

**A Native American Proposal:
De-Europeanizing Liberalism and
De-liberalizing Federalism for an Old,
New World Order**

by Jason Morgan

Abstract

Brandon Christensen's bold ideas for a transformation of the world order provide excellent impetus for a rethinking of moribund global paradigms. And yet, Christensen's American Proposal, while detailed and thoughtful, does not go far enough. In light of the erasure of Native Americans from the liberalism that underpins the American political order, as well as from the Philadelphia iteration of that order itself and its ensuing American empire, I propose a Native American Proposal, which entails the overturning of some five centuries of Euro-American imperialism and colonialism worldwide. In place of the morally bankrupt world system I envision a coexistence of civilizations along the lines of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, a Native American grouping rooted in mediation and reconciliation and dedicated to the production and maintenance of peace among would-be antagonists. A loose, peace-oriented grouping such as one inspired by the

Haudenosaunee Confederacy would also allow for multiple similar confederacies, such as BRICS, to flourish, further dismantling the inherently racist liberal world order.

Keywords

Haudenosaunee Confederacy; Great Law of Peace; American Proposal; liberalism; federalism

Introduction

In his 2021 paper “Reviving the Libertarian Interstate Federalist Tradition: The American Proposal,” *Isonomia Quarterly* editor and noted global federalism thinker Brandon Christensen argues in favor of expanding the Philadelphian federalist compromise, centered on the sovereignty-for-representation principle of the senate, the balanced power arrangement of the American Constitution, and other key Federalist innovations, into a global enterprise (Christensen 2021; see also Gauderie 2026 and Christensen 2022).⁴² If all goes well, Christensen avers, the limits of the Westphalian order can be overcome, and an “extended federalism” will “turn [Vincent] Ostrom’s [(1919-2012)] third American century into another episode in history where national sovereignties are abrogated so that individual liberty may flourish” (Christensen 2021, p. 446). Because

⁴² A helpful guide to varieties of federalism is at Kong 2025.

“Hayekian liberalism ‘in its pure form ... is represented in the United States ... by the ideas of James Madison [(1751-1836)]’,” Christensen writes, quoting from Friedrich Hayek (1899-1992) himself, the extrapolation of the system that Madison and other founders set forth in Philadelphia in 1787 can help counter the “illiberal alternatives to the status quo” that now threaten individual liberty (Christensen 2021, p. 446, citing Hayek 1960).

There is much to applaud in Christensen’s approach, not least the boldness of his thought. The dauntless pursuit of big ideas is just what is needed now, when the big idea of a Westphalian globalism is petering out and a new world order has yet definitely to be born. And yet, while I greatly appreciate Christensen’s erudition and verve, and commend him for organizing this and other symposia on one of the most pressing problems of our time, I would build beyond what he very capably suggests. The solution to the crisis of global liberalism is not more or better liberalism, but the destruction of liberalism once and for all. I see Christensen’s political approach and raise him a civilizational one.

Although liberalism is often framed as a universal political theory, the archaeology of political liberalism reveals that the ideology is founded on an elided Other, a “savage” whom the (European)

liberal is ordained to uplift, civilize, and tame (Hinderaker 2000, p. 588; Elbourn III 2025, pp. 2-3). Top-shelf figures in political and economic liberalism—Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778), Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679), and John Locke (1632-1704), to name a few—rooted their arguments in a politics denatured by overcoming the seemingly pre-political state of nature found in the Native American (Moloney 2011; Cattelino 2018; Canessa and Picq 2024, pp. 66-67, 75-78, 80-81). Liberalism as a European phenomenon is best described not as an organic outgrowth of European thought but as a hierarchized, uneven appropriation of radical ideas of freedom and anarchy originating in the New World. More narrowly, liberal American constitutionalists and other liberal political theorists and activists knew of, and may have been influenced by, Indian practice and thought (Miller 2015; Sturgis 1999; but see also Jensen 2017 and Payne, Jr. 1996). The Haudenosaunee Confederacy, in particular, may have provided a model for the very Philadelphia compromise that Christensen and others hold up as a model for world governance (Miller 2015, pp. 35-41). Whatever the origins, the Philadelphia-ists and their progeny steadily destroyed the original inhabitants of the continent (see Nichols 2022). That erasure, in body, in civilization, and in influence, must be undone, and the liberalism that is the product of that erasure discarded.

