

# basic call to consciousness

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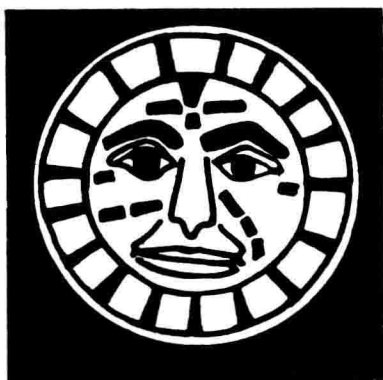
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# **basic call to consciousness**

Edited by


AKWESASNE NOTES



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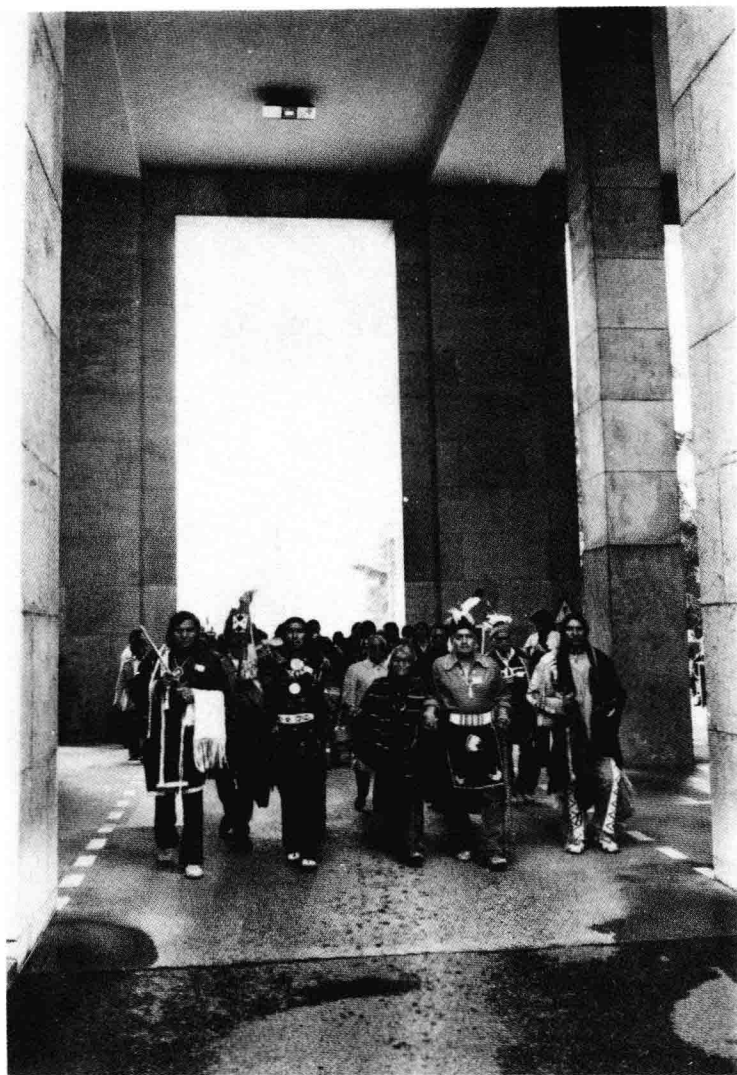
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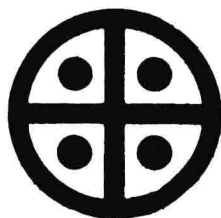
AKWESASNE NOTES PHOTO: CLAUS BIEGERT

*Native delegates entering the United Nations Headquarters in Geneva. In the words of one delegate: "We may seem small yet — but we represent the aspirations of millions and millions of people — small nations which will be recognized."*



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***THE HAU DE NO SAU NEE:  
A NATION SINCE TIME IMMEMORIAL***



The Haudenosaunee, more commonly known as the Iroquois Confederacy, are an ancient people of North America. Our tradition states that our people originate in the northeastern woodlands of North America. There are no stories within that tradition concerning migration across frozen lands to the area we occupy. We have been and continue to be the original inhabitants of these lands.

Our existence in these lands has not been one of absolute peace and tranquility. We have had to work hard to develop the civilization we enjoy. There was a time when our lands were torn by conflict and death. There were times when certain individuals attempted to establish themselves as the rulers of the people through exploitation and repression.

We emerged from those times to establish a strong democratic and spiritual Way of Life. The confederate state of the Haudenosaunee became the embodiment of democratic principles which continue to guide our peoples today. The Haudenosaunee became the first "United Nations" established on a firm foundation of peace, harmony and respect.

