Introduction

The first attempt to formally mark out the boundaries of the lands of the Oneida Haudenosaunee occurred within a few years of the dispossession of millions of acres of it. In September 1784, commissioners from New York asked the Oneidas to describe the extent of their territory. It was in preparation for an upcoming conference to be held in the charred ruins of Fort Stanwix. The Oneidas offered the Americans vital assistance in their War of Independence, which concluded the year before, and suffered greatly because of their participation. Yet they feared that the state would attempt to gain control over their land, in spite of all they had done to help the colonists achieve their victory.

Sensing that good relations with the Oneidas would strengthen his hand in negotiating with the other Haudenosaunee nations at Stanwix, Governor George Clinton sent a delegation to meet them. They addressed the Oneida leaders, saying they wished to know the precise boundaries of their homeland "in order to prevent any Intrusions thereupon."[1]

The Oneidas knew that the state wasn't the only danger to the continued possession of their homeland. It could be overrun by squatters or bought up by intriguing private speculators. They had seen it happen in the Mohawk lands to the east in the decades before the Revolution. The Oneidas had nothing to fear from the state, the commissioners told them. They posed as protectors. The Oneidas agreed to describe their boundaries. Knowing them would at least give the state a moral imperative to respect and keep their people on the right side of them, even if few Oneidas had much confidence that it would.

The Oneidas told the commissioners that their territory extended from the St. Lawrence River in the north to the Susquehanna in the south. Their lands to the southeast had already been bound by a previous treaty with the British in 1768, which set a "Line of Property" across the New York

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colony beyond which no Indian land could be bought or sold. To the east of that line lie thousands of acres of Oneida land that had already been transferred to white ownership, including the 1705 Oriskany Patent upon which Fort Stanwix was built. But some six million acres to the west of the line belonged to the Oneidas alone. The Line of Property's northernmost point was on Wood Creek, just west of Fort Stanwix. The Oneidas told the commissioners that from there, the eastern boundary of their territory extended up to Canada. It followed

> the Canada Creek till it comes to a certain Mountain called Esoiade or Ice Mountain, under which Mountain that Canada Creek opposite to old Fort Hendricks heads; from thence running Westerly to an old Fort which stood on the Creek called Weteringhra Guentire, and which empties into the River St. Lawrence about twelve Miles below Carleton's or Buck's Island, & which Fort the Oneidas took from their Enemies a long time ago.

They then described the western boundary separating their land from that of the Onondagas. From the old fort, the line ran

> Southerly to a Rift upon the Onondaga River called Ogontenayea or Aquegontenayea (a Place remarkable for Eels) about five Miles from where the River empties out of the Oneida Lake and from thence runs to the Creek called Cogshunto, to that part or Point of the said Creek which lays about six Miles East of Onondago and where the Water runs over a Ledge of Rocks and from thence runs up the said Creek to a Lake out of which it empties called Anagwolas and from thence to the head of the Owego River which heads in a Swamp nearly at the same Place where the said Cogshunto River heads, and from thence down the said Owego River to where it empties into the Susquehannah.

Making sense of this description is difficult, and plotting the area onto a current map of New York State cannot be done without making some approximations and interpretations. Some of the landmarks mentioned are identifiable. The junction of Canada Creek and Wood Creek is just west of Rome, New York. When the treaty text was published in *Proceedings of the Commissioners of Indian Affairs* (1861), the editor consulted Rev. Eleazar Williams—a St. Regis Mohawk who lived and preached among the Oneidas—about the locations of some of the places mentioned. Williams

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placed Ice Mountain in the central Adirondacks, Weteringhra Guentire at the present location of Clayton, New York, and the "Place remarkable for Eels" at the great bend in the Oneida River a few miles west of the outlet of Oneida Lake at Brewerton. The place where the "Water runs over a Ledge of Rock" is almost certainly Chittenango Falls in Madison County, and Anagwolas is Cazenovia Lake.[2]

Other landmarks can be guessed at but not pinpointed. The reality is, no one can say with certainty where Ice Mountain is. It is unclear if the Owego River referred to is what is currently known as Owego Creek. No corresponding map was made at the time that survives today.

