

Can We Agree on a Consensus?

Over the past 15 years or so, I've been invited several times to present the show "What is Real and What is Not Real", a program about the cougar, at the annual Seneca Pow Wow near Hearts Content, above the Allegheny River. The tribe had a cabin for us to stay in and some real cougars and wolves in cages to serenade us at night. In doing this, I teamed up with a Seneca Historian who was presenting a program on Seneca civilization and law.

We both needed a darkened tent to project our shows and I had the projector and computer. So...we alternated shows, one of us sitting and listening to the other. We did this for an entire weekend...twice in several years.

This historian, whose name escapes me at the moment, was also an ex-Marine and had worked in a steel plant in Buffalo for many years. In his talk to the various groups who sat in our tent, he explained how the Iroquois tribes had combined their peoples and formed a Confederation at some time during the 14th century. He spoke of many things, but the point that he drove home again and again was their use of "Consensus" in decision making. He kept coming back to that, driving the point that although the final decision may not be their first choice for their own tribe or family, if that decision is best for all tribes of the confederation, then they **must** be willing to support it.

He also noted that when in 1744, envoys from the Iroquois Confederacy met in Lancaster, PA., the Iroquois leader, as a friend of the colonies, advocated for the federal union of the American colonies

as a way to bring the colonies much strength and power. An Indian interpreter and old friend of Benjamin Franklin's brought Franklin the official transcript of those proceedings and he published the account. Later, during the colonies formation of an American nation, the Iroquois confederation methods were of some influence in the writing of the American Constitution.

When we were alone I did ask this Seneca historian what happened when a member of this council refused to agree to what was best for the Confederation. "Ah", he said. "If it is obvious that most support what is good for the Confederation and this member will not because of his own particular needs only, that is where consensus becomes important and members must be willing to forsake their own wants for the needs of the whole. If he is not able to do this, he will be asked to leave. He will be shunned. He must consider the good of the whole."

Considering what has befallen our nation in recent times, especially the tribal separations of our people, encouraged by some Americans, and exasperated by extremist groups and even foreign nations via the media, do you think it is time for a consensus?

Footnote....some time ago during the time that one of my sons was flying night missions in Kosovo during that war, and sending us pictures of burnt-out villages, I happened to catch him with an email just after he had landed one morning. I asked him if he thought America would be successful in helping those people in that war-torn place.

His answer was brief: “Dad, their hatreds are 1000 years old, ours are only about 200 years old.”

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