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The Iroquois and the Nature of American Government

DONALD A. GRINDE, JR.

The British Government cannot be our model. We have no materials for a similar one. Our manners, our laws . . . and . . . the whole genius of the people are opposed to it.¹

—James Wilson (delegate to the Constitutional Convention from Pennsylvania), 7 June 1787

We have gone back to ancient history for models of Government, and examined different forms of those Republics which having been formed with the seeds of their dissolution now no longer exist. And we have viewed Modern States all round Europe, but find none of their Constitutions suitable to our circumstances.²

—Benjamin Franklin's speech in the Constitutional Convention, 28 June 1787

As John Rutledge, delegate to the Constitutional Convention from South Carolina and chairman of the Committee of Detail, finished writing the first draft of the United States Constitution, Thomas Jefferson wrote him a letter revealing a sentiment that was present among many of the Founders and the American people. In observing the "civilized" European governments such as France, Jefferson wrote to Rutledge that most of the European societies

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were autocratic monarchies and thus not comparable to the more egalitarian governments of the United States. However, Jefferson went further in his observations on the nature of American government when he wrote Rutledge that "[t]he only condition on earth to be compared with [American government] . . . is that of the Indians, where they still have less law than we."³ Furthermore, according to his letter, Jefferson believed that American government and its Native American aspects were a vast improvement over the European models, which he viewed as "governments of kites over pigeons."⁴ When Jefferson wrote of American Indian governments to Rutledge, he had the League of the Haudenosaunee, or the Iroquois Confederacy, in mind. Before the Constitutional Convention, Jefferson had published an account of the Mingo, or Iroquois, Confederacy in his *Notes on the State of Virginia*.⁵

James Wilson of Pennsylvania, another member of the committee that completed the first draft of the United States Constitution, dutifully recorded in his notes on the preamble of the Constitution that the Committee on Detail meant to discuss "the different points in question—1. on principle. 2. by the Ind[ian] sense of the States in Common. 3. By some striking instance which may happen if the plan be adopted."⁶ Clearly, the Founders discoursed on American Indian polities when they looked for alternatives to the oppressive British constitutional monarchy.

In revising their accounts of American history to recognize the larger role of the American Indian, historians must avoid a tendency to see whites and Native Americans as having two distinct species of historical experience. Instead, historians should seek to construct what James Axtell has called a "mutual history of continuous interaction and influence."⁷ However, the path to the realization that the American system of government is partly derived from American Indian—specifically, Iroquois—ideas has been long and difficult.

In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Europeans and American colonials recognized the power and subtlety of the American Indian confederacies. By the late seventeenth century, John Locke observed that the "kings of the Indians in America" are not much more than "generals . . . and in time of peace they . . . have moderate sovereignty . . ." Locke added that decisions of peace were vested "ordinarily either in the people, or in a council."⁸ In 1694, French writer Baron Lahontan wrote an extremely popular account of the Huron Indians entitled "A

Conference or Dialogue between the Author and Adario, a Noted Man among the Savages." Although the alleged purpose of the dialogue was to reveal Christian truths to Adario, the real intent was to discredit coercive European societies. In criticizing divine right monarchy in Europe, Adario points out that the King is the only person who is happy with respect "to that adorable Liberty which he alone enjoys."⁹ After repudiating much of the "civilized" world, Adario counsels Lahontan to "take my advice and turn *Huron*."¹⁰

In a similar manner, the French Jesuits in Canada wrote of nonmaterialistic American Indian societies, where individuals possessed dignity and rights, distinct from the powers of the state. This was a radical concept for average Europeans who existed under repressive monarchies. The Jesuits correctly characterized the kinship state of the Iroquois as constituting "but one family."¹¹ By the eighteenth century, Montesquieu would observe that "all countries have a law of nations . . . [including the] . . . Iroquois . . . for they send and receive ambassadors . . . [and they] . . . understand the rights of war and peace."¹² *The New Cambridge Modern History* observes that the use that writers like "Montesquieu . . . made of a . . . noble savage to point a criticism of European conditions was an indication of how much the impact of other civilisations was affecting European ways of thought."¹³

Europeans who came to North America in the seventeenth century were impressed with Native American ways. Roger Williams, the pariah of Puritan New England, studied American Indian languages and cultures extensively. He described the process of consensus-building in American Indian government in ways similar to the governmental structure that he was erecting in Providence Plantations:

The sachims . . . will not conclude of ought that concerns all, either Lawes, or Subsidies, or warres, unto which people averse, or gentle perswasion cannot be brought.¹⁴

William Penn also had a healthy respect for American Indian governments and particularly the Iroquois. Penn described the native confederacies of eastern America as political societies with chieftainships inherited through the female side. In 1683, Penn perceived Iroquois government in this way:

Every king hath his council, and that consists of all the old and wise men of his nation . . . [N]othing is undertaken, be it war,

peace, the selling of land or traffick, without advising with them; and which is more, with the young men also The kings . . . move by the breath of their people It is the Indian custom to deliberate I have never seen more natural sagacity.¹⁵

In addition, Penn briefly described some aspects of the Iroquois Condolence Council. He noted that when someone kills a "woman they pay double [the wampum since] . . . she breeds children which men cannot."¹⁶ Penn was among American Indians a great deal, and he enjoyed it. An account of the time notes that Penn "made himself endeared to the Indians [and he] . . . walked with them, sat with them on the ground, and ate . . . their roasted acorns and hominy."¹⁷

In 1697, after almost twenty years' experience with native confederacies in America, Penn formulated his "Plan for the Union of the Colonies of America,"¹⁸ in the hope that the plan "[m]ay be usefull to . . . one anothers peace and safety with universall concurrence."¹⁹ It was a remarkable plan for union which proposed that each colony send two delegates to a central place to discuss commerce and defense. The plan may possibly have been influenced by Penn's interactions with the Iroquois and other native confederacies.²⁰

Certainly one can see a reflection of Penn's work a half-century later in the Albany Plan of Union of 1754, proposed by another Pennsylvanian, Benjamin Franklin. By that time, colonial Americans were turning away from many English customs. In 1747, the royal governor of New York, George Clinton, observed that most American democratic leaders "were ignorant, illiterate people of republican principle who have no knowledge of the English Constitution or love for their country."²¹

