

# The Founding (Indian?) Fathers

Week 05 Lecture

Weatherford chapters 7, 8 and 9

Pages 117–174

Second edition pages 151–223

## **The Founding (Indian) Fathers?**

### **Native American Contributions to American Democracy**

#### **The learning objectives for week 05 are:**

- to take the first exam and**
- to critically evaluate the pros and cons of the debate about the influence of Native Americans on the development of democracy in the United States**

## **Native American Contributions to American Democracy**

**Terms you should know for week 05 are:**

- anarchy/anarchism**
- Nambicuará**
- Thomas Paine**
- Jean Jacques Rousseau**
- League of the Iroquois**
- Seneca Falls, New York**
- 19th Amendment to the US Constitution (1920)**

# Native American Contributions to American Democracy

## Week 05 Sources:

Grinde, Donald A., Jr. 1977. *The Iroquois and the Founding of the American Nation*. San Francisco: The Indian Historian Press. A Yamasee Native American historian's account of the role of the Iroquois constitution in shaping American settler concepts of democracy and the American constitution. Includes a complete English text of *The Council of the Great Peace of Dekanawidah*.

Wagner, Sally Roesch. 1996. *The Untold Story of the Iroquois Influence on Early Feminists*. Aberdeen, South Dakota: Sky Carrier Press

Zinn, Howard. 1995. *A People's History of the United States: 1492–Present*. New York: Harper/Perennial. Esp. pages 102–23.

A debate about Grinde's work and that of colleague Bruce Johansen, appears in the following three sources (thanks to MSU History Prof. Robert Cray for these citations):

Levy, Philip. 1996. Exemplars of taking liberties: the Iroquois influence thesis and the problem of evidence. *The William and Mary Quarterly*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Series, 53(3):588–604.

Payne, Samuel B. Jr. 1996. The Iroquois League, the Articles of Confederation, and the Constitution. *The William and Mary Quarterly*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Series, 53(3):605–20.

Grinde, Donald A. Jr. and Bruce E. Johansen. 1996. Sauce for the goose: demand and definitions for "proof" regarding the Iroquois and democracy. *The William and Mary Quarterly*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Series, 53(3):621–35.

“To an outsider...powwows often appear chaotic...No one is in control...This seems to be typical of Indian community events...leaders can only lead by example...the event unfolds as a collective activity of all the participants.”

Weatherford, page 120; [second edition page 155](#)

- “Indian penchant for respectful individualism” ...first explorers wrote about it five centuries ago.
- Indian societies operated without...coercive political institutions.”

- Two basic concepts of freedom:
  - National independence and sovereignty
  - Personal liberty
- Personal liberty version “does not have a long pedigree in the Old World.”

Weatherford, page 121; second edition page 156

## Powwow observations introduce Weatherford's two part theory of Native American influences on the modern concept of democracy:

- Indirect (ideological) influences: widely accepted
- Direct (technical) influences on US constitution and the structure and practices of the US government: hotly debated



First examine the indirect  
(ideological) influences that are  
widely accepted

The American Revolution was heavily based on the ideas of the philosophical and intellectual historical period known as “The Enlightenment,” but...

“Egalitarian democracy and liberty as we know them today owe little to Europe. They are not Greco-Roman derivatives somehow revived by the French in the 18th Century. They entered modern western thought as American Indian notions translated into European language and culture.” (Weatherford page 128;[second edition page 166](#))

- The Enlightenment from about 1720–1790
- Grew out of the Renaissance
- Especially important in France and England
- Widespread criticism of traditions of middle ages

## Some key figures in England:

- Thomas More 1478–1535
- John Locke 1632–1704
- David Hume 1711–1776

## Thomas More

- Major background role in Enlightenment
- Refused Henry 8 plan to become head of church in England
- Henry had him executed



- Europeans initially astonished at the democratic, egalitarian ideals and behavior of Native Americans.
- Native American ability to carry out collective activities without strong positions of leadership or coercive political institutions was a far cry from the despotic monarchs to which Europeans were accustomed.

- 1516: Thomas More's *Utopia* described a future society of equality without money.
- Utopia literally “no place”
- More got many of his ideas from travelers' reports on Native Americans.



