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[HOME](#) [ABOUT US](#) [CULTURE](#) [GOVERNMENT](#) [NEWS/MEDIA](#) [LAND RIGHTS](#)

**POLISHING THE SILVER COVENANT CHAIN: A Brief History of Some of the Symbols and Metaphors in Haudenosaunee Treaty Negotiations**

**News**

2013  
 2012  
 2011  
 2010  
 2009  
 2008  
 2007  
 2006  
 2005 & Earlier  
 Press Releases  
 Photos  
 Resources  
 Video

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Part 3

council also brought the allies of the Kahnawake, Akwesasne, and Oka Mohawks into the Covenant Chain. Together, these recent allies of the French were known as "The Seven Nations" and included Kahnawake, Akwesasne, Oka, Arundacs, Algonkins, Abnakis, Skaghquanoghronos, and Hurons.

On September 7, 1763, "Teyawarunte, Speaker of Onondaga," addressed Sir William Johnson and the council, using a wampum belt to reaffirm that Kahnawakes ["Caghnawageys"] and other Canadian Indians were part of the Covenant Chain. Note that Teyawarunte refers to the Haudenosaunee as the "Five Nations" -- the number the Haudenosaunee most often used in colonial councils when referring to themselves (the whites, adding the Tuscaroras adopted into the league, referred to it as "Six Nations"). Teyawarunte thus spoke:

we the Five Nations, the Caghnawageys & many others in our alliance will carefully preserve peace....

We [are] now [to speak to you about the] Deliver you the Belt which we sent to [the Mohawks in] Canada whereby we [Haudenosaunee] bound ourselves all together in a peaceable alliance....

The speaker for the Kahnawakes, Assaragoa, spoke to the entire council and Sir William Johnson later that same day, September 7.

We [return] thank[s] [to] the Great Spirit for Enabling us to meet this day .... you may assure yourself we shall always concur with. yr. desires & hold fast by our old Agree[m]ent...the Covenant Chain which we are determined [you may] Ever to hold fast by, and therefore [desire and] entreat you to do the same.

A Belt

The Kahnawake spokesman Assaragoa then addressed the delegates from the Confederacy, reminding them to adhere to the Covenant Chain -- "the old Agreement" -- with the English and not to join the Indians allied with Pontiac. Assaragoa also used the philosophical imagery common in Haudenosaunee politics and religion: "to be all of one Mind." Assaragoa spoke as follows:

Brethren of the 6 Nations:

I am now to speak to you, & return thanks to the Great Spirit for this unexpected Meeting with you at this place.... we now desire [that] you will pay due Regard to the old Agreement, & speak the real Sentiments of your Hearts, and [therefore] we [now] address you the Sachims, and Warriors present to recollect yourselves, as you appear to us to be drunk, we therefore expect you to be all of one Mind, and Speak your true Sentiments to your Brother

Then Assaragoa spoke directly to the Senecas, some of whose warriors had already joined Pontiac. In fact, just six days later, on September 13, 1763, some Seneca warriors attacked a British wagon convoy near Niagara, at "Devil's Hole." (It is probable that this attack was intended to negate the efforts of the council at Johnson Hall with an act of war that would make negotiations irrelevant. However, news of this Seneca attack evidently did not reach Sir William Johnson until September 25, after the council had ended on September 16, 1763. )

Brethren of the Senecas --

What are you now about? or what do you think will be the Consequence of your letting slip the Covenant Chain? -- We desire you will Recollect yourselves, -- and we now shake you by the Heads to bring you to Reason. -- You are too apt to listen to false News, and idle Stories; but as that is no Excuse for your breaking the Covenant Chain, we desire you will bethink yourselves in Time, and pay no Regard to them, and that you will seriously consider what we have said to you, and for your Children, and Families sakes, mind our Words, otherwise you will lose your Country, and Possessions.

