

Deganawida, the Peacemaker

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DEGANAWIDA, THE PEACEMAKER

(c. 1150 CE: Native traditional/academic; c. 1450–1550 CE: non-Native academic)

Christopher Buck

DEGANAWIDA, A NAME traditionally considered too Peacemaker was "American" in that he was a sacred to pronounce (yet fine in printed form), is Native American—and possibly Native Canadian, respectfully referred to as "the Peacemaker" by that is, a "dual citizen," if his Canadian birth "on the Iroquois people, who are more properly the northerly side of the lake, Lake Ontario" (CL, known as the Haudenosaunee ("People of the p. 2) has any credence—and was certainly a Na-Longhouse"). The Iroquois were aboriginal inhabitants of lands bordering Lakes Huron, Erie, States and Canada, as nations, did not exist durand Ontario and the St. Lawrence River, an area ing the founding of the Confederacy.) Not being comprising nearly all of present-day New York a "writer" in the traditional sense, the Peacemaker State, part of Pennsylvania, and southern Ontario was a charismatic figure—orator, author, and and Quebec. The Peacemaker is a legendary yet author of a living tradition. Thus, Deganawida, historical figure, memorialized in traditions held the Peacemaker, with the assistance of Hiawatha to be sacred by indigenous peoples among the and Jigonsaseh (the leader of the corn-planting Iroquois Nations—and, generally, among Native "Cultivators," also called the "Peace Queen"), Americans and Native Canadians today. This united five warring Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) article takes a look at the Deganawida epic, a nations into a formidable and enduring federacy of narratives that exists in some forty ver- tion—a consensus-based matrilineally hereditary sions—composites of Iroquois sophiology, as it federal council of fifty chiefs ("sachems," or were—recorded largely as part of a process of

spokesmen), each appointed by local councils of Haudenosaunee survival and revival, culturally, clan matrons, with protocols rooted in "Condospiritually, and politically.

lence" ceremonies that served as a vehicle for The version privileged here is titled Concern-political decision-making. Never would Deing the League, translated by the linguist Hanni ganawida have been able to accomplish this had

Woodbury in collaboration with two native speak-he and his illustrious cohorts not met face-to-face ers of Onondaga, the late Reg Henry and the late with the warlords of belligerent tribes and skill-Harry Webster. This version (hereafter abbrevi-fully persuaded them to become close allies, ated CL in page references) provides a direct, replacing war with a sophisticated system of authentic link to the past. Other major versions peaceful conflict resolution by democratic consulwill be referred to as well. tation and collective

decision-making. Barbara Mann refers to Deganawida, Hiawatha, and Jigonsaseh as "the peace trio" (Iroquoian Women, WIDENING THE AMERICAN CANON: ORATURE p. 38). J. N. B. Hewitt, for instance, speaks of AS LITERATURE the peace trio as "the swart statesmen Dekanawida [sic], Hiawatha, and ! the equally astute

It may surprise readers to characterize De-stateswoman Djigonsasen [sic], a chieftainess of ganawida (a.k.a. Tekanawita and other variant the powerful Neutral Tribe" ("Some Esoteric spellings) as an "American writer." Yes, the Aspects," p. 322).

Some may disagree with characterizing the That said, in Hanni Woodbury's translation, Peacemaker as a [Native] "American writer," Concerning the League, a stock introductory since the Deganawida epic is about him, not by formula is used to directly quote the Peacemaker. him. However, the latter could not have happened The recurrent phrase "Thereupon Tekanawita without the former. In that sense, the "message" said," occurs 191 times (present writer's count). and the "history" contained in the Deganawida This phrase is a literary device used in Iroquoian

epic may be said to have been "authored" by texts to distinguish temporal sequencing from Deganawida. Since the Deganawida epic qualifies as oral literature (and arguably as sacred literature), an analogy may be drawn with the traditional ascription of Moses as the traditional

However, many, if not most, Native American and Native Canadian authorities tend to accept "author" of the Torah (i.e., "The Five Books of the statements attributed to Deganawida as Moses"), even though, as one early Jewish Christian document argued, referring to Deuteronomy 34:6, "But how could Moses write that 'Moses died'?" (Pseudo-Clementine Homilies,

The Deganawida epic, moreover, belongs to chap. 47). The Oxford English Dictionary defines world literature. Enter the Peacemaker among the "author," in part, as "A creator, cause, or source."

men and women of American and world literature, as a man of wisdom. The Deganawida cycle

One literary example given is this: "The author is an originary voice that stories America before of our religion." If the semantic penumbra of America was "America"—originally called "writer" adumbrates this sense of its synonym, "Turtle Island" by the Iroquois themselves. De-"author," then a case can be made. That said, ganawida may therefore be considered to be a provisions of the Great Law were preserved on

venerable "American writer" (orator/author of wampum belts (freshwater shells strung together), oral/written tradition) of history and culture, as a a form of communication which, like writing,

maker of history and culture, long before Ameriused visual symbols to convey information and can literati came on the scene.

aid memory. So transmission was not entirely Some regard the Peacemaker as the founder oral. (See Barbara Mann, "The Fire at Onondaga: (along with Hiawatha and Jigonsaseh) of the first Wampum as Proto-Writing.")

New World democracy. In this sense, not only is The Peacemaker's inclusion in the American

Deganawida a truly American orator/author in
Writers series is justified if "orature" is accepted
the indigenous sense but is equally "American"
as "literature." Compositions in languages lack-
given the extraordinary value that America ating writing can be
designated as "oral literature."
taches to democracy. That said, the notion of the
Literary productions in most indigenous lan-
Peacemaker as an "American writer" (orator/
guages remain predominantly "oral" in character
author) fails to do justice to so powerful a
until print technology brings them to the threshold
personality, who, by his inspired vision, charisof "writing."
"Oral literature" therefore becomes
matic influence, and skillful diplomacy, "wrote"
"orature" with the emergence of print technology
history and revolutionized a culture, which
as a means of literary dissemination, once such
survives today as a lived legacy. Given these
languages are committed to print. The Oxford
reasons, recognition of Deganawida as an
English Dictionary defines "orature" as a "body
"American writer" is both justified and timely.
of poetry, tales, etc., preserved through oral
Equally at issue, however, is the question of
transmission as part of a particular culture, esp. a
how this canonization of the Peacemaker compreliterate one." Thus
the Deganawida epic, bet- ports
with the views of Native Americans and
ter known as the "Great Law of Peace," is ora-
Native Canadians. What justification for this
ture here being recognized as part of the Ameri-
cultural appropriation, this impingement on all
can literary canon.
things indigenous, this infringement, as it were,
of sacred indigenous tradition, which is so cultur-
with the inscriptions "Haudenosaunee" ("People
ally sensitive? By what right can the non-Native
of the Longhouse") and "Great Law of Peace."
present writer presume to profane (i.e., to
The official description reads, in part:
publicly render secular) a sacred oral tradition?
The Iroquoian ethnologist Michael K. Foster,
The Haudenosaunee Confederation, also known as
curator emeritus of the Canadian Museum of
the Iroquois Confederacy of upstate New York, was

remarkable for being founded by 2 historic figures, Civilization, recounts how Chief Jacob ("Jake") the Peacemaker and his Onondaga spokesman, Thomas (d. 1998), a prominent proponent and Hiawatha, who spent years preaching the need for a interpreter of Haudenosaunee culture, justified league. The Peacemaker sealed the treaty by this profanation/translation to the non-Native symbolically burying weapons at the foot of a Great world when, in September 1992 on the Six Na- White Pine, or Great Tree of Peace, whose 5-needle tions Reserve near Brantford, Ontario, he took clusters stood for the original 5 nations: Mohawk, Oneida, Onondaga, Cayuga and Seneca.

the unprecedented step of reciting the Great Law (U.S. Mint, "2010 Native American \$1 Coin") in English (drawing much indigenous indignation thereby), in a nine-day event on the grounds of

The mastermind behind Iroquoian political genius his home, which attracted national media

was Deganawida, assisted by Hiawatha (no coverage. Among the some two thousand people resemblance to Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's present, a large number of these listeners were poetic fiction) and Jigonsaseh (whose presence white, not Iroquois. During the summer of 1994 assured a male-female equilibrium in the

Chief Thomas repeated the event. Responding to League's governance system). According to Chief criticism, he offered this justification, according

John Arthur Gibson's 1899 version (pp. 34–60), to Foster:

