

# Historical Timeline of Onondaga-U.S. History

## August 9, 2010

The Oneida Nation's land claim is dismissed by the 2nd Circuit Court of Appeals. The revived legal concept of laches was used to rule the Oneidas had unduly delayed the filing of their claim. The ruling allowed no remedy for historic wrongs.

## September 22, 2010

Onondaga Land Rights Action, is dismissed by U.S. District Court Judge Lawrence E. Kahn, citing a "readily identifiable disruptive nature" of the Onondaga claim. Suggesting he had no alternative: "Sherill, Cayuga and Oneida foreclose any possibility that the Onondaga Nation's action may prevail, the Court is bound by these precedent to find the Nation's claim equitably barred and subject to dismissal."

## October 25, 2010

The Tadodaho' and Onondaga General Counsel Joe Heath address the Central New York community on the topic: "Onondaga Land Rights: Progress for Mother Earth." They proclaim that the struggle to heal the theft of the Nation's lands will continue and that the Nation will continue working with its neighbors to heal the land, waters, air and the historic injustices inflicted on the Onondaga people.

## November 19, 2010

Jeanne Shenandoah and Joe Heath deliver a keynote presentation to the National People's Oil and Gas Summit, attended by about 400 people from 26 states. This presentation describes the Nation's and the Haudenosaunee Environmental Task

Force's work against hydro-fracking, including its coalition-building to prevent this dangerous gas extraction method from being used in the state.

## February 28, 2012

Onondaga Nation files appeal of their Land Rights Action at the National Press Club in Washington, D.C. They bring the wampum belt commissioned by George Washington to commemorate the Treaty of Canandaigua to remind the U.S. government and people of their treaty obligations. Other Haudenosaunee Chiefs, Clanmothers and Faithkeepers join the Onondaga leaders.

## October 19, 2012

The US 2nd Circuit Appeals Court dismisses the Onondaga Land Rights Action just one week after hearing oral arguments. The Court ignored evidence that the claim was not "disruptive" as evidenced by the packed courtroom at the hearing.

## Summer 2013

As part of the Two Row Wampum Renewal Campaign over 70 educational events are held across New York State and beyond. Hundreds of people participate in a paddle from Onondaga to New York City and the UN, thousands of people join in for events and hundreds of newspaper articles, radio and television interviews are published. The group is welcomed at the UN by Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon.

## October 15, 2013

The United States Supreme Court refuses to hear

the Onondaga Land Rights Action, allowing the 2nd Circuit Court of Appeals dismissal of the case to stand. The Onondaga called the decision "another example of the shameful history of broken treaties, land thefts, forced removal and cultural genocide" and vowed to take their case to an international arena.

## April 15, 2014

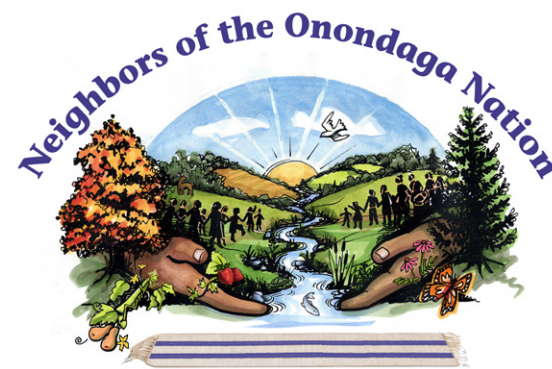
The Onondaga Nation files a petition before the Inter-American Human Rights Commission of the Organization of American States seeking the just and fair remedy that the United States courts failed to provide. The petition describes a variety of human rights violations inflicted on the Onondaga by the United States.



