

## ***What is meant by “Traditional Government,” and what does it imply?***

A Commentary by Teyowisonte (Thomas Deer)

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At 24 years old, this author has heard his whole life about the coming of traditional government. Of course I'm referring to the 1979 community mandate ordering the Mohawk Council of Kahnawake (MCK) to return to traditional government. It's been over 20 years now since that initial order, and as a community member, I am aware of no significant progress made by any institution. In the meantime, the community will continue to contemplate what such a movement means and implies? Indeed, there are many different interpretations in regards to the true meaning and implications of a move towards the ambiguous term, "traditional government". This article will attempt to dispel any misconceptions and suggest a more visionary meaning to term traditional government.

The seeds of our disunity were actually planted hundreds of years ago, when the traditional Mohawk Nation government found itself in impotent disarray due to the treasonous independent actions of Joseph Brant during the Revolutionary War. His actions ultimately determined the fate of the Haudenosaunee, as the ashes of the Confederate Council Fire were eventually covered up in 1777. A dark time reigned for the Mohawk Nation until 1888, when the Central Fire of the Mohawk Nation was rekindled at Ahkwesahsne, reaffirming its place in the Haudenosaunee. Since then, communities such as Kahnawake and Kanehsatake have once again embraced the Kaianere'kó:wa and the ancient ways of the Long House. Since this reintroduction of traditional government, in one shape or another, Kahnawake's traditional contingent has operated a community version of the Mohawk Nation Council that was equipped with Chiefs and Clanmothers recognized by the Haudenosaunee. Over time this system also began to decay resulting in a state of turmoil. Today, due to internal fighting combined with the assimilating contribution of the Indian Act system, the Long House people of Kahnawake have broken up into basically three separate camps, following paths as divided as their minds.

There is a portion of Kahnawa'kehró:non that believe a return to traditional government implies that the MCK will merely reformat the existing elected council structure. Perhaps that is the goal of some individuals in that system, but nothing can be proven, as there has never been any significant information released pertaining to that issue. Another misperception is that one of the three Long House camps, or all three together in the event of traditionalist unification, will be the official government in Kahnawake, thus alienating the voice of all non-traditional Kahnawa'kehró:non in the "new order". It is also thought by some, that current personnel employed in existing community and administrative services will be terminated due to the dissolution of the Indian Act. Some even believe the true intention of unification is to launch a hostile campaign against the MCK. All of these versions of a so-called return to traditional government deter at least one demographic in Kahnawake and likewise must become discarded theories as it will only delay and hamper any serious movement.

The majority of Kahnawake have jointly recognized the government of the Haudenosaunee as the only political, social, and cultural means of providing peace, righteousness, and power, as well as ensuring political and social equality, justice and liberty to its populous. In resolution to these debates, I hereby declare my own vision and interpretation of the meaning and implication of unity and the return to traditional government in Kahnawake:

Our traditional government can be identified as the original democratic institution designed by the Peacemaker to restore and provide peace and strength among the troubled nations of Iroquoia. It is a system that is governed by the people directly through our constitution known as the Kaianere'kó:wa, usually translated vaguely as the Great Law of Peace. Traditional government in Kahnawake calls for the creation of a new unified Mohawk Nation government that will provide a unified voice for the community regardless of an individual's religious denomination or previous political affiliation. Through this creation, Kahnawake's common link shall be the Kaianere'kó:wa, as the good tidings of peace and power are universal elements of humanity and not restricted to traditional people.

Traditional government implies that a new unified Mohawk Nation government at Kahnawake will reaffirm its allegiance and relationship with the traditional Mohawk Nation and the Haudenosaunee as a whole, contributing to its unity and renaissance. Thus, dissolving and terminating the reign of Indian Act. Moreover, Kahnawake will now have the legal ability to assert and defend inherit treaty rights and nationhood as one body, one heart, and one mind.

It is hoped that my interpretation answered questions and dispelled the many misconceptions, as well as provided an optimistic vision of what a return to traditional government could be. However, my main concern is not what it means or implies but rather, how do we get there?

Ever onward towards the good tidings of peace & power!