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Process Paper

**Eradicating the Logs, Brambles, and Boulders of Misunderstanding:
Creating Social Change through Oratory in Early America**

The idea to analyze methods of change-making in a paper about successful Iroquois oratory materialized during an exam for T.S. McMillan's English 225 course, In Search of America. Instead of responding to the essay question at hand about a speech by two Mohegans, Henry Quaquaquid and Robert Ashpo, I was thinking back to a TED talk I watched the summer before. The 18-minute talk by Nancy Duarte introduced to me the idea that, like many phenomenal leaders, the best in the field use similar structures and tools to elicit strong positive results and compel people into action. I was energized and encouraged by the possibility that the best speakers from Native American society – who were able to solidify treaties between adversaries that ameliorated relations – had algorithms to their success as change-makers. These structures included highlighting the differences between the problematic present and the ideal possible future, as well as relying on familiar metaphors placed in the natural ecologic world.

While the initial document of inspiration was a primary text assigned for the class, I questioned the vitality of this topic when perusing encyclopedias such as Encyclopedia of North American Colonies and the OBIS Resources that Rosie Linares compiled for other transcribed speeches was unsuccessful. At that point, I backed up and conducted a more general library search in Mudd for secondary sources. Two books in particular served me well at the beginning of this research process: Sandra Gustafson's book *Eloquence is Power: Oratory and Performance in Early America* and William Clements' *Oratory in Native North America*. The first highlighted the complexity and symbolism embodied in spoken oratorical performance, while the second book presented text from esteemed orators and examined in detail their reliability and possible interpretations. These books, however, also introduced me to the general approaches taken to this material and connected me to more literature on this topic. Through these first two books, I was acquainted with words that streamlined my online database searches. For example using "oration" as opposed to "speech" increased my research efficacy when searching in the Charles Evans collection of Early American Imprints, Indigenous Peoples North America, or Google and Google Scholar databases. The references and citations within these books also propelled my research because I could quickly vet interesting or relevant titles to determine which were worthy of obtaining and reading further.

By following the references in my initial secondary sources, I traced a wide web of information about rhetoric and oratory in early North America, and I was saturated with information, and I had to simultaneously narrow my focus and widen the analysis. The narrowing process resulted in selecting only two speeches from the dozen I read to analyze. By choosing two speeches delivered by Iroquois sachems 100 years apart, I was able to conduct background research on the Iroquois people to understand the tradition, composition, and style of that tribe to

contextualize the speeches I selected. Then, I turned back to Nancy Durate's analysis of good talks to appropriately categorize and analyze the speeches before making any conclusions about what made them "successful."

While I did not have a formal interview or observation component to my research, I benefited from talking to my peers about this project – who across the board affirmed this research topic as interesting, applicable, and inspiring. In addition to these casual conversations I informally tested the theory I was developing by comparing my criteria with my own analysis of good lecturers and talks throughout the end of the semester. This casual, non-scientific observation did not make it into my paper, but did confirm for me the relevance and importance of understanding how to elicit change.

I am grateful to T. S. McMillan for teaching me the importance of examining, explicating, and extrapolating meaning from sources and to the library staff for your support and direction. Together, through this assignment, you helped me metamorphose from a student to a scholar.