## John Locke (1632-1704)

- *Essay on Human Understanding*
- One of earliest arguments for religious toleration and separation of religion from government
- Distinguish legitimate from illegitimate government and argue right of rebellion against illegitimate government

## John Locke

- One of earliest to use “social contract”  
idea of government

## David Hume



- Knowledge from our senses, not revealed through Bible
- Opposed the “argument from design” for existence of God
- Now called “intelligent design”

# Key Figures in French Enlightenment: French Thinkers More Important

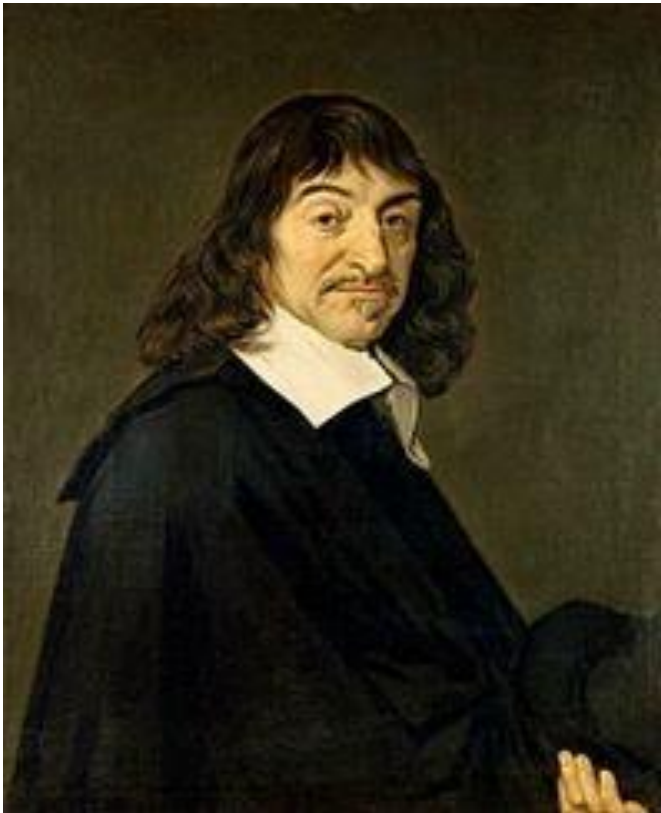
- Michel de Montaigne 1533 – 1592
- René Descartes 1597 – 1650
- Louis-Armand de Lom d'Arce 1666 – 1715
- Voltaire 1694 – 1778
- Jean Jacques Rousseau 1712 – 1778

## Montaigne (1533–1592)

- Described Indians' life without magistrates, forced service, riches, poverty, or inheritance
- Argued they lived better than Europeans



## Descartes (1597–1650)



- Questioned everything
- Refused to accept authority of Bible
- Tried to discover first principles
- Famous for “cogito ergo sum;”  
“I think therefore I am”
- Some consider him father of  
modern mathematics

## Louis-Armand de Lom d'Arce

- described the Huron Indians
- based on his personal stay with them from 1683 to 1694
- liberty and equality: no
  - social classes,
  - private property, or a
  - government separate from the kinship system.

## Louis-Armand de Lom d'Arce

- Used the word “anarchy” – “without a ruler” –  
to define the Huron political system.



## Voltaire (1694–1778)

- Real name was François Marie Arouet
- Influenced by Locke and by Isaac Newton
- Became ardent critic of religion



## Voltaire

- *Candide* (1759) one of most famous novels
- Despite constant problems and misfortunes the character Pangloss continues to believe this is the best possible world
- “Panglossian” now a word for excessive optimism
- 1956 Leonard Bernstein operetta “Candide”

- “Voltaireisms”
  - “I disagree with what you say but I would fight to the death for your right to say it.”
  - “Common sense is not so common.”
  - “It is dangerous to be right when the government is wrong.”
  - “Those who can make you believe absurdities can make you commit atrocities. “