Hiawatha was a former cannibal whom Deganawida won over and who then became the

I think the white man needs to understand. It isn't that he's going to take the law and use it himself.! latter's spokesman. (In Gibson's 1912 version, They already did! The 13 colonies already took the the cannibal is not named.) Together, De- Great Law for their so-called Constitution. So what ganawida, Hiawatha, and Jigonsaseh established should we be afraid of? ! If they want to learn it, the Iroquois League, uniting the "Five Nations" they have a right to. That should have been done (Mohawk, Oneida, Onondaga, Cayuga, and 500 years ago, to study and respect the Confederacy. Seneca) into a powerful confederacy, into which

Maybe we wouldn't have the problems we have today if they would have studied our people, and the Tuscaroras, after a gradual migration that [would now] understand and honor and respect [us]. began in 1714, were adopted in 1722 (now the (Foster, "Jacob Ezra Thomas," p. 227) "Six Nations"), with the Tuteloos and Nanticokes added to the "Longhouse" (the grand metaphor It is in the spirit of this advice that the following for the League) in 1753, and protection extended epitome of the life and teachings (i.e. oral to the Delawares and others. The territory under "writings") of the Peacemaker are here presented. the sway of the Iroquois League was vast, as In so doing, this is not intended as exploitation James A. Tuck notes in Scientific American: of Native American spiritual traditions. It is not a "theft of spirit." Rather, it is recognition of the Five tribes of the Iroquois confederacy were, from universality and contemporary relevance of the west to east, the Senecas, the Cayugas, the Ononda-Peacemaker's enunciation of "the Good Message, gas, the Oneidas and the Mohawks. At the beginalso the Power and the Peace." ning of the 18th century their power extended from Maine to Illinois and from southern Ontario to The Iroquois were known for their political Tennessee. The Tuscaroras became the sixth after genius, which impressed Benjamin Franklin and being ousted by white settlers in the Carolinas. continues to be noted by the U.S. government to ("The Iroquois Confederacy,"

p. 36)

this day. In 2010, for instance, the U.S. Mint issued its Native American one-dollar coin, featur- Arthur Gajarsa, circuit judge on the U.S. Court ing, on the reverse, an image of the "Hiawatha of Appeals for the Federal Circuit (1997–2012), Belt," with five arrows bound together, along in *Banner v. United States* (2001), noted:

The Iroquois Confederacy, or Haudenosaunee, is ment, the U.S. Constitution, that united immigrant believed to have been formed in the fifteenth Europeans into a symbiotic union called America. century when the legendary Hiawatha and the Great (pp. 29, 37)

Peacemaker united the warring eastern Native American tribes. Prior to European colonization, Tribalography, as understood by the present the Iroquois Confederacy exercised active dominion over nearly thirty-five million acres, most of what is now the states of New York and Pennsylvania, formative (culturally foundational), performative and was considered the most powerful peacekeeping force of Native Americans east of the Mississippi River. (ceremonially recited), and transformative (spiritually and socially revitalizing). They resippi River.

present the past in the present. Fact and fiction (Banner v. United States, 238 F.3d at p. 1350) synthesize into the grand, collective tradition, In New York, Archibald Kennedy and James Parker (Benjamin Franklin's printing partner) admixed with legendary and mythic elements (not unlike the "magical realism" of Gabriel García Márquez), integrating symbolically mnemonic published a pamphlet, The Importance of Gaining and Preserving the Friendship of the Indians accounts, where cosmogony (origin of universe) to the British Interest Considered (1751), calling functions as sociogony (origin of society), in a for the Iroquois Six Nations to be federated with sacred embrace of physical and metaphysical the colonies. In his letter, dated March 20, 1751, epistemology that characterizes Native American to James Parker, Benjamin Franklin held up the perspectives. In other words, while there is no Iroquois confederacy as a model of good government to definitively recapture "pre-contact" hisnance:

tory by way of "post-contact" sources, a consensus, for the most part, has emerged that the

It would be a very strange Thing, if six Nations of Peacemaker was a historical figure. ignorant Savages should be capable of forming a Scheme for such an Union, and be able to execute it in such a Manner, as that it has subsisted Ages, and appears indissoluble; and yet that a like Union

HISTORICITY OF THE PEACEMAKER

should be impracticable for ten or a Dozen English Colonies, to whom it is more necessary, and must

Without considering Native Americans, one canbe more advantageous;

and who cannot be sup- not
understand the early development of North
posed to want an equal Understanding of their
America. Enter the Peacemaker. Legends are
Interests.

historically rooted and culturally bound. As such,
(Papers of Benjamin Franklin, vol. 4, pp. 118–119)

Deganawida is not an ethnographic curiosity but
Having justified the significance and impor-
a living cultural presence. The overmastering fact
tance of Deganawida as an "American writer"

in the history of the Iroquois is the dominance
(orator/author of oral/written tradition) in the
and centrality of the "Longhouse" tradition based
grand sense of the word, a word regarding

upon the Peacemaker cycle. Phenomenologically,
methodology: The present author has adopted
the Deganawida epic—most notably Concerning
and adapted a new methodology called "tribalog-
the League, dictated by Chief John Arthur Gibson
raphy," which is still under development, and so

in 1912—compares favorably with the sacred
may mean slightly different approaches depend-
scripture in the world's great religions and, as
ing on the scholar. In her highly influential article
such, belongs to world literature.

"The Story of America: A Tribalography," Le-
Most ethnologists and linguists have assumed
Anne Howe explains:

that Deganawida was a historical figure and use
the term "tradition" for that reason. A solid intel-
Native stories are power. They create people. They
lectual approach is that the Peacemaker ought to
author tribes. America is a tribal creation story, a
be treated as phenomenologically parallel to the
tribalography.! I am suggesting that when the
European Founding Fathers heard the stories of
founders of world religions—such as Buddha,
how the Haudenosaunee unified six individual tribes
Moses, Christ, Muhammad, or Bahá'u'lláh. By
into an Indian confederacy, they created a docu-
adopting this approach, the Deganawida epic, in

its several versions, is understood as a sacred or
process that took place over generations. Taking
"enlightened" tradition within the Haudenosaunee
Crawford's and Parmenter's best estimates

worldview, with an appreciation of the irreducible, the date range for the historical Peaceable historical dimension of the Peacemaker as maker becomes c. 1450–1550.

founder (variants and possible embellishments

That date range is not the final word on the subject, however, for what about "ethnohistory"? For the Peacemaker gave supernatural sanction to What does Haudenosaunee tradition have to say about the question of when the Great League was "because the Great Spirit never planned for humans to hurt one another nor to slaughter one another" (CL, p. 106). While the historicity of indigenous scholars and activists are reclaiming the Peacemaker is widely accepted by scholars, the right to their own history. So the date range dating varies. By analogy, such dating presents that extends to the mid-1500s may soon be problems akin to the so-called "quest for the historical Jesus."

history. The Haudenosaunee see insisting on the All religions are influenced by subsequent post-contact date (after Columbus) as colonializevents. As such, there is no single pristine ac- ing their history. count of the Peacemaker, uninflected by various

In principle (legally, at least), oral tradition outside influences, be they Christian or otherwise. should be taken far more seriously. As of March Traditionally, however, a plurality of Deganawida 21, 2014, U.S. federal law, as put forth in the traditions are considered to be simultaneously Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA), Gibson-Goldenweiser version tion Act (NAGPRA), now recognizes that oral (see below) has been widely acknowledged as tradition is accepted as admissible on a par with the best version extant, in that it is structured expert opinion: faithfully to how it was ceremonially recited and ritually performed in the present.

