



---

## The *Akwesasne Notes*: A Catalyst of Cold War Native American Transnational Protest

**Gyorgy Toth**

---



**Electronic version**

URL: <https://journals.openedition.org/ejas/27042>

DOI: 10.4000/16x14

ISSN: 1991-9336

**Publisher**

European Association for American Studies

**Electronic reference**

Gyorgy Toth, "The *Akwesasne Notes*: A Catalyst of Cold War Native American Transnational Protest", *European journal of American studies* [Online], 21-3 | 2026, Online since 07 September 2026, connection on 08 October 2026. URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/ejas/27042> ; DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4000/16x14>

---

This text was automatically generated on October 8, 2026.



The text only may be used under licence CC BY 4.0. All other elements (illustrations, imported files) may be subject to specific use terms.

---

# The *Akwesasne Notes*: A Catalyst of Cold War Native American Transnational Protest<sup>1</sup>

Gyorgy Toth

---

## 1. Introduction

- <sup>1</sup> Launched by the longhouse faction of the Mohawk of the Six Nations Iroquois Confederacy in 1969 after Native American activists reasserted their transnational passage rights by blockading the International Bridge connecting the U.S. state of New York and the Canadian provinces of Ontario and Quebec, the *Akwesasne Notes*<sup>2</sup> soon became one of the Native North American papers with the largest circulation, and served as the flagship periodical of the American Indian radical sovereignty movement through the end of the Cold War. Through a close-reading of content, multi-sited archival research, and a mapping out of the biographies of key activists and the histories of their organizations, this study will go beyond establishing that the *Notes* was transnational in its geography, politics of production and coverage, and will investigate whether the newspaper developed from an organ into a *catalyst* for Cold War Native transnational protest. Using a framework from Performance Studies, the article will argue that, in its coverage, *Akwesasne Notes* both recorded *and* provided scripts for protest performances that challenged and articulated alternatives to the current Native American/First Nations status and rights. Thereby and through its circulation across and beyond national borders, the *Notes* helped catalyse transnational alliances for American Indian sovereignty that over time spanned the Western hemisphere, reached across the Atlantic, and entered the United Nations.
- <sup>2</sup> Accordingly, after a brief definition of its theoretical approaches to Native American transnationalism and the periodical, this article will first outline the origins and the politics of production of the *Akwesasne Notes* as a transnational Native American periodical; next it will show how the paper was transnational in its coverage of

Indigenous issues and protest; and finally, it will make a case for how the *Notes* moved from being an organ to being a catalyst of transnational advocacy for Native American rights and sovereignty by being a means of facilitating exchange in the movement's transatlantic solidarity networks.

## 2. Native American Transnationalism and *Akwesasne Notes*

- 3 In the 1970s, the Red Power movement's American Indian activists challenged the United States as a historical and Cold War empire and attempted to decolonize Native America through transnational alliance building and outside pressure. Early in the decade, leading members of the American Indian Movement and other radical Native organizations began traveling to Central Europe, where they founded support groups and built a solidarity movement for Indian sovereignty across the iron curtain. Starting in the fall of 1977, American Indian sovereignty activists regularly travelled to Central Europe, where they would annually attend the sessions of the United Nations, after which they toured with their support groups in Switzerland, Austria, and West and East Germany. Their performances—solidarity rallies, fundraising concerts, diplomatic meetings, commemorations, and press conferences—were transnational because they took place beyond the borders of the United States. They were transnational also because they articulated a Native status and identity beyond individual Indian tribes and the U.S. nation-state. More specifically, they were transatlantic because they were often jointly done by American Indian activists and German-speaking Central Europeans, thus making for cultural interaction and a fluidity of identities.
- 4 A study of a Native newspaper of the character and stature of the *Akwesasne Notes* sits at the intersection of a number of scholarly fields. Within national scholarship, the *Notes* fits into the ethnic press in the United States. A more periodized and specific history of this topic would be that of studies of the U.S. underground press of the long 1960s, including the Vietnam era.<sup>3</sup>
- 5 Moving away from U.S. exceptionalism would locate this project in the history of Native American print cultures.<sup>4</sup> It is in this vein that most contemporary and later studies were conducted about and related to the *Akwesasne Notes*. Murphy and Murphy's 1981 *Let My People Know: American Indian Journalism, 1828-1978* provides crucial information on the rise and height of the *Notes* from its beginning through 1978.<sup>5</sup> This makes it all the more curious why, despite reaching its peak by the late 1970s, the *Akwesasne Notes* did not even get a single mention in Daniel F. Littlefield and James W. Parins' 1986 *American Indian and Alaska Native Newspapers and Periodicals, 1971-1985*.<sup>6</sup> Lowe and Mella's 2005 study focused on the relationship between Native American newspapers and tribal sovereignty in four tribal press organs in the settler state of Wisconsin<sup>7</sup>—in a period some 20 years later, and a category different from a pan-Native transnational newspaper the like of the *Akwesasne Notes*.
- 6 The 2010s saw scholarship providing better context for the *Notes* as well as information on the paper itself. Littlefield's later collaborator Seonghoon Kim published a 2015 study of poetry in Red Power newspapers between 1968 and 1974.<sup>8</sup> Kim discusses the *Akwesasne Notes* as one of the cohort of racial Native papers birthed by the Red Power movement, including *Americans Before Columbus* (established by the American Indian

Youth Council in 1963), and *Warpath* (launched by the United Native Americans in 1968).<sup>9</sup> In a 2011 book chapter, *Notes* editor between 1986 and 1992 Doug George-Kanentiio recounts the history of the *Akwesasne Notes* as a Mohawk community organ that rapidly grew to the stature of a pan-Native national newspaper.<sup>10</sup> Both George-Kanentiio and the Murphys locate the *Notes* in the older radical Native American newspaper tradition represented by Carlos Montezuma's 1910s and '20s *Wassaja* and its 1970s relaunched version.<sup>11</sup>

