A Neo-Aristotelian Analysis of
Chief Sagoyewatha’s ("Red Jacket") Oration to Christian Missionaries, 1805

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**Introduction**

Sagoyewatha later dubbed “Red Jacket”, because he frequently wore an embroidered coat given to him by the British as a gift, was a Seneca Chief of the Iroquois Confederacy situated primarily in the North Eastern part of what is now the United States of America. Founded in the 15th century or earlier the confederacy was originally comprised of the Mohawk, Oneida, Onondaga, Cayuga, and Seneca nations. The Five Nations incorporated the Tuscarora tribe in the early 18th century and was thereafter known as the Six Nations. Extending east to Lake Ontario and Lake Erie and as far north as Quebec, Canada, the Iroquois Confederacy covered approximately 4/5ths of what is now New York State. At the time that refugees fleeing religious persecution in Europe landed on the shores of North America, the Iroquois Confederacy had existed as a socio-political entity for more than 300 years. This democratic union derived its power from a constitution that bound the individual tribes together for mutual support and protection. Known as the “Laws of the Great Peace”, it was this concept of separate political entities joined together in a democratic union that became the model for the founders of the fledgling United States to develop the three-branch system of government comprised of the Legislature, Senate and House of Representatives. (Murphy)

**Description of the Artifact**

Having sided with the British during the Revolutionary War, in the years after cessation of hostilities, Red Jacket was instrumental in facilitating peace talks and establishing diplomatic ties with the newly formed United States Government and the Six Nations. In 1805, a Christian missionary society from New England requested permission from Red Jacket to proselytize the Iroquois settlements in northern New York. Led by Jacob Cram, They traveled to Buffalo Creek, New York to meet with the elders of the Iroquois Confederacy and discuss the request. Red Jacket’s speech was highly logical and
utilized terminology intended to foster consubstantiality between him and the missionaries. During the oration, he argues that it would be preferable to preserve the status quo and respect each group's right to practice their faith the way it had been passed down to them from their ancestors. Although very skillfully and persuasively presented, ultimately, the missionaries rebuffed Red Jacket’s attempt to reach a compromise an added insult to injury by refusing to accept his hand in friendship at the conclusion of his response.

Description of the Analytical Method

Well known as a skilled orator, Sagoyewatha’s name, roughly translated, means “he keeps them awake” (Sagoyewatha) and was bestowed upon him by the Seneca around 1780 due to his speaking ability which he demonstrated at the numerous peace talks between representatives of the United States and the Iroquois Confederacy as well as in tribal council meetings. A proponent of peace, Red Jacket was considered a pacifist among his people, and struggled politically during the duration of the Revolutionary War. Ultimately, his ability to weave words superseded the negative affect this had and he was frequently included in negotiations and became the spokesperson for the Six Nations in many instances.

Understanding Red Jacket’s background and the context of the artifact is critical to evaluating its efficacy with respect to the organization and presentation. Although history records that the speech was not well received by the American audience it is the opinion of this author that the speech was exceptionally well thought out, skillfully drafted and eloquently presented.

Using neo-Aristotelian criticism, we will examine the speech given by Red Jacket to Jacob Cram and his fellow missionaries in response to the formal request to proselytize among the Iroquois people of Northern New York. Through a systematic examination of the five canons of rhetoric, invention, organization, style, memory and delivery, and paying particular attention to his use of ethos, logos and pathos, we will determine if he used all available means of persuasion to support his argument that freedom of religion should be applied equitably to all inhabitants of America.
Analysis of the Artifact

With regard to invention, Red Jacket employed a combination of the artistic proofs of *ethos*, *logos* and *pathos* to questionable effect. In order to measure that effect, let us examine the three in order of importance based on historical record and frequency within the artifact. The truth is that simply being chosen to represent all of the Six Nations on this matter speaks to his credibility, or *ethos*.