## Rousseau (1712–1778)

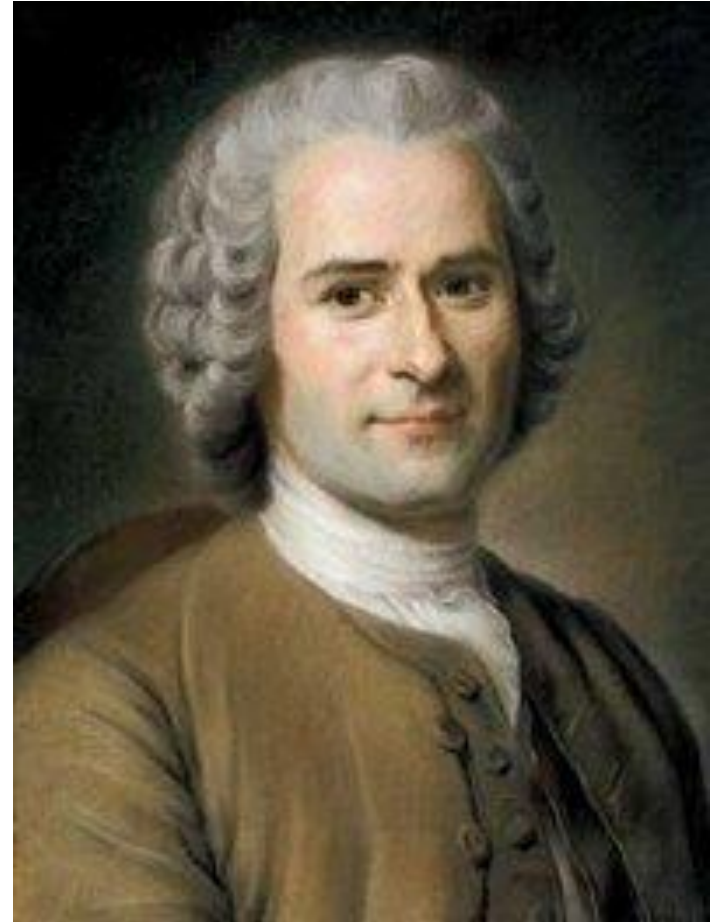
- Was the most important French enlightenment philosopher
- In 1742 wrote an operetta on the discovery of America contrasting the Indians' liberty and the lack of it among the Europeans.
- Later published his *Discourse on the Origins of Inequality* and his *The Social Contract* which both feature Native American societies as models of democracy.

## Rousseau

- Was probably the main philosopher to popularize the idea of the “noble savage.”
- Was particularly influenced by accounts of the Nambicuaras of Brazil.
- Thomas Jefferson, Thomas Paine, and Benjamin Franklin were all influenced by Rousseau.

