

Journal #3654 from sdc 6.10.16

American Democracy: An Invention or a Discovery?

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On June 11 1776, an Onondaga sachem gave John Hancock an Iniquis name at Independence Hall.

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American Democracy: An Invention or a Discovery?

by Laura Waterman Wittstock <http://www.manataka.org/page2007.html>

The enduring Democracy—rule by the people—is widely believed to have been invented by the brash but brave Americans of the 18th century. Their creation was a new kind of government, free from monarchs or the equally despised rule of aristocratic despots.

They created a representative government in three parts: administrative, legislative, and judicial. Lifting liberally from the Greeks, early Americans took the word democracy and expanded it to represent everything from Massachusetts town meetings to the Virginia House of Burgesses' bicameral representative assembly.

Best of all, it is said the Americans created a democracy which guaranteed individual rights so fundamental and universal they are collectively called a "Bill of Rights," and they became the first set of amendments to the United States Constitution.

But was American democracy thus invented? Or did the revolutionists, kicking around to find something different from their historical political roots in England, discover a new way to govern right under their noses?

For all of the credit given to republican ideals, it is tragic that the freedom so loved by 18th-century Americans and held up as an example for the rest of the world, did not include African slaves, women, children nor any members of the non-human fauna family. The one exception was Natives, who in a peculiar way were conceptually free in America, because treaties with England and later with the United States acknowledged that Native nations had rights, including those of individuals (safety, education, land and water use, among others). But Natives were not literally free. They could not safely travel outside their shrinking territories, nor within them, in some cases. Families were in constant danger of attack by European settlers who were not content to build homesteads in their own territory, especially during expansionist pushes.

Interestingly, the concept of democracy, although known, was held in considerably lower esteem by 17th-century Americans. Democracy was scorned in those days because it meant the inclusion of the lower classes. The aristocratic grandees who founded Massachusetts and Virginia preferred rule by landowning white men (25 acres and a house, for example). Landless white men had virtually no chance of partaking in government, nor were they considered fit for the genteel business of government, religion and trade, inseparable as these three pursuits were in Colonial times. It was the revolutionary war that embraced the common man, enlisting him in the struggle for freedom from England. His muscle was needed for the effort. Therefore, after the war was won, the elite could hardly retreat to their former habits. Thus "democracy" began to lose its former negative connotation of "rule by the rabble" and took on a new luster among the gentry as a dignified label for the new republic.

Freely interpreting Greek philosophy, architecture, literature and art, 18th-century Americans immersed themselves in a romantic revival of a Golden Age that never was. It certainly wasn't much in the way of being democratic.

However, back in the 17th century, particularly around the time of the Virginia Company (1607) and the Massachusetts Bay Company (1628), European "adventurers" began to colonize North America in larger numbers, with profits on their minds. Those with money ventured their capital; those without ventured their persons for labor in the hopes of making fortunes through hard work.

Virginia became a royal colony in 1624, having floundered before Native tobacco saved its failing commercial efforts. England's Civil War (1642 to 1660) led to the ouster of the English governor in Virginia. After the war, the weakened royal monopoly over the slave trade gave Virginia planters the access to cheap labor they wanted. At the end of the century, Virginia's primary trade was in slaves. By 1720, up to 40 percent of the Virginia population comprised African slaves.

Massachusetts never fulfilled the dreams of its Puritan backers. The financiers of the effort were aristocratic adventurers who had grown tired of the Massachusetts "Pilgrims" and, turning their attention to another Puritan colony, backed what they hoped would be a profitable investment. The colony was called Providence Island, located just off the coast of Nicaragua. (This is not to be confused with Providence, Rhode Island, which was founded by Roger Williams in 1636 after he was kicked out of Puritan Massachusetts).

Providence Island came into being in 1630, as religiously-inclined English lords hoped to get huge profits out of their efforts—profits they believed would not come out of Massachusetts—with which to launch their hotly desired Civil War against Charles I. They went heavily into tobacco, which failed. The colonists then turned to a vigorous slave trade, setting the stage for the first slave rebellion in an English colony.

This group of aristocrats, religious though they were, had no dreams of democracy. They wanted the king dead, and their class in power. The colonization process had to do with making a lot of money, so slavery was quite appropriate to their way of thinking. The colony had been deliberately positioned to be in the middle of the bloodthirsty Spanish empire as a sort of religious taunt—a Protestant Reformist's finger, of sorts. After the 1638 slave rebellion, Spain invaded and within two years exterminated the English presence on Providence Island. The war against Charles had to wait another nine years.