- 7 Completing the trajectory away from U.S. exceptionalist scholarship would frame the topic as part of Indigenous recording and communication systems. Indeed—without a doubt, the most current scholarly approach for analysing Native American newspapers is Indigenous Studies. However, in the case of the *Akwesasne Notes*, it is legitimate to rely upon a Western-derived analytical framework because such Native newspapers were using a Euro-centric communication system (Benedict Anderson's nationalist print culture)<sup>12</sup> for both infusing it with Indigenous content, and for driving a pan-Native ethno-political nationalist movement.<sup>13</sup>
- 8 This case study of one periodical as a catalyst for Cold War Native American transnational protest is indebted in its approach to Transnational American Studies, a scholarly paradigm which probes the limits of the U.S. as a nation state, the elasticity of its cultural imaginary abroad, and the circulation of people, ideas, commodities, and cultural forms across and beyond the borders of the United States proper. As it was articulated in the early 2000s,<sup>14</sup> Transnational American Studies acknowledges the many forms of domination and maps out minority agency along lines of race, class, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, religion, and region, both within and beyond the borders of the United States as a superpower, in order to better understand the potential, limitations, and flaws of the American empire. In this, Transnational American Studies has the potential for recovering the alternative practices, visions, and agencies of groups marginalized in, or excluded from, the body of the nation—of which American Indians are a prime example.

### 3. The *Akwesasne Notes* as a Transnational Periodical

- 9 I conceptualize the transnational periodical by refining Diana Taylor's Performance Studies theoretical model of the *archive* and the *repertoire*. Taylor defines the archive as containing "documents, maps, literary texts, letters, archaeological remains, bones, videos, films, CDs, all those items supposedly resistant to change." On the other hand, the repertoire "enacts embodied memory: performances, gestures, orality, movement, dance, singing – in short, all those acts usually thought of as ephemeral, nonreproducible knowledge."<sup>15</sup> Taylor is careful to point out that while the archive is often privileged over the repertoire, these two forms of knowledge work in complementary ways, and she observes that materials from the archive can shape performance practices.<sup>16</sup> I interpret this particular periodical, the *Akwesasne Notes*, as both recording recent performances of transnational protest—being an organ—and inspiring and providing 'scripts' for such performances—motivating or catalysing them. These documents were always mediated by both the editorial decisions of those who created them and by the nature of the medium itself. Thus, the periodical forms a feedback loop with embodied activism that is itself conditioned by selective retrieval and activation.

## 4. Origins and Politics of Production

- <sup>10</sup> The Haudenosaunee or Six Nations Confederacy is a prime historical example of a transnational Native people living in the interstices of two North American nation states. The Akwesasne Territory of the Mohawk straddles the border between the U.S. state of New York and the Canadian provinces of Ontario and Quebec. The struggle of the Mohawk for transit rights came to a head in late 1968 through 1969, when Native activists blockaded the International Bridge, which connects the two countries, to force a lifting of the restrictions on passage.<sup>17</sup> The flagship radical Native newspaper *Akwesasne Notes* originated in efforts to document the Mohawk's reassertion of their territorial rights—which was itself a performance of transnational protest. The *Notes* began as a service of newspaper clippings reporting on the December 1968 blockade of the international bridge between Ontario and Cornwall Island, New York—a protest for the Mohawk's transnational passage rights into Canada guaranteed by the Jay Treaty of 1794. The paper soon expanded to carrying editorials, features, political cartoons, and articles from across Turtle Island, and developed a global scope and focus on Indigenous issues and struggles<sup>18</sup>—as this article will show, with an international distribution.
- <sup>11</sup> In the early 1970s, *Akwesasne Notes* developed into one of the Native papers with the largest circulation—averaging 10,000 copies per issue, occasionally as high as 38,000, and claimed to reach some 125,000 in 1977.<sup>19</sup> Selling over time from 25 cents to \$1 and running on volunteer labor and financial contributions, the hard copy paper was published by the Indian Studies Program of Wesleyan University in Middletown, Connecticut, but its actual editorial offices were located in Hogansburg, NY, as well as at Route 3, Cornwall Island, Ontario—on both sides of the international border of the St. Regis Reservation.<sup>20</sup>
- <sup>12</sup> To be sure, the *Notes* was rooted in its local community, and Indigenous traditions and history. As George-Kanentiio explains, the Mohawk word “akwesasne” evokes the drumming sound of partridges that were once aplenty in the area.<sup>21</sup> The newspaper's early issues featured the byline “where the partridge drums” as a reference to this.<sup>22</sup> The paper's fourth editor also pointed out that the publication arose out of a tribal attitude that he summed up as “Mohawks go to the media by creating their own.”<sup>23</sup> The idea for the paper was born from the community's emergency making of a film documentary with a crew of the National Film Board of Canada about their blockade of the Seaway International Bridge in December 1968. According to him, it was specifically the group of Ernest Benedict, Tom Porter, John Fadden, Mike Boots, Mose David, Iran Benedict, Alec Gray, Mary Tebo, and Anne Jock, who met at a private home after the bridge blockade protest and created the newspaper.<sup>24</sup> For George-Kanentiio, however, the paper was also a creation in the tradition of the teachings and activities of Ray Fadden during the Great Depression—and Fadden's influences went through Clinton Rickard back to Carlos Montezuma's *Wassaja*.<sup>25</sup>

## 5. The Economics of *Notes*

- <sup>13</sup> It is likely that, as George-Kanentiio claims, it was the earlier forms of Fadden's Depression-era school field trips and Wallace “Mad Bear” Anderson's 1960s Unity