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Photo: Charlotte Logan

Compiled by NOON with consultation Onondaga Nation historians and Robert W. Venables



Neighbors of the Onondaga Nation (NOON) is a grassroots effort of Central New Yorkers. We support the sovereignty of the Onondaga Nation's traditional government, their Land Rights Action and we collaborate with them on environmental protection and restoration. We join in the Onondaga Nation's call for justice, reconciliation and healing. We believe that we, and the wider community, have a great deal to learn from the Onondagas about living more peacefully with one another and more harmoniously with the Earth. NOON is a project of the Syracuse Peace Council. For more information, or to join in our efforts, contact:

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## ...909

Earliest date established by non-Indian scholars for the founding of the Confederacy. The Peacemaker gathers representatives from the Five Nations to bury their weapons and agree to the Great Law of Peace forming the Haudenosaunee Confederacy.

## 1452

Papal Bull (letter from Pope Nicholas V) bestows "special graces... to invade, search out, capture, vanquish, and subdue all Saracens and pagans whatsoever." This initiated the "Doctrine of Discovery," which served to justify the subjugation of indigenous people throughout the world, including Native Americans.

## 1493

The Inter Caetera Bull issued by Pope Alexander VI elaborated on the earlier bull, further codifying and validating Christian conquest of non-Christians.

## 1613

Probable date of the first treaty between the Haudenosaunee and the Dutch, signified by the Two Row Wampum, the Guswenta. For the Haudenosaunee, this formed the basis for all future relations with European settlers. It establishes the idea of two separate but equal nations that will respect one another's sovereignty.

## 1615

Samuel de Champlain and an army of hundreds of Hurons (Wyandot) attack and lay siege to the Onondaga fortified town on the shores of Onondaga Lake, between Onondaga and Ley Creeks. Despite

extensive casualties, this imperialist attack without warning was not successful and Champlain was seriously wounded.

## 1654

French send Jesuit Simon LeMoyne to Onondagas.

## 1677

Treaty negotiations in Albany result in the first known Silver Covenant Chain Treaty with New York, Massachusetts, and Connecticut.

## 1694

The French attack the Onondaga. The French find abandoned villages, decide to burn the crops of the Onondaga.

## 1713-1722

Tuscaroras are adopted into the Haudenosaunee Confederacy after being defeated in war by colonists in North Carolina who sought to make slaves of their people.

## 1744

During treaty negotiations in Lancaster, PA, Canasatego, an Onondaga chief, urges the English colonists to unite by following the example of the Haudenosaunee.

## 1754

Benjamin Franklin's "Albany Plan of Union" for a central government of the British colonies names its legislative branch "the Grand Council," language directly borrowed from the Haudenosaunee. Franklin often met with Haudenosaunee leaders.

## 1776

John Hancock, President of the Continental Congress, sends a wampum belt to the Haudenosaunee to "show good intentions" and "cultivate peace."

## 1777

Despite intense pressures by both the British and American colonists, the Haudenosaunee decide to remain neutral during the Revolutionary War. As colonial combatants vie for the land, they continue to encroach upon Native communities, implementing the policy of divide and conquer. Through coercion, some individuals break from the Confederacy. In part, Mohawks and Senecas ally with the British, as do Oneidas and Tuscaroras with the colonists.

## 1779

George Washington orders General Sullivan to destroy all of the Haudenosaunee and to burn their crops and villages. This came to be known as the Sullivan and Clinton Campaign. Colonial soldiers burned Onondaga villages, killing at least 1. An Onondaga Chief recalled: "When they came to the Onondaga Town (of which I was one of the principal Chiefs) They put to death all the Women and Children, excepting some of the young Women that they carried away for the use of their Soldiers, and were put to death in a more shameful and Scandalous manner; Yet these Rebels calls themselves Christians." General John Sullivan invaded other Haudenosaunee lands. These actions encouraged many neutral Haudenosaunee to side with British forces in the War of Independence.

**continued inside**

# ONONDAGA HISTORICAL TIMELINE

**1783**

U.S. War of Independence ends with the colonists victory over England.

