

The next speaker was an Inuit woman, a veteran activist in native causes:

I am watching the first generation of my people [from Alaska] be forced to give up their traditional nomadic ways; the first generation that had to move into settlements because of oil development. It's been many years, but I was also resettled from the North down here to the States, and I would never do such a thing to anyone. . . . I go home now every year and see that the people there still have the joy of living . . . the joy of taking care of each other. But I don't think it will last. There is no justice in America. Indians in prison are not even permitted to pray in their traditional ways. Treaties with Indians are supposed to be the law of the land but the U.S. ignored them. I am here to help the traditional Indian people, those who still have their land. They are still strong. That way of life is natural. That way of life is good.

The final speaker was a young Menominee Indian woman, whom I know as Ingrid Washinawatok, but who also uses her Indian name, Opēgtaw Mataēmōh:

My first name means Flying Eagle Woman. My second name means The Spirit Watches Over. I am one of those Indians who lives between worlds but I know the one I prefer. I go back and forth from the reservation [in Wisconsin] to my job in New York City. When I fly over the land in a plane I can see a big dark spot and I know that's where the reservation is. Everywhere else has been clear-cut for dairy land and farming and for timber. The reservation is the only place where the people try to leave the land in its natural state. . . . Americans have really strange notions about what's an Indian. If you're a traditional Indian they tell us we don't belong in the world anymore and they ignore us. If we wear blue jeans and drive a pickup truck they say we're not really Indians. . . . My kid was watching TV and he started talking about power. He saw a commercial where power was associated with a toy gun. I told him that wasn't power. I told him to come back to the land and I'd show him what power is. . . . The traditional Indian people are protecting something that is important for everyone. They are trying to keep the land alive, and the world in balance. Sometimes I get the feeling that you [looking at the audience] don't really get the point. You are not really helping us. We are helping you.

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THE GIFT OF DEMOCRACY

JOHN BOORMAN'S POPULAR 1985 film *The Emerald Forest*, set in the Amazon rainforest, may come closer to describing the contemporary Indian problem in certain parts of the world than any other film. It is not a perfect film by any means. The acting is awkward and the attempt to portray authentic Xingu Indian dances, arts, and rituals (performed by actors from Rio) makes it self-consciously "realistic." But the film gets an A+ on a few counts. First, the situation it describes—an Indian tribe being pushed off its land by the construction of a huge dam that causes massive destruction to the forest—is typical of what is happening to the Xingu and the Yanomamo Indians of South America, as well as Indian nations throughout the world. Second, the film accurately depicts the intertribal conflict that ensues when one tribe is pushed from its own lands into territories of other tribes. Third, the destructive role of Western technology—bulldozers, dams, guns—is clearly portrayed, as is the inexorable drive of Westerners to expand without regard for the forest or the peoples within it.

The Emerald Forest is also unusual in its effort to show white people from the point of view of Indians. The Indians call the whites "the termite people," because of how they destroy the forest; white society is "the dead world," because of the concrete environments it creates, where nothing grows.

That the film describes a *current* situation distinguishes it from the usual media portrayal of Indian issues as part of the past. *The Emerald Forest* is as topical for Indians as *The China Syndrome* was for anti-nuke activists.

But for me, the most interesting moment in the film is a fleeting one that I never saw mentioned in reviews or articles, though it authentically portrays a fascinating aspect of Indian governance. It happens during a conversation between an American engineer who has wandered deeply into the jungle searching for his lost son, and a chief of the Invisible People. The engineer has been pushing the chief to order that one of the young men of the tribe undertake a certain exploration that no one had volunteered to do. The chief declines, explaining to the American, "If I tell a man to do something he doesn't want to do, then I wouldn't be chief anymore."

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coercive govt

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In the years I worked on this book, the most surprising revelations concerned the political and governmental forms of native peoples. Like most Americans I was raised with the idea that American constitutional democracy represented a new and unique political system, a utopian system that has proven itself workable in actual practice. I held the usual prejudices against other structures of government, especially socialism and Marxism, but it never passed through my mind that "primitive" peoples might have something to offer in the way of democratic government. Such a possibility was never mentioned in schools or in the media. Indian government systems, like all other dimensions of Indian life, were described with clichés about "anarchy" or despotic chiefdoms. Indian governments were described as representing an earlier stage of political development, of which we are the advanced form.

Describing Indian governments in such negative terms, or else declining to mention them at all, was and still is convenient for Americans and Westerners. It is yet another way we justify our interventions of past and present as having benefit for them: *we* bring the gift of democracy. More than hubris, this is a direct distortion of historical truth. It turns out that many Indian nations around the world, especially the Indians of the Americas, practiced a very high form of participatory democracy for thousands of years; and many nations continue to do so today.

In fact, there is a large and growing body of evidence among scholars of Indian-U.S. history that a pre-Columbian governmental form—the Great Binding Law of the Iroquois Confederacy—may have been the primary model and inspiration for the U.S. Articles of Confederation and for the Constitution itself. This possibility was not even mentioned as part of the official celebration of the Constitution's bicentennial in 1987, which represents a scandalous disregard for the role Indians played in the for-

mation of our country, and our debt to them. I will come back to this later in this chapter.

Of course not every Indian government was democratic, and no one description of a particular tribal government can apply to the many thousands of native governmental systems that have existed around the world. Sadly, we can no longer observe these traditional forms because the tribes themselves are gone, or have been forcibly destroyed or so manipulated by Western intervention that the original traditional systems have disappeared. Nonetheless, it seems abundantly clear that the majority of native nations on this continent, as well as most in South America, Australia, New Zealand, the Arctic, and Africa were small, non-imperial, non-hierarchical, usually matriarchal, and democratic societies. (Notable exceptions to this are the Aztec, Inca, and perhaps Zapotec societies, which tended toward large imperialist theocracies.) This generalization applies to tribes that were nomadic (such as the Navajo and Sioux in North America) and those that were more sedentary, as well as to tribes that lived in deserts or mountains or in the frozen north.

What's most significant, perhaps, is that virtually all traditional tribal people share three primary political principles: 1) all land, water, and forest is communally owned by the tribe; private ownership of land or goods beyond those of the immediate household is unthinkable; 2) all tribal decisions are made by consensus, in which every tribal member participates; and 3) chiefs are not coercive, authoritarian rulers, as we tend to think of them; they are more like teachers or facilitators, and their duties are confined to specific realms (medicine, planting, war, relationships, ceremonies).

On the North American continent (as elsewhere) these three factors were the source of much conflict with the colonists and later with the American government, as they conspired to frustrate American expansionist dreams.

For example, communal ownership of land, combined with consensus decision-making, made it profoundly difficult for Americans to make deals or buy land from Indians, or even to trade for land, because all members of the tribe needed to agree. Direct military action, therefore, became a more viable option. In recent times, more legalistic means have been found to subvert traditional Indian government forms, as we'll see in later chapters.

In addition, the fluidity of a chief's role was incomprehensible to Western invaders, who had come from a Europe that had only known monarchies. Here they found no single authority with whom to negotiate, and who could then exercise authority over everyone else. Many tribes had sev-

eral chiefs; some, such as the Plains Indian tribes, had dozens. At certain times of year, the ceremonial chiefs would gain prominence. At other times it might be those with knowledge of agriculture. It was only during wartime that war chiefs would emerge, but even their position would subside as things calmed. None of the chiefs had lifetime tenure, reigning in their roles only so long as they were trusted and supported by the tribe, as in the example from *The Emerald Forest*. If a chief's wisdom or performance was found wanting, another person would emerge or be placed into that role.

(Early contacts with white colonists disrupted some of the fluidity of the power arrangements within Indian tribes. Typically a white military force might make first contact with a tribe, and be greeted, appropriately, by the warrior chiefs. To the invading peoples the warrior chiefs seemed like monarchs, and were treated in that manner. This gave the warriors a political importance within the tribe that they might not have had before. Meanwhile, the arriving invaders never recognized the other chiefs, especially those responsible for such subtle matters as medicine, agriculture, or relationships, many of whom might have been women.)

RULE WITHOUT COERCION

The seminal work on the true nature of Indian chiefdom is *Society Against the State* by French anthropologist Pierre Clastres, in which he reports on his travels among several South American tribes. He also refers to research among tribes in areas of North America, Africa, Siberia, and the South Sea Islands that continue to live by traditional subsistence ways, that are outside the market economy, and that maintain their ancient forms of governance.

Clastres concludes that the Western idea of the Indian chief as a mini-king is totally erroneous:

The chief has no authority at his disposal, no power of coercion, no means of giving an order. The chief is not a commander; the people of the tribe are under no obligation to obey. . . .

The chief has to rely on nothing more than the prestige accorded him by the society to restore order and harmony. . . . What qualifies a man to be chief is his technical competence, his oratorical talent, his expertise as a hunter, his ability to coordinate . . . and in no circumstance does the tribe allow the technical superiority to change into a political authority. . . .

. . . The oldest chronicles leave no room for doubt on this score: if there is something completely alien to an Indian, it is the idea of giving an order or having to obey, except under very special circumstances such as prevail during a martial expedition.

Describing the duties of a chief, Clastres says, "The chief must be responsible for maintaining peace and harmony in the group. He must appease quarrels and settle disputes—not by employing a force he does not possess, but by relying solely on the strength of his prestige, his fairness and his verbal ability. More than a judge who passes sentence, he is an arbiter, who seeks to reconcile. . . . A second characteristic is generosity, which is both a duty and a bondage."