Even if all the places mentioned were clearly identifiable, using this description as a set of boundaries for the ancestral Oneida homeland would still be problematic. The description only covers lands west of the Line of Property, and so it does not capture the full extent of the Oneida domains prior to 1768. The context in which the description was given, when the Oneidas were in a vulnerable position at the conclusion of a devastating war, is important. It is conceivable that the commissioners wrote down what they wanted to hear from the Oneidas rather than what they said. The record of New York's land negotiations and treaties with its Native people abounds with examples of this kind of tactic being used. In the period after the Revolution, legislators were keen to make sure that the borders with British Canada did not remain under Native American control. This may explain why land along the St. Lawrence River that the Oneidas frequently used in the eighteenth century is not within the boundaries recorded in 1784.

What is clear, however, is that the Oneidas inhabited, hunted, and traveled over a homeland that stretched up through the center of what is now New York State. To the west lay the easternmost of the Great Lakes, Ontario, and to the east, the peaks of the Adirondacks. In the heart of the country is Oneida Lake. To the north of Oneida Lake is a comparatively flat corridor running up to Canada (except for the elevated region known as the Tug Hill Plateau) through which the Salmon River, Sandy Creek, and the Black River run before pouring into Lake Ontario, the lattermost through a wide bay guarded by Sackets Harbor. To the south is a hilly plateau, with long rounded-top highlands, divided by creek and river valleys flowing north into Oneida Lake or south to the Susquehanna River.

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The Oneidas' main villages for centuries lay in the hilly country just south of the Oneida Lake plain. Before the appearance of Europeans, and in the

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early centuries of colonization, they lived together in matrilinear families in wooden longhouses. They were members of the confederacy called the League of the Iroquois, or the Five Nations by Europeans. They called themselves the Haudenosaunee, the People of the Longhouse. The confederated nations controlled most of what is now known as upstate New York. From east to west, the Mohawks, Oneidas, Onondagas, Cayugas, and Senecas worked together, seeking consensus with one another in times of war and peace. The Onondagas in what is now the Syracuse area hosted the council fire, where delegations from each of the nations met to discuss matters of mutual concern. The peace with the peoples to the east and west allowed the Oneidas to push the area they controlled to the north and south, explaining the sliver-like shape of their homeland.

A process of change began in the sixteenth century, when European traders began arriving on the Atlantic seaboard and exploring the Hudson and St. Lawrence Rivers. From their strong inland position, the Haudenosaunee became a dominant force in the fur trade and in the so-called Beaver Wars it spawned, even if they were at times far from unified in a political or military sense. Native American tribes (backed by European allies) vied for control over vital hunting grounds and trade hubs. European products began appearing in Oneida villages, and before long, Dutch and French visitors arrived in their homeland, on missions to woo or to punish, depending on the tides of trade and war. A poisonous cocktail of guns, disease, violence, and alcohol staggered the Oneidas in the seventeenth century, but still they remained a powerful force capable of launching devastating raids against European and Native enemies. Non-native witnesses recorded that torture, cannibalism, and captive-taking were commonplace in these years. (A few missionaries even reflected on their own people's guilt in causing it. Seventeenth-century Europe was also a cauldron of war, the scene of atrocities on a far greater scale.) Christianity and European-made goods changed the Oneidas' way of life. Competing colonial forces divided loyalties.

Across the center of the Oneida lands there is a great valley that runs west to east, through which the Mohawk River flows. This corridor is what explains the vast importance that the region would later have in the making of America. The Mohawk River carried goods from the interior of the continent east to Albany where it connects to the Hudson River and thence to the Atlantic. At present-day Rome, a few miles of dry, flat land separate the Mohawk River from Wood Creek, a meandering stream that flows westward until reaching Oneida Lake. The water route then proceeds along the Oneida and Oswego Rivers to Lake Ontario. It is the only significant break in the Appalachian Mountains that stretch from Maine to Georgia, and it remains

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the flattest route by which to traverse that thousand-mile barrier separating the Atlantic seaboard from the interior of North America. This valley was the key to a continent. Apart from the St. Lawrence River, which was firmly in the hands of the French, any hopes of westward expansion from the coast would depend on control of the Mohawk to Ontario corridor. The British, who controlled the Atlantic seaboard and supplanted the Dutch in the Hudson Valley during the 1640s, grasped the significance.

