

What Are Indigenous Religions? Lessons from Onondaga

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Introduction

The Haudenosaunee (People of the Longhouse) is a confederation of five native nations (Seneca, Cayuga, Onondaga, Oneida, and Mohawk) who joined together under the Great Law of Peace. In the early eighteenth century, the Tuscarora, who were escaping the European slave trade and exploitation of their homelands by colonial governments, joined the Confederacy as the sixth nation. Iroquois is the name assigned to the Haudenosaunee by the French, but the indigenous term for this confederation means "People of the Longhouse." Prior to European invasion, the Longhouse was an actual building in which resided several, perhaps hundreds, of families related through a matrilineal clan. The most senior and respected mother of the clan oversaw the Longhouse and she was called the Clan-mother. As a result of the forced infusion of European understandings of private property, the Haudenosaunee no longer live in Longhouses. Today, however, the Longhouse is still the ceremonial center of traditional communities, which are organized by clans and led by Clan-mothers and male clan "chiefs" called *royaner* (good mind). Where the Longhouse system has not been weakened by U.S and Canadian intervention, it is also where political and economic decisions are made. The Haudenosaunee have no word for "religion" as such and do not separate the ceremonial function of the Longhouse from its political and economic functions. The Haudenosaunee are the last remaining group that is recognized by the United States that has retained their indigenous government. All other governments on Native American lands have adopted an elective style government mandated and funded by the U.S. Federal Government through the BIA (Bureau of Indian Affairs).

The Seneca are "Keepers of the Western Door"; the Mohawks are "Keepers of the Eastern Door"; and the Onondaga are the "Central Fire" for the Haudenosaunee. According to Longhouse people, the Great Law of Peace was created roughly 1000 years ago by the combined efforts of four individuals: The Peacemaker, Hiawantha, Jikonsase, and the Tadadaho. Since the founding of Haudenosaunee

Confederacy, Onondaga has been where the Grand Council meets to debate matters pertaining to the entire Confederacy. There is a geographical arrangement to the organization of the Haudenosaunee which traditionally extends throughout upstate New York and into parts of Canada and Ohio (see figure 1). This arrangement is visually expressed as an enormous Longhouse that houses all nations of the Haudenosaunee. The Hiawantha Belt, made of wampum shell beads, is the symbolic expression of the original five Nations as a confederation. From the right (or East) are represented the Mohawks and the Oneida. The tree in the middle represents the Onondaga. To the left (or West) are represented the Cayuga and Seneca. Lines extending to the East and West acknowledge that the Confederacy is unfinished and will include other people in the future.

Year of the Locust

2001 was the year of the locust on the Onondaga Territory. Every seventeen years, between strawberry and blackberry seasons, millions of locust emerge from the ground. They live only for a brief two to three week period all the while aggressively eating tree leaves, mating, laying eggs and dying. Elders say that their song, always in the key of D or D flat, is the sound of creation. It can be heard throughout the Onondaga Territory at all hours of the day or night.

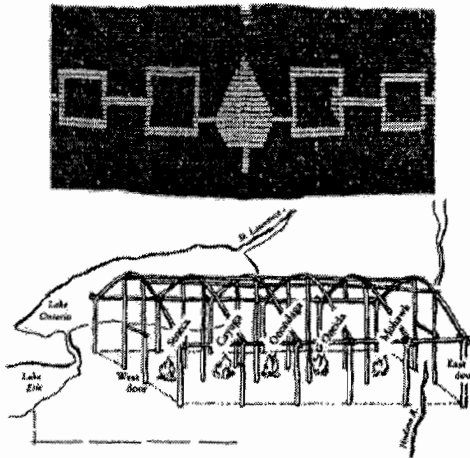


Figure 1. The Hiawantha Belt of the Haudenosaunee as it mirrors the geographical distribution of the original five nations across New York State (*Haudenosaunee Press Guide*: 9).

