

## The Other Side of Niagara

The father of your country, at the time of its birth pains, sent his emissary to visit mine, where the six Iroquois nations dwelled and where the corn grew up as high as the eye of a buffalo--when it is standing upon the back of another buffalo--and mingled in the fields with beans, potatoes, pumpkins, squash, and melons, not segregated as your crops are, lined up like ranks of soldiers arrayed against some enemy crop in the field across the road (or on the other side of a fence) but caressing and enriching one another and sharing the land as friends, the same way we mingled, and caressed and enriched each other, and shared everything we owned, from field to home, in common, like the orchards with their thousands of trees--cherries and apples and peaches--until he sent General Sullivan, on May 31, a date which years later you would pick to commemorate those who died during "American wars" (of course, only on your side of those wars, especially not on our side when you made war against us), but in 1779 this was merely the date that General Sullivan got his orders: "Lay waste all the settlements around that the country may not be merely overrun but destroyed," he was instructed by your father and the order was carried out as a military order should be carried out, to the letter, so our towns and fields and orchards were burned, along with some of our people since no Geneva convention among civilized nations then prohibited him from making war against us in this fashion: "There is not even the appearance of an Indian on this side of the Niagara" Sullivan reported back to his chief, your father, when he was finished and well satisfied with his success, but on the other side of the Niagara where we were cold and hungry and suffering from diseases unknown to us before, "Town Destroyer" would forever be the name of the one who had issued these orders and more than a decade later Chief Cornplanter told this to the great man, by now President George Washington (he was not, you see, put on trial for war crimes) and explained: "Still today when your name is spoken our women look back over their shoulders and turn pale and the children cling closely to the necks of their mothers."

Today we live in the age of ethnic cleansers who become fathers by way of rape. And even at that time the white plantation owners, of whom our Town Destroyer was one, had already acquired the habit of raping their female slaves, while other respectable folk did their part by raping the entire continent of Africa--so why should it surprise us that George Washington such a path on his way to becoming your father? But still curiosity prods so I ask: Did anyone ever tell you who the mother of your country was so that you might have also a neck that you will be able to cling closely to when, one day, you realize the horror--and find that it will not let go of you either?

Steve Bloom  
December 2000