

Traditional American Indian Leadership: A Comparison with U.S. Governance

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Traditional American Indian Leadership - Intro

This report is an examination of two systems of decision-making - traditional American Indian leadership and U.S. governance. Long before contact with Europeans, American Indian people had complex and dynamic methods of developing and asserting leadership in tribal matters. Because of the diversity of American Indian tribal cultures and traditions, there was no single system of traditional American Indian leadership. American Indian tribal cultures in general, however, shared common distinctions from European-American traditions. We describe American Indian leadership and U.S. governance as two dichotomous systems while recognizing that they are multi-faceted and complex. This is an intentionally simplified conceptualization meant to outline the differences between American Indian and European-American forms of leadership and governance.

We have purposefully chosen to use the words "leadership" and "governance" to illustrate the difference between American Indian and European-American traditions. This is a deliberate attempt to deconstruct the language dominating the common understanding of these relationships. The concept of government is rooted in European political philosophy and tradition, and it denotes a bureaucratic organizational system of legitimate public power. Governance is

commonly defined as the exercise of authority, control or power. Given this definition, American Indians did not traditionally "govern" themselves and it is inaccurate to try to fit American Indian leadership paradigms into this conceptual framework.

In delineating the major differences between these two decision-making systems, we describe traditional American Indian leadership in the past tense to introduce its historical basis. The crux of this report, however, is that traditional American Indian values and culture have been handed down through the generations and continue to influence American Indian leadership today. Knowledge about traditional American Indian leadership is therefore essential to understanding the contemporary situation of American Indians.

Accurate information about traditional American Indian leadership is necessary to counteract cultural misunderstandings and to illuminate the differences between American Indian and European-American traditions. Knowledge about the features of traditional American Indian leadership may help those working on behalf of American Indians to begin to develop more culturally-appropriate policies and programs for American Indians. It may also benefit the many American Indian tribes working to incorporate traditional leadership into their contemporary tribal governments. As an Ojibwe storyteller states, "Before you begin your council, bear in mind the history of the people, so that you may find inspiration and strength in knowing who and what we are" (Johnston, 1982, p. 163).

Accurate knowledge about American Indian leadership remains largely unknown to the majority of people in the U.S. because mainstream U.S. educational institutions have not satisfactorily explored it. Central aspects of traditional American Indian leadership have been overlooked and incorrect assumptions are disseminated in overt and subtle ways.

For many people in the U.S., the Iroquois Confederacy is the most familiar system of traditional American Indian leadership. This is partially because most academic information focuses on those aspects of the Iroquois Confederacy that correspond with the European-American understanding of "government." Some historical accounts suggest that Europeans used the Iroquois Confederacy as a model for designing the U.S. government's tricameral structure and separation of powers. Because of this, many people assume that the Iroquois Confederacy was a government similar to the U.S. system. In fact, not all of the Iroquois Confederacy was adopted into U.S. government. Missing from most historical accounts is a discussion of the traditions of the Iroquois Confederacy, and of American Indian leadership, that are distinct from U.S. governance.

Legitimate academic information on traditional American Indian leadership is scarce. Our literature review reveals a dearth of writings on this subject from an American Indian perspective. Most of the written information on traditional American Indian leadership is found in ethnographic documents written by non-Indian anthropologists. Unfortunately, ethnographers wrote from a European-American perspective and often lacked an understanding of American Indian traditions. As a result, ethnographers retro-fitted traditional Indian leadership practices into European-American conceptual frameworks. Hence, traditional American Indian leadership has been ill-defined and often misinterpreted in comparison to European-based governance.

In compiling this report, we gathered personal knowledge from American Indians. Talking with people about their experiences with traditional American Indian leadership practices is as important as written documentation. We also used written material from an American Indian perspective, primarily a book of stories called *Ojibway Ceremonies*, by Basil Johnston (1982), an

Ojibwe born on the Parry Island Indian Reserve in Canada. Since we utilized this book, several examples of American Indian traditions from Ojibwe culture are cited. Another notable resource used was *Neither Wolf Nor Dog* (Nerburn, 1994), which records the thoughts of an American Indian elder who chose to be identified as "Dan". Dan is from the upper Midwest, but does not identify a specific tribal affiliation. While these were good resources, it is important to note that as with all research being developed about American Indians, we have incorporated information by reviewing and reading between the lines of various written materials about American Indian culture and traditions. This report is an effort to deliberately talk about leadership from an American Indian perspective, and that effort requires us to continuously develop methods with caution, tolerance, respect and creativity.