Clastres quotes Francis Huxley on practices of the Urubu people: "It is the business of a chief to be generous and to give what is asked of him. In some Indian tribes you can always tell the chief because he has the fewest possessions and wears the shabbiest ornaments. He has had to give away everything else." The point of the giveaway process is to maintain economic equality among the people, as with the potlatch ceremonies of the Kwakiutl and others.

Speaking specifically of North American Indian societies, Clastres adds: "One is confronted by a vast constellation of societies in which the holders of what elsewhere would be called power [chiefs] are actually without power; where the political is determined as a domain beyond coercion and violence, beyond hierarchical subordination, where no relationship of command-obedience is in force. This is the major difference of the Indian world, making it possible to speak of the American tribes as a homogeneous universe despite the extreme diversity of cultures moving within it."

Clastres is not alone among anthropologists who have noted this phenomenon of chiefs without power. But astonishingly, most of them conclude that this indicates the inferiority of "primitive" governance. Rather than celebrating communities capable of living happily for millennia without using coercive power, most anthropologists denigrate these governments, calling them "embryonic," "nascent," or "poorly developed," while decrying that most Indians did not "advance" sufficiently to develop "states."

The notion that coercive power is somehow "higher" than systems that function without it is debatable, to say the least. So is the notion that the "state" is an advancement over more informal nationhood, given that the term "state" lumps together democracies and monarchies and dictatorships of all kinds.

But the creation of such a standard does serve one important purpose for Western anthropologists: It becomes another thread in the fabric of standards by which we confirm our imagined superiority.

OUR FOUNDING FATHERS, THE IROQUOIS

One of the greatest irritations for American Indians today is how American society refuses to acknowledge that the flow of influence between our societies over the centuries has not been entirely one-directional. That *we* had a major impact on Indians—mostly destructive—cannot be denied. But virtually no credit is given the Indian contribution to Westerners. Occasionally, begrudging recognition is given the fact that the Indians taught the early arrivals to these shores what to eat, how to farm, and how to survive in the harsh, cold woods. And nowadays, because of the recent work of groups attempting to protect the rainforests of the world, we are hearing about forest Indians' knowledge of medicinal plants. We are beginning to grasp that modern pharmacology is rooted in the ancient knowledge of forest plants, and that we have barely begun to tap the Indians' full knowledge in these matters. And yet that knowledge is on the verge of being totally lost as the forests are destroyed and the Indians are killed or removed from their lands.

In his book *Indian Givers*, anthropologist Jack Weatherford lists numerous areas where Indian contributions have not been acknowledged, particularly in agriculture, food, architecture, and urban planning. But to me, the most important area where the Indian role has been ignored, or hidden, is their influence on democratic government. It is surely one of the most closely guarded secrets of American history that the Iroquois Confederacy had a major role in helping such people as Benjamin Franklin, James Madison, and Thomas Jefferson as they attempted to confederate a new government under democratic principles.

Recent scholarship has shown that in the mid-1700s Indians were not only invited to participate in the deliberations of our "founding fathers," but that the Great Binding Law of the Iroquois Confederacy arguably became the single most important model for the 1754 Albany Plan of Union, and later the Articles of Confederation and the Constitution. That this would be absent from our school texts, and from history, and from media is not surprising given the devotion Americans feel to our founding myth: Great men gathered to express a new vision that has withstood the test of

time. If it were revealed that Indians had a role in it, imagine the blow to the American psyche.

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Please try to imagine what it was like in the mid-1700s, when the colonists were desperate to free themselves from oppressive English control. The major urban settlements of the time—Albany, Philadelphia, Boston, New York—were nothing like they are today. Albany, the capital of New York, and site of the most important meetings about confederation, had only some 200 houses in 1754. Its population was under 3,000. Philadelphia, which was to become the U.S. capital, was the largest city in the colonies, with a population of 13,000. These places were really tiny towns, with mud roads, separated from one another by hundreds of miles of forest and several days' travel. Within those forests were Indians! In fact, the Indians were still, at that time, the stronger society, having yielded only a small part of their coastal territories. The Iroquois Confederacy (of New York, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Tennessee, and Ontario) had yielded practically nothing.

The colonists were still quite vulnerable. It was exceedingly important to them to get along with the Indians, who were all around. They often met to discuss mutually important issues: safe passage, commercial trade, land agreements (treaties), and military alliances. The Iroquois were especially important to the English colonies militarily, since alliance with the Iroquois against the French was critical to survival.

If the Iroquois had not finally fought on the side of the English colonies, we would all now be speaking French, and would probably be part of Quebec. Dealings with Indians took place on an everyday basis, and, according to many scholars, most negotiations were "in the Indian manner," that is, they were held as part of Indian councils, and followed Indian rules of discussion, procedure, and contact. So the colonists who negotiated with the Indians had significant knowledge of Indian decision-making and governance and went to considerable pain to accommodate the Indian processes. Even the selection of Albany as the site of many meetings was at the behest of the Indians.

It is fair to say that good relations with the Indians of that period were as important to the colonists as, say, present-day U.S. relations with Canada or the Soviet Union. In the 1700s, "foreign policy" was largely about relating to the Indians.

In addition to having day-to-day contact with the Indians of the mid-1700s, and carrying on negotiations in the Indian mode, the men who were

striving to achieve independence, confederation, and democracy were struggling under another great burden: Nowhere in their own experience was there a working model of a democratic confederation of states. All of Europe at that time was under the rule of monarchs who claimed their authority by Divine Right. There *were* stirrings of democratic ferment in Europe, in the writings of Montesquieu, Locke, and Hume, who were being studied and discussed. And the Greeks provided a model, although it was 2,000 years old, only a partial democracy, not a confederation, and existed in an utterly different geopolitical context.

Meanwhile, living side by side with these aspiring federalists, in constant negotiation with them, was an Indian nation that, beyond theory or historical abstraction, was an actual living example of a successful democratic confederation, united under a single law that had already survived for many centuries: the Great Binding Law of the Iroquois Confederacy.

Although some Western scholars assert that the Great Law was created in the early 1400s, the Iroquois themselves argue that the Great Law existed for hundreds of years before Columbus's arrival. There is little doubt, however, that the Great Law arose from circumstances very similar to those faced by the separate colonies. The law was designed to form a peaceful federation among five previously separate, disputatious Indian nations—Onondaga, Oneida, Mohawk, Seneca, and Cayuga (joined later by Tuscarora)—who resided for millennia in adjoining areas that extended from what is now Tennessee to most of Ontario. The Great Law articulated the manner in which the confederated nations would thenceforth relate to one another as a single body. It also articulated the rights that would be reserved for the individual nations (states' rights). The Law described a system for democratically electing representatives to a Grand Council, divided into separate deliberative bodies (multi-cameral legislature). And it included, in great detail, descriptions of the legislatures of individual nations, as well as rights of universal suffrage, popular selection and removal of chiefs, and the manner in which all the members of the population should participate.

That the model was successful was apparent by the mere fact that it was already many centuries old, during which time the separate nations had cooperated peacefully on federal matters, yet remained separate. In fact the Iroquois Confederacy is still functional today among the six member nations, and the Great Law remains as the system of governance.

Given all of the above, it is preposterous to assume that the colonists were not influenced by the Iroquois. And yet it has been an uphill struggle for historians who have argued this point against the founding myths of American society.

Foremost among the maverick historians is Professor Donald Grinde, Jr., of the University of California at Riverside. In his book *The Iroquois and the Founding of the American Nation*, Grinde argues that the Iroquois were a significant influence on colonial leaders, who had nowhere else to turn. He quotes George Clinton, then governor of New York, as observing in 1747 that most American democratic leaders were "people of republican principles who have no knowledge of democratic governments." Grinde continues, "The tribesmen of America seemed to many Europeans to be free of such abuses [as were generated by the European monarchs]. . . . The colonists saw freedom widely exercised by American Indians. Even the cultural arrogance and racism of English colonists could not fully disguise their astonishment at finding Native Americans in such a free and peaceful state."

Grinde points out that James Madison made frequent forays to study and speak with Iroquois leaders. William Livingston was fluent in Mohawk, and visited and stayed with Indians over extended periods. John Adams and his family socialized with Cayuga chiefs on numerous occasions. Thomas Jefferson's personal papers show specific references to the forms of Iroquois governance, and, says Grinde, "Benjamin Franklin's work is resplendent with stories about Indians and Indian ideas of personal freedom and structures of government." University of Nebraska professor Bruce Johansen has added that Franklin, who was in the printing business, was especially intimate with Indian thinking since he "had been printing Indian treaties since 1736 and not only was he acquainted with them, he set the type." Franklin was also present at an important meeting among Iroquois chiefs and several colonial governors in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, in 1744, at which the chiefs recommended that the colonists stop fighting among themselves and form a union.

By 1754, when most of these men and others gathered to create the Albany Plan of Union, the first try at confederation, they invited forty-two members of the Iroquois Grand Council to serve as advisors on confederate structures. Benjamin Franklin freely acknowledged his interest in the Iroquois achievement in a famous speech at the Albany Congress: "It would be a strange thing . . . if six nations of ignorant savages [*sic*] 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."

According to Grinde, Franklin convened meetings of Iroquois chiefs and congressional delegates in order to "hammer out a plan that he acknowledged to be similar to the Iroquois Confederacy."

