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The Iroquois and the Athenians, A Political Ontology. By Brian Seitz and Thomas Thorp.

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oral histories, which are the highlight of her discussion regarding their interplay with neoliberalism. This discussion is a good fit in any class that is focused on diversity, indigenous populations, gender relations, and global/regional politics.

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**The Iroquois and the Athenians, A Political Ontology.** By Brian Seitz and Thomas Thorp. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2013. 306 pages. \$90.00 cloth; electronic \$89.99.

As the title indicates, this study juxtaposes forays into ancient Greece and Iroquoia, which raises an important question: who is the intended audience? It turns out that the coauthors' audience members are neither Iroquoianists nor classicists, but fellow philosophers. Their goal is to "extend philosophy's rafters toward the Iroquoia," with the hope of showing how Native American political development might reshape the current "direction of philosophy" (62). As stated, then, for this study understanding the Iroquois becomes a means to something else rather than an end unto itself. Still, there are two reasons to read this book. First, the authors challenge existing political philosophical attitudes concerning the "social contract." Second, because they are not specialists in the field, they bring an outsider's eye to their understanding of Sky Woman and Deganawidah stories. The result is an analysis that focuses on a particular aspect of the story that many have commented on, but few have explored.

The authors rely on William Fenton's *The Great Law and the Longhouse* (1998) for their understanding of Iroquois cosmology and the League's creation. Synthesizing a lifetime of scholarship and fieldwork, in many ways Fenton's book is a summary of where Iroquoian studies stood at the end of the twentieth century. The resulting book is a history of the Iroquois over the centuries. Seitz and Thorp have a different focus: how the story of the League shaped Iroquoian understanding of themselves and others. This understanding, we are told, emerges from the shared power structure the League created—between older and younger brothers, or with matrons "raising up" sachems but being excluded from the position themselves—resulting in a democratic society that Europeans misunderstood from the beginning.

By focusing almost exclusively on the years before 1689, or the "classical" period of Iroquoian studies, the authors avoid having to discuss how the post-colonization Confederacy challenged the original League's political discourse. Seitz and Thorp see this challenge as relatively undemocratic, since Confederacy politicians were "village chiefs and war chiefs" and not "League title holders" (130). Interestingly, this political change mirrored another change in Iroquoia. The Iroquoian longhouse, which gave the League its metaphorical girding, was replaced by log structures imitating the Iroquois' European neighbors. Moreover, certain League titles went unfilled in the classical period. Fenton argues that this was due to declining population numbers: the Iroquois League had difficulty transmitting traditions because there were fewer

teachers and eligible candidates for chiefship. Providing a different interpretation, Seitz and Thorp see the empty titles as another sign of the “withdrawal” that they trace to the Sky Woman and Deganawidah stories. They pay little attention to the ebb and flow of Iroquois populations, or even territorial fluctuations. They are uninterested in how such events might transform the story (or stories) they are trying to understand, perhaps explaining why the book references alternative interpretations of the same story.

While the authors use Fenton’s work for its foundational underpinnings, they turn to modern philosophers to construct their arguments for why one ought to take a new look at the Iroquois League. Relying on Martin Heidegger, Michel Foucault, and Jean-François Lyotard, the authors contend the Iroquois League challenges the postmodernist assertion that political constitutions are “mere systems of power” (18). This is true, they contend, only if one accepts political constitutions as a form of “social contract.” Here is one of strengths of the book. According to Seitz and Thorp, the Iroquois League offers an alternative to the social contract interpretation of politics. The authors argue that Europeans were developing their social contract theory of government at the very time they were getting to know the Iroquois. Because the idea was just being developed at the time Europeans encountered the Iroquois, Jesuits such as Joseph François Lafitau used the idea to explain the Iroquois League. Unfamiliar with the cultural context upon which League politics operated, Lafitau retreated to the social contract for his understanding of the Iroquois, thereby placing the Iroquois within an understandable (from a European perspective) political development. The result was that a Eurocentric discourse replaced the indigenous narrative of political theory.