In the eighteenth century, European relations with the Haudenosaunee became less about pelts and more about land. British colonists bought huge tracts from the Mohawks along the river bearing their name. They wooed the Oneidas into selling the so-called "Oneida Carry"—the portage on the Mohawk-to-Ontario water route—and into allowing British forts to be erected deep in the wilderness of Iroquoia along that vital artery. For the eastern Haudenosaunee, now linked inextricably to the British in trade, there were benefits in British military presence, for they, too, feared raids from the French and their Native allies. Another plague of violence engulfed the region in the eighteenth-century wars between Britain and France, known in North America as the French and Indian Wars.

Thanks in large part to their Haudenosaunee allies, the British prevailed in that conflict. They gained control of the St. Lawrence in 1763 and knocked France out of contention for control of the Great Lakes. But within fifteen years, they were at war once again, this time against their own colonial subjects. The American War of Independence was perhaps the most destructive conflict in the two hundred years of European-backed warfare to disturb Iroquoia. The Oneidas primarily sided with the American colonists, while the other Haudenosaunee nations backed the British, or so goes the simplified version of events. In fact, it was far more divisive even than that. Individual Oneidas fought on both sides, though on balance the help they offered the American side was more significant, particularly in the Siege of Fort Stanwix and Battle of Oriskany in 1777. Haudenosaunee leaders who attempted to tread a path of neutrality found themselves drawn into the conflict as their warriors often ignored elders and rushed off to fight. Raiding parties destroyed nearly every village in Iroquoia, including the Oneida capital of Kanonwalohale (Oneida Castle on today's map). By the end of the war, most of the Oneidas lived in dismal conditions as refugees in Schenectady or Massachusetts. Most other Haudenosaunee people were also refugees, in camps supplied by the British at Niagara.

Central New York's wilderness battles were of the utmost importance in explaining the outcome of the war. The great three-pronged thrust that the British planned to destroy the rebellion in the summer of 1777 was

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thwarted in large part by the Oneida and American resistance at Stanwix and Oriskany. Barry St. Leger's army, which had come across Lake Ontario to Oneida Lake, was supposed to proceed down the Mohawk Valley and meet with General Burgoyne's army marching down the Champlain corridor to Albany. Instead, they were forced to retreat after a failed siege and a bloody battle that pitted Haudenosaunee against Haudenosaunee at Oriskany. Without hope of reinforcement from the west, Burgoyne was also defeated at Saratoga. These victories prompted France to join the war, paving the way to the final British surrender at Yorktown in 1781.

In the aftermath of the war, the Oneidas returned and rebuilt Kanonwalohale, but nothing was ever the same. They were feted, to some extent, by American leaders who acknowledged their key role in the conflict. Compared to other Haudenosaunee nations, who were treated as defeated enemies, the Oneidas were given promises in a treaty with the United States at Fort Stanwix in October 1784 that they would be "secured in the possession of the lands on which they are settled." But with a small, weakened, and impoverished population, voracious Americans knew that the Oneidas would not be able to guard a six-million-acre homeland against westward-spreading settlers and speculators; nor did the state of New York feel it in their own interest to help them do so. Quite the contrary, the state wanted to acquire as much of Iroquoia as it could to stave off rival claims to the area and pay its debts by selling the land on at much higher prices. In 1788, New York signed treaties with the Onondagas, Cayugas, and Oneidas in which they paid relatively small sums for huge expanses of land. The Onondagas and Cayugas kept 64,000-acre reservations. The Oneidas kept a 250,000-acre reservation in what are now Oneida and Madison Counties. Some of the Oneidas' leaders were fed lies and told that the transfer of land was a lease rather than a sale.

To prevent states taking advantage of Indians in treaties such as these, the United States government (with a new Constitution in 1789) passed the Indian Nonintercourse Act in 1790. It stipulated that federal representatives must be present at any treaty signing where Indian land was sold. New York officials nevertheless persisted in chipping away at the Oneidas' reservation, procuring sale after sale, ignoring the law. The largest of these sales was in a 1795 treaty where 132,000 acres were sold by a faction of Oneidas to the state with no federal oversight. The United States government was aware of the sale but was not prepared to enforce its own law, despite having pledged again at the 1794 Treaty of Canandaigua to protect the Indians on their land.