Caravans to Native reservations<sup>26</sup> that transferred to the Mohawk's creation of an economic base for the *Akwesasne Notes*. The paper's skyrocketing distribution made it imperative to find enough funding streams for it. Institutional sponsorship filled some of this need. Wesleyan University sponsored the newspaper's mailing and staff insurance costs, while the United Methodist Voluntary Service paid for subsistence costs for one staff volunteer. By the time it reached its peak, the *Notes* was working with the Washington, D.C.-based Youth Project to attain tax-exempt status for contributions.<sup>27</sup> Grassroots contributions, however, were paramount for the operation of *Notes*. The paper asked its readers to sell some copies at community events for 50 cents and give 35 cents to the press operation. Fundraising happened not only locally, but also across the United States through the White Roots of Peace. This was a "traveling communications" and educational group of 6-16 Native people, who toured the country twice a year, holding workshops, exhibitions, craft shows, cultural presentations, and film screenings in Native communities. As the *Notes* advertised and distributed Mohawk basketry and artworks from Akwesasne in New York, White Roots of Peace were selling the paper's calendars, books, posters, pamphlets, as well as herbal smoking products, stamps, buttons, and Native music records and tapes. As the *Notes'* staff gardens helped provide food for its local volunteers, its readers' donations and contributions helped support the paper.<sup>28</sup>

## 6. The *Akwesasne Notes* and Native American Transnational Protest

### 6.1 From Organ to Catalyst: Periodical as Archive, Record, and Script

- <sup>14</sup> A survey of the coverage of *Akwesasne Notes* shows that the foremost radical American Indian newspaper of the early 1970s exhibited a transnationalist Native discourse that disseminated information about other Indigenous, anti-colonial and national liberation struggles in the United States, the Western Hemisphere, and beyond.<sup>29</sup> Inspired by a transnational event itself, the paper's assembly and production happened across borders. In its reports on Native conscientious objectors against the draft, as well as its coverage of the atrocities of the war in Vietnam,<sup>30</sup> the paper recorded and provided scripts for performances that critiqued U.S. foreign policy. Just as importantly, the *Notes* reported on Native efforts to build transnational alliances by traveling to other countries.<sup>31</sup> In this, the paper was documenting, informing about, and inspiring performances of transnational diplomacy for Native sovereignty.

### 6.2 An Editor Crossing Borders

- <sup>15</sup> The work of the *Notes'* first editor attests to a careful politics of what today we would call allyship.<sup>32</sup> The first editor of *Akwesasne Notes* 1968-1977, Jerry Gambill,<sup>33</sup> was a non-Native person who helped build this newspaper out of an Indigenous community. Gambill had earned his tribal name Rarihokwats ("he uncovers facts" or "he writes") by working with and on behalf of the traditionalist Longhouse faction of the Mohawk.<sup>34</sup> One of his successors in the editorship, George-Kanentiio, attributed the paper's success to Gambill's commitment to the Mohawk that included learning their language, as well as that "[h]e was careful to surround himself with a young Native staff, which

diminished what could have been a contentious subject: a white man running a Native newspaper.”<sup>35</sup> Editorials were created through the editor, and the paper's content was decided by the editor based on suggestions from the staff, taking into account collective and external issues, events, and deadlines. All staff could range beyond their standard duties, and play the spectrum of newspaper worker roles—“oversee mailing [...] compose a short story or make an editorial comment.” Likewise, the *Notes* was open to volunteers in its production tasks, from layout through editing to proofreading.<sup>36</sup>

- 16 Predictably, the potential of *Akwesasne Notes* to mobilize transnationally incurred the attention and wrath of both the U.S. and the Canadian governments. Originally a U.S. citizen, in the mid-to-late 1960s Gambill had worked for the Canadian government's Department of Indian Affairs in the area, and in the process had acquired Canadian citizenship. The Department of Indian Affairs first reprimanded, then fired Gambill, for associating with the Mohawk traditionalists. The Longhouse people then took him in and put him up on Cornwall Island, on the Canadian side of the tribal territory, and he spearheaded the creation and subsequent expansion of the *Akwesasne Notes*.<sup>37</sup> As the paper self-admittedly became an organ of the Longhouse faction that was opposed to the Mohawk tribal trustees and the Department of Indian Affairs, the latter two institutions attempted to silence or at least disrupt the paper by going after Rarihokwats. In 1971 and 1972, Rarihokwats was arrested, briefly jailed, and subjected to an investigation and interrogation by U.S. immigration agents and state troopers.<sup>38</sup> In this, both nation states attempted to quash the editor of a transnationalist Indian newspaper.

### 6.3 Transnationalizing the Sovereignty Struggle

- 17 Possibly the most dramatic event of the American Indian rights movement was the February 1973 takeover of the village of Wounded Knee by Oglala Sioux traditionalists and the militant activists of the American Indian Movement (AIM). During the ensuing 3-month long standoff, the occupiers held their ground in the face of overwhelming pressure—and firepower—from the Pine Ridge Reservation tribal police, South Dakota state troopers, the FBI, federal marshals, and the American military—the full force of the United States government. The demands of the occupiers—a federal investigation into the wrongdoings of tribal chairman Dick Wilson, the reinstatement of the 1868 Fort Laramie Treaty as the basis of relations between the U.S. government and the Sioux Indians, and amnesty for all in the village—were at best partially met by a government that stalled, negotiated, hedged its bets, and tried to wear out those in the Knee by sealing the roads, imposing a media blackout, and keeping the village under withering gunfire that cost the lives of two Indians. Nevertheless, the occupation proved to be a momentous event that galvanized Native activism, garnered national and international solidarity, and it was a milestone on the road to further U.S. and international legislation on Indigenous rights. The 1973 occupation of the village of Wounded Knee was the radical Native sovereignty struggle's transnational challenge to the U.S. nation state, and the *Akwesasne Notes* covered it accordingly. According to the paper's last editor, leading Native activists at the key Red Power protests gave *Notes* unprecedented access.<sup>39</sup>

