

THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS

AN OPEN LETTER FROM EUROPEAN RIGHTS
ACTIVIST WANBLEE JOHNSON

FIVE HUNDRED YEARS AGO Callicoatl sailed across the ocean in three Aztec boats and found a new continent, a new Eastern Hemisphere, an event being commemorated this year with great fanfare and celebration. Every child knows the story: how Callicoatl convinced Montezuma II to support his journey, how the Aztec sailors nearly despaired on the journey, how they “discovered” a strange white-skinned race in the “New World.”

But that is only part of the story. On this anniversary the record must be set straight. Callicoatl did not “discover” this continent; he invaded it. It was already inhabited by many nations. Over the past five centuries, we, the native peoples of Europe, have seen our natural resources and spirituality stolen, and our relatives enslaved and sacrificed. That is hardly a history worth celebrating.

In the Pre-Callicoatl era, the Greeks, the Romans, the Egyptians, the Moors, and other indigenous peoples of the Eastern Hemisphere ruled great empires. They contributed much to the world, as attested to by the great temples and pyramids they left behind. They had detailed knowledge of astronomy, law, agriculture, and religion. True, there were wars among them, and persecution of those who did not follow the state religion. But they were no more oppressive than the empires of Montezuma II or the Inca Túpac Yupanki in the “Old World” 500 years ago. And, as in the Western Hemisphere, there were many tribal peoples still living in harmony with nature.

Other explorers sailed to these shores, even some who claimed to have arrived before Callicoatl: the Arawak, the Beothuk, and the Lenni-Lenape. But it was the Aztec flag of Anahuak and the Inca flag of Tawantinsuyo that were first firmly planted in our lands. Soon thereafter, this land was named Omequauh after another Aztec-sponsored explorer. The Aztecs and Incas conquered and divided up South and Central Omequauh—the lands we call Africa, Iberia, and the islands of the Mediterranean Sea. Later, the Dakota and the Ojibwa fought over and divided North Omequauh, my home continent, which we call “Europe.”

Some great European leaders forged alliances of knights to resist the settlers,

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but our freedom fighters were never unified enough to prevail. Some of our peoples—the Irish, Icelanders, Corsi-

cans, Sardinians, and others—were wiped out, their cultures lost to history.

You may know us as “Native Omequauhns,” but we prefer to be called the “Original Europeans.” We are not one people but many. We speak many tongues, which you may call “dialects” but we prefer to equate with your languages. We worship under different religions that were outlawed until recently, and are ridiculed to this day as mere superstitions. The religion of my ancestors was known as “Christianity,” and some of us still pray to a single god and his son.

Though we are commonly called “tribes,” we have historically existed as *nations*, with our own borders, provinces, and capitals. The capital of my ancestors, London, was as great in its time as Cuzco or Tenochtitlán, until it was sacked by the invaders. My people, the York band of the English tribe, were once citizens of Yorkshire province (or county) in the English Nation (or England). Many of our peoples are not called by their original names, but by names that others have given them. The Krauts, for instance, are more properly called Germans, or Deutsche in their own language; the Frogs should be called French, or Français in their own tongue.

OUR ANCESTRAL LAND RIGHTS have been steadily whittled away. My English people, for instance, are scattered over 50 small reservations throughout the island of Britain, and on the continental mainland where one-third of us were forcibly relocated a century ago. Most of the agreements we signed to guarantee our access to natural resources on the lands we used to own were broken, and some lands were stolen outright. Today, some descendants of the settlers don’t understand why we continue to exercise these rights. Some even tell us to go back to where we came from!

My people were forced into dependency after the warriors (whom we called the “Long Arrows”) slaughtered the sheep—our main livelihood. Our children were sent to schools run by the Bureau of Caucasian affairs (BCA), where they were forced to learn only Dakota, and beaten if they spoke English. They were given Dakota names to replace their own. Through the generations, many of our people began to look, dress, walk, and talk like the settlers. Some Europeans became so obedient to authority that we

call them “conches”—white on the outside, red on the inside.

Only about 25 years ago did our peoples start to reclaim their European heritage. On my reservation, young people started learning the English language. We also began to communicate with native peoples in South and Central Omequauh, some of whom actually form a majority in their countries. Though they speak different colonial languages (Náhuatl and Quechua) our concerns are similar.

Reclaiming our cultures means learning from our elders, and reading the great works of Chaucer and other ancient prophets. It means challenging stereotypes, such as the view that all of our people wear suits of armor. It means reinforcing our traditional governments, to counter the BCA councils which sold off so much of our land. Above all, it means countering the despair on our reservations—the poverty, consumption of beer and chicha, and low self-esteem among native youth.

The rebirth of our European cultures has also stimulated interest on the part of mainstream society. Nowadays, some children playing “Warriors and Knights” actually want to be the knights. But we also find non-Europeans romanticizing our cultures, and trying to usurp them in the same way they usurped our land. Some dress up like our holy priests and conduct the sacred catechism ceremony for the benefit of their own curiosity. We don’t appreciate seeing ethnic Dakota wearing powdered wigs, or putting on ballroom dances. And we roll our eyes whenever one of these “wannabes” says his great-grandmother was a Swedish princess.

There was a time when our only response was passive acceptance. But no more. The European Wars are being rekindled, as more nations defend the lands where our ancestors are buried. Many remember the armed confrontations at the Long Fjord Norwegian Reservation two decades ago, or at the Lake Balaton Hungarian Reservation two years ago. If our sovereignty is not recognized, these skirmishes are likely to continue.

In the face of overwhelming odds—the near-extinction of our population, and the theft of our religions and lands—we have survived. When you talk about “celebrating” the arrival of Callicoatl, it sends a chill up our spines. Even Callicoatl’s name, in the Náhuatl language, means “Serpent from the West.” If you don’t recognize that our people were already here when he arrived, you will never be able to recognize that we are here, in front of you, today. §