By the mid-eighteenth century, American Indians began to take an active interest in promoting colonial unity against the French and told the colonists that they would ally with Europeans who developed a system of governmental unity similar to the native confederacies. In 1744, Canassateego, an Iroquois sachem whom Benjamin Franklin had met, advised a group of colonial governors on the wisdom of Iroquois concepts of unity:

Our wise forefathers established Union and Amity between the Five Nations. This has made us formidable; this has given us great Weight and Authority with our neighboring Nations. We are a powerful Confederacy; and by your observing the same methods, our wise forefathers have taken, you will

acquire such Strength and power. Therefore whatever befalls you, never fall out with one another.²²

Canassateego's admonition was not to go unheeded. In 1751, Benjamin Franklin, searching for a path to colonial unity, observed,

It would be a strange thing . . . if Six Nations of Ignorant savages should be capable of forming such a union and be able to execute it in such a manner that it has subsisted for ages and appears indissoluble, and yet that a like union should be impractical for ten or a dozen English colonies, to whom it is more necessary and must be more advantageous, and who cannot be supposed to want an equal understanding of their interest.²³

Franklin knew a great deal about the Iroquois. He published a series of Indian treaties from 1736 to 1762, and he attended a treaty council with the Iroquois and Ohio Indians at Carlisle, Pennsylvania in 1753 (just a few months before he wrote the Albany Plan of Union). On 1 October 1753, while at the treaty council, Franklin observed a Condolence Ceremony conducted by Scarrooyady, an Oneida chief, and Cayanguileguoa, a Mohawk. The purpose was to condole the Ohio Indians' losses to the French. Franklin listened while Scarrooyady spoke of the origins of the Iroquois Great Law.

We must let you know, that there was a friendship established by our and your Grandfathers, and a mutual Council fire was kindled. In this friendship all those then under the ground, who had not obtained eyes or faces [that is, those unborn] were included; and it was then mutually promised to tell the same to their children and children's children.²⁴

In addressing the colonists in council the next day, the treaty commissioners and Franklin echoed the earlier sentiments of Canassateego:

We . . . hereby place before you the necessity of preserving your faith entire to one another, as well as to this government. Do not separate; do not part on any score. Let no differences nor jealousies subsist a moment between Nation and Nation, but join together as one man . . .²⁵

When Scarrooyady replied to the treaty commissioners, he took for granted that they understood the protocol and structure of the Iroquois League:

[Y]ou will please lay all our present transactions before the council at *Onondago* [the capital of the Iroquois Confederacy], that they may know we do nothing in the dark.²⁶

By the eve of the Albany Congress, Franklin had had a great deal of exposure to the political ideas and imagery of the Iroquois. His impressions of the Iroquois were derived from his firsthand experience and from his reading of Cadwallader Colden's *History of the Five Nations*.²⁷

At the Albany Congress in the summer of 1754, the problem of colonial unity against the French in Canada was formally addressed. Taking on the mantle of Canassatego, the Mohawk chief Hendrick criticized the colonists for their lack of unity and hinted that the Iroquois would not ally with the English colonies unless a suitable form of unity (in the style of the Iroquois) was secured. On 9 July 1754, Hendrick noted, "We wish this tree of friendship may grow up to a great height and then we shall be a powerful people."²⁸ Expressing confidence in Iroquois forms of unity, acting governor of New York James Delancey replied to Hendrick, "I hope that by this present Union, we shall grow up to a great height and that we shall be as powerful and famous as you were of old."²⁹

In this environment, Franklin formally proposed his Albany Plan of Union to the Congress:

By this plan the general government was to be administered by a president-general, appointed and supported by the Crown, and a grand council was to be chosen by the representatives of the people of the several colonies, met in their respective assemblies.³⁰

Franklin wrote that the debates on the Albany Plan "went on daily, hand in hand with the Indian business."³¹

After editing Franklin's Indian treaties, Julian P. Boyd noted the impact of the Iroquois on the Albany Plan of Union. Boyd stated that, in 1754, Franklin "proposed a plan for union of the colonies and he found his materials in the great confederacy of the Iroquois." Boyd also pointed out that the Iroquois' ability to unite peoples over a large geographic expanse made their form of government "worthy of copying."³² Indeed, Robert D. Marcus and

David Burner asserted in 1989 that "Franklin was so impressed with the structure of the Iroquois Confederacy that he recommended its government as a model for the colonies to join separate sovereign states into a powerful nation."³³ And so it is that as American colonists became more restive under the autocracy of British rule, they turned to Native American, and especially Iroquois, ideas for alternatives.

Iroquois ways also provided the rebellious colonists with an alternative identity. While the Stamp Act crisis was in progress in 1766, the New York City Sons of Liberty sent wampum belts to the Iroquois, asking them to intercept British troops moving down the Hudson River from Canada to reinforce the occupation of New York City. Subsequent to these messages to the Iroquois, the New York Sons of Liberty erected a "pine post . . . called . . . the Tree of Liberty," where they conducted their daily exercises.³⁴ The principal image of the Iroquois League is a Great Pine Tree sheltering peace- and freedom-loving people. Perhaps the Sons of Liberty were admonished by Iroquois chiefs to erect such a tree before the Iroquois would think of helping them against the British. Certainly, the notion of the Liberty Tree united disparate patriot groups throughout the American colonies. By 1772, the Constitutional Sons of Saint Tammany (an outgrowth of the Sons of Liberty) was proclaiming that its members looked to American Indian traditions for guidance and that they wanted to preserve their "Constitutional American Liberties" in the face of British tyranny. The Tammany Society was named after a respected Delaware chief whom American colonists "sainted" to signify their American identity.³⁵ Benjamin Franklin was a member of the Tammany Society, and after his death the society continued to tell American Indian "Anecdotes of Franklin" at its meetings.³⁶