Where cultural affiliation of Native American hu- So what is the most tenable date of De-

man remains and funerary objects has not been established in an inventory prepared pursuant to ganawida? Arguably the most widely accepted section 5 [25 USCS § 3003], or the summary pursuant among academics is c. 1450 CE. In "The ant to section 6 [25 USCS § 3004], ! such Native Long Peace Among Iroquois Nations," Neta C. American human remains and funerary objects shall Crawford, after reviewing traditional sources and be expeditiously returned where the requesting scholarly literature, concludes that Indian tribe or Native Hawaiian organization can show cultural affiliation by a preponderance of the evidence based upon geographical, kinship, biological it seems likely that the League of the Iroquois was cal, archaeological, anthropological, linguistic, formed well before the five original nations came folkloric, oral traditional, historical, or other into contact with European explorers and settlers. ! relevant information or expert opinion. The negotiations for the formation of the League (25 USCS § 3005(a)(4)) were probably concluded around 1450, about 85 years before the Mohawks, in the League members' One Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) voice is that of first direct contact with Europeans, met Cartier on the Saint Lawrence. Barbara Alice Mann, associate professor in the (p. 351) Honors Department of the University of Toledo and also an Ohio Bear Clan Seneca, who would Similarly, Jon Parmenter, in his *The Edge of the* therefore be considered an expert in more than *Woods: Iroquoia, 1534–1701*, holds that plausible one sense as defined by NAGPRA, given her dates for the historical Peacemaker, where the command of the oral tradition, documentary date of "founding" can be interpreted as the evidence, and the scholarly literature. At the polar initiation of diplomacy by the Peacemaker and opposite are the reductionist views of the anthro-Hiawatha, could be anywhere circa 1400–1550, pologist William A. Starna, professor emeritus at while the League formation itself was a lengthy the State University of New York College at Oneonta. This intellectual landscape—a hyper-divine portent of cosmic and therefore historical

critical minefield—is difficult to map, because
significance.

the claims are so territorial, with so much

The latest date for the formation of the
heritage and history at stake.

Iroquois Confederacy has been put forward by

At issue is a central question: was the League

Starna, who postulates that "the genesis of the
"pre-contact" (before Europeans arrived on the

League is tied directly to the arrival of the Dutch
American scene), or was it "post-contact"? The
[in 1609] and the trade at Fort Nassau [1613–
earliest date posited for the formation of the
14]" (p. 321). Henry Hudson, an English naviga-
Iroquois Confederacy is August 31, 1142, during
tor in the service of the Dutch East India
which a "Black Sun" (total eclipse) occurred right
Company aboard the ship Half Moon, discovered
before the League was finally and fully
established. This date has been proposed by

the Delaware Bay and River, according to the
Barbara Mann and Jerry Fields, an astronomer, in
journal kept by his first officer, on August 28,

"A Sign in the Sky: Dating the League of the

1609. According to Starna (pp. 285–286), the
Haudenosaunee." According to Mann and Fields,

earliest documentary mention of a version of the
the Peacemaker, along with Hiawatha and Jigon-

name "Deganawida" is found in A Dictionary of
saseh, flourished in the twelfth century. This is

the Mohawk Language produced sometime in the
squarely based on a Seneca legend which holds

period 1743–1748 by Johann Christopher Pyrthat, during a
ratification council held at Ganon-
laeus, a German-born Moravian missionary.

dagan (near modern-day Victor, New York), a

Pyrlaeus' informant was an elderly Mohawk man,
solar eclipse coincided with the Senecas' deci-

Sganarády. While Starna recognizes the Desion to join the
League. In William W. Canfield's

ganawida epic's "status as a sacred text" (p. 320),
comment on a parallel traditional account, as told

he does not accord it much historical value.

to him by "the Cornplanter" (a warrior, Seneca

Starna, moreover, holds that, once the Dechief, and major
Iroquois leader of the late

ganawida epic is set aside, nothing in the historieighteenth century), he cites

both the Cornplanter cal or
archaeological record confirms the exisand Chief Governor Blacksnake as
authorities for tence of the
League before contact; in other
the Seneca eclipse tradition:

words, that "the impetus for and timing of the
The legend of its formation here published is not
formation of the League ! cannot be satisfactorily
only based upon what was considered reliable
answered solely on the basis of the Deganawidah
authority by Cornplanter, but has also the sanction
epic" (p. 315), and that it is too much to expect
of that other noted Seneca chief, Governor Black-
historians to accept a sacred narrative of events
snake (the Nephew), who was contemporaneous
so deep in the past without independent evidence.
with Cornplanter.! These chiefs both claimed to
have seen a string of wampum in their early years

Even if one does not accept the date of
that placed the formation of the confederacy at a
August 31, 1142, proposed by Mann and Fields,
time when there occurred a total eclipse of the
sun—"a darkening of the Great Spirit's smiling
they make a powerful and compelling argument
face"—that took place when the corn was receiving
against dating the formation of the League as a
its last tillage, long before events that could be reli-
response to Europeans in the mid-sixteenth
ably ascribed to the year 1540.

century and beyond:
(Canfield, "Notes to the Legends,"
The Legends of the Iroquois, pp. 205–206)
We know who "the enemy" was during the mid-
The same traditional/astrophysical approach
sixteenth century: the Europeans. We also know
was used by Dean Snow to arrive at the Julian
who "the enemy" was in League tradition: the cancalendar
date of June 28, 1451, by adopting the
nibal cult. At no point does League tradition state
that the cannibals were Europeans; quite the oupdate of a later solar eclipse.
(See "Dating the
posite, the cannibals were an absolutely Native
Emergence of the League of the Iroquois: A
group. If the mid-sixteenth century claim is to stand,
Reconsideration of the Documentary Evidence.")
its advocates must demonstrate that the cannibals
Such an eclipse could easily be interpreted as a

and the Europeans are one and the same. They must

also explain why the Keepers seem unaware of this Cayuga, he would reply in Onondaga.) Gibson extraordinary fact.

could, at will, converse with visiting Oneida (p. 110) chiefs. Occasionally Chief Gibson performed

rituals in Mohawk. He knew some Tuscarora as well. Chief Gibson was trained as a ceremonialist
DEGANAWIDA EPIC: VERSIONS BY LANGUAGE

under the oldest living Onondaga fire-keeper at that time (Fenton, 1962, p. 286.) Besides the Although the chronological focus of the sundry Chiefs' version, there is the 1899 Gibson-Hewitt Peacemaker traditions (collectively referred to as version and the 1912 Gibson-Goldenweiser the Deganawida epic) is essentially "pre-contact," version. (See below.)

the primary sources are "post-contact."

The Chiefs' version was compiled in English

Native-Authored English Versions: As previin 1900 ("or composed in one of the Iroquois

ously stated, more than forty versions (oral and languages and then translated by them into written) of the Deganawida epic exist (Kimura, English—the exact method used is not known," p. 49). All are honored as "authoritative" among according to Hanni Woodbury in her introduction Iroquois communities and speakers. Perhaps the to Concerning the League [p. xvi, n. 12]). It was most truly representative tradition is the Chiefs'

published as Traditional History of the Confedversion (English-only), "written from dictation

eracy of the Six Nations in 1912 by Duncan C.

by the ceremonial Chiefs" from each of the Six Scott, superintendent of Indian Affairs in Canada.

Nations. These chiefs were Peter Powless

Arthur C. Parker (Seneca, but who did not speak (Mohawk), Nicodemus Porter (Oneida), William any Iroquoian languages) published The Constitu- Wage and Abram Charles (Cayuga), John Arthur tion of the Five Nations (1916), in which he

Gibson (Seneca), Thomas William Echo

combined the Chiefs' version—reviewed, cor-

(Onondaga), and Josiah Hill (Tuscarora), with J.

rected, and revised by Albert Cusick (Onondaga- W. M. Elliott serving as secretary, along with

Tuscarora)—with the Iroquois code of laws set
Chief Hill. The chiefs' version was promulgated
down by Seth Newhouse ("Da-yo-de-ka-ne,"
on August 17, 1900, at the Six Nations Reserve
Mohawk-Onondaga) in "Indian English," corin Ontario, Canada, where, in 1874,
Loyalist

rected by Cusick. Parker edited Newhouse's code
Mohawks and their confederated allies followed
of laws by reorganizing the sections to more
Joseph Brant to the banks of the Grand River
closely resemble the U.S. Constitution. Oddly,
near Brantford, Ontario. There, the Six Nations
Parker does not cite Scott's prior publication of
reconstituted the old League.

the Chiefs' version.

