

Haudenosaunee Influence

Field

Experiment in Democracy – Melissa Blake

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The Haudenosaunee Confederacy and the Great Law of Peace were significant influences on the US Constitution. The Great Law of Peace is speculated to have been around since 1142. There are similarities and differences between the two documents. Some similarities are checks and balances and have a two-house, or "bicameral", system. Some differences are the roles and rights of women as well as caring for and valuing the Earth.

One similarity between the US Constitution and the Haudenosaunee Confederacy is that they both have checks and balances, also known as the separation of powers. In the US Constitution there are provisions for the three separate branches of government, the Judicial, the Executive and the Legislative. Each of these branches has multiple important checks on each other. For example, the Supreme Court can strike down Executive Orders enacted by the President. The Great Law of Peace similarly puts checks and balances on the different branches of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy. For example, if a Clan Chief is acting selfishly or recklessly, they can be removed from their position by the Clan Mothers. These checks and balances were important for both nations.

One important part of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy is its system of decision-making. It is made up of two parties: the Elder Brothers and Younger Brothers. The Elder Brothers are made of Mohawk, Seneca, and Onondaga. The Younger Brothers are made up of Cayuga and Oneida. The two parties come together when making significant decisions that will affect the Haudenosaunee. This is similar to the US Constitution's two-house Legislative Branch: The Senate and the House of Representatives. The purpose of the two-house system is to balance out the power and ensure fairness so more people can be represented.

One important difference between the US Constitution and the Haudenosaunee Confederacy's Great Law of Peace is the role and rights of women. For example, Haudenosaunee women had a very important role in their democracy. One way we see this is in how the Clan Mothers were responsible for choosing the Chiefs of their Clans, whereas the Constitution did not guarantee women equal rights. For example, women did not have the right to vote until the 19th Amendment was ratified in 1920, 133 years after the Constitution was originally signed.

Another main difference between the Haudenosaunee Confederacy and the US Constitution is that the Haudenosaunee Confederacy is built on the spiritual connection of Mother Earth and all living things. The US Constitution didn't include or acknowledge this spirituality or connectedness to the environment and living creatures. Haudenosaunee believe they are borrowing from "their children's children", meaning they try to take care of Mother Earth to protect and preserve her for the future. This principle should have been included in the US Constitution because our environment/habitat has been damaged and sometimes destroyed because it was not a central part of the US Constitution.

The Haudenosaunee Confederacy was an important influence on the US Constitution. The US could have benefited from incorporating some of the principles of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy and the Great Law of Peace, which emphasized the value of women and the natural world.