

Unnamed (Onondaga and Cayuga)

(August 2, 1684)

“Our young men are soldiers, and when they are provoked, they are like wolves.”

The Iroquois chiefs, making a treaty with the British against the French, addressed the governors of Virginia and New York, to assert their independence and rights.

Brother Corlear, your sachem is a great sachem, and we are but a small people; but when the English came first to Manhattan, to Aragiske [Virginia] and to Yakokranagary [Maryland], they were then but a small people, and we were great. Then, because we found you a good people, we treated you kindly, and gave you land; we hope therefore, now that you are great, and we small, you will protect us from the French. If you do not, we shall lose all our hunting and beavers: The French will get all the beavers. The reasons they are not angry with us is, because we carry our beavers to our brethren.

We have put our lands and ourselves under the protection of the great Duke of York, the brother of your great sachem, who is likewise a great sachem.

We have annexed the Susquehanna River, which we won with the sword, to this government; and we desire it may be a branch of the great tree that grows in this place, the top of which reaches the sun, and its branches shelter us from the French, and all other nations. Our fire burns in your houses, and your fire burns with us; we desire it may be so always. But we will not that any of the great Penn's people settle upon the Susquehanna River, for we have no other land to leave to our children.

Our young men are soldiers, and when they are provoked, they are like wolves in the woods, as you, Sachem of Virginia, very well know.

We have put ourselves under the great Sachem Charles, that lives on the other side of the great lake. We give you these two white dressed deerskins, to send to the great sachem, that he may write on them, and put a great red seal to them, to confirm what we know do; and put the Susquehanna River above the falls, and all the rest of our land under the great Duke of York, and give that land to none else. Our brethren, his people, have been like fathers to our wives and children, and have given us bread when we were in need of it; we will not therefore join ourselves, or our land, to any other government but this. We desire Corlear, our governor, may send this our proposition to the great Sachem Charles, who dwells on the other side the great lake, with this belt of wampum, and this other smaller belt to the Duke of York his brother. And we give you, Corlear, this beaver, that you may send over this proposition.

You great man of Virginia, we let you know, that great Penn did speak to us here in Corlear's house by his Agents and desired to buy the Susquehanna River of us, but we would not hearken to him, for we had fastened to this government.

We desire you therefore to bear witness of what we now do, and that we now confirm what we have done before. Let your friend, that lives on the other side of the great lake, know this, that we being a free people, though united to the English, may give our lands, and be joined to the sachem we like best. We give this beaver to remember what we say.

Native American text set: Unnamed (Iroquois)

(1744)

**“If the gentlemen of Virginia will send us a dozen of their sons,
we will take great care of their education.”**

Benjamin Franklin tells the story of the speech that follows, how at a council between them and the government of Virginia, the Iroquois were offered a college education for some of their young men.

We know that you highly esteem the kind of learning taught in those colleges, and that the maintenance of our young men, while with you, would be very expensive to you. We are convinced, therefore, that you mean to do us good by your proposal, and we thank you heartily. But you who are wise must know that different nations have different conceptions of things; and you will therefore not take it amiss if our ideas of this kind of education happen not to be the same with yours. We have had some experience of it: several of our young people were formerly brought up at the colleges of the northern provinces; they were instructed in all your sciences; but when they came back to us, they were bad runners, ignorant of every means of living in the woods; unable to bear either cold or hunger; knew neither how to build a cabin, take a deer, or kill an enemy; spoke our language imperfectly; were therefore neither fit for hunters, warriors, or counselors; they were totally good for nothing. We are, however, not the less obliged by your kind offer, though we decline accepting it: and to show our grateful sense of it, if the gentlemen of Virginia will send us a dozen of their sons, we will take great care of their education, instruct them in all we know, and make men of them.

Great Speeches by Native Americans

Editor: Bob Blaisdell

Native American text set:

Excerpts from speeches by Canassatego

This speech shows the deep resentment that many Native Americans felt about colonial encroachment on their lands and their subsequent difficulties with self-support. Canassatego criticizes the fact that the settlements spoil Native American hunting, as well as that colonial horses eat grass that is meant for deer.

We know our lands are now become more valuable: the white people think we do not know their value; but we are sensible that the land is everlasting, and the few goods we receive for it are soon worn out and gone. For the future we will sell no lands but when Brother Onas [the proprietor of Pennsylvania] is in the country; and we will know beforehand the quantity of the goods we are to receive. Besides, we are not well used with respect to the lands still unsold by us. Your people daily settle on these lands, and spoil our hunting...