As mentioned previously, Red Jacket was renowned for his oratorical ability, demonstrating a mastery of the art of communication rivaled by few. Thomas Morris, son of Robert Morris considered by many to be the “Financier of the American Revolution,” (Why is Red Jacket so Fascinating) said of Sagoyewatha, “He was well-made. His eyes were fine and expressive of the intellect of which he possessed an uncommon portion. His address, particularly when he spoke, was very fine and almost majestic.” He was, Morris concluded, “The most talented speaker that I have ever heard address an audience of any description” (Why). So great was his reputation, that in 1792, Sagoyewatha led a delegation to meet with President George Washington that culminated with the new president bestowing the Seneca Chief a peace medal in honor of his efforts to reconcile the opposing sides. The final example that speaks to the strength of his credibility is the remarks made by the Governor of New York; DeWitt Clinton after Red Jacket was acquitted of sorcery in a Seneca trial. “Perhaps the annals of history cannot furnish a more conspicuous triumph of the powers of oratory in a barbarous nation devoted to superstition,” (Why). Ironically, the charges against him had been made by political enemies frustrated with his uncanny ability to outwit any opponent whether white or Native.

In the text *Theoretical Criticism*, the author, Sonja Foss defines *logos* as the “logical argument. Essentially, *logos* deals with the rational or logical appeal of a communicative artifact. In this case, examination of Red Jacket’s speech reveals that he has a highly logical thought process combined with the ability to present arguments in a clear and concise manner that is difficult to refute. For example, in
the first instance of logos in the artifact he questions the logic in accepting the missionaries claim that their religion is the only true way to worship the Great Spirit.

Brother, continue to listen. You say you are sent to instruct us how to worship the Great Spirit agreeably to his mind, and if we do not take hold of the religion which you white people teach, we shall be unhappy hereafter. You say that you are right, and we are lost; how do we know this to be true? We understand that your religion is written in a book; if it was intended for us as well as you, why has not the Great Spirit given it to us, and not only to us, but why did he not give to our forefathers the knowledge of that book, with the means of understanding it rightly? We only know what you tell us about it. How shall we know when to believe, being so often deceived by the white people? (Red Jacket)

As you can see, Red Jacket uses the historical mistreatment of Native Americans by white settlers to question the legitimacy of the missionaries claim. He agrees that Christianity was written and therefore has some credibility, but his peoples experience with whites’ damages that credibility and justifies some measure of caution. He goes on to say,

Brother, you say there is but one way to worship and serve the Great Spirit; if there is but one religion, why do you white people differ so much about it? Why not all agree, as you can all read the book?

Brother, we do not understand these things. We are told that your religion was given to your forefathers, and has been handed down from father to son. We also have a religion which was given to our forefathers, and has been handed down to us their children. We worship that way. It teaches us to be thankful for all the favors we receive; to love each other, and to be united. We never quarrel about religion. (Red Jacket)

In this segment, Red Jacket deftly points out that if, as the missionaries claim, there is only one true religion and that it is written down in a book for all to read, why then do whites continue to disagree about it? He claims ignorance to this dilemma and attempts to make a comparison between his peoples’ faith and Christianity first by noting that both have been handed down from their respective forefathers, but that for the Iroquois, there is no argument about religion despite being passed down through an oral tradition. Again, he questions the legitimacy of the claim that Christianity is the only
true religion using 

\textit{logos}. The final example of logic we will inspect lies in the second and third to last paragraphs of the speech.

Brother, you say you have not come to get our land or our money, but to enlighten our minds. I will now tell you that I have been at your meetings, and saw you collecting money from the meeting. I cannot tell what this money was intended for, but suppose it was for your minister; and if we should conform to your way of thinking, perhaps you may want some from us.

