

Origins of Democracy

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1. Iroquois Government. All of the Indian government is by the Counsel or advice of the Sages. There is no force, there are no prisons, no officers to compel obedience or inflict punishment. Hence they generally study oratory, the best speaker having the most influence. Having frequent occasions to hold public councils, they have acquired great order and decency in conducting them. The old men sit in the foremost ranks. The warriors in the next. The women and children in the hindmost. The business of women is to take exact notice of what passes, imprint it in their memories, for they have no writing. They communicate it to their children. To interrupt another even in common conversation is considered highly indecent. How different it is from the House of Commons where scarce a day passes without some confusion that makes the Speaker hoarse in calling to order. Benjamin Franklin, *Remarks Concerning the Savages of North America*, Benjamin Franklin: *Writings*, ed. J. A. Leo Lemay (New York: The Library of Congress, 1987), 969-971.

Main Ideas:
Key Words:
Analysis:

One of Benjamin Franklin's contemporaries wrote, The Iroquois had "outdone the Romans." Cadwallader Colden wrote about a federal union of five (and later six) Indian nations that had put into practice concepts of popular participation and natural rights that the European savants had thus far only theorized. The Iroquoian system expressed through its constitution, "The Great Law of Peace," rested on assumptions foreign to the monarchies of Europe. It regarded leaders as servants of the people, rather than their masters. It made provisions for the leaders' impeachment for errant behavior. The Iroquois' law and custom upheld freedom of expression in political and religious matters. It forbade the unauthorized entry of homes. It provided for political participation by women and the relatively equitable distribution of wealth. Bruce E. Johansen, Professor of Native American Studies, University of Nebraska, *Forgotten Founders: Benjamin Franklin, the Iroquois and the Rationale for the American Revolution* (Ofipswich, Massachusetts: Gambit Inc, 1982), xiv.

At the beginning of the twentieth century Arthur C. Parker

<p>wrote, "Here, then (in the Iroquois Great Law of Peace), we find the right of popular nomination, the right of recall and of woman suffrage flourishing in the old America of the Red Man and centuries before it became the clamor of the white invader. Bruce E. Johansen, 10.</p>	
<p>[Iroquois] Women . . . played a central role in choosing the clan chiefs . . . there were regular women's councils, which "are always the first to deliberate . . . on private or community matters"; these would "advise the chiefs . . . On some "matters" women had both the first and the final say: on the disposition of captives, for example, and on initiating wars of revenge." John Demos, Professor of History at Yale, <i>The UnRedeemed Captive, A Family Story From Early America</i>, (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), 165.</p>	
<p>2. Equality. The Lenape religion recognized the equality of all people as a fundamental principle. Lenape philosophy was an ancient form of democracy. Traditional Lenape recognized not only the rights of all men, but those of women. They also believed human beings should respect life-animals, plants and even tiny insects-because all had been made by the Creator for a purpose. The right to lead was confirmed by the common consent of the people. If a chief's advice was fair and reasonable, the people followed it. Gregory Schaaf, Professor of Ethnic Studies, University of California at Davis, <i>Wampum Belts & Peace Treaties</i> (Golden, Colorado: Fulcrum Publishing, 1990), 3.</p>	<p>Main Ideas: Key Words: Analysis:</p>
<p>The practice of attacking hunters who strayed into the territories of another nation was outlawed by the Great Law of Peace. Deer belonged to the Creator, not to political units. The power of the warrior leaders was subordinated to the workings of a council of elders whose purpose was to promote peace within the framework of a true confederacy. Oren R. Lyons, chief of the Onondaga Nation, Iroquois Confederacy, Associate Professor of American Studies, State University of New York, Buffalo, <i>Exiles in the Land of the Free: Democracy, Indian Nations and the US Constitution</i>, (Santa Fe, New Mexico: Clear Light Publishers, 1992), 37.</p>	
<p>Even following unconditional conquest of an invader, the conquered were to enjoy rights. There would be no collection of spoils from those who were conquered. There would be no requirement that the conquered people adopt the religion of their conquerors. The aggressors</p>	