## 6.4 Wounded Knee as Vietnam: Challenges to Cold War U.S. Imperialism

- 18 One way in which Wounded Knee 1973 posed a discursive and embodied challenge to the U.S. as a nation state consisted in how those involved in the standoff connected it to the military involvement of the United States in Vietnam. While its critics—including some local whites, tribal chairman Dick Wilson, and some in the U.S. government—charged that the occupation was inspired, supported, or committed by Communists,<sup>40</sup> what is striking is how consistently the activists and their sympathizers linked Wounded Knee 1973 to the American war in Vietnam. For years before Wounded Knee 1973, the *Akwesasne Notes* had carried articles that bitterly observed that “The Frontier Moves West: The U.S. Has Got Itself Some New Indians” in Indochina, elaborated on the shared characteristics of historical “Indian fighter” Kit Carson and My Lai massacre perpetrator Lieutenant William Calley, and pointed out that the world-famous photo of Vietnamese children running from a napalm attack “could be Cheyenne, Lakota, or Pomo country, a century or less ago.”<sup>41</sup> During the actual event, radical and outspoken figures such as Angela Davis characterized the siege of Wounded Knee as “It’s Just Like a Vietnam Battlefield Out There.”<sup>42</sup> Participants discursively transferred Wounded Knee 1973 out of U.S. domestic policy into the foreign policy of the U.S. superpower in Cold War geopolitics. In this, the standoff tested the outlines and behavior of the United States as a nation-state on (what had been presumed to be) its own soil. Such a discursive manoeuvre further strengthened the link between the American Indian rights struggle and a global anti-colonialist project in the minds of the occupiers and the mainstream anti-war movement.
- 19 While the interest and overtures existed before, the event that catalyzed the transatlantic alliance for Indian sovereignty was the spring 1973 occupation and siege of Wounded Knee, South Dakota. Due to its prolonged duration and the Transatlantic press coverage, Central Europeans now read about the occupation of the village by Oglala Lakota traditionalists and the militant activists of the American Indian Movement, and its siege by the armed deputies of Oglala tribal chairman Dick Wilson, the FBI, and the United States military. Europeans on both sides of the iron curtain also saw iconic images of young Indians with rifles on horseback, rooftops, and foxholes, staring down federal marshals and armored vehicles. According to Bernd C. Peyer, the transatlantic reportage of the early 1970s “transformed the contemporary Indian into a primitivistic symbol of resistance against the system, in this case U.S. capitalism.” In the rooms of European students, “[i]mages of Geronimo and Sitting Bull were posted up alongside of Ché Guevara’s, and the AIM ‘Warrior’ became their immediate reincarnation.”<sup>43</sup> Seonghoon Kim and I concur that, in updating and deploying this “warrior” image, AIM activists played into, but also subverted, older, white U.S. and transatlantic stereotypes to perform their demands for an alternative American Indian status.<sup>44</sup>

## 7. Distribution and Role in Transnational Exchange

- 20 In addition to their own national presses, Europeans also had some information about the sovereignty struggle from North American Indian printed sources. There is evidence in the historical record that some of the radical Native press also circulated in

Central Europe. It can be assumed that some Native American G.I.s stationed in Western European countries would have subscribed to, and received, issues of the *Akwesasne Notes* and passed them on to family members or German civilians.<sup>45</sup>

- 21 European readers of the *Akwesasne Notes* expressed frustration with the dearth of information about Indian issues in their own societies, and they often condemned those as misleading stereotypes of popular culture or propaganda by the U.S. government.<sup>46</sup> What is evident from the letters section of the paper is that Europeans<sup>47</sup> were responding to what they read and heard about the radical Indian sovereignty movement. At the very least, in writing to the paper, these Europeans were seeking a way to join a discussion of the goals and means of the movement and to address Indians in North America. In their engagement with the Native press, European readers not only tried to better understand the needs, goals, and worldview of Native nations,<sup>48</sup> but they also attempted to use the history of U.S. colonialism and Native resistance to understand their own recent past.<sup>49</sup> In turn, the selection of European letters for publication in the *Akwesasne Notes* suggests an editorial desire to bolster the paper's stature and sense of mission for its readers by showing that people as far as Europe and Australia followed and supported the Native sovereignty struggle.

- 22 Considering these functions of the *Notes* for its non-U.S. audiences, it is understandable that some of its European readers valued the paper greatly. The April-August 1972 issue's letters section carried the following message from Stefania Antoniewicz in Poland:

I wait for the paper in anxiety and sadness, in a great fear at because of the troubles perhaps AKWESASNE NOTES cannot appear.

For me, there exists no treasure in the world equivalent with NOTES. The news are sorrowful, but not hopeless. They bring strength and unity. My great trouble is where is the editor? and Means Russell? I am constantly unrest of the members of AIM. My spirit and heart will follow you in all events.<sup>50</sup>

- 23 The causes of such anxiousness for the arrival of *Notes* by Antoniewicz may have been the paper's hiccups with the production schedule due to high staff turnover and piecemeal funding, or delays caused by Rarihokwats' 1971-72 harassment by the U.S. government, or any of a number of other obstacles to the paper's transmission across the borders from Mohawk country through the North American settler states to Western Europe, and across the iron curtain to Poland. Antoniewicz, one of the leaders of her country's solidarity movement with Native causes, wrote these lines when she was nearing 80. She also entered into correspondence with the paper's later and third editor, Peter Blue Cloud (Kahnawake Mohawk, 1984-86).<sup>51</sup>

- 24 European letters reveal that publications of the radical Native press like the *Akwesasne Notes* circulated in Europe as they were both sent there by relatives and friends living in the United States,<sup>52</sup> and also by readers who became subscribers and distributors themselves.<sup>53</sup> In a letter titled "German View" in the September 1970 issue of the paper, Waltraud Wagner of Horneburg, Germany claimed that "several groups from Germany have sent supporting letters to the Mohawks, groups like workshops on Third-World problems and the World University Service." One year later, Wagner was listed in the *Akwesasne Notes* as one of the people who distributed the paper overseas. Presumably in the same period, Wagner received from members of the Swiss group Incomindios (Committee for the Indians of the Americas) a newsletter about traditional Indian land and life. By the early 1970s, Wagner had also become one of the leading members of the Arbeitskreis für Nordamerikanische Indianer (Working Circle for North American

Indians), building relations between the solidarity organizations across the German-speaking countries of Central Europe.<sup>54</sup>

