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INFLUENCE ON DEMOCRACY

While many debate the validity of the claim that the Constitution of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy was a model for the United States of America's Constitution, much evidence leads us to believe that the U.S.

Constitution developed by Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Jefferson was indeed influenced by the Haudenosaunee Confederacy.



Both models stress the importance of unity and **peace** and provide freedom to seek out one's success. Similarities can also be seen in the symbols of each nation. While the Great Law features five arrows bound together as a symbol signifying the unity and strength of the five nations, the seal of the United States uses an eagle clutching a bundle of 13 arrows signifying the 13 original colonies.

The way the U.S. Congress operates is also similar to the actions made by the Grand Council as outlined by the Peacemaker. Within Grand Council meet the Chiefs of each nation which then divide into sections of Elder Brothers and Younger Brothers. This model is very similar to the U.S. Constitution's two-house congress.

The founding fathers of the United States had ample opportunity to study and learn from the Haudenosaunee. During the 1730s and 1740s English allegiance with the Haudenosaunee was essential if the English hoped to prevent the French from encroaching on the territory. During this time colonists intermingled with the Haudenosaunee in an attempt to build trust and establish treaties that would ensure their alliance.

In 1744 Benjamin Franklin ran a successful printing company in Pennsylvania running newspapers, money, and legal documents. It was during this period he began to become immersed in the treaty councils which were brought to him by Conrad Weiser, a man who had gained the respect of the Haudenosaunee and had even been adopted into the Mohawk nation. The treaty council proceedings were of high interest in Europe making them a profitable venture for Franklin.

It was one such treaty council that brought to life the proceedings of the confederacy. This particular meeting also saw Canassatego, the then **Chief** of the Onondaga, impressing upon the colonists the importance of forming a union of all the colonies. Canassatego

expressed the difficulty they had faced in dealing with each separate colony and how forming one union could repair the problem. The Haudenosaunee did not want to cement a union until the colonies were united.

In 1747 Franklin became involved with Cadwallader Colden over the subject of colonial union suggested by Canassatego. Colden had written *History of the Five Indian Nations Depending on the Province of New York in America* in 1727 and revised and reissued it in 1744 with Franklin reviewing and appraising it. During this time Franklin and Colden often discussed the issue put forward by Canassatego of colonial union, an idea which Franklin took seriously and began to execute.

During 1750 it was clear that the colonist's ideals were beginning to diverge from those of Europe and Franklin began to look at a new system of government. The Haudenosaunee Confederacy model presented a society free of oppression and definition of class. But issues with the alliance faced the colonists with the Haudenosaunee complaining of too many traders and no regulation among them. Franklin, who had already become immersed in English-Haudenosaunee alliance politics, took the next logical step and took the position of Indian Commissioner for Pennsylvania.

June 19, 1754 marked a monumental meeting of the Albany Congress with members from each colony with the Haudenosaunee in attendance. While Franklin was one of the most influential in attendance at the Albany Congress during which was discussed the English-Haudenosaunee alliance against the French and a plan of union for the colonies, Sir William Johnson played an integral part. It was Johnson, a well respected man among the Haudenosaunee, whose friendship with the Mohawk Chief Hendrick helped to persuade the Haudenosaunee to attend the Albany Congress. Johnson played a major role in ensuring the alliance between the English and Haudenosaunee while pushing the French out of the territory. By special invite, Hendrick was asked to explain the Haudenosaunee Confederacy's model.

Following the Albany Congress Franklin drew up a plan that had all the British American colonies federated under a single legislature with a president-general who would be appointed by the Crown, a very similar model to the Haudenosaunee Confederacy. Like the confederacy all states had to agree on a course of action before it could be implemented. Unfortunately at the time the colonies were not ready to unite and the crown disapproved of the freedom it provided

and the plan failed.

It took two decades for the colonies of America to form a union and representatives to share the news with the Haudenosaunee that they had united.

While in the mid-1770s Franklin was the most obvious choice when considering a person to draft the Declaration of Independence, he chose not to write it and instead sat on the committee as Thomas Jefferson's editor. Having much respect for Franklin, Jefferson shared Franklin's respect and views of the Haudenosaunee. Both shared the same frame of mind that the Haudenosaunee way of life was one to be admired and respected and his writings showed that as America claimed its independence.