would be required to disarm, but otherwise they would be left in control of their country. Oren R. Lyons, 37.	
Iroquois people were trained to enter a society that was egalitarian, with power more equally distributed between male and female, young and old than in Euro-American society. European society emphasized dominance and command structures, while Iroquois society was interested in collaborative behavior. The Iroquois did not respect submissive behavior. Donald A. Grinde, history teacher Cal Poly, Exiles, 236.	
3. Coercion. The Confederacy Council had no coercive power whatsoever over its people. There was no permanent army, no police force, no insane asylums and no jails. Oren R. Lyons, 39.	Main Ideas: Key Words: Analysis:
The Great Law of Peace stated that an especially important matter must be submitted to the decision of their people. The people could also initiate proceedings. The people could propose their own laws. Iroquois power rested upon consent of the governed. It was not coercive in areas of military service, taxation and police powers. Donald A. Grinde, <i>Exiles</i> , 239.	
The father of American anthropology, Lewis Henry Morgan wrote in 1851 that checks and balances in the Iroquoian system acted to prevent concentration of power. "Their whole civil policy was averse to the concentration of power in the hands of any single individual, but inclined to the opposite principle of division among a number of equals." The Iroquois maximized individual freedom while seeking to minimize excess governmental interference in people's lives. Bruce E. Johansen, 9.	
[Iroquois] Chiefs at every level were extremely careful in exercising their authority, seeking always to build consensus and avoid "any trace of absolutism." They had "neither . . . crown, nor scepter, nor guards, nor consular axes to differentiate them from the common people. Their opinions carried much weight, however, and the "commands, given as requests," were usually followed." John Demos, 164-5.	
4. Great Peacemaker. The Peacemaker's vision extended to all peoples of the earth then known to him. He erected a symbolic tree that has come to be called the Great Tree of Peace. Under the great long leaves, people would find protection from arbitrary violence. The Great Law of Peace was to be international in character. If a people	Main Ideas: Key Words: Analysis:

<p>were invaded, the nations were to gather together to provide a show of force to dissuade the invader and to urge that the dispute be taken to a council where the dispute could be discussed and an amicable settlement reached. There would be no wars of conquest. If the aggressor continued to pursue violence as a means of conquest, the war would continue until the aggressor was vanquished or exhausted. Oren R. Lyons, 37.</p>	
<p>The true purpose of human political organization, according to the Peacemaker, must be to oppose violence. This can be accomplished when men of healthy minds unite to create a just world in which human abuse is abolished forever. Where war is abandoned as a way of settling disputes. Force is justified only when necessary to halt aggression and to create the conditions for a truce that can be used to create a road to peace. Oren R. Lyons, 34.</p>	
<p>The Iroquois Great Law of Peace is the earliest surviving governmental tradition in human history based on the principle of peace. It provided for peaceful succession of leadership. It installed in government the idea of accountability to future life and responsibility to the seventh generation to come . . . the Peacemaker proposed a council where violence would be replaced with thinking. Disputes would be settled with words. Glorifying warfare would lead to destruction of all peoples on the earth. The only hope for mankind was the application of clear thinking to situations resulting from rage and warfare. Oren R. Lyons, 33, 34.</p>	
<p>There is wisdom and justice of the part of the Great Spirit to create and raise chiefs, give and establish unchangeable laws, rules and customs between the Five Nation Indians. The object of these laws is to establish peace between numerous nations of Indians, hostility will be done away with, for the preservation and protection of life, property and liberty. Thomas R. Henry, <i>Wilderness Messiah: The Story of Hiawatha and the Iroquois</i>, (New York: 1955), Appendix 2). Wayne Moquin, ed., <i>Great Documents in American Indian History</i>, (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1973), 20.</p>	
<p>5. No Influence. Modern American society owes more of its apparent features to European antecedents than to Indian traits. Francis Jennings, PH.D. in history at Temple University, <i>The Invasion of America: Indians, Colonialism and the Cant of Conquest</i>, (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press,</p>	<p>Main Ideas: Key Words: Analysis:</p>