Within the Haudenosaunee, all member nations are equal, regardless of size. Within their national territories the member nations are autonomous, but all adhere to the central principles of democracy that we agreed to at the formation of the Confederacy.

We have male and female leaders who are chosen by their respective clans. The decision of the people concerning the choice of leaders, must be unanimous. The leaders must possess both political and spiritual integrity. They are chosen for life, although they may be removed if they commit crimes or if they act against the will of the people.



The national councils of chiefs do not govern the people, but act as representatives of their clans in a process which coordinates the wishes of the people. They also act as judiciary in serious disputes that people cannot resolve among themselves.

The confederated Council of Chiefs, or Grand Council, acts as the coordinating body of the will and determinations of the member nations. The Grand Council also has responsibility of conducting affairs with other states and nations.

All of this political activity is set in the roots of an ancient tradition of the spirituality of our peoples. This cosmology places the Haudenosaunee in a balanced familiar relationship with the Universe and the Earth. In our languages, the Earth is our Mother Earth, the sun our Eldest Brother, the moon our Grandmother, and so on. It is the belief of our people that all elements of the Natural World were created for the benefit of all living things and that we, as humans, are one of the weakest of the whole Creation, since we are totally dependent on the whole Creation for our survival.

This philosophy taught us to treat the Natural World with great care. Our institutions, practices and technologies were developed with a careful eye to their potential for disturbing the delicate balance we lived in.

European peoples first made contact with Haudenosaunee peoples early during the Seventeenth Century. The Dutch occupation of the Hudson River and the English colonies on the Connecticut River and in Rhode Island resulted in conflicts which rapidly escalated to warfare and which resulted in massacres of the Algonkian-speaking peoples in those areas.

The European invasion of the North American Continent brought radical and permanent changes in the nature and objectives of warfare. The very first contact between Europeans and people of the Haudenosaunee resulted in the deaths of a number of Mohawk people at the hands of a contingent under the command of Samuel de Champlain.

Within three decades our people were embroiled in a life-and-death struggle which was triggered by conflicts between two imperialist powers over trade in furs and agricultural settler colonies.

During this period of colonial warfare, our country received a massive influx of refugees fleeing from the invaders. At the same time, our lands were invaded on several occasions by European armies which carried out "burnt earth" policies against our people with an intensity which had never been seen in our part of the world. The Haudenosaunee survived those attacks, and we consummated numerous international treaties of peace and friendship with Holland, England and France.

By the time of the American Revolution, the people of the Haudenosaunee had experienced over one hundred fifty years of intermittent warfare. The conclusion of the Revolution brought into existence the world's first settler state, and our struggle for survival entered a new phase.

In 1784, our government negotiated a treaty of peace and friendship with the newly formed United States. Almost immediately, we were faced with the establishment of illegal American settlements within the lands defined in the treaty. Scattered skirmishes and conflicts were occurring throughout our lands.

At about this time, the State of New York was attempting to negotiate its own treaties with our peoples. The settlers knew that our governing councils would never relinquish lands, or allow their settlements. In response, New York began the practice of negotiating with any native person who might grant them the concessions, especially the land concessions, they wished. Dozens of state treaties were signed by people who were under the influence of alcohol at the time and who often represented no one. A number of treaties were made which bear signatures which are outright forgeries.

All of this was occurring at a time when the years of warfare and disease had taken a heavy toll within our communities.

Many people's spirit had been broken and they had taken to drinking or had sunken into states of apathy. All of this was to the advantage of unscrupulous settlers.

From 1784 to 1838 most of the Haudenosaunee territory was taken under fraudulent treaty or treaties obtained through coercion. Many of our people fled to lands promised them by the British Crown, lands which are now within the area shown on European maps as Canada. A number of our people were coerced, cajoled and otherwise caused to remove to lands in Oklahoma and Kansas, and to Wisconsin.

It was during this time that a Chief of the Confederacy named Handsome Lake began to articulate a vision of liberation and resistance. His words became the guiding force that saved our peoples from complete cultural destruction during a period which saw practically complete cultural destruction among Native people throughout the northeastern North America. His teachings continue to act as a guide for our people in the work we must carry on to insure our survival as a distinct people of the world. His vision made clear the nature of the enemy, for he explained the way in which the colonizers would use their institutions and laws, not only to gain our lands, but also our minds and our self-esteem.