As the American Revolution drew nearer, the colonists turned to American Indian ideas and disguises to assert their desire for freedom and autonomy. In 1773, the Sons of Liberty in Boston dressed as "Mohawks" to dump tea into Boston harbor.³⁷ In August 1775, members of the Continental Congress met with the Iroquois and recalled Iroquois admonitions for unity, declaring that they had taught "[their] children to follow it." The Americans also invited the Iroquois to visit and observe our "Great Council Fire at Philadelphia . . ." ³⁸ In January 1776, while dining with several Iroquois chiefs and his military staff, George Washington introduced John Adams as a member of "the Grand Council Fire at Philadelphia."³⁹ In May and June 1776, chiefs from "4 tribes of

the Six Nations" were at Independence Hall.⁴⁰ In fact, the meeting with the Iroquois sachems was so important that the Continental Congress ordered George Washington to leave his post in New York City and come to Philadelphia to review Pennsylvania troops in late May 1776.⁴¹

On 11 June 1776, during the debates on independence, an Onondaga chief gave President John Hancock the name "Karanduawn, or the Great Tree."⁴² On the same day, plans for a confederation based on Franklin's 1754 Albany Plan of Union were reported to a committee of the Continental Congress that later drafted the Articles of Confederation.⁴³ After the Iroquois sachems left in late June and as Franklin's revised Albany Plan was in committee, James Wilson, delegate from Pennsylvania and future author of the first draft of the United States Constitution, argued forcefully for a confederation similar to the Iroquois League. On 26 July 1776, Wilson asserted that "Indians know the striking benefits of Confederation . . .," and we "have an example of it in the Union of the Six Nations." Wilson recalled his diplomatic mission to the Iroquois in 1775, when he stated that the "idea of the union of the colonies struck [the Iroquois] forcibly last year."⁴⁴ In essence, Wilson, a friend of Franklin, believed that a strong confederation like the Iroquois Confederacy was crucial not only to the development of the new nation but also to the maintenance of friendly relations with the Iroquois.

In 1777, the Continental Congress published propaganda that used an Iroquois prophecy emphasizing the synthesis of European and Iroquois ways in North America. The pamphlet, *Apocalypse de Chiokoyhekoy, Chefs des Iroquois* (1777), asked the French to side with the Americans and implied that America was developing a government that reflected some Iroquois ways. Using a diplomatic idiom (a news carrier bird, Tskleleli), the pamphlet proclaimed that an Iroquois prophecy was coming to pass and that if the French allied with the Americans, it would a "great victory for humanity."⁴⁵

As the revolution unfolded, the Iroquois example of strength through unity gained a powerful hold on the American people. At Valley Forge, the Continental Army staged an elaborate Saint Tammany Society ceremony on 30 April and 1 May of 1778. Washington's men marched past "May poles" and clasped bundles of thirteen arrows to demonstrate American unity in the style of the Iroquois. On the evening of 1 May 1778, the officers had a "song and dance in honor of King Tammany."⁴⁶

After the American Revolution, three Virginia politicians and future presidents (James Madison, Thomas Jefferson, and James Monroe) decided to visit the Iroquois. The first to go was James Madison in 1784. Observing that Virginia and other states were unwilling to give powers to a central government, Madison decided to accompany the Marquis de Lafayette and his entourage on a trip to Iroquois country (Fort Stanwix, near Rome, New York). Ostensibly, western expansion was Madison's main concern for the trip. Also, when he contemplated westward expansion, he must have been thinking about a government that would unite diverse peoples across a great geographic expanse. Perhaps this is the reason why he consulted with his old friend Grasshopper, an Oneida sachem, when he got to Iroquois country.⁴⁷ Before Madison got to Fort Stanwix, however, the Oneidas gave him and his French companions some startling lessons about the virtues of Iroquois life. Several days into their journey up the Mohawk River, an Oneida scout accompanying Madison identified himself, in excellent French, as Nicolas Jordan, from a French village near Amiens. The Oneidas had captured Jordan during the French and Indian War, and he had married a chief's daughter. Jordan admitted that he had missed France initially but quickly said, "[My age and] my children, fix me here, forever." Jordan told Madison that as soon as the Oneidas adopted him, he experienced "great humanity from them." Such a revelation surprised Lafayette and Madison.⁴⁸

Even more surprising was the discovery of a white woman living among the Oneidas and possessing strong opinions about the advantages of Iroquois life. On their trip up the Mohawk River to Fort Stanwix, Madison and his companions noticed a woman who was fairer than the other Oneidas. After being verbally hammered in English, the woman admitted to being white. She told them that she had been a servant girl in a New York manor house and had fled to the Iroquois in adolescence. The Oneidas freely welcomed her into their society, and she lived happily among them. She told the puzzled Frenchmen and Madison,

The whites treated me harshly. I saw them take rest while they made me work without a break. I ran the risk of being beaten, or dying of hunger, if through fatigue or laziness I refused to do what I was told. Here, I have no master, I am the equal of all the women in the tribe, I do what I please without anyone's saying anything about it. I work only for myself—I shall marry if I wish and be unmarried again when I wish. Is there a single woman as independent as I in your cities?⁴⁹

These remarkable experiences had an impact on Madison in the next few years, as he was seeking to forge a new government. While at Fort Stanwix, Madison renewed his friendship with the Oneida sachem, Grasshopper, who had visited Philadelphia several years earlier. No doubt Madison was exposed firsthand to the ideas and political concepts of the Iroquois.⁵⁰

Although Thomas Jefferson wanted to visit the Iroquois with James Monroe in 1784, his appointment as ambassador to France forced him to abandon his plans, so James Monroe went without him.⁵¹ Nevertheless, Jefferson was emphatic about his lifelong interest in American Indians. In a letter to John Adams, Jefferson pointed out that, as a child and as a student, he was in continual contact with Native Americans. He explained this contact in these terms:

[C]oncerning Indians, . . . in the early part of my life, I was very familiar, and acquired impressions of attachment and commiseration for them which have never been obliterated. Before the Revolution, they were in the habit of coming often and in great numbers to the seat of government, where *I was very much with them* [emphasis added]. I knew much the great Ontassete, the warrior and orator of the Cherokees; he was always the guest of my father, on his journeys to and from Williamsburg . . .⁵²

John Adams responded to Jefferson in this manner:

I have also felt an interest in the Indians, and a commiseration for them with my childhood. Aaron Pomham and Moses Pomham . . . of the Punkapang and Neponset tribes were frequent visitors at my father's house . . . and I, in my boyish rambles, used to call at their wigwam . . .⁵³