The seventeen-year locust is also known as the periodical cicada, *Magicicada septendecim*, or *Magicicada cassini*. Onondaga, near Syracuse, is the only place in

Central New York where the locust appear in these numbers. Outside of Onondaga they are known to inhabit areas of Louisiana and Mississippi. The main purpose of their three week lives is to eat and lay eggs on the leaves of the trees. The eggs hatch and the young larvae fall to the ground. For seventeen years the locust live in a grub-like stage sucking liquids and nutrients from the roots of the trees. Unlike the Biblical locust, however, the seventeen-year locust are not regarded as a plague but, on the contrary, as a blessing sent directly from the Creator. The Onondaga call them *Ogwenyo?da*.¹ Instead of their seventeen-year cycle, this term refers to the place of a community of animals. Far from being a nuisance, they are greatly respected by the Onondaga. In particular, they are appreciated for their nutritive value. Onondaga is the Central Fire of the Haudenosaunee (i.e, the Iroquois Confederacy) and they are the only nation of the Confederacy who eat locust. The Onondaga are jokingly referred to as the “bug-eaters” by others of the Haudenosaunee (the Seneca, Tuscarora, Cayuga, Oneida and Mohawk). Jake Edwards, a Clan chief of Onondaga, says, “The Tuscarora people don’t want us bringing them to their territory. They are afraid that if they get loose, they will destroy their land. I tell them that it is another kind of locust, but they don’t want to hear it.” Peter Edwards, Jake’s brother, says, “We are the bug-eaters, that’s true, but only the locusts. It is as common for us as strawberries and milkweed and deer meat. We still use the old medicines here, like our ancestors did.”² The Onondaga taste for the seventeen-year locust was reported in major newspapers around the world during the summer of 2001.

The Onondaga relish the locusts. Peter Edwards has referred to them as “flying vitamin capsules.” Indeed the insects are very high in nutritive value. They are high in vitamins, protein and minerals, with no fat and low cholesterol. Early in the morning, people gather the locust when they have just come out of the ground. At that time of day they are slow and easy to collect. Some eat the locust raw but most put them in the freezer. Freezing slows the bugs down even more. They are usually pan-fried with butter or oil and a little salt and then usually eaten throughout the day. Putting them in the refrigerator before cooking ensures against their jumping out of the pan.

My family and I ate the locust at the home of Anna Homer. Anna was referred to as the “bug lady” in our local paper (McAndrew 2001). In our case getting the bugs into our mouths was the challenge. But my wife, Sandy Bigtree, and I were aided by our twin 6-year-old boys, Kroy and Clay. Anna welcomed us to her home by bringing out to the front yard a heaping plate of the freshly fried locust. To delay the inevitable, we kept talking and making jokes about eating bugs. Sandy was the first of us to gingerly try one of the locust. The twins couldn’t wait any longer and grabbed a handful of the locust and popped them into their mouths crunching them up wings and all. After deciding that the bugs were pretty good, they went after the plate for seconds. In a short time it became clear to me that I wasn’t going to be able to try the locust if I waited any longer—so I

took the plunge. Really, they taste like popcorn! I didn't have to worry about not getting a chance to try them though because, before we left that night, Anna made sure that we had a big bag of locust from her refrigerator.



Figure 2. Ogenwo?da, or “the seventeen-year locust”, is also know to scientists as the periodical cicada, *Magicicada septendecim*, or *Magicicada cassini* (Buncombe 2001: 14)

A first meaning of the locust is as a highly valued food. In addition to their being a healthy and tasty food source, there are other reasons why the Onondaga eat the locust. They are widely regarded as a gift of the Creator given specifically to the Onondaga people. There are numerous personal histories associated with the appearance of the locust. People often talk about when they first ate the locust as children. I experienced eating the locust as a memorable event. The photo above underscores why one would likely never forget the experience of putting the red-eyed creature into one's mouth. They mark personal and familial events with respect to the appearance of seventeen-year cycle of the locust. Recollections of when and where a person was seventeen years ago, and imaginings of where they will be seventeen years hence, connect the locust intimately with individual and familial life experiences.

A second meaning of the locust is a calendar in which people mark their own personal life stories. In Spring 2001 Sandy and I were invited to attend a class given by Robert Venables of Cornell University. He is a longtime friend of the Onondaga and had been invited by a Clan-mother, Frieda Jacques, to give a class on Haudenosaunee history for the Onondaga community at a local High School. It was a remarkable experience for me. I had never taken a history class with such an engaged group of students. I came away with an understanding of the American Revolution being a dramatic break in European/Haudenosaunee relations. Prior to the American Revolution, the Haudenosaunee were highly regarded as trading partners with various European commercial empires and were, therefore, treated as a sovereign nation. Even though they were often enemies of various European nations, and often feared for their prowess in battle, they were still highly respected and regarded. The formidable presence of the Haudenosaunee in international

trade had both beneficial and negative consequences. After the Revolutionary War, however, the Haudenosaunee were simply seen as being in the way of the forward-moving direction of the young United States. In other words, with the advent of the United States things became dramatically worse for the Haudenosaunee, as it would become worse in the nineteenth century for tribes out West.