Throughout the 1800's and 1900's, every aspect of this vision has proven true. The initial assaults against our culture were carried out by missionaries and "educators." The historical record provides ample proof that there was a deliberate effort during this period to destroy our laws and customs and our spiritual beliefs, and a concerted effort to destroy our languages.

The ultimate purpose of that strategy became clear as both the United States and the Canadian governments passed laws and adopted policies which were intended to assimilate our people and our remaining territories into those countries.

In 1892, New York State forcibly placed in illegal government in the Mohawk territory of Akwesasne, and passed laws restricting the traditional governments in our territories. Canada acted with the same strategy at about the same time.

In 1923, one of our leaders, a Cayuga Chief named Deskaheh, attempted to take our complaints to the League of Nations, in Geneva, Switzerland. He was unsuccessful, although he did receive the support of many sympathetic Swiss people. He died in exile when the Canadian government refused to allow him to return to his homeland.

The next year, both the U.S. and Canada passed citizenship laws which ostensibly imposed citizenship upon Indigenous peoples. The Haudenosaunee notified both countries that we would not accept citizenship, and that we would remain citizens of our own country. Canada responded by sending a military contingent to the Grand River Country and erecting a military barracks there, occupying the territory and forcibly expelling the Traditional government.

In 1934, the United States passed the Indian Reorganization Act (IRA) which was designed to destroy the traditional governments and to place Native peoples under the supervision of the Secretary of the Department of the Interior.

In two separate bills passed in 1948 and 1950, the United States Congress granted New York State civil and criminal jurisdiction over the Haudenosaunee territories.

During the early 1950's the Haudenosaunee lost thousands of acres of land to dams, water reservoirs, highways, electrical and gas lines, and the St. Lawrence Seaway.

None of these events have occurred without resistance from our peoples. In all of our territories there have been confrontations with police forces. There have been many attempts to stop these attacks against our landbase, and many court battles have been fought.

During the 1970's a new strategy has begun to unfold for the Haudenosaunee. In the Onondaga territory, New York State was stopped from expanding an interstate highway. The international bridge which passes through Akwesane was blockaded until unrestricted passage for our people was obtained. In 1974, our people undertook the re-occupation of part of our homeland

which had been illegally taken by the United States.

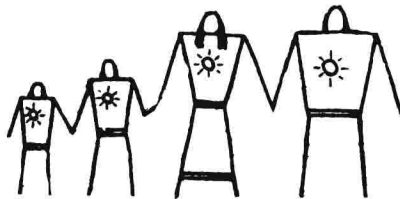
Throughout that time, several other Haudenosaunee communities underwent a revitalization of community culture — with a strong emphasis on economic, educational and spiritual self-sufficiency.

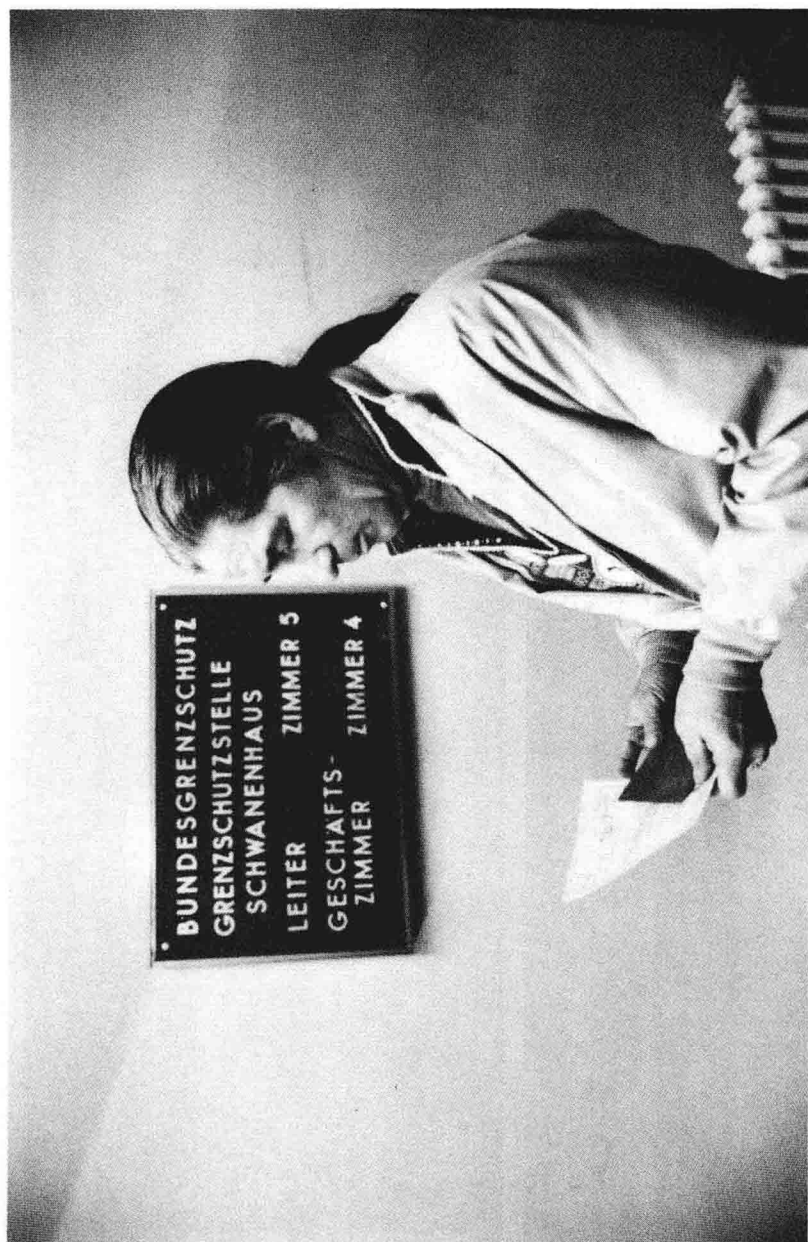
In the past two years (1979-81), the Mohawk Nation at Akwesasne has gained international attention as a struggle there against the colonial government imposed by the United States involving hundreds of community residents has intensified.

