Reaching the Grassroots:

The World-wide Diffusion of Iroquois Democratic Traditions

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Contents

After many years of intense debate (our roster of annotations has reached 1,369 items), the idea that the Iroquois helped shape democracy has passed generally into the realm of general knowledge the length and breadth of "Turtle Island," and beyond. While a few brushfires of criticism remain in academia, many people and organizations have been applying Iroquois political principles in their daily lives and operations.

As of April 6, 2002, according to our records, the issue had been raised in 334 books, 175 scholarly-journal articles, commentaries, letters to the editor, book and film reviews, or bibliographies; 167 other periodical articles (including book reviews); 372 newspaper or news-service articles, columns, letters, or book reviews, and 188 Internet Web sites. Additionally, "influence" has been raised in 80 other venues, including several documentary films, a commencement speech at Wellesley College by Gloria Steinem; an *ABC Radio* "Perspectives," by Hugh Downs, a presidential proclamation by Bill Clinton, several college course outlines, other school curricula; a transcript of "Larry King Live" on *Cable News Network*; a speech by Joe Clark, Canadian Minister of Constitutional Affairs; and a feature film script ("The Indian in the Cupboard," 1995). The subject now has its own Library of Congress classification, and citations in three dozen legal journals, as well as a place in a speech by Janet Reno while she was U.S. attorney general. "Influence" also has emerged in a set of U.S. history trading cards and a 1958 Classics Illustrated comic book, as well as a CD-ROM cut by Portland (Oregon) State University.

A Wide range of Opinions in a World-wide Context

As usual, the range of opinions on the idea is very broad, from the Dalai Lama (who embraces the idea) 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 political science's standard references. We continue to be surprised continuously by the sheer range of the idea that the Iroquois had 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." (Mann, xx) 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, (Frazier, 2000, 8) as he recounted Benjamin Franklin's use of Iroquois precedents in the Albany Plan. Frazier also quotes Thomas Jefferson on Native American government (Frazier, 2000, 9), and provides, on following pages, a detailed description of ways in which Native American notions of freedom have permeated the general society.

The last page of North Dakota's Turtle Mountain Chippewas' Constitution, revised during 2001 and 2002, contains an acknowledgement to 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. (Constitution, 2002)

By the turn of the millennium the tracing of Iroquois democratic roots was becoming a world-wide pursuit. Our daily e-mails often bring inquiries this sort. Jesus Herrera, professor of political science at Simon Bolivar University in Caracas, Venezuela, asked for material he could use in lectures there. Japanese author Jun Hoshikawa's *The Water Planet* (2000) includes a chapter (pp. 169-190) entitled "Native Democracy," which describes the Iroquois system and its influence on governance in North America and Japan as an extension of the "MacArthur Constitution" that has governed Japan since the end of World War II. (Hoshikawa, 2000, 169-190) Hoshikawa and several other Japanese have traveled to Onondaga and met, face to face, with representatives of the Confederacy. José Moreira da Silva, a teacher of English in Sao Paulo, Brazil, undertook a translation of Johansen's *Forgotten Founders* (1982) into Portuguese.

Often a week does not pass by in our offices without an inquiry from Europe -- two examples being Floyd Rudiman, a professor of Psychology at Tromso University in northernmost 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 the

subject at Yeditepe University in Istanbul.

More and more often, the Iroquois political system is discussed in the context of world surveys of political and philosophical history. An example is provided by a documentary film prepared and broadcast by KCTS (Seattle), a Public Broadcasting Service affiliate, titled "The Crucible of the Millennium," January 31, 2002. The film discusses a number of cultural, political, and religious systems -- European, Moslem, Chinese, and Native American (e.g. Iroquois).

Circulation of these ideas world-wide has been greatly aided by the spread of the Internet. Grinde and Johansen's *Exemplar of Liberty* is available on line in full text at [http://www.ratical.org/many_worlds/6Nations/EoL/]. *Forgotten Founders* also is available in full text on the Internet at [http://www.ratical.org/many_worlds/6Nations/FF.html]; it has been included around the world in Web-page links describing the basics of U.S. government. For two of many examples, see:

1. "WWW.SuperEva.com; International Directory: American Government," An Italian Web site. 1999. [http://dmoz.supereva.it/Science/Social_Sciences/Political_Science/American_Government/];
2. "Malaysia Web Directory: American Government." 1999. [http://www.malaysiadirectory.com/op/index.cgi/Science/Social_Sciences/Political_Science/American_Government]

[NOTE: As of October 2002, the above links no longer resolve. At this time *Forgotten Founders* is found listed on an Indonesian web site, http://islamlib.com/EBOOKS/us.html and a Japanese site run by a faculty member of Osaka University: http://cobalt.lang.osaka-u.ac.jp/~krkvls/history.html --ratitor]

Celebrations from Celebrities

The Iroquois-influence idea continues to receive endorsements from some well-known people. One example is His Holiness the 14th 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 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!" (His Holiness)

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 single human being) *in Perspectives* (a collection of fifty essays) closely examines Iroquois precedents for United States government, drawing in large part from Johansen's *Forgotten Founders*. The essays in Perspectives are adapted from ten-minute essays by Downs on a program of the same name aired over the American Broadcasting Company (*ABC*) Radio Network.

