

# Intertribal Traditionalism and the Religious Roots of Red Power

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*Most so-called serious historians have seen a different Sixties than did many of the participants. Rejecting the counterculture and the hippies as a clownish sideshow, and the drug scene as an embarrassment, they have zeroed in on what appears in hindsight to have been really important, the political side of the decade's experience: the dramatic free speech, civil rights, antiwar, black power, and other protest and revolutionary movements.*

*Robert S. Ellwood  
The Sixties Spiritual Awakening*

*Every time I come up here it seems like I've been in hell all my life and I'm coming into some sort of utopia. . . . This convention might not mean we'll have more food on the table, but it does mean spiritual revival for Indians. Man can't survive on bread alone.*

*Clifton Hill  
Creek Centralization Committee*

As word spread that Tadodaho had died, tribal people throughout the Iroquois confederacy mourned the loss of their leader and quietly speculated on the selection of his successor. It was the fall of 1968, a time of rising conflict with colonial powers, and many Iroquois traditionalists hoped their new "chief of chiefs" would be both wise and strong, able to defend their land and sovereignty against unrelenting encroachments. Long-standing tradition required that a confederacy council of hereditary chiefs—who governed under the watchful eyes of the clan mothers—select a new leader from among the Onondagas, the keepers of the fire. The waiting finally ended on December 7th when the council chiefs announced that fifty-three-year-old Leon Shenandoah had been installed as Tadodaho of the confederacy. Known as a humble man who supported his large family by working as a custodian at nearby Syracuse University, Shenandoah inaugurated his tenure by promising to be true to his tribal name, which can be translated as

"Unfinished Business."<sup>1</sup>

Only eleven days later, Mohawk activists blockaded the international bridge at Cornwall Island to protest Canada's aggressive violations of the 1794 Jay Treaty, which guaranteed native people free passage and trade across the Canada-U.S. border. The influential Mohawk periodical *Akwesasne Notes* was born in the midst of this struggle, and the highly publicized—and ultimately successful—blockade generated a heightened sense of political consciousness in other Iroquois communities and among native people across North America. Unlike his predecessor, who had preferred the religious aspects of Tadodaho's leadership responsibilities, Shenandoah did not shy away from this conflict and quickly distinguished himself as one who recognized the need to assert both the spiritual prerogative and the political authority of his office.<sup>2</sup>

A number of Iroquois leaders had already been urging the council chiefs to convene an intertribal gathering of traditionalists where they could discuss common concerns and develop a sense of solidarity. The Cornwall Island controversy brought the need for such a meeting into sharp relief and on January 5th, in one of his first official acts as Tadodaho, Shenandoah announced that the confederacy would host the hemispheric "super-council" during the summer of 1969. "We'll be discussing the warning signs of disaster and ways to prepare ahead," he explained to local reporters. "We don't know definitely what we'll talk about. That is why we will gather." A headline in the *Syracuse Post-Standard* called the Iroquois "disturbed" and their planned gathering a "pow-wow," but Shenandoah objected to these demeaning characterizations. "We're not calling it a powwow. It's a meeting," he insisted in an interview several weeks later, "to discuss plans for uniting all our people for action. We have to plan ahead for our future." He even suggested that the council chiefs

might invite other native communities to join the confederacy, which could expand to include as many as one hundred tribal nations spanning the continent. "They are interested. There has been preliminary discussion. They may come into the confederacy."<sup>3</sup>

Initial plans called for a four-day meeting at the Tonawanda Seneca reservation beginning August 16th, an automobile caravan across upstate New York, and another four-day meeting at the Onondaga reservation ending August 24th. A joint Seneca-Onondaga planning committee formed and invitations were mailed to more than a hundred tribal communities throughout North, Central, and South America. *Akwesasne Notes* published a handwritten advertisement in their March issue, encouraging "Native Aboriginals of the Americas" to attend the "Unity Convention" and billing it as "one of the largest Indian meetings of our times." Shenandoah anticipated that hundreds of delegates would attend the gathering. "It could be one thousand," he predicted. "We're just beginning our plans for uniting all of our people for action."<sup>4</sup>

Another *Akwesasne Notes* advertisement four months later reflected growing interest in the convention. Traditionalist men and women from a number of tribal communities—Algonquin, Cheyenne, Chipewyan, Cree, Hopi, Muscogee, Nisqually, Salish, Seminole, Shoshone—had already committed to attend, and the schedule had been extended to include meetings further north at the Akwesasne Mohawk reservation and the Maniwaki Algonquin reserve. The political situation was little changed; although the Cornwall Island blockade had succeeded in forcing Canada to recognize native rights to free passage and trade across the Canada-U.S. border, Shenandoah and other Iroquois leaders still faced ongoing disputes involving their lands, schools, and sacred wampum belts. Convention organizers hoped to address these and other political issues but were even more concerned to foster the cultural survival of native people. Activities planned for the gathering included tribal feasts, social dancing, discussion of prophecies, and handicraft trading. Local leaders in the four host communities kept busy organizing the free food, firewood, and camping space that would be provided to delegates.<sup>5</sup>

On the fifteenth day of August old cars and pickup trucks bearing battered license plates from the four directions—Washington, Oklahoma, Massachusetts, Ontario, and points beyond—began pulling into the camping grounds at Beeman Logan's place on the Tonawanda Seneca reservation. Respected elders and spiritual leaders, medicine men and women, young people and small children unloaded themselves and set up tents and tipis, anticipating the momentous events that would begin unfolding the next morning.<sup>6</sup>

## Traditional Movement

Like all human communities, native people in the Americas have always recognized the cultural continuities that mark collective experience, those idiosyncratic beliefs and practices identifiable as "tradition." Of course, any living cultural tradition is also a dynamic process, an indeterminate body of knowledge whose specific content is ever evolving in accordance with environmental and social circumstances. Even the very notion of a "traditional" identity has emerged, in the aftermath of European imperialism, as a common native tradition, a convenient strategy for tagging the factionalism provoked by assimilationist aggression. Intertribal "traditionalism" was born in colonial-era experiments in military alliance, retreated underground during the repressions of republican expansionism, and has flourished in the postwar period as a distinctly postcolonial phenomenon.