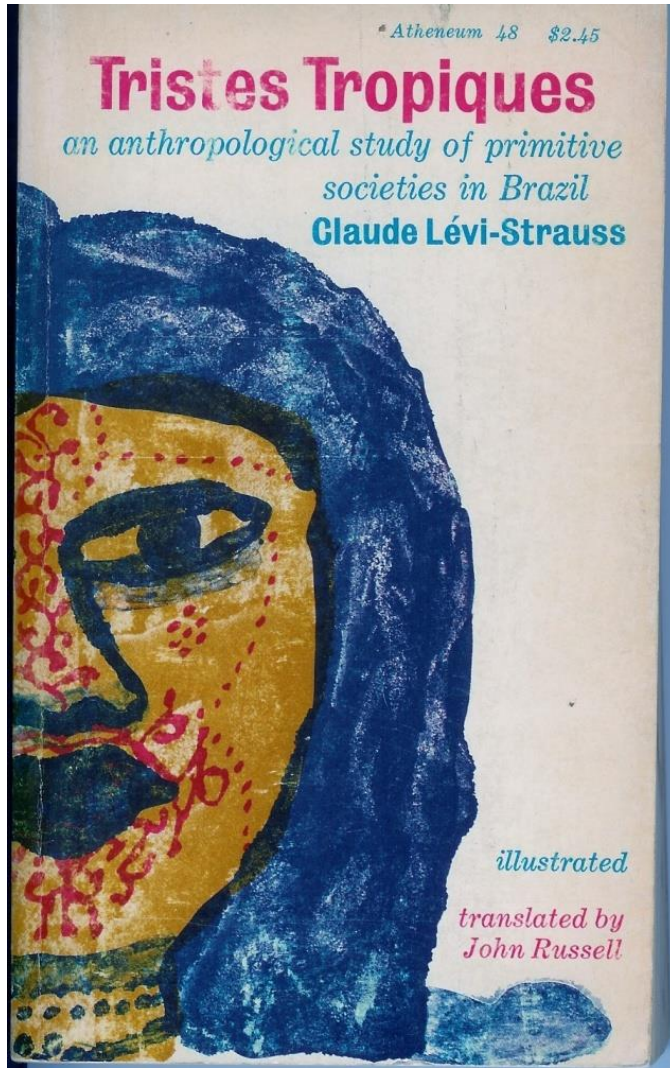
## Rousseau

- Wrote the famous line “Man is born free but everywhere he is in chains.”
- His book *The Social Contract* expanded Locke’s idea that government requires the consent of the governed
- Was banned in France



## Rousseau

- Might be the single most important thinker of the Enlightenment
- Was a major influence on the American and French revolutions (French: 1789 – 1794)
- Nambicuaras of Brazil still exist



## Nambicuarara

- Studied in 1930s by famous French anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss
  - Found **social contract** still functioning
  - Nambicuararas voluntarily give up some powers to “chief” in return for his hard work and sacrifice
- 32



## Father Joseph François Lafitau:

- In 1724 his *Customs of the American Savages Compared with Those of Earliest Times* described the Mohawks.
- Thinking they could only be so democratic if originally descended from the Greeks, he pronounced them refugees of the Trojan Wars who had managed to get to America or somehow bring their ideas there.

## Summary: Indirect Influences

- Aztec and Inca empires familiar to Europeans – had similar authoritarian style
- But Nambicuara and Iroquois unlike anything Europeans had seen

## Summary: Indirect Influences

- Historical conjuncture: Europeans made contact with radically democratic Native Americans just as late Renaissance was unfolding
- Questioning of medieval world view
- Enlightenment brought “radical” theories of democracy
- Attacks on organized church because of its authoritarian structure

## Summary: Indirect Influences

- Historical conjuncture:
  - Iroquois and Nambicuara based views of Enlightenment influenced US Founding Fathers
  - Thomas Jefferson spent time in France, read Voltaire and Rousseau
  - Benjamin Franklin was ambassador to France in 1775-76, had read Locke, Voltaire and Rousseau

## Direct Influences?

- Historical conjuncture:
  - Iroquois as model for US constitution?
  - Thomas Paine very much influenced by the Iroquois from whom he first learned about democracy in practice., Paine used the Indians as models of how the new American society might be organized.

## Thomas Paine (1737–1809)

- One of the first to call for American independence
- First person to propose the name “United States of America” for the country.
- His *The Age of Reason* is one of the premier statements of the Enlightenment, and probably its most influential defense in the English language.

## Thomas Paine

- *Common Sense*, published in 1775 was a major call for American independence – thousands printed
- *The Crisis* as series of articles including “These are the times that try men’s souls...”
- Washington had it read aloud to troops at Valley Forge

## Thomas Paine

- Paine later part of French revolution
- One of first white Americans to publicly oppose slavery (as did Benjamin Franklin)



## Direct Influences? Benjamin Franklin

- Was official printer for the colony of Pennsylvania
- Printed speeches and records of the various Indian assemblies and treaty negotiations
- Studied the Iroquois structure in detail
- Advocated its adoption by the US. Speaking to the Albany Congress in 1754, Franklin called on the delegates to emulate the League of the Iroquois

## Direct Influences? Charles Thomson

- Secretary to the Continental Congress
- Studied the Delaware so much that they adopted him as a full tribal member
- Wrote in detail about Indian political ideas and practices at the request of Thomas Jefferson
- According to Weatherford Thomson's descriptions of Iroquois and Delaware practices read like a blueprint for the US Constitution