This endorsed version, promulgated "by the
authority of the Six Nations Council," represents

Twice previously, the chiefs had rejected Seth
a synthesis of parallel traditions. Of these eight
Newhouse's 1885 Native-English version of the
leaders, Gibson (1850–1912) was arguably the

Peacemaker narrative, Cosmogony of the Iroquois
most influential. In 1872, at age twenty-three,
Confederacy, for which he wanted to be paid and
Gibson was appointed a Seneca chief, having
which called into question certain titles of
inherited his title, Kanyataiyo ("Beautiful Lake"),
chieftainship and some of the Council's procefrom his mother's side. At
thirty-one, Gibson dures as well. A true

Mohawk patriot, Newhouse
suddenly became blind due to an injury suffered
translated his Cosmogony into Mohawk, possibly
during a lacrosse match, a sport invented by the
with Hewitt's assistance. It languishes as an
Iroquois. From then on, Gibson's nephew would
unpublished manuscript.

typically escort and assist him. As one of the ap-

The Chiefs' version was promulgated ostensiproximately 20 percent of the
Grand River bly for the purpose of
preserving the Peacemaker

Iroquois who followed the Longhouse religion,
tradition for posterity. Why English? Theoreti-
Seneca was Gibson's mother tongue. Although
cally, while the Chiefs' version could have been
his English was excellent, he spoke mostly in
set forth in an Iroquoian language, as a practical
Onondaga. (While his wife would address him in

matter, English was preferred since "birth speakers" of indigenous languages were fast of men's tradition and women spoke of women's disappearing. Moreover, this project was also tradition. Scholars have not quite grasped that concerned with legitimacy. This is indicated by fact, although Barbara Mann's work has drawn the text's noting that "the installation of the Lords attention to this problem and to the need to hear or Chiefs as rulers of the people, laid down in both traditions to regain a full perspective. these unwritten rules hundreds of years ago, is According to Kimura (pp. 181–182), the still strictly observed and adhered to by the Chiefs' version was promulgated "for the purpose Chiefs of the Six Nations and people" (p. 196). of authorizing and legitimating a political Not only was the Chiefs' version an anticolonial structure." Specifically, "the matrilineally hereditary project, it was one of self-empowerment as well, tary council's primary intention was to persuade particularly as a bulwark against Canadian the Department of Indian Affairs to accept the colonial and assimilation policy. According to legitimacy of their special status." To achieve Takeshi Kimura (p. 62), the Chiefs' version is that objective, a process of "reconstructing tradition understood as a response to a self-tion" was involved. This reconstruction was essentially an act of reconstituting and codifying a partment of Indian Affairs and the matrilineally somewhat fluid tradition into a solid framework, hereditary Six Nations Council "in order to vested with the stamp of authority by representatives to justify the political authenticity of the chiefs' tives of the Six Nations. council." That there was a clear need to establish In their "introductory remarks" of August 17, and maintain such legitimacy is illustrated by the 1900, Chiefs Josiah Hill (Six Nations Council) fact that, in 1924, the Canadian government and J. W. M. Elliott (secretary of the Ceremonial abrogated the authority of the Six Nations Committee on Indian Rites and Customs) ac-Council. Establishing the League tradition in an

knowledge that some of the miraculous feats authoritative, written version was an act of covert ascribed to the Peacemaker may betray some resistance against overt coercion into U.S.- and Jesuit influence (p. 197). According to Darren Canadian-friendly tribal councils—in other words, a "settler" oppression tactic.

Bonaparte, however, the birth of the Peacemaker has precedents not only in Christianity, but also This is not to say that the Chiefs manipulated in the Iroquois creation story, where Sky Woman and recast tradition beyond recognition in light and her virgin daughter may have been recast as of these exigent historical circumstances, especially since such updating is itself traditional. As Deganawida's grandmother and mother. In either case, Kimura (p. 63) states that this foreword social agents, anchored in time and place, the Chiefs obviously had reasons—a complex of motivations (not individually identified), since certain characteristics—for producing an endorsed version of the Peacemaker epic in English, since doing so was such as "much modified" (p. 196), "past myth far from customary and traditionally would have logical legends," "crude (religious) belief," and been frowned upon. Thus the Chiefs' version was "transition from a state of paganism to that of not only culturally and religiously significant but civilization and christianity" (p. 197)—could not had political, economic, and juridical dimensions have been made by the traditional Longhouse as well. By providing an authoritative narrative chiefs. Some of the Christian chiefs strongly of the Longhouse tradition to the Department of advocated an elective rather than matrilineally the Indian Affairs and to outsiders generally, the hereditary tribal council, for instance. Although Chiefs' version was intended for the public. This united for the purpose of producing the Chiefs' rendition was not an "invention," since the version, the preface raises some questions that Peacemaker tradition was a long-standing and must remain unanswered until the perspective of venerable one. That said, Parker's version each of the eight ceremonial Chiefs is analyzed.

crucially included women's sections, which are

That said, the preface may well be an instance of missing from other traditions, because men spoke "double-voicing" (what W. E. B. Du Bois called

"double-consciousness"), in which an oppressed group speaks in language that the oppressed group would respond to. as the Gibson-Hewitt version, this manuscript is preserved as MS 2316, National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution (189 typescript pages). Other Native-English versions—beginning with the 1899 recitation is a shortened version with the 1885 version by Seth Newhouse—are

Other Native-English versions—beginning with the 1899 recitation is a shortened version with the 1885 version by Seth Newhouse—are cited in that it does not relate the great ceremony

cited in the selected bibliography below. Native-English versions for condoling deceased chiefs and raising their language versions are listed, by language, at the end of this article as well. A brief overview of these versions in indigenous languages is provided as follows:

Onondaga.

Onondaga Versions: In 1888, Chief John

In 1912 Chief Gibson dictated his fuller version of the League tradition to the anthropologist Alexander Aleksandrovich Goldenweiser (born in Onondaga, a critically endangered language, his

Kiev) at the Six Nations Reserve. This "Gibson version of the League tradition to the ethnographer Alexander Goldenweiser" version was transcribed in the

paper J. N. B. Hewitt at the Six Nations Reserve, first part of the twentieth century, when recording Ontario, Canada. Hewitt was part Tuscarora and technology was unavailable. This undertaking had a good command of the Onondaga and was completed just four months before Chief Mohawk languages. (It was Hewitt, a founder of Gibson suddenly died of a stroke on November 1, 1912. The original manuscript (529 pages on in 1887 definitively established the connection of lined legal pads) is archived as III-I-116M in the

Cherokee with the Iroquoian family of Canadian Ethnology Services Archives, Canadian languages.) The original is preserved as MS 3130, Museum of Civilization, Hull, Québec. Taken together, the Gibson-Hewitt (1899) and the Institution. A translation of Chief Buck's was published by Hewitt in 1892. This version, albeit "the most satisfactory single native account of anomalously, ascribes certain events to Hiawatha the League" (Fenton, p. 158).

instead of Deganawida. Oddly, this version refers

Oneida Versions: On June 22, 1971, Damas to the "Seven Nations."

Elm (ninety-three-year-old Oneida elder of Now we come to the preeminent—and per-Southwold, Ontario) recited "The Story of Dehaps definitive—version of the peacemaker epic. ganawida" in the Oneida language. This version

A renowned speaker in the Longhouse, the was recorded on magnetic tape. The text was Seneca chief John Arthur Gibson has already transcribed by the linguist Floyd G. Lounsbury been introduced above. Chief Gibson assiduously with the assistance of Damas Elm on June 23—followed the time-honored method of committing 28, 1971. It remains unpublished. The archival oral traditions to memory. From youth, Gibson files are difficult to access since they are deemed took every possible opportunity to hear recitals "culturally sensitive."

from his elders, which, over time, he learned by

Another Oneida version is that recited by heart, bit by bit. Stock phrases and word-for-Chief Robert Brown (a.k.a. Anahalihs ["Great word repetitions, as obvious memory aids, are Vines"]), Bear Clan chief of the Oneida tribe, very typical of oral literature. (Improvisation is translated by Brown and Clifford F. Abbott of the not acceptable in the strict performance of a University of Wisconsin—Green Bay and edited sacred narrative. Although the main action can be by Randy Cornelius (Tehahuko'tha), also of the never be changed, certain details in the narrative Sovereign Oneida Nation of Wisconsin. It can fluctuate, depending on the era and the telling. appears that Brown's recitation

closely parallels, if

And so, in 1899, at the Six Nations Reserve, depends heavily upon, Gibson's 1912 Onondaga version, such that it may be fair to say that the League tradition to J. N. B. Hewitt. Known Brown was recasting Gibson's work into Oneida.

not

But there are significant differences as well.

most of these core elements (as summarized by Although not formally published, this version is the present writer), with headings by Vecsey, as currently available on the Internet.

noted:

Mohawk Versions: Chief Seth Newhouse

(1) "The Migration and Separation of the produced a typescript translation of the Mohawk People" (Vecsey, pp. 82–83): This element is version of the "The Great Law of Peace," as the absent in the Gibson-Goldenweiser version.