Brother, we are told that you have been preaching to the white people in this place. These people are our neighbors; we are acquainted with them; we will wait, a little while and see what effect your preaching has upon them. If we find it does them good, makes them honest and less disposed to cheat Indians, we will then consider again what you have said. (Red Jacket)

Here, Red Jacket doesn’t hold back. He reiterates the claim that the missionaries’ make that their intentions are solely for the salvation of the Iroquois with no regard or desire to garner land or money, yet he cleverly points out that he himself has witnessed the collection of a monetary offering at a Christian service. He then questions the possibility that if the Iroquois conform to the tenets of Christianity, they too will be required to make similar monetary offerings. Lastly, he extends a logical challenge to the missionaries by simply asking for a little time to observe if the ministry of Christianity among the white residents of Buffalo alters their historical behavior and mistreatment of his people. “If”, he says, “we find it does them good, makes them honest and less disposed to cheat Indians, we will then consider again what you have said” (Red Jacket)

In this oration, if \textit{ethos} is the root of the argument and \textit{logos} is the trunk, then \textit{pathos} is the branches and leaves crowning the tree. Foss defines \textit{pathos} as an emotional appeal and Red Jacket uses it liberally sprinkled throughout the artifact. The most frequent use of \textit{pathos} is clearly visible in the use of the word “brother” throughout the text in an effort to build consubstantiality between the two disparate cultures. “Brother appears thirteen times and is frequently supported by the pronouns “we”, “us” and “our”, which he uses in a collective sense to describe Natives and whites together. He begins his response to Jacob Cram in the following manner,

\textbf{Friend} and \textbf{brother}; it was the will of the Great Spirit that \textbf{we} should meet together this day. \textit{He} orders all things, and \textit{he} has given \textbf{us} a fine day for \textbf{our} council. \textit{He} has taken \textit{his} garment from before the sun, and caused it to shine with brightness upon \textbf{us}; our eyes are opened, that we see clearly; our ears are unstopped, that we have been able to hear distinctly the words that you have spoken; for all these favors, we thank the Great Spirit and \textit{him} only. (Red Jacket)
Note how he immediately joins the two groups together verbally. Furthermore, in a clear effort to foster goodwill, he refers to the Great Spirit directly or with the pronouns “he” and “him” six times in the first paragraph alone and total of eighteen times in the course of his speech. The next example of Red Jacket’s attempt to evoke an emotional response within his audience is found in the fourth and fifth paragraphs of the speech.

...your forefathers crossed the great waters, and landed on this island. Their numbers were small; they found friends, and not enemies; they told us they had fled from their own country for fear of wicked men, and come here to enjoy their religion. They asked for a small seat; we took pity on them, granted their request, and they sat down amongst us; we gave them corn and meat; they gave us poison in return. The white people had now found our country; tidings were carried back, and more came amongst us; yet we did not fear them, we took them to be friends; they called us brothers; we believed them, and gave them a larger seat. At length, their numbers had greatly increased; they wanted more land; they wanted our country. Our eyes were opened, and our minds became uneasy. Wars took place; Indians were hired to fight against Indians, and many of our people were destroyed. They also brought strong liquor among us; it was strong and powerful, and has slain thousands.

Brother, our seats were once large, and yours were very small; you have now become a great people, and we have scarcely a place left to spread our blankets; you have got our country, but are not satisfied; you want to force your religion upon us. (Red Jacket)

This recollection of events and the description of the relationship between Natives and early European religious refugees and the subsequent role reversal is a powerful attempt to garner pathos within the missionaries. Essentially, Red Jacket reminds them that when their ancestors were weak, the Iroquois took pity on them and protected them as friends, allowing them “a seat” or space in their lands to build their homes and grow their communities. Yet, in the end, that kindness was repaid with treachery and death. The most poignant and truly ironic excerpt is the statement highlighted above, “they told us they had fled from their own country for fear of wicked men, and come here to enjoy their religion.” (Red Jacket)
Organization
The overall organization of the artifact is a four-part pattern designed to have the greatest persuasive effect on the audience. The first part consists of three paragraphs that are specifically intended to foster consubstantiality between the two sides and to put the audience at ease with specific terminology. The second section and the longest oration is the fourth and fifth paragraphs in which Red Jacket attempts to generate an emotional response, specifically remorse or guilt, within the audience through the story of role reversal and loss on the part of the Iroquois Confederacy. The next seven paragraphs make up the third section and are brief exercises in the logical process that are designed to support the Natives position of wariness and suspicion of the missionaries motives while reinforcing the concept of religious freedom and applying it to the Iroquois as well. The final segment and last paragraph returns to the concept of consubstantiality, punctuating the oration with a renewed sense of camaraderie and friendship culminating in the extension of Red Jacket’s hand in the white European tradition as a gesture of good will.