The idea has spread, in some cases, into 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 follows this line: "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." (Pirsig, 48)

The Antiquity of the Idea

Older mentions of "influence" continue to come to light. Harry Liebersohn, writing in Aristocratic Encounters: European travelers and North American Indians (1998) illustrates the role of Iroquois democracy in the French Revolution by quoting Jacques Grasset de Saint-Sauveur's 1784 work, in French, on costumes from around the world. The book included a chapter on the Iroquois that discoursed not only on costume, but also on government. "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?" (Grasset, in Liebersohn, 1998, 13)

In the Introduction of Indian Treaties Printed by Benjamin Franklin 1736-1762 (1938), editors Carl Van Doren and Julian P. Boyd Van Doren, author of the most enduringly popular biography of Benjamin Franklin, (first published the same year, 1938, as this volume) describes the historical context of the Lancaster Treaty (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," writes Van Doren, "Pennsylvania's steady alliance with the Six Nations had a large effect in preserving the friendship of the Iroquois for the English." (page x.)

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." (Illustrated Story, n.p.)

Continued Criticism from the "Trolls"

The "Trolls'" full-frontal bashings of the influence idea have become less frequent. The literature is still marked by a number of angry brushfires of abject denial, however, even with Elisabeth Tooker in retirement and William A. Starna having retired and moved to Germany. James Axtell has been notably absent from Troll ranks lately; he has been busy penning books such as The Pleasures of Academe. Mohawk artist, teacher and culture bearer

John Kahionhes Fadden gave the constant critics the nickname "Trolls" dueing the 1980s after the European mythological characters who charge tolls to cross bridges, observing the notion that certain people, at that time, controlled access of the idea to the realm of established knowledge.

Some of the more enduring critics of the Iroquois-influence idea continue to hammer away at it. One example is Laurence Hauptman who, in a review, of Griffin and Grinde, eds., 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 is "incensed" by the publication of this book. As usual, the "Trolls" ad hominem style of attack does not exactly brim over with decorum and respect for "would-be academics" whose opinions they consider to be in error. Hauptman thus opined that Grinde's annotations have "as much depth as a comic strip." (Hauptman, 220)

Richard White, the celebrated new western historian, who hangs his mortarboard at Stanford University, by 1998 was sounding a lot like Tooker's and Starna's aseertions a decade earlier. In so doing, White invoked the invisible authority of uncited historians as he wildly overstates 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. (White, 232)

More Poundings from Right-wing Pundits

Dismissive polemics from right-of-center commentators have long been another staple of opposition to the "influence" idea. George Will, Patrick Buchanan, Rush Limbaugh, and John Leo have slimed 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, in Washington, D.C., 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. Brooks then 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." This exhibit was said to Brooks to include 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.'" (Brooks, 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 Lutz' article as an invention by "a few non-historians." "Historians," writes Lutz, "quickly concluded that such claims were ill-founded." (Lutz, 1998, 99) Lutz cites Johansen's Forgotten Founders calling its author "a journalist" (i.e., "a non-historian"). Lutz struggles mightily to squeeze the Iroquois League into a European framework. Is it "Aristotelian" or "Hobbesian"? Lutz, who is so sure how to define "historian" and "journalist," and declare that never the twain shall meet, can't decide. (Lutz, 1998, 99) Lutz, who seems be making a case that only academics whom he regards as historians should have a crack at writing history is not, himself, a card-carrying member of a history faculty. He is a political scientist.

Increasing Use of the Idea in Educational Venues

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. An example is the State of California's history and social-science curriculum for the Fourth Grade. This guide contains a section on the Iroquois Confederacy's government which identifies the Iroquois Confederacy as "the first democratically governed federation in North America," and describes its structure, adding: "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." (California)

Saskatchewan Education's history curriculum includes a classroom activity which "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 referendums, 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." (Saskatchewan)

The Dayton, Ohio, 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."

