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COMMENTARY

Reaching the Grassroots: The Worldwide Diffusion of Iroquois Democratic Traditions

BRUCE E. JOHANSEN AND DONALD A. GRINDE, JR.

After many years of intense debate, the idea that the Iroquois helped shape democracy has passed into the realm of general knowledge the length and breadth of "Turtle Island," and beyond. Although a few brushfires of criticism remain in academia, many people and organizations have been applying Iroquois political principles in their daily lives. As of 21 November 2003 our roster of annotations had reached 1,404 items. According to our records, the issue of Iroquois influence had appeared in 350 books; 184 articles in scholarly journals, including commentaries, letters to the editor, book and film reviews, and bibliographies; 169 other periodical articles, including book reviews; 377 newspaper or news-service articles, columns, letters, or book reviews, and 189 websites. Additionally, influence has been raised in 82 other venues, including several documentary films; a commencement speech at Wellesley College by Gloria Steinem; a radio essay by Hugh Downs; a presidential proclamation by Bill Clinton, several college course outlines and other school curricula; a segment of *Larry King Live* on Cable News Network; a speech by Canadian Minister of Constitutional Affairs Joe Clark; and a feature film, *The Indian in the Cupboard*, in 1995. The subject now has its own Library of Congress classification, citations in three dozen legal journals, and was mentioned by Janet Reno in a speech when she was U.S. Attorney General.

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Iroquois influence has also been seen in a set of U.S. history trading cards and a 1958 *Classics Illustrated* comic book.

Exemplar of Liberty was excerpted in Portland State University's enhanced curriculum website, "Iroquois Confederacy and the U.S. Constitution."[1] The goal of the curriculum site is to increase adolescents' knowledge about the Iroquois influence on the development of democracy. An expanded compact disc (CD) version of the website also was created for schools that have limited Internet access. In addition, Donald A. Grinde, Jr., worked with Raymond Skye (Tuscarora) on a CD version of the Great Law and its interpretation by Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) people. Grinde helped with the historical portions, giving special attention to the Iroquois influence on American government.

A WIDE RANGE OF OPINIONS IN A WORLDWIDE CONTEXT

The range of opinions on the idea of Iroquois influence is extensive, from the Dalai Lama, who embraces it, to the celebrated "new western historian" Richard White of Stanford University, who loathes it. The most notable change in the idea's ideological landscape has been its diffusion through various educational enterprises (such as state curriculum guides) and its acceptance in some of standard political science reference works. We continue to be surprised by the sheer range of responses to the idea that the Iroquois played a fundamental role in the evolution of democracy. During 1984, Paula Gunn Allen wrote in a poem that "The shot heard 'round the world was fired from an Iroquois gun."[2] Her verse has proved to be prescient, as students of democracy around the world are now becoming aware of the role Native American confederacies played in the worldwide evolution of government by consensus.

Works from many parts of Indian Country often discuss Iroquois roots of democracy. Ian Frazier, in *On the Rez* (a book mainly about the Oglala Lakota) begins his tour of Indian Country (notably the Pine Ridge reservation) with a discussion of how Native American foods and ideas have shaped general American society. "Influence is harder to document than corn and beans, but as real," Frazier wrote, as he recounted Benjamin Franklin's use of Iroquois precedents in the Albany Plan.[3] Frazier also quotes Thomas Jefferson on Native American government and provides a detailed description of ways in which Native American notions of freedom have permeated American society.

The last page of the Turtle Mountain Chippewa Constitution, revised during 2001 and 2002, contains an acknowledgment of the Iroquois Confederacy:

> The Turtle Mountain Constitution Committee acknowledges the people of the Six Nations, also known by the term Iroquois Confederation, who comprise the oldest living participatory democracy on Earth. Their government, with a separation of powers and a Bill of Rights for the people, was and currently is based on the consent of the governed. The original United States representative democracy fashioned by such central members as Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Jefferson drew much inspiration from the tribes of the Six Nations. In

> our quest to establish a new government, truly dedicated to all life's liberty and happiness, we need to look no further than our own native people who have practiced true democracy for hundreds of years.[4]

By the turn of the millennium, tracing Iroquois democratic roots was becoming a worldwide pursuit. Our daily emails often bring inquiries on this subject. Jesus Herrera, professor of political science at Simon Bolivar University in Caracas, Venezuela, asked for material he could use in lectures. Japanese author Jun Hoshikawa's *The Water Planet* includes a chapter entitled "Native Democracy," which describes the Iroquois system and its influence on governance in North America and the "MacArthur Constitution" that has governed Japan since the end of World War II.[5] Hoshikawa and several other Japanese traveled to Onondaga and met with representatives of the Confederacy. Hoshikawa is translating *Exemplar of Liberty* into Japanese.

