Exemplars of Taking Liberties: The Iroquois Influence Thesis and the Problem of Evidence

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FOR nearly two decades, Donald A. Grinde, Jr., and Bruce E. Johansen have been the most outspoken proponents of the controversial theory that the Iroquois Confederacy and Great Law of Peace had an important influence on the constitutional design of the United States government. In three books—Grinde's *The Iroquois and the Founding of the American Nation,* Johansen's *Forgotten Founders,* and their co-authored *Exemplar of Liberty: Native America and the Evolution of Democracy*—as well as in numerous articles and essays—the two have made the case for what has come to be called the Iroquois influence thesis.[1] Supporters applaud Grinde and Johansen for "doing pioneering work in Indian history"[2] while critics decry the influence thesis as deceptive and shoddy scholarship.

In *Exemplar of Liberty,* the most comprehensive presentation of influence thesis arguments and evidence to date, Grinde and Johansen contend that "the character of American democracy evolved importantly (although, of course, not solely) from the examples provided by the American Indian confederacies that bordered the British colonies." They hold that the "League of the Iroquois, with its representative form of democracy," helped shape the federal Constitution and "served as a catalyst for American unity." They find "overwhelming evidence that, during the framing and ratification process of the United States Constitution, the Iroquois lectured to colonial and revolutionary leaders on the virtues of unity and served as an example of democracy for Europeans and colonial Americans." They also assert that "the Iroquois had a profound impact on American notions about unity, territorial expansion, the origins of sovereignty in the people, and universal suffrage." They

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[1] Grinde, *The Iroquois and the Founding of the American Nation* ([San Francisco], 1977); Johansen, *Forgotten Founders: Benjamin Franklin, the Iroquois, and the Rationale for the American Revolution* (Ipswich, Mass., 1982); Grinde and Johansen, *Exemplar of Liberty: Native America and the Evolution of Democracy* (Los Angeles, 1991). Hereafter cited as *Exemplar of Liberty.*

[2] Wilbur R. Jacobs, "The American Indian Legacy of Freedom and Liberty," *American Indian Culture and Research Journal,* 16, No. 4 (1992), 186.

conclude that, "in essence, American democracy is a synthesis of Native American and European political theories" and that "there is an abundance of inferential and direct evidence to support the thesis that American government was influenced by Native American political concepts."[3]

Grinde and Johansen consider the "interpretive and documentary evidence"[4] of the "intellectual transference of American Indian governmental theories to the American people" to be so "clearly present in the colonial, revolutionary, and early national records of the United States"[5] that "it is no longer a question of whether the Iroquois had an impact on the nature of American government but rather it now becomes a question of degree."[6]

Many Native Americans and educational multiculturalists have warmly received the influence thesis. In 1989, a New York State public school curriculum review panel recommended teaching that Indian traditions "such as the Iroquois system of governance have had an impact on the development of institutions and practices of the State of New York and the United States."[7] During the 1987 Constitutional Bicentennial, the United States Senate passed Senator Daniel Inouye's resolution "to acknowledge the contribution of the Iroquois Confederacy of Nations to the development of the United States Constitution."[8] Despite this official recognition, much of the academic community remains skeptical about the influence thesis in general and Grinde and Johansen's work in particular. Their most outspoken critic, anthropologist Elisabeth Tooker, has challenged Grinde and Johansen's logic and their understanding of Iroquois political culture while labeling the influence thesis "scholarly misapprehension."[9] Reviewers of *Exemplar of Liberty* noted that Grinde and Johansen's "sweeping claims for the extent of native influence go beyond what the evidence will sustain" and that the authors construct a "causal argument out of circumstantial evidence, perhaps even coincidence."[10] Grinde and Johansen have frequently dismissed such rebukes as motivated by professional elitism, cultural chauvinism, or

[3] Grinde and Johansen, *Exemplar of Liberty*, xx, xxii, 177, xxiv, xxiii, xxiv.

[4] Grinde, "Iroquoian Political Concept and the Genesis of American Government: Further Research and Contentions," *Northeast Indian Quarterly*, 6, No. 4 (1989), 10.

[5] Grinde and Johansen, *Exemplar of Liberty*, xxii.

[6] Grinde, "It's Time to Take Away the Veil," in Jose Barreiro, ed., *Indian Roots of American Democracy* (Ithaca, 1988), (special issue of *Northeast Indian Quarterly*, 4, No. 1, 1988), 28–34, quotation on 30. The same sentiment is expressed in Grinde and Johansen, *Exemplar of Liberty*, xxiii.

[7] *A Curriculum of Inclusion: Report of the Commissioner's Task Force on Minorities* (New York, 1989), Appendix 4, 21.

[8] Text of Senate Resolution S. Cong. Res. 76, in David Weintraub, "Iroquois Influence on the Founding of the American Nation," *Court Review*, 29 (Winter 1992), 17–32.

[9] Tooker, "The United States Constitution and the Iroquois League," *Ethnohistory*, 35 (1988), 327.