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Over the next four decades, further parcels were sold off to the state of New York at first in large pieces and, when there were no large pieces left, in transactions as small as seventy-five acres. With their land base and chance at self-sufficiency dwindling, most Oneidas reluctantly emigrated out of New York State to Wisconsin and Ontario. Those who remained lived mainly in poverty on small plots hidden away in rural Madison and Oneida Counties, or as guests on the Onondaga Reservation near Syracuse, until the final decades of the twentieth century.

The land of the Oneidas was sold by the state, mainly to wealthy speculators and land companies who then sold it on to settlers. In the pioneer era, thousands of land-hungry sons of New England built log cabins to see them through their first years, then set up farms and homesteads. They cut down the seemingly infinite forest, burned the timber, and sometimes sold the ashes down the Hudson or the St. Lawrence after turning them to potash. Many of them interacted with the Oneidas—some as friends, some as swindlers, some as traders, and others as squatters on their remaining land. Non-Native Americans and Oneidas fought the British and their Indian allies again during the War of 1812 on the shores of Lake Ontario, and once again events there had a crucial bearing on the outcome of the war.

Peace with Britain in 1815 ushered in a new era of westward expansion. The long-held prediction that the Mohawk-to-Ontario corridor would be the key to unlock the vast interior of the continent proved true. Engineers dug canals, first to make transport on the existing route easier, then to circumnavigate its most challenging features entirely, including the Oneida Carry. In the 1820s, the state directed the construction of the Erie Canal straight across what had only recently been the Oneida Reservation. It transported passengers from the east and freight from the expanding west. Later the New York Central Railroad, the Barge Canal, and finally the New York State Thruway occupied that vital corridor.

America was shaped by it. Today millions of Americans in the Midwest and beyond have ancestors who came there by canal or rail. Millions more in cities from Buffalo to Albany and, most of all, in New York City, live in urban environments that grew to preeminence due to the Erie Canal's success. Had the Oneidas remained in possession of their original reservation and the state not obtained and dug through it, the subsequent development of the United States would have played out much differently. Had they received rent or tolls for allowing the canal to pass through their land, the Oneidas' history may not have been marked by two mass emigrations and multigenerational poverty.

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Instead, in the first half of the nineteenth century, the former Oneida lands, including nearly all areas of the former reservation in Oneida and Madison Counties, were rapidly populated with new American settlements. They became a unique and highly important part of the United States. Waves of religious revivalism crashed with tremendous force there in the 1820s and '30s. Preachers like Charles Grandison Finney set church buildings and meeting halls ablaze with evangelical passion. The Oneida Community—religious perfectionists from Vermont who practiced a form of free love—started a new life there in the cabins left behind by the emigrant Oneida Indians in 1848. It became the most successful utopian experiment in American history. The factory they started continued manufacturing operations on the former Oneida Reservation until 2004.

The sectional tensions of antebellum America and the advent of the Civil War arguably had as much to do with events and people in this central part of the most powerful state in the Union as it did with the plantations of the south. Abolitionists like Gerrit Smith from Madison County spoke and campaigned ceaselessly about the evils of slavery. Hundreds of central New Yorkers housed fugitive slaves escaping to freedom on the Underground Railroad. Anti-slavery conventions in places like Utica, Peterboro, and Cazenovia brought together the nation's most prominent abolitionists, Black and white, male and female. John Brown found a welcome reception and financial support there on his path to Harper's Ferry. During the Civil War, it was one of the most solidly pro-Lincoln areas of the nation. Thousands of young men joined the Oneida regiments and other forces that went by rail or by ship to fight in the South, many never to return.

On the nineteenth-century map, the region that had once been the Oneida homeland was bracketed by two of the North's most important cities: Syracuse and Utica. Strictly speaking, the land upon which they were built had not been Oneida Indian possessions, or at least not exclusively so. The former was in the domain of the Onondagas rather than the Oneidas, and the latter was near where Oneida lands gave way to those of the Mohawks. The term "central New York" is a confounding one, which has been defined differently by various writers and agencies at different times. But for the purposes of this book, it will refer to the ancestral homeland of the Oneidas plus the two large cities that bookend it. In the canal and railroad era in which these cities experienced exponential growth, they became major industrial centers and entrepots, the host cities of thousands of immigrants who came to live and work there first before moving into

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smaller towns and villages in between. Many New York Oneidas themselves lived mainly in the Syracuse area for nearly a century between the Civil War and the 1960s.