We have consistently been aggressive in asserting that we are a state, a government, and a people who have a right to a place in the international community. In 1977, we sent a 21 person delegation to take part in the Non- Governmental Organization's conference on "Discrimination Against the Indigenous Populations of the Americas," held in Geneva, Switzerland. All 21 people travelled on passports issued by our government, and have since visited a number of other countries with these passports.

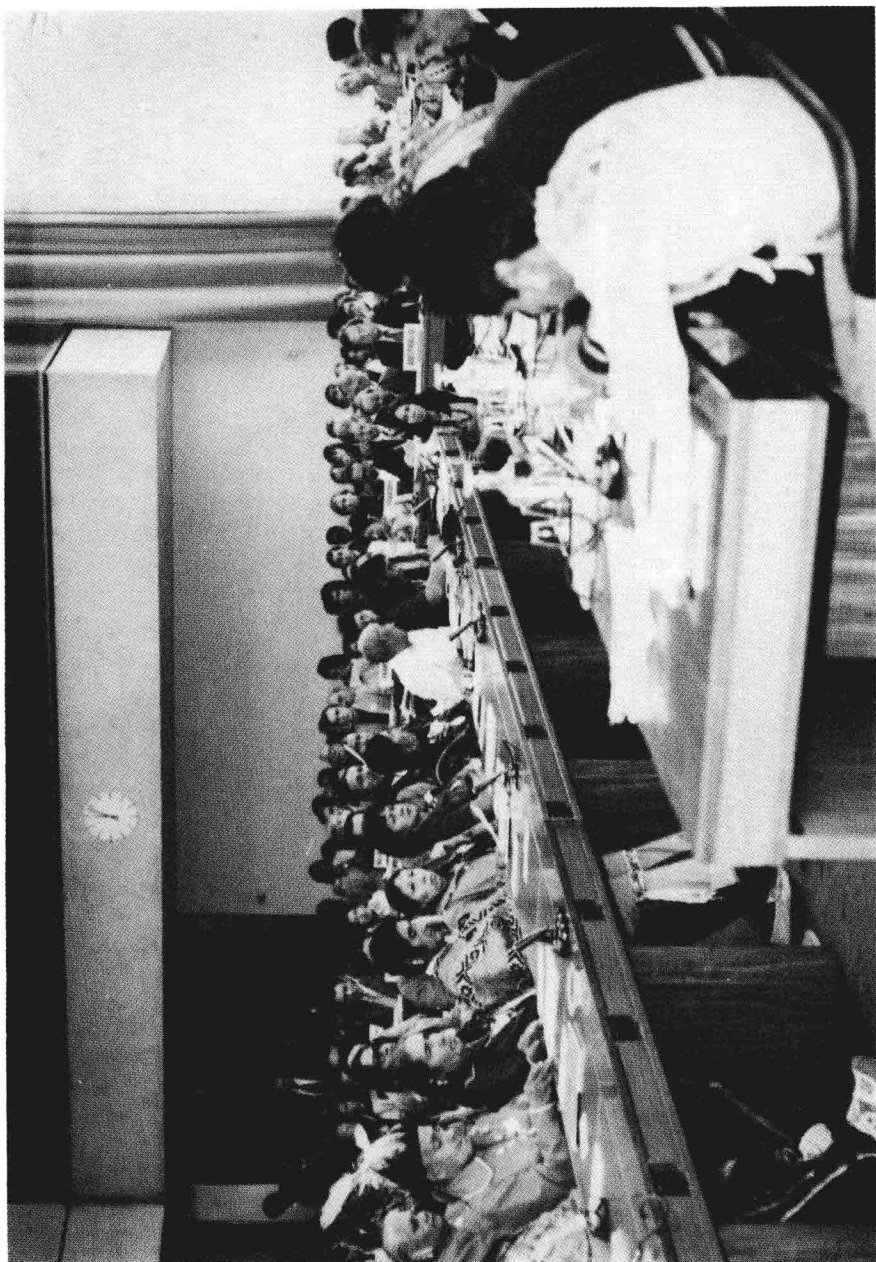
The position papers we presented at that conference are in this book, and serve to underline our position. As the 1980's begin, we are a people confident about our future and clear about the nature of our struggle.