[10] J. A. Brandao, review of Grinde and Johansen, *Exemplar of Liberty*, in *Canadian Historical Review*, 74 (1993), 436–37; Peter C. Mancall, review of Grinde and Johansen, *Exemplar of Liberty*, in *Journal of American History*, 80 (1993), 248. Other reviews include Yasuhide Kawashima, in *American Historical Review*, 98 (1993), 941; Jacobs, "American Indian Legacy of Freedom and Liberty," 185–93; and Tooker, in *Northeast Anthropology*, 46 (Fall 1993), 103–07.

outright racism.[11] In a 1989 "Critique of Responses" in the *Northeast Indian Quarterly*, Grinde wrote:

> Some scholars are seeking to stop the process of de-Europeanizing American history. Such attempts in the 21st century will be seen as last ditch efforts to maintain an Anglo cultural veneer that sought to dominate new scholarship in a rapidly changing intellectual and social environment. This Eurocentric approach with its "gatekeepers," etc. is playing to the subliminal motivations that are the present in the contemporary political situation.[12]

Grinde and Johansen repeat this opinion in the introduction to *Exemplar of Liberty*. Affirming that "history is discovery through the debate of many voices, not just a few 'expert' opinions," they wish to "let American Indian voices be heard on the issue of Iroquois political theory and its role in the development of American governmental structures" in the hope that "when the dominant society becomes more concerned about reciprocity and less concerned about superiority and domination, we may all be able to join hands and celebrate the diverse roots of the American democratic tradition without the blinders of indifference and cultural arrogance."[13]

Skepticism about the influence thesis stems from something other than "indifference" or "cultural arrogance" or establishmentarian devotion to the intellectual status quo or all of these. Although Grinde and Johansen maintain that "the oral and written traditions of the Iroquois"[14] substantiate the thesis, *Exemplar of Liberty* offers little supporting native testimony. Instead, the authors discover the "Indian roots of American democracy"[15] largely in the words of Anglo-American founders such as Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, Benjamin Franklin, and John Adams. Throughout *Exemplar of Liberty*, these words are misquoted, misattributed, decontextualized, inaccurately paraphrased, liberally edited, and misinterpreted. Grinde and Johansen state that "the credibility of any argument rests on the quality of the evidence that supports it."[16] A review of the evidence cited in important portions of Grinde's and Johansen's arguments reveals that the influence thesis as set forth in *Exemplar of Liberty* simply does not meet their own professed standard for historical credibility.

[11] The debate on the influence thesis can be traced in Barreiro, ed., *Indian Roots of American Democracy*; Grinde, "Iroquoian Political Concept and the Genesis of American Government"; Johansen and Grinde, "Native Voices and the Diffusion of an Idea," *Akwesasne Journal*, 10, No. 2 (1993), 30–39; Johansen and Grinde, "The Debate Regarding Native American Precedents for Democracy: A Recent Historiography," *American Indian Culture and Research Journal*, 14, No. 1 (1990), 61–88; Tooker, "United States Constitution and the Iroquois League"; Johansen, "Native American Societies and the Evolution of Democracy in America, 1600–1800," *Ethnohistory*, 37 (1990), 279–90; Tooker, "Rejoinder to Johansen," ibid., 291–97; and Grinde, "Teaching American Indian History: A Native Voice," *Perspectives*, 32, No. 6 (1994), 1, 11–16.

[12] Grinde, "Iroquoian Political Concept and the Genesis of American Government," 16.

[13] Grinde and Johansen, *Exemplar of Liberty*, xxv, xxiv.

[14] Ibid., xxii.

[15] Barreiro, ed., *Indian Roots of American Democracy*.

[16] Grinde and Johansen, *Exemplar of Liberty*, 241.

The roots of the influence thesis extend at least as far back as the late nineteenth century. In his *Sir William Johnson and the Six Nations,* William E. Griffis stated that the Iroquois were "not without direct influence" on key American statesmen.[17] This belief was repeated in print by William B. Newell, a Caughnawaga Mohawk, and J.N.B. Hewitt, a Smithsonian Institution ethnologist and Tuscarora, in the early twentieth century.[18] For substantiation, Hewitt connected two separate passages that have ever since been at the center of influence thesis thinking.

The first is from Onondaga chief Canasatego's speech at the 1744 Treaty Council at Lancaster, Pennsylvania.[19]

> Our wise Forefathers established Union and Amity between the *Five Nations;* This has made us formidable; this has given us great Weight and Authority with our neighboring Nations.
>
> We are a powerful Confederacy; and, by your observing the same Methods, our wise Forefathers have taken, you will acquire fresh Strength and Power; therefore whatever befals you, never fall out with one another.[20]

The second passage is from Franklin's letter to New York printer and postmaster James Parker. Franklin was an outspoken advocate of a union of British colonies and an active participant in Indian diplomacy. He wrote Parker that

> It would be a very strange Thing, if *Six Nations* of ignorant Savages should be capable of forming a Scheme for such an Union, and be able to execute it in such a Manner, as that it has subsisted Ages, and appears indissoluble; and yet that a like Union should be impracticable for ten or a Dozen *English* Colonies, to whom it is more necessary, and must be more advantageous; and who cannot be supposed to want an equal Understanding of their Interests.[21]

Paul A. W. Wallace subsequently cited Franklin's words and opined that the Iroquois "provided a model for, and an incentive to, the transformation

[17] Griffis, *Sir William Johnson and the Six Nations* (New York, 1891), 53–54, quoted in Tooker, "United States Constitution and the Iroquois League," 323.

[18] A more detailed review of the history of the "Iroquois influence thesis" is in Tooker, "United States Constitution and the Iroquois League," 322–27.

[19] For a review of Grinde's and Johansen's handling of the 1744 Lancaster Treaty Councils and Benjamin Franklin see Nancy Dieter Egloff, "'Six Nations of Ignorant Savages': Benjamin Franklin and the Iroquois League of Nations" (M. A. thesis, College of William and Mary, 1987).

[20] Julian P. Boyd, ed., *Indian Treaties Printed by Benjamin Franklin, 1736–1762* (Philadelphia, 1938), 78. In *Exemplar of Liberty,* 94, Grinde and Johansen change the phrase "you will acquire fresh Strength and Power" to "you will acquire such Strength and power."

