John Napoleon Hewitt’s modern version, taken from the dictation of Chief John Gibson, the two grandchildren of Skywoman had very different mental tendencies. Skyholder, the maker of the first man and woman, was peaceful and desired all his creations to have contented minds. Flint, his jealous brother, was constantly making mischief and created animals with fierce tempers (Mohawk, Iroquois 52). Flint’s grandmother sided with him against Skyholder and together they acted out their malicious feelings. In Haudenosaunee cosmology, these two kinds of minds, one of content and the other of turmoil, are illustrated in the two paths in the Milky Way (71; 75). When the people of the earth began to forget the rituals that Skyholder taught them, violence and dissension began to break out (77). The repetition of pairings in the Earthgrasper stories suggest that the conflicts between peaceable and distempered mental states are part of the human condition, but they also clearly show that Flint and his grandmother’s twisted acts of love and aggression are not the path of peace. They claim to love Skyholder but constantly plot against him.

Unfortunately, Red Jacket himself has been widely smeared in historical literature as a double-dealing schemer, but there is scant evidence to support the claim. The most influential accusation against him was made in the early 1840s by Thomas Morris, a land speculator, who wrote that Red Jacket publicly opposed the land sale of the Treaty of Big Tree (1797), but privately came to Morris’s tent at night to say that he actually supported the sale. In his personal memoir, Morris had every reason to denigrate Red Jacket’s performance at the treaty, which embarrassed Morris several times, but Morris’s allegations have been repeated without question to the present day, despite the fact that Morris’s own council records contradict his later claims.8 Sagoyewatha had a tendency to speak with irony and sarcasm, but one of the remarkable aspects of Red Jacket’s speeches at Big Tree (as elsewhere) is its consistency of argument.

ETIQUETTE AND REBUKE

Even though expressions of anger can be found in Iroquois oratorical traditions, they are not part of the Great Law. One of the most famous specimens of eighteenth-century Six Nations’ oratory is Canassatego’s rebuke of the Delawares in Philadelphia in 1742. Angry that the Delawares
had made claims to lands that they had already sold, Canassatego dismissively reminded them that the Six Nations had made them into women:

“You ought to be taken by the Hair of the Head and shaked severely, til you recover your senses and become sober [...] how came you to take upon you to sell Land at all: We conquered you; we made Women of you; you know you are Women, and can no more sell Land than Women” (The Treaty 21). The speech is probably the historical event that inspired the “petticoat” repartee between the Iroquois and the Delaware in The Last of the Mohicans, but it contains peculiarities that James Fenimore Cooper was unaware of when he drafted the Indian dialogues of his novel. First, Canassatego was angry at the Delawares for breaking the chain of friendship, not upholding it, and his outrage was based on desecration of the Great Law. Although they are rare, there are other records of this type of strong language being used by Longhouse speakers, irate that covenants of peace had been broken (Colden 43–47). The Six Nations also engaged in gendered taunting during the eighteenth century with both their southern enemies the Catawbas and their ostensible allies the Delawares (see Shoemaker). But even though Canassatego’s anger may have been justified—his entire speech is a rebuke, without mixture of blame and praise—his breach of council decorum is not representative of Haudenosaunee custom. And furthermore, his comment that the women cannot sell land would have struck his fellow chiefs as bizarre: as he well knew, Haudenosaunee women are the people who own the land—without their consent the sachems could not sell an inch during this period (see also Wallace, King 37). By making such an absurd claim, it seems Canassatego had become so angry that he wanted to heap a private rhetorical insult on another male chief, because he certainly was not giving an accurate description of Haudenosaunee society. Nonetheless, because of its dramatic content, Canassatego’s inflammatory speech is sometimes taken as representative of Iroquois diplomacy when it should really be understood as a departure from a council tradition that otherwise emphasizes deliberation and restraint.