It is fascinating to see that, finding themselves in the midst of a dark people who worked hard at maintaining a harmonious place in nature, the 17th-century colonists took little notice except to cook up charges to expel Natives from coveted land. The noble savage, as some were to call Native people, lived in a world where women, children and animals had just as much right, perhaps more, to inhabit space as men. Individual wealth was not an entree to society, trade and government.

Competition was used as a convenient bridge for white men to walk across the backs of the less fortunate on the way to individual wealth and glory, but this technique found no favor in the Native "New World." There was no Protestant reformer whispering in men's ears that wealth was good and meritorious, and that some men were superior to others, God having said so. Such contradictions would resurface in the U.S. Constitution later.

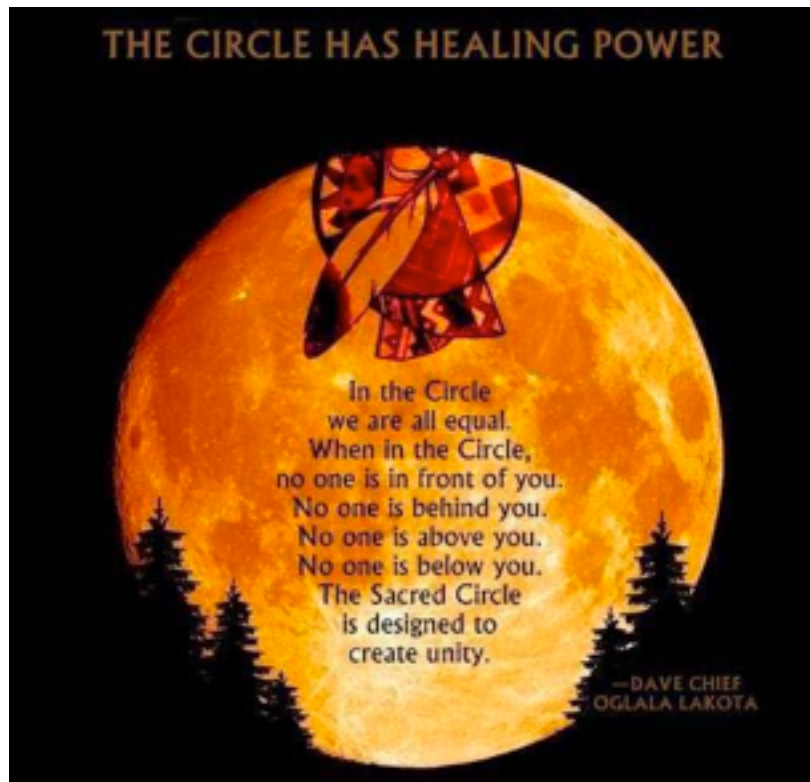
Unlike the slums of London, in the wilds of America known dangers lurked. Having allies was thus preferred over individualism, no matter how rugged. The singular authority of Pope or King was unknown among the Natives encountered by the English. There was no King Henry VIII, who, as was his wont, might barge into a woman's birthing room to force sex upon the just-delivered mother. Henry could be rugged and an individual, but no bloody one else had dare try, at least not in his royal earshot.

This and the many other accouterments of "civilization" had not reached the council fires of the northern Native people, leaving them content to live in their territories of village, town, city, or farm, building governments and confederations that reinforced group unity and welfare. Their societies, nearly perfectly suited to their environments, included choruses of hecklers who could and did run individual leaders out when they became convinced their pomposity was just the thing the tribe needed to get on with life, an acknowledgment that self-aggrandizement lurks in every population. Native government

and English colonizing did collide. The question is, did they also make exchanges?

Consider the Massachusetts town meeting, one of the great examples of America's uniqueness. The Plymouth colony of Puritans came from an Anabaptist religious background. They were Protestant separatists, or reformers, who vehemently opposed the monarchy. To say they were persecuted is perhaps understating what they would have done to the royalists if they were in power. Present day distant cousins can be seen in the gentle Amish farming communities throughout the United States.

By the time (1635) Massachusetts towns (from the Dutch "tunnes"), were defined to



include not just fenced gardens, but a community with a church at the center, the Puritans had worked out several problems within their ranks. Primary among these was that members did not have to work for one another without compensation. Bickering and crop failure followed an early impasse when communal work was promoted. The historic Native figure Squanto is credited with saving the community and showing them how to live together.

Upon arrival in America, the Plymouth band of settlers took over a recently-abandoned Native town, Pawtuxet. The fields were already cleared and it was a

habitable area. It was, in fact, Squanto's home town, and he was the sole survivor of his community. He escaped death because he had been in England when a plague struck, killing the entire town. He returned to see the English taking over—members from the same group that had enslaved him—but he helped them nevertheless. Reports from the period record the unwillingness of Puritans to help one another freely without pay. Squanto introduced them to the Native model of individually-owned plots within a commonly-owned community land area. Once the Puritans had family plots, they worked diligently and learned the value of community life.