Both Jefferson and Adams felt that their experiences with American Indians were important. Adams, like Jefferson, was skeptical of European ideas. Indeed, Adams felt "weary of Philosophers, Theologians, Politicians, and Historians. They are an immense mass of absurdities and lies."⁵⁴ It is easy to see how, in this intellectual environment, the innovative minds of the period turned to American Indian ideas. Franklin, Madison, Jefferson, and Adams were pragmatic enough to know that many of the concepts of American Indian liberty and freedom could not be transferred rapidly to Euro-American forms of government. A

few months before the Constitutional Convention, Jefferson wrote Madison about the virtues of American Indian government: "Societies . . . as among our Indians [may be] . . . best. But I believe [them] . . . inconsistent with any great degree of population."⁵⁵ Although most scholars are aware of the knowledge that Jefferson, Madison, and Franklin had of the Iroquois, few have noticed that Adams discussed American Indian governments in his works on American and world governments.

Sensing the need for an analysis of American and world governments, Adams wrote his *Defence of the Constitutions . . . of the United States* in 1786 and published it in 1787, on the eve of the Constitutional Convention. The *Defence* has been called "the finest fruit of the American Enlightenment . . ." ⁵⁶ Adams saw two conflicting views on the nature of government in America. He recognized in Franklin's recommendations for a unicameral legislature (as in the Pennsylvania Constitution of 1776) a sense of serenity of character, since the Pennsylvania Constitution placed a great deal of faith in one house as the best way to express the will of the people. Adams pointed out that the French *philosophes* were on Franklin's side. There can be no doubt that many of their concepts were associated with American Indian governments. Documentary evidence indicates that Franklin talked a great deal about the Iroquois and their customs in the French salons during the American Revolution. A French physician and *philosophe*, Pierre Jean Georges Cabanis, observed that, while discussing concepts of liberty and government, Franklin "loved to cite and practice faithfully the proverb of his friends the American Indians, 'Keep the chain of friendship bright and shining.'" ⁵⁷

Like Franklin, Adams believed that American Indian governments could serve as models for the United States. Unlike Franklin, however, who had faith in the voice of the people, Adams, in his *Defence*, demonstrated more pessimism about human nature and all orders of society. He believed in a kind of intellectual perpetual motion—that balancing the interests of the aristocracy and the common people through a divided or "complex" government was the best course to avoid anarchy and tyranny. He felt that this separation of powers in government was crucial to maintain a republic.⁵⁸ With these ideas in mind, we can see how American Indian governments and, more specifically, the Iroquois League, were factored into the intellectual discourses on government at the time of the Constitutional Convention.

Drawing on his knowledge and experience with American Indians, Adams urged the Founders at the Constitutional Con-

vention to investigate "the government of . . . modern Indians," because the separation of powers in their three branches of government "is marked with a precision that excludes all controversy."⁵⁹ He believed that the study of "the legislation of the Indians . . . would be well worth the pains."⁶⁰ In making these statements, Adams recognized that some of the "great philosophers . . . of the age," such as Benjamin Franklin and Turgot, were arguing, in part, for the establishment of "governments [like] . . . modern Indians."⁶¹ Adams implied that the Iroquois style of government had "fifty families governed by all authority in one centre." He believed that people like Franklin advocating such unicameral governments ran the risk of setting up governments that would develop the "individual independence of the Mohawks."⁶² It is obvious that Adams knew the basic political structure of Native American confederacies (he had to have some understanding of their governmental structures to counter the arguments of Franklin), since he described them in the following manner:

Every nation in North America has a king, a senate, and a people. The royal office is elective, but it is for life; his sachems are his ordinary council, where all national affairs are deliberated and resolved in the first instance; but in the greatest of all, which is declaring war, the king and sachems call a national assembly round a great council fire, communicate to the people their resolution, and sacrifice an animal. Those of the people who approve the war partake of the sacrifice; throw the hatchet into a tree, after the example of the king; and join in the subsequent war songs and dances. Those who disapprove, take no part of the sacrifice, but retire.⁶³

When the men at the Constitutional Convention embraced the two-house concept of John Adams, they were not enacting a copy of the English Houses of Lords and Commons. Rather they were trying to balance the parts of government one from another.⁶⁴ Obviously, Adams saw the wisdom of balance and separation of powers in American Indian governments and urged that their examples be examined and copied, in part.

Adams's admonitions to study Indian governments were not the only ones. During the Constitutional Convention, an editorial addressed "to the Federal Constitution" used the bundle of arrows imagery (section 57 of the Iroquois constitution) and urged the drafters of the Constitution to incorporate the idea of "Unite or

Die" into their deliberations.⁶⁵ During the ratification period of the United States Constitution, Matthew Carey, in consultation with Benjamin Franklin, asserted in a major Philadelphia magazine that Franklin's Albany Plan of Union (1754) had a strong "resemblance to the present system." Carey believed that an examination of the similarities of the Constitution and the Albany Plan will "convince the wavering, the new constitution is not the fabrication of the moment."⁶⁶

In reflecting on the process of drafting the Constitution, Charles Pinckney (delegate from South Carolina) observed that "from the European world no precedents are to be drawn for a people who think they are capable of governing themselves."⁶⁷ In making this observation, Pinckney reinforced the notion that Franklin, Rutledge, Wilson, and others had searched non-European sources (notably, American Indian) in their quest for suitable concepts to include in the United States Constitution.