As the liberal age wanes, it is important to recover the origins of political liberalism, recognizing it as the product not of the West but of non-Western civilizations. By the same token, the unraveling of the liberal age, really the denouement of some five centuries of European exploitation of non-European places and peoples, brings back into view the civilizational mode of belonging that prevailed before the imposition of political liberalism and constitutionalism as (artificial) ways of forming a political grouping (see Lee 2026). Others have noted possible problems with the Philadelphia System (see Marquis and Coyne 2026 and Duryea 2026).⁴³ I largely agree, and go further. In this essay, I interrogate political liberalism, including the American (Philadelphia) Proposal, as a parasitic deformation of Native American ideas and mores. I suggest that, globally, what is needed for the dawning age is a paradigm fit for civilizational, not political, grouping. I propose, as a counter to the American Proposal, a Native American Proposal, one invoking Haudenosaunee Confederacy practices as a working model for a multi-polar, civilization-based world order. An added advantage of this Native American Proposal is that the Haudenosaunee Confederacy has strong elements of mediation and reconciliation, making it also useful for coming to a reckoning with some five hundred

⁴³ Owsley 1999 and Spooner 1870 speak against the Constitution more broadly.

years of Euro-American dispossession of Native American and other peoples and places—a dispossession also including what is commonly known as political liberalism (see Elbourn III 2025, pp. 1-2, 5-6; Birch and Hart 2018, pp. 26-27). My goal in doing this is not to strengthen or reform the liberal, Westphalian order, but to destroy it (but see Nicol and Zellen 2022).

The Formation of the American Proposal

When representatives from across the American colonies met in Philadelphia in 1787, they did so as Americans. But when they formulated, as was their purpose, an approach to self-government in the Americas, they did so, curiously, as Europeans. Informed by Locke, Rousseau, Hobbes, and other Europeans, the men in the jabots, breeches, and long-tailed coats wanted to set up a new form of political order, something distinctly New World, but they did so by appealing to men who had never set foot in America (Nichols 2005).

There was a trick to the seeming incongruity. In grounding their ideas in European liberalism, the men in Philadelphia were actually circling back around to their own homeland. To put a finer point on it, the American-born Philadelphia conventiongoers were invoking the other native Americans, those who had not only given liberalism its start but also provided the Philadelphia

conventiongoers with many of their more immediate ideas about how to conduct public affairs. In a remarkable passage in their 2021 book *The Dawn of Everything*, David Graeber (1961-2020) and David Wengrow argue that ideas of freedom and equality, which had been very sparsely attested in European intellectual history theretofore, suddenly burst into European consciousness in the seventeenth century because Europeans then, thanks to missionaries and traders in North America, were exposed to Native American ideas of the same.⁴⁴

“There is a reason why so many key Enlightenment thinkers insisted that their ideals of individual liberty and political equality were inspired by Native American sources and examples,” Graeber and Wengrow write. “Because it was true” (Graeber and Wengrow 2021, p. 37). In matters of freedom, equality, popular sovereignty, and other things, Graeber and Wengrow argue, contemporary American ideas are probably much nearer those of the seventeenth-century Native Americans whom Europeans encountered than to those of seventeenth-century Europeans (Graeber and

⁴⁴ Graeber and Wengrow mention that Michel de Montaigne’s (1533-1592) 1580 essay “On Cannibals” “appears to be the first to consider indigenous American perspectives on European societies” (Graeber and Wengrow 2021, p. 536, endnote 47; see also Canessa and Picq 2024, pp. 71-72). On Graeber and Wengrow’s work see also Jonsson 2022, pp. 9-10.

Wengrow 2021, pp. 40-42). When Jean-Jacques Rousseau set out to examine “the origins of social inequality” for a 1754 Académie de Dijon essay contest, Graeber and Wengrow explain, he did not cite French accounts of Native American critiques of European society, but was nevertheless “clearly familiar with them, as any intellectual of the time would have been” (Graeber and Wengrow 2021, pp. 63-67). Those familiar with Rousseau’s political writings will understand the foundational place Native Americans occupy in his arguments.