## Charles Thomson (1729–1824)

- introduced the Iroquois *sachems* (representatives) concepts that
  - 1. Sachems do not acquire their positions by heredity but by election
  - 2. outsiders can be naturalized and then elected to such offices, and
  - 3. Military and civilian leaders must be separate

## League of the Iroquois

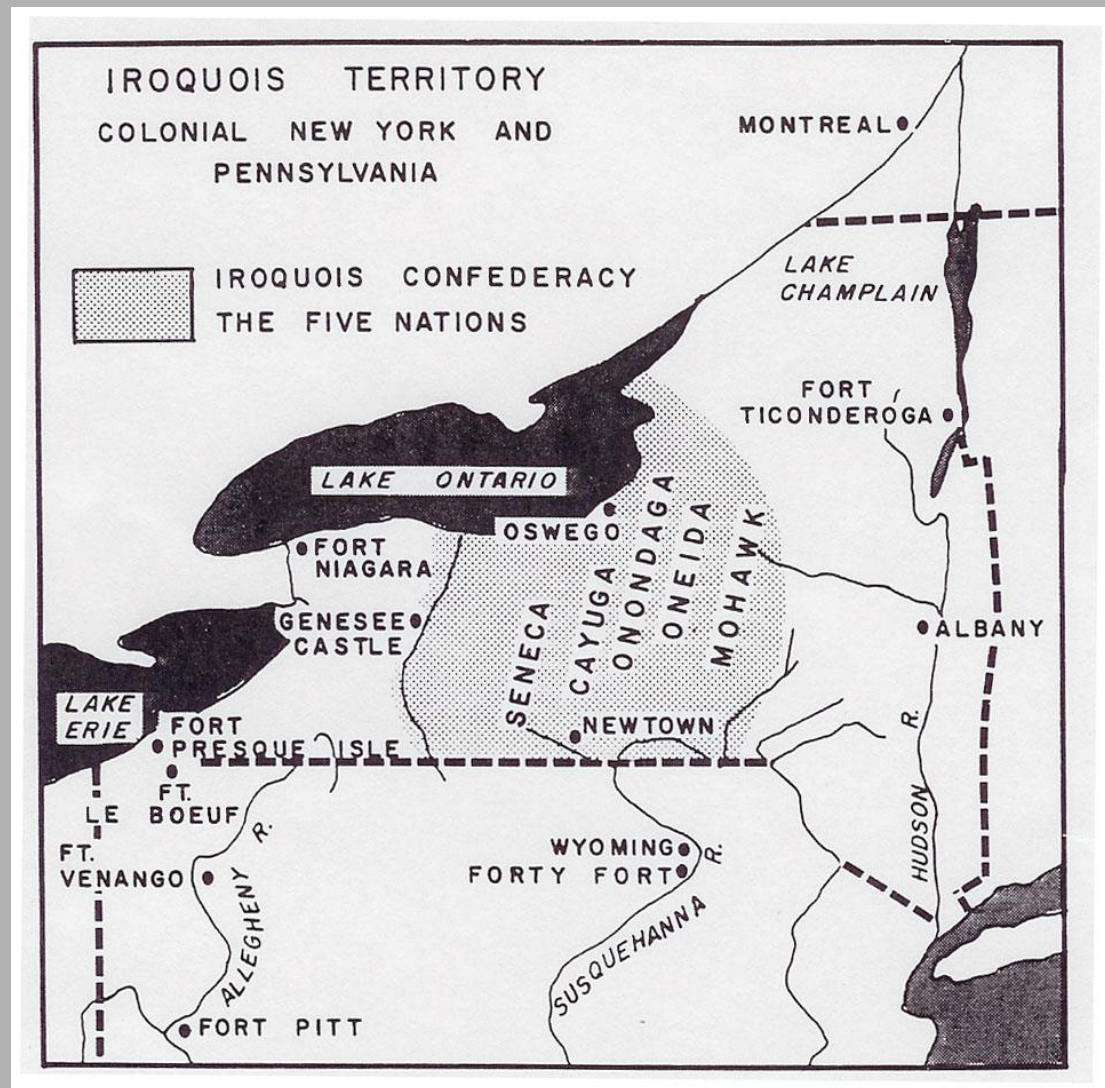
- Founded by Hiawatha and Deganwidah between AD 1000 and AD 1450, under a constitution called the "Great Law of Peace"
- The League of the Iroquois united 5 Indian nations:

## **League of the Iroquois**

- **Mohawk: People Possessors of the Flint**
- **Onondaga: People on the Hills**
- **Seneca: Great Hill People**
- **Oneida: Granite People**
- **Cayuga: People at the Mucky Land**

# League of the Iroquois

Source: Grinde, Donald A. Jr. 1977. *The Iroquois and the Founding of the American Nation*. San Francisco: The Indian Historian Press. Page 18.