We stress that given the limitation of available written resources and the breadth of the topic, this report is a pilot effort to summarize the distinctions between traditional American Indian leadership and the U.S. system of governance. It draws primarily from traditions of the Ojibwe and Lakota tribes of the upper Midwest and is not intended to be representative of all American Indian nations. Many aspects of what is written here, however, are inter-tribal in nature.

Traditional American Indian Leadership

Traditional American Indian leadership displayed several distinct characteristics that developed out of a longstanding history of cultural traditions and values. American Indians lived holistically. They understood themselves to be interconnected with all physical and spiritual forms of life, and they did not compartmentalize their physical, emotional, intellectual and spiritual lives. Spirituality was a fundamental cornerstone of American Indian culture, and leadership was one of the ways the culture was sustained and nurtured.

Because spirituality was a core element of American Indian life, all leadership possessed spiritual significance. Strong leaders were those who had a strong spiritual core. Some leaders were elders who, because of their age, possessed knowledge and had earned the respect of the people. Elders had a close relationship with spirituality. Ojibwe elders, for example, had a special kinship with manitous, or spirits, that validated their status as elders and leaders (Johnston, 1982).

Full elder status was earned by those who displayed care for future generations and honored responsibilities of cultural traditions and tribal relations. Elders demonstrated generosity and kindness, and honored all living things including people, plants, animals and the earth. They were deeply respected and valued for the wisdom and experience they accumulated over time. Elders were the source of information for younger generations, and passed on knowledge through oral traditions. American Indians depended on this transfer of knowledge for their cultural survival.

The oral transfer of cultural traditions, spirituality and experience served to protect the existence of the tribe. Oral tradition also provided education and entertainment. Elders shared their knowledge with those who demonstrated respect for the cultural and spiritual traditions. In this way elders cultivated the leadership of future tribal generations. Ojibwe elders, for example, had nightly winter lessons for those considered gifted and caring of the cultural and spiritual heritage. Johnston (1995) tells how Ojibwe "young men and women who were chosen to receive special tutelage would be the learned elders when their time came, accredited to interpret and to adjudicate" (Introductory Pages). Winter lessons were special sessions where tribal customs and traditions were passed on through sacred teachings.

American Indian leaders were humble servants to the community. Individual American Indians did not seek leadership or promote themselves for it. Rather, persons with strong traditional values and persons who contributed to the community emerged as leaders. The community recognized and sought leadership from persons perceived as having the knowledge, wisdom, skills and experience to act as a leader for the tribe.

No one person in an American Indian tribe was always a leader, and many were leaders at different times. Leadership was distributed among capable and respected persons. The people chose an individual to lead a particular project which, when concluded, ended his or her leadership. The Ojibwe word for this person was *ogimauh*, which meant the foremost person for the one project (Johnston, 1995). Dan explains the process of choosing this person:

In the past when we needed a warrior we made a warrior our leader. But when the war was over and we needed a healer to lead us, he became our leader. Or maybe we needed a great speaker or a deep thinker. The warrior knew his time had passed and he didn't pretend to be our leader beyond the time he was needed. He was proud to serve his people and he knew when it was time to step aside. (Nerburn, 1994, p. 175).

Just as the community recognized leaders it could also cease to recognize leaders. If tribal members did not like or trust the actions of a leader, or if they felt that the leader had violated their trust or acted inappropriately, they simply did not follow him or her. As Dan states:

When our leaders don't lead, we walk away from them. When they lead well, we stay with them....A leader is a leader as long as the people believe in him and as long as he is the best person to lead us. You can only lead as long as people will follow (Nerburn, 1994, p. 175).

American Indian leaders never ordered people to do anything because they strictly adhered to the principle that people have a right to self-determination. American Indians believe that people have a right to their own beliefs, and as a sign of respect do not attempt to impose their beliefs on others. According to Good Tracks (1976), in American Indian societies "no interference or meddling of any kind is allowed or tolerated, even when it is to keep the other person from doing something foolish or dangerous" (p. 497). American Indians led by example rather than by authority or holding power over others. Only those leaders who had a special bond with the spirits could invoke an imperative command. In this way, American Indian leadership was neither coercive nor hierarchical.