[21] Franklin to Parker, Mar. 20, 1750, in *The Writings of Benjamin Franklin,* ed. Albert Henry Smyth, vol. 3 (New York, 1907), 42.

of the thirteen colonies into the United States of America."[22] Similarly, Indian law expert and author of the *Handbook of Federal Indian Law* Felix S. Cohen concluded that "the advice of Canasatego was eagerly taken up by Benjamin Franklin."[23] Wilbur R. Jacobs echoed earlier conclusions and provocatively suggested that "it is known that other framers of the Constitution had knowledge of Indian confederation systems and the ideals of Indian democracy."[24] Grinde's *The Iroquois and the Founding of the American Nation* and Johansen's *Forgotten Founders* devote considerable space to the Canasatego-Franklin connection, and *Exemplar of Liberty* gives it an entire chapter.

That chapter—"The White Roots Reach Out"—argues that the 1754 "Albany Plan of Union was the product" of Franklin's meetings with the Iroquois and that "on the eve of the Albany conference, Franklin was already persuaded that Canassatego's words of the previous decade were good council."[25] *Exemplar of Liberty* offers no citation from Franklin's writings to support this assessment of his motivations. The authors also see important parallels between the Albany Plan (which no colony ratified) and the League of the Iroquois. They note that Franklin's title, "Grand Council," for the plan's deliberative body is "the same title generally applied to the Iroquois central council. Even the proposed number of delegates, forty-eight, was similar to the Iroquois council's size of fifty."[26] But these supposed parallels are inexact (forty-eight is not fifty), and Grinde's and Johansen's contention that the plan's "retention of internal sovereignty within the individual colonies" had "no existing precedent in Europe" is hyperbolic.[27]

The Franklin-Canasatego connection is the central piece of evidence for the influence thesis. The two quoted passages contain similar sentiments, but, as Tooker observes, "considered together these statements confirm what is already well known: at least some whites and some Indians in the eighteenth century realized the advantages of confederation."[28] *Exemplar of Liberty*'s discussion of Franklin and the Iroquois demonstrates how influence

[22] Wallace, *The White Roots of Peace* (Philadelphia, 1946), 3.

[23] Cohen, "Americanizing the White Man," *American Scholar*, 21 (1952), 184. Legal historians who rely on Grinde and Johansen include Robert J. Miller, "American Indian Influence on the United States Constitution and Its Framers," *American Indian Law Review*, 18 (1991), 133–60, and David Weintraub, "Iroquois Influence on the Founding of the American Nation: First Prize Winner, American Judges Foundation Law Student Essay Competition," *Court Review*, 29 (Winter 1992), 17–32.

[24] Jacobs, *Dispossessing the American Indian: Indians and Whites on the Colonial Frontier* (New York, 1972), 168.

[25] Grinde and Johansen, *Exemplar of Liberty*, 94, 104. See also xxiii, 144.

[26] Ibid., 107.

[27] Ibid. Swizerland exhibited this type of federation, and John Adams wrote about it extensively in 1787 in *A Defence of the Constitutions of Government of the United States of America . . .*, in *The Works of John Adams*, ed. Charles Francis Adams, vol. 4 (Boston, 1865) (hereafter cited as Adams, *Defence of the Constitutions*). John Bartram during a 1743 visit to Iroquoia compared the League of the Iroquois to "the thirteen cantons of Switzerland" in *A Journey from Pennsylvania to Onondaga in 1743* (Barre, Mass., 1973).

[28] Tooker, "United States Constitution and the Iroquois League," 310.

theorists make revisionist mountains out of historical molehills. It also reveals Grinde's and Johansen's use of circular logic in which Indian contact serves as both the vehicle of influence and the proof of that influence. Throughout *Exemplar of Liberty,* the authors assume that Franklin's and other founders' interest in any aspect of Indian culture or any personal contact with Indians resulted in their acquiring substantive and accurate knowledge of the workings of Native American governments, particularly the Iroquois Confederacy. They then see this assumed substantive and accurate knowledge applied to the development of American government, either through mention of Indians in a founder's writings (Franklin, Jefferson, and Adams) or through a founder's physical presence at treaty councils, meetings, or conventions (Madison).[29] The unquestionable and well-documented historical importance of Indian relations provides the authors with numerous opportunities to apply this form of logic.

One of *Exemplar of Liberty*'s most farfetched examples is its discussion of John Rutledge. Grinde and Johansen write that Rutledge was "exposed to Iroquois political theory"[30] at the Stamp Act Congress in 1765 and that at the Constitutional Convention he "recalled his experience with the Iroquois"[31] or, alternately, that "Rutledge supposedly read aloud some Iroquois advice regarding the will of 'the people.'"[32] Using only Richard Barry's *Mr. Rutledge of South Carolina* for authority, Grinde and Johansen portray Rutledge as a vehicle for transferring unspecified elements of "Iroquois political theory" over a twenty-year period to the Constitutional Convention.[33]

Grinde's and Johansen's discussion of Jefferson displays the same contact-equals-influence argumentation as applied to Franklin and Rutledge, but here they also rely on a highly suspect reading of the documentary record. Jefferson's interest in Indian languages, histories, and burial mounds forms the basis of their account of the alleged Iroquois influences on the Virginian. They argue that "American Indians and their societies figured into the conception of 'life, liberty, and happiness' as understood by Jefferson" and that Jefferson's "descriptions of American Indian societies played a provocative role in a major debate of the time, which erupted when the phrase 'happiness' was substituted for 'property.'"[34] Grinde and Johansen offer no support

[29] Similarly, Grinde's and Johansen's analysis of the St. Tammany Society and its Revolutionary predecessor, the Sons of Liberty, equates the ceremonial wearing of pseudo-Indian garb with being influenced by Indian governments and values. Their discussion of the society, of which many founders were members, overlooks the fact that it had among its principal goals the acquisition of new lands, westward expansion, and the displacement of the Indians. In fact, the society lionized its Indian patron "saint," Chief Tammany, for his willingness to hand over his tribal lands to William Penn. See John Pitman, "A Long Talk Delivered before the Tammany Society, or Columbian Order, on their Anniversary, 1810" (microfiche), (Louisville, Ky., 1983). See also Tooker, "United States Constitution and the Iroquois League," 322–23.