The very next words of Assaragoa reflect a number of significant details. First, Assaragoa intended to persuade the Senecas by the Kahnawake Mohawks' own recent example. Second, Assaragoa stressed that he speaks on behalf of the Seven Nations Confederacy formerly allied with the French but now allied with both the Haudenosaunee and the English. The fact that Assaragoa met privately with the Confederacy delegates prior to giving this address is an indication of how both he and the delegates of the Confederacy could perceive Assaragoa and the Canadian Mohawks both as Mohawks and as members of the "Seven Nations" of French Catholic mission Indians who, in the past, had frequently been French allies; had just as frequently been trading partners with the Confederacy and the English at Albany and Oswego; and who were presently allies of the Confederacy.

Don't despair of the Forgiveness of the English. -- You see an Instance of it in us, who were for a Time their Enemies [most recently, from 1755 to 1760], and we doubt not, if you will shew a proper Sorrow for your Behavior, you may Obtain the same. -- We therefore desire, you will hold fast by your old agreements [the Covenant Chain], and mind your Brother Warraghiyagey, and that you will take this Belt to the Seneca Country which is spoke on Behalf of the Sachims & Warriors of Seven Nations who are all unanimous, and to Acquaint them, that if they will not pay a due Regard thereto, our Nations will assuredly be Obligated to Quarrel. -- You will excuse our giving you this Belt, as we knew not of your being here [at Johnson Hall], which if we had, we should have brought one larger, and fitter for the Purpose. --

A Belt.

On September 9, the Oneida spokesman Conoghquieson assured Sir William Johnson that all Indians in attendance, including the Kahnawake Mohawks, spoke with "one mind:"

Brother Warraghiyagey [Sir William Johnson] --

...we are ... of one Mind, linked together in the Chain of Friendship, and Determined to Procure Peace

Sir William Johnson then addressed the Kahnawake (Caughnawaga) Mohawks:

I now therefore deliver You [with] a good English Ax made of the best Stuff, [and when it appears necessary shall Send you Instructions in wt. manner you are to use it] which I desire you will give to the Warriors of all yr. Nations [the Seven Nations whom the Caughnawagas represented at this meeting] with directions to use the same against those Covt. Breakers by Cutting off the bad links which have sullied the Chain of Freindship [sic]

**The 1768 Treaty of Fort Stanwix** separated Haudenosaunee lands west of Fort Stanwix (Rome, New York) from New York and set New York's western boundary at a line beginning at Fort Stanwix. On August 17, 1768, General Thomas Gage, the commander of all British forces in North America, wrote Lord Hillsborough in London regarding the upcoming treaty at Fort Stanwix:

The Congress with the Six Nations, and Indians of Ohio, for the Settlement of the general Boundary, is expected to be held sometime next Month ... so as to form Limits between the Six Nations, and [the] Province of New-York, [otherwise] the Indians will not be Secure, and the Affair of the Boundary defeated, in its principal Object.

(General Thomas Gage to Lord Hillsborough, August 17, 1768, in Clarence Edwin Carter, ed., *The Correspondence of General Thomas Gage with the Secretaries of State, 1763-1775* (2 vols.; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1931 and 1933), 1: 185)

The key metaphor during the actual negotiations that led to the 1768 Treaty of Fort Stanwix was the Covenant Chain, and was referred to by both Haudenosaunee and colonial representatives. Thus on October 26, 1768, Sir William Johnson addressed the council and presented the Haudenosaunee with a wampum belt:

I do therefore by this Belt in the name of your Father the great King of England, in behalf of all his American Subjects renew & confirm the Covenant Chain subsisting between us, strengthening it, and rubbing off any rust which it may have contracted that it may appear bright to all Nations as a proof of our love and Friendship....

[Sir William then presented a] Belt of the Covt Chain 15 Rows with human figures at each end.

And on November 1, a Haudenosaunee speaker, probably Tagawaron, observed:

Brother

We remember that on our first Meeting with you [that is, "you" whites -- the Dutch], when you came with your ship we kindly received you, entertained you, entered into an alliance with you, though we were then great & numerous and your people inconsiderable and weak and we know that we entered into a Covenant Chain with you and fastened your ship therewith, but being apprehensive the Bark would break and your ship be lost we made one of iron, and held it fast that it should not slip from us, but perceiving the former chain was liable to rust; We made a silver chain to guard against it Then, Brother, you arose, renewed that chain which began to look dull, and have for many years taken care of our affairs by the command of the Great King, & you by your labors have polished that chain so that it has looked bright and is become known to all Nations.