In American Indian culture, all people were treated with respect regardless of their position within the tribe. Certain persons were recognized as having special gifts, but those gifts did not make them "better than" another person. Ironically, Europeans viewed this as a flaw in the system of American Indian life. A French fur-trader who lived with the Ojibwe and Ottawa during the 17th century was shocked to find that "the chiefs who are most influential...are on an equal footing with the poorest, and even with the boys" (Smith, 1979, p. 311).

American Indian respect for all people regardless of their tribal status is derived from their belief in the circle of life and the interconnectedness it represents. Like the circle of life, natural growth and change, the pace of American Indian life was slow, patient, deliberate and unhurried (Johnston, 1982). American Indian culture distrusted haste and urgency. American Indian leaders, therefore, were patient, and took their time when making a decision. The Ojibwe, for example, often took days, weeks, or even months to contemplate a matter before giving an answer. They always considered it better to take time when making a decision (Johnston, 1982).

Johnston (1982) explains the moral reasons behind this deliberate decision making. He states, "there were many practical reasons for 'taking time', but dominating them all was a reverence for 'the word'. To be asked to make a decision was to be asked to give 'word', an awesome request" (p. 80). The 'word' was viewed as a final answer or decision. It was an irrevocable pledge, binding upon those who pronounced and agreed to it. It was for this reason that American Indians believed that keeping one's word was a measure of integrity. When making a decision, American Indian leaders carefully considered the welfare of the tribe and future generations and did not make decisions lightly.

When tribal leaders met to make a decision, they would deliberate by pondering the question from many different perspectives. Different points of view were welcomed and respected. Leaders did not argue for their points of view, and there was no debate. They sought understanding and consensus through mutual inquiry. They stated their words as new interpretations on the matter and prefaced their remarks with statements such as 'I have yet another understanding' and 'our brother or sister has provided us with an idea' (Johnston, 1982). Ideas were put forth in this manner until a resolution presented itself to everyone involved. Dan explains: ...no real Indian leader would try to speak for everybody before hearing from everybody. He might get the elders together, or the council of chiefs. It depended on the tribe. Then they listened to everyone. Everyone could speak. If someone didn't like the decision that was made, they could leave. If the chief made a decision enough people disagreed with, they could make another chief (Nerburn, 1994, p. 178). In this way, decisions were the consensus of the tribe and not individual decisions made by any one leader. The process of consensus was central to the way in which decision-making was made and it assured that leadership was authentic to the community. Only decisions reached by consensus were honored and followed by members of the tribe.

An important part of American Indian culture was the significance of spiritual ceremonies which helped to provide guidance and knowledge in decision-making. Once a decision had been made and agreed upon by the participating parties, there was often a spiritual ceremony to make the decision official. For example, when Ojibwe leaders gave their promise, they lit the sacred pipe. Smoking of the pipe sealed a pact and acknowledged their pledge was not given lightly, but was binding. As Johnston (1982) explains:

The ritual smoking of the pipe was an essential part of every conference, performed before deliberations began in order to induce temperance in speech and wisdom in decision (p. 160).

As with leadership, American Indian tribes also had their own ways of resolving social conflict. American Indian methods of resolving social conflict were based on the concept of restitution instead of retribution. Tribal restitution reconciled the people involved in a conflict and restored respectful relationships. The Supreme Court case, *Ex parte Crow Dog* (1883), which involved the murder of one American Indian by another, concerned one of the most widely known examples of this process. The interaction between traditional American Indian reconciliation and the U.S. system of retribution exemplified in the case of *Ex parte Crow Dog* will be discussed in more detail later in this report.

This is a summary description of some of the main characteristics of traditional American Indian leadership. It is not meant to comprehensively describe the leadership of all American Indian nations, although many aspects are inter-tribal in nature. We also emphasize that while we describe traditional American Indian leadership in the past tense, traditional American Indian leadership practices continue to influence American Indian people today.