Rarely does a week pass in our offices without an inquiry from Europe—two examples being Floyd Rudmin, a professor of psychology at Tromso University in Norway, and Demichelis Livio, a graduate student of political science at the University of Turin. Denis Baggi, a professor in Switzerland, wrote that the Swiss adopted large parts of the United States Constitution shortly after 1800 (as did several other European nations); he is now interested in how the Iroquois example helped shape Swiss practice. Jay Fikes, an anthropologist known for his biography of Reuben Snake, has lectured on Native American influence on the development of democracy at Yeditepe University in Istanbul. The "influence" idea has been described in detail by the Polish magazine *Tawacin.*

The Iroquois political system is being discussed more frequently in the context of world surveys of political and philosophical history. One example is "The Crucible of the Millennium," a two-part documentary broadcast during late January and early February 2002 by the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS). The film discusses a number of cultural, political, and religious systems—European, Moslem, Chinese, and Native American (Iroquois).

Circulation of these ideas worldwide has been aided greatly by the spread of the Internet. Grinde and Johansen's *Exemplar of Liberty* is available online in full text.[6] *Forgotten Founders* is also available in full text on the Internet,[7] and has been included in international web-page links from Italy to Malaysia describing the basics of U.S. government. [8]

CELEBRATIONS FROM CELEBRITIES

The Iroquois-influence idea continues to receive endorsements from some well-known people. One example is His Holiness the fourteenth Dalai Lama of Tibet, who decried the United Nations' ignorance of Tibet's oppression by China, comparing it to the subjugation of North American Native peoples. Along the way, the Dalai Lama observed that "the inspiration for the American founding forefathers, Thomas Paine and Benjamin Franklin, by their comprehensive studies of the Iroquois Confederacy and the thousand-year-old 'Great Law of Peace' given by the Peacemaker [and] Hiawatha,

provided them with the foundation stone for our United States Constitution and the Declaration of Independence! The early drafts of the American Constitution included some of the Iroquois language, for the English words were too limiting!"[9]

Television personality Hugh Downs (whom the *Guinness Book of World Records* credits with having logged more hours of on-air television and radio exposure than any other human being) closely examines Iroquois precedents for the United States government, drawing in large part from Johansen's *Forgotten Founders*. The essays in *Perspectives* are adapted from ten-minute talks by Downs on a radio program of the same name aired over the American Broadcasting Company (ABC) radio network.[10]

The idea has entered popular literature. Robert Pirsig, author of *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*, chronicles a sailboat journey carrying his philosopher-narrator Phaedrus down the Hudson River as winter closes in. Along the way, he finds a traveling companion, Lila. One of their conversations goes something like this: The idea that "all men are created equal" is a gift to the world from the American Indians. Europeans only transmitted [this] as a doctrine that they sometimes followed and sometimes did not. Phaedrus thought the Indians haven't yet lost this one. They haven't won it either, he realized; the fight isn't over. It's still the central internal conflict in America today.[11]

THE SPREAD OF THE IDEA

Older references to Iroquois influence continue to come to light. Jacques Grasset de Saint-Sauveur's 1784 book on customs from around the world included a chapter on the Iroquois in which he commented, "The form of their government has a simplicity and at the same time a wisdom that our profound legislators have not yet been able to achieve in their sophisticated codes. . . . Is it necessary then to go to the Iroquois to find a model of legislation?"[12]

In the introduction to *Indian Treaties Printed by Benjamin Franklin* 1736–1762, Carl Van Doren, author of the most enduringly popular biography of Benjamin Franklin, describes the historical context of the Lancaster Treaty of 1744 during which the Onondaga Canassatego, Tadadaho (Speaker) of the Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) Confederacy, urged the English colonists to unite on an Iroquois model. "Though the colonists were slow in learning union from the Indians," wrote Van Doren, "Pennsylvania's steady alliance with the Six Nations had a large effect in preserving the friendship of the Iroquois for the English."[13]