In spite of the Oneida having saved him and his troops from starvation at Valley Forge, in 1779 President George Washington ordered the forced removal and/or destruction of the Haudenosaunee. Washington ordered Major General John Sullivan to lead the Continental Army on a mission to destroy the power of the Iroquois, whether they were allies, enemies or neutral in the American Revolution. At that time, the Haudenosaunee were living in what is now New York State (founded in 1788) and had direct influence as far north as the Ottawa River, into Vermont, Massachusetts, Maine and west into Pennsylvania. On June 10, 1778, the Continental Congress voted the sum of \$932,743 (a huge sum of money at the time) to “put down the Indian menace.” In December, General Washington recommended that the campaign be planned for 1779. Congress approved Washington’s plan on February 25, 1779, “directing him to take all measures necessary to protect the settlers and to punish the Indians.” The other threat was seen as the Haudenosaunee supplying food to the British army. Washington knew the potential value of virgin lands in western New York, Pennsylvania and other areas to the south and west, which were directly under the control of the Haudenosaunee. Washington wrote to Sullivan on May 31, 1779 with explicit instructions:

The expedition you are appointed to command is to be directed against the hostile tribes of the Six Nations of Indians [i.e., the Haudenosaunee] with their associates and adherents. The immediate objects are total destruction and devastation of their settlements and the capture of as many prisoners of every sex and age as possible. It will be essential to ruin their crops in the ground and prevent their planting more. (Boardman 1978: 40-41)

Several of Sullivan’s officers and enlisted men kept journals of the devastation wrought on the Haudenosaunee by U.S. forces. Sullivan said, “The officers and men had been much impressed by the prosperity of the Indians and the extent of their villages. The greatest part of the Indian houses were larger than common [houses]” (Mitchell 2001). In Sergeant Major George Grant’s journal of August 9, he describes how an Indian village of about thirty houses in northern Pennsylvania was burned, but the inhabitants were gone. On August 27 Sullivan’s troops marched northwest from Fort Sullivan near Tioga along the Chemung River to

the Haudenosaunee settlement of Newtown one Sergeant Moses Fellows wrote, "we arrived at a large Place of Corn Containing about 80 Acres as Good as I ever beheld, with Great Quantities of Squashes Beenes &c. . . ." (Boardman 1978: 59; Mitchell 2001). These were destroyed. On August 29 came the pitched battle at Newtown between Sullivan's troops and a group of mostly Haudenosaunee, and some British troops. The Haudenosaunee force consisted of Seneca warriors who were led by Cornplanter and Red Jacket, Cayuga warriors, and Mohawk warriors who were led by Joseph Brant. A day after the Newtown battle, Sullivan's men destroyed what Sullivan told Washington was a "vast quantity of corn." They also burned twenty houses there and thirty more about two miles to the east. Lieutenant Beatty was much impressed with the lush Indian crops. He wrote, "Our Brigade Destroyed about 150 acres of the best corn that I ever saw." He said that some of the stalks grew sixteen feet high. They also devastated "great Quantities of Beans, Potatoes, Pumpkins, Cucumbers, Squashes & Watermelons, and the Enemy looking at us from the hills but did not fire on us" (Boardman 1978: 66; Mitchell 2001).

On August 31 they continued marching northeast toward Elmira. Major Burrowes wrote, "The land exceeds any that I have ever seen." They destroyed eight houses at a hamlet two miles beyond Newtown and twenty more at the site of Elmira. A detachment was sent west after "fleeing and wiped out the Indian village at Big Flats, also burning thirty acres of corn and a quantity of hay. Feather beds and buried chests were also found there." On September 3 Sullivan's men destroyed thirty houses along with cornfields and fruit trees at Catherine's Town, which is at the southern end of Seneca Lake. Livestock was taken as food. An old woman, estimated to be 100 years old, told them that the village had fled due to the heavy casualties suffered at the Newtown battle. On September 5 near the Northern end of Seneca Lake at Kendaia or Appletown, Sullivan, in his own words, "reduced to ashes" twenty houses that were "neatly built."