[30] Grinde and Johansen, *Exemplar of Liberty,* 113.

[31] Ibid., 173.

[32] Ibid., 208.

[33] Barry, *Mr. Rutledge of South Carolina* (Freeport, N. Y., 1942), chap. 3.

[34] Grinde and Johansen, *Exemplar of Liberty,* 158.

for these assertions from Jefferson's writings. They cite only Johansen's largely citation-free *Forgotten Founders,* pages 103–08, which neither clarifies *Exemplar of Liberty*'s claims nor offers primary source evidence.

Grinde and Johansen state that, in his *Notes on the State of Virginia,* "Jefferson rather accurately described the deliberations of native national councils" and that these descriptions were "probably . . . drawn from the Indian nations he knew."[35] They support this assertion with two quotations that they attribute to Jefferson. The quotations are actually from an appendix to the *Notes* written not by Jefferson but by Charles Thomson.[36]

The authors try to demonstrate Jefferson's deep respect for Indians and possible familiarity with the Iroquois by arguing that "believing as he did in the universal morality of humankind, Jefferson had no objection to intermarriage" and that he "occasionally promoted intermarriage with native peoples in order to create a 'continental family.'" In support of this statement they write that "in January 1802, Jefferson told an Indian delegation that '[y]our blood will mix with ours, and will spread, with ours, over this great island.'" Grinde and Johansen speculate that Jefferson's "great island" might refer to the Iroquois creation story.[37] These assertions are based on a misreading of the cited evidence.

The Jefferson quotation comes from a speech he made to "Captain Hendrick, The Delawares, Mohiccons, and Munries" in which he urged these Ohio Valley Indians to abandon their traditions and live more like Anglo-Americans. Jefferson advised them to "give up the deer and buffalo, live in peace, and cultivate the earth." He encouraged them to adopt Euro-American agriculture: "on the lands now given you to begin to give every man a farm; let him enclose it, cultivate it, build a warm house on it, and when he dies, let it belong to his wife and children after him." Jefferson offered American help: "we are always ready to teach you how to make ploughs, hoes, and necessary utensils." Finally, in direct opposition to the influence thesis, he prophesied that

> when once you have property, you will want laws and magistrates to protect your property and persons, and to punish those among you who commit crimes. You will find that our laws are good for this purpose; you will wish to live under them, you will unite yourselves with us, join in our great councils and form one people with us, and we shall all be Americans; you will mix with us by marriage, your blood will run in our veins, and will spread with us over this great island. Instead, then, my children, of the gloomy prospect you have drawn of your total disappearance from the face of the earth, which is true, if you continue to hunt the deer and buffalo and go to war, you see what a brilliant aspect is offered to your future history, if you give up war and hunting. Adopt the

[35] Ibid., 161.

[36] Jefferson, *Writings of Thomas Jefferson,* ed. Paul Leicester Ford, vol. 3 (New York, 1894), note 1, 198–202.

[37] Grinde and Johansen, *Exemplar of Liberty,* 156.

> culture of the earth and raise domestic animals; you see how from a small family you may become a great nation by adopting the course which from the small beginning you describe has made us a great nation.[38]

In attempting to prove their assertions about Jefferson, Grinde and Johansen overlook the quotation's context and create an interpretation that actually reverses the tenor of Jefferson's speech.

Grinde and Johansen similarly distort the historical record in discussing Adams. They contend that Adams was a "student of Native American societies" who possessed "firsthand knowledge of American Indian governments" and "remembered and used the lessons from the Iroquois; while pondering the restructuring of American government during the period from 1786 to 1787, he would write that collecting the legislation 'of the Indians would be well worth the pains' and would aid in the process of creating a new constitution." They claim that Adams wrote reports about Indian governments, "particularly those of the Mohawks and the Iroquois," and that "Adams's insight indicates that the founders knew a great deal more about the Iroquois governance system than has previously been acknowledged."[39] Grinde and Johansen base virtually all of these contentions on quotations from Adams's *Defence of the Constitutions of Government of the United States of America*, a three-volume review and analysis of governmental systems from the ancient Greeks to the modern English that contains six explicit references to American Indians.[40]

Adams was in London when the Constitution was drafted, but *Defence of the Constitutions* conveyed his opinions to the delegates at the Philadelphia convention. Grinde and Johansen believe that it also presented Iroquois political ideas to the framers, making Adams's writings an important link in the chain of Indian influence they propose. Combining *Defence of the Constitutions*'s Indian references with an assertion by Charles Francis Adams (Adams's grandson and editor) that the books were "much circulated" at the convention, Grinde and Johansen conclude that, "given the nature of Adams's *Defence*, there can be no doubt that Native American governmental structures and ideas were part of the process of constitution-making."[41] But in making their case they liberally edit Adams's words and opinions while also taking them out of context.

