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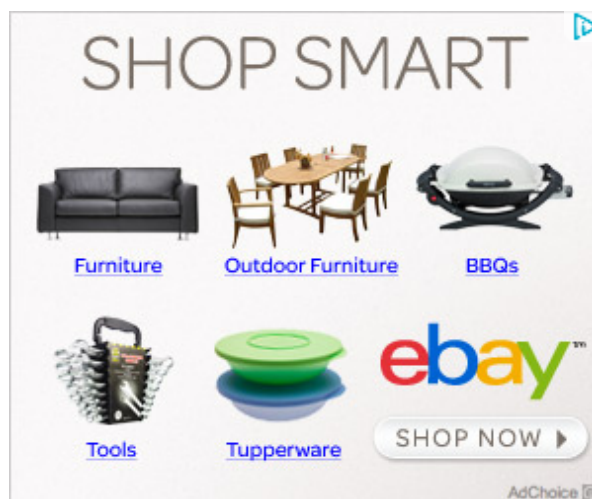
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The Iroquois Confederacy and the Founding Fathers

The Iroquois Confederacy (also known as the "League of Peace and Power", the "Five Nations"; the "Six Nations"; or the "People of the Long house") is a group of First Nations/Native Americans that originally consisted of five nations: the Mohawk, the Oneida, the Onondaga, the Cayuga, and the Seneca. A sixth tribe, the Tuscarora, joined after the original five nations were formed. Although frequently referred to as the Iroquois, the Iroquois Confederacy Nations refer to themselves collectively as **Haudenosaunee**.



Read more about this truly amazing culture and the tremendous impact of the the Iroquois Confederacy on the U.S. as it was forming over 200 years ago...

[The Great Law and the Longhouse: A Political History of the Iroquois Confederacy \(Civilization of the American Indian Series\)](#)

[The Iroquois confederacy: Its political system, military system, marriages, divorces, property rights, etc](#)

[Encyclopedia of the Haudenosaunee \(Iroquois Confederacy\):](#)

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At the time Europeans first arrived in North America, the the Iroquois Confederacy was located in what is now the northeastern United States and southern Canada, including New England, upstate New York, Pennsylvania, Ontario, and Quebec.

Info snippet: Did you know that...Hiawatha, a lawgiver, prophet and statesman was an Iroquois chief and made famous by Longfellow's poem, *The Song of Hiawatha*

The Iroquois Confederacy was established before European contact, complete with a constitution known as the Gayanashagowa (or "Great Law of Peace"), with the help of a memory device in the form of special beads called **wampum** that have inherent spiritual value (wampum has been inaccurately compared to money in other cultures).



Info snippet: Did you know that...Recent archaeological studies have suggested the the Iroquois Confederacy was formed around August 31, 1142, based on a coinciding solar eclipse!

The two prophets, Ayonwentah (frequently thought to be *Hiawatha* due to the Longfellow poem) and Dekanawidah, The Great Peacemaker, brought a message of peace to squabbling tribes. The tribes who joined the League, or the Iroquois Confederacy, were the Seneca, Onondaga, Oneida, Cayuga and Mohawks. Once they ceased most infighting, they rapidly became one of the strongest forces in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century northeastern North America.





According to legend, an evil Onondaga chieftain named Tadadaho was the last to be converted to the ways of peace by The Great Peacemaker and Ayonwentah and became the spiritual leader of the Haudenosaunee. This event is said to have occurred at Onondaga Lake near Syracuse, New York. The title Tadadaho is still used for the league's spiritual leader, the fiftieth chief, who sits with the Onondaga in council, but is the only one of the fifty chosen by the entire Haudenosaunee people. The current Tadadaho of the the Iroquois Confederacy is Sid Hill of the Onondaga Nation.