Iroquois protests against violations of their sovereign rights, like their leadership in promoting intertribal solidarity, began decades before the confederacy chiefs agreed to sponsor the 1969 unity convention. In 1926 Tuscarora chief Clinton Rickard led a group of traditionalists in founding the Indian Defense League of America to protect native political interests on both sides of the Canada-U.S. border. They organized an annual "Border Crossing Celebration" at Niagara Falls (an event that continues today) to call attention to their rights under the Jay Treaty and other international agreements, and in the years that followed they also lobbied against the Indian Reorganization Act and other assimilationist schemes hatched in Washington and Ottawa. Rickard had volunteered for service in the Philippines during the

Spanish-American War and later fought the 1924 Indian Citizenship Act; in 1940 he opposed the enforcement of the military draft in tribal communities and encouraged those who wanted to volunteer their services during the Second World War to enlist as “alien non-residents.”

In 1948 an Indian Defense League delegation visited the United Nations headquarters in New York City, where they reported on treaty violations and requested assistance in their struggles with Canadian and American authorities. The downstate pilgrimage became an annual event and two years later the *New York Times* covered their visit, though reporters were more impressed by the delegates’ feathered head-dresses and beaded buckskin jackets than by their petition for membership in the international body. The accomplishments of the Indian Defense League figure prominently in Rickard’s autobiography *Fighting Tuscarora*, which concludes with an emphasis on the need for intertribal solidarity: “The one message I wish to leave with all my people everywhere,” he wrote, “is to work for unity. If we do not all work together, if we are divided, then eventually we face the danger of being destroyed. . . . I want to see Indians help themselves, carry on their own affairs, and be independent. This we can do if we all pull together.”<sup>7</sup>

The postwar period also saw the emergence of a traditionalist faction among the Hopis in the desert Southwest. In a 1947 kiva meeting at Shungopavi village, clan leaders discussing an ancient prophecy concerning a “gourd full of ashes” concluded that it had been fulfilled by the dropping of the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki two years earlier. Several interpreted this development as a sign that the end of the present world is near and that they should now share their religious teachings with non-Hopis, and more meetings and discussions followed. In 1948 Shungopavi hosted an important four-day conference of village chiefs and clan leaders, the first such meeting in decades, at which they discussed strategies for revitalizing Hopi ceremonial traditions. They also laid plans for disseminating their apocalyptic message to the outside world by appointing four interpreter-spokesmen including Thomas Banyacya. Born into the churchgoing Jenkins family at

Moenkopi, he had been one of the first Hopis to attend college and later worked in the Bureau of Indian Affairs for a few years. He eventually grew disillusioned with the American way of life and served as an interpreter in 1941 when Hotevilla clan leaders Dan Katchongva and James Pongonyuma testified on behalf of several Hopi traditionalists who had refused the military draft. Attaching himself to Katchongva, Jenkins soon replaced his Anglo surname with an initiation name used in one of the kachina societies.

Hopi elders met again at Shungopavi on four days in March of 1949, where they drafted a letter to President Truman from the “Hopi Indian Empire” enumerating their concerns regarding Hopi sovereignty and American policy in an era of Cold War. Warning the U.S. leader about a coming judgment day in this, “the most critical time in the history of mankind,” they asked both the American people and “our own people, American Indians,” to “give these words of ours your most serious consideration. Let us all re-examine ourselves and see where we stand today.” During the next several years Hopi traditionalists sent additional letters to various government officials protesting federal policies, asserting Hopi autonomy, and threatening to take their complaints to the United Nations. In 1953 clan leader Andrew Hermequafewa recorded the traditionalists’ version of Hopi history in a short manifesto titled “The Hopi Way of Life Is the Way of Peace,” which was published in pamphlet form and circulated widely. Banyacya, meanwhile, had begun touring the country as a missionary of Hopi prophetic apocalypticism.<sup>8</sup>

Katchongva and other traditionalist leaders traveled to Washington in May of 1955 and visited the commissioner of Indian affairs, persuading him to convene hearings on Hopi grievances. The hearings were held at Keams Canyon during the last two weeks of July; the traditionalists made their case, but Hopis representing other political and religious persuasions were also allowed to participate in the proceedings and no consensus emerged. Unable to supplant these other Hopi voices or to dislodge the tribal council, Katchongva and his colleagues instead sought out like-minded leaders in other native communities. The Hopi traditionalists adopted an inter-

tribal orientation in 1956 by hosting two important gatherings at Hotevilla: The “Meeting of Indian Brothers” brought together traditionalist leaders from other tribal communities, while the “Meeting of Religious People” welcomed both native and non-native participants. Katchongva, Hermequafewa, and others delivered lengthy speeches describing Hopi origins and prophecies. The Great Spirit gave each tribal community their homeland and “life plan,” Katchongva explained in one of his orations, and “we must never lose faith” or “we will once again destroy both life and land.” Warning his listeners to be prepared for the coming day of purification, he argued that “it is up to the Hopi and other religious organizations not to participate in war.” “I am sure,” Katchongva concluded, “that all other Indian people on this land know these same teachings.” In the years to come Hopi traditionalists would be among the most vocal opponents of various development projects—such as the infamous strip-mining operation at Black Mesa—approved by the tribal council.<sup>9</sup>

Many Americans remember the fifties as a period of expansive prosperity, but few also recall the intense exploitation of natural resources that facilitated consumer extravagance. Iroquois communities endured repeated assaults on their lands and sovereign powers during the fifties, the most severe of which were the massive hydroelectric projects imposed on the Allegany Seneca and Tuscarora reservations and the Saint Lawrence Seaway project that stripped land from the Mohawk reserves at Akwesasne and Caughnawaga. Although the Iroquois ultimately lost each of these battles, their spirited resistance caught the attention of the media and inspired native people elsewhere. The dramatic protests that began in 1958 over the construction of a reservoir at Tuscarora were led by Clinton Rickard’s son William along with John Hewitt and Wallace “Mad Bear” Anderson, though Anderson quickly preempted the other leaders and dominated media accounts of the non-violent “stand-ins.”