Puritan councils grew to include non-landowners, causing friction, and some plantation owners left to begin other towns, taking with them, nevertheless, the Native model of mutual help. "Town meetings," called by the beating of a drum, included landowners and plot holders alike. Votes were often counted using beans and other seeds. Town replaced plantation, and that term went out of vogue, after the old planters who had held complete

control in matters of the community moved away. The town meeting was truly born.

In their first year in America, the Puritans could not survive because they would not work in common. By subdividing their lands in the Native fashion they maintained their community and went on to include all members in the town meetings, just as the Natives did. Thus the first steps toward representative federalism were taken that would eventually lead to the Bill of Rights. The Native roots of this new democracy took hold among a people who needed Native wisdom and tutelage to survive. It was a communion of secular need and spiritual oblige, with the Natives doing the giving.

One hundred forty years later, the Iroquois Confederacy and others were invited to attend the "Grand Council Fire" in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, to take part in the debates that would shape the future United States. In 1776, an Iroquois delegation visited Congress. The confederacies were held in such high esteem by William Penn that in 1683 he said of them "the kings move by the breath of their people."

Earlier, on July 4, 1744, the Iroquois leader Canasatego spoke at Lancaster, Pennsylvania on the merits of unity. "We are a powerful Confederacy; and, by your observing the same methods our wise forefathers have taken, you will acquire fresh strength and power; therefore whatever befalls you, never fall out one with another."

Benjamin Franklin printed the speech and sent 300 copies to London for sale.

Franklin's Albany Plan of Union drew from Iroquois government. He attended Iroquois ceremonies in 1753, less than a year before writing the plan. His plan would include a Grand Council, a speaker, and a general government under which all colonies would retain their own constitutions, just as the Iroquois confederacy did.

Importantly, Franklin's plan gave the Americans an identity separate from the English. This was something desperately sought. To continue to be associated with European labels made creating an American identity more difficult, and the northern colonies readily adopted Native symbols, particularly the symbol of the arrows bound together. Thirteen bound arrows signified the unified colonies. The thirteen arrows appear today in the talons of the eagle on the United States Seal.

In 1777, a small publication of the Continental Congress hinted that America was developing a government that reflected the Iroquois government, which was in fulfillment of an Iroquois prophecy that predicted an European and Iroquois symmetry of governments. Strength through unity, the Iroquois standard, became the revolutionary cry of the Americans. This sentiment was later expressed as E pluribus unum— one out of many.

By 1784, the Virginians Thomas Jefferson, James Madison and James Monroe had made plans to visit the Iroquois. Madison went first, traveling with the Marquis de Lafayette to Fort Stanwix, New York. The Virginians had come from a different background than the Pennsylvanians. Slave owning Virginia had saturated its society with the ideals of the plantation, the gentry and the deeply rooted right to own slaves.

Among the Natives, Madison was surprised to hear the stories of French and American

adults who lived among the Iroquois as their preferred countries. A young American woman told Madison, "I am the equal of all the women in the tribe.... 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?"

Monroe went in 1784. Jefferson, who was to have gone with him, instead went to Paris as the American French Ambassador.

French interest in Natives continued. In 1796, Louis Philippe, then a future king of France, visited America over a three-and-a-half year period, spending some of his time with the Cherokees in Tennessee. The king, then the Duc d' Orleans, kept a diary of his travels, leaving a rare record of a monarch's view of the times. Many of the King's observations about Natives seem to have come from the reports of others, but he did attend a pipe ceremony and met face to face with Natives. Of them he says, "Hospitality is the rule among all Indians....Any man's tobacco and taluma are always available to all without offer or permission." (Taluma is believed to be sumac or lobelia).

The culmination of all of this contact which resulted in a United States government had two sides. On the one, the continued alliance ("The Covenant Chain") between the Iroquois and the English strengthened the nation to nation relationship between two vastly different governments. After 1701, the alliance was expanded to mean that the Iroquois would take a neutral position with regard to conflicts between the French and English. The alliance was then expanded to include the colonies. Canasetago's 1744 speech in Lancaster was part of this expansion. He told the colonists "We heartily recommend Union and a good agreement between you and our brethren. Never disagree, but preserve a strict friendship for one another, and thereby you, as well as we, will become stronger.

Iroquois control extended from Virginia northward, a vast territory, particularly because the bulk of European settlement was along the eastern seaboard and no further west than Ohio.