**1784**

Treaty of Fort Stanwix cedes Haudenosaunee land north of the Ohio River to the U.S. (Onondaga territory is not affected.) Six million acres of land are guaranteed to the Haudenosaunee. During treaty negotiations Haudenosaunee leaders were taken hostage. In a meeting to discuss ratification of the treaty in 1786, the treaty was rejected by the Six Nations government, which quickly began appealing to the U.S. government for redress. This treaty followed an unsuccessful attempt by New York Governor George Clinton to negotiate land purchases from the Haudenosaunee.

**1788**

New York State "buys" more than 96% of the Onondagas' land (about 2 million acres) from the Onondaga Nation. Onondaga territory is reduced to about 108 square miles, including a one-mile strip around Onondaga Lake. The "treaty" followed a private effort to buy land and was made with Onondagas without authority to negotiate for their people. New York Governor George Clinton promised, "this tract is to remain with the Onondagoes (sic) forever. Our people will know that they cannot get any Part of this Tract and therefore will not attempt it."

**1789**

Treaty of Fort Harmar renews peace and friendship between U.S. and Six Nations. The Six Nations give up claim to lands west of modern day Buffalo, but are guaranteed lands east and north of there.

**1790**

Because President Washington is so concerned with NY's continued illegal taking of Haudenosaunee lands, and the trouble this caused, Congress enacts the Trade and Intercourse Act requiring federal involvement in any negotiations involving native land and ratification of treaties by the Senate.

**1793**

New York State "takes" 79 square miles (50,560 acres) of the Onondaga territory. Onondagas believed that they were leasing land to New York State, not selling it.

**1794**

Treaty of Canandaigua establishes peace between the U.S. and Haudenosaunee, guarantees that the U.S. will not claim lands of the Oneida, Onondaga and Cayuga Nations and accepts the right of the Haudenosaunee to "free use and enjoyment of their lands." It re-affirms the nation-to-nation relationship.

**1794**

Jay Treaty states that the Haudenosaunee have free

passage between the U.S. and Canada and do not have to pay a duty or toll.

**1795**

New York State "buys" rights to Onondaga Lake and the land surrounding it. The state is in clear violation of both the 1790 and 1793 Trade and Intercourse Acts. And like earlier treaties, these were negotiated with factions of the nation who had no authority to sell land.

**1790-1822**

New York State continues to purchase land from Onondaga without following the rules and regulations set forth by the Federal government. By 1822 the Onondaga territory is reduced to its current size of 7,300 acres

**1799-1815**

After negative influences affect the Haudenosaunee, a messenger, Handsome Lake (Seneca) travels to the villages to remind the people of their ancient way of life. This code of Handsome Lake, or "Gaiwio," is recited every fall within the Confederacy.

**1823**

Chief Justice John Marshall authors the opinion in "Johnson v M'Intosh" that lays the foundation to U.S. property law and aboriginal land title as it pertains to the Doctrine of Christian Discovery.

**1825**

Erie Canal opens. This increased access heightens the financial incentive for taking Haudenosaunee land.

**1838**

New York State attempts to have all remaining Haudenosaunee removed to a territory west of Missouri. This effort is thwarted.

**1847**

The Grand Council Fire is returned to Onondaga Territory. The fire had been moved to Buffalo Creek by 1790 after being maintained at Onondaga for hundreds of years.

**1848**

Syracuse becomes a city.

**1861**

The Hough Report. New York State sets up a commission to "Extinguish Title" of natives to their land in New York State.

**1887**

General Allotment Act, passed by the U.S. Congress, breaks up the communal land base of most reservation lands across the U.S. by subdividing the reservations into personally-owned tracts. But this act specifically exempts the Haudenosaunee.

**1890**

A second school is built on the Onondaga Nation (the first was built in 1850, but burned down). Students are taught in English-only classes. The Onondaga language is prohibited. Children are sent to Boarding Schools in western New York and Pennsylvania.

**1898**

New York State and its Museum engage in a carefully planned and executed pattern of taking as many wampum belts and strings as they can from individual Haudenosaunee citizens who do not have the authority to dispose of the Confederacy's cultural patrimony. This is a further attempt to destroy the Haudenosaunee and its cultural integrity.