Sullivan's troops stayed until September 8 at Kanadesaga (Geneva) at the northern tip of Seneca Lake. There they burned all of the houses and crops. From there they made raids on villages east to Canandaigua, at the northern tip of Canandaigua Lake, Conesus, and as far west as Little Beard's Town (Deonundagaa), or Genesee Castle. This was the largest Seneca town they had found. It consisted of 128 houses. Sullivan wrote that the "town was beautifully situated, almost encircled with a clear flat which extends for a number of miles, where the most extensive fields of corn were, and every kind of vegetable that can be conceived" (Boardman 1978: 78). Also at Little Beard's Town they met Mary Jemison (1743-1833) who had been taken captive and adopted into the Seneca tribe. She had eight children and was treated with respect by her Seneca husband and had become an influential figure among the Seneca nation. She was not afraid of Sullivan's men and had chosen to stay and face the U.S. invasion rather than flee with the residents of Little Beard's Town. All was destroyed

and estimates range from fifteen thousand to twenty thousand bushels of corn.

Rather than face the British forces at Fort Niagara, Sullivan decided to retrace his steps. On September 15 he issued this message to his men:

The commander-in-chief informs this brave and resolute army that the immediate objects of this expedition are accomplished, viz.: total ruin of the Indian settlements, and the destruction of their corps, which were designed for the support of those inhuman barbarians, while they were desolating the American frontiers. He is by no means insensible of the obligations he is under to those brave officers and soldiers whose virtue and fortitude have enabled him to complete the important design of the expedition, and he assures them he will not fail to inform America at large how much they stand indebted to them. (Boardman 1978: 81)

Sullivan arrived back at Canandaigua on September 18 where he met with an Oneida chief and three others of his tribe. The Oneida were well known to Sullivan and were to be used to assist Sullivan's troops as guides or directly in the fight. Being part of the Haudenosaunee, however, there were undoubtedly divided loyalties and the Oneida contingent to the expedition never rendezvoused with Sullivan. The Oneida chief asked Sullivan not to punish the Cayugas east of Canandaigua, nor to invade the lands of the other nations (Onondaga, Oneida and Mohawk) further east. Sullivan and his war council decided, however, to attack to the east. On September 20 he sent Lieutenant Colonel William Butler to lead an attack to destroy all the villages he could find on the eastern shore of Cayuga Lake. This he did and also destroyed Cayuga Castle and four other large towns with about one hundred houses and two hundred acres of corn.

Also on September 20 he sent Colonel Peter Gansevoort eastward toward the Mohawk River. He was told to destroy the lower Mohawk Castle at Fort Hunter and go all the way to Albany. Gansevoort's path would have led right through Onondaga territory where, along the way, he is said to have destroyed a village of twenty houses and their crops. Colonel William Smith was dispatched on September 20 to march along the west side of Seneca Lake. On September 21 Colonel Dearborn marched south along the west side of Cayuga Lake and laid waste to six Cayuga villages, along with their orchards and crops.

The campaign ended about September 30. Sullivan reported to the Continental Congress that 160,000 bushels of corn, as well as other fruit and vegetables, were destroyed. Forty Indian settlements had been burned to the ground. Guy Johnson wrote that almost all of the villages were gone and that the Continental army had only suffered the loss of forty men.

After Sullivan's campaign, the winter of 1779-80 was severe and most of the

Haudenosaunee territory was buried under five feet of snow. Deer and other game were very scarce. It was presumed that many Haudenosaunee died from cold and starvation (Fischer 1997: 4). According to oral tradition, many Haudenosaunee returned to their villages in the spring of 1780 to rebuild their homes and replant their crops. At Onondaga people were in dire straights as their homeland had been particularly hard hit. Those people who survived were starving and there was little food to support them in the early season.

The Haudenosaunee refer to the office of the President of the United States as *Honnahdahguyuss*, which translates as "He Who Destroys Villages", or "Burner of Villages." This title is directly linked to the Sullivan campaign and their history of relationships with the U.S. For example, when the Tadadaho of the Haudenosaunee, Sid Hill, wrote a letter of condolence for the September 11, 2001, attack on New York and Washington, DC to George W. Bush he referred to him as *Honnahdahguyuss*.

In the midst of the enormous human suffering in the spring of 1780 the Onondaga heard a voice in the woods. It was a buzzing they had never heard before. It was the locust and some Onondaga listened intently to the creatures that told them that they had been sent by the Creator as food for the people. The nourishment that the locust provided would be enough to get them to the harvest season. The locust also told the Onondaga that they would come again when those who were born in that year were old enough to have babies of their own. They would continue to offer themselves to each generation.