The puzzle for Rousseau, Graeber and Wengrow assert, was the seeming noncontradiction in North America “between individual liberty and communism”. There was no absolutist private property regime in North America, and yet, improbably by European measures, there was also an extraordinary degree of personal freedom, balanced with a kind of social justice that emphasized the sharing of goods with others in need (Graeber and Wengrow 2021, pp. 66-67). This was a sticking point for many other European thinkers as well. After all, as Graeber and Wengrow point out, “the European conception of individual freedom was [...] tied ineluctably to notions of private property. Legally, this association traces back above all to the power of the male household head in ancient Rome, who could do whatever he liked with his chattels and possessions, including his children and slaves. In this view, freedom was always

defined—at least potentially—as something exercised to the cost of others” (Graeber and Wengrow 2021, p. 66, citing Graeber 2011, pp. 203-207). Neither Rousseau nor any prominent Western political theorist who followed him in the formational and implementational decades of liberalism came to a working understanding of how one could be both materially unburdened and politically free.

When the men met at Philadelphia to hammer out what would later be known as the American Proposal, they labored under much the same perplexity as Rousseau. Property in human beings proved to be an obstacle to achieving the ideals of universal equality proclaimed by Thomas Jefferson (1743-1826) in the Declaration of Independence just eleven years before. But there is something deeper to the contradiction (see Nichols 2005, pp. 51-52). If Graeber and Wengrow are right, then it is not just property in people, but property as a European concept in general, that proved the downfall of the American Proposal (see Canessa and Picq 2024, pp. 86-89; Arnold 2023, pp. 19, 23). Radical title, which the American government even today sees as having supplanted aboriginal title, thereby establishing working property rights in the New World, is an exclusivist, Roman-style form of ownership (see Williams 2021; see also Merrill and Smith 2012, pp. 90-97). It is also inherently racist. Confronted with a vast expanse of what the

Euro-Americans deemed *terra nullius*, liberals and other white colonists working in the legal shadow of radical title ownership caused the concept to metastasize, taking in Native land, and land from other, weakened European colonists (such as the Spanish and French), until the concept could go no farther in any direction (see Benton 2004 and Sai 2024). The American Proposal was doomed not just by slavery, but by the property ideology that underpinned it, namely that liberty rests on ownership of land and goods, and that that ownership is and ought to be absolute (Rommen 2016, p. 153).

Like Rousseau, Hobbes, Locke, and many others who are now lodestars of liberal thought began their arguments from the form of ‘primitive communism’ found in the New World and worked from those origins up to an array of political and economic rights seeking to maximize liberty and property, fitting Native American ideals into a pre-existing European framework (see Canessa and Picq 2024, p. 69). This sleight of hand, by which the influence of Native Americans is turned into the set of political ideologies (call it “liberalism”) that justified the Native Americans’ erasure both ideologically and physically, as a civilization, is why liberal-based world orders must be undone if there is to be any hope of common human happiness. Liberalism is like a sarcophagus, decorous on the outside, perhaps, but concealing a

corpse within. Perhaps Eric Voegelin (1901-1985) had this half in mind when he juxtaposed Plato's *metaxy* and modernity, describing the former as a "Second Reality" and a "dream world" (Raeder 2020). Oyebade Kunle Oyerinde and Teri Platt limn what I understand to be a similar dynamic in invoking W.E.B. Du Bois' "double consciousness" as a critique of American federalism in practice (Oyerinde and Platt 2026; see also Coyne and Hall 2022; Black 2012, pp. 179-180, 400; Jacobs 2024). Liberalism, especially American, Philadelphian liberalism, has been, not an organizer of worlds, but a destroyer of them.

The Moral Imperative of Dismantling Global Political Liberalism

The liberal order that Europeans and Euro-Americans have globalized, an order rooted in almost entirely concealed Native American origins and grounded in the tension between the illiberal savage and the liberating bearer of European civilization, is now under severe pressure worldwide (Horne 2020). Emergent alternative orders, such as BRICS, challenge the unipolar (formerly bipolar) hegemony of European thought predicated on the erasure of Native Americans. (To help understand the futility of the Cold War clash between dueling Enlightenment ideologies, recall that Friedrich Engels (1820-1895) wrote *Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* (1884)

working, as the book's subtitle makes plain, from notes written by Karl Marx (1818-1883) based on anthropologist Lewis H. Morgan's (1818-1881) researches among the Iroquois.) It is a moral imperative to support these oppositional orders. Five centuries of Euro-American colonialism are enough.

