

**Pocahontas Incarcerated: An Activist's Account of Early Twentieth-Century Native America**

Judit Szathmári

**Ackley, Kristina, and Cristina Stanciu, eds. *Laura Cornelius Kellogg: Our Democracy and the American Indian and Other Works*. New York: Syracuse UP, 2015. xxviii + 301 pages. ISBN 978-0-8156-3390-7. Hb. Npr.**

Scholars of American Indian cultures, literatures, anthropology, and ethnography have long drawn upon personal narratives by Indigenous peoples, but only recently have such collections become more widely available to serve as invaluable resources to contextualize the Native experience in the United States. This tendency has long been awaited, particularly among scholars of American Indian history, as hardly can US history studies be complete without an in-depth exploration of the Indigenous contribution to America's past, and, for that matter, present and future. Laura Cornelius Kellogg's *Our Democracy and the American Indian and Other Works* is one of those outstanding collections that introduce the Indigenous voice from the first decades of the twentieth century, a time when the major goal of federal Indian policy was to assimilate America's remaining Indigenous population.

Editors Kristina Ackley and Cristina Stanciu compiled a book that does not only serve as an eye-witness account of the dire years between 1901 and 1929, but also (re)establishes the legacy of an activist, poet, organizer, ethnographer, and, first and foremost, a community member devoting her life to her people. Oneida tribal historian Loretta Metoxen recommends the volume to tribal members "to reflect on their histories to come to grips with their present circumstances" (xii). Nevertheless, with or without tribal affiliations, well-educated in American Indian history and federal Indian policy or lay, Kellogg's works offer an insight into the complexities and nuances of Indigenous experience, high and low, to all readers.

"I am the product of almost every institution of the outside except the insane asylum and Tammany Hall" (143) says Kellogg, a controversial character of the age, whose life, indeed, testifies to the peculiar nature of early twentieth-century American Indian activism. To comprehend the ironic and tragic momentums revealed through the impressive range of writings, I recommend that readers start with the briefest section, titled "Other Writings," composed of a variety of genres, from short stories and poems to

essays on contemporary Indian affairs. All but two of the eight items in this section are from the first decade of the twentieth century, beginning in 1901 and the last two written in 1912 and 1913. The dates professedly indicate how Kellogg's interest in politics escalates parallel to her growing awareness of the injustices American Indian peoples struggle with, partly due to her expansive educational and travelling experience. By no means, however, is her activism exclusively confined to the 1910s. As early as 1903, at 23, she is quoted as the "Indian Joan of Arc," a designation she earns when protesting the eviction of California Indians from their farm (xxiii).

The editorial decision to arrange texts "by genre, rather than chronology, to give the reader a better sense of the different ways Kellogg communicated her ideas" (xviii) is the most perceptible and arguable in the "Other Writings" section. Inserting the bloc between two thematically related chapters—the first "Our Democracy and the American Indian: A Presentation of the Indian Situation as It Is Today" and the closing "Public Speeches and Testimonies," both reflecting Kellogg's political and activist works—seems a peculiar editorial choice.

Editors Ackley and Stanciu did invaluable research to uncover writings by Kellogg, and they also admit that the research is far from complete. Responding to the ever-growing need to include all histories as equal, the collection of Kellogg's works does exactly that. Her essays, public speeches, and testimonies before Congress and diverse committees are critical reflections of American Indian and federal (Euro-American) relations in an era when Indigenous communities saw the lowest population figures; when the federal government executed policies to enhance the assimilation of the remaining half a million American Indians by allotting reservation lands to turn the Indian into small-scale farmers; and by kidnapping children off reservations to be educated in boarding schools where the idea of "kill the Indian, save the man" was the guiding principle in the curriculum. In her 1912 essay on Indian education, Kellogg challenges the practice of distorting histories by critically asking "why should [the Indian] not justly know his race's own heroes rather than through false teaching think them wrong" (156).

*Our Democracy* also gives an insight into twentieth-century women's history. As female "leadership qualities" were not recognized either in the US or worldwide (xi), Kellogg's reception is further complicated in view of the fact that the Oneida were traditionally a matriarchal society, and women were highly esteemed in the Haudenosaunee social organization. It was not only her ancestry of Oneida chiefs and leaders, but also her erudite discourse and

social skills that prompted contemporary press to refer to Kellogg as the “Indian princess” (5), “Princess Neoskalita” (15), “Princess Egahtahyen” (19), and the “Daughter of Long Line of Indian Chiefs” (31). The Publisher’s Introduction to the 1920 “Our Democracy and the American Indian” declares the essay to be a work measuring up to the “historic heroism of Pocahontas” (65). However gravely stereotypical the designations may seem, Kellogg herself cultivated some of these images and capitalized on them to her own, or rather, her people’s advantage. Her criticism clad in humor is the most apparent in her frequent use of the term “paleface” to refer to mainstream society. When she asserts that “I am not the new Indian; I am the old Indian adjusted to the new conditions” (9), she reflects on the discrepancy between the traditional roles and social expectations both towards women and Indigenous peoples, and the daring modern woman. In 1920, she calls for a radical change when stating: “I see no hope in the party politics of the United States until the women of the land get the suffrage and form a no-party organization” (86). Considering that universal American Indian suffrage is not granted until the 1924 Indian Citizenship Act, Kellogg’s statement reads all the more daring. Yet, Kellogg is also willing to conform; her 1911 speech at the dedication of Lorado Taft’s Indian statue *Black Hawk* reveals not only her familiarity with contemporary art and literature but also the desire to meet the expectations of a public very much conditioned by the widely-known but historically unconfirmed speech by Chief Seattle: “Like the faint whispers of the last leaf upon the oak, when the northwest winds have done with summer, is the Indian’s message to you” (167).