The Haudenosaunee flag represents the original five nations of the the Iroquois Confederacy that were united by the Peacemaker. The tree symbol in the center represents an Eastern White Pine, the needles of which are clustered in groups of five. The flag is based on the "Hiawatha Wampum Belt ... created from purple and white wampum beads centuries ago to symbolize the union forged when the former enemies buried their weapons under the Great Tree of Peace."

The combined leadership of the Nations comprising the Iroquois Confederacy is known as the Haudenosaunee, a term that the people use to refer to themselves. Haudenosaunee means "People of the Long House." The term is said to have been introduced by The Great Peacemaker at the time of the formation of the the Iroquois Confederacy. It implies that the Nations of the the Iroquois Confederacy should live together as families in the same longhouse. Symbolically, the Seneca were the guardians of the western door of the "tribal long house," and the Mohawk were the guardians of the eastern door.

The Basis for The Founding Fathers

The decision-making process mirrored the creation of peace among the Iroquois. The Onondaga introduced a topic and offered it to the Mohawk for consideration. When a decision was reached, they passed it to the Seneca. A joint decision was announced to the groups across the fire for deliberation. When these groups reached an agreement, they reported to the Onondaga Council Leader. If he agreed, the decision was unanimous. If not, the negotiation process began again with the Mohawk. If unanimity were impossible, the matter was set aside and the fire covered with ashes. At the conclusion of a session, the acts of the council were recorded in the belts of wampum that chronicle events of significance.

The structure of the Iroquois Confederacy inspired the American Colonists' development of the U.S. government. On June 11, 1776 while the question of independence was being debated, the visiting Iroquois chiefs were formally invited into the meeting hall of the Continental Congress. There a speech was delivered, in which they were addressed as "Brothers" and told

of the delegates' wish that the "friendship" between them would "continue as long as the sun shall shine" and the "waters run." The speech also expressed the hope that the new Americans and the Iroquois act "as one people, and have but one heart." After this speech, an Onondaga chief requested permission to give Hancock an Indian name. The Congress graciously consented, and so the president was renamed "Karanduawn, or the Great Tree." With the Iroquois chiefs inside the halls of Congress on the eve of American Independence, **the impact of Iroquois ideas on the founders is unmistakable.** History is indebted to Charles Thomson, an adopted Delaware, whose knowledge of and respect for American Indians is reflected in the attention that he gave to this ceremony in the records of the Continental Congress.

To this day, Iroquois law remains unchanged. It continues to guide the Grand Council of the People of the Longhouse and has influenced nations outside of the the Iroquois Confederacy as well.

[Constitution of the Iroquois Confederacy](#)

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[The Six Nations: Oldest Living *Participatory* Democracy on Earth](#)

A collection of documents and images reviewing the Iroquois Confederacy, the interaction with the Founding Fathers, statements on the environment, presentation to the United Nations, etc. So very interesting!

[An informative page about the Iroquois Nation.](#)

[InfoPlease.com](#) has a page of links further describing the confederacy, then a list of links for further research.

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[This paper about the Iroquois Confederacy](#) was written while Kanatiyosh, who is Onondaga/Mohawk, was in her 3rd year of law school at Arizona State University College of Law.

Kanatiyosh is from Akwesasne (land of the drumming partridge) also known as St. Regis Mohawk Indian Reservation located in New York and Canada.

Introduction of the paper follows. Please click on the above link for the full text.

Today there is a growing number of historians who acknowledge that the native peoples especially the Haudenosaunee (People of the Longhouse), also known as the Iroquois Confederacy, influenced the founding fathers. The Haudenosaunee influenced the founding fathers' perspective concerning democratic thought. and they helped to forae the idea of

...federalism that led to what has become the Constitution of the United States.

Through oral tradition and wampum, the Haudenosaunee date the origins of the Great Law of Peace to be between 1000 and 1400 AD. However, Anglo-American scholars set the date to be, based on written accounts, at about 1450 AD. It is unfortunate that many Anglo-scholars, do not accept wampum belts as a legitimate form of writing, for these symbols when read by the elders, speak volumes.