In contrapunctuality to Brandon Christensen's clarion call for global betterment, the American Proposal that I think would most benefit human beings worldwide is one modeled on the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, a grouping of five nations (the Seneca, Cayuga, Onondaga, Oneida, and Mohawk) "dispersed in discrete settlement clusters across central New York" (Birch and Hart 2018, p. 18). The confederacy, which "may have started out as a loose nonaggression pact among member nations intended to resolve conflict in the region," eventually welcomed a sixth member, the Tuscarora, who were originally from what is today the Carolinas (Birch and Hart 2018, p. 18; see also Blackhawk 2023, p. 111). The "only corporate activities" of the confederacy were the "councils of sachems," with "kinship idioms" and "chiefly titles" used widely across the confederacy's members (Birch and Hart 2018, p. 18). This confederacy, richly and deeply rooted in North American political and civilizational realities both before and during the age of European invasion, presents a hope for a new global order constructed after the

prevailing, Euro-American liberal order has, thankfully and mercifully, fallen.

The reasons I propose the Haudenosaunee Confederacy are threefold. First, such a confederacy is not a political but a civilizational order. As with many BRICS countries, national belonging is not merely a matter of holding a passport for that country or subscribing to a set of political ideals. The Philadelphia order, on which the United States is based, is a political, ideological one. Those who pledge allegiance to a republic, which in turn is predicated on certain political ideas and assumptions, are grouped as Americans, regardless of civilizational background. The world is changing, however. Civilizational states are on the ascendant (Zhang 2012). The thick belonging of ethnicities, cultures, histories, and tribes is taking the place of thin, albeit often loud and shrill, nationalism. I do not endorse the rise of civilizational states as a way to continue or even abet a Pabstian vision of revived Western civilization, but as a chastisement to the West (see Smith 2022). The liberal world order, which is another way to say the order of erasure of civilization in favor of political ideology, is dying. What is needed is not a revivification of ancient Roman alliance thinking, but a rebirth of civilizational complexity without unnecessary (military or economic or any other kind of) entanglement (see Studebaker 2026). A Haudenosaunee Confederacy model allows for

civilizations to live side by side, without the burden of committing to putatively universal (in reality, bastardized Native American and operationally European and Euro-American) political ideologies. Such a model, in other words, recognizes the multipolar world currently being born. And it does so with the added benefit of being free from totalizing property rights ideas which have been the justification for nearly ceaseless Westphalian imperialism.

Second, the Haudenosaunee Confederacy was, at its heart, a forum for discussion with an eye to reconciliation of disputes. While government form and civilizational inflection will differ worldwide, troubles among peoples are the lot of human life. There must be some way to mediate troubles, but how this is done is key. Politics subscribing to statist ideologies such as just war theory, an ideology which unfortunately has deep roots in European modes of thought and practice, are incapable of providing the wisdom and understanding necessary to effect solutions to troubles in a way satisfactory to everyone involved. In general, no lasting peace is possible when political ideologies, such as liberalism, democracy, or other abstractions, are at stake. Mediation and reconciliation, and not ideological conflict or adversarial, abstract justice, offer a much better way to maintain peace among potential adversaries (see

Ramseyer 2015; Morgan 2021; Walker 2004; Arnold 2023, pp. 19-20, fn. 11).

In support of this second reason, it should be remembered that the fact that the original Haudenosaunee Confederacy was open to others' joining indicates that this model was, and is, adaptable to virtually any situation requiring dialogue in the world today (see Arnold 2023, p. 15, fn. 3, and p. 17; Moore and Doxtater 2020, pp. 8-9). The Haudenosaunee Confederacy is open-ended, with a very low barrier to joining. The Great Law of Peace at the center of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy seeks unity of mind and not superficial cleaning up of disputes (see, e.g., Kelton 2012, p. 773). "Nonhierarchical" wise men, Hoyane ("Men of the Good Mind"), are chosen by Clan Mothers (the Haudenosaunee peoples were largely matriarchal) to effect peace, which Haudenosaunee members understand as flowing from a spirit of love and healing (Arnold 2023, pp. 36, 38-42; see also Merrell 2006, p. 777). The goal is strength for all members through "join[ing] under the protection of the Great Tree of Peace" (Arnold 2023, p. 41). The Hoyane, Men of the Good Mind, are charged with maintaining this peace by transcending their individual station and working for harmony among all people (Arnold 2023, p. 41). That the ideal of unity was often honored more in the breach seems to me a recommendation of the ideal, as interstate peace is, and has always been, more a performance

than a steady state (see Dickason 1999, p. 219; Calloway 1989). The important thing is that peace is, ostensibly, a goal, and that all are, ostensibly, working toward it (Blackhawk 2023, pp. 74-75).