Peacemaker cycle is also known. This Newhouse

(2) "The Birth and Growth of Deganawida" document is archived as MS 3490, National (Vecsey, p. 83): In the distant past, war and blood Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian revenge plagued the Mohawk homeland on the Institution. The translation is titled Constitution northern shore of Lake Ontario (in what is now of the Confederacy by Dekanawidah: Collected

Canada), where warriors, ruthlessly and relentlessly Translated from [the] Mohawk Text by Chief

lessly, killed and scalped inhabitants of settle- Seth Newhouse. Digital scans of all forty-three

ments across forest and countryside. (This may pages of the translation are available online. A

be a Western interpolation. According to Mann, bilingual Mohawk-English version was published the war was the overthrow of the Mound Builder in 1993 by Ohontsa Films.

priesthood.) To escape the dangers of this ongoing Cayuga Version: The ethnographer J. N. B.

ing onslaught, a mother ("End of the Field") takes Hewitt committed to writing the "Cayuga version

her daughter ("She Walks Ahead") away from of the Deganawida legend 1890," cataloged as

her people and migrates to a remote area of the MS 1582, National Anthropological Archives,

bush, where the two do not see another human
Smithsonian Institution. Digital scans of all
being for a long time.

seventeen pages are available online. (See

Later on, the mother discovers that her
bibliography.)

daughter is pregnant and demands to know who

Non-Native English Version: In January 1946

the father is. The daughter has no idea. The old
the University of Pennsylvania Press published

woman, sure that her daughter is lying, grows
Paul Wallace's *White Roots of Peace*. See discus-

angry, and the two are estranged until a mission of this book
below.

senger from the Great Spirit appears and tells the

mother that her daughter is about to have a divine

birth. (This is patent Christianization, since the

DEGANAWIDA EPIC: STRUCTURAL ANALYSIS

Haudenosaunee traditionally do not value "virgins" and "virgin
birth" stories.) They should call

Comparing the major versions, Christopher Vecse the boy Tekánawí-ta';

[Deganawida], whose mission identifies twenty-two key structural elements

mission will be to bring about peace. The boy grows

common to the majority of extant versions of the

rapidly, a sign of supernatural origin or powers

Deganawida epic. To give the reader a fair

(CL, pp. 1–14).

impression, Christopher Vecsey's twenty-two elements may be cited as a

structural framework of (3)

"The Journey to the Mohawks, the Situation analysis. As Vecsey observes: "No one

version tion, and the Mission

Explained" (Vecsey, p. 84):

contains every episode, although Gibson's 1899

When the boy becomes a young man, his mother
manuscript comes the closest to completeness"

and grandmother return home, where he an-

(p. 82). From a traditional (plurality) perspective,

nounces to their people the Good Message, the

these episodes enjoyed reciprocity as simultane-

Power, and the Peace. After the Peacemaker tells

ously true. Gibson simply put together all the

the village's children of his mission, the older

versions he had heard, which is allowed in

women spread the news, and a day is appointed

indigenous tradition. Vecsey wrote this in 1986,

for the Peacemaker to speak to the elders (CL,

before Hanni Woodbury published her translation

pp. 15–36). This is his message, which the chief
of Concerning the League in 1992. The Gibson-
and elders accept:

Goldenweiser version (Concerning the League

Thereupon Tekanawita [Deganawida] stood up in
[CL], translated by Hanni Woodbury et al.) has
the center of the gathering place, and then he said,

"First I will answer what it means to say, 'now it is

After Tekanawita had departed in that direction
arriving, the Good Message.' This indeed, is what it

he came to a house belonging to a cannibal who
means: When it stops, the slaughter of your own

had his house there. Then Tekanawita went close
people who live here on earth, then everywhere

to the house. Then, when he saw the man coming
peace will come about, by day and also by night,

out, departing, sliding down the hill to the river,
and it will come about that as one travels around,

and dipping water, thereupon Tekanawita here everyone will be related.

Then, indeed, [?] in future riedly climbed

onto the house to the place where

days to come.

there was a chimney for the smoke to escape; he

lay down on his stomach and looking into the house

he saw that the task of breaking up meat and piling

Now again [?], secondly, I say, 'now it is arriving,

it up had been completed.

the power,' and this means that the different nations, all the nations, will

become just a single one, Then the man

returned, and he was carrying a drum

and the Great Law will come into being, so that

of water in it. Thereupon he poured it into a vessel,

now all will be related to each other, and there will

put meat into the liquid, and hung the vessel up

come to be just a single family, and in the future, in

over the fire until it boiled. Moreover, the man

days to come, this family will continue on.

watched it, and when it was done, he took down

the vessel placing it near the embers. Thereupon he

Now in turn, the other, my third saying, 'Now it is

said, "Now indeed it is done. Moreover, now I will

arriving, the Peace,' this means that everyone will

eat." There upon he set up a seat, a bench, thinking

become related, men and also women, and also the

that he will put it on there when he eats. Thereupon

young people and the children, and when all are

he went to where the vessel sat, intending to take
relatives, every nation, then there will be peace as
the meat out of the liquid, when he saw, from inside
they roam about by day and also by night. Now,
the vessel, a man looking out.
also, it will become possible for them to assemble
in meetings. Then there will be truthfulness, and
Thereupon he moved away without removing the
they will uphold hope and charity, so that it is peace
meat, and sat down again on the long bench, for it
that will unite all the people, indeed, it will be as
was a surprise to him, seeing the man in the vessel.
though they have but one mind, and they are a
Thereupon he thought, "Let me look again."
single person with only one body and one head and
Thereupon he, Tekanawita, looked again from
one life, which means that there will be unity.
above where the smoke hole was, again causing a
Moreover, and most importantly, one is going to as-
reflection in the vessel, and then the man, standing
sembly in meetings where it will be announced that
up again, went to where the vessel sat, looked into
all of mankind will repent of their sins, even evil
the vessel again, saw the man looking out, and he
people, and in the future, they will be kind to one
was handsome, he having a nice face. Thereupon
another, one and all. When they are functioning, the
the man moved away again and he sat down again
Good Message and also the Power and the Peace,
on the long bench, and then he bowed his head,
moreover, these will be the principal things every-
pondering and thinking, "I am exceedingly handsome will live by; these
will be the great values some and I have
a nice face; it is probably not right,
among the people."

my habit of eating humans. So I will now stop,
(CL, pp. 36–41)

from now on I ought not kill humans anymore."

(CL, pp. 78–83)

This episode is omitted in the Chiefs' version

Hiawatha mistakes the Peacemaker's face, which
and in the Gibson-Hewitt version.

is reflected in the pot, for his own. In the Gibson-
(4) "The Cannibal Converts" (Vecsey, p. 84):

Hewitt version, the Peacemaker gives the former

After returning to their camp in the bush, the

cannibal the name Hiawatha, who is then sent to

Peacemaker carves a canoe of white stone. He
a settlement to announce the coming of "the
sets out on his mission. He first encounters a

Good Message, and the Power, and the Peace."
Mohawk who had fled for safety from the

However, in the Gibson-Goldenweiser version
bloodshed, and the Peacemaker tells the Mohawk
(Vecsey, p. 84, citing the Gibson-Hewitt version,
to announce his forthcoming arrival and mission
pp. 34–60), the cannibal remains unnamed, and
to the chief. Peacemaker then encounters a can-
the Peacemaker confers the name "Hiawatha" on
nibal, the story of which is one of the most
the great warrior and chief of the next Mohawk
famous episodes (CL, pp. 78–90) of the Peace-
settlement. (See also *White Roots of Peace*, pp.
maker epic:

42–45.) If analyzed sociologically, this episode
may indicate a transition from cannibalism
negotiations with the Peacemaker and her per-
(especially by Mound Builder priests among the
sonal centrality and ending the Second Epochal
Ohio Iroquois) to crop farming and deer hunting.

war resulted in the women's sections of the
(5) The "Mother of Nations Accepts
Iroquois Constitution, twenty-three of the one
Deganawida's Message" (Vecsey, p. 84): Arriv-
hundred seventeen clauses, according to Renée
ing at the waterfalls on the eastern side of the
Jacobs' count" (Iroquoian Women, p. 155).

river, the Peacemaker encounters "Fat Face" (the
(6) "The Prophets Prove Their Power"
traditional name is most commonly spelled

(Vecsey, p. 84): The Peacemaker proceeds to a
"Jigonsaseh"), the head mother of the Senecas,