**1922**

NYS Legislature rejects the New York State Indian Commission "Everett" Report which concluded that the original six million acres of land guaranteed to the Haudenosaunee by the 1784 Treaty of Fort Stanwix still belonged to them. The report was hidden from the public until 1971.

**1923**

Cayuga Chief Deskaheh travels from Six Nations Territory in Canada to Geneva, Switzerland to seek assistance from the League of Nations for Canada's infringement on sovereignty. He is denied a formal hearing but speaks to a large crowd at an event sponsored by the Mayor of Geneva.

**1924**

The U.S. enacts the American Indian Citizenship Act making all Natives born in the U.S. into U.S. citizens. The Haudenosaunee refuse the act, referring to the Two Row Wampum as a binding agreement, as one government cannot impose laws on the other and its people. Beginning with a letter to President Coolidge on December 30, 1924, the Haudenosaunee consistently reject U.S. citizenship.

**1946**

Following World War II, the Indian Claims Commission is established by Congress to redress past land frauds and treaties.

**Late 40's**

Onondaga land is taken as the result of a dam project.

**1947-60**

The New York State Power Authority confiscates 550 acres of Tuscarora land to build a hydroelectric dam and reservoir.

**1956-63**

Despite determined resistance by the Senecas, the Kinzua Dam is built, flooding 9,000 acres of the Allegany reservation, causing the relocation of 130 families and many graves.

**1970**

New York State places a ban on eating fish from Onondaga Lake.

**1971**

The Onondagas resist New York State's efforts to take Onondaga Nation land to widen Rt. 81. Negotiations in the longhouse lead to an agreement that limits the expansion and reasserts Onondaga sovereignty.

**1972**

Onondaga Nation School begins language and culture classes to teach students the Onondaga language after the community boycotts the local school system.

**1974**

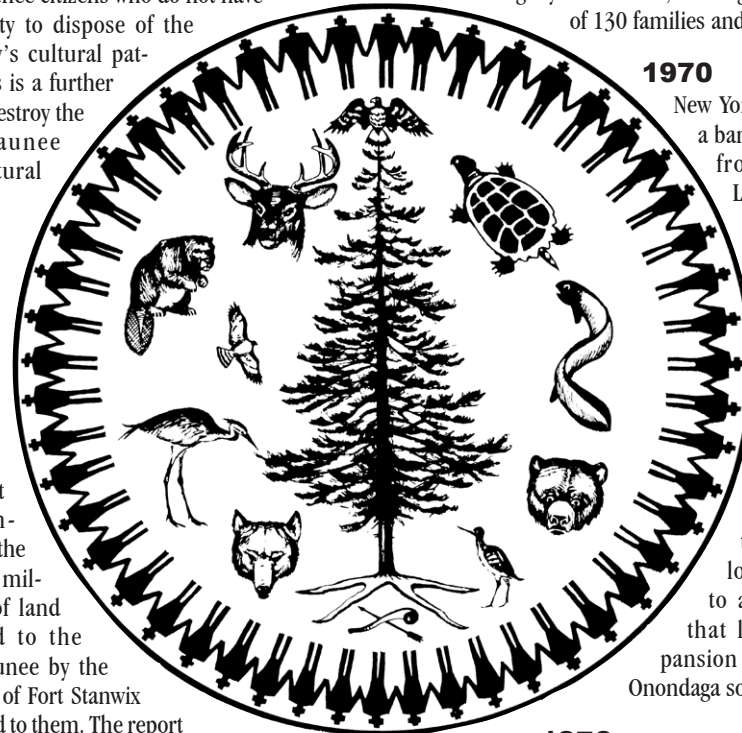
U.S. Supreme Court decides that the Oneida Nation's claim for lands which were lost through a violation of the Trade and Intercourse Act should be heard in federal court.

**1977**

The first Haudenosaunee Passports are issued and a Haudenosaunee delegation travels to Switzerland using the passports.