From the mid-nineteenth century onward, Welsh, Irish, and German immigrants changed the cultural and religious profile of the region. Later waves of Italians, Poles, Jews, and Russians arrived around the turn of the twentieth century. Finally, before, during, and after World War II, thousands of African Americans came, not as immigrants but as migrants from the south looking to start new lives in cities with better economic prospects, free of Jim Crow laws. They moved into neighborhoods that were being evacuated by previous immigrant groups who joined the so-called "white flight" to the suburbs in the post-war era.

After 1970, the cracks in central New York State's economy and social fabric became fissures. The manufacturing jobs that had underwritten the area's prosperity for decades started disappearing by the thousands. Black neighborhoods in urban areas were plunged into poverty. The entire region struggled with economic stagnation and depopulation as one major employer after another left for reasons ranging from global competition to the end of the Cold War.

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This is the story of a people's homeland, a biography of the land of the Oneidas from the earliest times to the present day. To the Oneida Haudenosaunee, it is sacred ground.[3] It is a homeland in which they have been, since the early nineteenth century, a minority, but in which they have always maintained a presence.

For decades this Indian presence would have gone completely unnoticed to most people passing through it. The Oneida people residing on their ancestral homeland lived mainly in poverty. But in the last three decades all that has changed. New legislation allowed the Oneidas to open a casino which has been phenomenally successful, bringing in millions of dollars and fundamentally changing the fortunes of the original occupants of this land.

The Oneidas of New York, Wisconsin, and Ontario also gained the right to pursue land claims in federal courts through a stunning test case victory in the US Supreme Court in 1974. For nearly four decades, they vigorously pursued two different land claims in court called the "pre-1790" and "post-1790" claims respectively. The post-1790 claim was for the

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250,000 acres of the Oneida Reservation as defined in the 1788 Treaty of Fort Stanwix. It hinged on the fact that the 1790 Indian Nonintercourse Act forbade the state from purchasing Indian land without federal oversight or authority. The pre-1790 claim was for the much larger six-million-acre area that the Oneidas possessed before the 1788 sale of land to New York State, which most Oneida leaders thought at the time was a lease.

Other Indian land claims were also filed in federal courts from the 1970s onward, but the Oneida case was particularly prominent. Not only was it the oldest and largest of the cases, but there was a bitter irony in that the people who had done so much to help the Americans to win their independence, and who had been promised repeatedly by the United States government that their lands would be protected, were so badly defrauded. The fact that these lands, through which the Erie Canal was dug, were of such immense value to the expansion of the American Republic lent support to the argument that if the law had been adhered to, the Oneidas would have remained strong and prosperous on their own lands.

This book tells the story of the Oneida lands in central New York both before and after they were coveted and settled upon by Euro-Americans. The title, *Land of the Oneidas*, conveys two truths. The first is that this was and is the ancestral land of the Oneida Indians, lands that were sold to the state of New York in treaties that were exploitative and mainly illegal. The second is that there are other Oneidas, entities that appropriate the Indian name but are American rather than Native American in character. There is a city of Oneida and a village of Oneida Castle, the latter built atop the site of Kanonwalohale. There is Oneida County in which Utica, Rome, and dozens of towns, villages, and rural crossroads grew up, each with a history of its own. The "Oneida woods" was a name familiar in pioneer days for any part of the highly sought-after former Oneida Indian land that was being opened for settlement. The Oneida Community was a utopian commune, famous and notorious for its sexual practices. Its successor, Oneida Limited, became a household name as one of the world's largest silverware producers in the twentieth century.

The Oneida Carry, Oneida Lake, Oneida Creek, and the Oneida River shaped the destinies of both the Oneida Indians and of the state of New York. Indeed, insofar as they exist at a critical point on what was the most strategically important route from the Atlantic coast to the Great Lakes and beyond, these places and the battles fought over them exerted a determining impact on the history of the United States and of the entire North American continent.