[38] Jefferson, "To Captain Hendrick, the Delawares, Mohiccons, and Munries," n. d., in *The Complete Jefferson: Containing His Major Writings . . .*, ed. Saul Padover (New York, 1943), 502–04, quotation on 503.

[39] Grinde and Johansen, *Exemplar of Liberty*, 153, 203, 279 n. 39, 286 n. 19, 202.

[40] Grinde and Johansen cite references to Indians in *Defence of the Constitutions*, 189, 276, 279, 287–92, 296, 298–302, 369, 398, 510–11, 566–67. They also interpret each use of the word "Americans" to mean Indians, not Anglo-Americans as the text indicates, as in "Without three orders, and an effectual balance between them, in every American constitution, it must be destined to frequent unavoidable revolutions"; ibid., 287. See also ibid., 298–302.

[41] Grinde and Johansen, *Exemplar of Liberty*, 204; Charles Francis Adams, ed., *Works of John Adams*, 4:276.

They posit three grounds for attributing to Adams a "firsthand knowledge" of Iroquois government. The first is "that Adams received intelligence about the Iroquois during 1776," containing "lessons" that he later codified in *Defence of the Constitutions.*[42] Adams's papers cited in *Exemplar of Liberty* indicate that he received military intelligence from Samuel Chase regarding the Six Nations' possible stance in the war with Britain. But Chase made no mention of Iroquois governmental systems.[43]

Second, Grinde and Johansen cite meetings between Adams and "Iroquois missionary, Reverend Samuel Kirkland," during the summer of 1775. They state that "Kirkland received frequent visits from Iroquois sachems, and he probably made routine reports about their behavior and habits to the curious Adams."[44] They cite *The Journals of Samuel Kirkland* as their authority. The journals' biographical notes by editor Walter Pilkington mention Kirkland's visiting Philadelphia in the summer of 1775 to "consult with John Adams and members of the Continental Congress" about Kirkland's "work towards keeping the Six Nations neutral."[45] But this source offers no support for Grinde and Johansen's supposition that Kirkland "probably" made "routine reports" to Adams.

Third, Grinde and Johansen write that, "just a year before he wrote *Defence,* Adams received a visit from the Mohawk leader Joseph Brant at his residence in Boston" and that "perhaps they talked of the Iroquois system of government."[46] In fact, Adams was in London that winter as the United States minister to England, and no such meeting took place. Grinde and Johansen base their assertion on a misquotation of a letter from Adams. They argue that "association with native leaders was a rather routine matter in the late eighteenth century. On 23 December 1785, for example, Adams wrote to Rufus King that 'Joseph Brant was yesterday in the Drawing Room.'"[47] Adams actually wrote that "Joseph Brant was yesterday at the Drawing Room,"[48] referring to the Royal Drawing Room. Brant also was in London that winter and frequently met with King George III to discuss particulars of their anti-United States military alliance.[49] Adams's letter to Rufus King refers to one of these diplomatically significant meetings—quite a different scenario from a Brant-Adams political consultation that Grinde and Johansen adduce.

These errors leave no credible basis for Grinde's and Johansen's claim that "Adams remembered and used the lessons from the Iroquois" when writing *Defence of the Constitutions* in 1786–1787. Nevertheless, the authors make

[42] Grinde and Johansen, *Exemplar of Liberty,* 279 n. 39.

[43] Chase to Adams, Apr. 18, 1776, in *Papers of John Adams,* ed. Robert Taylor, vol. 4 (Cambridge, Mass., 1979), 129–30.

[44] Grinde and Johansen, *Exemplar of Liberty,* 279 n. 39.

[45] *The Journals of Samuel Kirkland, 18th-Century Missionary to the Iroquois . . . ,* ed. Pilkington (Clinton, N. Y., 1980), 120.

[46] Grinde and Johansen, *Exemplar of Liberty,* 295 n. 46.

[47] Ibid., 280 n. 49.

[48] Adams to King, Dec. 23, 1785, in *The Life and Correspondence of Rufus King . . . ,* ed. Charles King, vol. 1 (New York, 1894), 118.

[49] Isabel Thompson Kelsay, *Joseph Brant, 1743–1807: Man of Two Worlds* (Syracuse, 1984), 385.

much of the book's few references to Indians. They argue that Adams believed "the League of the Iroquois was the best example of the governmental separation of powers available to Americans for direct observation."[50] To support this assertion, *Exemplar of Liberty* presents an edited passage from *Defence of the Constitutions*'s preface:

> If Cicero and Tacitus could revisit the earth, and learn that the English nation had reduced the great idea to practice . . . and that the Americans, after having enjoyed the benefits of such a constitution a century and a half, were advised by some of the greatest philosophers and politicians to renounce it, and set up governments of the ancient Goths and modern Indians—what would they say? That the Americans would be more reprehensible than the Cappadocians, if they should listen to such advice.[51]

Compare this version with the passage as Adams wrote it:

> If Cicero and Tacitus could revisit the earth, and learn that the English nation had reduced the great idea to practice, and brought it nearly to perfection, by giving each division a power to defend itself by a negative; had found it the most solid and durable government, as well as the most free; had obtained by means of it a prosperity among civilized nations, in an enlightened age, like that of the Romans among barbarians; and that the Americans, after having enjoyed the benefits of such a constitution a century and a half, were advised by some of the greatest philosophers and politicians of the age to renounce it, and set up governments of the ancient Goths and modern Indians,—what would they say? That the Americans would be more reprehensible than the Cappadocians, if they should listen to such advice.[52]

The "great idea" to which Adams refers is "a republic, in which there is a governor, a senate, and a house of representatives."[53] Grinde and Johansen claim that Adams's *Defence of the Constitutions* lauds Iroquois government, but this assertion relies on their omission of Adams's assessment that England possessed "the most solid and durable government, as well as the most free;" which gave "each division a power to defend itself by a negative." Grinde and Johansen replace these words with an ellipsis. Furthermore, Adams never used the word "Iroquois" in the book. He referred only to "Indians," "modern Indians," "savages," "savages of North or South America," and "Mohawks."[54] Once again, their cited primary material offers no support for their conclusions.