Miccosukees threatened by similar development pressures in the Everglades heard about the Tuscarora conflict and later that year invited Anderson to meet with them and other southeastern traditionalist leaders, where they resolved to form an intertribal

alliance of native people in the Americas. Traditionalists in the Far West also became more active during this period, coordinating efforts with their eastern counterparts through Rickard’s Indian Defense League and through the League of North American Indians, an intertribal political organization led by Cherokee Frank Tom-Pee-Saw. Hopi traditionalists at Hotevilla village hosted another “Meeting of Religious People” in 1958 as well.<sup>10</sup>

The year 1959 witnessed a number of important events in the rise of traditionalist activism and intertribal cooperation. In March Iroquois traditionalists occupied the band council headquarters at the Six Nations reserve on the Grand River for a week, until they were evicted by Canadian Mounties. One week later an intertribal delegation of more than one hundred traditionalists traveled to Washington, where they delivered a petition protesting Canadian and American policies and demanded the removal of the commissioner of Indian affairs. Thirty-six of these men and women then met with the Miccosukees in the Everglades and together laid plans for organizing a “United Indian Republic” that would eventually apply for membership in the United Nations. In May a delegation of Hopi traditionalists including Katchongva and Banyacya went to New York City, where their request to address the United Nations assembly was denied; instead, they met with Iroquois traditionalists at Onondaga before returning home. In July Pit River leader Ray Johnson died in Washington while picketing the Bureau of Indian Affairs over his people’s land claim, so Anderson organized an intertribal caravan and carried Johnson’s body home to northeastern California in a rented trailer. The League of North American Indians continued to enlist grassroots activists and published a periodical titled *Indian Views* to disseminate the traditionalist perspective.<sup>11</sup>

By 1960 traditionalists from Iroquois, Hopi, and other tribal communities had established an intertribal network spanning the continent and had laid the political and religious foundations for the broad native activism that would follow over the next decade. Intertribal contacts among traditionalists intensified during the early sixties. Clinton Rickard, now in his eighties, enjoyed a reputation as an elder

statesman among traditionalists and was visited at his home by tribal contingents from near and far. His son William, who had experienced a spiritual awakening during a two-week stay with the Hopis, developed a close friendship with Banyacya. In 1961 William was invited to serve on the steering committee for the American Indian Chicago Conference and emerged as that historic event’s most forceful voice of nationalist dissent. Clinton’s daughter Karen also attended the Chicago conference and several months later was one of the founding members of the National Indian Youth Council.

Hotevilla village hosted several more gatherings of “Indian Brothers” and “Religious People” during this period and welcomed both groups at a combined meeting in 1963. The League of North American Indians convened a “Grand Spiritual and Temporal Council” in June of that year, with about five hundred traditionalists from thirty-five tribal nations attending the event. The Committee for the Great Council Fire, led by Ojibwa Francis Le Quier, issued a statement to “chiefs and Spiritual Leaders of the Indians of the North and South American Continents,” proclaiming: “This is the day when all tribes shall come together and be one nation. This is the day when all the nations shall come together and be one world. . . . This is the day of the Great Justice.” In Los Angeles a group called the Native American Movement proclaimed itself the “spiritual descendant” of earlier intertribal alliances (such as those led by Popé, Tecumseh, and Wovoka) and announced the “reawakening” and “revival” of native cultural traditions.<sup>12</sup>

By the mid-sixties these and other traditionalist initiatives had coalesced into the “traditional movement,” an amorphous network of native groups and individuals. Developing in the context of nation-state policies aimed at extinguishing tribal land claims, disestablishing tribal governments, and relocating tribal people to urban environments, the traditional movement was intertribal and transnational, nationalistic and populist, intergenerational and prophetic. As the growing consciousness that would soon be labeled “Red Power” gathered momentum, native activists formed a multitude of local, regional, national, and international organizations that built on these pioneer-

ing efforts.

## Unity Convention

William Rickard had been a central figure in the Tuscarora resistance since 1957 and within several years had become one of the most influential young leaders in Indian country. His untimely death in 1964 was a major loss both for his own people and for the expanding intertribal network of traditionalists, and native periodicals as far away as the Pacific Northwest published his obituary. During the early sixties Rickard had served as president of the League of North American Indians; after his death Alfred Gagne, an old friend of the Rickard family, assumed leadership of the organization and broadened its scope, renaming it the League of Nations, Pan-American Indians. Gagne worked to protect native political rights, sponsoring meetings and lobbying the U.S. Congress, and he supported the growing interest in intertribal solidarity by cooperating with various traditionalist leaders, especially Tonawanda Seneca chief Beeman Logan.<sup>13</sup>

As the traditional movement grew stronger, political protests over fishing rights by tribal communities in the Pacific Northwest generated a new round of media attention to native issues. The involvement of the National Indian Youth Council in these “fish-ins” beginning in 1964 signaled a militant turn for that organization and reflected the increasingly varied forces that could be brought to bear on local conflicts. Logan and Gagne, meanwhile, began strategizing ways to bring together their many traditionalist colleagues in hopes of presenting a united front against territorial and assimilationist intrusions. Undoubtedly inspired by the intertribal religious gatherings first held at Hotevilla a decade earlier, they and other Iroquois leaders eventually settled on the idea of hosting a “unity convention” at the end of the summer of 1967. Logan and other Tonawanda Seneca chiefs volunteered their longhouse as a site for the gathering. Traditionalist leaders throughout North America soon received letters and telephone calls inviting them to participate, while local organizers began preparing to host a large and diverse group of people.<sup>14</sup>