- 25 Another remarkable instance illustrates the power of *Notes* as a vehicle, catalyst, or facilitator of Native transnational protest. At the end of 1971, Pete “Wyoming” Bender sent the *Notes* a letter from “Western Germany,” calling for Indian musicians to join his project of putting together an Indian musical with lyrics from the poetry section of *Notes*, as a fundraiser for the paper. Four years later, in 1975, Bender was volunteering at the American Indian Movement’s West Berlin office, which had just been opened, and which was in high demand for programming on Native sovereignty rights. Bender stepped up. A February 1976 diplomatic cable from the U.S. Embassy in West Berlin reported that East Berlin’s recently held annual festival of political songs featured “an American Indian singer named ‘Wyoming,’ who is pictured sitting at the piano singing his own composition, ‘Freedom.’” The embassy cable notes that one major East German newspaper described “Wyoming” as “a spokesman for the Indian freedom movement,” who was “sentenced to many years in jail last August by American racist justice for his political opinion and action.”<sup>55</sup> This white singer of unclear nationality<sup>56</sup> performed a sovereign Indian identity with his on-stage persona. His performance served as fodder for East German anti-U.S. propaganda, but it also put the U.S. government on alert that American Indians were engaging in diplomacy in the Central European contact zone. It also stretched the transatlantic sovereignty movement to confer a kind of Indian identity on non-Natives who were willing to work for the movement.
- 26 Finally, publications like the *Akwesasne Notes* also became a means of exchange in the transatlantic alliance of the radical Native sovereignty movement. In return for their financial donations to the Wounded Knee Defense/Offense Committee, European supporters asked for up-to-date information on the trial proceedings.<sup>57</sup> In response, the Committee sent European support groups trial updates in their letters, as well as the current and recent issues of their newsletter and press materials.<sup>58</sup> European organizations then incorporated these materials into their own newsletters and public relations kits.<sup>59</sup> Thus, the *Notes* and similar publications were a means of exchange that also involved European financial donations, mutual messages of solidarity, logistical correspondence, and petitions that circulated across the Atlantic. This circulation helped shore up the Native struggle at its lowest point during the 1974-76 Wounded Knee trials, and by 1977 helped catapult it into the United Nations, to develop a global Indigenous rights regime there.

## 8. Conclusion

- 27 This article has argued that the *Akwesasne Notes*, this flagship transnational Native North American newspaper of the radical Red Power movement, not only originated in transnational protest events and covered the Native sovereignty struggle and Indigenous issues globally, but also helped catalyze the transatlantic wing of the movement by facilitating networking and planning for protest events, and by itself being a means of exchange in the transatlantic alliance. In this, as a performance feedback loop, the *Akwesasne Notes* both recorded and provided scripts for, in other words, motivated, transnational Native North American and allied protests for sovereignty. The *Akwesasne Notes* is one specific and powerful example of Indigenous

activists and their allies utilizing a Euro-centric system of communication for resistance to colonialism and the advancement of Indigenous rights across borders.

---

## NOTES

1. This paper owes special recognition to the many veteran journalists of Native media, including the paper's fourth editor, Doug George-Kanentiio, their sustaining movement and tribal communities, and to the American Indian Digital History Project created and maintained by Kent Blansett and Jason Heppler: <http://www.aidhp.com/>.
2. Pronounced ahg-wah-SAHs-nay Notes.
3. See Doug George-Kanentiio, "Akwesasne Notes: How the Mohawk Nation Created a Newspaper and Shaped Contemporary Native America" in Ken Wachsberger, ed., *Insider Histories of the Vietnam Era Underground Press*, Part 1 (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2011), 109-138. Also see the whole journal issue by Victoria Bazin, Sue Currell, and E. James West, eds, *Radical Americas* 3, no. 1 (2018).
4. See, among others, Phillip H. Round, *Removable Type: Histories of the Book in Indian Country, 1663-1880* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2010).
5. See James E. Murphy and Sharon M. Murphy, *Let My People Know: American Indian Journalism, 1828-1978* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1981), 80, 86-90, 154-155.
6. This publication did not even list *Akwesasne Notes* and *Americans Before Columbus*, two of the most robust pan-Native radical sovereignty publications. Daniel F. Littlefield and James W. Parins, eds, *American Indian and Alaska Native Newspapers and Periodicals, 1971-1985* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1986).
7. See Patty Loew and Kelly Mella, *Black Ink and the New Red Power: Native American Newspapers and Tribal Sovereignty* (Columbia, SC: Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication, 2005).
8. Seonghoon Kim, "'We Have Always Had These Many Voices': Red Power Newspapers and a Community of Poetic Resistance," *American Indian Quarterly* 39, no. 3 (2015): 271-301, 296, note 1.
9. *Ibid.*, 271-72.
10. George-Kanentiio, "Akwesasne Notes," 109-138.
11. *Ibid.*, 121; Murphy and Murphy, *Let My People Know*, 80, 90.
12. "The Origins of National Consciousness" and "Old Languages, New Models" in Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (New York: Verso, 1983, 1991), 37-46, 67-83.
13. In this, my study is closest not to Indigenous Studies as working out of Native traditions, but to scholarship on "the impacts that Indigenous peoples have had on media innovations and changes by repurposing Western print and digital technologies," the focus of the forthcoming book: Jill Doerfler, Oliver Scheiding, Cristina Stanciu, eds, *Indigenous Media Ecologies* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2026), <https://www.nebraskapress.unl.edu/nebraska/9781496247858/indigenous-media-ecologies> accessed June 7, 2026.
14. While non-U.S. Americanists may have been engaging in Transnational American Studies in the forms of comparative, immigration and reception studies for much longer, in the United States, Transnational American Studies emerged as a paradigm in the (inter)discipline of American Studies in the mid-1990s, when scholars such as Jane Desmond and Virginia Dominguez started to spearhead this theoretical framework. By the dawn of the new millennium, this

approach had gained ground: in her 1998 presidential address at the American Studies Association, Janice Radway explored the possibility of the ASA refashioning its name after The International Forum for U.S. Studies, a research organization co-founded and co-run by Desmond and Dominguez. See Jane C. Desmond and Virginia R. Dominguez, "Resituating American Studies in a Critical Internationalism," *American Quarterly* 48, no. 3 (1996): 475-490; Janice Radway, "What's in a Name? Presidential Address to the American Studies Association, 20 November 1998," *American Quarterly* 51, no. 1 (1999): 1-32, 19. Also see the website of the International Forum for U.S. Studies, now at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign: <https://ifuss.illinois.edu/>, accessed February 24, 2024.