After the ratification of the Constitution, the Tammany Society toasted the document as our "tree of peace [that will] shelter us with its branches of union."⁶⁸ The Tammany Society (which had added "Or Columbian Order" to its name in the 1780s) believed that the United States was a synthesis of European and American Indian ideas; this notion persisted in the history of the Tammany Society well into the twentieth century.⁶⁹

The interpretive and documentary data demonstrate that Native American/Iroquois ideas were used in American political discourse during the latter part of the eighteenth century. Recently, Wilbur R. Jacobs analyzed the impact of Iroquois and American Indian political theory on the evolution of American government in this manner:

Academics still argue about whether the Indian confederations of colonial times had a tangible influence upon the fathers of the Constitution. The case for the Indians is not so far-fetched as one might think. Franklin, an admirer of the Iroquois league, had good reason to know its virtues for he had been an Indian commissioner at treaties, and . . . [i]t is known that other framers of the Constitution had a knowledge of Indian confederation systems and the ideals of Indian democracy. Moreover, these statesmen were avid readers of the French *philosophes* whose writings were partly influenced by descriptions of North American Indians set forth in the writings of French Jesuit missionaries. The noble savage idea, hammered into the writings of Michel de Montaigne and later

French writers, including Rousseau, was embellished with the ideas of natural rights, of the equality of man, and with the democratic tribal traditions of North American Indians.⁷⁰

Obviously, American Indian notions of confederation, federalism, separation of powers, and the unification of vast geographic expanses under a noncolonial government were important alternative concepts that the Founders used when they found portions of the British system lacking (e. g., no enumeration of human rights) or repugnant (monarchy, hereditary nobility). In essence, America is not a complete transplantation of European society, and the revolutionary generation rejoiced in that fact.

If we are to continue believing that the American experience is unique, then we must cast aside the cultural arrogance of the dominant society and openly admit the material and intellectual contributions of Native American peoples in the last five hundred years. Although there are a few scholars of the American Indian who oppose the notion that the ideas of the Iroquois and/or other Native American peoples were a factor in the evolution of American government, there is an emerging body of interpretive and documentary evidence that provides a strong basis for American Indian (and, more specifically, Iroquois) influence on the evolution of American government. Many colonists may have wished to create a society based on a discrete, transplanted European culture without American Indian influences, and some contemporary scholars may believe it was so, but the behavioral controls to make this a reality were not present two hundred years ago.

America is a synthesis of many peoples and cultures, and that synthesis began when Europeans and Native Americans first met. Virginia's first native-born historian, Robert Beverley, saw America as the cradle of natural liberty and Europe as the symbol of authority. Beverley deliberately declared his own natural liberty and his identification with American Indians when he stated, "I am an Indian."⁷¹ Thus the founders, in utilizing American Indian governmental examples, were engaging in a time-honored colonial, intellectual tradition. After all, they had the advantage of observing eastern American Indian governments in their full flower. Perhaps Euro-Americans are as the great Latin American revolutionary Simon Bolivar stated: "[W]e are . . . neither Indian nor European but a species midway . . ."⁷²

In the final analysis, a balanced interpretation of the role of American Indian ideas in United States and hemispheric history

will yield a richer, more diverse history for all. After five hundred years of chronicling the conquest of the Americas, Americans and the rest of the world must accept the fact that broader, multicultural intellectual forces shaped the development of distinctly American ideas of liberty, freedom, and equality.

NOTES

1. James Wilson's speech at the Constitutional Convention, 7 June 1787, in *Note on Debates in the Federal Convention*, ed. Adrienne Koch (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1966), 85.

2. Benjamin Franklin's speech at the Constitutional Convention, 28 June 1787, in *The Records of the Federal Convention*, vol. 1, ed. Max Farrand (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1911), 450. After voicing frustration with the inapplicability of European governmental systems, Franklin would write three cryptic letters to "Indians" on 30 June 1787. (All of them used Iroquois imagery that demonstrated Franklin's understanding of Iroquois government.) For an example of one of Franklin's "Indian" letters using Iroquois imagery, see Benjamin Franklin to Cornstalk, a sachem name in the Tammany Society, 30 June 1787, Benjamin Franklin Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

3. Thomas Jefferson to John Rutledge, Paris, 6 August 1787, in *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, vol. 11, ed. Julian P. Boyd (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1955), 701. On 26 July 1787, the Constitutional Convention had adjourned for ten days while the Committee on Detail (John Rutledge of South Carolina, chairman, Edmund Randolph of Virginia, Nathaniel Gorham of Massachusetts, Oliver Ellsworth of Connecticut, and James Wilson of Pennsylvania) met to "arrange and systematize the materials which . . ." the convention had collected. See *Pennsylvania Herald*, 18 August 1787. For ten days, the Committee on Detail labored to produce a first draft of the United States Constitution. For a fuller discussion of this drafting process, see Charles L. Mee, Jr., *The Genius of the People* (New York: Harper & Row, 1987), 237. According to John Rutledge's most recent biographer, Richard Barry, in *Mr. Rutledge of South Carolina* (New York: Duell, Sloan and Pierce, 1942), 338 and chapter 3, Rutledge discoursed on the Iroquois during the meetings of the Committee of Detail. However, Barry gives us no documentation on this subject except for Rutledge family lore.

4. Boyd, *Papers of Jefferson*, vol. 11, 701.

5. For a copy of Jefferson's *Notes on Virginia*, see Paul L. Ford, ed., *The Works of Thomas Jefferson*, vol. 3 (New York: G. P. Putnam, 1904-1905), 454-58, 494-504 and 508-509. Actually, this portion of the *Notes* was done by Jefferson's friend Charles Thomson, secretary to Congress (1774-89). In the 1750s, Thomson was adopted into the Delaware tribe and called the "man who speaks the truth." (See John F. Watson, *Annals of Philadelphia and Pennsylvania in the Olden Time* [Philadelphia: E. Thomas, 1857], 570.)

6. "Notes on Drafting the Constitution," in "Propositions, Objections &c in Debates on Adoption of the Constitution," James Wilson Papers, Manuscript Division, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, vol. 2, 61-68. The origin of these comments on American Indians by Wilson and Rutledge probably comes from

John Adams's discussion of American Indian governments in his *Defence of the Constitutions of Government of the United States of America* (Philadelphia: Hall and Sellars, 1787). This extremely influential book was published in Boston and Philadelphia on the eve of the Constitutional Convention. John Adams pointed out that the *Defence* "was put into the hands of the members of the Convention in 1787. . . ." (See John Adams to Mercy Warren, 20 July 1807, in *Correspondence between John Adams and Mercy Warren*, ed. Charles F. Adams [New York: Arno Press, 1972], 332.) Indeed, Adams stated that, upon his return to the United States, he heard but "one voice concerning my book" and it was that "people believed the Convention that formed the National Constitution had been too much influenced by Mr. Adams's book . . ." (See *ibid.*, p. 333.) As discussed later in this essay, Adams's *Defence* clearly pointed out that some Americans wanted to establish governments similar to American Indian governments. Adams himself did not completely recoil from such a suggestion but argued, in part, for a synthesis of British and American Indian approaches to government.