The locust have appeared thirteen times since 1780 (or, 2001 was the thirteenth locust hierophany) and each time they arrive they are greeted with heartfelt thanks. Indeed, eating them is understood to be the activity of giving thanks to the locust. The Onondaga have continued to eat the locust for thirteen generations. It is particularly important that they teach their children the stories of their relationships with the U.S. But a more subtle and important meaning of hierophany is appreciated from the appearance of the locust. This hierophany is a result of cultural contact and genocide, in which the interaction of human history is intimately involved in promoting a "manifestation of the sacred." This is an example of a provoked hierophany, one in which the deity or Creator responds to a situation of crisis of human origin (Eliade 1954; Long 1986). With respect to native relationships with the United States, this is a common religious theme that perpetuates indigenous communities in spite of the fact that they are despised by the immigrant culture.

A third meaning of the locust, therefore, is as a community history. Intimately related to this meaning is a fourth meaning of the locust as hierophany. The story of the locust is a particularly powerful example of an "indigenous religious relationship with the land." The eating of locust at Onondaga is a thanksgiving that acknowledges a continuing relationship with the spirit of Creation. It also promotes and sustains their indigenous identity in spite of the at-

tempted extermination of their people by the newly formed United States. This does not mean that the Onondaga have always been where they currently are and have practiced their traditions in the exactly the same way. Their indigenoussness does not mean that they have remained untouched and unspoiled by the outside world. On the contrary, indigenous communities are constantly shifting their relationships with their places as conditions for material existence change. Indigenousness refers to a people who have a history of ongoing relationships with the land in such a way that promotes their human community without violating the integrity of other communities that inhabit the same place. Their indigenous sensibility is in their ability to pay attention to where they are and what it means to survive *in their place* (Long 1986). They have suffered the ordeal of their place and, as such, have a binding and deep understanding of their land. The Onondaga, no matter what the situation, have always been attuned to their environment. *Paying attention*, a survival skill that my parents used to teach me and I now try to teach my children, is also a religious response to crisis and a process of promoting life. Every seventeen years the Onondaga ingest this history, all the while teaching their children and giving thanks to Creation for sustaining them for all of this time.

Has Anything Changed?

Relationships between the United States and the Haudenosaunee have been difficult up until the present time. Unfortunately, cultural differences between the U.S. and the Haudenosaunee have been overlooked as a feature of this relationship. Over 220 years ago the United States, as well as state and local governments, feared and tried to destroy the indigeneity of the Haudenosaunee. That is to say, they wanted to conquer the Haudenosaunee and separate them from their relationships with the land. The Haudenosaunee, however, have developed techniques for coping with the chaos that follows such disruptions of people and therefore have survived intact to a much greater degree than other Native American nations. U.S. and New York State citizens, however, have been unable to gauge the cultural and religious distance between neighbors and have routinely unacknowledged the detrimental aspects of their history. Very soon the legal, cultural, environmental, and religious consequences of an American unwillingness or inability to deal with indigenous traditions will have dramatic effects. The gaping gulf between indigenous and immigrant orientations to the world, as well as a deep unwillingness to critically examine the viability of the U.S. heritage, has been expressed recently by the New York State government in a directive from the Pataki administration.

A memorandum, dated 30 November 2001, was sent from Governor George Pataki's office through the SUNY University Counsel to all presidents of New York State operated campuses and community colleges. It stated that all contacts

with Indian people (including anyone who purports to represent, speak on behalf of, or in any way is affiliated with an Indian tribe or nation) should be immediately reported to the University Counsel's office. After reporting such interaction, all campus personnel should "await further instructions from us before engaging in any further contact," including replying to correspondence, returning phone calls, holding meetings, or sharing information of any kind.

News of this memorandum broke in the February 24, 2002, issue of *Indian Country Today*. When I distributed the article to colleagues via email there was a tremendous reaction that I would characterize as a mixture of outrage and disbelief. Many of my colleagues urged me to investigate to see if indeed such a memo actually existed and whether or not it was a hoax. Of course, the reason for this reaction is that, in effect, the Governor's office is directing that all faculty and staff at campuses supported by New York State suspend contact with Indian people. If, for example, the Governor were to send out a directive suspending contact with African Americans, Latino/a Americans, or Asian Americans, there would be massive protests against the racist efforts by the Governor to subdue minority voices. This strikes academics as patently absurd on campuses where we have undergone strenuous efforts to diversify our faculty, staff, and intellectual offerings.

The issue cuts deeper than limiting the voices of Indian people. It restricts an ability of academics to explore and articulate intellectual areas that are controversial. As Charles Long put it "Today, shut up about Native Americans, tomorrow, shut up about anything I say shut up about." This directive raises the question of academic freedom in state supported schools in a way that is chilling. But, one may ask, why did the Governor single out Native Americans? Indeed, the answer to that question is directly related to New York State politics and raises other questions about the structural nature of racism.