In 1846, when Henry Schoolcraft published his Notes on the Iroquois, he printed a similar speech allegedly given by Sagoyewatha on the occasion of a dispute over lighting the council fire:

“Have the Quatoghis [Hurons] forgotten themselves? Or do they suppose we have forgotten them? Who gave you the right in the west or...
east, to light the general council fire? You must have fallen asleep, and
dreamt that the Six Nations were dead! Who permitted you to escape
from the lower country? Had you any heart left to speak a word for
yourselves? Remember how you hung on by the bushes. You had not
even a place to land on. You had not yet done p[issin]g for fear of the
Konoshioni [Longhouse]. High calm, indeed, for a tribe who had to run
away from the Kadarakwa [Cataracqui, i.e., Fort Frontenac]. “As for you
my nephews, he continued, turning to the Lenapees, or Delawares, it is
fit you should let another light your fire. Before Miquon [William Penn]
came, we had put out your fire and poured water on it; it would not
burn. Could you hunt or plant without our leave? Could you sell a foot
of land? Did not the voice of the Long House cry, go, and you went? Had
you any power at all? Fit act indeed for you to give in to our wandering
brothers—you, from whom we took the war-club and put on petticoats.
(Collected Speeches 159–60; Schoolcraft 423–24)

The final comment about petticoats suggests that Cooper's Leatherstocking
fantasies may have supplied the dressing to this account, if indeed it were
based on an actual event, but it is hard to imagine what sort of statecraft
Red Jacket could expect to transact after this outburst. Even in comparison
to several angry speeches he made in the1820s, when Red Jacket voiced his
outrage at the corruption of his former friend and Indian agent Jasper Par-
rish, Schoolcraft’s fragment seems like cartoon Indian speech.

Nonetheless, the fragment may be based on transcripts of an actual pan-
Indian council held at upper Sandusky in 1816. Although he used strong
language, Sagoyewatha’s mission was to explain the importance of keeping
peace with the United States after the War of 1812, should the British and
Americans start yet another war. Speaking to the Shawnees, he told them
that even though they were newcomers to their lands, they had produced
great mischief:

You must be sensible that you are foreigners. A number of years since
you came to this country, and were taken under the protection of our
brethren the Wyandots, who gave you a pleasant seat, where you enjoyed
delightful country, and shared in common with them the game of the
forest. These proceedings came to the knowledge of the Six Nations.
You had not resided here long before you became uneasy, and you have
been first to produce disturbances, and been forward to effect the sale
of lands which did not belong to your nation. You have been the authors of other difficulties between the red and white people. You have been forward in the late difficulties, by listening to the voice from across the waters [the British]. Where is now your head sachem? Where a part of your people? They lent an ear to the red-coats, and are now in exile beyond the waters.9 We admonish you to recall them,—unite them with their brethren,—form a band of union with the Wyandots. Settled on the seats of the Wyandots, your friends, listen to their counsel. It will be good. Listen also to the counsels of the Six Nations, your elder brethren. Do not attempt to transact important business, involving the rights of others, unless at the great council fire, and with the approbation of the Wyandots. (Collected Speeches 187; Stone 286–87)

Rather than employ fury and insults to make his point (as Canassatego had), Sagoyewatha turns to history to convince the Shawnees of their error. In many of his speeches, such as his reply to Cram in 1805 or his speech to the Delawares in 1792, Sagoyewatha told historical narratives that clearly explained the reasons for the Six Nations’ position (see Konkle). For example, prior to the War of 1812, Red Jacket advocated neutrality and unity at a large pan-Indian council at Brownstown (Detroit). Lamenting the consequences of fragmented Indian leadership, he dramatized their steady westward retreat by moving his hand across the handle of his tomahawk. At the end of his narrative, his hand came to the butt of his weapon, and he let it drop into the dirt. Facing the Shawnees at Sandusky for the first time since that speech, Sagoyawatha speaks strong words to them but carefully explains his reasons. In this speech to the Shawnees, the Haudenosaunee hoped to establish a central council fire where the Great Lakes Indian nations could unite on a common strategy to deal with the Anglos. They were skeptical about the yield of military alliances with the British in the future, and they were also attempting to strengthen Indian confederation to resist American expansion onto their lands. Unfortunately, because of their proximity to the planned Erie Canal, the Six Nations themselves were among the first on the federal government’s list to be removed westward.