The following highlights of some of the main features of traditional American Indian leadership:

- Spirituality was a core element of American Indian life and all leadership possessed spiritual significance.
- Leaders demonstrated generosity and kindness, and honored all living things.
- Elders cultivated the leadership of future generations.
- American Indian leaders were humble servants to the community. Individuals did not seek leadership. Leaders emerged from their contributions to the community and the people recognized and selected those considered most able to lead.
- No one person was always a leader and many were leaders at different times.
- The community could cease to recognize leaders by simply choosing to not follow him or her.
- American Indian leaders led by example rather than by authority or command.
- American Indian leaders took their time when making a decision. When they gave their word on a decision it was a final, binding pledge.
- When tribal leaders met to deliberate on a matter they sought understanding and consensus through mutual inquiry. There was no debate.
- American Indian methods of resolving social conflict were based on the concept of restitution that focused on restoring respectful personal and social relations.

A Comparison with U.S. Governance

Several differences emerge when traditional American Indian leadership is compared to the U.S. model of governance. Again, we emphasize that this is an deliberately simplified depiction of both American Indian leadership and of U.S. governance. With U.S. governance, we purposefully neither discuss the complex levels of government nor engage in a discussion of conflicting political philosophies. Our intent is to overview some of the major differences between U.S. governance and traditional American Indian leadership. The following is a brief comparison of these dichotomous systems.

As discussed, culture and tradition were fundamental to American Indian leadership. American Indian elders were sought for their experience and wisdom, and leaders were followed because they demonstrated generosity, kindness and concern. Those who showed responsibility for the welfare the tribe and emerged as leaders through their contributions to the community.

In contrast, the power and legitimacy for making decisions in the U.S. system is established through the institutions of government. Lowi and Ginsburg (1996) state that "government is . . . the formal institution through which a land and its people are ruled. To govern is to rule" (p. 9). Governance, therefore, has distinct characteristics and goals that are significantly different from those of traditional American Indian leadership.

One fundamental difference is that U.S. decision-making is grounded in a formal bureaucratic organizational authority. An element of a bureaucracy, according to sociologist Max Weber (1946), is that "the regular activities required for the purposes of the bureaucratically governed structure are distributed in a fixed way as official duties" (p. 196). In the U.S. system, authority is located in positions that exist independent of the leaders who fill them. The power and authority

to make decisions are official duties legitimized by the organizational position and exists independently of the person selected to operate in that position.

The U.S. governance system derives its authority to create and enforce laws from the consent of the people to be governed. In the European-American tradition, this power and consent of the people is based on the "social contract" in which the governed give up individual liberties for security and order. This form of consent is partially rooted in the political philosophy of John Locke (1632-1704) who asserted that, "the only way whereby any one divests himself of his natural liberty and puts on the bonds of civil society is by agreeing with other men to join and unite into a community...[and] they are thereby presently incorporated to make one body politic" (pp. 98-99). With implied consent, granted through the voting process, the U.S. government has power over people through enforcement of laws and regulation. Casting a vote allows a voter to select a leader for a fixed term of service. Voters have little control over a leader's decisions or actions once the leader is elected.

American Indian leaders, in comparison, had no power over their people. An illustration is the 1695 response of Chief Chingouabé to the request from Comte de Frontenac that the Ojibwe align themselves with the French. Chief Chingouabé replied, "When you command, all the French obey and go to war. But I shall not be heeded and obeyed by my nation in like manner. Therefore I cannot answer, except for myself, and those immediately allied or related to me" (O'Callaghan, 1855, p. 612 as cited in Smith, 1979, p. 311).

American Indian people were free to cease following a leader at any time. American Indian leaders' responsibilities were to the welfare of the tribe and future generations, and they led only as long as their leadership was needed or wanted. Johnston (1995) states:

In the Anishinaubae [sic] nation there was no central authority or government, divinely appointed or humanly seized, to issue and enforce laws, dispense favors to friends, impose fines on enemies, declare war against other nations, or demand homage and tributes from its subjects (Introductory Pages).

Most American Indian societies had holistic systems of leadership in which community members shared in the leadership of different tasks.