Both the directive and memorandum explicitly state that it is the policy of the State to engage in formal government-to-government dialogue only with legitimate representatives of federally recognized Indian nations or tribes. Only official Indian representatives are to be in dialogue with the State. Any other person or group is considered a "dissident faction." The presence of dissidents in the dialogue process, according to the memo, causes unnecessary confusion in the State negotiations with federally recognized Indian nations. Clearly, for the Pataki administration, SUNY schools are considered an extension of State government. Therefore, all employees of those institutions need to be ever-mindful of affairs of the State.

The sovereign status of Indian nations, and their ongoing negotiations with the State of New York, bring another analogy to mind. If, for example, New York was negotiating with the country of Mexico (let's say a free trade agreement), then would it be the policy of the State that no Mexican citizen who was not an official representative of Mexico could visit SUNY campuses and lecture in

classes or speak to the university community? If that person were particularly critical of a free trade agreement between Mexico and New York (let's say a representative of the Zapatista Movement), would their presence be regarded as unnecessarily complicating already complicated negotiations? The directive and memorandum, therefore, are not designed to accomplish what they say they want to accomplish—namely, uncomplicated negotiations between State and Indian Nations. Instead, they should be seen as attempts to silence what the State regards as “dissent” voices so it can carry out a particular political agenda at the expense of academic freedom.

The background on this issue goes back to the founding of the United States when the newly formed country expanded into Indian territories in violation of treaties. For over two hundred years, the land base of Indian nations has been eroded by local interests in violation of treaties between the U.S. Federal Government and the Haudenosaunee. As with other Native American groups in the U.S., the Federal Government forced a new style of government on some of the native nations of the Haudenosaunee that was modeled on U.S. elective form of government. These “federally recognized” governments were first designed and then controlled by the BIA, or Bureau of Indian Affairs, in Washington D.C. Historically, the Federal Government has “recognized” those individual Native Americans with whom they could most easily negotiate various deals. These people were sanctioned as the “federally recognized” Indian governments, which were formed in opposition to “traditional” governmental structures. This is also true in New York State where the “federally recognized” tribal governments are at odds with the Haudenosaunee traditional Longhouse governments. The Longhouse is the ceremonial, political and economic center of Haudenosaunee communities. Ironically, in 1987 the U.S. Senate passed a resolution (no. 76) stating that the Longhouse system inspired the Founding Fathers who sat in council with Haudenosaunee chiefs to develop the U.S. Constitution. In spite of this special relationship between the Haudenosaunee and the U.S., the history of intercultural contact is a sad one. Federal, State and local governments did everything they could to break the traditional Longhouse governments because these Indian groups controlled vast amounts of land. Today, there are three Haudenosaunee nations that have resisted the incursions of the U.S. government and are completely governed by the Longhouse tradition. Onondaga is the Central Fire of the Confederacy, and located near Syracuse. Tonawanda is a Seneca Nation near Buffalo, and Tuscarora, between Buffalo and Rochester. From the point of view of the U.S., the rest of the Haudenosaunee nations are governed by BIA, “federally recognized” governments, in spite of the fact of the continuing presence of the Longhouse tradition. It is not unusual that on a single Indian nation territory there is both a BIA and Longhouse government, which are often referred to as “progressive” and “traditional” governments—as at the Mohawk Nation of Akwesasne located in the Northern part of the state. If it is the case that the

Indian nation is split, then the progressive government is “federally recognized” and the traditional is the “dissident faction.” The people who have defended the Longhouse system have undergone incredible hardships that include attempts at forced assimilation through boarding schools, religious conversion, and direct military action. That the traditional Longhouse government has survived is a tribute to the Haudenosaunee people and also to the durability of that system. Particularly contentious are the differences between traditional and progressive factions with respect to Casino ventures. Traditional Longhouse people see Casinos as contrary and detrimental to their ceremonial emphasis on giving thanks. In contrast, progressive people who are organized by BIA governments have embraced Casinos as a way out of generations of crushing poverty.

Because of past misdeeds, we are saddled today with the monumental quagmire of land-claims. The balance of Federal plenary power over the States was made possible through the treaty agreements with Indian nations. Therefore, the Federal government is literally based on these treaties and cannot simply deny their existence. But the elected officials of U.S., State and local governments will not rule in favor of returning stolen land, or even a cash settlement, because such an action would, in effect, be taking the side of sovereign Indian nations, which are seen as being in opposition to their own constituents. In short, justly settling the Indian land issues would be political suicide for politicians. It matters little whether the governor is Republican (as is Pataki) or Democrat (as are Senators Schumer and Clinton), no public official wants to settle the land-claims. There have been recent developments, however, that make it possible for the land-claims to go away.