FAMILY, CLAN, AND NATION

Aware that they did not have a strong military hand to play with the United States (which partially explains their exasperation with the Shaw-
nees), the Six Nations preferred to utilize the obligations of federal trust owed to them by the United States. Knowing that the president claimed them as his children—family terminology the United States adopted from the Eastern Woodland Native vocabulary—the Six Nations demanded that the United States fulfill its promises. When a federal commissioner accompanied the Ogden Land Company in its bid to buy out most of the Seneca reservations in 1819, the Senecas solidly rejected the offer. Responding to the Ogden company’s assertion that it already owned their lands through the “right of pre-emption,” Red Jacket asked why the United States had forgotten the treaty agreements it had made 30 years earlier. He told the federal commissioner that the United States guaranteed the Senecas possession of their reservations in 1794. Appealing to national honor, Red Jacket asked how the young republic could allow the Ogden company to make such claims:

Formerly we called the British as brothers. Now we call the President our Father. Probably among you are gentlemen with families of children. We consider ourselves the children of the President. What then would be your feelings, were you told, your children were to be cast on a naked rock, there to protect themselves. (Collected Speeches 21.4; “Speech” frame 1474)

Rather than threatening to fight, Red Jacket asked the federal representatives to consider the Indians as fellow humans. Other Seneca chiefs of Red Jacket’s era also used this language effectively. Speaking in Philadelphia in 1790, Cornplanter memorably asked George Washington if the United States was bent on destroying his people: “Father, you have said that we are in your hand, and that, by closing it, you could crush us to nothing. Are you determined to crush us? If you are, tell us so, that those of our nation who have become your children, and have determined to die so, may know what to do” (American 1:141). Speaking to United States politicians, both Cornplanter and Red Jacket were probably conscious that EuroAmericans responded favorably to domestic entreaty, and these passages show them using pathetic appeal (in the oratorical sense) to gain the sympathy of their audiences.10

As valuable as it is to recognize these orators adapting the sentimental values of their opponents to suit their purposes, pursuing strictly Eurocentric ideas about parenting has had the unfortunate consequence of ob-
scuring crucial elements of Native politics where family relations merge with political responsibility in ways that do not square with the hierarchical disciplinary paradigms of Angloamerica. When Red Jacket speaks of parental obligations, he is not simply referring to the nostalgic ideals of nineteenth-century homelife, but is also invoking the language of the complementary Longhouse matrilineal family and clan relationships that structure the polity of the Six Nations.

Longhouse social organization is very complex (see Morgan and Fenton), but it centers on a principle of complementary gesture derived from the organization of families into matrilineal clans. In her dissertation on the evolution of the clans since the early nineteenth century, Deborah Doxtator argues that Longhouse society is based on the reciprocal activities of the men's world of the forest and the women's world of the clearing. One is not above the other; they are different expressions of power. She sees this principle of spatial complementarity operating on multiple levels: the forest and the clearing; men and women; youngers and elders; the moieties of the clans; and the complementary national brotherhoods of the Six Nations. For example, in public council and social events, people perform duties according to their maternal connections to their clan. Among the Senecas, the Wolf, Bear, Beaver, and Turtle clans have a mirrored relation to the Deer, Snipe, Heron, and Hawk (Shimony 119). When mourning a death, the complementary clan, or moiety, comes forward to ease the afflicted minds of the clan that has suffered the loss. The clans have hereditarily appointed sachems, 50 of whom form the central Council Fire of the Longhouse, whose organization reflects the moiety relationships of the clans, with the Mohawks, Senecas, and Onondagas recognized as elder brothers, and the Oneidas, Cayugas, and Tuscaroras as younger brothers. Clan affiliations cut across national affiliations, so that a Wolf Seneca (Sagoyewatha's clan) has kinship with a Wolf Mohawk.