In the U.S. government, on the other hand, the bureaucracy is methodically arranged to provide for the continuous and regular fulfillment of official duties (Weber, 1946). Individuals are elected, appointed or hired to positions within this system of power. Citizenship, age, formal education and credentials are required and act as measures of skills or competencies for these positions. Elected officials enter positions contingent on their ability to convince the electorate to vote for them and they fill their position for specified terms or for the duration of their employment.

In addition to differences in the selection of leaders, traditional American Indian leadership and U.S. governance have different philosophical foundations, and regarded the welfare of the people differently. American Indian leadership was wedded with spirituality and all leadership had spiritual significance. American Indian elders protected the welfare of the tribe as guardians of tribal culture with spirituality at the core of their leadership. Equipped with the knowledge of the elders, generations of American Indian people carried on the practices which were most important to the existence of the tribe.

U.S. governance, on the other hand, is based on the protection of individual rights, private property and economic growth. The U.S. was founded by European immigrants who came to America to escape abuses of governing power under the European monarchy. They purposefully structured a government based on the protection of individual rights, with a division between church and state, and strict limitations on the power of leaders. Locke (1632-1704) asserted that the right to private property was an individual right that stemmed from natural law. Adam Smith (1776), the father of capitalism, believed the protection of free trade defined a civilized society. Based on this philosophy, U.S. governance operates on the principle that the welfare of society is based on the protection of private property, free markets and individual rights.

Decision-making in U.S. governance is significantly different than that of traditional American Indian leaders. As noted, consensus-building was the driving force behind American Indian decision-making and leaders deliberated on a matter until a resolution became clear to all. In this way, all persons involved supported the decision. Decisions were not made lightly. American Indian leaders made decisions bearing in mind the welfare of future generations. The Iroquois Great Binding Law, or Gayanashagowa, states "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" (The Constitution of the Iroquois Nations Website, August, 1997).

Rational decision-making is the central component of the U.S. governance model. With elected officials, obtaining majority vote is the driving force behind decision making. Debate is central to this process. Support of all the people is not required because consent to be governed through the social contract binds citizens to the conclusions of the majority (Locke, 1632-1704). Government decisions, viewed as part of an official duty, may not be as directly linked to the integrity of the official as are decisions made by American Indian leaders.

In sum, traditional Indian leadership and U.S. governance represent two very distinct world views, values and ways of life. Table 1 compares some of the key components under the two systems.

Table 1

American Indian Leadership	U.S. Governance
Leaders were chosen as leaders for their knowledge, experience and contribution.	Leadership is a position.
Leaders were chosen by the tribe and thus remained leaders as long as the tribe needed them.	Leaders seek and are employed or elected to a position. They serve for a specified term or for the duration of their employment.
Leaders had no power over others and could not command.	Leaders can create laws which are enforced by police and justice system.
Welfare of the tribe protected through maintaining culture and traditions.	Protection of individual rights. Protection of nation through economic growth and maintenance of private property.
Consensus was driving force behind decision-making.	Decisions arrived at by majority vote.
Spirituality inextricably intertwined in decision-making.	Rationality is the driving force behind decision-making.
Restitution-based justice which was focused on restoring relationships.	Retribution-based justice.

Traditional American Indian Leadership: A Comparison with U.S. Governance

The Systems Collide

As stated earlier, it is clear that historical American Indian and European-American society viewed the world in two distinct ways. After European contact, American Indians quickly realized that European immigrants intended to supplant traditional tribal structures with their own. American Indians viewed the structure and laws of European-American government intended to protect individuals from abuses of governing power as limitations on freedom. Dan elaborates:

The white world puts all the power at the top...When your people [Europeans] first came to our land they were trying to get away from those people at the top. But they still thought the same, and soon there were new people at the top in the new country. It is just the way you were taught to think...When you came among us, you couldn't understand our way. You wanted to find the person at the top. You wanted to find the fences that bound us in - how far our land went, how far our government went. Your world was made of cages and you thought ours was, too. Even though you hated your cages you believed in them. They defined your world and you needed them to define ours (Nerburn, 1994, p. 135).

