

Discussion guide for the Roots of Democracy series

Turtle Island Confederacies: Relationships and Balance

How were Indigenous nations' understanding of community different from the way the framers of the Constitution defined their constituency?

What did Richard Monette mean when he talked about an "unwritten constitution?" How about the concept of "right relations?"

How did the Haudenosaunee Confederacy handle conflicts that could not be resolved in short order?

Founding Narratives: The Evolution of Ancient Athenian and Early American Democracy

America is much larger and more diverse than ancient Athens. Can you imagine any way of recreating the direct participation that Athenian citizens experienced today?

Athens made an investment in democracy by subsidizing citizen participation. How might our government make a similar investment today? Do you think that kind of investment is appropriate?

The framers of the Constitution hoped that shared "virtues," like patriotism and zeal for the common good, would weld citizens of different religious and ethnic backgrounds together. How does that hope seem today, given our increasingly polarized political environment?

Post-Contact Indigenous Governance

Margaret Noodin described the Ojibwe "star sky map" and storytelling as fundamental ways of teaching ethics and right relationship. What stories or models from your youth influenced your adult worldview?

How is the separation of powers in the Haudenosaunee Confederacy similar to the U.S. Constitution? How is it different?

How would you describe the differences between the Indigenous worldview described by the presenters and that of mainstream American culture?

Balancing Individual Interests and the Common Good

Do you believe democracy is inherently fragile? In what way?

John Kaminski explained that some of the founders were concerned about the “excesses of democracy.” What do you think he meant by that?

Rebecca Webster and Adriana Brook talked about the difference between proceeding from a sense of *gratitude*, rather than simply *respect*. How does this distinction affect the tension between individual rights and the common good in contemporary American life?

How might our democracy be different if, as Aldo Leopold suggested, we understood the individual as “a member of a community of interdependent parts?”

What are the skills and values of 21st century citizenship? Are there new or additional responsibilities that were not necessary in the past?