

Comparative Constitutional Excerpts: Great Law of Peace vs. US Constitution

This document presents selected excerpts from two foundational constitutional documents: the **Great Law of Peace (Gayanashagowa)** of the Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) Confederacy and the **United States Constitution**. These excerpts highlight key similarities and differences in governance structures, democratic principles, and constitutional concepts.

Excerpt Set 1: Foundational Principles and Unity

Great Law of Peace (Sections 1-2)

Section 1: "I am Dekanawidah and with the Five Nations' Confederate Lords I plant the Tree of Great Peace. I plant it in your territory, Adodarhoh, and the Onondaga Nation, in the territory of you who are Firekeepers... There shall you sit and watch the Council Fire of the Confederacy of the Five Nations, and all the affairs of the Five Nations shall be transacted at this place before you..."

Section 2: "Roots have spread out from the Tree of the Great Peace, one to the north, one to the east, one to the south and one to the west. The name of these roots is The Great White Roots and their nature is Peace and Strength. If any man or any nation outside the Five Nations shall obey the laws of the Great Peace... they may trace the Roots to the Tree and... shall be welcomed to take shelter beneath the Tree of the Long Leaves."

US Constitution (Preamble and Article I)

Preamble: "We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic tranquility, provide for the common defence, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America."

Article I, Section 1: "All legislative Powers herein granted shall be vested in a Congress of the United States, which shall consist of a Senate and House of Representatives."

Comparison: Both documents establish unity among previously separate nations/states and create central governing bodies. The Great Law uses organic metaphors (tree, roots) while the Constitution uses legal language.

Excerpt Set 2: Legislative Structure and Process

Great Law of Peace (Sections 5, 9-10)

Section 5: "The Council of the Mohawk shall be divided into three parties... The third party is to listen only to the discussion of the first and second parties and if an error is made or the proceeding is irregular they are to call attention to it..."

Section 9: "All the business of the Five Nations Confederate Council shall be conducted by the two combined bodies of Confederate Lords. First the question shall be passed upon by the Mohawk and Seneca Lords, then it shall be discussed and passed by the Oneida and Cayuga Lords. Their decisions shall then be referred to the Onondaga Lords, (Fire Keepers) for final judgement."

US Constitution (Article I, Sections 1-7)

Article I, Section 3, Clause 6: "The Senate shall have the sole Power to try all Impeachments. When sitting for that Purpose, they shall be on Oath or affirmation..."

Article I, Section 7, Clause 2: "Every Bill which shall have passed the House of Representatives and the Senate, shall, before it become a Law, be presented to the President of the United States; If he approve he shall sign it, but if not he shall return it, with his Objections..."

Comparison: Both systems feature bicameral structures with checks and balances, though the Iroquois system includes a third reviewing body (Onondaga Fire Keepers) similar to judicial review.

Excerpt Set 3: Leadership Selection and Accountability

Great Law of Peace (Sections 18-19)

Section 18: "If any Confederate Lord neglects or refuses to attend the Confederate Council... the women holding the title shall immediately select another candidate for the title."

Section 19: "If at any time it shall be manifest that a Confederate Lord has not in mind the welfare of the people or disobeys the rules of this Great Law, the men or women of the Confederacy, or both jointly, shall come to the Council and upbraid the erring Lord... If the Lord is contumacious the matter shall go to the council of War Chiefs. The War Chiefs shall then divest the erring Lord of his title by order of the women in whom the titleship is vested."

US Constitution (Article I, Section 2; Article II, Section 4)

Article I, Section 2, Clause 5: "The House of Representatives shall chuse their Speaker and other Officers; and shall have the sole Power of impeachment."

Article II, Section 4: "The President, Vice President and all civil Officers of the United States, shall be removed from Office on Impeachment for, and Conviction of, Treason, Bribery, or other high Crimes and Misdemeanors."

Comparison: Both systems provide mechanisms for removing leaders, but the Iroquois system gives significant power to women and emphasizes community accountability, while the US system relies on formal impeachment procedures.

Excerpt Set 4: Rights and Representation

Great Law of Peace (Sections 93-96)

Section 93: "Whenever a specially important matter or a great emergency is presented before the Confederate Council and the nature of the matter affects the entire body of the Five Nations... then the Lords of the Confederacy must submit the matter to the decision of their people and the decision of the people shall affect the decision of the Confederate Council."

Section 95: "The women of every clan of the Five Nations shall have a Council Fire ever burning in readiness for a council of the clan. When in their opinion it seems necessary for the interest of the people they shall hold a council and their decisions and recommendations shall be introduced before the Council of the Lords by the War Chief for its consideration."

US Constitution (Article I, Section 2; Amendment I)

Article I, Section 2, Clause 1: "The House of Representatives shall be composed of Members chosen every second Year by the People of the several States..."

Amendment I: "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances."

Comparison: Both recognize popular sovereignty and the right of people to influence government, though the Iroquois system institutionalizes women's political roles and clan-based representation.

Excerpt Set 5: Peace and Conflict Resolution

Great Law of Peace (Sections 65, 88)

Section 65: "I, Dekanawida, and the Union Lords, now uproot the tallest pine tree and into the cavity thereby made we cast all weapons of war... We bury them from sight and we plant again the tree. Thus shall the Great Peace be established and hostilities shall no longer be known between the Five Nations but peace to the United People."

Section 88: "When the proposition to establish the Great Peace is made to a foreign nation it shall be done in mutual council. The foreign nation is to be persuaded by reason and urged to come into the Great Peace..."

US Constitution (Article I, Section 8; Article II, Section 2)

Article I, Section 8, Clause 11: "To declare War, grant Letters of Marque and Reprisal, and make Rules concerning Captures on Land and Water;"

Article II, Section 2, Clause 2: "He shall have Power, by and with the Advice and Consent of the Senate, to make Treaties, provided two thirds of the Senators present concur..."

Comparison: The Great Law emphasizes peace as the primary goal and war as a last resort, while the Constitution grants explicit war powers and treaty-making authority to specific branches.