In a 1989 interview with Catherine Stifter of National Public Radio,

Grinde referred to the considerable resistance in the academic community to the idea of the Iroquois role in the formative stages of American history. According to Grinde, as recently as fifteen years ago people considered the idea a "fantasy," but there has since been considerable progress:

People have [now] accepted the fact the Iroquois were at the Continental Congress on the eve of the Declaration of Independence and they're having to deal with the fact that John Adams was advocating the study of Indian governments, and that Adams observed that others among the founding fathers were advancing Indian ideas on the eve of the Constitutional Convention. But people have been led kicking and screaming into these realizations. . . . The promise and the vision that Indian societies provided to Europeans was that democracy did not die 2,000 years before in ancient Greece, [to be followed by] Divine Right monarchy as the evolution of government. In North America and in other places in the world there were people that were living without kings or landed nobility and who had systems of government that were clearly less coercive than those in Europe. . . . Some people [still] deny this. I believe for some people this is a problem. . . . It's difficult to entertain the idea that the founding fathers were relating to, talking about, and evaluating the ideas of non-white peoples . . . it goes against the conventional wisdom of our society.

If Indian influence upon American constitutional democracy is a tough pill for Americans to swallow, there is yet another minor aspect to the story that can only create still greater anxiety. There's a case to be made that the Iroquois model was also influential in Europe, particularly upon Frederick Engels and Karl Marx.

At the time when Marx and Engels were struggling to create models for an egalitarian, classless society, which later evolved into communism, Engels was strongly influenced by the eighteenth-century work of anthropologist Lewis Morgan, particularly his reports on the Iroquois. Engels was so impressed that in his work *Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, the Iroquois were used as the prime example of a successful classless, egalitarian, noncoercive society.

And so we have the bizarre situation that while Westerners continue to assume that the flow of influence was simply from the more "advanced" Western societies to the Indians of the Americas, it is arguably the case that the two dominant political systems of the past century were both at least partly rooted in the wisdom of the Great Binding Law of the Iroquois Confederacy. If so, both the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. would do well to ac-

knowledge the connection, study the original document, see where each went wrong, and try to get it right the next time.

THE GREAT BINDING LAW OF THE IROQUOIS CONFEDERACY

According to Iroquois history, the creation of the Great Law is attributed primarily to the work of two men: Hiawatha (Mohawk) and Dekanawida (Onondaga), who spent several decades wandering together across what is now the eastern U.S. and Canada hundreds of years before Columbus landed, with a plan to unite the Mohawk, Oneida, Cayuga, Onondaga, and Seneca. (The Tuscarora joined much later, in 1715.)

The Great Law was transmitted orally from generation to generation, with its tenets recorded only on wampum belts and strings. Many of these wampums have since been lost, and those that remain were the subject of bitter lawsuits during the 1980s between the Iroquois and the State University of New York, which housed them. The university finally returned them to the Indians in 1989.

One of the early translations of the Iroquois constitution was by the turn-of-the-century anthropologist Arthur H. Parker, and is contained in *Parker on the Iroquois*, edited by William Fenton. In addition to Parker's commentaries on Iroquois life, the book contains Parker's English translation of the entire constitution: 115 pages of text.

Parker comments that "The Great Law as a governmental system was an almost ideal one for the stage of culture [sic] with which it was designed to cope. . . . By adhering to it the Five Nations became the dominant native power east of the Mississippi and during colonial times exercised an immense influence in determining the fate of English civilization on the continent." Iroquois members today credit the Great Law as the main reason for their continued coherence as a viable nation, more successful than other American Indians in resisting domination by white society.

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Certain features of the Great Law, as reported in Parker's book, are instantly recognizable for their similarity with the U.S. Constitution: the establishment of a federation with separate powers for federal and state governments; provisions for the common defense; representative democracy at the federal and local levels; separate legislative branches that debate issues and reconcile disagreements; checks and balances against excessive

powers; rights of popular nomination and recall; and universal suffrage (although this last provision took Americans another 150 years to achieve).

But the features the colonists declined to introduce are just as interesting as the features that resemble our Constitution. For example, the Iroquois had no executive branch, no rulers or presidents; the colonists couldn't bear to get too far away from their monarch. Many of the powers to appoint and remove chiefs for the Iroquois were held by the women, another dimension of checks and balances that the United States did not include, along with the principle of consensual decision-making at each level of government and in each legislative branch.

According to Parker, the Great Council of the Iroquois Confederacy, the federation's legislature, consisted of fifty *rodiyaner* (civil chiefs, as opposed to war chiefs) divided into three distinct "houses" according to tribal membership. Each of the "houses" debated issues separately, eventually reporting their decisions to the Onondaga, who were not part of the other legislatures, but served as "firekeepers." The Onondaga determined if a consensus had been reached among the houses. If not, they would return the question to the houses and demand that they reach the unanimity required for the passage of any policy.

v. The only executive person was a temporary "speaker," appointed by acclamation, who served for one day only.

The right to nominate chiefs was hereditary, held only by clan mothers of certain clans from each tribe. After nomination, the candidate was then ratified in stages by the whole clan, the national council, the Grand Council of the Confederacy, and then finally by all the people. The women also had the power to remove the chiefs from office if they proved not to have "in mind the welfare of the people," as the Law says. They could also remove a chief "who should seek to establish any authority independent of the jurisdiction of the Great Law." If the women removed a chief, they also nominated the replacement.

The procedure for removing chiefs was spelled out in exquisite detail, as were all rules of the Great Law, including the exact words the women used to deliver a warning to the offending chief, then follow-up warnings and removal.

In addition to the chiefs nominated by the women, the Law permitted the recognition of "Pine Tree Chiefs" who spontaneously sprang from the community. According to the Great Law these are people "with special ability [who] show great interest in the affairs of the nation, and [who] prove themselves wise, honest and worthy of confidence." Such chiefs participated in all council deliberations.

The duties of the chiefs were spelled out in great detail:

[They] shall be mentors of the people for all time. The thickness of their skin shall be seven spans, which is to say that they shall be proof against anger, offensive actions and criticism. Their hearts shall be full of peace and good will and their minds filled with a yearning for the welfare of the people of the confederacy. With endless patience they shall carry out their duty and their firmness shall be tempered with a tenderness for their people. Neither anger nor fury shall find lodgement in their minds and all their words and actions shall be marked by calm deliberation. . . . [They] must be honest in all things . . . self-interest must be cast into oblivion . . . [They shall] look and listen for the welfare of the whole people and have always in view not only the present but also the coming generations, even those whose faces are yet beneath the surface of the ground, the unborn of the future Nation.

Deliberately Slow

The Great Law contains one rule that I found particularly extraordinary for its democratic import and the degree of trust it reveals for the people of the member nations. The Law says that when an "especially important matter or a great emergency is presented before the council, and the nature of the matter affects the entire body of the Five Nations," then the council is not permitted to act without first going back to all of the people in the confederacy. The chiefs "of the confederacy must submit the matter to the decision of their people and the decision of the people shall affect the decision of the confederate council. This decision shall be a confirmation of the voice of the people."

What is remarkable is that this rule describes a way of doing things that is exactly the opposite of our own. In the United States the most apocalyptic decisions, especially military ones, are always made by government, quickly—often secretly—without consulting the people. This speed and secrecy is justified precisely because of the importance of the matter and by the need for rapid action. Often this reflects how technology has accelerated the pace of events, creating situations such as "launch on warning."

In the United States, the president makes all war decisions. The constitutional principle that only Congress can declare war is a farce, as was most recently obvious in the U.S.-Iraq situation. For although Congress finally gave its (divided) approval for war, it came only after President Bush had maneuvered 450,000 troops to the front lines *without* approval, and issued a level of verbal invective against Iraq that made war impossible to avoid. And in preceding years, we saw U.S. presidents bomb countries

(Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos), invade countries (Grenada, Lebanon, Panama), and undertake indirect military actions (Nicaragua), all without congressional approval, let alone the approval of the people.

I don't know of any native society in which any war chief could undertake military action without long meetings of the entire tribe, which could take days or even weeks. Even when a military response was approved, warrior recruitment was voluntary. If an insufficient number of warriors showed up, there was simply no war, or else the war chief would have to go out there alone, as occasionally happened. The Iroquois Confederacy institutionalized this rule, making the war decision slower and much more difficult.

States' Rights

Several rules in the Great Law were created to ensure the continued sovereignty of each member nation of the confederacy. For example, one section stated, ". . . The five Council Fires shall continue to burn as before and they are not quenched. The [chiefs] of each nation in the future shall settle their nation's affairs at this council fire [though] governed always by the laws and rules of the council of the Confederacy and by the Great Peace."

Sound familiar? It is very close to the model adopted by Franklin and Jefferson for the United States Constitution.

According to Arthur Parker, in addition to ensuring sovereignty for each member nation, there were also rules ensuring sexual equality, as well as the rights of local communities to determine their own affairs:

The men of every clan of the Five Nations shall have a Council Fire ever burning in readiness for a council of the clan. When it seems necessary for a council to be held to discuss the welfare of the clans, then the men may gather about the fire. This council shall have the same rights as the council of the women.

The women of every clan of the Five Nations shall have a Council Fire ever burning in readiness for a council of the clan. When in their opinion it seems necessary for the interest of the people they shall hold a council and decisions and recommendations shall be introduced before the Council . . .