On the other side, as soon as the fledgling United States had won independence and the new country was underway, revisionists began the job of creating the myth of democracy. Benjamin Franklin and his kind died, and the Virginians took center stage among the "Founding Fathers" group. This was quite far from the truth. The Virginians, including the beloved Thomas Jefferson, were never able to escape their slave-holding societal norms. They were very different from the New Yorkers and Pennsylvanians in their acceptance of human cruelty and the rule of the elite. Creating George Washington in the image of the "Father of our country" took some doing. He was a slaveholder who refused to give up this inhumane practice, even upon death, when he could have released his chattel.

Thomas Jefferson no doubt struggled with his ideals as he continued to live in a society that accepted human degradation. His words, "all men are created equal" penned into the Declaration of Independence must have haunted him to the grave, particularly since he had an African mistress. Yet the only slaves he freed upon death were the two sons and three other male kin of his mistress.

The revisionists also sought to dismiss the statesmanship, diplomacy, and cunning politics of the Iroquois in ways that emphasized the confederacy's fading military power to the exclusion of anything else. The military forced Iroquois and other eastern tribes off their land and carried out the "removal" of dozens of tribes to the western territories. This unfortunate circumstance did not bode well for the western tribes. As the westward expansion continued, the United States chose Virginian thinking over Pennsylvanian, and created an "Indian policy" that resulted in war, disease, and enormous loss of life for Native people.

Only one gift, left by the English, mitigated the probability of Native annihilation once the Americans won independence and the United States was formed. That gift was the treaty between nations. The English crown, unlike the more sanguine Spanish, readily entered into treaties with Native governments as nations. That meant a government-to-government relationship. That meant diplomacy and the search for common ground was possible. It meant the possibility of alliance rather than intractable enmity. The American colonies followed the pattern. It would have been foolish to have done otherwise and face the military might of the confederated tribes, as the Americans might have, were it not for the treaties. After all, if the Virginians deluded themselves that slavery was possible in an otherwise free society, how without treaties would they have dealt with Native people who were considered to be wild and unschooled beings—not slaves, but not white, either?

However earnestly the Americans tried to disengage themselves from the European models of government and social norms, it would not be long after the Constitution and Bill of Rights were established before the United States began to take an imperious posture. For some, this was the beginning of America's descent from democracy.



Jefferson wanted to expand westward. The Merriwether Lewis and William Clark expedition to map the northwest was part of the plan. Jefferson's purchase of the Louisiana territory from France was intended to create a unified country, free of foreign presence. The extreme form of this policy was called "Manifest Destiny," and it was adopted in the mid-1840s to promote nationhood in the United States—extending from sea to sea and from Canada to Mexico (or as much of Mexico as the United States could get).

America would brook no other country within its borders—not Mexico, and certainly not any independent Native nations. Manifest Destiny involved, in part, removing Native nations to the west as well as weakening the treaty tradition by creating ever less meaningful compacts.

When treaty-making ended in 1871, none of the later agreements had been ratified individually by the United States Senate. U.S. Courts routinely allowed the rest of the government to violate the treaties with Native nations in absolute violation of international law—which allowed unilateral amendment of treaties only in narrow, specific circumstances. The United States simply failed to enforce the rule of international law.

The steady deterioration of Native and U.S. Government relations hit bottom during the western expansion and the western "Indian wars." More recently, there has been a ragged and tenuous climb back to a United States policy of true government-to-government relations.

The story of democracy, and the Native nations who found themselves hosts to the most misbehaving guests in history, is still unfolding. As it does so, there will be, sadly, a race against time for the Native nations. In order to help the United States move back toward democracy, Native nations will have to survive long enough to discharge their duty as foretold in the old Iroquois prophecy. The optimistic view is that there is just enough time.

California Tribes Push Back on Water Issues

Tara Lohan, News Deeply

California Tribal Policy Advisor Anecita Agustinez explains how Native American communities are impacted by some of the state's most pressing water issues.

STEP - Spokane Tribe Economic Project WE DID IT!!!!

Today, Gov. Inslee approved STEP! Thanks to ALL OF YOU who helped make this happen, and thanks to Gov. Inslee for his support. Come join us at a celebration at Spoko Fuel at Airway Heights today at 3pm. We look forward to enjoying this moment together!!!

Inslee concurs with federal determination regarding Spokane Tribe proposal for new gaming...