It was difficult for European-Americans to understand the American Indian way of life. The events surrounding the U.S. Supreme Court case *Ex parte Crow Dog* (1883) are an example of this conflict. On August 5, 1881, on the Sioux Reservation in Dakota Territory, Crow Dog shot to death Spotted Tail, a Brule Sioux chief. Following the tribal system of resolving social conflict, a tribal council was delegated to reconcile the issue. The families of Crow Dog and Spotted Tail met in a tribal council meeting and settled the matter for \$600 in cash, eight horses and one blanket. This decision restored relationships between the two families, and was honored and respected by the families and the tribe.

This traditional American Indian system of resolution, however, was not honored by the U.S. government criminal justice system. On orders of the reservation's chief clerk, who was an agent of the U.S. government, Crow Dog was hunted down and locked in jail. Crow Dog remained in a U.S. jail for one year after the matter had been settled by the tribal council.

In 1882, he was tried in a U.S. court, convicted of murder and sentenced to hang. The case went to the U.S. Supreme Court and in the case of *Ex parte Crow Dog*, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in support of traditional American Indian ways. They held that, following *Worcester v. Georgia* (1832), American Indian tribes retained tribal law as an inherent attribute of tribal sovereignty and that U.S. courts lacked criminal jurisdiction over crimes committed between American Indians in Indian country.

The events leading up to the case of *Ex parte Crow Dog* illustrated the clash between American Indian ways and the U.S. legal system. A fundamental principle of the American Indian way of life was to maintain relations between tribal members, not to pass judgement over them. U.S. jurisprudence is based on the concept of retribution or punishment. Retribution exacts a penalty

for a wrong or an injury and is codified in Constitutional non-Indian law. The restoration of personal or relational ties is not included in the consideration of a penalty. This contrasts to American Indian ways which focused on restoring respectful personal and social relations. Harring (1994) states:

The council met not to adjudicate the dispute but to reconcile the parties involved. Hence, the result of the case - the offering of property to one side by the other - does not indicate any substantive resolution of the merits of the case: Crow Dog had been in no way 'convicted' by a tribal council. Nor was the offered property 'blood money,' a payment to relatives to atone for the killing in a substantive way or to take the place of blood revenge. It was an offer of reconciliation and a symbolic commitment to continuation of tribal social relations [italics added] (pp. 104-105).

Soon after the U.S. Supreme Court decision that American Indian tribes retained traditional reconciliation methods, the U.S. Congress passed legislation to counteract this decision. In 1885, the U.S. Congress passed the Major Crimes Act which extended federal jurisdiction over certain crimes committed in Indian country. The passage of this legislation marked an end to the American Indian way of resolving these conflicts. All major federal crimes, such as murder, are prosecuted under the jurisdiction of the Major Crimes Act to this day.

The U.S. congressional response the case of Ex parte Crow Dog is only one of many examples where European-Americans realized that American Indians had a different way of managing their affairs, but refused to understand other than through the European-American framework.

The U.S. Congress was unable to comprehend American Indian ways and would not accept that American Indian ways were as legitimate as their own.

For the most part, European-Americans viewed American Indian culture and tradition as inferior to their own. European-Americans believed in the Christian philosophy of Manifest Destiny which granted them the right to dominion over the earth. American Indian people did not agree with this reasoning, but neither interfered nor argued with this thinking because they respected others' rights to their own beliefs. As a consequence of these different approaches, the interaction between these two world views resulted in European-Americans imposing their ways on American Indian people.

The U.S. government's failure to understand and respect American Indian ways has resulted in inappropriate policies that adversely affect American Indians and are not considerate of American Indian traditions and systems. One of the most evident results of inappropriate U.S. policy is the tribal government systems under which American Indian tribes now operate.

The Formation of Contemporary American Indian Tribal Governments

The Indian Reorganization Act (IRA), passed by the U.S. government in 1934, provided for the establishment of tribal governments. The IRA pressed for tribes to adopt standard constitutions based on the European-American conception of government. Symptomatic of the European-American view that American Indians were an inferior people, the U.S. Congress wrote and passed the IRA without involvement from tribal leadership.

Under the IRA, tribes were required to vote via referendum on the adoption of tribal constitutions and the establishment of tribal government. The ratification process was structured so that a minority of Indians could pass the referendum. O'Brien (1989) explains:

Although the IRA seemed to provide for tribal ratification of its terms, it did so in a way that effectively negated tribal wishes. Tribal members could vote either to accept or reject the IRA, but all abstentions (that is, the "votes" of anyone who did not vote) were counted as votes in favor of the IRA [italics added] (p. 82).