[50] Grinde and Johansen, *Exemplar of Liberty*, 279 n. 39, 202.
[51] Ibid., 241–42.
[52] Adams, *Defence of the Constitutions*, 296.
[53] Ibid., 294.
[54] Ibid., 296, 298, 292, 398, 511, 566.

Grinde and Johansen further claim that Adams "discoursed on the need to study Indian governments—citing examples such as their separation of powers, the personal independence of the Mohawks, the sachemship of the Iroquois Confederacy, and the 'fifty [governing] families.'"[55] They base the first part of this assertion on Adams's statement that

> it would have been much to the purpose, to have inserted a more accurate investigation of the form of government of the ancient Germans and modern Indians; in both, the existence of the three divisions of power is marked with a precision that excludes all controversy. The democratical branch, especially, is so determined, that the real sovereignty resided in the body of the people, and was exercised in the assembly of kings, nobles, and commons together.[56]

Adams indeed noted that further study of the "government of the ancient Germans and modern Indians" would aid his study. But he also believed that, although these governments possessed "three divisions of power" that were "marked with a precision that excludes all controversy," in fact "these institutions really collected all authority into one centre of kings, nobles, and people" and that "the consequence was confusion."[57] He went on to write, referring more to ancient Germans than to modern Indians, that

> each part believed it governed the whole; the chiefs thought they were sovereigns; the nobles believed the power to be in their hands; and the people flattered themselves that all depended upon them. Their purposes were well enough answered, without coming to an explanation, so long as they were few in number, and had no property; but when spread over large provinces of the Roman empire, now the great kingdoms of Europe, and grown populous and rich, they found the inconvenience of each not knowing its place.[58]

Adams thus used Indians and Germans as negative examples.

Although Grinde and Johansen are correct in stating that Adams referred to Indians to help him "clarify his positions in the debates surrounding the emerging republicanism of the eighteenth century,"[59] they fail to note that Adams devoted hundreds of pages to detailed governmental, philosophical, and historical accounts of Greece, Rome, the medieval Italian city states, England, and many other ancient and contemporary European polities. The distribution of his pages strongly suggests that he believed Anglo-Americans could learn more, for better or worse, from Athens, Sparta, Mycenae, Argos, Thebes, Corinth, Rome, Siena, Genoa, Milan, Florence, Padua, San Marino,

[55] Grinde and Johansen, *Exemplar of Liberty,* 175–77 (brackets in original).
[56] Adams, *Defence of the Constitutions,* 296.
[57] Ibid., 296–97.
[58] Ibid., 297.
[59] Grinde and Johansen, *Exemplar of Liberty,* 203.

Biscay, Appenzel, Underwald, Glarus, Bern, Lucerne, Zurich, Geneva, Poland, and Neuchatel than from the Indians.

Grinde and Johansen use *Defence of the Constitutions* to substantiate their assertion that Adams was familiar with many specific aspects of Iroquois governance and the symbols relating to them. They argue that his "knowledge of Iroquois and other American Indian confederacies extended to their sachemship system," that he "understood the voluntary nature of Iroquois warfare," and that "the historical record shows that Adams knew some very basic things about American Indian governments, specifically the Iroquois."[60] They base these claims on the longest passage about Indian governments in *Defence of the Constitutions*—a paragraph sandwiched between discussions of the ancient Germans and of Phaeacia, as represented in the *Odyssey*. Adams wrote:

> Before we proceed to the Greeks, we may even mention the savages. Every nation in North America has a king, a senate, and a people. The royal office is elective, but it is for life; his sachems are his ordinary council, where all the national affairs are deliberated and resolved in the first instance; but in the greatest of all, which is declaring war, the king and sachems call a national assembly round a great council fire, communicate to the people their resolution, and sacrifice an animal. Those of the people who approve the war, partake of the sacrifice; throw the hatchet into a tree, after the example of the king; and join in the subsequent war songs and dances. Those who disapprove, take no part of the sacrifice, but retire.[61]

Grinde and Johansen state that Adams "wrote that a sachem was elected for life and had an 'ordinary council' composed of lesser sachems."[62] In fact, Adams wrote that a "king" was elected for life and that the sachems were his "ordinary council." Grinde and Johansen use this misquotation to argue that Adams was familiar with the Iroquois sachemship system long before it was recorded by the pioneering ethnographer Lewis Henry Morgan in the 1840s.[63] They interpret Adams's mention of animal sacrifice as "no doubt a reference to the 'white dog ceremony' of the Iroquois also described by Morgan more than six decades after Adams."[64] But Adams's reference to the sacrifice is too unspecific to justify such certainty.

Grinde and Johansen state that Adams "knew about the 'fifty families' of the Iroquois long before Lewis Henry Morgan,"[65] that, "while discussing the Mohawks, Adams referred to 'fifty families governed by all authority in one centre,'" and that he believed that "personal liberty was so important to them

[60] Ibid., 202, 203, 306.

[61] Adams, *Defence of the Constitutions*, 566–67.

[62] Grinde and Johansen, *Exemplar of Liberty*, 202.

[63] Ibid., 202–03; Lewis H. Morgan, *League of the Ho-Dé-No-Sau-Nee, or Iroquois*, (Rochester, 1851), 59.