1975), 171.	
The League of the Iroquois was not a model for the United States Constitution," and that "a review of the evidence in the historical and ethnographic documents offers virtually no support for this contention." Elizabeth Tooker, Professor of Anthropology at Temple, University, "The United States Constitution and the Iroquois League," <i>Ethnohistory</i> 35, no 4 (Fall 1988), 305.	
The specific American form of liberty had an Anglo-Saxon origin. Virginians were Anglo-Saxons in the woods again, and the New Englanders carried on the tradition of Germanic liberty in their characteristic institutions. That "vital principle of Teutonic liberty lies in the memorial to use of a meeting of all peoples with the with equal rights of each qualified inhabitant to give counsel a devote and to vote on public affairs. George Bancroft was America's most influential 19th century historian, Ernst Breisach, <i>Historiography: Ancient, Medieval, & Modern</i> , (University of Chicago Press, Chicago, IL), 1983, 256-7.	
Our democratic and liberal institutions were the result of the "Teutonic germ theory" whose seeds were sown in "English institutions." They took root in the New England "town meeting." Peter Novick, Professor of History at the University of Chicago, <i>That Noble Dream: The "Objectivity Question" and the American Historical Profession</i> , (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 87.	
Our Constitution is not a mathematical formula, it is an organic living institution transplanted from English soil. Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr., Michael Kammen, <i>A Machine that Would Go of Itself</i> (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994), 168.	
"Christopher G. Tideman, a professor of law at the University of Missouri, emphasized the lineal descent of the American constitutional law from the British . . . The Constitution legalizes, and therefore makes possible and successful, the opposition to the popular will. Judicial review as an instrument of social control!" Michael Kammen, 168	
6. European Influences. Native American ideas may be partly responsible for our democratic institutions. . . Native ideas of liberty, fraternity, and equality found their way to Europe to influence social philosophers such as Thomas More, Locke, Montaigne, Montesquieu, and	Main Ideas: Key Words: Analysis:

<p>Rousseau. These European thinkers then influenced Americans such as Franklin, Jefferson, and Madison. James W. Loewen, Professor of Sociology at the University of Vermont, <i>Lies My Teacher Told Me: Everything Your American History Textbook Got Wrong</i> (New York: The New Press, 1995), 103.</p>	
<p>In 500 B.C., the Greek Constitution of Sparta provided that the upper class voted. This comprised the 5% of the people who were rulers and soldiers who did no work. 60% were Helots, farm laborers, personal servants, military orderlies and auxiliaries, who could not vote. The third caste was the perioikoi, dwellers around the city (neighbors). Inhabitants of villages and outlying areas. They had more personal freedom than the Helots. They were not allowed to join the ranks of the Spartans as voters. No social class was allowed to intermarry.</p>	
<p>90% of the Roman population were plebeians, from the Latin word Plebs, meaning the multitude. They were merchants, laborers, small farmers, and debtors. They were denied full political rights, meaning that they could not vote. The Roman monarchy was replaced by an oligarchy. In 100 B.C., Rome was ruled by one man and an aristocracy.</p>	
<p>Most conspicuous in the writings of the Revolutionary period was the heritage of classical antiquity. Bernard Bailyn, Professor of History at Harvard, <i>The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution</i> (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1967), 23.</p>	
<p>More directly influential in shaping the thought of the Revolutionary generation were the ideas and attitudes associated with the writings of the Enlightenment rationalism [such as John Locke and Jean Rousseau]. Bernard Bailyn, 26.</p>	
<p>7. English History. The Magna Carta, upon close examination, was an agreement between a monarchy and a struggling oligarchy. During the American Revolution, only one person in twenty could vote in England. John C. Mohawk, Seneca Nation, American Studies professor, SUNY, <i>Exiles</i>, 63.</p>	<p>Main Ideas: Key Words: Analysis:</p>
<p>John Locke's constitution for South Carolina was so oligarchical that only eight men in the whole colony owned enough land to qualify as candidates for governor. John C. Mohawk, 68, 71.</p>	
<p>"English common law" was also influential. Bernard Bailyn, 30.</p>	