The result of these interconnections between family, space, and government is an elaborate political and social etiquette that involves people, in Vine Deloria's words, in the positive practices of "doing things" for each other (qtd. in Alfred 68), rather than the negative practices of prohibition and discipline. These ritualistic behaviors echo throughout family, clan, and political practices. When Sagoyewatha reminds the president of his family obligations to the Six Nations, he is invoking a network of active reciprocal responsibility to others.
In contrast to Euroamerican norms, Longhouse parents do not tell their children what to do. Parents in Haudenosaunee life, like chiefs, do not dictate behavior; rather, it is elders’ ability to provide, protect, and to give counsel that gives them power. In Red Jacket’s day, Haudenosaunee parents did not spank or berate their children. This tradition had existed many years. In the words of an anonymous Jesuit observer of the Senecas in 1657, “There is nothing for which these peoples have a greater horror than restraint. The very children cannot endure it, and live as they please in the houses of their parents, without fear of reprimand or chastisement” (Thwaites 43: 271; see also Wallace, Rebirth 35–38). Similarly, Euroamerican observers were often astonished that Haudenosaunee chiefs could not demand compliance like European rulers. Rather, chiefs lead through what they can provide, not what they can take away.

These vastly differing ideals of leadership between the Natives and Euroamericans appear in Sagoyewatha’s January 1818 speech addressed to the president and the secretary of war. In his closing remarks, Sagoyewatha declared his assurance that the president would listen to them:

\[ \text{\textit{Our Father}} \]

We will not be deceived; our words will find his heart. He will receive them.—They are the words of truth and sobriety. We ask nothing but wherein we have been mistaken, we may be better informed—wherein we may have been wronged, we may be righted—wherein we may be in danger we may be protected, and that our white brothers may know our fixed purpose of living and dying on our present seats. (Collected Speeches 195; “Extract”)

In this sophisticated peroration, Sagoyewatha entreats the president to listen to them and humbly asks for assistance if the Senecas have misunderstood their title to their own lands. He requests aid as if he were asking for help from a clear-minded parent. At the same time Red Jacket makes this supplication, however, he does not give the president the authority to tell them what to do in their affairs. He declares his own nation’s intention “of living and dying on our present seats.”

At the discretion of Jabez Hyde, a Christian schoolteacher at Buffalo Creek, Sagoyewatha’s appeal to the president was published in the Niagara Patriot, along with others that reviewed the previous year’s dialogue.
with the government (13, 20, 27 October and 30 November 1818). Although Hyde wrote that the Senecas initially were not informed of his intention to publish their speeches, they quickly adopted this public relations tool to augment the annual petitions (called memorials) that they had already been sending to the state and federal legislatures since 1816. As the circumstances and purposes of council speaking began to be aimed toward the press, Red Jacket’s speeches often became more strident, particularly when his own character was assailed. The Pagan/Christian schism between Senecas, which began around 1818, brought out some of Red Jacket’s most acrimonious language. Criticizing Jasper Parrish’s support of missionaries in 1823, Sagoyewatha bluntly told the president: “[W]e want nothing to do with black coats but threads” (Collected Speeches 235; “Six Nations” 2).

Some of this language obviously reflects the desperate circumstances the Senecas faced. Despite Sagoyewatha’s protests, the Christian Senecas were finally coerced into selling their lands to the Ogden company at a fraudulent council in 1826, a sale he opposed until his death in 1830, even though he and all the other dissenting chiefs signed the treaty out of traditional respect for unanimity. In the final weeks of his life, however, Red Jacket attempted to heal the religious breach that had occurred, and was sitting at a peace council when he was fatally stricken with cholera (Stone 392). Although he had become a celebrated opponent of Christianity, he had returned to the business of making peace in the spirit of the Great Law.

One of the most important yields of recognizing Sagoyewatha’s connection to longstanding cultural traditions of the Haudenosaunee is to move early Native oratory—and our sense of early Native literature in general—away from the Euroamerican rhetorical frameworks from which they have usually been interpreted. If Jeremiah, Demosthenes, and Cato have shaped the practices and telos of oratory for Euroamerican society, Deganawidah marks the beginning of a Haudenosaunee literary tradition with a significantly different philosophy and technique—speech gauged toward maintaining a contented mind, with elaborate protocols of etiquette and straight speech, and respect for the humanity of others. Although the hermetic segregation of Euroamerican and Native literary traditions is never entirely possible, given the consequences of intercultural trade, the continuing recovery of Indigenous thought promises to remake our sense of early Ameri-
can literature. By returning to figures like Sagoyewatha—whose words made a deep impression on generations of American readers—perhaps we can begin to thank the Longhouse for an education under its rafters.