7. James Axtell, "Colonial America Without the Indians: Counterfactual Reflections," *Journal of American History* 73:4 (March 1987): 981. Actually, while Axtell may posit an "influence" and interactive approach to American Indian history, he repudiates this approach by calling *influence* a weasel word. See Bruce E. Johansen and Donald A. Grinde, Jr., "The Debate Regarding Native American Precedents for Democracy: A Recent Historiography," *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* 14:1 (Spring 1990): 79.

8. John Locke, "Second Treatise on Government," in *The Works of John Locke*, vol. 4 (London: Printed for C. & J. Rivington, 1824), 402.

9. Baron Lahontan, *New Voyages to North America . . .*, vol. 2 (London: Printed for H. Bonwicke, T. Goodwin, M. Wooten, B. Tooke, and S. Manship, 1703), 146. (The French version of this book was published in 1694.) It is plain that Adario was a literary foil employed by Lahontan to present controversial ideas effectively to Europeans. Using fictionalized American Indians and other non-Europeans in travel accounts was a common practice of the time. See Percy G. Adams, "Benjamin Franklin and the Travel-Writing Tradition," in *The Oldest Revolutionary: Essays on Benjamin Franklin*, ed. J. A. Leo Lemay (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1976).

10. Lahontan, *Voyages*, vol. 2, 124.

11. Rueben G. Thwaites, ed., *The Jesuit Relations*, vol. 41 (1896; New York: Albert and Charles Boni, 1925), 87.

12. *The Complete Works of Montesquieu* [1777], vol. 1, book 1, chapter 3, "Of Positive Laws," 7.

13. J. O. Lindsay, ed., *The New Cambridge Modern History: The Old Regime, 1713-1763*, vol. 7 (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 65.

14. Roger Williams, *The Complete Writings of Roger Williams*, vol. 1 (New York: Russell & Russell, 1963), 224. The word *sachim* or *sachem* is a Native American term for chief.

15. William Penn to the Society of Free Traders, 16 August 1683, in *The Papers of William Penn*, vol. 2, ed. Richard S. and Mary M. Dunn (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1981-87), 452-53.

16. *Ibid.* A knowledge of the Iroquois Condolence Ceremony is one of the key factors in gaining an understanding of the structure of the League of the Haudenosaunee.

17. Watson, *Annals*, 55.

18. E. B. O'Callaghan, ed., *New York Colonial Documents*, vol. 4 (New York: Weed and Parsons, 1854), 296–97.
19. Ibid.
20. Ibid.
21. Ibid., vol. 6, 670–71.
22. Carl Van Doren and Julian P. Boyd, ed., *Indian Treaties Printed By Benjamin Franklin 1736–1762* (Philadelphia: Historical Society of Pennsylvania, 1938), 75.
23. Albert H. Smyth, ed., *The Writings of Benjamin Franklin*, vol. 3 (New York: MacMillan, 1905–1907), 42.
24. Van Doren and Boyd, *Indian Treaties*, 197–99. This reference is to the imagery of the Great Law of the Iroquois. See Arthur C. Parker, *Constitution of the Five Nations* (Albany, NY: State Museum, 1916), section 28. In using Parker's version of the Iroquois Great Law, the author recognizes that it is essentially a nineteenth-century version, but the salient rhetoric and imagery in the Great Law can be traced historically to the seventeenth century quite easily.
25. Van Doren and Boyd, *Indian Treaties*, 131. The "join together as one man" phrase is derived from section 59 of the Iroquois Great Law. See Parker, *Constitution*, section 59.
26. Van Doren and Boyd, *Indian Treaties*, 131.
27. After returning from the Carlisle treaty, Franklin wrote Colden that he would send him a copy of the treaty. Franklin also commented to Colden that he had a copy of his book. See Leonard W. Labaree and Whitfield J. Bell, Jr., eds., *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, vol. 5 (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1962–), 80–81.
28. *Colonial Records of Pennsylvania*, vol. 6 (Harrisburg, PA: Theo. Fenn & Co., 1851), 98.
29. Ibid.
30. Dixon Wecter and Larzer Ziff, eds. *Benjamin Franklin's Autobiography and Selected Writings* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1969), 125.
31. Ibid.
32. Julian P. Boyd, "Dr. Franklin: Friend of the Indians," in *Meet Dr. Franklin*, ed. Roy N. Lokken (Philadelphia: The Franklin Institute, 1981), 239, 246. Arrell M. Gibson in *The American Indian* (Lexington, KY: D. C. Heath, 1980), 580–81, concurs with Boyd's analysis, as do Vine Deloria, Jr. and Clifford Lytle in *American Indians, American Justice* (Austin, TX: University of Texas, 1984), 82. Indeed, Richard K. Matthews, in *The Radical Politics of Thomas Jefferson* (Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas Press, 1984), 122, states that "American Indians . . . provided the empirical model for [Jefferson's] political vision."
33. Robert D. Marcus and David Burner, eds., *America Firsthand*, vol. 1 (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1989), 9.
34. See "Journals of Captain John Montresor, 1757–1778," 4 April 1766, *Collections of the New York Historical Society*, vol. 14 (New York: Printed for the Society, 1868–1949, 2nd set), 357, 367–68. The Eastern White Pine or "Great Tree" is the overreaching symbol of the Great Law of the Iroquois Confederacy.
35. *Pennsylvania Chronicle*, 4 May 1772. Tammany Day was celebrated as early as the 1730s. The New York City Tammany Society traced its roots to the Sons of Liberty. See "Preface to the Constitution," in "Constitution and Roll of Members of the St. Tammany Society, 1789–1916, Manuscript Division, New York Public Library.
36. *Pennsylvania Herald*, 4 May 1786. See also "Anecdotes of Franklin re-

cited," in "Society of St. Tammany or Columbian Order, 1792–1916, Manuscript Division, New York Public Library. The Tammany Society believed that America was a synthesis of the best of European (thus the Columbian Order) and Native American (Tammany) traditions.