Steven Crum examined correspondence to and from Harold L. Ickes, secretary of the Interior under Franklin Roosevelt, during and after his tenure in office, advocating establishment of a scholarly chair in American Indian history at a major U.S. university. According to Crum, one of Ickes' motives was to "make the public aware … that the Indian people had made significant contributions in the development of United States history, including the Iroquoian impact on this nation's form of government, and it would make

clear the history of white America as subjugator of native peoples."[14] Ickes, as secretary of the Interior, hired John Collier as commissioner of Indian Affairs.

In the early 1950s, the idea of Iroquois influence appeared in the realm of science fiction. Discussing lengthy letters written by some science fiction editors to writers, author Robert Silverberg quoted from a six-page letter from famed editor John W. Campbell to Poul Anderson, 6 December 1952: "Item: Wallace West, scf writer, is also a professional history text writer. But he's a researcher and not a traditionalist. He dug up some papers that quoted Washington and Jefferson, separately, as saying that our constitution was based largely on the constitution of the Iroquois Nations, as originally drawn up by Hiawatha, the truly great American statesman."[15]

The *Classics Illustrated* series of comic books, designed to teach children history and other subjects in a comic book format, in 1958 featured an account of the Iroquois, "The Woodsmen of the Eastern Forests." The text of the comic observes, "The Iroquois-speaking tribes formed a democratic form of government that was admired by Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Jefferson. Some historians say our government borrowed the ideas of the Iroquois for our Constitution."[16]

Despite this evidence, some scholars still disparage the idea. In *The Blank Slate*, Steven Pinker attacks the notion that an infant's mind is a more-or-less empty vessel (*tabula rasa*), arguing that the mind has an inherited universal structure based on demands made upon the species for survival, with some room for cultural and individual variation. Pinker is a chaired professor at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. In this context, Pinker cites with approval arguments by J. O. McGinnis that the authors of the U.S. Constitution possessed a theory of human nature based on evolutionary psychology. McGinnis argues, according to Pinker, that the Constitution was designed to limit the drive for dominance and esteem so that it would not imperil government. On the same pages that cite McGinnis approvingly, Pinker disparages the idea that the Iroquois helped shape the Constitution as "a popular belief that . . . is just 1960s granola."[17]

CRITICISM FROM THE "TROLLS"

During the 1980s Mohawk artist, teacher, and culture bearer John Kahionhes Fadden gave such critics of the Iroquois influence on American government the nickname "Trolls" after European mythological characters said to charge tolls for passage over bridges. (The nickname came from the idea that certain people seek to control access to the realm of established knowledge.) Criticism by the Trolls has become less frequent with the retirement of Elizabeth Tooker and William A. Starna.

Some of the more enduring critics of the Iroquois-influence idea continue to hammer away. One example is Laurence Hauptman who, in a review of *Apocalypse of Chiokoyhikoy* (1997), does not spare invective. "According to its editors," Hauptman begins his review, "this minor, enigmatic document further supports those would-be academics who believe that the Iroquois Indians had an influence on the thought of . . . the institutions created by the

Founding Fathers." Hauptman wrote that he's "incensed" by the publication of this book. As usual, the *ad hominem* attacks of the Trolls do not brim over with decorum or respect for "would-be academics" whose opinions they consider to be in error. According to Hauptman, the annotations of the *Apocalypse* by its editor, Grinde, have "as much depth as a comic strip."[18]

By 1998 Richard White, the celebrated New Western historian at Stanford University, was re-echoing the assertions of Tooker and Starna a decade earlier. In so doing, White invoked the invisible authority of uncited historians by overstating the assertions of "influence" advocates in order to discredit them:

> The newer contributionist [*sic*] school has set its sights much higher. Native Americans, this new school says, gave us democracy and republican government and inspired our Constitution. . . . Some of the literature has proved very popular with the tribes. The Six Nations, who were the central figures in the theory of American Indian democracy put forward by Bruce Johansen and Donald Grinde, were quick to embrace their role in founding the Republic against whose birth many of their ancestors had, for good reason, fought bitterly. To oppose the American Indian origins of the Constitution was to oppose not just academics but sometimes quite vocal and articulate Native American people. Still, very few historians accepted the Grinde and Johansen thesis. Both historians of Native American peoples and American historians in general have regarded it as a fabric of insinuation, invention, and misreading. The factual basis was weak and its own portrayal of Indian governance simplistic.[19]

As is common in Troll argumentation, White stops only long enough to spew generalized invective, doing little to elaborate his blanket condemnations.