All of the Clan Council Fires of a nation or of the Five Nations may unite into one general Council Fire, or delegates from all the Council Fires may be appointed to unite in a general council for discussing the interests of the people. The people shall have the right to

make appointments and to delegate their power to others of their number. When their council shall have come to a conclusion on any matter, their decision shall be reported to the Council of the Nation or to the Confederate Council, as the case may require.

The Great Law also contained specific articles concerning the rights and duties of war chiefs, the rules of consanguinity, the official symbolism of the tribes, laws of adoption, and laws of emigration and immigration (including political asylum). The rights of foreign nationals were spelled out, as well as many passages containing the exact words and procedures to be used for "raising chiefs," funeral addresses, installation songs, and all ceremonies. For example, at the opening ceremonies before each council meeting, the Onondaga were required to "offer thanks to the Earth where men dwell, to the streams of water, the pools, the springs and the lakes, to the maize and the fruits, to the medicinal herbs and trees, to the forest trees for their usefulness, to the animals that serve as food and give their pelts for clothing, the great winds and the lesser winds, to the Thunderers, to the Sun, the mighty warrior, to the moon, to the messengers of the Creator, and to the Great Creator who dwells in the heavens above, who gives all the things useful to men, and who is the source and the ruler of health and life."

IROQUOIS NATION, 1991

Two hundred years after the founding of the United States, the Iroquois Confederacy is rare among American Indian nations in its successful resistance to U.S. efforts to dismantle the traditional government in favor of a new government created under the Indian Reorganization Act (IRA). The Six Nations credit the clarity and cohesiveness of their Great Law as the reason they have become the leaders among American Indian nations on issues of sovereignty, maintenance of traditional governments, and protection of land rights.

The Onondaga, the "firekeepers" of the Iroquois, exert particular leadership on the sovereignty issue. Now living in a small territory outside of Syracuse, New York, the Onondaga steadfastly maintain that neither New York State nor the United States has legal sovereignty over them. Onondaga chiefs are frequently invited to visit and advise other Indian nations about maintaining and recovering their traditional governments. By now it is clear to most American Indians that the IRA governments have failed to protect traditional Indian cultural and spiritual values, and serve instead

as an arm of the U.S. bureaucracy, making deals with the mining and development interests that the native peoples abhor.

Prominent among the militant Onondaga leadership is Oren Lyons, Faithkeeper of the Turtle Clan. I visited Lyons at his home several times to learn more about the subtleties and power of the Great Law.

Now in his early sixties, as handsome as a movie star, Lyons lives alone in a small log house on the reservation. As a younger man, Lyons had lived in a far more affluent manner in non-Indian society. He had a successful career in New York City, as planning director for Norcross Greeting Cards, and as an illustrator for books and advertising. The experience left him with a unique ability, among Indians, to speak with ease to upper echelons of the non-Indian world.

Lyons told me that he left his marketing career in 1967 to return to the reservation when he was "called by the clan mothers of the Turtle Clan" to replace a Turtle Clan chief who had died. He also represents the Onondaga on the Iroquois Grand Council.

Chiefs don't get paid, so Lyons partly supports himself by directing the Native American studies program at the State University of New York at Buffalo. He also paints paintings of traditional Indian subjects, and he's coach of the Iroquois Confederacy national lacrosse team. (At Syracuse University, Lyons had been an all-American goalie on the same lacrosse team as Jim Brown, better known for his football exploits. Lyons's dream is to have the Iroquois compete in the Olympics as a separate nation. The Iroquois team did compete in the 1990 World Games of the International Lacrosse Federation.)

In 1977, Lyons was selected by the American Indian delegation to the United Nations Conference on Indigenous People to be one of the official spokespersons for all the Indians of the Western Hemisphere. The selection was extended to Lyons in recognition of the role the Six Nations has played among American Indian nations as the leading advocate of traditional Indian governments and sovereign rights. Lyons is also on the steering committee of the Global Forum of Spiritual and Parliamentary Leaders for Global Survival, an international ecumenical organization of religious and political leaders, formed to address the relationship between the world's environmental and spiritual problems.

During my visits with Lyons, and in later correspondence, my goal was to gain further insight into the history of the Great Law, as well as its present-day workings within the Iroquois (Hau de no sau nee) governments.

Lyons cautioned me to remember that "the Great Law is [essentially] an oral law and [will] remain that way. In 1974, the Grand Council of

the Hau de no sau nee rejected all written versions," said Lyons, including that of Arthur Parker. While many of Parker's passages are not objectionable, Parker's use of such devices as articles and numbers to define the sections has nothing to do with the oral version, and Parker's use of words such as "Lords" to describe the members of the Council is actually offensive to Indians. Lyons told me that the Indians are constantly engaged in study, discussion, and interpretation to ferret out nuances of the Great Law's meaning, and that much subtlety is lost in the English translations of the spoken versions. The opening prayer of thanks, for example, that I quoted earlier from Parker, has at least three different oral versions; according to Lyons, "the shortest version is about fifteen to twenty minutes long; the long version can take up to an hour and a half.

"I think it is fair to say the Hau de no sau nee council of chiefs may be the last of the traditional governments in North America that have control of their territories," said Lyons. Of the six confederated nations, only the Mohawk have seen their traditional system succumb to an American-imposed governmental form, which has led to disastrous events on the Akwesasne (Mohawk) Reservation in New York State. "That is where the government instituted gambling operations without the consent of the people, and they've been fighting among themselves ever since."

According to Lyons, the basic strength of Iroquois governance comes from its trust in and dependence upon the participation of all the people. "The word *chief* is an English word," said Lyons. "The Indian word *hoyawnah* means 'the good mind,' the peacemaker. We [the chiefs] are servants. With our nations, the leaders are directly accessible to the people. In nation-states like the U.S. you develop an entity separate from the people with accompanying power structures—for example, executive committees or central committees. In our government, national consensus is paramount. There is no process for voting. We have a system of discussion and council that requires agreements from all sides of our council fire; all must finally agree on the subject before them. All meetings are public. We cannot have a closed meeting in the long house. There are no executive [presidential] decisions."

In all council meetings, "every adult member of the tribe is permitted to speak for as long as he or she wishes, unless they raise their voice too loud. There are strictures against attempting to dominate the meeting, or to use any measure of force, even verbal force. The idea is for everyone to have a say, and to say everything they wish.

"Discussion continues until consensus is reached," Lyons said. "It's a very slow process. Sometimes it takes days or weeks, but we're not in a

hurry, especially about important things." Lyons added that only in machine-oriented societies is there pressure to get human matters processed quickly, because society is moving at machine speed.

"If everyone has spoken and still there's no decision, then the question is put off to the next meeting. If the issue is discussed at three meetings and there's still no decision, then we decide that there will be no decision. We stop discussing it. We figure it will come up again some other time."

At first I was shocked by this idea of just dropping something that cannot be agreed upon. But eventually I realized that the Indian decision-making system is biased toward the idea that things don't really have to be changed. They can stay the way they are. If some step really is needed—say there's an attack of some kind—then a consensus *will* be reached and steps will be taken. The equivalent principle in American terms is "If it ain't broke, don't fix it."

It's not as if decisions are not made at all. While I was present, for example, the tribe decided to evict several white families who had, by various means, insinuated themselves into houses on the reservation. Although the intrusion of non-Indians onto the reservation was a violation of treaties with the U.S. and with New York State, appeals to those governments for enforcement had produced no action. After three months of discussion, it was decided that Indians would do the evictions, and they did.

Lyons told me that unlike many Indian nations, especially those governed by U.S.-style IRA governments, the Onondaga "do not have to this day a police force or army to carry out any orders by the chiefs. Therefore it is elemental that the people agree before any change takes place, because they are the ones to carry it out." New York State police and federal agents are not permitted to take action on Onondaga land without the invitation of the Onondaga Council. (Because of this rule, fugitive Sioux Indian leader Dennis Banks was able to remain safe with the Onondaga, even though the FBI knew where he was. "He was under the protection of the Grand Council," said Lyons. New York police and the FBI attempted to negotiate with the chiefs for Banks's release, but did not succeed. So Banks remained, though he could not set foot off the Indians' land. Eventually Banks decided to return to South Dakota and completed his jail term.)

I asked Lyons about the principles used to make decisions about tribal matters. What happens, say, if there is an act of violence by one Indian against another on the reservation? Lyons told me that in matters affecting the whole Iroquois Confederacy, questions are discussed in the Grand Council and its rules are followed. But in local matters, "All I can tell you is that every situation is seen as entirely different. We really don't have the kind of specific rules or laws that you have. Nothing is ever written down.

Well, we do have a few rules. If you rape or murder somebody, you are banished from the tribe for life. But we've only had one such case in thirty years [unlike many Indian tribes]. If you write the rules down, then you have to deal with the rule rather than figuring out what's fair. We're interested in principle. The principle is to be fair. We know everybody, we know their families, what they like, what they don't like, what's troubling them, what the kids may be going through. We have all the problems any community has. When one member intrudes on another, we have a situation. We meet and just keep talking until there's nothing left but the obvious truth, and both families agree on the solution."

I asked Lyons to tell me more about the role of the chiefs. He told me they do not function the way Westerners think. It is true that in the end they seem to decide what's going to happen, but this comes only after the whole nation has spoken for many hours and has reached an agreement. The chiefs only confirm what is already obvious. The chief is a kind of facilitator, according to Lyons, an employee. If the people don't like the way the chief is acting, he is removed. Technically speaking, the chiefs are "appointed for life," but there are standards for chiefly behavior among the Onondaga. If they stray from that behavior, they can be removed immediately by the clan mothers.