“Our Democracy and the American Indian: A Presentation of the Indian Situation as It is Today,” Kellogg’s most renowned plea to advance the case of the American Indian, constitutes the first chapter of the book. Including the original Publisher’s Introduction and the chapter synopsis of the 1920 edition, in “Our Democracy” Kellogg traces the roots of the idea of the League of Nations 600 years back and accredits the organization’s origin to the Indigenous peoples of America. In the traditional American Indian manner, which regards origin and creation stories much as Western culture values documented, that is written and printed, sources valid, she recounts the oral history of the Haudenosaunee /Iroquois people, with special emphasis on the Turtle clan. “Our Democracy,” as well as the senate testimonies comprising the third chapter of the book address issues still contested in today’s Indian Country.

*Lolomi*, Kellogg’s American Indian version of the European Garden City project she had studied on her European trip and combined it with her

Oneida heritage, is “an order of self-government by means of federal incorporation into industrial communities” (81). In Kellogg’s view, the American Indian has but little chance to escape the grave fate very realistically on the horizon, “for the drama we have been enacting is a tragedy, nearly ended” (75). Drawing international parallels, particularly with Russia, she remarks that fault lies with the Indigenous population for “having been simple enough to trust our fate into the hands of incompetent and dishonest officials too long” (75). Kellogg strongly believes that the only solution to the Indian problem must be economic and educational measures.

Confident in American Indian creativity and ingenuity, Kellogg perceives the *Lolomi*, a word of Hopi origin meaning both “good” and “beautiful” (186), to serve as a feasible community structure with social, economic, educational, and cultural functions all working towards “saving” the American Indian and solving the Indian problem. Likewise today’s Indigenous communities, she was of two minds concerning the role and operation of federal agencies supervising Indian issues. On the one hand, she deems the Indian Bureau to be the most corrupt of all government agencies, suffocating Native existence by red tape, incompetence, corruption, and racist attitudes. On the other hand, she warns against abolishing the Bureau, as such a move would terminate the special relationship of Indian communities with the federal government, secured by centuries of treaty making.

“Our Democracy” was published only three decades after the 1887 General Allotment (Dawes Severalty) Act that started to dismember reservation land, this way annihilating collective tribal landownership and by the time the Act was repealed in 1934, 2/3 of tribal land base had been lost. Kellogg’s vision of the ideal communistic Indian reservation may seem utopistic, but students of American Indian studies will find her ideas intriguing, as *Lolomi* speaks of the same struggles for self-determination and sovereignty to replace federal paternalism that twentieth- and twenty-first-century Indian Country political discourse reveals.

“Our Democracy,” likewise several of Kellogg’s other works, are expressions of her contribution to Oneida placemaking, a term the editors define as the creation of “sustainable places for both industry and ideas” (39). In addition to offering a secure land base in contrast to tribal lands lost to various federal policies, the land also functions as a cultural sphere to cultivate Oneida, and, by extension, Native identity. Again, parallels with current Indian Country affairs are striking: Kellogg’s testimony on Oneida land

claims cites the very same arguments as used in twenty-first-century treaty rights conflicts.

The last section contains a public speech, two testimonies, and a statement by Kellogg, the latter three demonstrating her activism as a public figure. Addressing health care, land ownership, and reservation economics issues, Kellogg sees the source of evil affecting the state of Indian affairs in the “educational system [which is making] a pinch-back white man instead of a good Indian” (183). Although she lives to see the passing of the 1934 Indian Reorganization Act, a relatively pro-Indian federal attempt at remedying previous wrongs, her last testimony included in the volume is dated 1929, thus her reactions to this radically beneficial policy remain unknown.

The editors’ meticulous research brought forth a collection of writings invaluable for scholars of American Indian studies, and (US) history in general. Never do Ackley and Stanciu claim that they have managed to unveil all the controversies surrounding Kellogg’s character. The “Chronology” and Introduction preceding Kellogg’s texts offer further research possibilities. Such an intriguing incident in Kellogg’s life is the series of arrests and senate testimonies alternating in her biography. In the chronological outline, the reader learns of her Oklahoma, Colorado, and Canada arrests in 1913, 1916, and 1927, respectively, but not until page 243 is information provided by the records of Kellogg’s 1929 Senate testimony about the nature of accusations and arrests.

The footnotes in all Kellogg’s writings are of paramount help for the socio-political contextualization of the themes she addresses, although in some cases editorial revision is recommended. Readers less familiar with late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century federal Indian policy may find some references difficult to understand. While, for example, a brief history of the League of Nations is provided, never is the structure and significance of the Iroquois clan system or Haudenosaunee cosmology explicated. Occasionally, the numbering of footnotes does not correspond with the information explained. Even if such mistakes may pose problems, *Our Democracy and the American Indian and Other Works* offers insights in an early twentieth-century activist’s perspectives and first-hand accounts of the burning issues some of which still permeate Indian Country today.