37. See John Adams to Hezekiah Niles, 10 May 1819 in *Niles Register*, vol. 16, 226.

38. "Proceedings of the Commissioners . . . to Negotiate a Treaty with the Six Nations, 1775," *Papers of the Continental Congress* (M247, roll 144, item 134). The term *Grand Council Fire* refers to the Iroquois League in session at its capital at Onondaga (near present-day Syracuse, New York). At this meeting, the Iroquois expressed concern about the nature of the executive of the Continental Congress. Doubtless, this concern resulted in the naming of John Hancock "The Great Tree" in 1776.

39. Lyman H. Butterfield, ed., *Diary and Autobiography of John Adams*, vol. 2 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1961), 226.

40. Caesar Rodney to Thomas Rodney, 28 May 1776 in *Letters of the Delegates to Congress*, vol. 4, ed. Paul H. Smith (Washington, DC: Library of Congress, 1976–), 99, 281.

41. *Pennsylvania Gazette*, 29 May 1776.

42. Worthington C. Ford, ed., *Journals of the Continental Congress*, vol. 4 (Washington, DC: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1904–1937), 430.

43. See Charles Thomson's "History of the Articles of Confederation," in *Papers of the Continental Congress*, National Archives (M247, roll 22, item 9). According to an editorial note in Smith, ed., *Letters of Delegates*, vol. 4, 252 "the 4th, 7th, 8th and 12th of Franklin's Thirteen Articles are conspicuously incorporated into the committee's work."

44. Ford, *Journals*, vol. 6, 1078.

45. See *Apocalypse de Chiokoyhekoy, Chef des Iroquois* [1777], Library Company of Philadelphia, and Dwight W. Hoover, *The Red and the Black* (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1976), 56–57. The prophet bird *Tskleleli*, or news carrier, was an image used in the rhetoric of Iroquois diplomacy (especially with the French). See Peter Force, ed., *American Archives*, 4th series, vol. 3 (Washington, DC: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1837–53), 479, 491, for examples of how this image was used by the American commissioners and the Iroquois at the Albany conference of 1775. Perhaps Benjamin Franklin, Arthur Lee, and Silas Deane, as American commissioners to France, worked on this pamphlet, since they were all familiar with Iroquois ideas and imagery (see Ford, *Journals*, vol. 2, 186). In 1776, during the debates regarding independence, it was asserted that Spain and France might be jealous of the United States, since it might "one day . . . strip them of all their American possessions." (See *ibid.*, vol. 6, 1088.) This pamphlet was a combination of ideas and images to alleviate Spanish, French, and Dutch fears about American independence. It also appeals to the "noble savage" sentiments so ardently advanced by French philosophers like Jean Jacques Rousseau. In the nineteenth century, Tuscarora anthropologist J. N. B. Hewitt recorded a Tuscarora story, "The Prophet Bird-like Being," about a creature that could foresee events important to the survival of the tribe (see J. N. B. Hewitt Collection, manuscript 422, National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution). For a contemporary version of a similar apocalyptic prophecy, see Wallace (Mad Bear) Anderson (Tuscarora), "The Lost Brother: An Iroquois Prophecy of Serpents," in *The Way: An Anthology of American Indian Literature*, ed. Shirley Hill Witt and Stan Steiner (New York: Vintage, 1973), 243–47.

46. See John C. Fitzpatrick, ed., *The Writings of George Washington*, vol. 11 (Washington, DC: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1931–44), 342. The Oneida had brought corn to the Continental Army during the winter. See Cara Richards, *The Oneida People* (Phoenix, AZ: Indian Tribal Series, 1974), 53–54.

47. James Madison to Thomas Jefferson, 20 August and 15 September 1784, in *Letters and Other Writings of James Madison*, vol. 1, ed. William C. Rives and Philip R. Fendall (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1865), 101. Madison was quite clear about the conditions of the time. He observed,

It required but little time . . . in the house of delegates in May 1784 to discover that . . . the Confederacy . . . retained the aversion of its predecessors to transfers of power from the state to the government of the union
(Quoted from Gaillard Hunt and James B. Scott, eds., *Debates in Federal Convention* [New York: Oxford, 1920], 6.)

48. Eugene B. Chase, ed., *Our Revolutionary Forefathers: The Letters of Francois, Marquis de Barbe-Marbois* (Freeport, NY: Books for Libraries Press, 1969), 191–93, and Irving Brant, *James Madison*, vol. 1 (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1941), 330–31. It should be noted that Thomas Jefferson wrote his *Notes On Virginia* at Barbois's request. Charles Thomson (secretary to Congress, 1774–89 and adopted Delaware) wrote the description of the political structure of the Iroquois Confederacy (he called it Mingo) in Jefferson's *Notes On Virginia*. See Paul L. Ford, ed., *The Works of Thomas Jefferson*, vol. 3 (New York: Putnam, 1904–1905), 314–15, 499–504.

49. Chase, *Letters of Marquis de Barbe-Marbois*, 211–12.

50. For a lengthier account of this affair, see Brant, *Madison*, vol. 1, chapter 21. It should be noted that Madison was skeptical of the British constitution. In *The Federalist*, no. 53, Madison denounced the "dangerous practices" of Parliament and its damages to the British constitution demonstrated by the Septennial Act of 1716. Madison abhorred the British constitution's ability to change, "by legislative acts, some of the most fundamental articles of government." In contrast, Madison advocated a "constitution paramount to government," or a written constitution. See Jacob E. Cooke, ed., *The Federalist* (New York: Meridian Books, 1961), 576–78. For Thomas Paine, the Septennial Act of 1716 was proof that "there was no constitution in England." See Thomas Paine's "The Rights of Man," in *Constitutionalism: Ancient and Modern*, ed. Charles H. McIlwain (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1947), 2.

51. Stuart G. Brown, *The Autobiography of James Monroe* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1965), 38–39.

