

Neal Powless

Selected Audio Transcript

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If I think about the scale of the land itself, I think about the proximity of the current space that this Columbus statue sits on, and its proximity to Onondaga Lake, and the history of Onondaga Lake, that it has, not only for Haudenosaunee people—it represents the ratification of our Haudenosaunee Confederacy and the unification of our five original Confederacy nations and then eventually Tuscarora coming under that umbrella as well to make the Six Nations—but also that relationship that the Haudenosaunee and our Leadership have had, the impact on American democracy. The three branches of government, the federal and state system of governance. The idea of a democratic process of all people having a voice. The American seal says “*E Pluribus Unum*,” in Onondaga and the Haudenosaunee, we say “One dish, one spoon.” They’re one and the same. And that’s just one of hundreds of relationships that exist there. And you can look at the geography of the entire country, and you can go down to Virginia and see that the Shenandoah Valley National Park is right next to the George Washington and Jefferson National Forest. Why are the three of those names connected together? It’s because they sat together during the formation of, the drafting of, the Constitution, because Chief Shenandoah, an Oneida Chief, advised them along with his Clan Mothers to help America come up with their version of a useful transmission of power and governance. To me, the proximity of Columbus and the statue, and how close it is to Onondaga Lake, the most polluted lake in the country, and yet, on those shores, the origins of democracy on this continent. I think we should all be celebrating the lake, if not more than this site, as a group, together. And maybe that this space could then be, because of its proximity, a beacon of that relationship, as opposed to a symbol of the degradation and attack on my ancestors that it currently represents with this statue.

I understand and recognize that the Italian community is traumatized. And I understand that the Indigenous community and other communities that exist in Syracuse that represent refugees, that come from all over the world, that represent traumatized peoples. And the great thing is that our Great Law of Peace is signified by the Tree of Peace, the Great White Pine. And they say that that Tree of Peace, the roots extend to north, south, east to west, all around Turtle Island, all around Mother Earth. And that anyone can follow those roots of peace to come and take shelter in peace and tranquility under that umbrella of peace, if they so choose.

And I don't think it's by accident that Syracuse, as a city, is one of the hubs for refugees around the world. We have over ten thousand refugees that exist in Syracuse. They don't know why they're here, but Indigenous people that are here do. They followed those roots of peace, because that's what they were seeking. And this community is responsible for teaching what that peace means. And the conversation on this site, upon this space, is one that we need to engage in for all of those that will follow, for future generations yet to come that have not been even born. The grandchildren of the young girls that exist in the city of Syracuse, whose eggs are already existing there, that DNA knowledge is being developed now for those young women that will impact their grandchildren. So if we can find a way to resolve this in a peaceful and loving manner today, the impact on our community and our city for generations to come will be monumental. That is what inspires me, from my culture and my history and my family, to be a part of that conversation and a part of that resolution for the generations that are yet to come. It's not about me or even my own children, or my children's children, it's their grandchildren's grandchildren, that we need to do this for.

Biography

My name is Hawhenawdies. The translation is: His voice is heard among the people. I'm commonly known as Neal Powless. I am a member of the Onondaga Nation, and I am Eel Clan. I am the Syracuse

University Ombuds, and the co-founder of Indigenous Concepts Consulting with my wife, Michelle Shenandoah, and we do consulting on diversity, equity and inclusion as well as assisting groups, organizations and companies on how they can incorporate Indigenous concepts, values and how to work with Indigenous communities across the country. I'm also a former professional lacrosse player. I currently coach the Dutch national box lacrosse team. And I am a movie and film producer including documentaries, short films and different types of media projects. I am currently engaging in my PhD studies at Syracuse University's Newhouse S.I. School of Public Communications.