Mohawk settlement. He camps on the outskirts
who became the Head Mother of the League.

overnight, and awaits invitation. The next day,
The Peacemaker chides her for feeding the war-
the chief sends scouts, calls a meeting, and invites
riors, thereby aiding and abetting warfare. After
the Peacemaker to deliver his message. The chief
converting her to his message, he sends Fat Face
accepts, yet "the Great Warrior and his deputy"
to travel east, to announce his arrival in three
express hesitation, challenging Deganawida to a

days (which is really three years) (CL, pp. 90–94). On the role of women who carry the traditional title of "Jigonsaseh," Barbara Mann notes

power. The Peacemaker climbs a great tree, that the Head Clan Mothers of the League were perched precipitously over a deep gorge. The title-keepers (and also lineage-keepers):

Great Warrior's men then cut down the tree. Deganawida plunges into the river's turbulent waters

The Jigonsaseh ! allowed or disallowed passage of below and disappears. The next morning, a young war parties, thus giving them tacit veto power over man sees smoke rising from the edge of the warfare. Because federal officials could be put

cornfield, which turns out to be where the forward only by their respective Clan Mothers, and could be impeached by them, Clan Mothers effectively controlled the national agenda: Federal of- Peacemaker is encamped, and the chief, Great Warrior, and deputy are now convinced of the officials of the two Brotherhoods (Congress) and the Peacemaker's power to accomplish his mission Firekeepers (the Executive Branch) considered mat-

(CL, pp. 95–130). ters at a national level only after they had already been discussed, approved, and forwarded by the (7) "Tadadaho the Wizard Prevents Peace" "women's councils," i.e., the Clan Mothers in their (Vecsey, p. 85): The Peacemaker proceeds own councils.

eastward. "First I will go to the dangerous place, ("The Lynx in Time," p. 440; where we two will converse, the Great Witch [or see also Mann, Iroquoian Women, chap. 3) 'Sorcerer'] and I." If the Wizard accepts, they Seneca Chief Cornplanter refers to the office of will hear a great voice announcing this, at which those who succeeded Jigonsaseh (who, according time the meeting should be convened at "Standto parallel traditional accounts, would, and did, ing Stone" [the Oneida nation] (CL, pp. 130– carry the title of "the Jigonsaseh") as the "Peace- 132).

maker Queen," among the Seneca. (Cornplanter, (8) "Hiawatha's Relatives Are Killed" qtd. in Canfield, "The Peacemaker," The Legends

(Vecsey, p. 85): Meanwhile, Hiawatha's eldest of the Iroquois, pp. 149–154.) Barbara Mann daughter has taken ill and died. Then the next stresses the traditional importance of this office. daughter succumbs. To console him, the young She also laments the fact that it was largely warriors divert Hiawatha's attention by putting forgotten, due to American and Canadian policies on a game of lacrosse. During the game, his third of forced assimilation, and further obscured by daughter, the youngest of the three and pregnant, Western scholarship, which has simply failed to goes to the river to bathe. On her way back, the appreciate the importance of the "Peace Queen" warriors see a great bird flying low overhead. In and those who held her office, in succeeding their zeal to seize it, they collide with the last generations, among the Iroquois nations. Speak- daughter, whose injuries are fatal (CL, pp. 132– ing of the original Jigonsaseh, Mann notes: "Her 138).

(9) "Hiawatha Mourns and Quits Onondaga" Deganawida then sends two messengers to "look (Vecsey, p. 86): Heartbroken, Hiawatha departs. for smoke." They transform into hawks, see the He goes to a cornfield, builds a lean-to, and lights smoke rising, and change back into humans. They a fire to camp overnight (CL, p. 139).

see a man smoking a large pipe, who is the chief (10) "Hiawatha Invents Wampum" (Vecsey, of the "Big Pipe People" (the Cayugas). He acp. 86): At his camp, Hiawatha cuts and cores cepts the Peacemaker's message.

The messengers sumac branches (later described as "basswood," proceed to the "Great Mountain." identified as elderberry in the Chiefs' version) The Senecas remain unconvinced. So the into short sticks, hooks them onto a horizontally Peacemaker goes to them, and finds them split suspended rod, and gazes at them (CL, pp. 140– into two factions. The chiefs accept, although the 141). This is the origin of the "Welcome at the warriors do not (CL, pp. 141–222).

Woods' Edge" wampum. Since wampum already (14) "Scouts Travel to Tadadaho" (Vecsey, p. existed and was widely used, what Hiawatha

87): Deganawida and Hiawatha launch the stone actually invented—or rather, revived—were the canoe to cross the great lake. Representatives Condolence speeches.

from the Mohawk, Oneida, Cayuga, and Seneca (11) "Hiawatha Gives the Mohawks Lessons nations embark, climb aboard. Hiawatha paddles. in Protocol" (Vecsey, pp. 86–87): Puzzled at see-

In the middle of the lake, the Sorcerer shouts, "Is ing this, the man guarding the cornfield reports it time yet?" This stirs up a fierce gale, with great to the chief, who sends two scouts to invite waves threatening to capsize the canoe. Then the Hiawatha to the chief's house. They address Peacemaker commands, "Rest wind!" The Sor- Hiawatha three times. No response. On hearing cerer shouts again, stirring up a great whirlwind. this, the chief guesses what's expected. Cutting Deganawida then says, "Stop wind!" and calms shafts from feathers, he arranges these in similar the tempest (CL, pp. 223–225).

fashion. When the scouts then present these to

(15) "The Nations March to Tadadaho, Sing- Hiawatha, he accepts the chief's overture, saying: ing the Peace Hymn" (Vecsey, pp. 87–88): This "This is right and I accept it." (This is the origin element evidently is absent from the Gibson of the "Invitation Wampum," which is part of Goldenweiser version as well.

"forest diplomacy.") The chief calls a meeting.

(16) "Deganawida and Hiawatha Transform Hiawatha relates what transpired among the Tadadaho" (Vecsey, p. 88): At last they reach the Mohawks and announces the Peacemaker's im- "Great Sorcerer" (i.e., Tadadaho). "They observed minent arrival (CL, pp. 141–171).

that all over his head beings were writhing—it

(12) "Deganawida Consoles Hiawatha"

was

like snakes, his hair, and his fingers were (Vecsey, p. 87): This element appears to be absent gnarled—all over they were writhing, nor was he in the Gibson-Goldenweiser version.

about to talk. Thereupon they saw something

(13) "Deganawida and Hiawatha Join Onei- hanging on him" (CL, p. 228). The Peacemaker das, Cayugas, and Senecas to Mohawks" (Vecsey, then sends Hiawatha to fetch "Fat Face"

p. 87): The Peacemaker arrives in the middle of

(Jigonsaseh), now called "our mother, the Great
the night, tells Hiawatha he has been to Onon-
Matron." She arrives. A "grand council"
daga, where he announced his mission to the
convenes. The Peacemaker proposes the follow-
"Great Sorcerer," and from there proceeded to
ing to the Great Sorcerer:

the "Great Mountain" (a Seneca settlement) as
Now, indeed, all of them have arrived, they of the
well. The Peacemaker's unobserved arrival

four nations, that is, the Mohawks and the Oneidas
astonishes the inhabitants of Standing Stone
and the Cayugas and the Senecas; they are the ones
[Oneidas], who take council, where Deganawida
who have accepted the Good Message and the
proclaims his message. They accept.

Power and the Peace, that which will now function:
the Great Law. Moreover, everything reposes there,
Meanwhile, the Great Sorcerer (by whom Ta-
the minds of the several nations, and as to you,
dadaho is likely meant), now growing impatient,
they place before you their proposition that it is to
shouts a great shout, heard all over the world.

be you who is the title bearer, and the Great Chief,
and you also are to be the fire keeper at the place
order for the operation of good governance
where we will kindle the fire, whose rising smoke
among the Five Nations, Hiawatha then invites
will pierce the sky. Then one will see it in all of the
the recalcitrant Seneca warrior chief ("the Great
settlements on earth.