**1979**

An agreement is signed between the Onondaga Nation and Onondaga County Sheriff's Department affirming that the Sheriff's Department will recognize Onondaga Sovereignty by not entering Nation territory without permission of the Chiefs except in life-threatening situations.



**1980**

Cayuga Nation files a claim for the return of 64,000 acres of land.

**1982**

The Ancient Indian Land Claims Settlement Act seeks to resolve land claims by validating all prior land transfers and allowing Indian nations to sue only for monetary damages. The bill dies in Congress.

**1988**

US Congress passes joint resolution (H.Con.Res. 331) "To acknowledge the contribution of the Iroquois Confederacy of Nations to the development of the United States Constitution and to reaffirm the continuing government-to-government relationship between Indian tribes and the United States established in the Constitution."

**1992**

The United States government intervenes in the Cayuga case, allowing it to move forward in court.

**1994**

U.S. District Court Judge Neal McCurn rules that the Cayugas had a valid claim to their ancestral land.

**1998**

Onondaga chiefs meet with Gov. George Pataki in Albany to notify him that a land claim will be filed.

**2000-2001**

After negotiations break down, the Cayuga claim becomes first to go to trial in federal court. In February, a jury awarded the Cayugas \$36.9 million for their land and loss of use of that land. On October 2, 2001, Judge Neal McCurn added \$211 million in interest to the jury award.

**2001**

Onondaga Chief Sidney Hill is condoled (installed) as Tadadaho (spiritual leader) of the the Haudenosaunee Confederacy.

**November 2003**

Onondaga students and adults convince the LaFayette School District to fly the Haudenosaunee flag at the High School following years of persistent effort.

**March 11, 2005**

Onondaga Nation files historic Land Rights Action in federal court seeking recognition of its aboriginal title over some 4,000 square miles of land and calling for environmental cleanup in the territory.

**March 29, 2005**

US Supreme Court (Sherrill v. Oneida) rules that the Oneida Nation cannot reassert sovereignty over land bought within its aboriginal territory. The first footnote in the decision referenced the racist "Doctrine of Discovery" (see 1452 listing above.) The decision, based on a number of mistaken assumptions, is a major, but

hopefully temporary, setback for Native sovereignty.

**June 28, 2005**

Second Circuit US Appeals Court overturns the Cayuga decision, nullifying an award of some \$250 million to the Cayugas for loss of their land. The full court later chose not to review the divided decision of the three judge panel.

**August 2005**

Onondaga Nation files amended Land Rights Action on August 1, 2005 responding to court decisions in Sherrill v. Oneida and an appeal of the Cayuga Land Claim.

**August 2006**

NYS files a motion seeking the dismissal of the Onondaga Land Rights Action. They argue that the Onondagas have waited too long to go to court and that their action is "disruptive."

**September 2007**

Following 30 years of work, the UN passes the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, affirming the rights of indigenous peoples to self-government in matters relating to their internal affairs and prohibiting discrimination against them. The US is one of four countries voting against the declaration.

**October 2007**

The first oral arguments hearing is held on October 11, 2007 in the Onondaga Land Rights Action in Federal District Court in Albany, NY.

**January 2009**

The Onondaga Nation is officially recognized as a trustee of Onondaga Lake giving it a greater role in the lake cleanup. In particular regarding plans and implementation of restoration activities for the lake and the associated watershed.

**April 23, 2010**

Onondaga Nation and its environmental team awarded an EPA Region 2 Environmental Quality Awards. Works in coalition with Partnership for Onondaga Creek, Atlantic States Legal Foundation and Onondaga County Executive Joanie Mahoney to use green infrastructure rather than large, industrial sewage plants in neighborhoods, to correct the combined sewer overflow discharges into Onondaga Creek.

**July 2010**

The Iroquois Nationals Lacrosse Team members, using Haudenosaunee passports, are denied visas by the British Consulate, preventing their participation in the 2010 World Lacrosse Championships held in Manchester, England. The team garnered world support while waiting in NYC, including Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, but were still denied travel.

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