<p>Still another source were the "political and social theories of New England Puritanism, and particularly from the ideas associated with covenant theology. Bernard Bailyn, 32.</p>	
<p>What brought these disparate strands of thought together . . . and shaped it into a coherent whole . . . lay in the radical social and political thought of the English Civil War and of the Commonwealth period. [Milton was an important figure] Bernard Bailyn, 34.</p>	
<p>Naturally the history of England was most important for the colonists, for, as Dickinson said, it "abounds with instances" of how a people had protected their liberties against their rulers.¹³ Gordon Wood, <i>The Creation of the American Republic, 1776-1787</i> (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 1969), 7.</p> <p>13. [Dickinson] Letters from a Farmer, Ford, ed., Writings of Dickinson, 365.</p>	
<p>8. Albany Plan of Union. Benjamin Franklin met with both Albany colonial and Iroquois delegates to construct a plan that Franklin acknowledged to be similar to the tenets of the Iroquois Confederacy. Franklin wrote that the debates on the Albany Plan "went on daily, hand in hand with the Indian business." John Bigdlow ed., <i>Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin</i> (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Lippincott, 1868), 295.</p>	<p>Main Ideas: Key Words: Analysis:</p>
<p>In 1754 Benjamin Franklin, who had spent much time among the Iroquois observing their deliberations, pleaded with colonial leaders to consider the Albany Plan of Union: "It would be a strange thing if six nations of ignorant savages should be capable of forming a scheme for such a union and be able to execute it in such a manner as that it has subsisted ages and appears insoluble; and yet that a like union should be impracticable for ten or a dozen English colonies." James W. Loewen, 103.</p>	
<p>Among the Iroquois who attended the conference, Hendrick, who was called Tiyanoga among the Iroquois, received a special invitation from James de Lancy, acting governor of New York, to provide information on the structure of the Iroquois Confederacy to the Colonial delegates (at the Albany Plan of Union). Bruce E. Johansen, 69.</p>	
<p>An Indian man named Hendrick converted to Christianity and became a Mohawk preacher around 1700. In 1754 James Delancey, acting governor of New York, sent a</p>	

<p>special invitation to Hendrick to attend the Albany Conference so that the aging Mohawk sachem could provide insights into the structure of the League of the Iroquois for the assembled colonial delegates. For both military and philosophical reasons, Hendrick should be considered one of the Founding Fathers of the United States. Donald A. Grinde Jr., <i>The Iroquois and the Founding of the American Nation</i> (San Francisco: Indian Historian Press, 1977), 34-36.</p>	
<p>The colonies rejected the plan. But it was a forerunner of the Articles of Confederation and the Constitution. Both the Continental Congress and the Constitutional Convention referred openly to Iroquois ideas and imagery. In 1775 Congress formulated a speech to the Iroquois, signed by John Hancock, that quoted Iroquois advice from 1744. "The Six Nations are a wise people," Congress wrote, "let us harken to their council and teach our children to follow it." James W. Loewen, 103.</p>	
<p>9. Articles of Confederation. In May and June of 1776 twenty-one Iroquois Indians met with the Continental Congress. On 26 July 1776, James Wilson of Pennsylvania argued forcefully for confederation, stating that "Indians know the striking benefits of Confederation (and they) have an example of it in the union of the Six Nations." Donald A. Grinde, 256.</p>	<p>Main Ideas: Key Words: Analysis:</p>
<p>With the Iroquois chiefs inside the halls of Congress on the eve of American independence, the impact of Iroquois ideas on the Founding Fathers is unmistakable. Donald A. Grinde, 255.</p>	
<p>The Articles of Confederation resembled the Iroquois Confederacy more than they did the Constitution. The Articles were intended as a league of friendship among sovereign states. Robert W. Venables, 115.</p>	
<p>In 1784 the Articles of Confederation were experiencing difficulty. James Madison, a major architect of the US Constitution, traveled to Iroquois country. Madison met with Oneida Chief Grasshopper who exposed him to the governmental structure of the Iroquois and their ideals of freedom. Donald A. Grinde, <i>Exiles</i>, 258.</p>	
<p>10. US Constitution. On July 26, 1787 the Constitutional Convention adjourned for ten days while a Committee of Detail, John Rutledge of South Carolina, Edmund Randolph of Virginia, Nathaniel Gorham of Massachusetts, Oliver Ellsworth of Connecticut and James</p>	<p>Main Ideas: Key Words: Analysis:</p>