Warrior") and his deputy, who are brought to the
(CL, pp. 230–232)

council to hear the Peacemaker's message. He
offers them the special authority over all of the
So, after the uniting of four nations (Mohawks,
League's warriors, and also offers them the post
Oneidas, Cayugas, and Senecas), the allegiance
of "Doorkeepers." The Great Warrior accepts,
of one more remains to be won: the Onondagas,

whereupon the Peacemaker gives thanks by recited by the Great
Sorcerer (still, at this point in
ing a short version of the Thanksgiving Address:
the saga, unnamed). The Peacemaker then proclaims:

Thereupon

Tekanawita stood up, saying, "The

Great Power came from up in the sky, and now it is
"Now moreover, it is accomplished; now she has
functioning, the Great Power that we accepted when
arrived, our mother, the Great Matron whose name
we reached consensus. So now our house has
is [Tsikonhsahsen]; now she has accepted the Good
become complete. Now, therefore, we shall give
Message, and this, moreover, is what you should
thanks, that is, we shall thank the Creator of the
confirm and adopt, the Great Law, so that she may
earth, that is, he who planted all kinds of weeds
place antlers on you, our mother, and they shall
and all varieties of shrubs and all kinds of trees;
together form a circle, standing alongside your
and springs, flowing water, such as rivers and large
body." ! "Now you are looking at all of the ones
bodies of water, such as lakes; and the sun that
who will be standing with you." Thereupon the man
keeps moving by day, and by night, the moon, and
bowed his head. Thereupon his hair stopped writh-
where the sky is, the stars, which no one is able to
ing and all of his fingers became quiet. Thereupon
count; moreover, the way it is on earth in relation
Tekanawita said, "Now, indeed, it is functioning,
to which no one is able to tell the extent to which it
the Peace." Thereupon the man spoke up saying,
is to their benefit, that is the people whom he cre-
"Now I confirm the matter, I accept the Good Mes-
ated and who will continue to live on earth. This,
sage and the Power and the Peace."
then, is the reason we thank him, the one with great
(CL, pp. 232–234) power, the one who is
the Creator, for that which
will now move forward, the Good Message and the
Power and the Peace; the Great Law."
In this dramatic scene, the Great Sorcerer bows
(CL, pp. 294–296)
his head in humble, yet grand, acquiescence. His
hair stops writhing. His fingers uncurl. Un-
The Peacemaker then lays out the specific
seethed, he accepts the message. Then the
laws of good governance by which the Confed-
Peacemaker strokes the Sorcerer's head, straight-
eracy will function. Women become the propriens his fingers,
while others disentangle the
etors of lordship titles (CL, pp. 294–326).
objects hanging from his shoulders. The Sorcerer

(19) "The Confederacy Takes Symbolic Imis now righted, his humanity restored (CL, pp. 226–235). ages" (Vecsey, p. 89): The Peacemaker estab-

lishes the central hearth, being the council fire.

(17) "Deganawida and Hiawatha Establish

They plant a great white pine ("Great Tall Tree Iroquois Unity and Law" (Vecsey, p. 88): The Trunk") named, in Woodbury's translation, as the Peacemaker then summons Jigonsaseh, the Great

"Great Long Leaf," which puts forth four white Matron, whom he recognizes as a "Great Chief."

roots ("Great White Root[s]") extending east, Together with Jigonsaseh, Deganawida places a west, north, and south (CL, pp. 296–297). Arcrown of antlers

(a symbol of authority) on the

rows are bound together by the sinew of a deer, Sorcerer's head. The Peacemaker confers on the

to represent the Confederacy's strong bond (CL, Sorcerer the title "Thatotaho'." Antlers are then

pp. 300–309): "for this bundle, made of five arplaced on the other chiefs (CL, pp. 235–251).

rows, is impossible to break, and it is impossible

(18) "Deganawida and Hiawatha Establish

to bend it" (CL, p. 306).

League Chiefs and Council Polity" (Vecsey, pp.

Later, on his way home, Hiawatha comes 88–89): After the Peacemaker sets forth rules of upon a lake, on which a group of ducks are

floating. When the ducks take notice, they fly off,

Barbara Mann (personal communication, Septemmagically lifting all of the water from the lake. ber 3, 2014), these are

traditionally referred to as

On the lake bed, Hiawatha sees "white objects"

the "Three Pillars," since "three" is the indig- (that is, shells; CL, p. 326) that remind him of

enous number meaning "pay attention"; therefore, his first wampum of sumac sticks. He then col-

the Chiefs' version, in giving two, not three such lects the white shells and puts them into a pouch

"pillars," reveals its Christianization. However, of fawn skin, and places these objects near the

the Oneida version recited by Chief Robert central fire, to serve as symbols of the Great Law

Brown of the Wisconsin Oneida Nation (who is (CL, pp. 326–330). According to Mann ("The

considered a national treasure), echoes this
Fire at Onondaga: Wampum as Proto-Writing"),
formulation: "First, what is the meaning of 'good
wampum was a full writing system, whose
message' and second what is the meaning of
characters were immediately readable by any
'power' and then third what is the meaning of
wampum reader.

'peace has now arrived?'" (Brown, pp. 46–47).
(20) "The League Declares Its Sovereignty"
So, in the final analysis, this may be a distinction
(Vecsey, pp. 89–90): This element is absent in the
without a difference.

Gibson-Goldenweiser version as well.

Translator Hanni Woodbury characterizes the
(21) "The Condolence Maintains the Confed-
"Good Message, Power and Peace" as the "three
eracy" (Vecsey, p. 90): The Peacemaker sets forth

Great Words" (CL, p. 61 and n. 61-1.) In Conclear laws of succession to the
matrilineally cerning the League, "the

Good Message, Power
hereditary titles of the Confederacy, with ceremo-
and the Peace" occurs only once (p. 63). But its
nies for mourning the passing of a former chief
variations are numerous. "Good Message and the
and installing his replacement. The League is
Power and the Peace" is the expression most
constituted by fifty chiefs, upon each and every
commonly met with (37 times). "Good Message"
one of whom is bestowed, by the head clan moth-
comes up 112 times. "Peace" (also capitalized)
ers (each of whom bears the position title of
occurs 114 times. "Power" is found 85 times.

"Jigonsaseh," after the Great Matron), a matriline-
The three great words, summed up, is the "Great
ally hereditary title (CL, pp. 237–250). The
Law" (16 times).

Condolence ceremonies are then set forth, in

In Chief Brown's Oneida version, the Peaceconsiderable detail and at
great length. These maker gives the
following explanation to a

solemn rites of passage are followed by installa-
Mohawk chief (a former cannibal), to whom he
tion ceremonies to induct a successor to the
gives the name "Two Matters":
deceased chief (CL, pp. 486–701).

(22) "Deganawida Departs" (Vecsey, p. 90):

["Two Matters"] "Who are you and where did you
This element appears to be absent in the Gibson-
come from?"

Goldenweiser version as well. In other words,
[The Peacemaker] Then he said, "I am the Peace there is no departure scene in
Concerning the maker and from the
north I have come.!" The
League. Certain other versions feature the
Creator sent me here on earth. The Creator ap-
Peacemaker's farewell prophecy.
pointed me to lecture people on what they are
doing.!

THE PEACEMAKER'S MESSAGE

Now I will tell you what message the Creator send
[sent] with me of what there will be on earth. He
As Kathryn Muller points out (p. 22, n. 5), the
intended everyone to have a good mind on the earth
Gibson-Goldenweiser version is unique in that it
you travel. He thought there would be reasons. First,
refers to the "Good Message, Power and Peace"
he intended all the peopled [people] should be having peaceful
thoughts in their minds. Then love will
(Onondaga: kaihwíyóh, ka'tshátstéhsæ' and
come from that. If their thinking is not peaceful
? e'é'nu?") as three distinct concepts, whereas the
ske?éé'nu
ske'é'nu
Àðe

then they will not have love. And if they do have
Chiefs' version refers to the "the message of the
love then from it will come compassion and if they
good news of Peace and Power." According to
have no love, then they won't have any compassion.

Each and every one of you has the power. Whatever
Power means authority, the authority of law and
power you have comes from what you have thought.
custom, backed by such force as is necessary to
Then that comes from a good mind. He intended
make justice prevail; it means also religion, for
you all to be helping each other. You people should
justice enforced is the will of the Holder of the
not be arguing."
Heavens and has his sanction."

(The Great Law of Peace, pp. 28–31)

"Thy message is good," said the woman; "but a
This explanation appears to be a gloss on the

"and my message will bring an end to the wars
Speaker of the Six Nations Council at Grand
between east and west."

River, 1917–1918, and a noted orator of Haude-
"How will this be?" asked the woman, who won-
nosaunee traditions and stories in the 1920s and
dered at his words, for it was her custom to feed
1930s. Another source may be the Gibsonthe warriors passing before
her door on their way Goldenweiser
version, which Wallace read in a
between the east and the west.

draft translation that was begun by Hewitt and
"The Word that I bring," he said, "is that all peoples
completed by William Fenton, with Simeon
shall love one another and live together in peace.