If you have not done anything, we now renew our request, and desire you will inform the person whose people are seated on our lands, that that country belongs to us, in right of conquest; we having bought it with our blood, and taken it from our enemies in fair war...

It is customary with us to make a present of skins whenever we renew our treaties. We are ashamed to offer our brethren so few; but your horses and cows have eat the grass our deer used to feed on. This has made them scarce, and will, we hope, plead in excuse for our not bringing a larger quantity: if we could have spared more we would have given more; but we are really poor; and desire you'll not consider the quantity, but, few as they are, accept them in testimony of our regard...

Our wise forefathers established union and amity between the five nations [Iroquois Nation]. This has made us formidable. This has given us great weight and authority with our neighboring nations. We are a powerful Confederacy, and by your observing the same methods our wise forefathers have taken you will acquire much strength and power; therefore, whatever befalls you, do not fall out with one another.

*Excerpts from speeches by Canassatego,
an Iroquois, as printed by Benjamin Franklin, 1740s
Smithsonian Source*

Native American text set:

William Apess, “Eulogy on King Philip,” speech

January 26, 1836

William Apess was a Pequot activist and author who fought for Native American rights. The following is an excerpt from his lecture on the history of the New England and specifically King Philip (Metacom), who led a war against the New England colonists from 1675–1678.

...How they could go to work to enslave a free people and call it religion is beyond the power of my imagination and outstrips the revelation of God's word. O thou pretended hypocritical Christian, whoever thou art, to say it was the design of God that we should murder and slay one another because we have the power. Power was not given us to abuse each other, but a mere power delegated to us by the King of heaven, a weapon of defense against error and evil; and when abused, it will turn to our destruction. Mark, then, the history of nations throughout the world...

When the governor finds that His Majesty [King Philip] was displeased, he then sends messengers to him and wishes to know why he would make war upon him (as if he had done all right), and wished to enter into a new treaty with him. The king answered them thus: “Your governor is but a subject of King Charles of England; I shall not treat with a subject; I shall treat of peace only with a king, my brother; when he comes, I am ready.”

Voices of Democracy

Native American text set:

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January 26, 1836

William Apess was a Pequot activist and author who fought for Native American rights. The following is an excerpt from his lecture on the history of the New England and specifically King Philip (Metacom), who led a war against the New England colonists from 1675–1678.

Philip and all the Indians generally felt indignantly toward whites, whereby they were more easily allied together by Philip, their king and emperor, we come to notice more particularly his history. As to His Majesty, King Philip, it was certain that his honor was put to the test, and it was certainly to be tried, even at the loss of his life and country...

[42] At this council it appears that Philip made the following speech to his chiefs, counselors, and warriors:

[43] “Brothers, you see this vast country before us, which the Great Spirit gave to our fathers and us; you see the buffalo and deer that now are our support. Brothers, you see these little ones, our wives and children, who are looking to us for food and raiment; and you now see the foe before you, that they have grown insolent and bold; that all our ancient customs are disregarded; the treaties made by our fathers and us are broken, and all of us insulted; our council fires disregarded, and all the ancient customs of our fathers; our brothers murdered before our eyes, and their spirits cry to us for revenge. Brothers, these people from the unknown world will cut down our groves, spoil our hunting and planting grounds, and drive us and our children from the graves of our fathers, and our council fires, and enslave our women and children.”

[44] This famous speech of Philip was calculated to arouse them to arms, to do the best they could in protecting and defending their rights. The blow had now been struck, the die was cast, and nothing but blood and carnage was before them. When he begins the war, he goes forward and musters about 500 of his men and arms them complete, and about 900 of the other, making in all about fourteen hundred warriors when he commenced. It must be recollected that this war was legally declared by Philip, so that the colonies had a fair warning...Philip’s young men were eager to do exploits and to lead captive their haughty lords. It does appear that every Indian heart had been lighted up at the council fires, at Philip’s speech, and that the forest was literally alive with this injured race. And now town after town fell before them. The Pilgrims with their forces were marching ever in one direction, while Philip and his forces were marching in another, burning all before them, until Middleborough, Taunton, and Dartmouth were laid in ruins and forsaken by its inhabitants.