NOTES

1. For excellent backgrounds on Sagoyewatha's principal interpreters, Jasper Parrish and Horatio Jones, see Parrish; Harris; Allen; Hauptman.

2. Because he was not a hereditary sachem, Sagoyewatha earned his chieftainship as a speaker for the elder women, and also as a speaker for the sachems. In the early decades of his career, he opened councils with condolence speeches and presented the decisions of the chiefs for whom he spoke. During the last two decades of his life, he developed a position of great influence in his own right even though most of his speeches in this later period still reflected the collective decisions of the chiefs with whom he counseled.

3. See Chafe for a helpful discussion of low, middle, and high genres of contemporary Seneca public speaking styles. Chafe cites the preaching of the Gaiwiio (Handsome Lake's "Good Message") as one of the few situations where high style is currently heard today.

4. The Haudenosaunee also have a rich tradition of boasting their military exploits, but those traditions are not part of the Great Law. Seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Longhouse rhetoric about its subjugation of other Indian nations is itself a controversial topic which has intrigued some of the principal Iroquoianists of recent decades. See Jennings, Ambiguous; Fenton. For reference to the Iroquois "empire" as rhetoric, see Richter 47, 277. Indeed, the disjunction between Longhouse rhetoric about their traditions and the evidence of historical practices to the contrary is the greatest question Fenton himself wrestled with at the end of his career (302–6; 310; 324; 349; 356; 400; esp. 493; 531–32; 576; 701–23; esp. 733).

5. With his characteristic good humor, John Mohawk once told me the purpose of The Great Law was to "treat other people as if they were human beings." See also Mohawk, "Warriors," par. 20. I have also been greatly influenced in my thinking by Georges Sioui's chapter "The Amerindian Idea of Being Human" in For an Amerindian Autohistory.

6. In an interesting variant version of the speech I discovered after publishing The Collected Speeches of Sagoyewatha, travel writer Fortescue Cuming in 1810, reprinted Red Jacket's speech to Cram with a paragraph he claims was omitted in the original newspaper versions published in 1809: "Brother, You say you have not come to get our land or our money, but to enlighten our minds. I will now tell you that I have been at your meetings and saw you collecting money from the meeting. I cannot tell what this money was intended for, but suppose it was for your minister, and if we should conform to your way of thinking, perhaps you may want some from us" (435). Cuming does not state who his informant was.
7. I am grateful to Alan Taylor for pointing out the proper spelling of Johnston's last name (Taylor 316).
8. Stone's 1841 biography was the first to print Morris's claims (161–62), which Morris himself later drafted in his 1844 manuscript memoir held at the New York Historical Society. Almost every study of Sagoyewatha repeats them, even Densmore (53) and Taylor (251), although Densmore is aware of Morris's motives. For a skeptical view of Morris, see Ganter, "Cunning."
9. Tecumseh was dead, and the Prophet Tenskwatawa had fled across the Great Lakes to Canada.
10. Following Thomas Jefferson's popularization of Cayuga chief Logán's "lament" in 1784, traffic in sentimental fragments of Native expression was, as David Murray and others have noted, one of the ways by which the political claims of Native America were blunted. For a remarkable interpretation of the way Jefferson celebrated the eloquence of Logán as a means of distracting attention from the dubious ethics of land acquisition from the Indians, see Wallace, Jefferson and the Indians, 2–13.
11. There are a few forms of child discipline used by the Haudenosaunee and the eastern woodland Indians in general: parents might draw some water into their mouths and squirt it with their lips in the face of a misbehaving infant (which is still sometimes done today), dunk it in cold water, or smear a bitter herb on its lips. But in general, most Euroamerican observers were puzzled that children could learn to be well behaved without physical punishment or verbal reprimand.

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