

A Comparison of France and the Five Nations

Iroquois	French
<p>a). Before the Europeans arrived the Iroquois had developed a semi-democratic political system.</p> <p>b). The "Iroquois Confederacy" was an inclusive political system that promoted unity amongst its members.</p> <p>c). The confederacy was governed by an unwritten constitution called the "Great Law." Everyone, i.e. chiefs, matriarchs, warriors, etc. were all treated equally under the law.</p>	<p>a). In France, only the wealthy and powerful had any decision-making power.</p> <p>b). The Catholic Church and the king were the most powerful people in France and would not <i>share</i> power. French society was stratified along rigid class lines.</p> <p>c). The king of France <i>was the law</i>. In many respects, he made the rules up as he went along (but was at times limited by tradition).</p> <p>d). France would not have a constitution until the French Revolution in 1789 (and they wouldn't even bother paying any attention to it for another 25 years or so).</p>
<p>The Great Law of the Five Nations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Great Law was an unwritten set of rules that encouraged public participation in decision-making • Referendums were held, leaders were recalled if they proved to be incapable (or corrupt) • Decision-making was not made only by males in Iroquoian society. Women possessed influence and rights enabling them to have a meaningful and critical role in the selection and removal of leaders • Chiefs had to be tolerant and attentive to suggestions made by members of the tribe because if the people were unhappy the chief could be removed from power • Individuals (male and female) could bring complaints against a chief to the "Great Council of Chiefs" • This council could remove a chief if it was decided that he was not acting in the best interests of his people or not obeying the rules of the Great Law 	
<p>Which system was better?</p> <p>In a democracy, a constitution (especially a written one) is absolutely necessary. People need to know their rights; they need to know what their government can and cannot do; and people need to know what their obligations are as members of society. Written constitutions provide stability and allow authority in society to be based upon the principle of the rule of law.</p> <p>Constitutions place laws into writing so that they cannot be changed (easily). A constitution is the basis of law in a society in which power is <i>shared</i>.</p> <p>If the king is allowed to both make <i>and</i> enforce the law, the law will be enforced based upon arbitrary standards, I.e. He bases his decision as judge on whether or not he likes you instead of on evidence or the principles of reason, etc. For instance, if the king does not like your religion, then he has the power to outlaw it (and you). If the king changes his mind then he has the power to change the law he has made. His opinions are the law (and laws based on one man's opinion are a poor standard for any enlightened society).</p> <p>If we compare the political organization of the Five Nations and France based on democratic standards, the Five Nations are definitely more sophisticated:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Five Nations leadership was <i>elected</i> • Leadership was directly <i>accountable</i> to people other than themselves • Power was <i>shared</i> between men and women • Society was stable and orderly because <i>everyone</i>, I.e. Sachems, elders, mothers, sons, brothers, daughters, etc. were treated equally under the law 	