Some 175 delegates from more than fifty tribal

nations turned out for the gathering during the last week of August, where they socialized, shared traditional foods and dances, listened to mythic and prophetic teachings, and discussed strategies for surviving the continuing invasion of the Americas. Iroquois and Hopi leaders took the lead during the proceedings, with Hopi elders recounting their warnings about the impending destruction of the “Fourth World” and Iroquois chiefs offering their “Great Law of Peace” as a model for regenerating social and environmental relations. One delegate who took these teachings to heart was Clifton Hill, leader of the Creek Centralization Committee in eastern Oklahoma. Like most participants, he understood this gathering to be a fundamentally religious event. “Our movement was ignited,” he later wrote, “by inspiration of the Great Spirit. . . . We Traditionalists have acted as a messenger from the Great Spirit to interpret the meaning of our Indian customs, languages, prophecies, and treaties.” Intent on perpetuating native communities through both intertribal and transnational solidarities, these traditionalist men and women defied the cultural pressures and political powers modern nation-states were exerting on them by collectively affirming the value and priority of their indigenous religious traditions.<sup>15</sup>

Perhaps even more significant than the week-long convention was the cross-country motorcade that followed. While most participants packed up and headed for home after closing ceremonies, Logan, Gagne, and others—including Logan’s assistant “Mad Bear” Anderson and Hopi spokesman Thomas Banyacya—arranged what they called the “North American Indian Unity Caravan.” On the second day of September five carloads left the Tonawanda Seneca reservation for a pilgrimage across North America. Traveling through the Great Lakes region, the group was joined by a Canadian contingent at Whitefish Bay and then continued westward along the Canada-U.S. border. The caravan met with other traditionalists along the way and invited many to join them as they worked their way toward a large powwow at the Hoopa Valley reservation on the West Coast. Returning home by way of the Southwest, caravan leaders planted sacred stones at key points on their circular path as they disseminated

their message of apocalypse, natural law, and intertribal solidarity. Nearly two dozen tribal communities had hosted the unity caravan by the time it completed its transcontinental journey. Health problems prevented Hill from participating in the caravan, but he considered it to be a very important development in the traditional movement. “I rejoice when I think of the American Indian Caravan,” he wrote. “The Almighty, the Great Spirit, watched and cared for them til they completed the circle. The world was shown that there are yet faithful Indians with a burning desire to stand and represent their people at whatever cost—their livelihood, their homes, loved ones.” The caravan also inspired longtime Mohawk activist Ernest Benedict to found the North American Indian Travelling College, with the goal of providing cultural and educational resources to isolated tribal communities while promoting intertribal understanding and unity.<sup>16</sup>

The year 1967 was a watershed in modern American history. As protest strategies shifted from civil disobedience to power politics, a spirit of revolution intensified America’s many social contradictions, from military escalation in Southeast Asia to antiwar mobilization in North America, from the “summer of love” for middle-class hippies to the “long hot summer” in urban ghettos. In his study of “the Sixties spiritual awakening” Robert Ellwood interprets American religion during this period in light of the modern/postmodern debate, arguing that “the modern age in America died, and the new postmodern era was born, in July 1967,” a month before tribal traditionalists gathered at Tonawanda. According to Ellwood, sixties spirituality emphasized nonconformity, freedom, relevance, and the natural world, which suggests that the decade “may have been not so much an aberration as a restoration” of a classically American tradition. “In a certain sense,” he concludes, “the characteristic Sixties religious style was like a recovery of the more fluid, sentimental, charismatic, psychic, magical, communalistic, and righteous-prophetic style of the first decades of the Republic, perhaps especially the 1840s and 1850s, the ‘sentimental years’ and the heyday of the covered-wagon Western migration.”<sup>17</sup>

While many observers have styled modern

native communities as exotic subcultures or denizens of the counterculture, a more historically informed (and less colonial) perspective would recognize the priority of indigenous tradition—call it anteculture. “The new Indian is a religious man,” wrote journalist Stan Steiner in his noteworthy 1968 book *The New Indian*. “Land is the measure of life. In his view of the land the tribal Indian denies the values placed on it by the white society. His own values are to him more eternal and essential to the human spirit, having existed before the advent of the barbed wire and commercial fence.” As the traditional movement found expression in the institution of the unity convention and caravan, traditionalist leaders measured the land according to spiritual values and forged a communal refuge from the barbs of commerce. They pursued a vision of earthly existence that negates colonial borders and transcends tribal boundaries—the precarious fusion of old and new, of stability and disruption, that is named by the paradoxical juxtaposition “traditional movement.”<sup>18</sup>

### Indian Territory

Inspired by his experiences at the convention and by the rousing mission of the caravan, Clifton Hill returned to his Creek Nation home and worked to spread the gospel of intertribal unity. He was well suited for the task, a Baptist minister fluent in the Muscogee language and active in grassroots political organizing. Born and raised in the small town of Okemah, he had worked as a field hand and also earned some money in the boxing ring as a heavyweight prizefighter. Hill eventually followed his father’s footsteps into the ministry and settled in Okmulgee, the Creek Nation capital, where he and his wife Betty raised three sons. For many years he served the Baptist church there and in the surrounding Creek communities as preacher, teacher, and itinerant evangelist, establishing a reputation as a prophetic leader devoted to the spiritual—and material—welfare of his people. He also traveled to Washington to testify in congressional hearings on behalf of Creek land claims.<sup>19</sup>