[64] Grinde and Johansen, *Exemplar of Liberty*, 203.

[65] Ibid., 306.

[American Indians] that Mohawks might be characterized as having 'complete individual independence.'"[66] Grinde and Johansen base these statements on a passage from Adams's chapter on Argos, here followed by Adams's words.

Exemplar of Liberty

> Is it not sublime wisdom [according to the Iroquois system], to rush headlong into all the distractions and divisions . . . which are the certain consequence of the want of order and balances, merely for the sake of the popular caprice of having fifty families governed by all authority in one centre? Even this would not satisfy; the fifty families would soon dissolve their union, and nothing would ever content them short of the complete individual independence of the Mohawks; for it may be depended on, that individual independence is what every unthinking human heart aims at, nearly or remotely.[67]

Defence of the Constitutions

> Argos alone, of all the cities in the Peloponnesus, openly espoused the cause of Athens. This single circumstance, if it was not accidental, is enough to show that this city had more sense and profound wisdom than all the rest; for Sparta was certainly then leading all Greece to destruction. In other respects the Argives discovered the same temper and the same understanding with all the others; for they led their whole forces against Mycenae, took it by storm, decimated the inhabitants, and demolished the town. Is it not sublime wisdom, to rush headlong into all the distractions and divisions, all the assassinations and massacres, all the seditions, rebellions, and eternal revolutions, which are the certain consequence of the want of orders and balances, merely for the sake of the popular caprice of having every fifty families governed by all authority in one centre? Even this would not satisfy; the fifty families would dissolve their union, and nothing would ever content them short of the complete individual independence of the Mohawks; for it may be depended on, that individual independence is what every unthinking human heart aims at, nearly or remotely.[68]

At the start of this chapter Adams warns that a "disposition to fly to pieces, as possessed the minds of the Greeks, would divide America into thousands of petty, despicable states, and lay a certain foundation for irreconcilable wars."[69] The context of the passage reveals that Adams viewed the "complete individual independence of the Mohawks" as little more than anarchy. The context also strongly suggests that the phrase "fifty families" refers to ancient Greece's balkanizing oligarchical city states and not to the Iroquois.

[66] Ibid., 202.
[67] Ibid., 203 (brackets and ellipsis in original).
[68] Adams, *Defence of the Constitutions*, 511.
[69] Ibid., 509.

Grinde's and Johansen's assertion that "Adams's 'discovery' of the fifty families" predates Morgan's research is rendered largely meaningless by the fact that Morgan's research identified "fifty permanent Sachemships," not "fifty families."[70] This is more than a small point of ethnographic language. Grinde's and Johansen's vital claim that "Adams's insight indicates that the founders knew a great deal more about the Iroquois governance system than has previously been acknowledged"[71] rests on their ignoring the Greek context of Adams's passage (and the "ancient German context" of other passages) and then equating these "fifty families" with Morgan's "fifty permanent Sachemships."

In his *League of the Ho-Dé-No-Sau-Nee, or Iroquois,* Morgan wrote that "at the institution of the League, fifty permanent Sachemships were created, with appropriate names; and in the Sachems who held these titles were vested the supreme powers of the Confederacy."[72] These sachemships were divided unevenly among the nations; the Mohawks, for example, received nine while the Onondagas received fourteen. The titles were hereditary and belonged to particular clans, which Morgan called "the several tribes of which each nation was composed."[73] Morgan described each sachemship as hereditary and owned by a tribe (clan), but it is inaccurate for Grinde and Johansen to identify these sachemships as families. Furthermore, they categorize the Iroquois confederacy as being governed by "fifty families" when discussing Adams but earlier in *Exemplar of Liberty* call the same system a "central council" of fifty "delegates" when they seek parallels with Franklin's forty-eight delegates in the Albany Plan of Union.[74] These problems negate Grinde's and Johansen's conclusions about Adams's detailed knowledge of the Iroquois, while Adams's own words undermine the influence thesis itself.

Grinde and Johansen contend that Iroquois government also influenced Madison. Madison's central role in the drafting of the Constitution makes him vital to the influence thesis, but Grinde's and Johansen's discussion of Madison relies on the same systematic misuse of evidence and questionable logic that hobble their accounts of Adams and Jefferson.

They contend that "Madison was exposed to the governmental structure and ideas of freedom of the Iroquois people" and that this exposure "doubtless had an influence upon Madison in his search for a workable government for America during the next few years." They also state that "certainly, Madison would find a model for territorial expansion that was capable of incorporating diverse elements when he encountered the union and society of the Iroquois."[75] Their principal authority is Irving Brant's six-volume biography of James Madison, which they supplement with a letter of Madison's discussing the 1784 Fort Stanwix treaty and with the travel reminiscences of François, marquis de Barbé-Marbois.[76] They make no attempt to support their conclusions by quoting Madison.

[70] Grinde and Johansen, *Exemplar of Liberty,* 306; Morgan, *League of the Ho-Dé-NoSau-Nee,* 62.
[71] Grinde and Johansen, *Exemplar of Liberty,* 202.
[72] Morgan, *League of the Ho-Dé-NoSau-Nee,* 62.
[73] Ibid., 65.
[74] Grinde and Johansen, *Exemplar of Liberty,* 107.
[75] Ibid., 183, 182.
[76] Brant, *James Madison,* vol. 2 (Indianapolis, 1948); Madison to Jefferson, Oct. 11, 1784, in

In the spring of 1784, Madison traveled to Fort Stanwix near present-day Rome, New York, to attend treaty negotiations between delegates of the United States and the then-disunited League of the Iroquois. While there, Madison and his traveling companions, the marquis de Lafayette, his aide, the chevalier de Caraman, and the French chargé d'affaires, Barbé-Marbois, visited the Oneida village of Chief Grasshopper.[77] This visit serves as the basis for Grinde's and Johansen's claims about this important Constitutional architect.