Treaties such as the one at Fort Stanwix in 1768 also demonstrated that the colonies' central government in London, England, made treaties and did not allow individual colonies to make treaties or polish the Covenant Chain. This precedent of centralized responsibility for Indian affairs was later asserted in the Articles of Confederation and then in the United States Constitution. The 1768 Treaty of Fort Stanwix also demonstrated how Britain's central government -- not an individual colony -- had the right of preemption -- preemption being the exclusive right to purchase portions of Indian land because other European powers were excluded from any purchase rights. But this did not mean absolute sovereignty and thus did not mean absolute title to any Indian lands until lands were purchased. At Fort Stanwix in 1768, the negotiations demonstrated that the Covenant Chain was a symbol of peace between two independent peoples, not a symbol between a superior and a subordinate.

**1775, August 25.** Council at Albany, New York. At the start of the American Revolution, Patriot negotiators refer to both the Covenant Chain and the 1744 speech by Canasatego advocating a colonial union similar to the

league of the Haudenosaunee. Commissioners representing the Continental Congress -- General Philip Schuyler, Colonel Oliver Wolcott, Colonel Turbutt [sic] Francis, and Volkert P. Douw -- gave the following address to "the Six United Nations," Albany, New York.

*Brethren:* Our business with you here besides rekindling the ancient council fire, and renewing the covenant and brightening up every link of the chain, is in the first place to inform you of the advice that was given about thirty years ago, by your wise forefathers, in a great Council which they held at *Lancaster*, in *Pennsylvania*, when *Cannassatego* [sic] spoke to us, the white people, in these very words: "Brethren: We, the *Six Nations*, heartily recommend union and a good agreement between you, our brethren; never disagree, but preserve a strict friendship for one another, and thereby you, as well as we, will become stronger. Our wise forefathers established union and amity between the *Five Nations*; this has made us formidable; this has given us great weight and authority with our neighbouring Nations. We are a powerful confederacy; and if you observe the same methods our wise forefathers have taken, you will acquire fresh strength and power. Therefore, whatever befalls you, never fall out with one another." These were the words of *Cannassatego*.

*Brothers:* Our forefathers rejoiced to hear *Cannassatego* speak these words. They sunk deep into their hearts. The advice was good: it was kind. They said to one another, The *Six Nations* are a wise people; let us hearken to their counsel, and teach our children to follow it. Our old men have done so. They have frequently taken a single arrow, and said, Children, see how easy it is broken. Then they have tied twelve together [at this point, there were only twelve colonies in the Continental Congress, as Georgia's representatives had not yet arrived in Philadelphia] with strong cords, and our strongest men could not break them. "See," said they, "this is what the *Six Nations* mean: Divided, a single man may destroy you; united, you are a match for the whole world."

**1775, October 10.** Treaty of Fort Pitt, Pennsylvania. An example of how the Patriots used the imagery of the Covenant Chain, outright threats, and an actual wampum belt representing the Covenant Chain, also known as the Chain of Friendship, to try to keep the Haudenosaunee neutral. At Fort Pitt, Pennsylvania, seven commissioners from the Continental Congress met with the Haudenosaunee and representatives of other Indian nations who lived in the Ohio Valley and other regions near Fort Pitt. The commissioners were Lewis Morris, Thomas Walker, James Wilson, James Wood, Andrew Lewis, John Walker, and Adam Stephan. One of these commissioners (which one is not known), addressed the council and presented a wampum belt with the Covenant Chain woven into its beads:

*Brothers* we do with this Belt Brighten the Chain of Friendship between us and desire you may Continue to hold

fast by one End of it, so long as the Clouds shall Produce Rain, or the Earth Corn [...] on our part you may depend it will never be let go, unless you wrest it out of our hands, by Commencing Hostilities against us; in which Case you must know, that you will be but as one Child fighting against its family of an Hundred [at this point, the negotiator gave] *The Chain Belt*