The Peacemaker envisioned the Haudenosaunee as one united extended Longhouse in which each nation had its own hearth. This concept is written symbolically into the Hiawatha belt (pictured below), which is the broad belt to the right of the tree of Peace. To the novice, the belt looks like interlocking squares on each side of a tree, but to the Haudenosaunee, the entire story of how the Great Law of Peace developed is encapsulated within these symbols.



The Hiawatha belt represents the unity of the original Five Nations and is read from the right to the left. The first square, on the right, represents the Mohawk Nation. The second square represents the Oneida Nation. The heart or the tree in the middle of the Hiawatha belt represents the Onondaga Nation. The square to the left of the tree represents the Cayuga Nation, and the farthest square to the left represents the Seneca Nation. The small white lines that lead away from the Seneca and Mohawk Nations represent paths that welcome others to join the Confederacy. These nations have agreed to follow the Peacemaker's message of the Great Law of Peace.

Great Law Of Peace Government Structure

The Peacemaker provided through the Great Law of Peace, a complex structure allowing for the separation of powers, checks and balances, ratification, public opinion, and equality of all peoples. As the Onondaga Clan Mother, Audrey Shenandoah, states:

Within our society we maintain a balance between the responsibilities of the women, the responsibilities of the men, of the chiefs, of the faithkeepers. All the people in between have a special job to do to help to keep this balance so that at no time do we come to a place within our society where anyone has more power than any of the rest, for our leadership all have equal power. They must be able to listen to one another.

Each Nation has its own autonomy to deal with its internal affairs, and there is a Grand Council that deals with problems that may affect all of the nations within the Confederacy.

The Grand Council

The Grand Council is composed of the original Five Nations and the Tuscarora, who joined the Confederacy in approximately 1714. The Grand

Council of the League's "decision-making process somewhat resemble[s] that of a two-house congress in one body, with the 'older brothers' and 'younger brothers' each comprising a side of the house." The Onondaga occupy "an executive role, with a veto that could be overridden by the older and younger brothers in concert."

The Elder Brothers consist of the Seneca and the Mohawk and the Younger Brothers are the Cayuga and the Oneida. Today the Tuscarora also sit with the Younger Brothers during Grand Council meetings. The combined bodies of the chiefs work out all of the matters concerning the Haudenosaunee. Generally the matter first goes to the Mohawk and Seneca for deliberation, and then the matter goes to the Cayuga and Oneida for their deliberation. The matter then is given to the Onondaga, the Keepers of the Fire who have many responsibilities one of which is to keep records of the meetings, for their final confirmation and final ratification.

One must step back in time to see the influence that the great Haudenosaunee orators, like Canassatego and Tiyanoga (Hendrick), had on shaping the ideas of democracy developed by many of the founding fathers; especially, the influence that the Haudenosaunee had on Benjamin Franklin. The colonists had many opportunities to be influenced by the Haudenosaunee, and what the colonists saw in the native way of life was a freedom that they only knew in theory:

[N]ative societies became a counterpoint to the European order, in the view of the transplanted Europeans, including some of the United State's most influential founders, as they became more dissatisfied with the status quo. They found in existing native polities, the values that the seminal European documents of the time celebrated in theoretical abstraction -- life, liberty, happiness, and a model of government by consensus, under natural rights, with relative equality of property.

Colonists, such as William Johnson, Conrad Weiser, Cadwallader Colden, and Benjamin Franklin not only sat in on the treaty council meetings of the Haudenosaunee, they also participated and became quite knowledgeable in native customs and in the intricacies of the Iroquois Confederacy. For example, Sir William Johnson, an Englishman, had a very close relationship with Tiyanoga (Hendrick) a Mohawk Wolf Clan chief. Johnson's relationship with Tiyanoga and other Haudenosaunee was very important, for it kept the Haudenosaunee allies of the English until France was expelled from the continent in 1763. The Haudenosaunee during this period "mixed and mingled freely, sitting in each other's councils, and living each others lives." During this time Franklin wrote, "English Colonial society had trouble maintaining its hold on many men once they had tasted Indian life."