"A chief can de-horn himself [the symbol of a chief's authority is a set of deer antlers] by certain crimes like murder, rape, or arson, or crimes against children," as well as other behaviors that are spelled out in the Great Law. "The clan mother is the one to remove the chief," said Lyons, employing a carefully articulated three-step process that first involves a warning from the women, and then actions by the other chiefs.

Arthur Parker's translation of the Great Law suggests that a chief who refuses to leave can be killed, but Lyons strongly disagrees. "That sounds spectacular and makes good reading," he said, "but it is not true. The process of removing any chief is painful enough. . . . The law says if a leader cannot obey the tenets of the Great Law he is banished from the nation and he is ordered to take his followers with him. This is not applied to personal misconduct, but conduct that attacks the law itself and its structure." Lyons adds that Parker's mistranslation of that element of the law "is the best example of why the chiefs refuse to allow English translations, [preferring to keep it] only in the native tongue."

I asked Lyons to tell me what are the specific qualities sought in people selected to be chiefs. "Well, they're spelled out in the Great Law," he said. "I would say the most important ones are compassion, patience, commitment to natural law, commitment to process rather than goal [you don't stop the talking from running its course], courage, fairness, generosity,

commitment to and love for the seventh generation of unborn children, and dedication to the way of the long house [the spiritual path]. Chiefs cannot be Christians or of any other faith. Another quality is a kind of benign nature. Not too pushy."

I wondered about this last point, concerning the chiefs' levels of aggressiveness or the use of verbal force. "It's difficult to define," he answered. "You can be very powerful if you are right and can persuade [the people]. Ordered thought, logic, are the persuasive tools of Six Nations' meetings. [But equally important] is respect for other points of view and opinions, and the power and patience to listen and understand."

I finally gathered that it was a subtle point, a matter of degree. Good orators have an influence, but the power of oratory *itself* should not be used to overcome rationality and full discourse.

In thinking this issue over, I remembered a meeting I had in the late 1960s with some of the *kikmongwis*, the religious leaders of the Hopi Nation in Arizona. I had come to ask permission to make a film about the strip-mining of sacred sites on Hopi land, and expected to be able to make my case to the group and get a quick answer. Instead, I experienced a meeting unlike any I'd ever been part of before. The first half of the meeting lasted all morning, during which the *kikmongwis* (there were ten present) sat in a circle engaging in a very slow conversation, in Hopi. My translator, without revealing exactly what was being said, told me in general terms that they were discussing previous experiences with white outsiders who had come to them with projects, and how the issue was viewed from the perspective of Hopi teachings. It wasn't until midday that I was able to speak. I delivered my proposal in a well-organized snappy fashion, which took about twenty minutes. For the next several hours, the Hopi elders continued to discuss the matter in Hopi. It was the *style* of their discourse that amazed me, even more than the duration. Each speaker spoke in quiet, modulated tones, punctuated by very long silences. Meanwhile, the others sat very still, often with their eyes closed. Sometimes they seemed to be asleep, but I have since realized, from several such experiences with Indians, that there is among oral cultures a unique way of listening and remembering. They were not asleep; they were alert in a way that was difficult for me to see. Most of all, I was astonished that no speaker attempted to use any degree of persuasion on any other, except insofar as they expressed their own understanding of Hopi teachings on the matter at hand. It seemed to me to be a process of peeling away layers of consideration until nothing but a clear agreement remained. They were all equals in this process.

In the end, the Hopi *kikmongwis* told me they hoped I would come

back again and meet with them whenever my own thinking on the project was further developed. They never did answer yes or no, and I never did the film, although I did do an advertisement on their behalf about the mining at Black Mesa.

I don't think the Iroquois process is precisely like the Hopi, but the effort to achieve consensus is absolutely at the heart of the Iroquois decision-making process, as it is, in fact, among most Indian nations of the Americas. According to Oren Lyons, the strength of consensus is the unanimity it eventually produces. Unlike decisions made by majority rule, in which there is always a dissatisfied, resistant minority, once a position is reached by consensus, the solidarity that emerges is awesome to behold.

For example, the Onondaga have decided, irrevocably I'd say, that they will never give up more land. "Land is the most important thing the Indians have," said Lyons. In fact, they are committed to regaining much of the treaty land that they believe was fraudulently taken from them.

A few years ago they refused a cash offer of several hundred thousand dollars from a power company that wanted to put power lines along a fifty-foot right of way across the reservation. "One old woman stood up," Lyons told me, "and asserted, 'Not one more foot, ever,' and there was unanimous agreement right there. That one didn't take long."

The Onondaga have turned down large amounts of money to lease a tiny piece of land to New York State for a highway cloverleaf. And they turned down money to build a garbage-processing plant on their land.

The Onondagas have also refused to give the names and addresses of the children living on the reservation to the New York State Board of Education. "Our treaty with New York says that in return for ceding some land eighty years ago, New York is to provide us schools and the money to run them, forever. That's how they got some of our land. But lately they've asked us for the names of the kids. We are never going to give up those names," said Lyons.

For Oren Lyons, and the Onondaga chiefs, it's a question of maintaining the strength of native governance and sovereignty. "For the whole history of the Iroquois we have maintained that we are a separate nation. We have never lost a war. Our government still operates. We have refused the U.S. government's reorganization plans for us. We have kept our language and our traditions, and when we fly to Geneva to UN meetings, we carry *Hau de no sau nee* passports. We made some treaties that lost some land, but that also confirmed our separate-nation status. That the U.S. denies all this doesn't make it any less the case."

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LESSONS IN STONE-AGE
ECONOMICS

IF ONE FRAUDULENT justification for Western aggression upon native lands has been that we bring the gift of democracy, an equally fraudulent justification is that we bring freedom from toil.

Our mythology has been that native peoples live with the awful oppression of "subsistence economics"—a term that by its mere utterance invokes feelings of pity and images of squalor. Our machines, our technology, and our superior systems of economic management offer freedom from back-breaking labor, the opportunity for leisure, and protection against the arbitrariness of nature's cycles. Pre-technological peoples, living hand to mouth in a never-ending search for food and protection from the elements, need and want what Western society brings. So goes the story.

Given this logic, most Westerners are shocked to find that the majority of native peoples on the earth do not wish to climb onto the Western economic machine. They say their traditional ways have served them well for thousands of years and that our ways are doomed to fail. These views came forth in Canadian jurist Thomas R. Berger's book *Village Journey*, which describes a tour through Alaskan communities faced with the onslaught of Western economies. Berger's book offers extensive testimony from native Alaskans who are resisting the Western economic way.

Suzy Erlich of Kotzebue, Alaska:

I came from a subsistence family. I grew up that way. I am very proud of it. I want my children to grow up that way. It brings strength to us as Inupiat. It is something different than going to the store. Our grocery store is millions of acres wide, and it brings us pride.

Bobby Wells of Kotzebue, Alaska:

I remember our fathers, how they survived in this world, in strong winds, in cold temperatures. . . . They were taught to share, they were taught to help each other. . . . This time, we are fighting to survive among different people, among different races in this Western civilization. What does this Western civilization have to offer? Business.

Alice Solomon of Barrow, Alaska:

The people are happy . . . they caught a whale. They get really excited, and it goes all the way, deep inside. And when you go into the house that caught the whale, there's that happiness, that excitement, that crying for joy, because they are glad they have been given that gift.

On the rare occasion when Westerners hear such views as these—it was a point of Berger's book that native peoples are hardly ever asked—we tend to relegate native opinions to mere ignorance. We are so thoroughly convinced of the rightness of the Western technological project that we are determined to "improve" the native condition, even over their objections.

And so it has been for hundreds of years. Western attitudes today on such matters are no different than they have been since the seventeenth century. Our sense of superiority justifies the continued expansion of our economic system, of digging up, cutting down, and paving over the natural world, without guilt toward the native peoples' lands we destroy in the process. Our mythology supports this, our economic system is based on it, and our financial institutions—from your local bank to the World Bank—aggressively seek to ensure that these ways continue.

The system never questions itself on these points. Only recent campaigns by groups such as Rainforest Action Network and Earth First! have begun to challenge such attitudes and policies. But if our society ever really questioned its assumptions about the viability of native economies and asked the people within those societies how they felt about them, we would surely have to reassess our views.

PRE-TECHNOLOGICAL LEISURE

The publication of Marshall Sahlins' *Stone Age Economics* in 1972 should have exploded most of the operative paradigms by which we define

the beneficial aspects of our technology. A University of Chicago professor, Sahlins uses field research from tribes all over the globe to argue powerfully that, contrary to the prevailing wisdom, "primitive" societies (particularly hunter-gatherer communities like those in Alaska) enjoyed a great amount of "leisure time," satisfied their material desires and survival needs with little difficulty, did not work very hard, and consciously chose "subsistence economics": They *deliberately* did not accumulate surpluses.

Sahlins writes, "Almost universally committed to the proposition that life was hard in the paleolithic [era], our textbooks compete to convey a sense of impending doom, leaving one to wonder not only how hunters managed to live but whether, after all, this was living." Sahlins lists some of the commonly used terms of denigration: "mere subsistence economy," "limited leisure," "absence of economic surplus," and the need for these societies to survive by putting out a "maximum energy from a maximum number of people." Sahlins calls such attitudes "the first distinctly neolithic prejudice," created deliberately to depict the hunter's relationship to land and resources in the manner that would be "most congenial to the historic task of depriving him of the same."