Third, the Haudenosaunee Confederacy model carries within it a powerful catalyst for reconciliation, not just among civilizational parties, but also between the living and the dead, the present and the past. What is at stake is not just the world order, but a long-overdue reckoning with the horrors that have brought that world order into being (see, e.g., Crepelle and Murtazashvili 2022). An American proposal that is not European-American but fully American would be a watershed moment in human history. Other places and peoples would build on the initiative of a truly American Proposal to rediscover civilizational belonging beneath the artificial layers of ideology encrusted during centuries of European colonialism (see Sinha 2024, pp. 308-310). Peoples of Central and South America, sub-Saharan Africa, Southeast Asia, Pacific island nations, Australia, New Zealand, Canada, Mexico, and the United States, among other places, could use a Haudenosaunee moment to return to their own civilizational roots and begin again in a world freed from liberal tyranny. Haudenosaunee global interaction thus goes beyond the “science of sharing power” and becomes a method for undermining and reshaping it

(Lowery and Mattaini 1999).⁴⁵ One of the attractions of BRICS is that it works to defeat imperialism while providing an alternative to imperial domination.⁴⁶ This kind of contrarian verve also revives part of the spirit of the Haudenosaunee—although, to be sure, Native resistance to European imperialism also often involved assimilation of European rhetoric and ideas in furtherance of that resistance (Ablavsky 2019, pp. 593-594; Nichols 2005). I hope that resistance to empire inspired by the Haudenosaunee

⁴⁵ A useful overview of American imperial power is at Kramer 2011.

⁴⁶ The five main BRICS countries—Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa—have abysmal records when it comes to the treatment of native populations. I want to encourage the BRICS movement, however, because it is by and large an opponent of the liberal world order. Liberalism, as I explain in this essay, was born anti-Native. The inhuman horrors visited upon native populations in many BRICS countries are, at the very least, not ideologically self-perpetuating and -metastasizing in the way that liberalism is. By accentuating civilizations over ideology, the BRICS movement provides hope for peoples inside BRICS countries who continue to be oppressed and even killed by government. With the Haudenosaunee Confederacy as a model, there is further hope that civilizations can be reconciled. What worked to overcome ethnic and class oppression in India and South Africa was not liberalism but local activism, much of it religious and/or civilizational. China is a different case, but ethnic and cultural genocide ramped up with the rise of communist ideology. With civilization there is some chance of betterment. With ideology, however, the situation is hopeless.

will continue to build (see, e.g., Fukurai 2020, pp. 40-41; Reeve 2024). This is not “salvage anthropology,” but the dismantling of an order that has rendered Native Americans and many others unfree for many centuries (Arnold 2023, p. 25; see also Johansen 2024, p. 48).

To be sure, proposing the Haudenosaunee Confederacy as a model for global co-existence is not an endorsement of Native American society as perfect, peaceful, and always just (Graeber and Wengrow 2021, pp. 69-71). One of the major Indian sources of early European knowledge about North America was himself wary and fearful of the Haudenosaunee (Graeber and Wengrow 2021, p. 49). Also, the Haudenosaunee Confederacy was a multifaceted, highly complex arrangement. Situating in its historical context is more important than reifying it into an all-purpose paradigm (Engelbrecht 2022, p. 638). But the important things about the Haudenosaunee Confederacy-based Native American Proposal are that it is cooperative with movements already working to build back civilizations after centuries of liberalist cultural and physical genocides, it is procedural and peace-directed, and it is open to all.

Conclusion

Brandon Christensen’s American Proposal is exactly the kind of big, forward-looking thinking

that is needful now as the liberal world order slips under the waves. In this essay, I have offered a counter-proposal, one that seeks not to repair or improve upon that order, but to hasten its demise while exposing its genocidal underbelly. Only a moral reckoning with the horrors of European and American colonialism and imperialism, of which the liberal world order is a legacy and extension, will free human beings to envision a better world than the current one built on the erasure of some peoples. A loose, dialectical, open, peace-oriented federalism, one modeled on the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, can help heal the historical wounds caused (albeit not always intentionally) by liberalism's authors and supporters, allow civilizations to flourish in a true multipolarity, work in tandem with BRICS and other movements in that direction already underway, and provide for a future in which ideology and political systems do not constrain the freedom of any human being.

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