The Haudenosaunee agreed to neutrality, but the Patriots broke the 1775 Treaty of Pittsburgh immediately. All along the eastern Ohio Valley frontier, Patriot government officials were unwilling to stop the movement of white squatters onto Haudenosaunee lands in western Pennsylvania, and, worse, Patriot officials did not stop white attacks on citizens of the Six Nations and their allies. Not surprisingly, individuals from among the Haudenosaunee and other Indian nations in western Pennsylvania and Ohio retaliated. By the time the Patriots convened another treaty council at Fort Pitt in the summer of 1776, it was clear that the Patriots had no intention of respecting Haudenosaunee neutrality by controlling their own citizens.

**1784, April 12.** Message sent to the Mohawks, Onondagas, Cayugas, and Senecas, by Governor George Clinton in New York City, referring to "the ancient Covenant" – that is, the Covenant Chain. The quote below demonstrates how the State of New York usurped the image of the Covenant Chain used by the Crown. While the Haudenosaunee were used to dealing with the governor of New York colony, that colonial governor was *always* the direct representative of the Crown, the centralized government. In Clinton's case, he was *not* the representative of the United States government under the Articles of Confederation. Clinton's fraudulent masquerade was made easier by the fact that not only the colonial governors of New York had represented the Crown, so to had the Crown's Indian Superintendent, Sir William Johnson, who had, until his death in 1774, resided in the Mohawk Valley. Thus Sir William had been simultaneously a citizen of the of colony of New York *and* the Crown's Indian Superintendent. These circumstances make it easy to see how and why the Haudenosaunee could misperceive exactly who Governor Clinton represented. But by the time United States commissioners arrived at Fort Stanwix in October and warned Clinton and New York representatives to stay away from the subsequent treaty negotiations, confusion had already been successfully sown by Governor Clinton.

*Sachems and Warriors of the Mohawks, Onondagas, Cayugas, and Senecas,*

Attend! I am appointed, as Governor of this State, to preside at a Board of Commissioners instituted for the Purpose of conferring with You, in order to accommodate the Differences which have unhappily arisen between You and Us, in the Course of the late War between Great Britain and America. This appointment [of Clinton] has been made expressly, lest You should object to the Impropriety of treating with any others than those You have always (until the late Troubles) considered as your immediate Brethren, and who have always, until then, considered You as such, and who now wish to renew the ancient Covenant which subsisted between Us.

We invite You to meet Us in Council at the German Flats.

**1784, June 6,** at a New York State treaty council at Fort Stanwix (Fort Schuyler). "Chiefs & Warriors of the 6 Nations &c., viz Mohawks, Oneidas, Onondagas, Cayugas, Senecas, Tuscaroras, and Delawares" message to Governor George Clinton, noting that the Haudenosaunee

wish to renew the ancient Covenant which subsisted between Us...

We are inclined to renew the ancient Friendship which subsisted between Us.

**1784, September 10.** Fort Stanwix (Fort Schuyler), New York, at a New York State treaty council with the Haudenosaunee convened by Governor George Clinton and the New York State Indian Commissioners. An example of how Governor Clinton used – hypocritically, it would be seen in the coming years -- the concept of the Covenant Chain to reassure the Patriot-allied Oneidas and Tuscaroras that the State intended to work peacefully with them into the far future. Governor Clinton summarized the opening of negotiations with the Oneidas and Tuscaroras as follows:

Brothers! We have now fully opened our Minds to each other, and We are happy that Your Sentiments and ours do so well agree.

Brothers! We now conclude with the fullest Confidence that our Chain of Friendship will not contract any Rust, but that it will always remain bright throughout every Part of the State, that our Posterity may see their Faces in it, and that it will be their Object, as it has been ours, to promote each others Happiness and as a Pledge therefore We now give You this Belt.

at a New York State treaty council at Fort Stanwix.