SEGWALISE





Oren Lyons, Onondaga Chief, entering West Germany with Six Nations passport.



PLENARY SESSION DURING GENEVA CONFERENCE

## ***THOUGHTS OF PEACE: THE GREAT LAW***



Haudenosaunee oral history related that long before the Europeans arrived, Native peoples of the Northeast woodlands had reached a crisis. It is said that during this time a man or woman might be killed or injured for any slight offense by his or her enemies, and that blood feuds between clans and villages ravaged the people until no one was safe. It was during this time that a male child was born to a woman of the Wyandot people living on the north side of Lake Ontario near the Bay of Quinte. It would become the custom of the people of the Longhouse that this person's name would never be spoken except during the recountings of this oral history in the oral fashion (some say during the Condolence ceremony) and at other times he is addressed simply as the Peacemaker.

The Peacemaker became one of the great political philosophers and organizers in human history. It is impossible in this short essay to discuss more than a brief outline of his ideas and accomplishments, but it should become obvious that his vision for humankind was indeed extraordinary.

He concluded early in life that the system of blood feuds as practiced by the people inhabiting the forest at that time needed to be abolished. His ideas were rejected by the Wyandot and other Huron peoples, and while a young man he journeyed to the land of the People of the Flint located on the southeast shore of Lake Ontario and extending to the areas called today the Mohawk Valley. The People of the Flint, or Ganienkehaka, are known to English-speaking peoples as the Mohawks.

Upon arrival in the Mohawk country, he began seeking out those individuals who had the reputation as being the fiercest and most fearsome destroyers of human beings. He sought them out one at a time — murderers and hunters of humans, even cannibals — and he brought to each one his message.



One by one he “straightened out their minds” as each grasped the principles that he set forth. Nine men of the Mohawks — the nine most feared men in all Mohawk country — grasped hold of his words and became his disciples.

The first principle that the Peacemaker set forth was indisputable to those who first heard his words. He said that it has come to pass that in this land human beings are seen to abuse one another. He pointed to the world in which people live and said that people should consider that some force or some thing must have created this world — the Giver of Life — had not intended that human beings would abuse one another. Human beings whose minds are healthy always desire peace, and humans have minds which enable them to achieve peaceful resolutions of their conflicts.

From that initial explanation — that the Giver of Life (later addressed as the Great Creator) did not intend that human beings abuse one another — he proposed that human societies must form governments which will serve to prevent the abuse of human beings by other human beings, and which will ensure peace among nations and peoples. Government would be established for the purpose of abolishing war and robbery among brothers and to establish peace and quietness. He drew the Mohawks together under those principles and then went to the Oneidas, Onondagas, Cayugas and Senecas with the same teachings. What is unique about his work is that he not only set forth the argument that government is desirable but he also set forth the principle — that government is specifically organized to prevent the abuse of human beings by cultivating a spiritually healthy society and the establishment of peace.

Other political philosophers and organizers have come to the conclusion that governments can be formed for the purpose of establishing tranquility, but the Peacemaker went considerably further than that. He argued not for the establishment of law and order, but for the full establishment of peace. Peace was to be defined not as the simple absence of war or strife, but as the active striving of humans for the purpose of establishing universal justice. Peace was defined as the product of a society which strives to