## League of the Iroquois

- Each had a council of elected delegates called “sachems”
- Of equal voting power despite the size of the particular unit they represented
- First historical example of a "federal system" that was the basis for the US government: each state retains certain powers over its internal affairs and its representatives to the national government regulate affairs common to all

## **League of the Iroquois?**

- **US Congress modeled after Roman –**
  - **Senate**
  - **House of Plebians → US House of Representatives**
- **But several features of US system could be of Iroquois origin via Thomson, Franklin and Jefferson**



## League of the Iroquois

1. Impeachment of elected officials
2. Admission of new member nations (or states).
3. The Iroquois Great Council may have been the model for the Electoral College
4. Only one person may speak at a time in legislature
5. Elected legislators lose names, referred to only by title
6. The caucus, an Algonquian word, for a political organization or meeting in which informal discussion and consensus are emphasized over voting and formal rules of procedure

## League of the Iroquois?

- Many historians dispute the direct connections between Iroquois League and US constitution
- See the optional supplementary readings for sources including a detailed scholarly debate in *The William and Mary Quarterly*.

## Iroquois and Women's Rights

- Matilda Joslyn Gage (1826–1898)
- Lucretia Mott (1793–1880)
- Elizabeth Cady Stanton (1815–1902)
- organized the Seneca Falls, NY women's rights convention in 1848. This the first public call by women and their male supporters for women's right to vote.

## Iroquois and Women's Rights

- 260 women and 40 men attended
- Among the male delegates was Frederick Douglass – the famous antislavery activist and writer
- You can read the declaration of women's rights at:
- <https://www.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/Senecafalls.html>
- ...”all men and women are created equal.”

Sources: Wagner, Sally Roesch. 1996. *The Untold Story of the Iroquois Influence on Early Feminists*. Aberdeen, South Dakota: Sky Carrier Press; and Zinn, Howard. 1995. *A People's History of the United States: 1492–Present*. New York: Harper/Perennial. Esp. pages 102–23.

## Iroquois and Women's Rights 2012 Update

You can read Sally Wagner's 1996 essay online as published in the feminist journal "*On The Issues*"

Click [here](#).

## Iroquois and Women's Rights

- Their goal was realized in 1920 with the 19th Amendment to the US Constitution which states:

“The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of sex.”

## Iroquois and Women's Rights

- All three were influenced by the writings of Mary Wollstonecraft in England
- Her daughter married the British poet Shelley and also wrote *Frankenstein*
- and by the examples of Iroquois women who lived nearby Stanton in upstate New York.

## Iroquois and Women's Rights

- Stanton saw that Iroquois women were equal within the family
- Women elected the male *sachems* and women could impeach them
- Iroquois men did not physically abuse their wives
- Rape apparently not common in Iroquois life



## Iroquois and Women's Rights

- Iroquois women had equal right to divorce
- Women kept their property if divorced
- No “illegitimate” children among Iroquois
- Women participated equally in major decisions of the Great Council

## Women's Rights: Spring 2019 Update

- In 2020 the celebration of the 100th anniversary of the 19th Amendment will spark many debates and discussions –
- See the [Feb 3, 2019 New York Times Essay](#) on recent historical findings concerning the failure of the white women's emancipation movement to support the struggles of Black women seeking the right to vote – click on
- [When the Suffrage Movement Sold Out to White Supremacy](#)

**Montclair State University Department of Anthropology  
Anth 140: Non Western Contributions to the Western World  
Dr. Richard W. Franke**

# **End of Week 05 Lecture on Native American Contributions to American Democracy**