In the new millennium, the ascent of Transnational American Studies culminated in its official recognition as a full-blown paradigm: the proclamation of the so-called "Transnational Turn in American Studies" in Shelley Fisher Fishkin's 2004 presidential address to the American Studies Association. In Fisher Fishkin's formulation, Transnational American Studies interrogates the power, potential and limits of the United States as a nation and a system of cultures—transnational scholarship "see[s] the inside and outside, domestic and foreign, national and international, as interpenetrating." In that it considers "the ways in which ideas, people, culture, and capital have circulated and continue to circulate physically, and virtually, throughout the world, both in ways we might expect, and unpredictably," Transnational American Studies acknowledges and critically examines aspects of the United States in a supra-national context: in a regional or global setting, or as part of "web of contact zones"; Shelley Fisher Fishkin, "Crossroads of Cultures: The Transnational Turn in American Studies. Presidential Address to the American Studies Association, November 12, 2004," In *American Quarterly* 57, no. 1 (2005): 17-57, 21-22.

15. Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 19, 20

16. *Ibid.*, 21.

17. See "There Is An Alternative?" and "Battle for Crossing Rights" in *Akwesasne Notes* 1, no. 10 (1969), 6, <https://www.aidhp.com/files/original/dc559cd84e74ae2a4d87ff3133ce390f.pdf>.

18. Murphy and Murphy, *Let My People Know*, 86. Also electronic communication, Kent Blansett, the American Indian Digital History Project, Dec. 11, 2017. Also see George-Kanentiio, "Akwesasne Notes," 126.

19. George-Kanentiio, "Akwesasne Notes," 134. According to Murphy and Murphy, the Notes circulation went from 900 in 1968, to 7000 in 1969, 18,000 in 1971, 56,000 in early fall 1973, to 81,000 by early summer 1976; Murphy and Murphy, *Let My People Know*, 87.

20. Arnold Krupat, *The Voice in the Margin: Native American Literature and the Canon* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 206, footnote 4; Bruce Elliott Johansen and Barbara Alice Mann, eds., *Encyclopedia of the Haudenosaunee* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2000), 16; "Akwesasne Notes" in Bruce E. Johansen, *Encyclopedia of the American Indian Movement* (Santa Barbara: Greenwood, 2013). Front page, *Akwesasne Notes*, July-Aug. 1972. Jan.-Feb. 1972, 2-3. Underground Newspaper Collection, Center for Southwest Research, University of New Mexico, Albuquerque, NM, USA. See also Murphy and Murphy, *Let My People Know*, 86.

21. George-Kanentiio, "Akwesasne Notes," 111.

22. See the *Akwesasne Notes* issues at the American Indian Digital History Project. <https://www.aidhp.com/items/browse?collection=1>.

23. George-Kanentiio, "Akwesasne Notes," 126.

24. *Ibid.*

25. *Ibid.*, 121-22.

26. Ray Fadden developed a Native activist curriculum at Akwesasne and New York, and took his students on field trips to various reservations, and interviewed Native leaders. George-Kanentiio, "Akwesasne Notes," 122-23. A pillar and driver of not only the Six Nations Confederacy's rights

struggles, but also Red Power within North America and beyond, Wallace “Mad Bear” Anderson (Tuscarora, 1927-1985) went on the 1967 “Unity Caravan,” which led to the establishment of the North American Indian Traveling College, serving far-flung communities with cultural and educational training and resources. Troy R. Johnson, “Anderson, Wallace ‘Mad Bear’” in Paul Finkelman and Tim Alan Garrison, eds., *Encyclopedia of United States Indian Policy and Law* (Washington, D.C.: CQ Press, 2008), 83-84. For more on Wallace, see Anthony F. C. Wallace, *Tuscarora: A History* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2012), 148-152.

27. Murphy and Murphy, *Let My People Know*, 88.

28. *Ibid.*, 87-89.

29. While the paper did carry some news from individual tribal communities, it focused heavily on the Red Power movement, a pan-Native endeavor, and on Indigenous news globally. It also covered relevant inter-tribal Native American issues, and also often highlighted tribal-based issues within all its other topics. In this, it covered sovereignty struggles especially beyond the tribal level.

30. “Indians Don’t Need Draft” by Hank Adams, and “Puyallup Indian Suit Asks Men Of Tribe To Be Exempted from Draft,” *Akwesasne Notes*, March 1971, 7; “Indian Draft Resistance Growing,” April 1971, 42; “From the Tomahawk Statement,” “From the Statement of Sid Mills,” “An Indian GI’s Testimony on Racism,” and “Caught in the Draft,” April 1971, 42-43; “Indian Refuses Draft because of His Religion,” March-May 1972, 13; “Hidatsa Remembers Indian Teaching and Refuses to Kill in Vietnam,” May-Aug. 1972, 16; *ABC: Americans Before Columbus*, Dec. 1969-Jan. 1970, 8; John Nichols, “Lieutenant William Calley, Meet Kit Carson,” *Akwesasne Notes*, July-Aug., 1971, 40-41; “How Cruel the Whites’ Eyes Look: Tom Hayden on the War in Indochina,” March-May 1972, 32; Thom Marlowe, “The Frontier Moves West: The U.S. Has Got Itself Some New Indians,” *Akwesasne Notes*, March-May 1972, 32; “The Fruits of Racism,” uncredited photo, April-June 1972, 34, Underground Newspaper Collection.