52. Thomas Jefferson to John Adams, Monticello, 11 June 1812, in *The Writings of Thomas Jefferson*, vol. 11, ed. Albert E. Bergh (Washington, DC: Jefferson Memorial Association, 1903–1904), 160. During this reconciliation correspondence between Jefferson and Adams, Benjamin Rush had written (using Iroquois Covenant Chain rhetoric) that he hoped "the chain which now connects Quincy with Monticello continues to brighten with every post." (See Lyman H. Butterfield, ed., *The Papers of Benjamin Rush*, vol. 2 [Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1951], 1124.

In subsequent correspondence with Adams, Rush referred to the "Scotch Sachem" (Dr. John Witherspoon of New Jersey), in *ibid.*, vol. 2, 1134, and he referred to Isaac Norris of Pennsylvania as the "Quaker Sachem." See *ibid.*, vol. 2, 1167.

53. John Adams to Thomas Jefferson, Quincy, 28 June 1813, in Bergh, *Writings of Jefferson*, vol. 11, 288.

54. *Ibid.* In their reconciliation correspondence, Adams and Jefferson lamented the fact that, by the War of 1812, Americans on the East Coast were not being exposed to American Indian people and their ideas.

55. Thomas Jefferson to James Madison, 30 January 1787, in Boyd, *Papers of Jefferson*, vol. 11, 92–93. In discussions about American Indian governments, the generic term *Indian* was often used to explain eastern Native American confederacies and tribal ways. When observers in the eighteenth century used the generic term *Indian*, it often implied “Iroquois,” since they were the archetypal Indians of the eighteenth-century American mind, in much the same way that the Lakota or Sioux people are considered the generic Indian stereotype of the twentieth century.

56. Gordon S. Wood, *The Creation of the American Republic* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina, 1969), 568.

57. Pierre Jean George Cabanis, *Oeuvres Posthumes de Cabanis*, vol. 5 (Paris: Firmin Didot, père et fils, 1825), 256. It is obvious that Franklin is using the rhetoric and imagery of the Iroquois in the Covenant Chain quotation. Cabanis notes that Turgot, Helvetius, La Rochefoucault, and other Enlightenment thinkers were in these discussions. This was probably why Adams leveled some of his criticism of unicameral governments at Turgot in his *Defence* as well. See Charles F. Adams, ed., *Works of John Adams*, vol. 4 (Boston: Little, Brown, 1851), 299–302, 401–415. For a copy of the 1776 Pennsylvania Constitution, see Francis N. Thorpe, ed., *The Federal and State Constitutions: Colonial Charters and Other Organic Laws*, vol. 5 (Washington, DC: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1909), 3084–3092.

58. Adams, *Works*, vol. 4, 390. Having two legislatures, according to Franklin, resembled the practice of moving a heavily laden wagon down a hill by hitching teams of oxen at each end of the wagon to insure a slow, safe descent. See *ibid.*, 389–91.

59. *Ibid.*, 296.

60. *Ibid.*, IV, 296–97.

61. *Ibid.*, 296. See also pp. 273–74, 279, and 391–93 for how Adams perceives the arguments of Franklin and Turgot. Not only was Franklin constantly mentioning the Iroquois in the salons of Paris from 1777 to 1784 (see Cabanis, *Oeuvres*, vol. 5, 256), but he also was styled the “Philosopher as Savage” in France during this time. For a discussion of Franklin’s role in the Enlightenment in France, see Peter Gay, “Enlightenment Thought and the American Revolution,” in *The Role of Ideology in the American Revolution*, ed. John Howe, Jr. (Melbourne, FL: Krieger, 1976), 48.

62. Adams, *Works*, vol. 4, 511. In Jack P. Greene’s *The Intellectual Heritage of the Constitutional Era* (Philadelphia: The Library Company, 1986), 54, Adams’s *Defence* is termed one of the “most significant works [in] the discussion of the problem of forming new constitutions.” Green also characterizes Adams’s *Defence* as “massive and learned.”

63. Adams, *Works*, vol. 4, 566–67. Adams is obviously describing the Iroquois Confederacy here. His reference to the animal sacrifice is probably the “White Dog Ceremony” of the Iroquois, and his references to the sachemships being “elective” and the process of going to war probably come from the Great Law of the Iroquois. See Parker, *Constitution of the Five Nations*, sections 36–41 and 79–91. For an interesting portrayal of the White Dog Ceremony, see “The Onondaga Indians,” *Harper’s Weekly*, 17 February 1872.

64. Wood, *American Republic*, 571, and Adams, *Works*, vol. 6, 93.
65. *The American Museum* 2 (August 1787), 201. For the pertinent part of the Iroquois Great Law, see section 57 in White Roots of Peace, *The Great Law of the Iroquois People* (Rooseveltown, NY: White Roots of Peace, 1971). James Wilson, delegate to the Constitutional Convention from Pennsylvania, used this same "Unite or Die" phrase at the Pennsylvania ratification convention when discussing how the delegates overcame some of the problems of unity and federalism. See Farrand, ed., *Records of the Federal Convention*, vol. 3, 411. This phrase was also frequently used by the Tammany Society.
66. *American Museum* 5 (February 1789), 190.
67. *Charleston Columbian Herald*, 9 June 1788.
68. *New York Journal*, 10 August 1790.
69. *Ibid.* and "Preface to Constitution" in "Constitution . . . of the Tammany Society, 1789-1796," in Manuscript Division, New York Public Library.
70. Wilbur R. Jacobs, *Dispossessing the American Indian: Indians and Whites on the Colonial Frontier* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1985), 168-70. In addition to recognizing the intellectual impact of American Indian ideas on the developing American government, Jacobs also is one of the few contemporary Euro-American historians of American Indians that acknowledges an intellectual indebtedness to the work of modern American Indian scholars in the development of his thinking about American Indians (*ibid.*, 235). For a broader analysis of the impact of American Indian ideas on America, see Donald A. Grinde, Jr. and Bruce E. Johansen, *Exemplar of Liberty: Native America and the Evolution of Democracy* (Los Angeles: UCLA American Indian Studies Center, 1991).
71. Robert Beverley, *The History and Present State of Virginia* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1947), 9.
72. See Bolivar's "Jamaica Letter," in *The Political Thought of Bolivar*, ed. Gerald E. Fitzgerald (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1971), 33.