Gibson (son of John Arthur Gibson), archived in
This message has three parts: Righteousness and
the Smithsonian Institution's National Anthropol-
Health and Power—Gáiwoh, Skénon,
logical Archives. (MSS. 1517b, c.) Yet another
Gashasdénshaa. And each part has two branches.

source may be J. N. B. Hewitt, who gave a paper
Righteousness means justice practiced between men
at the International Congress of Americanists held
and between nations; it means also a desire to see
in Washington in December 1915 on "Some
justice prevail.

Esoteric Aspects of the League of the Iroquois,"
published in 1917.

Health means soundness of mind and body; it means
also peace, for that is what comes when minds are

Here, the three words that epitomize the essane and bodies
cared for.

sence of the Peacemaker's message—Gáiwoh

("Righteousness"), Skénon ("Health"), Gashas-

endangered" (p. 230). In so criticizing the recastdénshaa

("Power")—correspond to their respecting

of the Peacemaker's message, Jocks demontive Onondaga equivalents: kaihwíyóh

("Good strates how the "appropriation" of

Native Ameri-

Message"), ske?é'nu

? é'nu? ' ("Peace"), ka'tshátstéhsæ' can

spirituality implicates ethical, political, and

("Power"). Evidently, Professor Wallace has

hermeneutical issues. (See also Jocks's "Spiritualtaken artistic license with
these sacred terms ity for Sale.")

of art, reconfiguring the "Good Message, Peace,

However, the sixfold explication of the
and Power" as "Righteousness, Health, and
Peacemaker's three core principles evidently goes
Power." Thus, "Good Message" becomes

back to Hewitt, who wrote:

"Righteous-ness." "Peace" becomes primarily
The founders of the league, therefore, proposed and
"Health" and only secondarily "peace" (i.e., "also
expounded as the requisite basis of all good governpeace, for that is
what comes when minds are ment three
broad "double" doctrines or principles.
sane and bodies cared for"). In the Gibson-

The names of these principles in the native tongues
Goldenweiser version, "health" occurs only

vary dialectically, but these three notable terms are
expressed in Onondaga as follows: (1) Ne''
twice, and only in relation to a person's individual
?n~non', meaning, first, sanity of mind and the
Ske?ñ'no
SkeÄÜn

health (CL, pp. 13, 448), whereas "righteous-
health of the body; and, second, peace between
ness" is absent entirely. Such a shift in emphasis
individuals and between organized bodies or groups
is scarcely warranted by the 1912 text. Since De-
of persons. (2) Ne'' Gaii'hwiyo', meaning, first,
ganawida is revered as the "Peacemaker," whose
righteousness in conduct and its advocacy in
purpose was to unite five warring Iroquois tribes
thought and speech; and, second, equity or justice,
the adjustment of rights and obligations. (3) Ne''
into "the League of the Great Law" (CL, pp. 310-

?s'hasde? n'sä', meaning, first, physical strength
Ga?'s'hasde
Ga's'hasde

311) by means of the "the Good Message, the
or power, as military force or civil authority; and,
Power, and the Peace," it would seem odd to
second, the orenda or magic power of the people or
rename these three great words as "Righteous-
of their institutions and rituals, having mythic and
ness, Power, and Health."

religious implications. Six principles in all. The
constructive results of the control and guidance of
Christopher Jocks (Mohawk), in his article
human thinking and conduct in the private, the

"Living Words and Cartoon Translations," implicitly public, and the foreign relations of the peoples so itly takes a jaundiced view of this variation (or leagued by these six principles, the reformers outright alteration of the original message), but maintained, are the establishment and the conservation of what is reverently called Ne''

stops short of outright criticism (i.e., "I cite this

Gayaneñ'sä'go'na

Gayaneñ'sä'go

?ñ'sä'go'na? '—, i.e. the Great Common-
'na'—

modern exegesis not in order to criticize its ac-

wealth, the great Law of Equity and Righteousness curacy ! but to demonstrate how deeply a tradi-

and Well-being, of all known men. It is thus seen tion in translation may draw from very different

that the mental grasp and outlook of these prophetrealms of discourse in the process of recontextu- statesman

and states-women of the Iroquois looked

alizing itself in the target language" [pp. 225–

out beyond the limits of tribal boundaries to a vast sisterhood and brotherhood of all the tribes of men,

226]). Invoking the Mohawk terms of art, Jocks

dwelling in harmony and happiness. This indeed

notes that the first two terms in "the phrase, skén-

was a notable vision for the Stone Age of America.

:nen, ka'shatsténhsera, karihríio, or its equiva-

("A Constitutional League of Peace," p. 541)

lent" are "easily glossed as 'peace,' and either

'power' or 'strength,' respectively." "'Good

Thus, it would appear that Paul Wallace's

message," Jocks hastens to add as to the third

elaboration of the Peacemaker's message depends

term, "is the most direct rendering of the word's

on Hewitt, who reflects the central Iroquois view

composition" (p. 225). These key words are

of a twinned cosmos.

transmogrified, if not mutated, in their transposition from source language to target language in

CONCLUSION

translation, in a process that Jocks calls "the

'cartooning' of culture" where "the link with the

The Deganawida epic, in its sundry versions,

living tradition based on enactment is seriously

belongs to world literature. It can be regarded as

a foundational American text, both in the pre-European contact and post-contact periods. Its authenticity is unimpeached, and its magical realism granted that it is the founding "document" of the Iroquois as edifying embellishment. Few would doubt its League. It is performative in that it remains in historical core, much less its cultural significance. practice to this day. It is transformative in that it The influence of the Peacemaker—and that of decolonizes and revisions our conception of the Confederacy founded on its principles, America's origins. organization, and laws he expounded—is a matter of debate. The foremost proponents of the Iroquois influence thesis are Donald A. Grinde, Jr., and Bruce E. Johansen in their book *Exemplar of Liberty: Native America and the Evolution of Selected Bibliography*

Democracy, with a foreword by Vine Deloria, Jr. On October 4, 1988, during the 100th Congress, the U.S. House of Representatives passed **DEGANAWIDA EPIC**

House Concurrent Resolution 331 (H.Con.Res. 331) by a vote of 408–8. Then, on October 21, **NATIVE-AUTHORED ENGLISH VERSIONS**

1988, the Senate approved Senate Concurrent "The Legend of the Peacemaker, Part 1." Ohsweken, Ont.: Resolution 76 (S.Con.Res.76, identical to H.Con.

Jake Thomas Learning Centre, 1991. Res. 331), by unanimous voice vote. The joint Newhouse, Seth (Da-yo-de-ka-ne). The Original Literal resolution reads, in part:

Historical Narratives of the Iroquois Confederacy; or, The Birch Bark Canoe. American Philosophical Society, Microfilm No. 348, 1885. (Also titled *Cosmogony of the Whereas the original framers of the Constitution, Iroquois Confederacy.*)

including, most notably, George Washington and Benjamin Franklin, are known to have greatly

Parker, Arthur C. "The Constitution of the Five Nations or admired the concepts of the Six Nations of the

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Whereas the confederation of the original Thirteen
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political system developed by the Iroquois Confed-
Big Kittle," Cattaraugus Reservation, January 1905.
eracy as were many of the democratic principles
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which were incorporated into the Constitution itself
to be translated directly from a Seneca text.)

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Chief Jacob Thomas' version of Gayanashagowa
And so LeAnne Howe may be right after all,
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when she states: "America is a tribal creation
story, a tribalogy. When the European

ONONDAGA VERSIONS

Founding Fathers heard the stories of how the
The Gibson-Goldenweiser Version: John Arthur Gibson,
Haudenosaunee unified six individual tribes into

Concerning the League: The Iroquois League Tradition
an Indian confederacy, they created a document,
as Dictated in Onondaga by John Arthur Gibson. Newly
the U.S. Constitution, that united immigrant

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archives&uri=full=3100001Àú!83496Àú!0#focus For typed
encouragement of the following individuals, whose astute
transcript (also in Onondaga) see MS 1517(a), National
input has greatly enhanced the quality of this article: (1)
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Barbara Alice Mann, Ph.D. (Native American, Ohio Bear
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Bear Clan chief of the Oneida tribe; cultural advisor,
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