Stone-age peoples were not prisoners of hard labor, says Sahlins. To the contrary, "a good case can be made that hunters and gatherers work less than we do; and, rather than a continuous travail, the food quest is intermittent, leisure abundant, and there is a greater amount of sleep in the daytime per capita per year than in any other condition of society."

BANKER'S HOURS

In his book, Marshall Sahlins quotes a 1960 study by Frederick D. McCarthy and Margaret McArthur of aboriginal communities in Western Arnhem Land, Australia. The researchers added up all the time spent in all economic activities—plant collecting, food preparation, and weapon repair—over a span of several months, finding that the average male worked three hours and forty-four minutes per day, while the average female worked three hours and fifty minutes per day. "The most obvious immediate conclusion," said Sahlins, "is that the people do not work hard. . . . Moreover they do not work continuously."

According to McCarthy and McArthur, "Apart from the time spent in general social intercourse, chatting, gossiping, and so on, some hours of the daylight were also spent resting and sleeping. If the men were in camp, they usually slept after lunch from an hour to an hour and a half, or some-

times even more. Also, after returning from fishing or hunting they usually had a sleep. . . . The women, when out collecting in the forest, appeared to rest more frequently than the men. If in camp all day, they also slept at odd times, sometimes for long periods."

The Dobe Bushmen of southern Africa offer an example from a different continent. Sahlins cites research by Richard Lee demonstrating that the average Dobe Bushman's work week is approximately fifteen hours—two hours and nine minutes per day. What's more, only 65 percent of the population worked at all.

Sahlins comments on this: "One man's labor among the Bushmen will support four or five people. Taken at face value, Bushmen food-collecting is more efficient than French farming was in the period up to World War II, when more than 20 percent of the population were engaged in feeding the rest. Confessedly, the comparison is misleading, but not as misleading as it is astonishing." Such a comparison with our own society today would show American farmers, only 5 percent of the population, feeding the rest of the country, thanks to technology. But in primitive societies those who feed the others do so by a cooperative arrangement—sharing turns of work and sharing food—that frees the rest of society to not work at all. In our own society, in which there is virtually no sharing, and virtual dependence upon dollar purchases of food, the non-farming 95 percent are not freed from work; they are strapped to some economic machine other than farming to produce the money they need to pay for food.

According to Richard Lee, "A woman gathers in one day enough food to feed her family for three days, and spends the rest of her time resting in camp, doing embroidery, visiting other camps, or entertaining visitors from other camps. During each day at home, kitchen routines, such as cooking, nut cracking, collecting firewood, and fetching water, occupy one to three hours of her time. This rhythm of steady work and steady leisure is maintained throughout the year. The male hunters tend to work more frequently than the women, but their schedule is uneven. It is not unusual for a man to hunt avidly for a week and then do no hunting at all for two or three weeks. During these periods, visiting, entertaining and especially dancing are the primary activities of men."

DIETARY INTAKE

A common misconception is that primitive societies survive at only the bare minimum of existence, yet research proves otherwise. The Arnhem

Land hunters, for example, do not like a monotonous diet; they work to ensure themselves a wide diversity of food well beyond sufficiency. According to researchers McCarthy and McArthur, the dietary intake of the hunters was adequate according to today's standards of the National Research Council of America. Mean daily consumption for several aboriginal communities was above 2,130 calories per day, which is a better nutrition level than is enjoyed by 15 percent of the U.S. population.

Like the Aborigines, the Dobe Bushmen enjoyed a caloric intake of more than 2,100 calories per day. However, according to the calculations of one researcher, judging by the Bushman's average body weight, people only required about 1,900 calories per day. The surplus food, says that researcher, was given to the dogs.

"The conclusion can be drawn," says Richard Lee, "that the Bushmen do not lead a substandard existence on the edge of starvation as had been commonly supposed."

Marshall Sahlins summarizes by saying, "Hunters keep banker's hours, notably less than modern industrial workers," and yet, he points out, their food consumption is varied and adequate. They eat as much for pleasure as sustenance.

DELIBERATE UNDERPRODUCTION

In primitive societies, unlike modern industrial societies, the people choose not to produce at maximum levels. Incredible as it may seem to Western minds, "there is a conscious and consistent disregard for the notion of 'maximum effort from a maximum number of people,'" according to Sahlins. He goes on: "Labor power is underused, technological means are not fully engaged, natural resources are left untapped . . . production is low relative to existing possibilities. The work day is short. The number of days off exceeds the number of work days. Dancing, fishing, games, sleep, and ritual seem to occupy the greater part of one's time."

As labor is underused, so are environmental resources left to "go to waste," a fact that drives Westerners into a frenzy to get at those "wasted resources." The immediate environments of many hunter-gatherer communities could easily support triple their populations, but deliberate control of population growth, and deliberate underuse of the environment's full economic capacity, has kept the ratio of people to resources very small. Rather than using up the productive potential of the environment, stone-age communities chose to let some of the fruit fall to the ground, and some of the animals exist in peace. The people, meanwhile, are content to hang

out, sleep, dance, flirt, and engage in the rituals and relationships that have meaning within these societies. "Maximum effort" indeed.

THE CHOICE OF SUBSISTENCE

The Western assumption is that nomadic hunter-gatherers, especially those who are still functional today (numbering in the tens of millions), would love to be free of their "subsistence" economy. But Sahlins argues that these people have clearly chosen their lifestyle. Even when neighboring tribes convert themselves from hunter-gatherers into stable agricultural communities, sometimes using "advanced technological tools," many hunter-gatherer communities refuse that choice on the ground that it would require them to work harder. Richard Lee quotes the Bushmen: "Why should we plant when there are so many mongomongo nuts in the world?"

Hunter-gatherers are often called "culturally inferior" for failing to produce a surplus that could protect them from the whims of nature. Sahlins suggests four reasons why they eschew surpluses. First, they are optimists. When there is food they tend to eat it all, even gorging themselves. The attitude seems to be that since food is abundant in nature, storage is not necessary; nature itself stores food here and there in the plants and animals, if you know where to find it. So even when storms or accidents deprive a community of food for a period of days or weeks, the results are rarely disastrous and you can always move on to the next place.

Second, hunter-gatherers are nomadic by choice. If they stored or carried food they would be tied to a specific place, or have their movements seriously slowed. For nomadic hunter-gatherers, "It is truly said that his wealth is a burden," says Sahlins. The fact of movement "rapidly depreciates the satisfactions of property."

In *Lost World of the Kalahari*, author Laurens van der Post has written about his inability to give gifts to the Bushmen: "Almost everything seemed likely to make life more difficult for them by adding to the litter and weight of their daily round. They themselves had practically no possessions: a loin strap, a skin blanket, and a leather satchel. There was nothing that they could not assemble in one minute, wrap up in their blankets or carry on their shoulders for a journey of a thousand miles. They had no sense of possession." (In modern society, of course, "possession" may be our central passion.)

Third, an economy based on storage would increase the Bushmen's impact on the environment beyond the present-day ethic of underuse. Sur-

plus would also lead to population growth, which would threaten the community's mobility and increase vulnerability to natural calamities.

Fourth, the hunter's self-esteem is based on hunting. To accumulate surpluses would diminish the cultural and psychological importance of the hunter. It might also downplay the training of the young and produce a lazier society with fewer skills.

Sahlins does not argue that stone-age cultures are invulnerable to food shortages, but he does argue that hunter-gatherers are no more vulnerable than any other society. "What about the world today?" he asks. "One-third to one-half of humanity are said to go to bed hungry every night. Some twenty million [are] in the U.S. alone. In the Old Stone Age, the fraction must have been much smaller. *This* is the era of unprecedented hunger. Now, in the time of the greatest technical power, is starvation an institution. Reverse another venerable formula, the amount of hunger increases relatively and absolutely with the evolution of culture."

THE CREATION OF "POVERTY"

The Bushmen's lack of material wealth, which we call "poverty," is put into a different perspective by Sahlins:

Possession of the necessary tools is general and knowledge of the required skills common. . . . Add in the liberal customs of sharing, for which hunters are properly famous, and all the people can usually participate in the going prosperity. . . . But of course this prosperity depends upon an objectively low standard of living . . . that the customary quota of consumables be set at a modest point . . . want not, lack not.

Poverty is not a certain amount of goods, nor is it just a relation between means and ends; above all it is a relation between people. Poverty is a social status . . . it was not until culture neared the height of its material achievements that it erected a shrine to the Unattainable: Infinite Needs.

To bring the point to the present, it is worth noting the viewpoint of the Yupik (Eskimo) people of Alaska. In a publication by the Association of Village Council Presidents, edited by Art Davidson, *Does One Way of Life Have to Die So Another Can Live?* there was this comment on how modern economic systems have affected the creation of poverty:

Poverty has only recently been introduced to Native communities. . . . for thousands of years people subsisted from the land and ocean along the west coast of Alaska. It was a hard life, but it had none of the frustrations and stigmas of poverty, for the people were not poor. Living from the land sustained life and evolved the Yupik culture, a culture in which wealth was the common wealth of the people as provided by the earth. Whether food was plentiful or scarce among the people. This sharing created a bond between people that helped insure survival. Life was hard then, but people found life satisfying. Today life is getting easier, but it is no longer satisfying.

