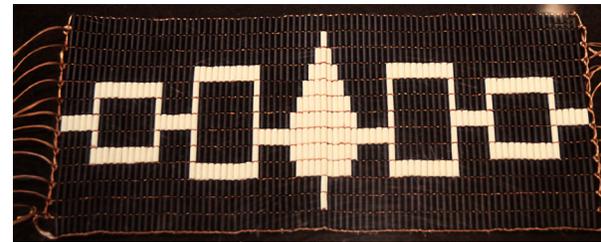




Excerpts from the Haudenosaunee* Great Law of Peace

*pronounced as *Ho-de-no-SHOW-nee*

Note: Following each bolded term, a definition has been provided in brackets to assist with comprehension. The bracketed words do not appear in the original primary source document.



The Hiawatha belt is a symbol of unity between the original five Haudenosaunee nations: the Seneca, Cayugas, Onondagas, Oneida, and Mohawk. This one is from the National Museum of the American Indian in New York City.

Section 1: Purpose and Mission

1. I am Dekanawidah and with the Five Nations' **Confederate** [political union] Lords. I plant the Tree of Great Peace. I plant it in your territory, **Adodarhoh** [name of a leader], and the Onondaga Nation, in the territory of you who are Firekeepers. I name the tree the Tree of the Great Long Leaves. Under the shade of this Tree of the Great Peace we spread the soft white feathery down of the globe thistle as seats for you, Adodarhoh, and your cousin Lords. We place you upon those seats, spread soft with the feathery down of the globe thistle, there beneath the shade of the spreading branches of the Tree of Peace. 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, Adodarhoh, and your cousin Lords, by the Confederate Lords of the Five Nations.

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 and make known their **disposition** [an individual's qualities and character] to the Lords of the Confederacy, they may trace the Roots to the Tree and if their minds are clean and they are obedient and promise to obey the wishes of the Confederate Council, they shall be welcomed to take shelter beneath the Tree of the Long Leaves.

This text is taken from The Constitution of the Iroquois Confederacy:

<https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/mod/iroquois.asp>



Section 2: Organizational Structure

9. All the business of the Five Nations Confederate Council shall be conducted by the two combined **bodies** [institutions or houses] 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 [sic]. The same process shall obtain when a question is brought before the council by an individual or a War Chief.

10. In all cases the procedure must be as follows: when the Mohawk and Seneca Lords have unanimously agreed upon a question, they shall report their decision to the Cayuga and Oneida Lords who shall deliberate upon the question and report a unanimous decision to the Mohawk Lords. The Mohawk Lords will then report the standing of the case to the Firekeepers, who shall render a decision as they see fit in case of a disagreement by the two bodies, or confirm the decisions of the two bodies if they are identical. The Fire Keepers shall then report their decision to the Mohawk Lords who shall announce it to the open council.

11. If through any misunderstanding or **obstinacy** [stubbornness] on the part of the Fire Keepers, they render a decision at **variance** [of disagreement or inconsistent with] with that of the Two Sides, the Two Sides shall reconsider the matter and if their decisions are jointly the same as before they shall report to the Fire Keepers who are then compelled to confirm their joint decision.

Section 3: Rights, Qualifications and Responsibilities of Lords

19. If at any time it shall be **manifest** [made clear] that a Confederate Lord has not in mind the **welfare** [well-being] 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** [causing the problem] Lord through his War Chief. If the complaint of the people through the War Chief is not heeded the first time it shall be uttered again and then if no attention is given a third complaint and warning shall be given. If the Lord is **contumacious** [disobedient] the matter shall go to the council of War Chiefs. The War Chiefs shall then **divest** [take away] the erring Lord of his title by order of the women in whom the titleship is vested. When the Lord is **deposed** [removed from office], the women shall notify the Confederate Lords through their War Chief, and the Confederate Lords shall **sanction** [give official approval] the act. The women will then select another of their sons as a candidate and the Lords shall elect him.



Section 4: Election of Pine Tree Chiefs

35. Should any man of the Nation assist with special ability or show great interest in the affairs of the Nation, if he proves himself wise, honest and worthy of confidence, the Confederate Lords may elect him to a seat with them and he may sit in the Confederate Council. He shall be proclaimed a 'Pine Tree sprung up for the Nation' and shall be installed as such at the next assembly for the installation of Lords. Should he ever do anything **contrary** [opposite] to the rules of the Great Peace, he may not be deposed from office—no one shall cut him down—but thereafter everyone shall be deaf to his voice and his advice. Should he resign his seat and title, no one shall prevent him. A Pine Tree chief has no authority to name a successor nor is his title hereditary.

36. The War Chiefs shall be selected from the eligible sons of the female families holding the head Lordship titles.

37. There shall be one War Chief for each Nation and their duties shall be to carry messages for their Lords and to take up the arms of war in case of emergency. They shall not participate in the proceedings of the Confederate Council but shall watch its progress and in case of an erroneous action by a Lord they shall receive the complaints of the people and convey the warnings of the women to him. The people who wish to convey messages to the Lords in the Confederate Council shall do so through the War Chief of their Nation. It shall ever be his duty to lay the cases, questions and propositions of the people before the Confederate Council.

38. When a War Chief dies another shall be installed by the same rite as that by which a Lord is installed.

Section 5: Clans and Members

42. These **clans** [families] distributed through their respective Nations, shall be the sole owners and holders of the soil of the country and in them is it **vested** [assigned to] as a birthright.

43. People of the Five Nations members of a certain clan shall recognize every other member of that clan, **irrespective** [no matter what] of the Nation, as relatives. Men and women, therefore, members of the same clan are forbidden to marry.

44. The lineal descent of the people of the Five Nations shall run in the female line. Women shall be considered the **progenitors** [family line from which the people originate] of the Nation. They shall own the land and the soil. Men and women shall follow the status of the mother.



Section 6: Rights of the People of the Five Nations

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, threatening their utter ruin, 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. This decision shall be a confirmation of the voice of the people.

94. The men of every clan of the Five Nations shall have a Council Fire ever burning in readiness for a council of the clan. When it seems necessary for a council to be held to discuss the welfare of the clans, then the men may gather about the fire. This council shall have the same rights as the council of the women.

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.

96. All the Clan council fires of a nation or of the Five Nations may unite into one general council fire, or delegates from all the council fires may be appointed to unite in a general council for discussing the interests of the people. The people shall have the right to make appointments and to delegate their power to others of their number. When their council shall have come to a conclusion on any matter, their decision shall be reported to the Council of the Nation or to the Confederate Council (as the case may require) by the War Chief or the War Chiefs.

97. Before the real people united their nations, each nation had its council fires. Before the Great Peace their councils were held. The five Council Fires shall continue to burn as before and they are not quenched. The Lords of each nation in future shall settle their nation's affairs at this council fire governed always by the laws and rules of the council of the Confederacy and by the Great Peace.