31. “Latin America” in *Akwesasne Notes* issues of summer 1971; “Brazil” in June 1972; “In the Colonies” in June 1970, 41; “Third World View” in June 1972, 11 and in July-Aug. 1972, 26; “Australia” in June 1970; Sept. 1970; Sept. 1971, 29; “The Pacific Peoples” in July-Aug. 1972, 29 and June 1972, 27; news on Lapplanders in June 1972, 11, April-June 1972, 30, May-Aug. 1972, 34; “Third World View,” in July-Aug., 1972, 26; “Wise Words on ‘The Movement’ by from Chicano Leader, Corky Gonzales,” in June 1972, 11; “Irish Republican Army Inspired by Indian Fishing Struggle in U.S.” in Dec. 1971, 11; Da Na Waq (White Beaver), “World Ambassador,” *Akwesasne Notes*, June 1970, 48; “Roland – trip of a lifetime,” Sept. 1971, 34; in May-Aug 1972, 27, and in March-May 1972, 40; “Use of Iroquois ‘passport’ questioned by British MP,” “Chief’s Iroquois passport said good for travel abroad,” and “Indian chief with ‘own’ passport: it was up to the man on the barrier,” in Sept. 1970, 40; Rudy Platiel, “Chief’s Iroquois passport said good for travel abroad,” *Akwesasne Notes*, Sept. 1970, 40; “Indians Seek Foreign Aid” (United Press International), Dec. 1971, 6; “Appeal to UN” in April 1971, 7; Robert C. Cowen, “Indian Voices from Sweden,” *Akwesasne Notes*, April-June 1972, 30; “Samer är också indianer: Our People in Stockholm,” in May-Aug 1972, 34; “Lapps Meet with Our People” in May-Aug 1972, 34, Underground Newspaper Collection.

32. *Allyship* is a term loaded with the identity and movement politics of our early 21<sup>st</sup> century’s BIPOC coalitions, including the NoDAPL and Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Relatives struggles. Historical studies of allyship include Gyorgy Toth, “Richard Erdoes, Red Power’s Ally” in Jonathan Singerton, Markéta Křížová, and Michael Burri, eds, *Familiar Strangers: Re-encountering Native America from the Habsburg Lands* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2025).

33. The *Notes* was edited first by Jerry Gambill (non-Native, 1968-1977), then John Mohawk-Satsisowah (Seneca, 1977-84), next by Peter Blue Cloud (Mohawk, 1984-86); Doug George-Kanentiio (Mohawk, 1986-1992), and finally by Salli Benedict and Darren Bonaparte (Mohawk,

- 1992-1998). In 1998, the Mohawk Nation Council 'mothballed' the paper indefinitely, for future generations to revive as they saw fit; George-Kanentiio, "Akwesasne Notes," 127, 134, 135, 136, 137.
34. George-Kanentiio, "Akwesasne Notes," 133-134; Murphy and Murphy, *Let My People Know*, 86.
35. George-Kanentiio, "Akwesasne Notes," 133.
36. *Ibid.*, 127.
37. *Ibid.*, 133-134.
38. "Harassment of Traditional Mohawks!"; "Editor of Akwesasne Notes Arrested!"; "Two Longhouse Families Threatened with Eviction!"; "Traditional Peoples Land Seized!"; "Indian Way' School in Danger!" *Akwesasne Notes*, July-Aug. 1972, front page/1-2, Underground Newspaper Collection. Also see the issue at the American Indian Digital History Project, <http://www.aidhp.com/files/original/5f9e1505dded57faaa256f0810abdbdb.pdf>. See also Johansen, "Akwesasne Notes"; George-Kanentiio, "Akwesasne Notes," 133-134; Murphy and Murphy, *Let My People Know*, 86.
39. George-Kanentiio, "Akwesasne Notes," 130-131.
40. For various such charges, made on and off the record, see Means and Wolf, 276, 328; Banks and Erdoes, 176, 220; Smith and Warrior, 192, 207; and William S. White, "The Red Storm-Trooper Phenomenon" (originally Associated Press, March 7, 1973), in *Akwesasne Notes*, April 1973, 16, Underground Newspaper Collection.
41. See, respectively, Thom Marlowe, Pacific News Service / Liberation News Service, "The Frontier Moves West: The U.S. Has Got Itself Some New Indians" in *Akwesasne Notes*, March-May 1972, 32; John Nichols, "Lieutenant William Calley, Meet Kit Carson" (originally *The New Mexican*, June-July 1971), *Akwesasne Notes*, July-Aug. 1971, 40-1; "The Fruits of Racism," *Akwesasne Notes*, April-June 1972, 34, Underground Newspaper Collection.
42. *Akwesasne Notes*, April 1973, 43, Underground Newspaper Collection.
43. Bernd C. Peyer, "Who is Afraid of AIM?" in Christian F. Feest, ed., *Indians and Europe: An Interdisciplinary Collection of Essays* (Aachen: Edition Herodt-Rader Verlag, 1987), 551.
44. Seonghoon Kim, "We Have Always Had These Many Voices," 282-83; 285; Gyorgy Toth, "Performing 'the Spirit of '76': U.S. Historical Memory and Counter-Commemorations for American Indian Sovereignty" in Amanda Gilroy and Marietta Messmer, eds, *America: Justice, Conflict, War* (Heidelberg: Winter University Press, 2016), 131-150. For how AIM was covered in Minneapolis newspapers, see Sasha Maria Suarez, "Contesting 'the so-called Indian experts': Reading Indigenous Resistance to Settler Depictions in post-World War II Minneapolis Newspapers," current issue. For a recent study of the 'warrior' image and ethos at Wounded Knee and in AIM, see Matthias Andre Voigt, *Reinventing the Warrior: Masculinity in the American Indian Movement, 1968-1973* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2024).
45. Other evidence of Native American G. I. activism in Germany include their plans to join AIM, to establish a Native American club on a base, and plans of American Indian service personnel stationed in the West Berlin area to finance and host the delegates of the 1977 UN NGO conference on discrimination against Indians in the Americas; Letter to Richard Erdoes from Regina Mayer, Feb. 13, 1975, Richard Erdoes Papers; "The Indians are Coming," *BZ* [most likely *Berliner Zeitung*], Sept. 29, 1977, 5, Records of the Gesellschaft für bedrohte Völker.
46. "Paola Ludovici, Rome, Italy" in letters section of *Akwesasne Notes* Aug.-Oct. 1973, 46; Ruth M. Benjamin in letters section of April-June 1972, 45, Underground Newspaper Collection.
47. This is not to say that all letters came from people in Europe. There were letters from countries as far as Australia.
48. Letters section of *Akwesasne Notes* April 1971, 47; April-June 1972, 46; April-June 1972, 45; and July-Aug 1972, 47; Jan.-Feb. 1972 47; April-June 1972 47, Underground Newspaper Collection.
49. "German View," Letters section of *Akwesasne Notes* Sept 1970, 2; July-Aug. 1972, 47, Underground Newspaper Collection.
50. Stefania Antoniewicz (Poland) in letters section, *Akwesasne Notes* April-Aug. 1972.