Style
There is a distinct pattern to Sagoyewatha’s oration in the repetition of the word “brother” at the beginning of every paragraph. He also consistently uses similar verbiage to refer to God as the Great Spirit or by the masculine derivatives of the pronoun “He” or “Him”, again, to foster that sense of belonging and similarity between the two groups. Essentially saying, “We’re not so different, we believe in the same God.” In addition, with the exception of the fourth paragraph, each point is succinct, with no more than four sentences per paragraph. This technique was well planned and allowed him the maneuverability to make a logical argument or foster consubstantiality quickly and then move on before the audience had time to question what he was saying. Red Jacket also began the speech by calling Jacob Cram “Friend and brother”, reinforcing that relationship throughout the oration before concluding in a physical gesture of goodwill by extending his hand in friendship, essentially saying, “We’re friends. For now, let’s agree to disagree.”
Delivery

As a boy, Sagoyewatha’s quick tongue caused others in his tribe to comment that he was “too big for his buckskins” (Why). Delivered, as it were, prior to the invention of either audio or video recording devices, no accurate depiction of Sagoyewatha’s speech to the missionary delegation exists. However, based on numerous reports describing other speeches and his seemingly indefatigable dedication to the mission of peace and his protectiveness of the Six Nations, it is clear that Sagoyewatha was extremely charismatic and eloquent in his ability to weave words and stir people to action, or in-action depending on the circumstance. When chided about his preference for peace, he replied, “I fight for the Great Peace. Is it wrong to fight for what is right?” (Why) Based on his previous experience and status among both Natives and whites, it would seem that Red Jackets delivery in this particular instance was powerful and well-rehearsed, although it would seem that the eloquence of it contributed to his failure to persuade the audience.

Memory

Almost 210 years later, all that remains is the transcription of the oration, however, with regard for the fifth canon of memory, there is little question that Sagoyewatha memorized this oration. Without the technology to prompt or record his thoughts, it seems likely that he spoke them from memory. This is not to say that he did not prepare them in advance as is obvious from the careful organization of the oration as a whole and the well-timed occurrences of logic counterbalanced by pathos.

Assessment of Effect

If one were to measure the effectiveness of this artifact based solely on the outcome, one would have to conclude that it was a complete and utter failure. History records that upon concluding his speech with an expression of goodwill, Red Jacket approached Jacob Cram with his hand extended in friendship only to have the offer refused. The missionary’s response was simply, to announce “that no fellowship could exist between the religion of God and the works of the Devil” (Red Jacket). However, if
the premise to determine its efficacy was “did the rhetor (Sagoyewatha) use all available means of persuasion at his disposal”, then this writer feels that the only conclusion is that this a singularly persuasive and loquacious speech that, as history has proven, has become an example of the speakers intelligence, eloquence and charisma. The most memorable aspect for this writer was the profoundly moving use of pathos in the description of the historical relationship between the Iroquois people and white settlers and the entreaty to allow them the dignity of retaining the right to worship their creator the same way that their ancestors had.

Ironically, it is the descendants of those brave souls so persecuted for their differing religious beliefs that they risked their very lives to cross the Atlantic Ocean for the slender hope of practicing their faith the way they wanted to, that refused the descendants of their benefactors the same right. What Red Jacket could not account for was the insular bigotry and close-mindedness of the missionaries so overwhelmed by his ability to speak so persuasively, that to accept his argument would be to count him as an equal, which was the one thing they could not bring themselves to do. After all, they were savages that needed to be saved.
Works Cited

Foss, Sonja K. “Rhetorical Criticism: Exploration and Practice” Waveland Press, Inc. 2009 Print