The BIA government that has most aggressively pursued land-claims has been the Oneida. The Oneidas, under the leadership of Ray Halbritter, have made deals with New York State (under Governor Cuomo) to open up a large scale Casino called “Turning Stone” (Johansen 2002: 8). This Casino was developed in opposition to the wishes of Longhouse people. Initially, it was greeted with enthusiasm by non-Indian people in Madison and Oneida counties as greatly contributing to the local economy. A few years ago, however, the Oneida pushed their land-claim settlement by suing almost all property owners in the surrounding area. This led to an anti-Indian backlash and has given more power to groups who wish to demolish Indian treaties in the name of equality. Protests by some members of these groups over the last few years include protesters who sometimes style themselves as defenders of democratic freedom by donning colonial and military costumes and waving U.S. flags. The current intolerance toward all Native Americans, as expressed in these protests, recalls the attitudes of the soldiers of the Sullivan Campaign.

In 2001 the State legislature determined that there would be six more Casinos developed in the Catskills (i.e., near New York City) and that Indian nations would have to bid for these new sites. U.S. Senator Schumer stated that any

negotiations with Indian nations about these Casino sites would have to include land-claim settlements. In other words, in order for Indian nations to get access to big Casino profits, they would have to give up their claims to land. In February of 2002, Governor Pataki and Ray Habritter held a press conference at which they announced a settlement of the land-claims. Immediately afterward, however, Oneida nations from Wisconsin and Ontario announced that they would not agree to this settlement. In some ways, this is a dispute between those communities who practice a traditional and a progressive style of government. In other ways, it may be that other Indian communities, who have been removed, are trying to get land in New York State. In still other ways, it may be that some Indian groups want to get in on the action. In any case, reaction to the Pataki/Halbritter deal has been that a number of different interests have stepped forward which threaten to derail the settlement.

The question is whether or not these political and legal issues are of direct relevance to the mission of the university? Why would a directive such as this be sent to SUNY campuses? Many academics at universities in upstate New York have been working vigorously toward a *cultural* solution to the terrible legacy of relations between Indigenous and Immigrant peoples. In the last few decades, several schools have developed programs that bring university students, faculty and staff into contact with local Native communities to promote awareness and understanding. To name just a few, there are important programs at SUNY Buffalo, Oswego, Cortland, and Plattsburgh, and the state-sponsored colleges within Cornell and Syracuse. There are countless programs at local community colleges that are located near Native communities with several Native American members of the faculty and staff. In all of these environments, however, there is generally an emphasis on interacting with more traditional Longhouse groups. The simple reason is that the Longhouse people have borne the tradition and are, therefore, of more interest to academic communities, particularly in the humanities and social sciences. But it is precisely the relationships between traditional groups and academics that could be seen by the Governor's office as a threat to the settlement of the land-claims. The situation in upstate New York is at a critical point, but it is precisely in this kind of political climate that academic freedom becomes most important. Rather than affirming the credibility of the Pataki directive to squelch academic freedom, universities ought to stay with their educational missions and continue to search for cultural interactions between different groups. It is not ours to pay homage to a State government's political agenda, but to promote dialogue with the widest possible selection of people. For the governor, however, it seems that only when those various voices have no political weight that they are deemed fit for involvement in the life of the university.

Another colleague of mine responded to this news by saying, "What's next? Are they going to tell us not to contact our Muslim friends because they are

terrorists?" The university has a role to play in the current events. But this role is not directly as a player, or an extension of State government, but as an interpreter of these situations. Pataki's directive should be seen as an attempt to negate the university's role as interpreter. But contrary to the government's view, now is the time to protect academic freedom. In so doing, all people, both citizens of the United States and of other countries, will be empowered through higher education. The shortsightedness of political remedies to deep and intractable cultural problems will not lead to the promotion of democratic principles of peace and freedom.