Iroquois decision-making processes were consciously utilized in the creation of New York

State's Shaker Mountain School. According to an Internet account:

> When we founded Shaker Mountain School [in New York State], 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. (Mintz)

Nevada's 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:
> 236.040 The governor of this state is authorized and requested to issue annually a proclamation designating the:
> 1. third week of July as "Nevada All-Indian Stampede Days" to be celebrated in Fallon, Nevada; and
> 2. 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.*

A description of Iroquois precedents for democracy was worked into Juan González' *Harvest of Empire: A History of Latinos in America* (2000). González wrote, in part: "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.'" (González, 24-25)

The Iroquois-influence idea has been receiving increasing attention in political-science curricula. Some political-science document sourcebooks now begin with extracts from the Iroquois Great Law of Peace. An example is the fourth edition of Kenneth M. Dolbeare's *American Political Thought* (1998). This college-level political-science textbook begins by stating that the main roots of political thought in the United States stem from Europe, but Dolbeare also acknowledges the debate over Iroquois precedents. On page 32, under "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." (Dolbeare, 38, 40)

Note in endnote: "Younger historians" is a relative termn. As of this writing, Grinde and Johansen are in their 50s.

The Course Catalogue for the Political Science Department, University of New Brunswick (Canada) listed a course (in 1998-99), "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."

"Government 473 -- American Political Thought," a course offered at Suffolk University (Boston), Fall, 1998, began with study of the Iroquois Great Law of Peace. The professor, John C. Berg (who is director of graduate studies in the Department of Government at Suffolk) also advises students to access on-line, 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* (1997), which begins with excerpts from the Great Law of Peace, with pictographic symbols provided by Mohawk culture bearer Ray Fadden. [http://www.cas.suffolk.edu/berg/syl-473.html] 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." (Sargent, 4)

Use of the Idea in Practical Politics

The opinions of Professors Lutz and White notwithstanding, the Iroquois-influence idea has been borrowed in the course of practical politics around the United States. In a speech sponsored by Utah State University Extension Education, Larry Echo-Hawk, professor 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 and 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. (Echo-Hawk)

Presidents George Bush (Senior) and Bill Clinton have endorsed the Iroquois-influence idea, most often in federal declarations of November as National American Indian Heritage Month. On August 3, 1990, Bush declared the month of November as "National American

Indian Heritage Month . . . 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." (American Heritage)

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 May 6, 1999 advocated an Iroquois model of federalism in which he said would allow states to retain jurisdiction within their borders: "The Iroquois model is the right one to follow." (Lefcourt) Lefcourt said that "federalization" of crimes is popular with politicians eager to appear to be doing something about crime. Such federalization duplicates state laws and has caused caseloads in many federal courts to become bloated.

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 Thomas Jefferson's theory of local governance (which she calls "ward republics") 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 [which] 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. (Morse, 266)

The enduring value of Iroquois and other Native American governmental models may be illustrated by pairing Morse's analysis of Jefferson with a speech November 28, 1999, by United States Attorney General Janet Reno. Reno opened a meeting with Native American leaders and Interior Department officials in Washington, D.C. by saying, in part, 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." (Reno)

The idea that the Iroquois helped shape our political character plays well with the United States Green Party, a Web page of which contains the following:

> 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. (An Introduction)

The Iroquois example also has been invoked by the Promise Keepers, which calls itself an "assembly of Christian men." According to a transcript of a Promise Keepers press conference February, 4, 1997 in Washington, D.C., Steve Chavis opened this "assembly of

Christian men" by recognizing Huron Claus, the North American director of Chief Ministries, Inc., based in Phoenix, Arizona:

> 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, and 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." (Press Conference)

Also in Washington, D.C., Winnebago elder Reuben Snake began a speech on the steps of the U.S. Capitol September 29, 1990, by observing that, "As an American, it is 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) 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." (Snake)

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, *et al.*, 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. (Bothwell, 177)

Conclusion

Richard Williams, executive director of the American Indian College Fund, who also is an historian, provides a concluding context for this description of ways in which Iroquois political ideas have spread around Turtle Island, and the world. Williams places the political accomplishments of Native North Americans in a broader context that illustrates early and advanced knowledge in many fields of knowledge. "The ancient structures and cities built by

natives on this continent," Williams wrote in the *Denver Post*, "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." (Williams, 2002)

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." (Williams, 2002)

Another concluding comment is provided by Kathleen Bragdon in her *Columbia Guide to American Indians of the Northeast* (2001), which includes a discussion of the "influence" issue (pp. 236-239) with a detailed bibliography of work on both sides. The author comments, in part: "Judging by the number of publications concerning it, the history and influence of the League of the Iroquois [on the 'Origins of the Constitution,' in the section's title] 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." (Bragdon, 2001, 237)

References

[NOTE: As of October 2002, links below that no longer resolve, or do not link to what is being cited, are not live. If anyone finds a working URL for any of these references please let the ratitor know.]

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