ASSIGNMENT. Read the attached document. Answer the following questions—

1. Why was the League of Iroquois formed? What did this league accomplish?

2. Describe the Iroquois Confederacy.

3. According to the author, how did the Iroquois compare with the Romans?

4. Do you agree with the title that he has given this article? Explain.


Romans of the New World

Read this narrative and answer the following essay questions.

When most historians speak of American empires, they nearly always refer to the South American cultures of the Aztec, Maya and Inca. However, North America also had its empires. The five civilized tribes of the southeast, for example, were knowledgeable in the use of medicines, had skilled builders, craftsmen and farmers, and lived according to a complex belief system. Dwelling in a large area stretching from the Atlantic Ocean to the Gulf of Texas, and as far north as the Ohio Valley, they showed concern for the environment, and practiced conservation of natural resources.

Another empire existed farther to the north, in the Great Lakes area. Here, tribes banded together politically and economically as the League of the Iroquois. Envisioned in the late sixteenth century by a holy man (Dekanawidah of the Mohawk), the union of the five nations was an alternative to the constant warring among the tribes of the northeastern woodlands. A Mohawk named Hiawatha was the active initiator of the league, traveling in a white canoe to the tribes of the Mohawk, Oneida, Onondaga, Cayuga and Seneca, until all agreed to meet under a symbolic Tree of Peace.

Fifty seats of thistledown were spread for the members of the five nations: nine went to the Mohawk tribes, and nine to the Oneidas; fourteen were allotted to the Onondagas, ten to the Cayugas and eight to the Senecas, according to the number of tribes in each of the five nations. Hiawatha of the Mohawk occupied the seat of “the Great Forehead” before the Great Council Fire.

Council seats were owned by the clans within each of the tribes. As they became vacant they were filled by male descendants who were selected by the tribal matrons. Women nominated the councillors, briefed them before each of the meetings, charted their council activities, and if necessary, had the power to remove them from office.

The Iroquois Confederacy was a major influence, controlling its own destiny by its economic control of the fur trade with the French, Dutch, and English.

A constant enemy of the league was the Huron, a tribe with lands to the west of the confederacy territories. Villages of the Huron were constantly destroyed in retaliation for their raids on tribes loyal to the confederacy, and eventually most of the Huron nation was obliterated.

Other tribes who opposed the league often fared better. Like the Romans, the Iroquois preferred to adopt conquered tribes into their system, allowing them to exist much as they had before the conquest, but now paying tribute and allegiance to the Iroquois League of Five Nations.

In later years, tribes who were being pushed westward (by the settlement of the English along the Atlantic Coast) were also accepted into the confederation.

During wars between England and France, the Iroquois joined forces with the British. The Algonquians, tribes of the western Great Lakes, including the Huron, became allies of the French.
During the American Revolution, four of the six tribes (the Tuscarora had been pushed out of their home territory by white settlements and moved to join the league) allied with the British and were led by a Mohawk chief called Joseph Brant.

With the American victory over the British, Iroquois power diminished. Americans pushed across the continent, clearing forests for villages and cities, and, except for an area in the far west of the upper Great Lakes, lands that had once belonged to the tribes of the Iroquois Confederacy were settled.

Like their historical counterparts, the Romans, only oratory remains to recall the power and glory of the Iroquois League. One famous speech which was delivered in 1664 by Grangula, an Onondaga chief, illustrates the force and imagery of the League members' eloquence. The remarks were an answer to the French, who had threatened war if the Iroquois did not relinquish their tight control of the fur trade.

Grangula addressed the Council and the Onondio, as white men were called. He knew full well that the French could not exercise their threat, since their numbers had been reduced by an epidemic. Grangula was aware however, that more French could come from across the sea and that the threat could be invoked again. So he issued this warning:

:"Onondio, I honor you. My words make haste to reach your ears. Harken to them!"

:"You must have believed when you left Quebec that the sun had burnt up the forest, which renders our country inaccessible to the French.

:"I and the warriors here present are come to assure you that the Senecas, Cayugas, Onondagas, Oneidas and Mohawks are yet alive... and we do not sleep!

:"Take care for the future that a great number of French soldiers do not appear here to choke the Tree of Peace!"

Another example of the power of the Oratory is from Dekanisora of the Onondaga, again warning the French, this time against their establishment of a fort at Caderaqui:

:"We have had a war together for a long time. Though you occasioned the war, we have never hated you. We forget what is past. Before, we threw the war hatchet into the river, but you fished it out, threw it to the sky and brought it down upon our people again. Now, we will not permit any settlement at Caderaqui. We will not consent to your building that fort. But your passage through the river shall be free and clear."

Again and again, Indian oratory suggests their desire to remain peaceful and trade with the white man, and their adamant insistence that settlements not encroach upon the vast fishing and hunting areas they saw as their

1America's Fascinating Indian Heritage [Readers Digest Association. 1978], 128.
2ibid.

birthright. As Dekanisora suggested, access for passage through the land, and hunting and fishing would be permitted, but settlements would not be tolerated.

Unknown to the natives of North America, the continent of Europe was populated by a large number of white people, who would come in ever larger numbers to the new world. Europeans did not see the land as belonging to anyone, but only as a great wilderness. Perception was faulty on both sides. The Indians could not conceive the huge numbers of whites who would overwhelm them, and the white man would not perceive the existence of property rights of the natives. The end result was a conflict that lasted more than two centuries.

Wave after wave of whites would wash onto the Atlantic Coast and push ever westward, tearing down forests, plowing the land, forming settlement after settlement and bringing civilization, European style, to replace the wilderness.

Only when they were finally conquered, their lands taken from them, their numbers greatly reduced, their power now only a memory, would the remaining natives of North America come to realize their error in judgment. The perception error of the white man has never been admitted; the question became moot with the eradication of most of the first, legitimate explorers and pioneers of the North American continent.