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This is a land that has captured the imagination of great American writers from James Fenimore Cooper in his *Leatherstocking Tales* to Walter D. Edmonds, whose 1936 novel *Drums along the Mohawk* became a beloved classic as well as a Hollywood smash hit. The Haudenosaunee Confederacy, the New York frontier in the American Revolution, and the Erie Canal figure in most broad-scoped histories of the United States. It is difficult to describe the nation's origins and its spread westward without them. Some historians have provided detailed studies of certain aspects of the Oneida lands and their history. Iroquoian studies emerged in the nineteenth century beginning with L. H. Morgan's *League of the Iroquois* (1851). In the twentieth century, archaeologists and ethno-historians conducted extensive studies of Haudenosaunee prehistory. Since the 1970s, some of these studies have focused on the early Oneida sites, meaning we now have a better picture than ever before of how and where Oneidas and other peoples lived on this land before contact with Europeans began changing their way of life.[4] In the last three decades, historians have written important studies of the Haudenosaunee, including the Oneidas, during the early years of colonization, the French and Indian Wars, the American Revolution, and in the era of dispossession that followed it.[5]

The land as it existed after the balance tipped towards white settlement in the pioneer era has also received some scrutiny from historians. Starting in second half of the nineteenth century, great tomes of county history were produced for all the counties of central New York beginning with Pomroy Jones's *Annals and Recollections of Oneida County* (1851). Some of these number in the thousands of pages and cover the early histories of every town, village, bank, industry, and church that existed at the time of writing. The earliest of these were written while many of the first white settlers in the area were still alive. Later ones, published in the final quarter of the nineteenth century and first decade of the twentieth, focused extensively on the region's leading men, particularly those who patronized local institutions and championed charity in a pre-income tax era.

Recently, historians reassessed the period in which the wilderness of Iroquoia was first opened to white settlement, divided up, and provided with American political structures, judges, officials, and dignitaries. The realities of life in Oneida's pioneer days were as much about dealing with murders and crimes between Indians and non-Indians, controlling unruly squatters, and dealing with rum-fueled feuds at frontier taverns as they were about planting the seeds of American democracy on new and fertile ground.[6]

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Historians of the nineteenth century have studied central New York as a hotbed of religious fervor and social progressivism that exerted enormous influence in the antebellum North.[7] The Oneida Community has a historiography all its own. Scores of books and scholarly articles dissect the sexual and spiritual life of the several hundred men and women that lived and breathed a philosophy of "Bible Communism" in central New York for over thirty years.[8] But detailed studies of central New York as an industrial powerhouse, a land in which immigrants became Americans in an era of vast social change, are fewer and farther between.[9] Even rarer are studies of the agricultural regions in which the vestiges of the original Yankee invasion of the "Oneida woods" can still be found.

The boom and devastating bust of the central New York economy in the twentieth century has had few in-depth chroniclers. The Oneida Indian land claims and growth of the Oneida Indian Nation's business enterprises received extensive coverage from journalists in the local and national press. But the way they shaped the politics and tested the social fabric of the region since 1970, and particularly since the opening of the Turning Stone Casino in 1993, is a fascinating story of its own and worthy of greater attention.[10]

Despite the rich body of historiography, no attempt at a complete history of this region has been written in over eighty years, and none have focused specifically on Oneida land.[11] Since William F. Galpin's four-volume *Central New York: An Inland Empire* (1941), new ways of understanding the region's past have emerged, and of course eight additional decades have been added to the story—decades that transformed the region in ways that could hardly have been foreseen in 1941. The Oneida land claim has gained the attention of Supreme Court justices and made national news since the 1970s. The Oneida Indian Nation of New York's current leader, Ray Halbritter, received widespread media attention, first for his role in building up the nation's businesses and more recently for spearheading a "Change the Mascot" campaign that led to the renaming of the Washington Redskins NFL franchise in 2020–21. The Oneida land claims and the long process of reckoning with them since 1970 have shown that this part of New York State has a complicated relationship with the past—one that shapes its present and will continue to impact its future.

This book has two central arguments. The first is that what happened in the land of the Oneidas, before and after it was exclusively the home of the Oneida people, is of great significance—locally, of course, but also nationally and internationally. This has always been a key strategic battleground in the most significant struggles for power—whether military, political, or

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moral—in North American history. The competition for control in the age of empires, the battle for freedom in the American Revolution, the struggle for the interior of the continent that culminated in the engineering triumph of the Erie Canal, and the war for America's soul in the fight against slavery all had front lines that ran across this land.