POUNDINGS FROM PUNDITS

Dismissive polemics from right-of-center commentators have long been another staple of opposition to the "Iroquois influence" idea. George Will, Patrick Buchanan, Rush Limbaugh, and John Leo have attacked the idea in past years.

In 1999, David Brooks, a senior editor of the conservative *Weekly Standard*, stepped into the breach. Brooks took an imaginary family of tourists through the National Museum of American History of the Smithsonian Institution, as he complained that the museum had been overtaken by multiculturalism and "political correctness." Brooks guided his imaginary family past exhibits detailing the Pueblo Revolt of 1680 and black protests of segregation during the 1950s. He complained that even an exhibit on first ladies' gowns was tainted by feminist rhetoric. Brooks continued to an exhibit titled "After the Revolution: Every-day Life in America, 1780–1800," which he said included a display of implements used by a typical Seneca family of the period. Brooks wrote: "It's in this room that you hit the first oblique reference to the U.S. Constitution: 'When the American colonies sought to unite during their war

with Britain, some leaders thought the [Iroquois] confederacy might serve as a model in some respects for the new American government.'"[20]

Donald S. Lutz, writing in *Publius: The Journal of Federalism,* offered a detailed examination of the Iroquois Confederacy, with special attention to its federalist attributes. The debate over Iroquois influence on the development of federalism was dismissed at the beginning of his article as an invention by "a few non-historians." "Historians," wrote Lutz, "quickly concluded that such claims were ill-founded." Lutz cited Johansen's *Forgotten Founders,* calling its author "a journalist" (i.e., "a non-historian"). He struggles to squeeze the Iroquois League into a European framework: Is it "Aristotelian" or "Hobbesian"? Lutz, who is sure how to define "historian" and "journalist" and to declare that never the twain shall meet, cannot decide.[21] He seems to be making a case that only academics whom he regards as historians should have a crack at writing history—although he himself is a political scientist.

THE IDEA IN EDUCATION

Despite the concerns of the critics, the idea that the Iroquois and other Native American confederations helped shape the character of democracy is being promulgated in an increasing number of educational venues. For example, California's history and social science curriculum for the fourth grade identifies the Iroquois Confederacy as "the first democratically governed federation in North America," describes its structure, and adds: "Some historians think that when Franklin attended the Constitutional Convention he applied what he had learned from the Iroquois to the creation of the United States Constitution."[22]

The Saskatchewan history curriculum includes a classroom activity that "provides students with an awareness of key attributes found in constitutions and how they impact the rights of the citizenry to influence societal decision making." Students discuss the Iroquois Great Law of Peace with reference to its "provisions for referendum, recall of leaders, and publicly-sponsored initiatives." The curriculum says that Iroquois leadership "was accountable to a degree not paralleled in contemporary Europe. . . . A complex system of checks and balances ensured that all member nations would participate in the decisions of the Confederacy's paramount decision-making body, the Grand Council."[23]

The Dayton Public Schools' Citizenship Competencies for 1999 asked pupils to "Identify contributions of cultural groups to American Society. . . . Competency Demonstration: Given a chart outlining characteristics of the Iroquois Confederacy and the Albany Plan of Union, indicate two ways in which the English colonists may have been influenced by their contact with the Iroquois."[24]

The creation of New York State's Shaker Mountain School made use of Iroquois decision-making processes:

> When we founded Shaker Mountain School, in 1968, it was set up as a democratic school, with the encouragement of the then-Commissioner

> of Education of the state, Harvey Scribner. . . . Shaker Mountain School [was] heavily influenced in the early years by [its] involvement with the traditionalist Mohawk Indians of the Iroquois Confederacy (We had regular exchange visits with them). This is perhaps quite fitting because it was the influence of the Iroquois Confederacy that convinced Benjamin Franklin, among others, that democratic decision-making was a good form of government and, therefore, a good one to be used for the fledgling independent colonies.[25]

