

Taken Together



Future generations will know us by the quality of life they live.

– Kaluhyanu:wes Michelle Schenandoah

i.

Of late, I have been pondering time writ sagacious.

The 250-year anniversary of the birth of the United States creates opportunity for a collective pause to reflect on the meaning and health of our democracy.

The pause comes as we are surrounded with heated debates about the intention of the constitution, the

character of the writer-founders, the long search for belonging, and the evolution (or not) of a more perfect union.

In this moment, this anniversary begs the question: How should we remember?

My teachers from Kahnawake, facing the daily unfolding of the Oka Crisis in the summer and fall of 1990, embodied a different form of memory: The imagination to both remember back and remember forward.

In conversation with life-friend, Bear clan mother Karoniahente Dale Dione, and later witnessed in Long House deliberations, *seven generation thinking* was evoked and ever-present. One phrase repeated: *How our ancestors seven generations ago chose to live, the decisions they made, affect us today. How we choose to live now will impact the next seven.*

At this 250th anniversary mark, we would do well to imagine the multi-generational arc and learn how to practice such reparative memory.

ii.

We find a nudge into this form of memory through a new book: [American Indigenous Democracy](#).

In the text, elder statespersons and contemporary indigenous leaders, including John Mohawk, Oren Lyons, Katsi Cook, and Michelle Schenandoah, share guidance emergent from the ancestral wisdom of the Haudenosaunee and their Great Law of Peace.

Rarely acknowledged is the historic fact that the writers of U.S. Constitution drew from and were influenced by the principles found in the six-nation covenant. Key to those

principles and captured in the book's subtitle and opening introductions by Baratunde Thurston and editor José Barriero is the call for a [declaration of interdependence](#).

The Great Law of Peace understood that the practices of interdependence — dignity, justice, mutuality, respect, and gratitude — constitute the responsibilities we carry to assure the well-being of our communities, the functioning of democracy, and the health of our planet.

These same practices forge the spirit of peacebuilding.

iii.

Recently, the Association of Peace Studies in Spain (AiPAZ) gathered to celebrate a conference marking a half century of their research and practice.

Fifty years ago, in the mid 1970s, I made my first visit to Spain. At that time, I met friends who today still contribute to and guide AiPAZ. In those years, we were all early into our peace and conflict curiosity.

In an opening address to the conference, I asked my colleagues about what they might suggest as the most significant *hallazgo*, the most significant *finding* peace research has offered us over these past fifty years. Less a question about conceptual frameworks or analytical tools, this inquiry asks what empirical evidence stands out.

I offered mine. It came from the research and pen of friend, colleague, and now ancestor Andrew Mack.

Through the annual *Human Security Report*, Andy placed the major peace and conflict databases into conversation to understand what had transpired, what had been found,

and what patterns global data offered in the period of 1990-2003.

In the 2005 report, he reflected on some remarkable patterns observed: A 40% decline in armed conflict; 80% decline in combat related deaths; a global decline in arms transfers and military budgets. In the same period, there was a six-fold increase in UN preventative diplomacy efforts, a four-fold increase in peacemaking missions, and a significant increase in government and philanthropic investment in regional and in community-led proximate actors' initiatives. In responding to the question of what accounted for *peace on the rise*, Andy offered this summary insight:

Not one of the peacebuilding and conflict prevention programs on its own (sic) had much of an impact on global security in this period. Taken together, however, their effect has been profound.

Peace requires investment and commitment to interdependent cooperation.

iv.

We seem to speak much less of human security these days.

The trends are reversing.

National defense and militarization dominate both narratives and budgets.

Internal domestic control and facing down international threats are creating ever crueler forms of "political realism."

In 2026, nations, certainly led by the current U.S. budget proposals, invest far less in diplomacy and violence

prevention and far more in militarized security. Regional wars have expanded. Wars of choice have entered contemporary vocabulary. We increasingly transfer and deploy the contents of our arsenals and armories, which in turn justify increases in military budgets to replenish them.

We are rich in the production of weapons.

We are poor in the habits of mutuality.

v.

Taken together.

What Andrew Mack offered as scientific evidence from peace studies aligns with what the Haudenosaunee, the longest continuous democracy in human history, have always carried as wisdom: Dignity, justice, peace, and life itself are birthed from and return to the quality of how we practice mutual respect and care for creation.

Peacebuilding and democracy converge around the commitment to a culture of interdependence.

The politics and practices of such a culture have been known for generations: To shift from power over to power with, from domination to inclusive respect, from singular ways of knowing toward opening space for pluralistic understanding, from control to participatory contribution.

I am grateful to the Haudenosaunee for their millennial offering.

May we learn from their reparative memory and capacity for seven generation imagination.

I join their appeal.

We need a declaration of interdependence.

john paul lederach
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