. . . With the first Russian traders came the idea of wealth and poverty. These new people added to the process of living the purpose of accumulation. Whether it was furs, money, land or the souls of converts, lines were drawn between people on the basis of what they had accumulated. . . . The new economic system . . . began replacing food and furs with cash, cooperation with competition, sharing with accumulating.

The Yupik give a recent example of what happened to them at Bristol Bay when the subsistence economy was replaced by a new cash economy:

Originally people subsisted from the land and sea; the tremendous salmon runs provided a reliable source of food. [Then] commercial fishing began with an attitude of get what you can. It was only a matter of time before urban politicians and outside economic interest permitted the salmon runs to be exploited nearly to extinction. The local people were left impoverished. Then the government became concerned. Then fishery research was called for, [and] "limited entry" demanded. Then food stamps were passed out to people who used to fish. Somehow or other Native people were expected to adapt their traditional ways to this western economic system. . . .

White men brought diseases like measles and syphilis, which killed thousands of our people. . . . It is not so well known that the economic impact of western civilization was every bit as devastating to the well being and spirit of the people . . . these new ways of doing things can be as disturbing to the life of a person or of a culture as the measles infection is to the life of a body. Fortunately a cure has been found for measles. A cure has not been found for our "poverty". . . . The attempted cures have involved ever-increased doses

of the western way of life in the hope that the new system will somehow successfully replace the old.

FAST FORWARD: LEISURE IN TECHNOTOPIA

In the United States today, according to figures from Louis Harris and Associates, the average work week is forty-seven hours. This is up from forty hours, the average of a decade earlier. More than one-third of the male employed population works longer than the average. According to the U.S. Department of Labor, nearly six million men and more than one million women work more than sixty hours per week at paid jobs. (This does not include the added unpaid domestic work of most women.)

In certain job categories, such as self-employed farmers, entrepreneurs, and professional people, the typical work week is sixty hours. The heads of corporations average more than sixty hours of work per week.

. . .

The figures quoted above represent a marked improvement over the situation in 1850, the usual time period with which such figures are compared. At that time, the average work week was seventy hours, working conditions were far worse, and the standard of living was much lower. So compared with 1850, we are far better off today. But is that an appropriate comparison? It was around 1850 that the worst excesses of the new industrialization were being visited upon workers, and created a new class of urban working poor. Compared with 1850, we are bound to look good.

Going back to the Middle Ages, according to French sociologist Alain Caillé, the average workday was 8½–16 hours, depending on the season. But urban workers also had about 130 days of *no work*: holy days and vigils, plus Sundays and some Saturdays. "In the countryside," said Caillé, "there [were] only 180 days of real work." And "living standards" were arguably as good for workers then as in the grim 1850s. As for Roman times, there were some 150–200 public holidays per year. And back in the stone age? (See Sahlins.)

So have things really improved? Those of us who enjoy the fruits of the technological juggernaut have more stuff in our lives. We are cleaner and we live longer. But if we compare ourselves to preindustrial societies, it is

arguable that we work harder than they did. In addition, our devotion to gathering and caring for commodities has created an extraordinary modern paradox: a scarcity of time, *loss* of leisure, and increase of stress amidst an environment of apparent abundance and wealth. A *decrease* in the quality of life and experience.

. . .

This paradox was addressed in a provocative series of articles in the *Los Angeles Times* entitled "The Harried Society," by reporter Kent McDougall. He argued that modern times have not increased the amount of leisure in our lives, but diminished it:

Back in 1609 when the Algonkin Indians discovered Henry Hudson sailing up their river, they were living off the fat of the land. They lived so well yet worked so little that the industrious Dutch considered them indolent savages and soon replaced their good life with feudalism. Today, along the Hudson River in New York, supposedly free citizens of the wealthiest society in the history of the world work longer and harder than any Algonkin Indians ever did, race around like rats in a maze, dodging cars, trucks, buses, bicycles, and each other, and dance to a frantic tempo destined to lead many to early deaths from stress and strain. . . . What went wrong? How, in the process of acquiring so much material wealth, did Americans manage to lose so much leisure?

McDougall quotes the late anthropologist Peter Farm: "The fact is that high civilization is hectic, whereas primitive hunters and collectors of wild food . . . are among the most leisured people on Earth." And, says Farm, "they are among the best fed people on Earth and also among the healthiest."

McDougall continues: "Work consumes as much of the average wage earner's time as it did a generation ago [actually, it takes more time now], while commuting to and from work takes more. And higher material living standards have so complicated Americans' lifestyles as to require them to spend more time at shopping, maintenance, and housework, leaving them less time to enjoy all the goods and recreational opportunities at their disposal. . . . In an age of high living standards, longer vacations, faster transportation, and supermarkets stuffed with convenience items, Americans somehow have wound up feeling more harried than ever."

THE ALLEGED SUPERIORITY OF MODERN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

On August 14, 1987, at the Big Cypress Seminole Indian Reservation, Florida, the trial began for Seminole Chief James Billy. He was charged with shooting a Florida panther while on a night hunt. The United States has charged that killing a Florida panther is a violation of the 1973 Endangered Species Act, and is punishable by one year in jail and a \$10,000 fine. The Seminole tribe argues that since it is a sovereign nation, recognized as such by treaties with the United States, it can determine its own rules about taking wildlife. Secondly, says the tribe, the treaties that arranged for the Seminoles to cede land to the U.S. also guaranteed the Indians the right to continue their traditional subsistence activities at their own discretion. (Hundreds of treaties with American Indian tribes guaranteed that Indian hunting and fishing would not be subject to U.S. law. This condition was of major importance in getting the Indians to cede land, as it assured the continued viability of the traditional economy. Now, however, most such guarantees are under assault by commercial fishing or ranching interests and by U.S. agencies, which claim that Indians should be bound by the same rules as the rest of Americans, and that the treaties are ancient history. That the treaties are not as "ancient" as many binding real-estate agreements dating back to the early 1800s is considered irrelevant. Treaties with Indians are not given the same respect.)

In the Seminole case, the United States now denies, as it has in other cases brought against Indian hunting and fishing rights, that Seminole law can supersede U.S. law. The U.S. argues it needs to control hunting and fishing to manage and protect wildlife population. But, in an interview with NPR radio, Chief Billy pointed out, "Our tribal laws existed for hundreds of years before the U.S. existed. We are a sovereign nation; the United States has acknowledged this [in treaties and other proceedings]." Billy says that when he shot the animal, he was just shooting two eyes in the dark, thinking it was another kind of cougar. He adds that in any event, the Endangered Species Act is an absurdity when it comes to Indians: "Indians are the best conservators of any natural resource and we have been for thousands of years. . . . The government is attempting to blame the Seminoles for the destruction of a species, but the real reason the Florida panther is endangered is the overdevelopment of south Florida. The reason is all these condominium communities, and the construction of Freeway I-95 right through the swamp, and then the highway

across the Everglades. It has nothing to do with our hunting practices. It has to do with yours."

. . .

It seems quite obvious—almost self-evident—that native cultures that have lived successfully in one place for millennia have been abiding by successful economic practices, including wildlife and resource conservation. But if we listen to our Western scientists and governments, we would think that native societies can barely manage another day without computers, quotas, satellite mapping, and "maximum sustainable yield" analysis. How, I wonder, do scientists rationalize how natives have survived for thousands of years? Instinct?

The assumption that our modern system of wildlife and resource management is more efficient—despite the fact that we "manage" without any understanding of the environment or the way the people have managed prior to our arrival—is not only hubristic, but racist.

In Chapter 4 I mentioned how computer models are being rapidly introduced for resource management in the Arctic North. A high percentage of American and Canadian government "aid" to the Indian and Inuit peoples of the Arctic regions now comes in the form of computer training. That this mode of wildlife and resource management has a regrettable negative effect on the traditional relationships between native peoples and animals is rarely considered.

Once an intimate knowledge based on close observation and centuries-old teachings, the relationship among humans and animals is now based on computer printouts, and has thus become a fast-paced, objective, abstract, quantitative kind of knowledge. This is destructive to Indian cultures and traditions. Within a generation, it is likely to shatter a mode of knowledge that survived for millennia. But beyond the damage done to cultures, recent evidence suggests that the objective-scientific-quantitative computer management systems rarely improve upon the native conservation and management systems. In fact, the modern systems often prove disastrous.

University of Alberta anthropologist Milton M. R. Freeman is among a growing number of scientists who have begun to organize resistance to the idea that our system of economic management has a great deal to offer traditional native communities.

Freeman is particularly peeved at wildlife biologists. Speaking at the 1984 meeting of the Western Regional Science Association (in Monterey,

California), Freeman said: "An explicit faith in the correctness of the scientific method is so integral a part of the professional formulation of wildlife biologists that the limits of that particular system of belief are only learned, often much later in life, as a result of experience gained in the non-professional world." Freeman recounts instances in which wildlife biologists ignored traditional practices, only to find them a more effective way of maintaining viability among animal species.

One example concerned caribou hunting on the Ellesmere Islands of Arctic Canada. Canadian wildlife managers told the Inuit that they should hunt only large and/or male caribou, and only a few animals from each herd. The Inuit argued that this practice contradicted their traditional relationship with the animals and would destroy the caribou herds, but their pleas were ignored. The result was as the Inuit predicted. Though their new limit was only twenty-six kills per year—far less than the Inuit had hunted before—the formerly abundant population dropped sharply. Why?