Nevada Assembly Bill No. 393, "An Act Relating to Native Americans; Revising the Provisions Relating to the Commemorative Day for Native Americans. . . . Approved May 2, 1997," begins:

> Whereas, many political concepts, such as federalism, the separation of political and military leaders, the process of admitting new states to the union rather than keeping them as colonies, modern notions of democracy based on egalitarian principles, and the recognition of the importance of independence, were concepts admittedly borrowed from the sophisticated League of Iroquois and other Indian nations by such writers as Thomas Payne [*sic*], Benjamin Franklin and Alexis de Tocqueville. . . . Section 1. NRS 236.040 is hereby amended to read as follows: "The governor of this state is authorized and requested to issue annually a proclamation designating the third week of July as 'Nevada All-Indian Stampede Days' to be celebrated in Fallon, Nevada; and the fourth Friday of September as Nevada Indian/Native American Day, in commemoration of the Indian people and their efforts to maintain their culture, customs and traditions, and in recognition of the many contributions of Native Americans to the economic and cultural heritage of all residents of the United States.[26]

A description of Iroquois precedents for democracy was worked into Juan González' recent book, *Harvest of Empire: A History of Latinos in America*:

> The Iroquois constitution, preserved over the years in oral tradition and recorded on wampum belts, led to a unique brand of democracy, which was based on consensus decision-making by elected representatives. Their confederation, according to [Lewis Henry] Morgan, contained "the germ of modern parliament, congress, and legislature." Since Morgan, numerous scholars have documented how the Iroquois influenced the democratic ideas of our own Founding Fathers. This country's fierce devotion to individual rights, insists historian Felix Cohen, has its roots in Iroquois thought, as does "universal suffrage for women. . . . The pattern of states within a state we call federalism, the habit of treating chiefs as servants of the people instead of as masters."[27]

The Iroquois-influence idea has been receiving increasing attention in political science curricula. Some political science sourcebooks now begin with extracts from the Iroquois Great Law of Peace. An example is Kenneth M. Dolbeare's college-level textbook *American Political Thought.* Dolbeare begins by stating that the main roots of political thought in the United States stem from Europe, but he also acknowledges the debate over Iroquois precedents. In a section on Benjamin Franklin, Dolbeare writes: "The extent to which the Six Nations' federal system served as a model for the U.S. Constitution of 1787 is a matter of debate among historians today. Two younger [*sic*] historians, Bruce Johansen and Donald Grinde … have produced a significant body of scholarship asserting that the Iroquois model was widely known and regularly drawn upon. . . . Franklin is central to this argument." [28]

The course catalogue for the political science department at the University of New Brunswick in Canada listed a course (in 1998–99) called "Political Science 3494: Theories of Federalism," which "will introduce students to theories of federalism. Using the Canadian, American, and Haudenosaunee federal systems as examples, the course will examine various analyses of federalism." [29]

"Government 473—American Political Thought," a course offered in 1998 at Suffolk University in Boston, began with a study of the Iroquois Great Law of Peace. The professor, John C. Berg, also director of graduate studies in the department of government at Suffolk, advises students to access an online, abbreviated text of the Great Law. He also asks students to read chapter one of Lyman Tower Sargent, ed., *Political Thought in the United States: A Documentary History,* which begins with excerpts from the Great Law of Peace and has pictographic symbols provided by Mohawk culture bearer Ray Fadden. Of the Iroquois Great Law, Sargent writes: "The practices of the League influenced Benjamin Franklin, who may, in turn, have been instrumental in bringing some of those practices—such as federalism—into the U.S. political system."[30]

THE IDEA IN PRACTICAL POLITICS

Despite the negative opinions of Professors Lutz and White, the idea of Iroquois influence has been used in practical politics throughout the United States. In a speech sponsored by Utah State University extension education, Larry Echo-Hawk, professor of law at Brigham Young University (as well as former attorney general of Idaho), recalled that he spoke to the 1992 Democratic Party national convention, describing Iroquois precedents for democracy:

> I had an opportunity to speak at a National Political Convention. In 1992 . . . I was invited to be a principal speaker at the Democratic National Convention in New York City at Madison Square Garden. I remember when I got the invitation, I was just struck with fear. 'Gee, what am I going to do to finalize the convention?' 'They have given me eight minutes, what am I gonna say?'. . . The thoughts I shared that evening were taken from a Native American concept of