**1784, September 10**, at a New York State treaty council at Fort Stanwix (Fort Schuyler). Governor George Clinton to the Oneidas and the Tuscaroras. Governor Clinton uses imagery typical in Haudenosaunee diplomacy to reassure the Oneidas and Tuscaroras: a variation on "to be of one Mind;" the "Chain of Friendship;"

preventing "Rust;" polishing the Chain so that it is "bright;" a reference to future generations, and the solemnity of purpose represented by his gift of a wampum belt.

Brothers! .... We advise You not to make any Bargain or Agreement for the Sale of any of your Lands, unless those who want to buy do previously obtain and shew you a License from the Government of this State properly authenticated....

Brothers! We have now fully opened our Minds to each other, and We are happy that Your Sentiments and ours do so well agree.

Brothers! We now conclude with the fullest Confidence that our Chain of Friendship will not contract any Rust, but that it will always remain so bright throughout every Part of the State, that our Posterity may see their Faces in it, and that it will be their Object, as it has been ours, to promote each others Happiness and as a Pledge thereof We now give You this Belt.

**1784, October 17**, at a treaty council convened by United States commissioners with the Haudenosaunee at Fort Stanwix (Fort Schuyler), New York. The following quote is an example of how the Covenant Chain that had defined Haudenosaunee-British relations for more than a century was used as a reason to explain why some Haudenosaunee had fought on the side of the Crown during the American Revolution. This time, the image of the Covenant Chain is raised by the Haudenosaunee as a logical focus for negotiations with the United States. Aaron Hill (Kanonaron), a pro-British Mohawk, also explained why the United States commissioners at the council could depend upon the Haudenosaunee to adhere to the terms of the Covenant to be drawn up at the council at Fort Stanwix.

Our adherence to our Covenant with the Great King drew us into the late war, which is a great proof to the Commissioners of our strick [sic] observance of our ancient covenant with the white people, and you will find the same attachment to the Covenant now to be made.

**1788, March 10.** Message from the New York State Commissioners to the Six Nations. Time is becoming a factor, as the new Constitution had been written in Philadelphia the previous summer and states were in the process of ratifying it.

We now wish to meet you again in a Treaty at Fort Schuyler [Fort Stanwix] on the tenth Day of July next, as well to brighten the Chain and renew the Covenant which has so long bound us together.

**1788, June 16.** Message from Governor George Clinton to the Six Nations, recognizing that the council scheduled for June would have to be postponed until September. *Background:* Clinton is determined to obtain land, and so he is willing to wait, but only so long. Clinton is writing from Poughkeepsie, where, on the very next day, a state convention would begin considering whether or not to ratify the new Constitution. Clinton was opposed to the Constitution, and controlled most of the votes. Clinton realized that a new government under the Constitution would soon add further restrictions regarding all states' involvement in Indian issues. Shortly after this letter was written, the Constitution was ratified by the necessary ninth state – New Hampshire – on June 21. Virginia ratified on June 25. When the New York State convention learned that the Constitution had become "official," New York State would either be isolated or forced to join the new government under Constitution. The New York convention voted for the Constitution on July 26, by a vote of 30 to 27. The first presidential election was held on January 7, 1789, and the first Congress under the Constitution met on March 4.

Brothers! The Business of the [upcoming] Treaty is of the great Importance both to you and to us, and concerns all your Men and all your Women and all your Children, and we could wish that all your People should be there, and we have therefore postponed the Time for holding the Treaty until the first Day of September next.

Brothers! We hope that all your People will come to the Treaty at Fort Schuyler [Fort Stanwix], and be present when we brighten the Chain and renew the Covenant between you and us.

Brothers! We request you to send us an Answer to this Message as soon as you can, so that we may know to depend on. I am your Friend and Brother,  
GEO: CLINTON.

**1788, September 4**, at a treaty at Fort Stanwix (aka Fort Schuyler), New York, convened by Governor George Clinton and New York State Indian Commissioners with the Onondagas and then with Oneidas. Clinton had expected representatives of all Six Nations to attend, but Clinton used this to his advantage to divide the Confederacy and deal with individual nations one at a time. An example of how the symbol of the Covenant Chain was evoked in a secret, private

[Part 1](#) - [Part 2](#) - [Part 4](#)

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