51. "Indiańska Babcia - Stefania Antoniewicz," *Przegląd Polskiego Ruchu Przyjaciół Indian* [Polish Movement of Friends of Indians], <http://www.indianie.eco.pl/bylo/babcia.html>. My gratitude to Izabela Wilkosz for summary translations of the website's materials from Polish to English. Also see Ewa Nowicka, "The 'Polish Movement of Friends of the American Indians'" in Feest, ed., *Indians and Europe*, 604-605.
52. Ruth M. Benjamin in letters section of *Akwesasne Notes* April-June 1972, 45, Underground Newspaper Collection.
53. Letters section of *Akwesasne Notes*, Dec. 1971, 47; Sept. 1970, 2; Sept 1971, 47, Underground Newspaper Collection; Feb. 13, 1975 letter from Regina Mayer to Richard Erdoes, Richard Erdoes Papers, Arbeitskreis für Nordamerikanische Indianer flier to order bulletin and papers; Committee for Traditional Indian Land and Life Newsletter issue 2, May 1969, sent to Waltraud Wagner in Germany, Organizational Records at the office of Incomindios Switzerland.
54. For more on Wagner's earlier trajectory into Central European solidarity with Native American rights, see H. Glenn Penny, "Red Power: Liselotte Welskopf-Henrich and Indian Activist Networks in East and West Germany" *Central European History* 41, no. 3 (2008): 447-476, 470-71.
55. Feb. 11, 1976 cable from the U.S. Embassy in Berlin to the Secretary of State, Washington, D.C., State Department Papers, National Archives II, College Park, Maryland, Online database.
56. According to his English biography on his website, Bender was born in France but spent much of his childhood in the United States before moving with his father "back to Germany." The lyrics of his hit "Born to be Indian" were "written by his brother Zeph Zephier Sr. (a Yankton Sioux). Pete was adopted by the family and tribe. Pete was also member of the American Indian Movement and speaker for the German office for some time." This kind of positioning of a white person 'adopted' by Native North Americans and being a member of the radical sovereignty movement is itself a transatlantic form of 'playing Indian'; Biography, Pete Wyoming Bender homepage (moribund), <http://pete-wyoming-bender.de/english/private.html>.
57. April 1, 1974 letter from Kiva Group, Friends of the North American Indians, of the Netherlands; Feb. 6, 1974 letter from the Irish Committee for the Defense of Wounded Knee. Records of the Wounded Knee Legal Defense / Offense Committee.
58. Letters in Records of the Wounded Knee Legal Defense / Offense Committee.
59. "For favor of publication," Jan. 11 and Feb. 6, 1974, letters from the Irish Committee for the Defense of Wounded Knee; June 3, 1974 letter from J. Heijink of "KIVA group, Friends of the North American Indians in the Netherlands"; article in March 11, 1974 letter from Pierrette Désy of "Comité français de soutien à AIM" Paris, France; article "For a Policy of Solidarity towards the Indians of Wounded Knee" by Pierrette Désy, published in *La Guelue Ouverte* in Paris, France. Records of the Wounded Knee Legal Defense / Offense Committee.

---

## ABSTRACTS

Launched by the longhouse faction of the Mohawk of the Six Nations Iroquois Confederacy in 1969 after Native American activists reasserted their transnational passage rights by blockading the International Bridge connecting the U.S. state of New York and the Canadian provinces of Ontario and Quebec, the *Akwesasne Notes* soon became one of the Native North American papers with the largest circulation and served as the flagship periodical of the American Indian radical sovereignty movement through the end of the Cold War. Through a close-reading of content,

multi-sited archival research, and mapping out of the biographies of key activists, this study goes beyond establishing that the *Notes* was transnational in its geography, politics of production, and coverage, and will investigate whether the newspaper developed from an organ into a *catalyst* for Cold War Native transnational protest. Using a framework from Performance Studies, the article argues that, in its coverage, *Akwesasne Notes* both recorded *and* provided scripts for protest performances that challenged and articulated alternatives to the current Native American/First Nations status and rights. Thereby and through its circulation across and beyond settler colonial borders, the *Notes* helped catalyse transnational alliances for American Indian sovereignty that over time spanned the Western hemisphere, reached across the Atlantic, and entered the United Nations.

## AUTHOR

### GYÖRGY TÓTH

György Tóth holds degrees from Eötvös Loránd University in Budapest, Hungary, and the University of Iowa in Iowa City, Iowa, USA. In his academic specializations, György combines U.S. cultural and social history with Transnational American Studies, Performance Studies, and archival scholarship to yield interdisciplinary insights into the politics of social and cultural movements in the U.S. and post-1945 Europe. Since 2014, György has served as Lecturer in post-1945 U.S. History and Transatlantic Relations at the University of Stirling, Scotland in the United Kingdom. His book *From Wounded Knee to Checkpoint Charlie*, on the transatlantic alliance for American Indian sovereignty in the Late Cold War, was published by SUNY Press in 2016. He is co-editor of the 2020 *Comparative American Studies* special issue “Red Power at 50: Re-Evaluations and Memory,” and author of “Richard Erdoes, Red Power’s Ally” in the volume *Familiar Strangers*, published with the Central European University Press – Amsterdam University Press in 2025.