> government that is many years old. It is a concept of governments that non-Indians learned a long time ago when they first came in contact with Native people on the Eastern Seaboard. There was a very sophisticated federation of Native people and Native governments, known as the Iroquois Confederacy. The white man adopted many things from them. In fact, it is taught in many constitutional law courses that many of the concepts that we now have in the Constitution of the United States were adopted from the Iroquois Confederacy. [31]

Presidents George Bush (senior) and Bill Clinton both endorsed the Iroquois-influence idea. On 3 August 1990 when declaring November National American Indian Heritage Month, Bush said, "Activities planned will focus on Native American contributions to this nation for the past five centuries, such as the foundation of the U.S. Constitution that was based upon the government of the Iroquois Confederacy of Nations."[32]

The Iroquois model of federalism has been invoked in an effort to prevent federal criminalization of acts that are already crimes under state laws. Gerald B. Lefcourt, speaking before the Committee on Governmental Affairs of the United States Senate on 6 May 1999, advocated an Iroquois model of federalism which he said would allow states to retain jurisdiction within their borders: "The Iroquois model is the right one to follow." According to Lefcourt, "federalization" of crimes is popular with politicians eager to appear to be doing something about crime.[33] Such federalization duplicates state laws and has caused bloated caseloads in many federal courts.

The application of Native American federal models on a local level has been an American tradition. According to one contemporary scholar, Thomas Jefferson advocated Native American federalism in local governance. In her analysis of Jefferson and "ward republics," Suzanne W. Morse traced Jefferson's theory of local governance to Native American polities:

> In his *Notes on the State of Virginia,* Jefferson addresses the self-governance of Native Americans. Jefferson greatly admired the fact that Native Americans operated, in his view … [on a] model [that] divided the large tribes down into smaller tribal councils for decision-making. Jefferson's observation of the tribal organization of Native American societies informed his vision of ward republics as vehicles for governing in its most basic and perhaps most necessary level.[34]

The enduring value of Iroquois and other Native American governmental models can be illustrated by pairing Morse's analysis of Jefferson with a speech by United States Attorney General Janet Reno on 28 November 1999. Reno opened a meeting with Native American leaders and interior department officials in Washington, D.C., by saying that before Columbus landed, "Native Americans had established democratic governments; societies with complex social institutions; economies with far-flung networks of trade." She elaborated on Iroquois governance, "The Constitution's framers, notably George Washington and Benjamin Franklin, recognized the genius of the

Iroquois Confederacy. And the confederation of the original thirteen colonies ... was influenced by the model of the confederacy."[35]

The idea that the Iroquois helped shape our political character plays well with the U.S. Green Party, whose web page says:

> The Committees of Correspondence, a term used by dissenting church groups in English history, was the name of the network set up by rebellious town meetings to exchange views and coordinate the political action that led to the first American Revolution. They closely followed the advice given to Benjamin Franklin and others by the Penacook and Iroquois Confederacies to have a movement grounded in and controlled by strong local units. Committees of Correspondence was also the name of a peace network in the 1950s, started by A. J. Muste, and has appeared in other movements as well.[36]

The men's Christian association, Promise Keepers, also invoked the Iroquois example. According to a transcript of a Promise Keepers press conference on 4 February 1997 in Washington, D.C., Steve Chavis opened the "assembly of Christian men" by recognizing Huron Claus, the North American director of Chief Ministries, Inc., based in Phoenix, Arizona, saying, "He brings with him and in him not only Kiowa but Mohawk lineage, and will offer a prayer in his native tongue and in English." Claus began his presentation:

> My name is Huron Claus, and I represent the Mohawk Six Nation Iroquois Confederation. And as I come here today, it was a couple hundred years ago that Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Jefferson visited our people. What they observed in that period of time was a people that were unified, six different nations coming together in unity. And yet, a great reverence, too, for our creator God. So I want to share with you this morning, I want to go to prayer to our Lord, and I want to share my native tongue with you, as well as pray in English. Let's bow for prayer.[37]