Gov. Jay Inslee today announced his concurrence with the U.S. Department of Interior's determination granting the Spokane Tribe of Indians the authority to build and operate a gaming facility —known as the STEP project — in Airway Heights, Washington. governor.wa.gov



Woe, California: Sierra Nevada Snowpack Hits a 500-Year Low

The Sierra Nevada snowpack—the source of more than one-third of California's water supply—is the lowest it has been in 500 years.

insideclimatenews.org

Autumn Harry added 96 new photos to the album: **RMSSN 2016** — with **Frederick Nelson**.

I'm already missing my **Rocky Mountain Sustainability and Science Network crew!** The past two weeks adventuring in Yellowstone and Grand Tetons have been such a b...

[http://www.upworthy.com/meet-the-teens-leading-an-unprecedented-lawsuit-against-the-us-government?](http://www.upworthy.com/meet-the-teens-leading-an-unprecedented-lawsuit-against-the-us-government?c=sr1&sr_source=lift_facebook)

[c=sr1&sr_source=lift facebook](http://www.upworthy.com/meet-the-teens-leading-an-unprecedented-lawsuit-against-the-us-government?c=sr1&sr_source=lift_facebook)

USGS Map highlights groundwater quality concerns
WaterWorld

More than 140 million people in the United States use *groundwater* as their ... According to the map, uranium is rising in *California's* Central Valley and in the

Hundreds Of Groups Unite For One Truckee River Plan | KUNR June 6, 2016
By **[ThisIsReno](#)** **[Leave a Comment](#)**

For the first time a comprehensive management plan is being proposed for the Truckee River. This week, that plan will be revealed to the public.

Along the Truckee River there are more than 130 groups and government agencies. Each one has its own way of managing things like people and pollution. Keep Truckee Meadows Beautiful Executive Director Christi Cakiroglu has seen the result of this inconsistent management.

“It’s a lot of user trash and a lot of camping trash, and so we really want to reduce that and make the Truckee River a highlight of our region,” she says.

KTMB, Nevada Land Trust and the US Parks Service spent the last 18 months bringing all the stakeholders together, identifying hundreds of problems and solutions. The result is the 83-page One River Plan. It has 26 goals for the next year, including: Managing bathrooms, public access, restoration, mapping, biodiversity and homelessness.

Cakiroglu says ideally the end result of this plan would be a Truckee regional park to handle of that.

There’s a mini-Earth in Arizona that’s teaching us to save the real one

NINA BURLEIGH

Are You Ready to Lead Your Company Through a Crisis?

Tips Shared at Free Webinar Hosted by SBA and Agility Recovery

WASHINGTON – Emergency responders are trained to make quick decisions that will protect people and save lives when a natural or man-made disaster occurs. This is a skill that comes in handy for anyone running a small business. When an emergency happens, the safety of your employees and clients will depend on your smart decisions and quick action.

In addition to making a disaster preparedness plan, it’s also a good idea to find ways to take charge while staying focused on what’s important—the well-being of your employees and customers, and a speedy recovery for your business.

Get tips on how to take charge of your company’s response to crisis during a free webinar on Wednesday, June 22, hosted by Agility Recovery and the U.S. Small Business Administration.

This session is intended for audiences at all levels of an organization, and will draw on lessons from Hurricanes Katrina and Sandy, covering the obstacles to proper leadership, and strategies for developing your capacity to be more resilient as leaders.

SBA has partnered with Agility to offer business continuity strategies at its “PrepareMyBusiness” website. Visit www.preparemybusiness.org to access previous webinars and to download disaster preparedness checklists.

The SBA provides disaster recovery assistance in the form of low-interest loans to homeowners, renters, private nonprofits and businesses of all sizes. To learn more, visit www.sba.gov/disaster.

WHAT: “Leading with Resiliency During a Crisis”

The presentation will be followed by a question-and-answer session

WHEN: Wednesday, June 22, 2016 from 1 to 2 p.m. EDT

HOW: Space is limited. Register at <http://agil.me/leadduringcrisis>

"It's Time for a Land Reform Movement": An Interview With Cooperative Property Specialist Cassandra Ferrera

Matt Stannard, Occupy.com: Cassandra Ferrera is chief community officer at Green Key Real Estate, a sustainability-oriented company in Northern California. Green Key helps buyers transition into cooperative communities, and is part of the growing community land trust movement. Ferrera says the movement can help us "relearn how to care for the land and each other in a way that is not just about 'me and mine.'" [Read the Interview](#)

Norway Becomes World's First Country to Ban Deforestation

<http://ecowatch.com/2016/06/08/norway-bans-deforestation/>

Buy Native! Support Native owned businesses

Across Turtle Island, Native entrepreneurs have been creating some of the most unique and innovative businesses and products. From clothing and fashion wear to health and beauty products these insp... [lrinspire.com](#)