As a matter of fact Johnson was so accepted, and, the society so commingled with the Haudenosaunee way of life, that he is said to have fathered one hundred Mohawk children. However, some feel the number to be actually eight children, who by Haudenosaunee law, being a matrilineal society, were considered to be Mohawk, for they had clans. Tiyanoga's relationship with Johnson was so influential and beneficial to the alliance with the Haudenosaunee and English; and his heroism, philosophy, military, and political contributions at the Albany Congress was so important, it has been said that Tiyanoga (Hendrick) "should be considered one of the founders of the United States." In the next section, Canassatego's influence will be discussed.

1. Canassatego's Influence On The Founding Fathers

Canassatego was a chief for the Onondaga Nation. Canassatego was well thought of by many of the English colonists. He was said to have great charisma. a booming voice and to be a master of "logical argument. and

adroit negotiation." It was during the 1744 Treaty Council that Canassatego, dismayed by the disorganization of the English colonists, suggested that the colonist unite on a Haudenosaunee model. Canassatego said to the colonial commissioners:

Our wise forefathers established union and amity between the Five Nations. This has made us formidable. This has given us great weight and authority with our neighboring Nations. We are a powerful Confederacy and by your observing the same methods our wise forefathers have taken you will acquire much strength and power; therefore, whatever befalls you, do not fall out with one another.

Canassatego wanted the colonies to form a union so that the Haudenosaunee could deal with the colonies in a more efficient manner. He was concerned with the unscrupulous traders who were taking advantage of the native peoples, and he wanted to stop their illegal taking and encroachment on treaty retained lands. The Haudenosaunee orators were quite fluent in English, but they often pretended not to understand in an attempt to gain insight as to what some of the colonists were really thinking. These are just a few of the many incidents in which the colonists had a chance to be influenced by the great Haudenosaunee orators. In the proceeding section, the Haudenosaunee influence on Benjamin Franklin will be further discussed.

2. Benjamin Franklin

Benjamin Franklin was very good friends with Conrad Weiser who was adopted by the Mohawks. The Great Law of Peace, the Iroquois Constitution, contains in provisions "Wampums 78 through 82", for adoptions. In order for Weiser to have been adopted by the Mohawk

Nation, he must have been greatly respected amongst the Haudenosaunee, for the process of adoption is quite complex and must be approved by the chiefs of the Nation and confirmed in consensus by the people of the nation. Interestingly, the adoption laws of the Great law of Peace allowed for freedom of religion when the Haudenosaunee adopted into the Confederacy another nation.

Weiser had won the esteem of the Haudenosaunee and not only attended the treaty council meetings, he also was a recorder, for he wrote down each attendee and their accounts. Weiser then provided Franklin with these numerous treaty council accounts, in all, which Franklin then published because the "[i]nterest in treaty accounts was high enough by 1736 for a Philadelphia printer ... to begin publication and distribution of them." Through the publishing of these treaty accounts and his first- hand participation, Franklin became quite knowledgeable in the Great Law of Peace.

Not only were Franklin and his cohorts knowledgeable in the tenets of the Great Law of Peace, they also adopted the Great Law of Peace's procedures and protocol. For example, "the Pennsylvania commissioners (including Franklin) presented the assembled Indians with a wampum belt, which portrayed the union between the Iroquois and the colonists." Therefore, Franklin was being consistent with Iroquois custom in offering a wampum (recording) belt to bind their agreement. In the preceding section, the incidents in which the Haudenosaunee have influenced the colonialists has been examined. The proceeding section will illustrate some of the similarities between the Great Law of Peace and the Constitution of the United States....

If this piece of the Iroquois Confederacy / Founding Father history is of interest, continue reading the paper at Iroquois.net.

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