Winnebago elder Reuben Snake began a speech on the steps of the U.S. Capitol on 29 September1990 by observing that, "as an American, it's inspiring to stand here at the foot of the U.S. Capitol to exercise two of our basic American rights, the freedom of speech and the right to petition for a redress of grievances." Snake said that Native Americans have been identified with liberty in America since at least the Boston Tea Party. "Before that dramatic event," said Snake, the Iroquois Confederacy formed a government that utilized concepts of checks and balances, freedom of speech and religion, referendum, and veto. "These concepts became known to John Locke and Jean-Jacques Rousseau … whose writings are cited in identifying the sources of the U.S. Constitution."[38]

In a practical sense, the increased appreciation of Native American contributions to political theory and practice also represents an increased respect for contemporary Native political systems. For example, Anthony P. X.

Bothwell, a San Francisco attorney, has used the impact of Native American confederations on democracy to strengthen a case that Native nations be accorded voting rights in the United Nations. Bothwell's line of reasoning suggests that large Native American nations (such as the Navajo, Cherokee, and others) be admitted to the United Nations, and that smaller tribes and nations be admitted as members of confederations:

> The destruction of Native American nations is all the more ironic in light of the contribution Indians made to the formation of our country. Our Founders had extensive and generally friendly interactions with the Native Americans, who consequently exerted formative influences on our art, food and culture, our appreciation of nature, and our ideas about democracy. Their disrespect for authority influenced our own revolutionaries. Their penchant for helping others set an example for us. So did their thirst for freedom, and their commitment to participative democracy. Franklin, Jefferson and others internalized Indian political and social concepts, and embraced ideas of personal liberty that went far beyond anything ever imagined in England, from which the framework of our law came. Iroquois federalism—with six nations (Mohawks, Oneidas, Onondagas, Cayugas, Tuscaroras and Senecas) in a league, having checks and balances, separation of civilian and military authority, limited government, protection of individual rights, and tolerance for all religious views—set a model for our federal system.[39]

CONCLUSION

Richard Williams, executive director of the American Indian College Fund (and a historian), provides a concluding context for this description of ways in which Iroquois political ideas have spread throughout Turtle Island and the world. Williams places the political accomplishments of Native North Americans in a broader context that shows early and advanced knowledge in many fields of knowledge. Writing in the *Denver Post*, Williams said:

> The ancient structures and cities built by natives on this continent illustrate an advanced knowledge of mathematics, physics, engineering, astronomy, architecture and urban planning that rivaled—and in some cases surpassed—those in Europe, Asia and Africa. In fact, the Mayans pioneered zero as a numeric value, which is considered one of the great mathematical achievements in history and was used thousands of years ahead of the Europeans. . . . And though Mendel is credited with "discovering" the concept of genetics, the Indians of the Americas had perfected the science of hybridization thousands of years before, with scientific experimentation and sophisticated production methods that are studied by agricultural experts worldwide to this day.[40]

Immigrants from Europe often have borrowed from Native peoples, embraced this knowledge as their own, and then forgotten its origins. Meanwhile, the prevailing assumptions of the "winners'" histories condemn Native Americans as primitive and brutish. The reconstruction of history in its true complexity takes some work, since it often runs counter to the heavy weight of well-established assumptions. So it has been in the evolution of democracy, Williams believes:

> The political structure of the great Iroquois Confederacy served as a model for democracy … among the Founding Fathers, who wrote the Constitution based on "we the people," something unheard of in the aristocratic, feudal societies of Europe. In fact, there is no word for "I" in any American Indian language, which was a profound concept to the framers who closely studied the tribes' customs, government and culture.[41]

Another concluding comment comes from Kathleen Bragdon in her *Columbia Guide to American Indians of the Northeast*, which includes a discussion of the "influence" issue with a detailed bibliography of work on both sides. In a section on the "Origins of the Constitution" Bragdon comments that:

> judging by the number of publications concerning it, the history and influence of the League of the Iroquois ranks among the most controversial topics of the past several decades. . . . Did complex native institutions precede European influence, and did native institutions in turn contribute to American culture more generally? Many native people argue that both were so.[42]

NOTES

1. Available at [http://www.iroquoisdemocracy.pdx.edu].

2. Barbara Alice Mann, *Iroquoian Women: The Gantowisas* (New York: Peter Lang, 2000), xx.

3. Ian Frazier, *On the Rez* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2000), 8–9.

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