In the spring of 1965, Hill and other traditionalists formed the “Creek Centralization Committee” to advocate for tribal self-determination. The constitu-

tional government of the Creek Nation had been forcibly dissolved by an act of the U.S. Congress in 1906, and since that time the office of Principal Chief had been filled by puppet leaders appointed by the U.S. President. Meeting in Okmulgee, the committee drafted a new constitution with by-laws and elected Hill as their leader. “All the Creek Centralization Committee desires is a voice in their own affairs and a working, representative government,” he explained shortly after the meeting. “We have been fifty-eight years without representation and we do not want a drugstore Indian for a chief. We want a free election, a free voice, just like any other tribe.” Hill was especially annoyed by appointed officials who took credit for federally funded projects that provided little relief to poverty-stricken traditionalists: “Why in the SAM HILL do we say we want to help the Indians but we want so much of the Indians’ money to programize and so much money for tourists attraction. So much for this and so much for that. Then give the Indians a tiny drop of their own money. This is what some people call helping them. BIG DEAL.” Hill also accused various bureaucratic personnel of trying to sabotage the committee’s work by threatening supporters with the loss of tribal services.<sup>20</sup>

In January of 1967, the Creek Centralization Committee launched a pair of weekly radio programs in the Muscogee language, broadcast at midday over KOKL in Okmulgee, with Hill serving as programmer and host. A thirty-minute program on Sundays featured announcements, music, and a “non-sectarian” sermon, while a fifteen-minute program on Wednesdays was devoted to news items affecting Hill’s Creek and Seminole listeners. His reputation and influence as a traditionalist leader continued to grow, and later that year he was visited by Stan Steiner, who was busy gathering information for his forthcoming book on contemporary native people. Hill struck Steiner as a prophet, perhaps even a messiah, who drew on tribal traditions and biblical narratives in fashioning a “dirt-farm, grass-roots, backwoods movement” that might just lead his people into a new age of prosperity. Hill likened his effort to that of the biblical David and the legendary Robin Hood, doing battle with a bureaucratic Goliath in order to redistribute economic resources. “I always

tell my people we are like little David in the Bible," he explained. "Poor, but stands for justice. . . . Lots of these Indians, they were looking for a man with great intelligence, vast amounts of money, a very educated man. They were always looking for someone like that. That's why I tell my people the story of little David." He continued: "I see myself as a Robin Hood. I take from the rich. And give it to the poor. That's what we need, a Robin Hood type. That's how I see myself." Hill envisioned a day when traditionalists would no longer be dominated by colonial authorities or by "mixed-bloods and educated Indians" and would have control over their own destinies. "Love is what combined our organization, not money or intelligence, but love of the poor. I am proud of being poor. . . . The day of the poor will come. Long as there's breath flows through my veins, long as I am alive, I am going to try to spearhead that. I don't know how in the world I will. But I will."<sup>21</sup>

Hill and his supporters in the Creek Centralization Committee were not the only eastern Oklahoma traditionalists organizing during the sixties. Among their Cherokee neighbors to the northwest, community leaders began meeting in the fall of 1965 to discuss infringements on their culturally indispensable—and treaty-guaranteed—fishing and hunting rights. A loosely knit confederation of traditionalist settlements emerged from these discussions, which they named the "Five County Northeastern Oklahoma Cherokee Organization." Frequent meetings during the months that followed raised a number of pressing issues including fraudulent land sales, disputes over taxation, discrimination in health care and social services, and administrative neglect. The organization also quickly issued a "Declaration" outlining their concerns. "We meet in a time of darkness to seek the path to the light," it began. "We come together, just as our fathers have always done, . . . We stand united in the sight of God, our creator. We are joined by love and concern for each other and for all men. . . . We offer ourselves as the voice of the Cherokee people." Enumerating a series of changes necessary to insure the survival of the traditional Cherokee way of life, the manifesto concluded: "In the vision of our creator, we declare ourselves ready

to stand proudly among the nationalities of these United States of America." A year later secretary Andrew Dreadfulwater, a respected Keetoowah ceremonial leader and dedicated Baptist layman, was elevated to chairman of the traditionalist group, which he soon renamed the "Original Cherokee Community Organization."<sup>22</sup>

Dreadfulwater and the Original Cherokee Community Organization were joined by Hill and the Creek Centralization Committee in June of 1967 to protest the opening of "Cherokee Village," a tourist attraction built by the tribal government as the first phase of a "Cherokee Cultural Center." Promoted as an authentic reconstruction of a typical eighteenth-century Cherokee settlement, the marketable caricature featured actors wearing yarn wigs and vinyl buckskin costumes living in crude mud huts; anthropologists disputed this primitivist portrayal of "red cave men" and Cherokee traditionalists dubbed it "the zoo." Politicians and developers promised menial jobs for unemployed Cherokees, though local motel and restaurant owners seemed to be the project's most enthusiastic supporters. The National Indian Youth Council also participated in what was billed as the first picket line in Cherokee history, financing leaflets that explained to visitors why the village was opposed by traditionalists, who "teach our children of the days when our prosperous nation had a constitutional government, fine schools, and financial solidity. Can you imagine how it pains us to be presented to you as unlettered savages?" The three groups sponsoring the protest joined forces "to denounce this 'Cherokee Village' as an indignity and a cruel misuse of our living heritage."<sup>23</sup>

In August Hill and other Creek and Cherokee traditionalists traveled to the Tonawanda Seneca reservation for the 1967 unity convention and also met the caravan when it passed through eastern Oklahoma several weeks later. Encouraged by the new sense of intertribal solidarity generated by these events, Hill and Dreadfulwater offered to host another intertribal gathering the following summer. The Creek Centralization Committee and the Original Cherokee Community Organization agreed to co-sponsor the "National Aboriginal Traditional Convention" and scheduled the meeting for the first week in

June of 1968. Hill's ailing mother offered her forty-acre allotment near Okemah as a gathering site, which she envisioned as “a central meeting place of traditional Indians in the United States and Canada and Mexico, where they could come and exchange their views, prophecies, and medicine and be helpful one to another as the Great Spirit dictates.” Hill published an open invitation to the convention in the widely read periodical Indian Voices and offered for sale two booklets, titled “A Portion of Indian History, Part I: American Traditional Movement” and “The Whiteman’s Climaxing and Crumbling Power Structure.” Proceeds from the sale of both were earmarked for building arbors and bathrooms and providing meals at the convention. In April Hill and Thomas Banyacya made presentations at an international conference on education and culture in Chicago, where Hill endorsed a policy of cultural pluralism and self-determination: “We must recognize each other’s common and basic spiritual nature, taking into account all of our variety and sameness. Each people thus can contribute to one another’s spiritual and material well-being.”