In accordance with the American Indian tradition of non-interference, or unwillingness to argue, American Indians who did not support the IRA showed their disagreement by not voting in the election. Elections were alien to the American Indian way and traditional tribal members simply chose not to be involved in them.

As a consequence of this ratification process, many tribes adopted governments that tribal people, especially the elders and other traditional American Indians, did not support. Other tribes adopted governments because they were promised by supporters of the legislation that passage would help to end the massive hunger, poverty and loss of land on American Indian reservations. According to Getches, Wilkinson, and Williams, Jr. (1993), "within 12 years, 161 tribal constitutions and 131 Indian corporate charters had been adopted by tribes pursuant to the IRA" (p. 221).

The adoption of IRA governments may have been one of the biggest changes American Indian tribes faced this century. IRA tribal constitutions and bylaws were patterned after a European-American version of governance, and their structures were foreign to traditional American Indian ways. Standard IRA tribal constitutions and charters instituted a governing board, usually called the tribal council, and provided for election by majority vote. A place for elders, spiritual leaders and other traditional American Indian leadership was not configured into standard tribal government structures.

IRA governments were intended to establish the exercise of power over tribal members and become the authoritative body responsible for decisions for American Indian tribes. American Indian people did not recognize this authority, however, and tribal governments remained relatively powerless in the early decades of their existence. Essentially, it was not until the 1960s that tribal governments began to exert greater influence over tribal matters and establish control over social programs.

In spite of the IRA, traditional American Indian leadership survives in two ways. First, traditional leadership continues to live in the minds and hearts of American Indian people, and when allowed, manifests itself in their families and community. It can be seen, for example, in the humble work of American Indians working as teachers and service providers to the community. Second, traditional American Indian leadership subtly reveals itself in today's tribal government leadership. It is often reflected in tribal government leaders who were taught the traditions and culture. American Indian values, culture and traditions are not formally stated as rules concerning governance, but they influence leaders working in IRA governmental systems.

Conclusion

This paper offers an overview of traditional Indian leadership and some of the major differences from the U.S. model of governance. It briefly describes how Europeans imposed their system of

governance on American Indians when the two came into contact, and lends clarity to the conflict in values between the dichotomous systems. The U.S. government has failed to understand American Indian traditions and culture and this has resulted in policies, such as the IRA (1934), that did not incorporate American Indian ways of life. Given the significant differences between American Indian leadership and European-based governance it is understandable why American Indian people continue to struggle with IRA governments, and why there are many non-Indians and policy makers who do not support them.

This report is not intended to serve as the final word on the dichotomy between traditional American Indian leadership and U.S. governance. It does, however, clarify areas which warrant further exploration. Areas for further consideration include the following:

- American Indian elders, with their knowledge of traditional culture and history, need a place to legitimately participate in the tribal government decision-making process. Some American Indian tribes, such as the Ho-Chunk Nation, have recognized this need and have instituted elders councils.
- Whether or not American Indian tribes choose to institute traditional leadership practices, they may serve future generations by recording information about their unique traditional leadership. This would entail working with elders and others who possess this knowledge.
- Along with the need to more accurately record the history of traditional American Indian leadership is the need to disseminate accurate information on this subject within mainstream educational institutions. It has been pointed out that the most widely known example of American Indian leadership, the Iroquois Confederacy, is known only for its features that fit with the European-American understanding of governance. Most knowledge about American Indian leadership remains hidden and misunderstood. With a more accurate and complete history we can work toward changing misconceptions.
- A new relationship is needed between American Indian and non-Indian cultures where the two cultures can respectfully exchange knowledge. Those who possess roles in U.S. federal, state and local governments must become better educated about the history, culture and values of American Indian peoples so that policies and decisions which affect American Indians are considerate of the American Indian way of life.

This report is intended to serve as a first step toward providing missing information about American Indian leadership and how it is driven by American Indian traditions, spirituality and culture. Our hope is that this information will benefit American Indians and non-Indians alike as they expand their knowledge of the history and the contemporary situation of American Indians.

Traditional American Indian Leadership - References

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