The making of an industrial nation fueled by immigrant labor and the descent of once-thriving urban centers into racially divided rustbelt cities happened here, too. Today, the region is a major political battleground where recent elections have been among the most bitterly contested in the nation. This book shows how America was created on Indian land and argues that, to a significant extent, what happened on *this* Indian land created America as we know it. This process continues.

The second is that in central New York, perhaps more than in any other region in the United States, the past has never remained neatly in the past. It resurfaces constantly in the present, in ways that can range from thrilling to upsetting to uncanny. DeWitt Clinton passed through the region in 1810 scouting the route for the future Erie Canal that would connect New York to the great west but found himself face to face with an ancient Indian people in Oneida whose continuing existence he found both fascinating and problematic. Settlers in the region encountered the skeletons of Indians as they plowed their fields—some thought they found the remains of an ancient race of giants.[12] Gerrit Smith ran a philanthropic business empire that he used to finance abolitionist activities but struggled to come to terms with its origins in his father's less-savory procurements of vast expanses of Oneida Indian land. James Fenimore Cooper's *Leatherstocking Tales* sought to recapture aspects of central New York's past, to preserve and contrast them with what he saw as a more dismal, less-heroic present.

Since the nineteenth century, each transport line across Oneida lands has run alongside the one that proceeded it; the I-90 Thruway is yards away from the New York Central line, the Erie Canal, the Seneca Turnpike Road (once an Indian trail), and the Mohawk River in many places. Waves of immigrants moved into neighborhoods only recently dominated by the previous wave. Rural villages center around deteriorating wooden Protestant churches built by New Englanders in the early days of white settlement, reminders of a pioneer past. In the post–World War II era, Oneida Limited company executives burned an entire truckload of nineteenth-century documents pertaining to the Oneida Community to erase a problematic history. A swathe of urban Rome was demolished to make way for a reconstruction of eighteenth-century Fort Stanwix, erected on its original site in the middle

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of the city in the 1970s. Today, it is still there, the wooden battlements a short walk away from boarded-up nineteenth-century factory buildings and twentieth-century strip-malls.

More recently, battles raged over events that took place decades or even centuries ago. The assistance offered by the Oneida Indians to the Americans in the War for Independence was described repeatedly to explain their sense of betrayal over the loss of their land, as they sought compensation for it in federal courts and in talks with state officials. Opponents to the land claims, meanwhile, likened themselves to patriots of the Revolutionary War era, protesting an unfair tax system. The details of treaties signed between 1785 and the 1840s have been scoured in legal case after legal case. Rows erupted in 2015 when a new Oneida Indian-owned casino was built in the hometown of the celebrated author L. Frank Baum, best known for his *Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, who made viciously anti-Indian statements while editing a South Dakota newspaper in the 1890s.

The role of central New York as a hotbed of abolitionist activity has also been reexamined and celebrated with a statue commemorating the 1851 rescue of a fugitive slave from slavecatchers in Syracuse. At the same time, the ways in which Syracuse became an unofficially segregated city in the interwar and post–World War II years are being rediscovered. Recent Black Lives Matter protests against the unfair treatment of African Americans locally and nationally have used the statue as their meeting point, calling out the contrast between central New York's past and present.

Most of all, the continued presence of the Oneida Indians on this land links its present (and future) inextricably to its earliest history. Although that presence was hidden from view for over a hundred years, between the departure of large parties of Oneidas to Wisconsin and Canada and the emergence of the land claims cases in federal courts, there is no mistaking it now. The Turning Stone Casino attracts thousands of visitors per year. Its twenty-story hotel tower is visible from the New York State Thruway and from the high hills where the Oneidas built their villages centuries ago.

America is built on land that once belonged to Native peoples. This book shows how this happened on the land of one Indian tribe, the Oneida Haudenosaunee. The story told here raises questions about social justice, of how people living in the present should reckon with wrongs done in a distant or not-so-distant past. In this way it is part of much bigger story, one that is playing out all over America now. There are no easy answers, but it does show what attempts have been and are being made.

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