Delegates from sixty-five tribal nations throughout North America attended the 1968 unity convention on the Hill family allotment, some of them arriving in vehicles bearing bumper stickers that read “I Support the North American Indian Unity Caravan.” During the week-long gathering they discussed religious traditions and debated political strategies while enjoying the hospitality of their Creek and Cherokee hosts. In the end, they joined hands in a ceremonial embrace and then went their separate ways, looking forward to another opportunity for fellowship with their traditionalist kin.<sup>24</sup>

### Intertribal Confederacy

Iroquois traditionalists who attended the eastern Oklahoma gathering returned home to the turmoil of border conflicts and a change in leadership during the fall of 1968. These external and internal political developments generated increasing interest in pursuing intertribal unity through the traditional movement, which soon gained the support of Leon Shenandoah and the council chiefs. After months of planning and preparation, Beeman Logan opened the 1969 unity

convention by welcoming the assembled delegates to the Tonawanda Seneca reservation. It was the morning of August 16th; the military establishment had landed their Eagle near the Sea of Tranquillity less than a month earlier, and an army of baby boomers massed at Woodstock were engaged in their own variety of high-altitude exploration while Logan made his opening remarks. “The first step is to unite Indians and then bring them to understand each other,” he explained, in a more down-to-earth vein. “We don’t understand each other any more. Many of us are enemies. And it is because of the white man. He has separated us so we cannot communicate. . . . Once the Indian begins to understand himself and other Indians, the problems they thought existed between them will disappear.” Logan was also intent on stimulating the revival of cultural and religious traditions and led an afternoon thanksgiving ceremony, part of the ancient Iroquois ceremonial cycle.<sup>25</sup>

The convention met for four days at Tonawanda “in an atmosphere of a large family gathering,” as one local reporter described it. Only native people were allowed to attend formal sessions each morning, though the public was invited to participate in dancing and other social activities during the afternoons and evenings. Initial discussions made it clear that almost every reservation community represented at the convention was embroiled in some type of conflict involving land rights or cultural freedoms, and traditionalist leaders were quick to point out the importance of both for the survival of tribal religious traditions. Speakers also expressed concern over the policies of the U.S. Department of the Interior and its Bureau of Indian Affairs. The most controversial item on the agenda, however, was the growing influence of the Red Power movement, a new presence on the native political landscape. Three native activists from New York City made impassioned speeches describing their newly formed “Pipe-Tomahawk Clan,” an intertribal organization modeled after the Black Panthers.

Most convention participants were reservation traditionalists and showed little interest in the militant tactics advocated by these young urban radicals. Expounding on their Great Law of Peace, Iroquois

leaders encouraged all people to pursue non-violent strategies in protecting the earth and its inhabitants. "My religion and upbringing would not allow me to fight as a militant," confessed Tom Porter, a Mohawk delegate. These traditionalists may have been pacifist, but they were not passive. Porter proposed an intertribal demonstration spanning the continent, a collective act of civil disobedience capable of shaming the Canadian government into responsible behavior. "There are custom houses from the Atlantic to the Pacific, and there are Indians on both sides of the border from the Atlantic to the Pacific," he reminded those present. "We should pick one day during which Indians would take carloads of groceries and challenge every Canadian custom house along the border. What we would do is get arrested."<sup>26</sup>

Several hundred people representing some forty-five tribal nations had arrived at Tonawanda by the time they broke camp on August 20th, when the convention caravanned to the Onondaga reservation for another four-day gathering. Shenandoah welcomed his traditionalist colleagues to the Iroquois capital, encouraging them to consider the possibility of joining an expanded confederacy under his leadership. Picking up their discussion of political relations with the U.S., delegates issued a statement on August 22nd calling for the immediate removal from office of Interior Secretary Walter Hickel and urging tribal leaders to resist any and all federal initiatives until he was gone. A former governor of Alaska, Hickel "destroyed the faith of all Indians toward the U.S. Department of the Interior by his high-handed, inconsiderate and illegal theft" of Alaska Native "tribal lands, rivers, hunting and fishing rights, timber, oil, gas and mineral resources," and "has declared that he is against Indian people returning to their reservations once they have left them, thereby making the native American a vagrant in his own country." Calling Hickel "one of the most dangerous men to have jurisdiction over the lands, waters, air and natural resources" of the U.S., the resolution warned Americans that "he will destroy the sources of life not only for you, but, even more important, the sources of life of your children and grandchildren. . . . He will destroy the very air you breathe in the name of progress. . . . His policies are flagrant violations of

the natural laws of our creator, the giver of life." The next day convention delegates issued another statement, this one condemning the death sentence given by a South Dakota judge to Thomas White Hawk, a Rosebud Sioux university student convicted of killing an elderly white businessman. The White Hawk case had "become a symbol to all American Indians of the widespread discriminatory treatment of Indians in the legal systems of most states. Without reference to guilt or innocence, we protest this flagrant injustice, all too typical of the double standard of justice, one for whites and one for Indians, in local courts."<sup>27</sup>