The United States is founded as a country of immigrants. This cultural view determines the kinds of religious perspectives that are valued there. As such, the indigenous perspectives of the Haudenosaunee have been feared by U.S. culture. Various attempts have been made to destroy Native American people in outright warfare (as in the Sullivan Campaign) or through political, economic and cultural means. In spite of that history, however, the Haudenosaunee have persistently held to their traditions by looking to Creation as strengthening their people. New York State and the U.S., having stressed their immigrant claims on the land, look to directly control the world by taking possession. This perspective underscores the colonial elements of U.S. culture. Indigenous people from all over the world have been warning colonial cultures that a fiction of domination, whether it be over people, animals or the land, is a seriously flawed worldview that will ultimately lead us down the path of our own destruction. Rather than continue down the path of power politics, it is time to investigate the meaning of relations between indigenous and immigrant communities to discover a future for our coming generations.

Notes

¹ Thanks should go to Wendy Gonyea and Zenja Hyde of Onondaga Communications Liason Office. Wendy endured frequent phone calls from Boston and Farmington, Maine in June of 2002 to try and work out the meaning of this word. As near as she can figure it does not refer to the seventeen-year cycle, but rather, as is their tendency in Onondaga to something the locust do. Zenja, who is a community language coordinator, thinks that Ogowenyoda contains elements of a place of a community of animals. In this way the name of the locust refers to how the locust continually reside in the same place over generations.

² These comments come from LeDuff (2001). Much of this talk comes from newspaper articles in the *Syracuse Post Standard*, the *New York Times* and *The Independent of London*, as well as from local native newspapers and newsletters. In particular I want to acknowledge the work of Joyce Mitchell who wrote an excellent article in *Indian Time*, a newspaper from Akwesasne, a Mohawk Nation which straddles the border between New York and Ontario.

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APPENDIX I

Text of a letter sent from the office of Governor George E. Pataki, from Bradford J. Race, Jr., Secretary to the Governor, November 20, 2001.

The Governor's Office is continuously engaged in negotiations and dialogue with the Indian nations and tribes in New York State (and in some instances tribes in other states). In nearly every instance, these interactions involve issues that are highly sensitive. Several years ago I issued a directive to agency heads to forward all contacts between their agency and the various Indian nations or tribes to the Governor's Counsel's Office. With the passage of time, I realize there are now several new people occupying agency leadership positions who may not be aware of the directive. Therefore I will restate the position of this administration so there is no misunderstanding:

It is the policy of the State to engage in formal government-to-government dialogue only with the legitimate representatives of State of federally recognized Indian nations or tribes. It is common for individuals from dissident factions or non-recognized "tribes" to attempt to establish unilateral contacts with the State. This, when it occurs, causes tension between the legitimate Indian governments and the Governor's Office adding unnecessary complications to an already complicated situation.

Therefore, to avoid such situations, please direct your agency personnel to report all contacts with Indian tribes or nations (or anyone purporting to represent, speak on behalf of, or in any way be affiliated with, an Indian tribe or nation), to the Governor's Counsel's Office immediately upon such occurrence. Thereafter, unless it is a matter of immediate personal or public safety, agency personnel should await further instructions from the Governor's Counsel's Office before engaging in any further contact (i.e., reply correspondence, return phone calls, meetings, information sharing of any kind, etc.). Unless otherwise directed by my office, all written descriptions of agency contacts with Indian nations or tribes should be sent to the attention of Patrick Kehoe, Senior Assistant Counsel to the Governor, Room 210, State Capitol (phone: 518-474-1291; fax: 518-474-8099).

Sincerely,

Signed by Bradford J. Race, Jr.

APPENDIX II

Text of a memorandum dated November 30, 2001 from the SUNY, University Counsel's office

To: Presidents, State-operated Campuses
 Presidents, Community Colleges

Subject: Contact with Indian Tribes or Nations

It is the policy of the State to engage in formal government-to-government dialogue only with the legitimate representatives of State or federally recognized Indian nations or tribes. It is common for individuals from dissident factions or non-recognized "tribes" to attempt to establish unilateral contacts with the State. This, when it occurs, causes tension between the legitimate Indian governments and the State government, adding unnecessary complications to an already complicated situation.

Therefore, in accordance with a directive from the Governor's Office to this effect, please direct your personnel to report all contacts with Indian tribes or nations (or anyone purporting to represent, speak on behalf of, or in any way be affiliated with an Indian tribe or nation), to contact me immediately upon such occurrence. Thereafter, unless it is a matter of immediate personal or public safety, campus personnel should await further instructions from us before engaging in any further contact (i.e., reply correspondence, return phone calls, meetings, information sharing of any kind, etc.). All written descriptions of campus contacts with Indian nations or tribes should be sent to my attention via the most expeditious means.

If you have any questions, please contact me at (518) 443-5400.

Sincerely,

Signed by D. Andrew Edwards, Jr.
University Counsel