Unfortunately for Lafitau and contemporary political philosophy, the social contract theory missed the real meaning behind the Iroquois League, which is found in the stories of Sky Woman and Deganawidah. What makes the Iroquois League political alternative unique, at least according to the authors, is that relying on Deganawidah’s Great Law meant the Iroquois “never needed a ‘foundation’ of . . . the sort fancied by philosophers” for their identity. As a consequence, the League offers an opportunity “to remodel or transform the architectonics of—contemporary philosophy” (5). Because the Iroquois League’s “identity or claims of legitimacy” emerged out of the *kaianerekowa* there was never the need to create a social contract in the European sense. Unlike the creation of England’s constitutional monarchy, or the founding of the United States, the Iroquois League’s creation is lost in time. The League’s creation “was not an event but a labor process” that took years to accomplish (83). As a result, succeeding generations of Haudenosaunee, no matter where they reside, can continue to see themselves as Iroquois; the League provides “the condition of their existence” (54). The story of the League’s creation, then, becomes the linchpin of Iroquoian culture and society. To see how this is so, and to understand how it might help contemporary political philosophers, the authors attempt to recover the unrecoverable, what they call “the differend.” According to Lyotard, “the differend” involves one discourse usurping or eradicating another discourse. For Seitz and Thorp, Lafitau’s “Customs of the American Indians Compared with the Customs of Primitive Times”

began this differend for the Haudenosaunee. Understanding the differend is to recover some previous injustice, in this case, misinterpreting Iroquois political operations.

Thus, the authors examine *Sky Woman* and *Deganawidah*, both familiar to any Iroquoianist, from a unique perspective. First, they argue the procedures and rituals that emerged out of these stories, including the condolence ceremony, are the “central condition of Iroquois intersubjectivity,” which produced a set of practices that allow the Iroquois to survive over the centuries. The rituals and the resulting philosophy they produced cannot be translated “into Western terms,” or more specifically, into “types” (83; emphasis in original). This is why the authors use the word “politology” rather than “political science” throughout the work. The threads surrounding the Iroquois cannot be separated out if one hopes to truly understand how differently the Iroquois constructed their governmental structure from the western theories used to describe the system.

The second perspective the authors ask the reader to consider is the importance of “withdrawal” to the stories. Fenton’s discussion of these stories focused on notions of power, responsibility, and kinship. The book under review is more interested in the notion of “withdrawal” and “outsider” in the story. Whether it is *Sky Woman*’s withdrawal from the oldest twin, *Deganawidah*’s decision to withdraw after providing the “Great Message” or *Hiawatha*’s flight into the wilderness, we are asked to ponder the importance of withdrawal to the story being told and how it might impact the Iroquois community. Here is one place where Seitz and Thorp would have been advised to think more closely about some of Fenton’s arguments since they might have provided some historical detail that readers of this text might be missing.

A word of warning to the reader of this book: the prose is difficult and dense. There are many unnecessary parentheticals and detours into philosophy that take the reader away from the point the authors are trying to make. Nevertheless, if readers endure the prose, they are rewarded with an interesting interpretation of the meaning of the Iroquoian stories they thought they knew. One will not read or study any Iroquoian narrative without thinking about some of the points Seitz and Thorp have made. What the authors have done is provide a new window for reading, and perhaps understanding, the creation of the Iroquois League.

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**Literacy and Intellectual Life in the Cherokee Nation: 1820–1906.** By James W. Parins. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2013. 304 pages. \$34.95 cloth.

As a cofounder, with Daniel Littlefield, of the Sequoyah National Research Center at the University of Arkansas, professor emeritus James W. Parins has drawn upon the Center’s trove of journalistic and literary materials to write a definitive intellectual history of the Cherokee Nation’s struggle to maintain cultural survivance over nine perilous decades. In this synthesizing, tightly organized book he fills a gap in