As the Onondaga gathering drew to a close, Shenandoah announced that the unity convention was "coming along well" and that Maniwaki Algonquin traditionalists had expressed interest in joining the Iroquois confederacy. On August 25th convention participants formed another caravan and moved north to the Akwesasne Mohawk reservation, site of the Cornwall Island bridge blockade eight months earlier. Unhappy with media coverage of the convention and concerned about the intrusive presence of reporters at their meetings, delegates decided to bar the non-native press and issue regular news releases summarizing their deliberations. Animated sessions in the longhouse ensued, debating treaty rights and tribal sovereignty, social problems and natural law, cultural traditions and spiritual revival. At the end of the first day of the Akwesasne gathering, delegates issued a statement addressing the border crossing dispute: "The imposed border that has been recently and illegally created by the United States and Canada has caused grave hardship and has divided our families and has always disrupted our spiritual, traditional way of life. This denies us our religious freedom." The statement also pledged support for Iroquois efforts to negotiate a peaceful resolution with Canadian and American authorities.<sup>28</sup>

In response to requests from the media, convention leaders agreed to hold a press conference. "Society has become sick," spokesman "Mad Bear" Anderson told reporters. "Democracy has failed and Communism will fail too. The only sanity left in the world is the unspoiled spiritual nature of the Indians. . . . Indians will reign supreme again on this continent. We will not always be squashed and Indians are

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already showing their strength. It's happening so fast, it's hard to keep up with.” As one of the Akwesasne hosts, Porter also served as a spokesman and consented to an interview with a Canadian television station, which quizzed him on the goals of the unity convention. Another Mohawk, delegate Mike Mitchell, tried to assure bewildered reporters that the intertribal gathering of traditionalists was “both spiritual and political.” Clifton Hill seemed to be enjoying the hospitality of his Akwesasne hosts, though local newspapers used his offhand remarks to portray their reservation neighbors as prosperous compared to other tribal communities, a timeworn strategy for displacing colonial guilt. “Every time I come up here it seems like I've been in hell all my life and I'm coming into some sort of utopia,” Hill was quoted as saying. “[Akwesasne] Indians are wealthy people compared to us. . . . Our area is the most poverty-stricken in the United States and it's getting worse. There are hundreds of Indians suffering from acute malnutrition. We hear others talk of poverty, but they haven't had a taste of what we have.”

Although local media outlets clearly were interested in convention proceedings and eagerly excerpted comments made by designated spokesmen and other male participants, reporters were not very adept at rendering a demographically accurate portrait of the event. A large photo in the *Massena (NY) Observer* featured Glenna Shilling, a twenty-two-year-old photography student from the Rama Chippewa reserve, but the “many Indian women” described in the caption as being present were otherwise ignored in newspaper accounts of the unity convention. Such obvious gender bias, a familiar failing of the documentary record, certainly does frustrate any historiographical effort that aspires to a balanced representation of personalities and voices.<sup>29</sup>

The three-day council ended on August 28th with a “Joining of the Hands” ceremony. Many considered the Akwesasne gathering to have been the best part of the convention yet, with new tribal delegations joining the group and momentum continuing to grow. As participants prepared for one more caravan, to the Maniwaki Algonquin reserve north of the Canada-U.S. border, Porter and Hill

summed up the proceedings. “Our spiritual leaders have given us tranquillity,” Porter said. “Indians are not an aggressive people. We believe in equality and brotherhood and peace.” Hill agreed: “This convention might not mean we will have more food on the table, but it does mean spiritual revival for Indians. Man can't survive on bread alone.”<sup>30</sup>

Canadian border agents quickly realized they were unmatched when a lengthy intertribal motorcade rolled across the Cornwall Island bridge on the morning of August 29th, refusing to pay the toll. The caravan arrived at Maniwaki later that day and set up camp for a three-day gathering over the Labor Day weekend, the last stop of the convention. Hundreds of people representing more than seventy-five tribal nations were now present, and meetings were moved from the longhouse to a mammoth tent to accommodate the growing throng. Open discussions addressed the suffering caused by boarding schools, unemployment, and alcoholism, and a lively debate over police brutality and militant activism focused on the problem of violence. “The violence is already here!” cried Rose Ojek, an Ojibway from Upper Slave Lake. “There are young Indians in Alberta who are going to burn the schools and the churches. They're not criminals in their hearts, but one of them says he's going to get a huge Caterpillar tractor and go to High Prairie and bulldoze the liquor store, pretend he's drunk. The police arrest them when they get drunk; a girl was arrested for that, and when her brother tried to touch her hand, that she was reaching out of the police car, they arrested him, too, and he got six months! I can't stand it when I hear of talking peace!” Although they disavowed violence, traditionalist leaders did pledge their support for Kahn-Tineta Horn, a young Mohawk woman facing trial on charges related to the Cornwall Island bridge blockade. Delegates also expressed concern over the Canadian government's recent “White Paper” proposing terminationist and assimilationist policies toward native communities. They invited Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau to join them for a tribal feast of corn soup and roast beaver with beans baked in sand, but he kept busy vacationing in Europe instead.<sup>31</sup>

The 1969 unity convention drew to a close in formal ceremonies on the first day of September.

Convention delegates and other participants had spent over two weeks together, covering some five hundred miles as they caravanned through a pair of colonial nation-states in order to visit four welcoming reservation communities. From the four directions they had come—Algonquin, Penobscot, and Narragansett; Seminole, Creek, and Cherokee; Carib and Nahuatl; Apache, Navajo, Hopi, and Zuni; Shoshone, Washo, and Chumash; Nisqually, Walla Walla, Salish, Blackfeet, and Cheyenne; Chipewyan and Cree; Ojibwa, Winnebago, Potawatomi, and Ottawa; Seneca, Cayuga, Onondaga, Oneida, Mohawk, and Tuscarora—hundreds of men, women, and children united in a tribal circle of politics, prophecy, and peace.