Grinde and Johansen argue that Madison "tired of Virginia politics and decided to travel to Iroquois country in 1784 to renew his friendship with the Oneida chief, Grasshopper," because "perhaps he was curious about American Indian governments."[78] Their speculation about Madison's motives is not supported by Brant, who states that Madison was taking a relaxing tour of the eastern states. He had gone to Philadelphia and then to Baltimore, where he met Lafayette, who urged Madison to accompany him to Fort Stanwix. Madison agreed to travel as far as New York City and only there decided to continue on to Iroquoia.[79]

The portion of Brant's text cited by Grinde and Johansen makes no mention of "the governmental structure and ideas of freedom of the Iroquois people."[80] Instead, Brant unflatteringly describes Madison's visit as a night-long revelry. "Madison and the Frenchmen took with them five 'breasts of milk' (small kegs of brandy) each carried by an Indian," and Grasshopper "received his guests in a Bavarian court hunting costume" given him by the chevalier de la Luzerne. Upon the travelers' arrival, "young warriors began a masked dance, interrupted only by side trips to the brandy kegs." The exhausted visitors found the dance "an appalling prospect" and appealed to Grasshopper to curtail the revelries. But Grasshopper informed them that "he had no right" to stop the dancers. The night concluded with "the white men's servants going off with temporary wives who gave up on the masters when the likeliest of them, the youthful Caraman, refused to be seduced." The following morning, "the strayed horses were brought down from the hills," the "servants said farewell to squaws," and the party headed back to Fort Stanwix.[81] Brant in no way suggests that Madison's visit with the Oneidas was anything more than a diplomatically expedient diversion.

According to Grinde and Johansen, Madison and the Frenchmen conversed with two Europeans living with the Oneidas. One was a Frenchman named Nicolas Jordan; the other was an unidentified "Euro-American woman." They assert that the two adoptees' "revelation[s]" about the

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The Papers of Thomas Jefferson, vol. 7, ed. Julian P. Boyd et al. (Princeton, 1953), 439–41; Eugene Parker Chase, ed., *Our Revolutionary Forefathers: The Letters of François, Marquis de Barbé-Marbois . . . 1779–1785* (New York, 1929), 193–212.

[77] Brant, *Madison*, 235–36.

[78] Grinde and Johansen, *Exemplar of Liberty*, 182.

[79] Brant, *Madison*, 328–29.

[80] Grinde and Johansen, *Exemplar of Liberty*, 183.

[81] Brant, *Madison*, 331–33.

"virtues of American Indian life must had [sic] surprised Madison and his companions."[82] Grinde and Johansen print the woman's speech, in which she declared "Here I have no master" and asked the travelers, "Is there a single woman as independent as I in your cities?"[83] The text of the speech comes not from Brant, as *Exemplar of Liberty*'s notes indicate, but from Barbé-Marbois's letters, which date his meeting with this "rather fine looking squaw"[84] several days after returning from Grasshopper's village and do not indicate whether Madison was with him when the meeting occurred. Madison's papers contain no reference to any such meeting, and Brant's text alludes to the time gap between the village visit and the woman's testimony. But Grinde and Johansen conflate these separate events to strengthen their unsubstantiated conclusion that "these accounts doubtless had an influence upon Madison in his search for a workable government for America."[85]

The authors also pointedly argue that "three Virginians and future presidents—Madison, Jefferson, and Monroe—planned trips to Iroquois country after the American Revolution. Madison and Monroe were able to go, but Jefferson was called to France as ambassador and had to content himself with reports from his friends."[86] Grinde and Johansen ignore the salient point that Madison and Monroe were partners in an Iroquoia land speculation venture and that in 1786 the two purchased 900 acres located nine miles from Fort Stanwix. Brant discusses these business dealings in detail, yet no hint of them appears in *Exemplar of Liberty*.[87]

Grinde's and Johansen's discussion of Madison and the Iroquois hangs on their flawed reading of Brant's biography and a dubious reinterpretation of Madison's land speculation. The record they cite provides no evidence that Madison was "exposed" to Iroquois institutions and ideas and no ground for the view that his visit to Iroquoia affected his political thinking or furnished a model for an expanded union. Instead, they employ the same contact-or-interest-equals-influence argumentation that they apply to Franklin, Rutledge, Jefferson, and Adams.

Exemplar of Liberty makes impressive revisionist claims for the Indian origins of American government, but these claims do not withstand close examination. Grinde and Johansen call their book a "mosaic of fact and opinion"[88] and state that they seek to "discover the developing pattern [in primary documentation] and build a mosaic that perceptually reinforces itself."[89] In fact, what they have created is a crazy quilt of inaccurate assessments, free-floating speculations, incorrect or disembodied quotations, and

[82] Grinde and Johansen, *Exemplar of Liberty*, 182.
[83] Ibid., 183.
[84] Parker, ed., *Our Revolutionary Forefathers*, 211.
[85] Grinde and Johansen, *Exemplar of Liberty*, 183.
[86] Ibid., 182.
[87] Brant, *Madison*, 2:340.
[88] Grinde and Johansen, *Exemplar of Liberty*, xix.
[89] Ibid., 260 n. 30.

thesis-driven conclusions. Such methods damage their case and cause far more harm than academic elitism or cultural chauvinism ever could; Grinde and Johansen are their own worst enemies.