<p>Wilson of Pennsylvania met to arrange and systematize materials. At the beginning of the Committee's deliberations, John Rutledge read aloud some excerpts from Iroquois Indian treaties that reflected the will of the people. Pennsylvania Herald, 18 August 1787, Charles L. Mee Jr, <i>The Genius of the People</i> (New York: Harper & Row, 1987), 237.</p>	
<p>The Committee of Detail met daily at the State House, in James Wilson's study, and over at the Indian Queen. John Rutledge was the chairman. He had always admired the Iroquois Indians, particularly their legal system, which gave autonomy to each of the six Iroquois nations for their internal affairs but united them for purposes of war. The first text Rutledge read was taken from a piece of parchment that was a replica of the Iroquois Treaty of 1520, which began: "We the people, to form a union, to establish peace, equity and order . . ." He commended the phrasings to his colleagues. In some part, the preamble to the new constitution was based on the law of the land as it had been on the east coast before the white settlers arrived. Charles L. Mee Jr., <i>ibid.</i>, 237.</p>	
<p>In 1787 John Adams wrote, <i>Defense of the Constitutions of Government of the United States</i>. He acknowledged that some of the "great philosophers and politicians of the age (want to) set up governments of . . . modern Indians." It would be "well worth the pains . . . to collect . . . the legislation of the Indians" while developing a new constitution for the United States. Adams urged the leaders to investigate the "government of . . . modern Indians," since the separation of powers in their government "is marked with a precision that excludes all controversy." He remarked that the legislative branch in modern Indian governments is so democratic that the "real sovereignty resided in the body of the people." John Adams, <i>Defense of Constitutions</i>, xv-xvi, xvii, xv-xvi, Donald A. Grinde, 262.</p>	
<p>Some of the authors of the <i>Exiles</i> book debated noted historian, Arthur Schlessinger Jr. One got a copy of one of James Wilson's earlier drafts of the US Constitution from the federal archives. The liner note to "We the People" said, "per the Iroquois nation." Glenn Morris, Lakota, University of Denver Professor of Political Science, "The Legal Legacy of Columbus" (Greeley, Colorado: UNC lecture, 1994).</p>	
<p>In 1988, Congress finally passed a resolution officially recognizing that the US Constitution was "explicitly</p>	

<p>modeled after the Iroquois Confederacy." Gregory Schaaf, <i>Wampum Belts & Peace Treaties</i> (Golden, Colorado: Fulcrum Publishing, 1990), xx.</p>	
<p>11. Differences. The self-rule that was won (in 1776) was restricted to men, to white men, and among white men, to property owners, farmers, shopkeepers, or to those who were at least respectably employed. Charles L. Mee Jr., 16.</p>	<p>Main Ideas: Key Words: Analysis:</p>
<p>The Founding Fathers rejected the Indian concept of property based on a communal ethic. They turned away from the Iroquois model of government by persuasion and toward central cohesion. Women were omitted from the US political system. Blacks were valued at three-fifths the value of white human life. The Constitution rejected the idea of government by consensus. Instead the Constitution mandated the rule of the majority. The Constitution separated church and state. The Iroquois integrated religion and politics. Robert W. Venables, <i>Exiles</i>, 116.</p>	
<p>American history has long been written as a kind of Eurocentric mythology. John C. Mohawk and Oren R. Lyons, <i>Exiles</i>, 3.</p>	
<p>Most American history has been written as if history were a function solely of white culture. Since most history has been written by the conquerors, the influence of the primitive people upon American civilization has seldom been the subject of dispassionate consideration. Bruce E. Johansen, 6.</p>	

A comparison of the origins of democracy.	
Country	Vote
Greeks-an aristocracy	5%
Romans-an aristocracy,	10%
England-an aristocracy,	5%
Iroquois-a democracy, nearly	100%