#### Red Power

Iroquois activists, inspired by the 1969 unity convention, soon organized a communications collective called “White Roots of Peace” to promote the cause of intertribal solidarity on a year-round basis. In September a dozen traditionalist apostles led by Tom Porter left Akwesasne for a two-month tour of the West Coast, visiting reservation communities, urban centers, college campuses, churches, and prisons. Their public programs typically included tribal music and dancing, thanksgiving prayers, teachings on the Great Law of Peace, and a film documenting the Cornwall Island bridge blockade. Akwesasne Notes reported that the itinerant troupe interacted with more than ten thousand people—both native and non-native—and was especially active in the San Francisco Bay area, appearing at the Indian centers in San Francisco and Oakland and meeting with native students at nearby universities. Porter and company stayed with Richard Oakes, an Akwesasne Mohawk attending San Francisco State, for two weeks; they made a powerful impression on him and other young activists when they spoke to newly formed ethnic studies classes there and at the University of California in Berkeley. The group eventually left the Bay area for other engagements, but not before they had stimulated a heightened sense of cultural pride and political power among a number of these energetic urban leaders, who organized themselves as “Indians of All Tribes” and began plotting a takeover of the abandoned prison on Alcatraz Island.

White Roots of Peace was on the way home to Akwesasne by the first weekend in November; only one week later Indians of All Tribes laid claim to Alcatraz. “The Rock” was occupied again on November 20th and would remain under native jurisdiction for nineteenth months.<sup>32</sup>

The surprising and highly publicized occupation marked the beginning of a new era in native activism. Over the next decade many other urban organizations and reservation communities initiated their own occupations and protests, exploiting the media’s appetite for confrontational drama, though these radical actions were often trivialized by a consuming audience more interested in images than issues. The militant leaders of the American Indian Movement seized upon this public preference for style over substance and rose to prominence as the most memorable advocates of Red Power. As Robert Ellwood demonstrates for sixties historiography in general, most historical accounts of intertribal activism during this period have “seen a different Sixties” than did many of its native participants, in part because “the long-term impacts of spiritual movements are less easily read in the morning headlines than those of political movements.” While retrospective studies typically emphasize “the political side of the decade’s experience,” first-hand reports on grassroots organizing often suggest that “what was really going on was not political but religious or spiritual revolution.”

Reservation traditionalists, following the lead of the Onondagas, continued to organize during the early seventies by holding their annual unity conventions/caravans. In 1970 gatherings were hosted by traditionalists among the Creeks, Rosebud Sioux, and Tulalips. At the conclusion of the Tulalip convention in the Pacific Northwest, several dozen people caravanned down the coast to Alcatraz, where they conducted a religious ceremony in support of the occupation. In the summer of 1971 the unity caravan visited eight tribal communities on both sides of the Canada-U.S. border and also stopped at several urban Indian centers along the way. Young militant activists gradually began turning to their traditionalist elders for guidance and support; the twelve-month period beginning in June of 1972 proved to be one of the

most dramatic years in the history of modern inter-tribal activism.<sup>33</sup>

The summer opened with two unity conventions hosted by Penobscot and Creek traditionalists, which were followed by the most extensive caravan yet during the months of July and August. Traditionalists gathered on the fourth of July for a youth convention at the Cattaraugus Seneca reservation, then departed on a cross-continent pilgrimage including more than two dozen scheduled stops, with various tribal delegations joining the caravan at points along the way. A week-long convention near the La Jolla reservation in southern California launched a series of unity meetings throughout the Southwest, including one with Mormons in Salt Lake City. But the movement’s peaceful reputation was tarnished when caravan participants and members of the American Indian Movement protested the presence of non-native visitors at a Hopi snake dance, disrupting the ceremonies and provoking a violent confrontation with Shungopavi villagers. The 1972 caravan ended quietly back in the Iroquois homeland with conventions at the Six Nations and Kahnawake reserves, as summer heat gave way to the calm of autumn.<sup>34</sup>

During the third week of August, while the unity caravan was embroiled in controversy on the Hopi reservation, a group of reservation residents along with members of the American Indian Movement who were gathered at the Rosebud Sioux reservation began discussing the idea of a mass demonstration converging on the U.S. capital. Plans for the cross-country “Trail of Broken Treaties” were finalized by the end of September, and the large caravan arrived in Washington a month later, guided by spiritual leaders and armed with a twenty-point proposal for policy reform. Plans originally called for political negotiations as well as daily activities modeled after the unity conventions: speeches, discussions, ceremonies, and social events in the evenings. Organizers, however, had failed to arrange accommodations for the non-violent delegation—now several hundred members strong—and within a day local riot police had provoked a confrontation with restless activists, which quickly escalated into an occupation of the Bureau of Indian Affairs headquarters. Protesters agreed to vacate the building a week later, leaving

behind a disturbing scene of destruction, a symbolic massacre of bureaucratic proportions. The following February, members of the American Indian Movement joined Oglala Lakota traditionalists at the Pine Ridge reservation, where they occupied the hamlet of Wounded Knee. The militarized stand-off lasted more than two months, and its denouement in early May of 1973 marked another turning point in the complex evolution of contemporary native activism.<sup>35</sup>

Annual unity conventions and caravans had ceased by the mid-seventies, but the traditional movement lived on in local and regional cultural gatherings and in the global political arena, where traditionalist activists pursued self-determination by testifying before various international tribunals. If intertribal traditionalism failed to effect substantive changes in the political status of traditionalist factions among North America’s native communities, it did achieve some measure of success at facilitating “spiritual revival for Indians.” Like many religious movements, the most enduring legacy of the traditional movement can be found in the lives of those who participated in it. Aside from these personal considerations, the movement’s greatest heuristic significance may be its witness to the unqualified compatibility between “traditionalism” and “activism,” between religious commitment and political praxis, articulating cultural identity as a seamless garment of spiritual and social existence.

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