



Haudenosaunee Heritage

 **beanstack originals**



Haudenosaunee Heritage

Discover an important confederation of East Coast tribes.



For at least 16,000 years, humans have called the lands that now make up the United States home. Thousands of nations and tribes have lived and continue to live across the country. These peoples created many unique heritages. A heritage is a sense of identity, culture, and history that is passed down over time. Read on to learn more about just one part of the country's rich and varied Indigenous heritage.

East Coast History

Today, the eastern coast of the United States is made up of many different states. The first of these states, Delaware, was established in 1787. However, these lands were lived in long before that. More than 16,000 years ago, prehistoric humans living in Asia traveled to North America. Over time, these people spread out across the Americas. By 9,000 years ago, some humans had settled in the eastern lands of what is now the United States.

Over thousands of years, these people developed different cultures. They had different ways of living and different identities. Some of these people had similarities to one another. They spoke similar languages, known as Iroquoian languages. The people who spoke or speak these languages today are often called Iroquois. There have been many different nations and tribes among the Iroquois. Among others, these include the Kanien'kehá:ka (Mohawk), the



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Replica of a traditional Potawatomi longhouse.

Onʌyoteʔa·ká (Oneida), the Onoñdaʔegaʔ (Onondaga), the Gayo·go·hó:nqʔ (Cayuga), and the Onödowaʔgaʔ (Seneca).

Forming the Haudenosaunee Confederation

The Iroquoian peoples had some similarities. They spoke similar languages. Many people of these nations built and lived in longhouses. These are long buildings made from young, flexible trees and covered in bark walls and roofs. Many people also farmed corn, hunted, and fished. Each nation, however, also had their own practices, beliefs, and histories. They lived in different places across the eastern coast of what is now the United States.

According to legend, these nations were often at war with each other. But one man, known as the Peacemaker, believed there was a better way to live. He spread his message of peace across the land. One Onoñdaʔegaʔ leader named Hayoʔwetha (Hiawatha) believed strongly in this message. He helped join five of the Iroquoian nations together: the Kanienʔkehá:ka, Onʌyoteʔa·ká, Onoñdaʔegaʔ, Gayo·go·hó:nqʔ, and Onödowaʔgaʔ. Together, they became known as the Haudenosaunee Confederation.

DID YOU KNOW?

One of the people who helped found the United States, Benjamin Franklin, was inspired by the Great Law of Peace.



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Wampum belts being constructed.

Art and Culture

The nations of the Haudenosaunee Confederation follow the *Gayaneshagowa*, or the Great Law of Peace. This important law helps govern life for the Haudenosaunee. It provides the Haudenosaunee people with instructions on how to treat others, maintain a democratic society, and preserve peace.

One important part of the culture of the Haudenosaunee includes the making of wampum belts. Wampum are beads made from the white and purple shells of the quahog clams and whelks that live along the eastern coasts. Wampum beads are often used to create beautiful and important belts. These wampum belts display designs and codes and were used for official gatherings and ceremonies.

FUN FACT

Over time, one more nation joined the Haudenosaunee Confederation. Today, it also includes the Skarù-rę? (Tuscarora).

Sporting and games have also been an important part of life for the Haudenosaunee. One of these is the stick and ball game—now known across the world as lacrosse!