According to Freeman, "The Inuit hold that each small group of Peary caribou is a social group and there is good reason for those particular animals being together. Inuit hunters point out that given the marginality of the environment for herbivores, older/larger animals are important to the survival of the group. These older animals have experience and they have the physical strength enabling them to dig through the snow for food. Old animals are also more passive relative to the more nervous younger animals or pregnant females and this behavioral trait has a calming effect on the younger animals in the group."

A second example concerns the proposal to permit sport hunting of musk-ox in the Arctic. Again, only the male musk-ox would be harvested; since the best "trophy animals" were the old, biologically "superfluous" bulls, the managers were sure the hunting would not negatively affect the musk-ox population. The Inuit said otherwise. They argued that the musk-ox are highly social animals. The old males are not "surplus" at all. They play an important social role at certain times of the year, becoming the regathering point after periods of dispersal during rutting. They function like "elders," according to the Inuit. Again, the Inuit turned out to be correct: The government policy was eventually reversed.

Freeman points out that this "native critique of the management proposal was based upon essentially esoteric knowledge," from direct observation and traditional belief, since the Inuit did not actually use the musk-ox for meat or for anything else. Simply by sharing the land with the animals for thousands of years, they got to know their habits and social structures:

For our present purposes, it is sufficient to observe that as in the case of the Peary caribou example, behavioral knowledge of the species was the critical point of the Inuit position, contrasted with an inexact quantitative perspective proposed by the game management service. . . . In reality both Native systems and western science rest on the same foundation—namely empirical evidence. Both systems place value on the systematic accumulation of detailed observations and the abstraction of norms from disparate data sets. At this point, however, the two systems begin to diverge. The Native system assesses deviation from the norm in a qualitative sense: e.g., animals become fewer, or fatter, or more excited, there are fewer calves in the herd, more injured bulls, more barren cows, etc. . . . The sum total of the community's empirically based knowledge is awesome in breadth and detail, and often stands in marked contrast to the attenuated data available from scientific studies of these same populations.

The native management systems are also deeply ingrained in cultural practice, passed down from generation to generation. I have previously quoted from Dr. H. A. Feit concerning the exquisitely detailed management of wildlife resources practiced by the James Bay Cree of northern Ontario, including the appointment of "stewards" and the careful study and division of hunting regions.

Dr. Feit has also studied some of the more subtle practices, including the proper rituals used in killing and cooking an animal. Most of the rituals are designed to demonstrate "reciprocity between man and animal . . . which includes respect for the needs of animals to survive as a population, and which is complemented by animals respecting the needs for humans to subsist and survive as well."

Dr. Feit described the Cree methods of hunting beaver as a further demonstration of respect, as well as impeccable conservation practice. One method of hunting the beaver was during daylight, by trapping. The second method, at night, was to surround a beaver lodge, where 50 or 100 may reside, and to drive them out to the waiting hunters. The first system was not as efficient in terms of man-hours per beaver caught. But, said Feit, "the important finding was that while waking the beaver could permit the capture of more beaver in total, it was used only under special circumstances, relatively rarely . . . a clear indicator that hunters' choices limit their harvests, rather than inability to harvest more beaver. . . . More beaver could be caught if [the second] technique was widely used." The Cree were deliberately underusing their resources, according to Feit, for

conservation purposes, and ingraining this practice with traditional teachings about when to make one choice or another.

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Professor Freeman argues that the main problem with Western wildlife biology, as with most scientific interventions in age-old economic management systems, is that the basic operating assumptions are inappropriate to the situation at hand. For example, says Freeman, most Western biologists—college trained, usually white, and usually lacking direct knowledge of the environment or cultural group they are researching—will tend to view wildlife as a resource, and the harvesting of animals as strictly an economic activity. They adopt the capitalist terminology of “maximum sustainable yield” (the number beyond which a herd might begin to diminish). The biologist essentially acts as a resource manager, like a corporate functionary, whose goal is to maximize production and contribute to profit. No effort is made to become sensitive to alternative views stemming from native traditions and culture.

To native people, animals are never viewed strictly in quantitative terms, or as “resources.” They are part of a web of living systems that includes relationships among themselves and between them and human beings. These systems are passed on among natives through historical teachings and stories; they are further articulated through religious rituals; and they are part of native systems of social structure, status, and psychology. The ebbs and flows of the animal population, therefore, are inseparable from the continuous activities of the people. While it is possible that the scientific “maximum sustainable yield” might turn out to be very close to the numbers of animals the natives finally kill and use, the conceptual relationship to the animals, and processes involved in making those decisions, are entirely different. Furthermore, for native societies to adopt the Western conceptual processes could cause grave injury to the continued vitality of native culture and tradition, since their economic well-being is inexorably linked to their religious, social, and cultural practices.

When native societies decide to accept the advice of Western biologists, and employ Western-style wildlife management techniques, we tend to consider them to be acting rationally. American institutions become willing to invest. The World Bank offers development funds. And yet the Western mode, by failing to include the more holistic dimensions of native thought and practice, may ultimately prove to be the less rational approach. It is surely less rational, in the long run, for native people.

As discussed earlier, indigenous societies tend to not maximize production, and for very good reason. They deliberately underproduce. In fact, according to Professor Freeman (in basic agreement with Marshall Sahlins), when fortuitous circumstances do result in a surprise surplus, the favored manner of dealing with it is *not* to store it or trade it. Instead, it is consumed as a feast. “Widespread sharing and community feasting is a characteristic feature of all hunting and fishing societies,” says Freeman. “Moreover, in such societies there are values and sanctions to expressly guard against individual accumulation or hoarding of resources, and such societies have elaborate systems of kinship and social relationships that prescribe the channels along which the resources shall flow so that equanimity prevails in the face of the threat posed by unequal access to valued resources.” Unlike industrial and technological societies, where the primary purpose of economic activity is to maximize profit, “the purpose of nearly all economic activity in such foraging societies is directed toward the reproduction of the social group.” So, where capitalist management systems emphasize numbers and individual gain, native management emphasizes relationships among humans and animals, believing that balance is what feeds people and helps animals thrive. There is no such thing as “maximum sustainable yield” in the native economic outlook.

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In order to support native communities in their efforts to maintain traditional economic practices, Dr. Milton Freeman helped organize the Working Group on Traditional Knowledge, Conservation, and Rural Development, of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources. Based in Geneva, this group may be the first effective organization of scientists who take seriously the traditional methods of managing wildlife and resources.

Though the organization has only existed for a few years, it has shown tremendous vigor. A long list of programs are underway; their study projects include traditional knowledge of coastal systems, traditional fisheries management among South Pacific islanders, ecological and hunting practices of peoples of the Northern Circumpolar region, traditional agroforestry and conservation practices among the tribal peoples of New Guinea, practices of microclimate management among farming peoples, the preservation of the traditional knowledge of Native Alaskans, and the use of fire in agriculture among the Aborigines.

The urgency of the task at hand was articulated by Working Group member Dr. Bob Johannes:

Much of what we know about the nature and management of natural resources in developed countries can be found in libraries. [Among native communities], however, much of it resides only in the heads of older men and women in the villages. Scientists have come to realize within the past few years that such knowledge concerning the forest, the garden, the plains, and the sea, is both encyclopedic and of major scientific value, particularly as it relates to natural resource management. But it is being lost rapidly as a result of westernization, industrialization, urbanization, and the concomitant alienation of the young from their traditions. . . . Recording this knowledge is an urgent matter. Allowing it to vanish amounts to throwing away centuries of priceless practical experience.

Johannes warns of certain pitfalls, however, including the fact that many researchers do not exhibit respect for the peoples they are studying, often rushing to get answers and causing the communities internal conflict about whether or not to participate.

Also, according to Working Group member Diane Bell of Australian National University, in certain societies such as the Aborigines, much information is the province of women, who tend to refuse to report it to men.

Finally, there is the major issue cited by the Working Group of scientists' failure to recognize the rights of the native peoples they deal with. When Western researchers have discovered, for example, a medicinal herb's curative powers, the scientists have often sold the information for a large profit to Western corporations without any corresponding benefit for the natives. In fact, the scientists usually leave the scene and do not return to aid the same native peoples when their lands are assaulted by outsiders. Many examples of this can be found among the native peoples of the Amazon. Though many scientists gleaned profitable information from the Indians of the region, few have stood up to defend the natives who are now under direct assault.

When they ignore the concrete political situations that Indians face, Western scientists are merely mimicking corporate amorality. Indians, their knowledge, and their environment fall within the Western definition of "resource," and are thus subject to exploitation. The idea that Western intervention is somehow improving the lot of the natives—their government, their health, their economics—is self-aggrandizement at best. More likely it is a public relations mask designed to shield the scientists, the corporations, and you and me, from a true recognition of the horror of what is happening.

PART IV

WORLD WAR AGAINST THE INDIANS

IN THE LATER stages of an epic worldwide struggle, the forces of Western economic development are assaulting the remaining native peoples of the planet, whose presence obstructs their progress. In some places the assault is violent; elsewhere, as here in the United States, it is legalistic. Given the lack of public awareness and the misreporting by the media, a "final solution" for the native problem is deemed likely. Upon the ultimate outcome of this battle will depend whether a living alternative world view, rooted in an ancient connection with the Earth, can continue to express what is insane and suicidal about the Western technological project.